What Is the “Russian Cause” and Whom Does It Serve? 
Russian Nationalists and Imperial Bureaucracy in the 
Kingdom of Poland

Malte Rolf

In the summer of 1908, a letter from Warsaw reached the Interior Ministry in St. Petersburg. The message conveyed a bitter complaint about the local governor-general Georgii Skalon. The lament’s anonymous authors blamed the official of betraying the “Russian cause” (Ruskoe delo) in the Polish provinces. In their eyes, Skalon had failed to “venerate the Russian name” (podniat’ russkoe imia) and protect the “national interests near the Vistula.” The authors—who introduced themselves as “Russians from Warsaw”—made clear that the Kingdom was “held tightly in the hands of the enemies of Russia.”1 While the denunciation made it explicit that the Poles needed to be seen as “the enemies of Russia,” it also indicated that Skalon’s lack of vigilance may be explained by his non-Russian origins and his Baltic-German family background. 2 To make matters worse, those who were willing to fight for the “Russian cause” would be stigmatized as “Russifiers” (obrusiteli). No wonder, the letter concluded, that the situation of the “Russian community” (ruskoe obschestvo) in the Kingdom was desperate. This is why the central institutions and the minister in St. Petersburg should intervene and rescue the “dying Russian cause in Poland” (gibnushchee ruskoe delo v Pol’she).3

1 Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 215, op. 1, d. 156, l. 25–27 (Minister of the Interior on an anonymous letter, 26 July 1908), l. 25.
2 GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 156, l. 25–26.
3 GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 156, l. 27.
This fiery accusation may have been more drastic in its rhetoric than other complaints, but it was the only anonymous letter. During the last decade before World War I, the imperial ministries and politicians were frequently addressed with such “voices of concern” who discredited local imperial authorities and accused them of a lack of will to defend the “Russian cause” in the western borderlands. Skalon as the most powerful figure in the tsarist state machinery at the Vistula was especially vulnerable to accusations of giving in to Polish interests and “retreating” from the protection of “positions already held by Russians.”

Why did members of the “Russian community” feel stripped of their protections by an imperial bureaucracy that, after the January Uprising of 1863–64, had pledged to forever “defend” the “Russian cause” in the Kingdom? How can we explain the emergence of obvious frictions between local state authorities and the diaspora representing the “imperial nation” at the Vistula? What kind of different notions of the “Russian cause” surfaced in these conflicts, and why did advocates of the “Russian community” place their hopes on these central institutions while simultaneously losing trust in the regional branches of tsarist power? Finally, what dynamics were linked with these new tensions, and how did they contribute to the constraints that shaped the political landscape in post-revolutionary Russia?

This chapter will explore these questions. In the first part, it will discuss how the Revolution of 1905 led to a fundamental shift in imperial policies in the Kingdom of Poland. In the course of a strategic readjustment, tsarist authorities strove to create new alliances in order to undermine rev-

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4 In the denunciation of 1908, it sounded like this: Skalon was “handing over Russian positions to the enemies of Russia” (ustupat’ zaniatye russkitymi v krae pozitsii vragam Rossi). GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 156, l. 27. For similar letters from that time, see, e.g., Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych (AGAD), KGGW, sygn. 1893, kart. 1–89v (Report by the governor of Piotrków, April 15, 1906), l. 68ob; GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 156, l. 25–27 (Commentary on denunciations directed at the chief of the chancellery of the Warsaw governor-general, July 26, 1908).

olutionary unrest, thereby facilitating novel approaches to Polish political forces and their representatives. This contribution will elaborate the depth of imperial-Polish collaboration and the continuing tensions inscribed in it.

In the second part, the chapter turns to the deterioration of the relationship between imperial authorities and the Russian community in the western borderlands. It will focus on the dynamics that turned crucial questions, such as how to define the “Russian cause” and distinguish groups identified with it, into much disputed issues. Here, the emancipation process of the Russian diaspora from older imperial-bureaucratic domination is taken up. The study will elaborate on how the changing political framework, including the creation of a public sphere that evolved on grounds of the Fundamental Laws of 1906, empowered the Russian community, and how it equipped its members with new options to pressure state authorities. This essay will discuss how arguments in favor of “nationalizing” the empire or even for consistent “Russification” policies contested concepts of supra-ethnic imperial management. Different notions of imperial rule within the local and central institutions of the state bureaucracy will surface here.

Finally, the chapter reflects on the means the imperial administration had available for effectively managing the conflict-ridden situation in the Kingdom. It examines to what extent tsarist officials were, in fact, able to shape the political landscape in the borderlands, and to which vision of future imperial rule they subscribed. Did they have a long-term vision of how to “defend” the “Russian cause” in the peripheries? To what extend were concepts of “nationalizing” the empire part of the authorities’ agenda that targeted at “upholding” the “Russian name” at the Vistula? These are questions tackled in the last section of the chapter.

In posing these questions this contribution significantly differs from earlier scholarship due to its focus on the interaction of the imperial administration and the local Russian community. Taking a closer look at the chronology of tensions and frictions after 1905 helps us better understand the unfolding processes of radicalization. Earlier research has neglected such dynamics that, as we will see, had severe effects not only on the situa-
tion in the Empire’s peripheries, but on the political landscape in the capital as well. This chapter will, thus, address the “feedback loop” between Poland and Russia that facilitated processes of “provincializing the center” in a time of rising nationalism.

**Imperial Rule in the Kingdom of Poland Before 1905**

To understand the dynamics of the post-revolutionary period, it is necessary to provide a short survey of the long history of Russian hegemony in the Kingdom of Poland. Many of the tensions between 1905 and 1914 were connected to the conflicts that had shaped this part of the Empire for almost a century.

After the partitions of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in the eighteenth century, Russia successfully defended its claims on the Eastern territories of the former *Rzeczpospolita* at the Congress of Vienna. Additionally, in 1815, Alexander I also managed to expand Russian control over the core provinces of the old Polish monarchy. By creating a *de jure* independent Kingdom of Poland, St. Petersburg ensured its domination over this new state. Moving forward, all Russian Tsars were to be crowned Kings of Poland, and their viceroys in Warsaw would intervene in internal Polish affairs if necessary. After the 1830–31 Uprising, Russian troops were sent there, and much stricter surveillance over the Kingdom was enforced. Still, the 1863–64 January Uprising marked a clear caesura in the history of Russian hegemony in Poland. After crushing the revolt, St. Peters burg introduced a wide range of punitive and administrative measures to “pacify” the region and to intensify imperial influence.

Around 240,000 soldiers from Russia were stationed in the Kingdom, more than 40,000 of them in Warsaw alone. Local autonomy was banned in the Polish provinces, many existing legal peculiarities were abolished, and a military-bureaucratic command was enforced for the conflict-ridden borderland. The former Kingdom was to become nothing but a mere administrative district, tightly bound to the rest of the Empire. This blow was also reflected in the terminology used: after 1864 the territory was widely
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called “Vistula Land” (Privislinskii krai), eradicating all traces of former Polish statehood.6

After the January Uprising, tsarist authorities also began reforming the region’s state administration. They transferred the Russian governorate system to the Kingdom, and filled the most influential positions in the bureaucracy with external officials. With very few exceptions, Catholics (Poles) were barred from the higher ranks of the local administration. In effect, after 1863–64, the upper levels of officialdom were dominated by non-local civil servants imported from the core territories of the empire, who for the most part, were Russian and Orthodox.7

Although this system remained almost unchanged until World War I, certain periods were characterized by different modes of enforcement. In particular, during the reign of Alexander III and his highest representative in Warsaw—the polonophobic governor-general Iosif Gurko—much effort was directed toward the goal of further eliminating existing differences between the western periphery of the empire and Russia’s internal provinces. During these “dark years,” as Polish contemporaries called it, administrative interference reached all cultural and social spheres and affected educational institutions in particular. Teaching in institutions of higher learning as well as intermediate and advanced school classes was to be


conducted in Russian, and programs to introduce the Russian language in primary schools were launched.\(^8\)

Traditionally, these administrative measures have been labeled as policies of “Russification.” However, it is worth dwelling on this issue in more length. New research has questioned this terminology and has pointed toward the absence of a coherent program of Russification pushed by St. Petersburg and its representatives in the peripheries.\(^9\) In the Polish provinces, Russificatory policies can hardly be seen as the principal guidelines of local imperial officials over the decades.\(^10\) Despite all efforts to further tie this periphery to the greater empire, all state representatives agreed on the fundamental differences that separated the Kingdom from the Russian core lands. In contrast to a perception of the “Western provinces” that Russian authorities considered “national territory,” officials perceived the Kingdom of Poland as a quite distinct entity with its own history and population, which legitimatized a certain degree of local “distinctiveness” (osobennosti or obosoblennosti). The Kingdom was described as a “borderland” (okraina) or as a part of “historic Poland”; sometimes it was even identified as a “foreign country” (chuzhaia strana).\(^11\) In fact administrative policies—like the

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8 GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 76, ll. 160b–20 (Report of the governor-general Al’bedinskii to Alexander II., December 27, 1880); GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 94, l. 560b (Decisions of the Committee of Ministers, February 17, 1898).


11 GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 97, ll. 30–45 (Letter of the Warsaw governor-general to the Ministry of Interior, March 12, 1902), l. 320b; Archiwum Państwowe m. st. Warszawy (APW), t. 151, cz. 3 (KGW), sygn.
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non-extension of zemstvo- and Duma-institutions—even deepened the gap between Russia “proper” and the Kingdom.

To be sure, most imperial representatives avoided the term “Russification.” Instead, they described themselves as “defenders” of the “Russian cause” at the western border of the empire. Before 1900, they sought to extend and protect “Russian statehood” (Russkaiia gosudarstvennost’), a statehood that in historical perspective was identified as clearly “Russian,” but was not understood as Russian in a narrow ethnic sense. Still, most imperial authorities did privilege the Russian-Orthodox community—with Gurko in the forefront—because they saw local Russians as the most reliable group the empire could rely on in the borderlands. Iosif Gurko frankly praised their “wholehearted devotion to the Russian cause” (bezzavytnaia predannost’ russkomu delu). The exemplary erection of the gigantic Orthodox Alexander Nevskii Cathedral in Warsaw shows this most clearly: symbolic representations of the empire’s hegemony and the privileges for the Russian-Orthodox parish were fused together in one common cause.

543, kart. 3–6 (Report of the chief of Warsaw district administration, August 19, 1897), kart. 3; AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 1767, kart. 3–5v (Letter of the minister of the interior to the Warsaw governor-general, June 28, 1881).

12 For an explicit criticism, see Konstantin Pobedonostsev’s comment during a meeting of the Committee of Ministers: GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 55ob–58ob (Proceedings of the Committee of Ministers, February 17, 1898), ll. 55.

13 Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiy Arkhiv (RGIA), f. 1284, 1898, op. 185, d. 55, ll. 8 (Letter of the Warsaw governor-general Imeretinskii to the minister of the interior, January 4, 1899); GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 97, ll. 30–45 (Letter of the Warsaw governor-general Chertkov to the Ministry of Interior, March 12, 1902), here ll. 32ob–34. E.g., Warsaw Governor-general Imeretinskii called all imperial officials serving in the Polish provinces “istinnye pionery russkogo dela na okrainakh gosudarstva.” GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 97, ll. 25–27 (Notes of the Warsaw governor-general Imeretinskii, January 12, 1899), here l. 26ob.

14 AGAD, KGGW, Sygn. 1773, kart. 19–33ob (Report of Warsaw governor-general Iosif Gurko, 25 December 1883), here kart. 19. Konstantin Pobedonostsev expressed quite explicitly: “Russian state power (russkaia gosudarstvennaia vlast’) should understand itself as the representative of the ruling nationality (gospodstvuiushchaia narodnost’). It should take care to establish correct opinions on [...] the rights of the Russian people, their past and present, among all imperial subjects regardless of their descent.” GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 55ob–58ob (Proceedings of the Committee of Ministers, February 17, 1898), here l. 57.

Although this general approach remained unquestioned until 1905, the political atmosphere changed considerably after Gurko was forced into retirement in 1894. The succeeding governor-generals Pavel Shuvalov (1894–96) and Aleksandr Imeretinski (1896–1900) strove to come to terms with Polish society. With a series of symbolic concessions, they inaugurated what contemporaries called a "time of change." Nicholas II’s visit to Warsaw in 1897, the opening of a Polytechnic Institute, the erection of a monument dedicated to the Polish national poet and supporter of independent Polish statehood Adam Mickiewicz, the approval of a large exhibition hall for Warsaw’s Society of Fine Arts: all of these arrangements seemed to point at a serious reevaluation of imperial policies.

The international situation at the end of the nineteenth century and the threat of an anti-Russian Triple Alliance fueled this reassessment of negative policies toward Poles because they directed Polish loyalties to the neighboring empires. In addition, domestic social developments such as rapid industrialization and urban growth stimulated the overburdened authorities to look for new forms of cooperation with the local population.

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16 See Erazm I. Pil’ts, Povorotnyi moment v russko–pol’skikh otnosheniyakh (St. Petersburg, 1897), 3–12.
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This noticeable wind of change may have provided grounds for less constraint in the imperial–Polish encounter in the 1890s though it did not lead toward a general questioning of the authorities’ basic self-perception as “defenders of the Russian cause.” This became evident in an internal report issued by Imeretinskii on the political situation in the Kingdom, which was soon leaked by PPS-socialists. This report frustrated many Polish contemporaries who had hoped for a significant improvement in imperial–Polish relations. It became just as apparent in the ongoing policies of granting special privileges to the Russian community in the Kingdom.19

Indeed, the Russian-Orthodox population increased significantly during this decade, particularly in Warsaw. Now, contemporaries saw a “Russkaia Varshava” on the rise. This “Russian Warsaw” gradually transformed in terms of its social and professional structure. While around 1900, a large share of Russians living in Warsaw was still employed by the government, the size of the raznochintsy-milieu grew, and many of these people followed occupations outside the imperial bureaucracy. Nonetheless, until the turn of the century, “defending” the “Russian cause” remained a common denominator that encompassed very different notions of what the “Russkoe delo” would stand for. Shortly before the revolution, imperial authorities and members of Russkaia Varshava still subscribed to a concept of concordia in which the Russian community and the imperial state were seen as mostly overlapping spheres.20

It would be misleading, though, to characterize imperial policies at this point as “nationalizing.” It is worthwhile noting that neither Shuvalov nor

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Imeretinskiıı followed Gurko’s plan of further “Russifying” the Kingdom’s culture or educational system. Both were undecided on how far political concessions to the Poles should go, but they were both trying to come to terms at least with those segments of Polish aristocracy and bourgeois society willing to cooperate. Facing new challenges like the rise of socialism and nationalism and the increasing illegal activities of more radical groups among the younger generation, tsarist officials were offering a *modus vivendi* to groups like the Warsaw Positivists or the *Ugodowcy*. 21

The Revolution of 1905 radically changed this political situation. The social and political turmoil of the years 1905–1906 confronted the tsarist administration with hitherto unknown threats and, in the longer run, facilitated new concepts of imperial management.

**The Revolution of 1905 and the Reinvention of Imperial Policies in the Kingdom of Poland**

Hardly any other region of the empire reached the scale and intensity of revolutionary upheaval and violence as the Kingdom. Dead bodies in the streets in Warsaw or Lodz; assassinations of policemen and other officials; bloody clashes between army units and protestors; a deadly vendetta be-

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tween rival political factions, and a brutal enforcement of martial law and field court justice with more than 1,000 death sentences constituted “normality” in these tumultuous times. Only after martial law was declared in December 1905 were imperial authorities able to regain control over the Polish provinces.22

Nevertheless, the revolution was not a closed chapter by the end of 1905. The unrest, bloodshed, and anarchy persisted for more than two years. The tsarist administration kept the Kingdom of Poland in a state of emergency until 1909; officials and the local population alike were shaped, sometimes traumatized, by the revolution. The revolution left its imprint on the new political and legal order and the new political culture.23

In this moment of the Empire’s ultimate crisis, state officials started to reconsider some of the key features of imperial management and nationality policies. As a lesson of 1905, tsarist authorities reevaluated the traditional hierarchy ranking foes in which Poles, struggling for any sort of national emancipation, ranked at the top. During 1905–06, officials started


to see socialists as the main threat to the Empire and were, thus, more open to forms of cooperation with all non-revolutionary segments of the Polish political spectrum. Since older dialogue partners like the Positivists or the *Ugadowcy* had been politically marginalized during the revolution, tsarist authorities began looking for other options.\(^2^4\) By now, the Polish National Democrats (*Endecja*) appeared to be a political movement whose representatives, who were engaged in a bitter fight with the socialists, seemed receptive to some kind of collaboration. After 1906, Governor-general Skalon identified Roman Dmowski and his *Endecja* as possible accomplices in a joint effort to isolate socialist forces and end the turmoil in the Kingdom once and for all. In fact, Dmowski proved to be quite responsive to such ideas. While the socialist parties and the PPS in particular continued to attack the regime with terroristic assaults, Dmowski was willing to operate within the new legal sphere offered by the Fundamental Laws of 1906 and the electoral system of the Duma.

In this new alliance of uneven partners, Skalon openly supported the National Democrats as the rising political force. He approved their rallies for the first Duma election campaign even before the party was officially registered. And he ordered local state representatives to provide indoor spaces for *Endecja*-gatherings. Obviously, already at the turn of the year 1905–1906, Polish nationalists were assessed as a second-rate threat to the stability of the Kingdom.\(^2^5\)

By 1906, tsarist officials like Skalon were quite certain that they had won back the initiative in fighting the revolution. Martial law and ruthless field court justice, along with the presence of massive military forces, seemed to play out its effects during this second year of upheaval. Since the discipline of Russian soldiers in the Kingdom had never been in doubt, the authorities knew that they could enforce “order” at any time, while the random attacks

\(^{24}\) APW, t. 24 (WWO), sygn. 263, kart. 1–6 (Report on the social and political situation in the Kingdom, 1913–1914, January 14, 1914); APW, t. 24 (WWO), sygn. 261, kart. 1–32, here kart. 16–17 (Report on “people’s opinion” in the Kingdom, 1913).

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of socialist fighting groups failed in stirring up mass protests comparable to 1905. Reassured with such confidence in his own power, Skalon could easily grant space to the more moderate Polish forces. Thus, although political activities of any kind remained restricted during the period of martial law, the tsarist administration allowed a certain normalcy to return to the political and social sphere even before 1909.26

In addition, the Fundamental Laws of 1906 and the advent of parliamentarianism in Russia had radically changed the institutional framework of imperial policies. Although the continuing state of emergency suspended many civil rights, the political dynamics of inner-Russia also affected the Kingdom. Political parties and their outlets, social associations, cultural societies, and all sorts of institutions turned to the imperial administration with their request for official registration. Political, social, and cultural life began to self-organize and witnessed a boom after martial law was lifted in 1909. Tsarist authorities also had to adjust their agenda and policies within this new framework of civil laws, elections, and an active public sphere. Imperial management needed to find influential allies within this mushrooming public sphere if it wanted to be effective. National democrats, in contrast to liberal positivists or ugoda-conservatives, represented a powerful organization in this respect.27

Growing tensions in international relations also facilitated this alliance. Since war against imperial Germany seemed to be almost inevitable, anti-German sentiments provided some common ground for both imperial and Polish representatives. The perception of a common enemy across the border helped to bridge many differences in worldviews and political goals.28


27 See, e.g., Roman Dmowski’s analyses in Niency, Rosja i kwestia polska from 1908.

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All of this contributed to the readjustment of imperial policies in the Kingdom of Poland. After 1906, tsarist authorities not only strove to “restore order” but to stabilize the political situation long term. But defining new paradigms of imperial administration was not only a matter decided in the chancelleries of a mandarin bureaucracy. The search for new alliances and policy guidelines took place in direct contact with Polish society. The following section will take a closer look at how successful imperial managers were in their interactions with a multifaceted Polish society and to what extent they were indeed able to establish a new mode of collaboration. To make matters more complex, in a second step, I will elaborate on the effects this new Polish–imperial encounter had on the Russian community in the Kingdom.

In Search of New Alliances: The Tsarist Administration and Polish Society after 1905

St. Petersburg’s representatives had much to offer those willing to participate in the legal and political system established in 1906. In the period of martial law, it was the Warsaw governor-general who decided whether an institution would be legally registered and which restrictions might be imposed on it. The administration defined the boundaries of the legal public sphere, and its power rested on the fact that it could facilitate or hinder any kind of political activity.

The bureaucracy decided to use this “enabling power” in order to strengthen the National Democrats in particular. It was not only during the revolution that Skalon favored Dmowski’s party. Even after 1907, when the overall political situation had calmed down, the Endecia and its sub-institutions enjoyed considerable support by state authorities, for example, the Warsaw governor-general only in rare cases issued administrative decrees when it came to media associated with the National Democrats. Even investigative journalism that revealed the shortcomings of the local bureaucracy was tolerated. In 1908, journalists of the daily newspaper Goniec exposed the grave mismanagement of and networks of corrup-
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tion within the municipal administration of Warsaw. Skalon reacted to the scandal by commissioning a special committee. Consequently, city president Viktor Litvinskii had to resign. Contemporaries had already interpreted this as a sign of a new age of independent media empowered to pressure the state machinery.29

Even more astonishing is the scope of tacit permission Skalon showed toward one of the key projects of the National Democrats: the “Polish Motherland School” (Polska Macierz Szkolna). In summer 1906, the governor-general gave his approval for the creation of a network of private schools in the Kingdom. By 1907, almost seven hundred schools with more than seven thousand schoolchildren had already been registered.30 This sweeping success obviously raised doubts among imperial representatives as to whether a privately run school system might marginalize state-sponsored schools in the future. Already in December 1907, Skalon abruptly closed the schools run by the institution and withdrew the registration of Polska Macierz Szkolna.31 This clearly shows the narrow limits in which public initiatives were able to unfold in the Kingdom. It also demonstrates how arbitrary imperial policies were—even when it came to newly identified allies among the local population. Such sudden interference from above was a threat to all associations and institutions active under martial law. From time to time, Skalon reminded the young Polish civil society that, in the end, he held ultimate power in the Polish provinces.

Still, imperial officials generally showed a great deal of willingness to grant Polish civil society at least some participatory authority. After 1906, representatives of the municipal society in Warsaw were frequently invited to sit on numerous state committees that dealt with the problems of admin-

29 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 6247, kart. 30–38 (Report of the special committee to Skalon, December 21, 1909); AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 6247, kart. 20 (Report of the head of the special committee to Skalon, August 27, 1909); GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 156, l. 6ob (Letter of Skalon to Stolypin, October 1909).
30 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 2723, kart. 6–6v (Letter of the Governor of Siedlce to Skalon, October 30, 1906). See Blobaum, Rewolucja, 178–82.
31 Many of these schools were kept running by private initiatives. See Edmund Staszyński, Polityka oświatowa cara mu w Królestwie Polskim: Od powstania styczniowego do I wojny światowej (Warsaw: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1968), 207–40.
istrating the growing metropolis—for instance, the commission to prevent cholera epidemics in the city, or ad-hoc snow removal committees.\textsuperscript{32} The imperial bureaucracy and the city president’s board in particular constantly demonstrated their closeness to the urban citizenry and their goodwill to cooperate with the local population. At least in Warsaw, authorities made room for citizens to be directly involved in government affairs and granted them an, albeit restricted, share in decision-making.

Keeping this in mind, the reasons Governor-general Skalon was indeed in favor of introducing municipal self-institutions in the Kingdom of Poland is less surprising. With the City Duma, he identified an institutional body that could provide the framework for further cooperation with those segments of Polish society that were prosperous enough to indeed profit from this socially exclusive council. Skalon, thus, opposed those voices calling for laws that would have discriminated against Poles and the use of Polish in municipal assemblies and boards. In the end, even Skalon failed to enforce this highly controversial reform, as Russian nationalists in the State Duma and the Senate obstructed the project.\textsuperscript{33}

In general, it becomes obvious that local imperial authorities were trying to forge novel alliances in the post-revolutionary period and that they were willing to collaborate with political forces that, just a few years earlier, had been identified as bitter enemies. This new openness rested on the inversion of the hierarchy of friends and foes that had taken place during the turmoil of 1905. No doubt, this search for a modus vivendi was strictly limited even after 1909. Whenever the tsarist administration viewed the political and social activities of the National Democrats as threat to public order, they intervened; for example, Dmowski’s efforts to intensify political mobilization through antisemitic campaigns—such as the boycott of Jewish businesses in 1912—were curtailed by imperial authorities. This had little to do with sympathy for Jewish citizens among state officials, but rather

\textsuperscript{32} AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 5820, kart. 54 (Report of the commission’s chairman G. Giunter, January 12, 1907); APW, t. 25, sygn. 125, kart. 24–25; t. 151, cz. 1 (KGW), sygn. 471, kart. 171–75 (Documents of the commission for preventing cholera epidemics, 1908).
\textsuperscript{33} See Weeks, \textit{Nation and State}, 152–71.
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with their obsession with “public order” to which aggressive antisemitic agitation might pose a danger.34

But such examples do not distort the overall picture that local tsarist authorities acted with much less hostility toward the political mainstream of Polish society after the Revolution of 1905. The National Democrats were the principal beneficiaries of such an approach. It could be argued that the Endecia’s focus on “cultural autonomy” as the main political target for the near future was a reaction to this. This goal stayed within the legal framework provided by the reforms of 1906, but it opened up a terrain in which state representatives and Polish politicians could seek out pragmatic collaboration on a daily basis. All of this was indeed crucial for stabilizing the Kingdom’s political landscape in the final years before World War I.

Thus, imperial authorities proved rather successful in securing public order and political stability in the Kingdom after 1905. At the same time, they were confronted with a new challenge: the local Russian community underwent a deep transformation during the Revolution and began to petition state representatives with new demands.

A Fragile Alliance: Imperial Authorities and the Russian Community

By sheer numbers, the Russian-Orthodox community in the Kingdom had grown considerably during the last decade of the nineteenth century. This was particularly obvious in Warsaw: in 1897, the census recorded 49,997 Orthodox in the city, making up more than 7 percent of the city’s population.35 For a long time it was impossible to distinguish between the imperial administration and the Russian diaspora. All higher state representatives

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sent to their post in the Kingdom integrated into this local community of the “imperial nation.” Moreover, until 1900, most Russians in Warsaw were employed by the government. This began to change around the turn of the century, as new social groups and professions began to emerge. In the late 1890s, a broad range of occupational opportunities had arisen outside of the bureaucracy, professions like academics, (private) teachers, publicists, book dealers, priests, engineers, physicians, lawyers, and artists. Some of them engaged in activities that went beyond the traditional scope of government-sponsored culture. The process of a gradual emancipation of the Russian community from state structures was facilitated by the reforms brought about by the Revolution of 1905. Based on the Fundamental Laws of 1906 and similar to Polish society, the Russian diaspora managed to create a vivid cultural and political life. Many protagonists within this

39 Among others, see the Warsaw Section of the Russian Assembly (*Varshavskoe otdelenie russkogo sobraniia*) and the Russian Society in Warsaw (*Russkoe obschestvo v g. Varshave*), which were founded after 1905. The Warsaw Section of the Russian Assembly soon became the second largest regional branch of this organization in the empire and counted more than eight hundred members. AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 2548, kart. 1 (Letter of the minister of interior to the Warsaw governor-general, January 20, 1905); kart. 4–8v (Founding documents on the Warsaw Section of the Russian Assembly, May 1905). See also Iu. I. Kir’ianov, *Russkoe Sobraniie 1900–1917* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003), 99. Numerous cultural institutions like the Russian Circle for Literature and Science in Warsaw (*Russkii Varshavskii literaturno-nauchnyi kruzhok*), the Russian Circle for Music and Drama (*Russkii muzykal’no-dramaticheskii kruzhok*), or the Russian Circle of Lovers of Theater and Scenery (*Russkii kruzhok liubitelei teatral’no-iskusstva*) mushroomed alongside with plenty of sports clubs such as the Russian Athletic Society. On this, see Vladimir V. Esipov, *Ocherk zhizni i byta Privislinskago kraia* (Warsaw, 1909), 14–17; Grigorii G. Moskvich, *Putevoditel’ po Varshave* (St. Petersburg, 1907), 101–104.
new landscape voiced concerns and demands that were not automatically congruent with the interests of local state representatives. 40

But now, in the wake of revolution, tsarist officials had to take these claims more seriously. This was due to several reasons: first, the new electoral system imposed by Prime Minister Petr Stolypin in June 1907 privileged Russian-Orthodox voters in Warsaw. With a separate “national” electoral curia, one of the two Duma seats allocated to the metropolis was reserved for Russians, while the vast majority of Catholic and Jewish voters were left with a single representative in the State Duma. Russian voters thus had an over-proportional share of electoral power. 41

In addition, quite a few Russians in Warsaw maintained close ties to influential members of the imperial elite in the capital. Some of them held seats in the Senate, some of them worked in the central government, and some belonged to the circle of power around Prime Minister Stolypin. Many of them had served in different administrative positions in the Kingdom for some time before moving on to higher posts in St. Petersburg’s institutions. Obviously, belonging to this loose group of “former Warsovians” created a sense of affection and made them inclined to promote Russian interests in the Kingdom of Poland.

The most prominent figure here was, no doubt, Vladimir Gurko, son of former Governor-General Iosif Gurko. In 1897, shortly after serving as Warsaw’s vice governor, Vladimir Gurko wrote a polonophobic Essay on the Vistula Territory. In 1906, Gurko was promoted to deputy minister of the interior. He continued publishing polemics and historical studies in which he identified the pursuit of Russian national hegemony as a crucial feature of imperial policy. 42 Anton Budilovich was another visible self-declared “defender of the Russian cause” in the borderlands and the Kingdom of Poland. He had held administrative positions at the University of Warsaw in

40 Similar developments can be identified in the Northwestern regions. See Vytautas Petronis’s contribution to this volume.
42 See Vladimir I. Gurko (Pseudonym: V. R.), Ocherki Privislian’ia (Moscow, 1897); Vladimir I. Gurko, Osnovy vnútrennei politiki imperatora Aleksandra III (St. Petersburg, 1910).
the 1880s. In 1892–1893, he was transferred to Iur’ev-University where he served as its chancellor shortly after it had been renamed the University of Dorpat.\textsuperscript{43} In 1901, the Minister of Education promoted him to St. Petersburg, where he continued to deal with nationality issues and educational matters in the non-Russian peripheries of the empire.\textsuperscript{44} Both officials had different views on the most pressing questions in the borderlands, but both agreed with many other “former Warsovians” that the “Russian cause” was under particular threat in the Polish provinces and that it needed active protection from state institutions.

Figures like Gurko or Budilovich demonstrate how well the alliance between state representatives and the Russian community in the Kingdom still operated. They also show that even officials engaged actively in public debates after 1905, where they attempted to place the issue of an allegedly endangered “Russian cause” at the center of political discourse. But such prominent activists cannot conceal the fact that this traditional collaboration had become contested in many respects. Taking a look at several examples of interactions and conflicts between the imperial authorities and representatives of the Russian community will help elaborate on the extent to which the old alliance was still intact and where new frictions began to surface. Whether the founding of a “House of the Russian People,” the reopening of the Imperial University in Warsaw, or the electoral campaign for the Third and Fourth State Dumas, the cohabitation of imperial and national interest groups in the Kingdom caused numerous tensions, and sometimes even open clashes.

\textsuperscript{43} See Trude Maurer, Hochschullehrer im Zarenreich: Ein Beitrag zur russischen Sozial- und Bildungsgeschichte (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), 830–32.

\textsuperscript{44} See Anton S. Budilovich, Vopros ob okrainakh Rossii, v sviazi s teoriей samoопределения narodnostей i trebovaniami gosudarstvennogo edinstva (St. Petersburg, 1906); Budilovich, Rech’ O edinstve russkogo naroda (St. Petersburg, 1907). I have argued elsewhere that the life course and careers of officials like Budilovich can be analyzed as “imperial biographies.” See Tim Buchen and Malte Rolf, “Elites and Their Imperial Biographies: Introduction,” in Eliten im Vielvölkerreich: Imperiale Biographien in Russland und Österreich-Ungarn (1850–1918)/Elites and Empire: Imperial Biographies in Russia and Austria-Hungary (1850–1918), ed. Tim Buchen and Malte Rolf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 33–37; Malte Rolf, “Imperiale Biographien: Lebenswege imperialer Akteure in Groß- und Kolonialreichen (1850–1918) zur Einleitung,” Geschichte und Gesellschaft 40, no. 1 (2014): 5–21. See also Gorizontov, Paradoksy imperskoi politiki, 184.
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Already in 1905, it became evident that certain demands articulated by the Russian community did not overlap with the agenda of the local administration. The idea of establishing a “House of the Russian People” (Russkii narodnyi dom) as a cultural institution and giving it a home in the center of Warsaw was an old one. Voices calling to (finally) move onward with the realization of this project grew louder during the revolution. Obviously, the political mobilization of Poles during the upheaval spurred the Russian community to seek cultural countermeasures. Local activists managed to recruit the support of Stolypin, who pressured the authorities in Warsaw to pave the way for a large cultural center with conference facilities, a library and a concert hall. Although Governor-general Skalon backed this project, a dispute soon arose about where to build this impressive building. The newly founded Russian Society in Warsaw (Russkoe obschestvo v g. Varshave) proposed dedicating a large section of the centrally located Ujazdowski park as the future construction site. This provoked opposition among tsarist municipal authorities who were not willing to sacrifice parts of the city’s most representative and popular park.45

Skalon soon understood the problematic implications of such a symbolic act that would have antagonized Polish civil society in Warsaw whose support Skalon needed in his quest to stabilize the political situation. Since Ujazdowski park represented a core part of Warsaw’s bourgeois culture and identity, cutting it into slices in order to build a “Russian House” would surely have turned Polish opinion against the government. Furthermore, no consensus over the future use of this institution could be reached. While activists of the Russian community envisioned a cultural center open to the general (Russian) public without any restrictions based on estate or property, higher-ranking imperial authorities favored a socially more exclusive club and declined the idea of cultural services and venues that would also attract the lower classes of the Russian community.

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45 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 2606, kart. 8 (Letter of the Russkoe obschestvo to Skalon, February 3, 1906); AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 703, kart. 1–4 (Minutes of meetings with the Warsaw governor-general, August 20, 1911).
In the end, the project failed due to the lack of an adequate construction site. Skalon kept refusing to approve property procurement in the center of town. Representatives of the Russian community rejected all alternative locations proposed by the city administration, which were on the peripheries of the city center as this would have symbolically emphasized Russians’ marginal position in the metropolis. In light of the extremely high real estate prices in the metropolis, the Russian community could not afford any appropriate property downtown on its own. Consequently, the “House of the Russian people” was never built. 46 Thus, this failure also highlights the relative economic weakness of Russkaia Varshava in Warsaw. While the local Polish community independently financed numerous cultural institutions in the city center during the same period and was able to donate more than a million rubles for the foundation of the Polytechnic Institute, the imperial administration wrote frankly about the poverty of Warsaw’s Russians and their inability to finance a project like the “Russian House” without subsidies from the government.47

In the post-revolutionary period, imperial authorities reacted quite reservedly toward claims from the Russian community that would have fueled Polish resentments. This becomes even more evident in the debates surrounding the reopening of the Imperial University of Warsaw. The university had been closed due to student protests and boycotts during the revolution. In 1908, Skalon was considering re-launching academic life in Warsaw. Prior to this, numerous representatives of the Russian community raised their voices and advanced ideas about the future shape of the university in particular, and the educational system in the Kingdom in general.

46 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 2606, kart. 8–9v; sygn. 7031, kart. 1–97. In particular, AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 7031, kart. 9 (Letter of the city president to the Warsaw governor-general, November 24, 1911); kart. 96–96v (Letter of the minister of the interior to the Warsaw governor-general, November 8, 1913). Among other places, the municipal authorities proposed a construction site behind the Polytechnic Institute. For more detail, see Malte Rolf, Russian Rule in the Kingdom of Poland (1864–1915) (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, forthcoming in 2020) chap. 9.

47 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 7031, kart. 97 (Minutes of a meeting on building the “Russian House”, August 20, 1911). On the overall awareness among imperial officials that the Russian potential in the Western peripheries of the empire was rather weak, see also Darius Staliūnas, “Affirmative Action in the Western Borderlands of the Late Russian Empire?,” in Slavic Review 77, no. 4 (2018): 978–97, in particular, 996–97.
“Nationalizing education” was the key slogan in this discourse, and writers like the influential book trader Vladimir Istomin favored the strict apartheid of national cohorts in all educational institutions. Istomin argued that the government should only support Russian-language-based “national-patriotic schools.”

According to such radical views, the empire as a political space belonged to Russians only. In the anonymous pamphlet, “Why Should There Be a Russian University in Warsaw,” the author demanded that the Imperial University should finally take on a clear “Russian character” (russkii kharakter). Another author argued that the high school could become a motor of the “spiritual convergence of the borderland with the center” (dukhovnoe sblizenie okrainy s tsentrom) only if it took on such a Russian character. In these formulations, non-Russians within the Empire were assigned to the status of cultural helots, deprived of institutions of (higher) education.

Neither the governor-general nor the overseer of the educational district shared such radical judgments. When Warsaw’s university reopened in 1908, little of its pre-revolutionary design had changed. The university was explicitly announced as “imperial,” and as such, it was open to all imperial subjects regardless of descent and was by no means meant to be a “Russian university” in an exclusive ethnic sense.

Within these debates a great deal of disagreement between the imperial bureaucracy and more radical voices from the Russian community surfaced. These frictions became even more apparent during the electoral campaign launched for the Russian seat from Warsaw in the Third State Duma.

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48 Vladimir A. Istomin, Natsional’no-patrioticheskie shkoly (Moscow, 1907), 5: “O natsionalizatsii gosudarstvennoi shkol’noi sistemy,” See also: Vladimir A. Istomin, Svoi i chuzhie vragi pravoslavno-russkogo dela v guberniach Privislinskogo kraia (Moscow, 1907); N. A. Vetskii, K voprosu o Varshavskom Universitete (Warsaw, 1906).

49 “Pochemu v Varshave dolzhny byt’ russkie universitety?”, anonymous polemics, without dating, around 1908, Department of Handwritings, Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka, f. 44, op. 14, d. 3, l. 10.

50 See Varshavskii Universitet i bytshchaia Varshavskiaia Gavnaiia Shkola (St. Petersburg, 1908), 27.

51 Without question, Russian as the state language would remain the lingua franca of teaching. Due to this and other reasons, the number of Catholic students remained rather low in the following years. See in detail Rolf, Zadnye imperialne w Kraju Nadwielaiskim, 333–43.
During the elections, the nationalist “Russian Society in Warsaw” nominated philologist Sergei N. Alekseev as its candidate. Alekseev was infamous for his polonophobic views, and the \textit{Russkoe obshchestvo} left no doubt that they shared his beliefs. In their founding charter, the society already stated that it intended to present all “true Russians” in Warsaw. While anyone regardless of “sex, profession, or estate” could become a member, only “full-blooded Russians” (\textit{polnopravnyi russkii}) were invited to join the club.\footnote{Paragraph III, Artikel 5 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 2606, kart. 5 (Project of founding charter of the \textit{Russkoe obshchestvo v Varshave}, May 1906).} The \textit{Russkoe obshchestvo} called the governor-general to finally “protect the national and cultural interests of the Russian people in the Vistula lands.” From this perspective, “strengthening the Russian state in the province” was narrowed down to “a fight for the well-being of Russia and its great people” (\textit{bor’ba na blago Rossii i ee velikogo naroda}).\footnote{AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 2606 (1906–1910), kart. 8–9v (Letter of the \textit{Russkoe obshchestvo v g. Varshave} to Skalon, February 3, 1906), here kart. 9. See also \textit{Predvybornye izvestiia Russkogo obshchestva v Varshave}, No. 1 (August 10 [September 12], 1907), 1. On Alekseev, see \textit{Predvybornye izvestiia Russkogo obshchestva v Varshave}, no. 3 (September 14 [27], 1907), 2; \textit{Obzor deiatel’nosti Russkogo okrainnogo obshchestva za 1910} (St. Petersburg, 1911), 33.} The empire was redefined as serving only “true Russians,” and the government’s main goal was reduced to privileging the “national interests of Russians and all those who carry this idea [of protecting the Russian cause] in the borderlands.”\footnote{AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 9012, kart. 110b [Program of the \textit{Russkoe obshchestvo}]; AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 2606, kart. 8 (Charter of the \textit{Russkoe obshchestvo}, October 17, 1905); \textit{Ob autonomii Pol’shi}, \textit{Odnanie Soiuza 17–go oktiabria} (Moscow, 1906), 1–7.}

Opinion leaders of the \textit{Russkoe obshchestvo} propagated extreme visions of nationalizing the empire that had little in common with the notions of the “Russian cause” shared by most of the upper bureaucracy throughout the nineteenth century. In Skalon’s view, such demands laid waste to the fragile stability he had been able to establish in Poland. The governor-general, thus, refrained from supporting the Russian nationalists during the election campaign. Even though Prime Minister Stolypin sympathized with the \textit{Russkoe obshchestvo}, Skalon decided to opt for an open confrontation and granted his political patronage to the Octobrist Party. He advised the local state newspaper \textit{Varshavskii Dnevnik} to campaign for their
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candidate although the Russkoe obshchestvo and Stolypin raised bitter complaints about this.\textsuperscript{55} In the end, Skalon’s political engagement failed to obstruct Alekseev’s sweeping victory. Out of the election delegates, 62 percent voted for the nationalist candidate; therefore, they decided to send a polonophobic extremist to the State Duma, who, at the same time, was a bitter opponent of the highest state representative in Warsaw.\textsuperscript{56}

This conflict demonstrates quite clearly how divided political attitudes and perceptions were between members of the Russian community and the imperial bureaucracy. The following years did not ease tensions. In this period, petitions, anonymous letters of complaint, and denunciations against local officials flooded central institutions. Such accusations of “betrayal of the Russian cause” further distanced the Russian political public from local state structures and their representatives. This also fueled a process of radicalization in which opinion leaders of the Russian diaspora questioned the multi-ethnic composition of the tsarist administration and the supranational consensus to which most of the officials in the Kingdom still subscribed. The “Russian cause” that had served as a semantic link between the central bureaucracy and the Russian community had now turned into a highly controversial issue. Russian nationalists had successfully stripped the slogan of its original meaning—Russian statehood\textsuperscript{57}—and had narrowed it down to a matter of Russian exclusivity. In this understanding, the powerful political phrase could be used to demand guarantees of Russian superiority in all aspects of political and social life.\textsuperscript{58}

Skalon’s openness toward new forms of collaboration with Polish society specifically evoked anxieties of further marginalization among ma-

\textsuperscript{55} AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 9012, kart. 101 (Telegram from Stolypin to Skalon, September 13, 1907); AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 9012, kart. 103–104v (Open letter of the electoral delegates to Skalon, October 8, 1907). “Neskol’ko slov po povodu iskazheniia faktov v dvukh stat’iakh Varshavskogo Dnevnika,” in Predvybornye izvestiia Russkogo obshchestva, no. 1 (August 30, 1907), 1.

\textsuperscript{56} Predvybornye izvestiia Russkogo obshchestva, no. 6 (October 16, 1907), 3.

\textsuperscript{57} GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 97, ll. 25–27 (Notes of the Warsaw Governor-general Imeretinskii, January 12, 1899).

\textsuperscript{58} See, e.g., Vladimir A. Istomin, Svoi i chuzhie vragi pravoilavno–russkogo dela v guberniakh Privolzhskogo kraia (Moscow, 1907); Vladimir G. Smorodinov, Popechitel’ Varshavskogo uchebnogo okruga Aleksandr L’vovich Apukhtin (St. Petersburg, 1912).
ny Russians. Polish calls for cultural autonomy were perceived as essential threats to one’s own (privileged) status. Recent social and economic developments had increased such fears, as Polish civil society proved to be quite successful in overcoming the temporary crisis caused by the Russo–Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905. Already during the 1890s and again after 1907, the province’s urban bourgeoisie prospered, and its financial and cultural potentials became apparent in Warsaw in particular. With institutions like the Polytechnic Institute, the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, the Philharmonic, or the Wawelberg housing project, the philanthropy of affluent citizens transformed the face of the city and bore witness not only to the wealth of the Polish-Jewish bourgeoisie but also to the scope of the “enabling policy” practiced by governor-generals like Imeretinskii and Skalon. The failure of the Russian community to build a “Russian House” in the center of Warsaw was an awkward showcase of one’s own weakness. And there were other incidents at the time that pointed in the same direction: “cultural events” in desolate locations, the inability to collect sufficient funds to build a monument to Stolypin, the low academic prestige of the “Russian” university in Warsaw, and/or the poor appearance of the “Russian public” during celebrations of the anniversary of Borodino. All of this threatened to turn local Russians into an object of mockery.\footnote{For instance, during a Pushkin lecture convened by the Russian community, a number of guests fainted because the rented room proved to be much too small and the air too sticky. AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 2607, kart. 5–5v (Letter of the organizers to the governor-general, January 31, 1906). On the Borodino-celebrations and the monument to Stolypin that was never erected, see AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 1139, kart. 126 (Minutes of the committee for building a monument to Stolypin, 1912–13); GARF, f. 726, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 100–101 (Report of Warsaw’s chief of police, July 15, 1912). On Zachęta et al., see GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 11–14 (Report of the Warsaw governor-general, January 12, 1898); AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 7181, kart. 1 (Letter of the Warsaw governor-general, November 23, 1907). See also Beylin, \textit{W Warszawie w latach 1900–1914}, 7–36; Wiecińska, \textit{Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych.}}

Such everyday experiences of one’s own social and economic marginalization frustrated members of the Russian community who saw themselves as the primary representatives of the empire. This frustration was directed against local state authorities who seemingly did not intervene to elevate Russians to their entitled status. Some of the members of the Russian diaspora hoped to mobilize support from central state institutions. In par-
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ticular, Prime Minister Stolypin appeared to be a true advocate of “Russian interests” in the peripheries as he had made it clear that the state could not possibly be “an impartial arbitrator in the Russian and Polish competition” but needed to enforce Russian primacy there.60 Indeed, Stolypin interfered in local affairs several times by supporting the claims of the Russkoe obschestvo.61 When anonymous accusations against Skalon and other local officials grew louder, Stolypin decided to send a senator revision to the Kingdom. In 1910, Senator Dmitrii Neidgart headed the investigation, and in the following year, he published a devastating evaluation of the condition of Skalon’s local administration. The report echoed many of the claims of the Russian community and ennobled some of the core projects of the local Russian nationalists, like building a “Russian House.” Neidgart adopted their view that the imperial administration’s first and foremost duty was to shelter and promote ethnic Russians. In his report, the senator from St. Petersburg subscribed to an ethnic understanding of the “Russian cause.”62

From there it was only a small step toward viewing the loyalties of the empire’s multi-ethnic officialdom with growing doubts. When the young army officer Alexei Brusilov was stationed in the Warsaw military district, he was convinced he had found “German networks” at work in a local administration headed by a Baltic German.63 Such conspiracy theories may serve as proof of how strongly certain groups of “Young Turks” in the high-

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61 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 9012, kart. 101 (Telegram of the minister of the interior to Skalon, September 13, 1907).


63 See Aleksey A. Brusilov, Moi vospominaniiia (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), 50–53.
er bureaucracy and army were inclined toward ideas of Russian ethnic nationalism and subscribed to concepts of “imperial nation”-building.64

The Prime Minister in the capital may not have shared all of the inherent radicalism of such opinions, but still he was regularly playing “the national card” when it came to bolstering his position of power. In the case of Skalon, he tried to take advantage of the ethnic conflicts in Warsaw in order to promote his relative: Senator Dmitrii Neidgart was his brother-in-law, and it was an open secret that he had ambitions to replace the Warsaw governor-general. Accusations of a “betrayal of the Russian cause” served as a strong argument in this attempt to seize this influential position.65 For Skalon, this meant that he could hardly ignore the local Russian community despite their marginality both in economic terms and population size. Representatives of this small group knew all too well that they could exert pressure on the governor-general through central authorities in the imperial capital. To some of the nationalist activists in Warsaw’s Russian community, even this kind of support from St. Petersburg seemed weak. They sought a much broader political mobilization based on nationality policies that would go beyond the framework of the state apparatus. This became apparent when some of the protagonists from Warsaw sought to establish ties with other local centers of Russian nationalists. On the one hand, they


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tried to connect directly, inviting guest speakers from Kiev or other places; on the other, they utilized trans-local organizations such as the Russian Borderland Society (Русское окраинное общество). In addition, they coordinated publications in order to place “borderland topics” at the top of the agenda of contemporary debates. In Warsaw, the activists of the Русское общество around Alekseev effectively collaborated with the Russian Borderland Society. In Platon Kulakovskii, a professor at the Imperial University in Warsaw and one of the most prominent authors of the Library of Russia’s Borderlands (Библиотека Окрайн России, a series of book publications), Alekseev found a congenial fellow campaigner against alleged “Polish demands.” In his writings, Kulakovskii reduced the empire to a mere handmaid of ethnic Russian claims for superiority. No wonder the Русское общество put him on the short list of suggested readings.

The most important forum for influencing public debates and, in fact, shaping imperial policies, of course, was the State Duma. After their triumphant victory in the elections for the Third Duma, the “Russian Society” managed to defend their seat in 1912. Once again, Alekseev was sent to Tauride Palace to represent the Russian electoral curia of Warsaw. Here he was not a nationalist loner from the fringes of the empire. After 1907, Russian nationalists in general dominated the Duma. Within this heterogeneous group, delegates from the окраины-provinces were highly over-represented. Russian nationalists from these borderland territories not only tended to be more radical with regard to their calls for discriminating against other nationalities and in terms of their antisemitism. They were

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66 See, e.g., Platon A. Kulakovskii, Полити и вопрос а автономии Пол’ши (St. Petersburg, 1906); Kulakovskii, Пол’ский вопрос в проблемах и настолашьх, in Biblioteka Okrain Rossii (St. Petersburg, 1907); Kulakovskii, Русское русское, 5 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1907–1913). See also Aleksandr A. Bashmakov, Pamiati Platona Andrejevicha Kulakovskogo (Petrograd, 1915). See also D. A. Kotsiubinskii, Русский национализм в начале XX столетия (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003), 53–54. On the Russian nationalists’ circle in Kiev, see Faith Hillis, “Predvybornye izvestiia Russkogo obshchestva, no. 4 (September 23, 1907), 4.

67 See: Predvybornye izvestiia Russkogo obshchestva, no. 4 (September 23, 1907), 4.
also quite successful in placing “okrainy-topics”—like language regulations for the polyphonic peripheries or, generally speaking, the “national questions”—on the political agenda of the Empire writ large. In fact, individuals originating from these borderlands shaped the programmatic positions of both the moderate right and the more radical nationalists to such an extent that we can say that men of the periphery politically usurped the right wing of the imperial parliament in St. Petersburg.68

In addition, activists with a background in the western provinces figured prominently in the attempts to create a unified political force within the divided Russian nationalist camp. Warsaw’s Russkoe obshchestvo worked actively in the Third Duma to establish an empire-wide Russian-national party.69 In the Fourth Duma, the united “Nationalists” even temporarily surpassed the Octobrists, constituting the largest faction in the Tauride Palace. Since both factions were represented almost equally by politicians from the western regions, the Fourth Duma was not only a “duma of lackeys,” but a “duma of the okraina” as well.

The fact that in Russia’s political discourse, the multifaceted borderlands often were treated as one kind of okraina already demonstrates how radical activists coming from the margins of the empire successfully “provincialized” the metropolitan political landscape. In fostering a collective singular of “the okraina,” they promoted the notion of a basic dualism structuring imperial space. This binary model separated the okraina-regions from the “Russian core lands” (korennaia russkaia zemlia) and gave birth to calls for a consistent and standardized okraina-policy.70

While before 1900, the diversity of the peripheries, their languages, cultures, and people—and thus the fragmented nature of the empire—was

69 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 9012, kart. 114–114v (Report of the assistant of the Warsaw governor-general, September 5, 1907).
70 See, e.g., A. N. Druzhynin, Rossiia i ee okraina (Kiev, 1901). To some extent, this dichotomy was older with a plurality of borderland territories opposed to the “core of Russian statehood” (osnovnoe iadro russkoi gosudarstvennosti). AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 6469, kart. 77–78v (Letter of the Warsaw Governor-General Gurko to the chief of Moscow’s municipal administration, May 1, 1893), here kart. 77ob; GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 94, l. 58 (Decrees of the Committee of Ministers, February 17, 1898).
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widely acknowledged, Russian nationalists now strove to establish a perception of the borderlands as a singular larger entity in political discourse. In their view, the bitter fight for the “Russian cause” was the one common challenge in all the peripheries. It was the conflict between a small number of local Russians with the indigenous majority of the non-Russian populations they saw as the overarching feature of such diverse regions like Bessarabia, the Western and Baltic provinces, Finland, and the Kingdom of Poland. Such dualistic concepts of imperial territories made it easy to call for a centralized borderland policy that would have diminished the influence of local state representatives like governor-generals.71

Consequently, in 1912, the nationalist Duma-faction launched an initiative to eliminate the position of the Warsaw governor-general altogether. This maneuver was not only driven by the mutual hostility between Alekseev and Skalon, but also by the nationalists’ essential concept of okraina as a larger borderland territory that needed to be governed by central institutions without too many intermediate officeholders on the spot.72

Along with their ability to shape the agenda, nationalist Duma-delegates were a crucial political force when it came to obstructing reform projects that would have granted extended rights or participatory institutions to the non-Russian populations of the borderlands. The way in which the Council of Ministers’ scheme to introduce municipal self-government in the Kingdom of Poland fell apart due to the nationalists’ strict opposition in the Duma highlights their influence as a “spoiling factor” or destructive force. In this constellation, the St. Petersburg government could only


promulgate reforms in the peripheries and undermine the privileges of local Russian populations there only by executive decrees under article 87.73

All tsarist officials within the state apparatus, be they representatives of central or local authority, had to consider this political deadlock and its implications for imperial management. How much this new mode of permanent, institutionalized confrontation shaped the policies fostered by the governor-general in Warsaw still requires investigation.

Between Nationalizing and Managing the Empire: Tsarist Administration in the Kingdom of Poland After 1905

To clarify a crucial issue straight away: the nationalists’ attempts to remove Skalon from his position utterly failed. Skalon politically survived numerous denunciations, intrigues orchestrated by Stolypin and his entourage, and the kind of impeachment launched by delegates of the Fourth Duma. Until his death in 1914, Skalon remained the highest tsarist representative on the Vistula.

Still, Skalon had to react to the challenges of a shattered alliance with the local Russian community. Some of his executive decrees indicate that after 1910, the “Russian cause” seemed to return to the top of the governor-general’s agenda. Pressured by Russian nationalists, local authorities now re-launched policies to strengthen Russian influence in the periphery.

First, the nationalization of the Warsaw–Vienna Railway Company in 1912 was a bitter blow to the Polish Inteligencja because it entailed the loss of large number of jobs for Polish technical experts, engineers, and administrative directors. Soon tsarist authorities also called for a reduction of Catholic employees in the postal and telegraph service sector. These branches of government were now classified as areas of strategic importance in the borderland region, and efforts to increase the number of staff members of “Russian and Orthodox decent” were considered.74

73 On the project of elective city government, see Weeks, Nation and State, 160–71.
74 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 5076, kart. 1–3v (Letter of the minister of the interior to the Warsaw governor-general, May 21, 1914).
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To make matters worse, the bureaucracy proceeded with further limiting Polish self-organization in other respects. After 1910, conflicts between state authorities and the Polish-run institution of voluntary fire brigades intensified. Rumors circulated that the government might take over the organization, which was of tremendous symbolic significance to Polish society not only because it was an important association for local community-building, but also because it was the only occupation that allowed Poles to wear uniforms in public spaces. Russian nationalists had long called for a state take-over of this last bastion of Polish symbolic sovereignty. After 1910, this option seemed to be more realistic than ever.75

This was only a footnote in comparison to the debate revolving around the question of whether a separate Kholm Province should be created, and whether these territories should be extracted from the Kingdom of Poland.76 The older “Kholm-question” became a heated dispute when a law intending the formation of an autonomous province was discussed in the State Duma. In the years 1911–12, an illegal “Committee of National Mourning” in Warsaw organized a series of symbolic protests. All of this was in vain: with the support of the government in St. Petersburg and the nationalists in the Duma, the formation of a Kholm Province was decreed in June 1912, and already during this year, far reaching measures of Russification were enforced in the region.77

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75 AGAD, PomGGW, sygn. 1212, kart. 44–45 (Letter of the chief of police to the assistant of the Warsaw governor-general, June 8, 1910); kart. 75–75v. See: Stanisław Wiech, "Działalność ochotniczych straży ogniowych w Królestwie Polskim (1864–1914): Droga do emancypacji narodowej czy sposób na rusyfikację?,” in *Życie jest wszędzie... Vsistu zhizn’... Ruchy społeczne w Polsce i Rosji do II wojny światowej*, ed. Anna Brus (Warsaw: Nekton, 2005), 277–91.

76 See Weeks, *Nation and State*, chap. 9.

Finally, the list of state activities pointing at a new emphasis on the “Russian cause” would be incomplete if the inauguration of the Aleksandr Nevskii Cathedral in Warsaw remained unmentioned. The project itself was much older, dating back to the time of Gurko. Over the years and due to the slow pace of construction work, most of Warsaw’s inhabitants probably got used to this seemingly eternal building site in the center of the city. The opening of the cathedral in 1913 and the pompous celebrations accompanying it still came as a shock. The massive crowd of Orthodox churchgoers, the ringing of the huge bells in the bell tower—by far the tallest building in the metropolis—and the monstrosity of the golden cupola that “sparkled like polished Cossack-boots in the sun” made it clear to everyone that Russian-Orthodox hegemony overshadowed the old Polish capital.  

They reacted in symbolic forms of protest: for example, when in the same year, the opening of the third Vistula bridge was scheduled and tsarist authorities planned to have an Orthodox priest bless the viaduct, Polish representatives who had been invited to the event decided to boycott it. Granting symbolic priority to Orthodoxy through an infrastructural project, which, in Polish eyes, the community had paid for through a municipal tax, was unacceptable to them. The imperial Polish encounter again seemed to be overshadowed by mutual affronts and mistrust.

In overview, several legal initiatives, administrative orders and symbolic events between 1910 and 1914 seem to point in the direction of a new, coordinated wave of discriminatory policies against the local non-Russian population. So, the question may be posed: was there a “national paradigm shift” within the state bureaucracy on the eve of World War I?

The answer to this is less clear than it might seem at first sight. No doubt, even the higher echelons of the tsarist administration were infiltrated with a degree of ethnic Russo-centrism that had been rather foreign to these mi-

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78 Cited in Paszkiewicz, “Russian Orthodox Cathedral,” 69. See also: Paszkiewicz, Pod berłem Romanów; Paszkiewicz, W służbie Imperium Rosyjskiego; Przeciszewski, Warszawa: Prawosławie i rosyjskie dziedzictwo; Przygodzki, Russiandr Nevsñii-Kathedrale.”

79 APW, t. 24 (WWO), sygn. 163, kart. 1–6 (Report on the social and political situation in the Kingdom, 1913–1914, January 14, 1914), here kart. 5v.
lieus in earlier times. Stolypin’s style of policy making provided a role model in this respect, regardless of whether he was utilizing Russo-nationalism as a strategic tool in the political bargaining process or whether he was indeed convinced of the need to bolster Russian superiority in the empire.80

In contradiction to this, we can trace the strong reservations toward a “Russians first” agenda in the local halls of power. In Warsaw, with Skalon as the highest tsarist representative in office, we find a particular resentment toward interventionist policies aimed at nationalizing the empire. Consider, for example, the case of the state’s takeover of the Warsaw–Vienna railway in 1912. Although feared by Poles, it was not actually accompanied by major staff changes. Even after the government seized control of the company, the amount of Catholic employees remained extremely high at almost 96 percent. Neither did Skalon push strong Russification measures in the postal and telegraph administration although central institutions in St. Petersburg urged him to do so. In 1914, the percentage of Catholic Poles working in these “strategic branches” of the state apparatus was still nearly 70 percent.81

On top of this, the governor-general avoided the conflict with Polish society that any nationalization of the voluntary fire department would have initiated. This may have been largely due to practicality and the sheer fact that the state depended on the financial, infrastructural, and personal support from Polish society in organizing a fire protection and rescue system. But Skalon, no doubt, also refrained from escalating the issue with fragile political stability in the Kingdom in mind. Thus, the fire department remained a Polish voluntary business until the War, despite bitter protests from the Russian community.

Even the “Kholm-question” spotlights the differences in political priorities that existed between the local and central authorities. While Stolypin

81 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 5976, kart. 9 (Attachment to the letter of the minister of the interior to the Warsaw governor-general, May 21,1914).
strongly supported the creation of a separated and Russified province, Skalon openly opposed it. The Governor-general most likely was motivated by a fundamental dissent toward all attempts to diminish his power. The new province would have been removed from the “Vistula land,” and thus from Skalon’s administration. But he was probably also aware of the highly problematic implications the formation of a Kholm Province would have for maintaining “order” in the Kingdom. Because of this, Skalon tried to prevent the creation of a Kholm Province until the very end.82

Skalon’s hesitancy to transform imperial management into “Russians first” policies becomes most evident in the way he continued to distance himself from the nationalists’ milieu within the local Russian community. While the governor-general ostentatiously granted logistic and symbolic patronage to dignified institutions like the Russian Charity Society (Russkoe blagotvoritel’noe obschestvo), he avoided any form of contact with nationalists’ organizations like the Russian Society or the Russian Assembly in Warsaw (Russkoe sobranie v Varshave). During the Duma elections of 1912, Skalon again openly favored the Octobrists’ candidate—in vain.83

On the other side, Skalon continued to offer concessions, albeit limited, to Polish society after 1910. He was openly in favor of introducing municipal self-government to the Kingdom of Poland; he enabled a widespread network of privately run Polish schools; and he ceded space to a very vivid public discussion on “cultural autonomy” for the Polish provinces.84 In the heady days of “symbolic policies,”85 it was often symbolic actions that mat-


83 On the close ties between the Russian Charity Society and the Warsaw governor-general, see Przygrodzki, Russians in Warsaw, 113–32.


85 On the crucial importance of such politics of symbols, see Murray J. Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966). See also Laurence Cole and Daniel L. Unowsky, eds., The Limits of Loyalty: Imperial Symbolism, Popular Allegiances, and State Patriotism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy, (Oxford: Bergahn, 2009); Andreas Dörner, Politischer Mythos und symbolische Politik. Sinnstiftung durch symbolische Formen am Beispiel des Hermannsmythos (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993);
tered most: thus, in his efforts to maintain a certain *modus vivendi*, he supported the local initiative to erect a monument in honor of Frédéric Chopin in Warsaw. In 1912, the governor-general approved the location for the projected statue. The terrain chosen was highly significant: the monument was supposed to be unveiled in Ujazdowski park, precisely the spot Skalon denied to the Russian community for building a “Russian House.” No wonder that Russians from Warsaw again sent complaints to the minister of the interior, lamenting “with great bitterness” that they were witnessing the local administration giving way to Polish “national requests” (*natsional’noe domogatel’stvo*) by providing “state territory” for the purpose of “elevating a Polish national composer.”

It is no pure coincidence that the proposal of the Duma’s nationalist faction to eliminate the governor-general-position in the Kingdom dates to this very year. Besides their institutional reasoning, the initiative also sought to discredit Skalon personally, as well as his style of imperial management. Probably never before had a tsarist official and Polish society been brothers-in-arms as much as during these days. Confronted with the nationalists’ attacks on the special legal and administrative status of the Kingdom, Poles unanimously opposed this proposal. By 1912, the much-accursed institution of a governor-general had turned into an agency that guaranteed the distinctiveness of the Kingdom and its symbolic and ad-

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86 AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 7031, kart. 58–39 (Letter of the minister of the interior to the Warsaw governor-general, June 13, 1912).
ministrative distance to inner-Russia. Maintaining the institutional status quo was now in the interest of most Polish opinion leaders, and not those of the local Russian community.87

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All the incidents mentioned above show that, with regard to the local state authorities in the Western provinces, we can hardly identify a paradigm shift around 1910. Even in the final years before the First World War, the governor-general stayed faithful to the idea of imperial policies based on moderate reconciliation with Polish society. Nationalism aiming at the creation of an imperial nation and granting local Russians further privileges did not become the political policy line of his administration. In fact, the escalating radicalism of some members of the Russian community was triggered precisely by the official’s reluctance to embrace nationalizing strategies.

How can we explain this caution and, in some cases, even rejection of such claims? Skalon’s Baltic German roots might help us understand why he obstructed nationalizing policies. He was certainly aware of the fact that the Great Russian nationalist vision of the empire left little room for non-Russian officials. Nationalist endeavors threatened the pillars of the established multi-ethnic bureaucracy, of which Skalon was representative.88

But he also saw that in the medium and long term, nationalist policies would destabilize the multi-ethnic empire, particularly on the periphery. As a representative of the highest and most elite ranks of a state bureaucracy that was ethnically quite heterogeneous, Skalon advocated a different form of imperial governance. He promoted a political order that rested on strict social and estate hierarchies, but at same time built on dynastic loy-

87 See the memories of Stanisław Bukowiecki, published under the pseudonym Drogoslav: Rosja w Polsce (Warsaw, 1914), 29–10. For more detail, see Kindler, Die Cholmer Frage 1905–1918, 170–76.
88 For a very similar perspective, see, e.g., Gustav Emil Mannerheim’s views on the empire’s “national question.” See Bradley D. Woodworth, “The Imperial Career of Gustaf Mannerheim. Mobility and Identity of a Non-Russian within the Russian Empire,” in Eliten im Vielvölkerreich: Imperiale Biographien in Russland und Österreich-Ungarn (1850–1918)/Elites and Empire: Imperial Biographies in Russia and Austria-Hungary (1850–1918), ed. Tim Buchen and Malte Rolf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 135–54.
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alty that embraced all ethnic and religious groups in the empire. From his standpoint, nationalist agitators posed not only a threat to peace and stability in the borderlands, where ethnic Russians constituted just a small minority. They were also a danger to the fundamental estate-based status quo of an empire where, according to the 1897 census, Russian was the mother tongue of only 53 percent of the noble elite.89

Like many other higher state officials, Skalon was guided by estate-oriented concepts of social order. In conservative institutions like the emperor’s court, the Senate or the upper echelons of the state administration, noblemen maintained a corporative loyalty over ethnic–national frictions. It is not surprising that in such socially exclusive circles, a skepticism toward the “plebeian” elements of mass politics and the democratic implications of nationalistic demagoguery was widespread.90 Even in post-revolutionary times, Skalon and other higher officials tried to defend the established arrangements of an estate-based monarchy built on the supranational idea of dynastic loyalty, which was much more socially biased than exclusive in an ethnic sense. Furthermore, they accepted the structural principles of a composite monarchy that allowed a large variety of regional “peculiarities” in legal and administrative terms. In this perspective, a single okraina policy propagated by some nationalists not only seemed simplistic; it also neglected the historically rooted distinctiveness of each province, which no higher official dared to question. Skalon’s persistent emphasis on the special conditions of the Kingdom was not only a way of securing his own privileged position as governor-general. It rested on the tradition of managing a composite monarchy in which all subunits of the empire were unique. Interventionist nationalizing strategies were not a part of this long-established model of imperial rule.


In sum, the Warsaw governor-general refused to be a tool for nationalist agitators. The fact that the tsar kept him in office until his death in 1914 shows that Skalon’s notion of imperial policy found support not only along the Vistula, but in the court in St. Petersburg as well. Facing the nationalists’ narrow sense of the “Russian cause” being promoted among ethnic Russians, it is hardly astonishing that Skalon refrained from this leitmotif after 1905. A slogan that used to be equated with imperial-Russian statehood and the tsar’s mission in the peripheries now had been opened to the interpretation offered by opinion leaders on the nationalist right. On the eve of the Great War, the old semantic consensus between imperial officialdom and the Russian community in the borderlands evaporated.

“Splendid Isolation”? On Future Perspectives of Imperial Management in the Kingdom of Poland

The conflicts analyzed above demonstrate the twofold isolation that the higher state bureaucracy faced in the periphery of the late tsarist empire. In the Vistula lands, the highest representatives of the government were seen as foreign, and not only by the indigenous, Polish and Jewish population that went about molding their own public sphere after 1905. State authorities became equally alienated from the local Russian community, which increasingly questioned the multi-ethnic nature of the empire. Paired with fatalism about any possibility of progress given the continuing local crisis, this double isolation frustrated many officials.

Imperial management at the time of the Fundamental Laws and the expansion of civil rights was difficult business. After 1906, officials only slowly got used to the formation of autonomous public forums, but they could hardly ignore the blossoming political landscape. In the Kingdom of Poland,

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91 APW, t. 24 (WWO), sygn. 163, kart. 1–6 (Report on the social and political situation in the Kingdom, 1913–1914, January 14, 1914).
92 In 1907, Stolypin and Skalon—while stripping the Russian electoral curia of “unreliable” voters—communicated frankly about the “ills” of elections because their outcome was not predictable, but rather a matter of chance. AGAD, KGGW, sygn. 9012, kart. 10–12v (Letter from Stolypin to Skalon, July 17, 1907); kart. 13–15v (Letter of Skalon to Stolypin, July 24, 1907); kart. 101 (Telegram of Stolypin to Skalon, September 13, 1907).
land, they were confronted with the parallel existence of governmental and social spheres. State authorities were not able or willing to overcome their isolation and establish solid grounds for intensified collaboration with the indigenous population. Incidents of cooperation with representatives of Polish society were little more than situational coincidences. This limited the potential of an imperial management that fostered policies that would have had a deeper impact on the local society, a limitation of which some officials were quite aware. In times of rapid modernization and social transformation, state authority without such grounding remained a fragile endeavor. The administration’s isolation was paralyzing rather than empowering.

From the perspective of the periphery, tsarist officials in the Kingdom of Poland did not opt for a closer alliance with the local Russian community. Active “imperial nation” building did not advance to the top of the agenda of the Warsaw governor-general’s management strategies. Obviously, Skalon was aware that this would only have been meager compensation for the administration’s isolation, and that it would have hardly counterbalanced the loss of a certain cooperativeness among Poles. The local state bureaucracy, thus, refrained from interventionist nationalizing policies, and the coexistence of the imperial government and Russian nationalists in the Kingdom of Poland was strained by numerous tensions and confrontations.

In overview, it seems as if during the final years before the war, the highest representatives of the government had no long-term vision of the future of the empire, beyond simply trying to maneuver through the current troubles. Tsarist authorities retreated to core areas of governance, mainly focusing on the enforcement of “peace and order” in the public sphere while, at

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93 This is well demonstrated by the parallel existence of educational institutions after 1906, with (Russian) state-run schools on one side and Polish private ones on the other. See Blobaum, Rewolucja, chap. 5; Rolf, *Imperiale Herrschaft im Weichselland*, chap. 13. Another example is the Polish parallel public sphere: in 1913, Warsaw’s distribution network of prints alone counted more than forty bookstores, thirteen libraries, and fourteen shops for periodicals. AGAD, Warszawski Komitet Cenzury, sygn. 29, kart. 5–22 (List of bookstores and libraries in Warsaw, 1913).

94 APW, t. 24 (WWO), sygn. 263, kart. 1–6 (Report on the social and political situation in the Kingdom, 1913–1914, January 14, 1914), here kart. 5v.
the same time, enabling the advancement of social and cultural life in the Kingdom. Protecting the Empire in these provinces followed the guiding principle of border security through military means and the prevention of any form of domestic unrest. It was a reactive and even passive trait that characterized imperial rule in the Kingdom on the eve of the war.95

By now, the Kingdom had lost its experimental status for empire-wide “best practices” of imperial management it had been assigned following the January Uprising of 1863–64.96 After 1906, it turned into a trouble spot, marred by instability and gridlock, with little hope of improvement. While the unquestioned military suzerainty of Russia in its borderlands may have instilled a notion of “eternalness” of imperial power in the Kingdom, tsarist authorities still had to face the failure of their original ambitions to further integrate the Kingdom into the empire and to overcome the region’s fundamental foreignness. It had been one of the key features of the Great Reforms of Alexander II to surpass the dysfunctional patchwork of provinces with multifold legal and administrative subsystems, and thus, to forge a composite monarchy into a unified, homogenous empire.97 In the case of the Kingdom of Poland, this approach had reached a dead end. Imperial management put into practice after 1906 rather contributed to the persistence of the distinctiveness of these provinces.

Opinion leaders within the local Russian community in the Kingdom constantly criticized the authorities’ lack of zeal for fostering nationalizing policies and bolstering the “imperial nation.” Confronted with the admin-

95 See also Weeks, Nation and State, 5–8 and 193–98.
96 I have argued elsewhere that St. Petersburg’s decisions to impose some of the administrative principles of inner Russia on the Polish provinces in the aftermath of 1863–64 can also be seen as a test for homogenizing the imperial bureaucracy in the course of the Great Reforms, and thus as an experiment of intensified state building in the empire’s peripheries. See Rolf, “Russifizierung, Depolonisierung oder innerer Staatsaufbau?”; see also Hannes Grandits, Pieter Judson, and Malte Rolf, “Towards a New Quality of Statehood: Bureaucratization and State-Building in Empires and Nation States Before 1914,” in The Jena History of Twentieth-Century Central and Eastern Europe, vol. 2: Statehood, ed. Sabina Ferhadbegovic, Joachim von Puttkamer, and Włodzimierz Borodziej (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
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Administration’s reservations toward such an agenda, nationalists even radicalized their “Russians first” demands and further undermined the fragile foundation of the multiethnic empire. In this sense, the continuous tensions in the Kingdom of Poland had a severe impact on the political and mental landscape of the Russian Empire as a whole. Together with other peripheries, the Kingdom had become a “breeding ground” of nationalist radicalization and claims of Russian superiority. Russian nationalists from the fringes of the empire developed extreme apartheid policies that discriminated against the indigenous populations and, thus, contributed greatly to the overall crisis of the borderlands and the late empire as a whole. Contemporaries had already identified such a “feedback loop” between Poland and Russia. In the process of “provincializing the center,” the erosion of imperial rule in the okraina territories in the long run facilitated the demise of the authority of the monarchy in the capital itself.

Although the future prospects for the empire on the eve of World War I were grim, it would still be misleading to rate the implosion of the fragile imperial system as inevitable. The Russian Empire had proven before that it was able to overcome severe crises—for example, during and after the Revolution of 1905—and that it was able to adjust to new circumstances. It is worth stating that in 1914, the authorities’ police and military control over the Kingdom was not the least in doubt. The end of St. Petersburg’s long-lasting rule over the Polish provinces came not from within, but was enforced from the outside. Only with the Russian military defeat in August 1915 and the occupation of Warsaw by German troops, had the “Russian cause” on the Vistula become, in fact, a “dying cause.”

98 Politicheskie itogi: Russkaia politika v Pol’she; Ocherk Varshavskogo publitsista (Perevod s pol’skogo), published anonymously (Leipzig, 1896), 12. The authors also pointed out the danger that the Kingdom might turn into a negative role model for the empire because it was presented as an “incubator of arbitrariness” (rassadnik proizvola) that would eventually “infect” the imperial bureaucracy as a whole. See p. 14.
