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**‘RABID RUTHENIAN’: *L’HOMME SAUVAGE*
OF THE LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
POLISH-LITHUANIAN SEMIOSPHERE***

I

In 1789–90 the situation in the Ruthenian palatinates had to be truly horrifying. At least according to Franciszek Jaxa Makulski, a rather open-minded and pro-reform pamphleteer of that time. A rhyme woven into his short political tract about this region presented a gloomy picture of a sinister land infested with a bloodthirsty peasantry plotting the massacre of their noble masters:

Matters have reached a point / Where we’re deprived of all hope for hope. /
Peasantry incited by Muscovite spirits / has started to rebel and riot overtly:
/ They’re sharpening knives and loading guns, / Reforging and gearing up
spears; / They’re claiming arrogantly in our vicinity / That they’ll sift out
tares from wheat.¹ / Confessions of detainees prove / That the peasantry
has determined a rendezvous / To slaughter us on the very day of Easter.
/ Oh, for God’s sake, why is there no rescue for us / From you? You keep
promising it, / but in effect bring none.²

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¹ Cf. Matthew 13: 24–30.

² ‘W tym stopniu u nas rzeczy już stanęły, / iż nam nadzieję nadziei odjęły, /
chłopstwo przez Moskwy pobudzone duchy / już wszczyna jawne bunty i rozruchy,
/ już noże ostrzy, jańczarki nabija, / spisy nastala, bije i rozbija, / i głosi śmiało
w naszej okolicy, / iż ma oddzielać kąkol od pszenicy. / Z pojmanych wielu to się

This short excerpt of mediocre political verse comprises a number of elements recurrent in the late eighteenth-century Polish-language descriptions of the Ruthenian palatinates and it can serve as a kind of summary of what Polish-Lithuanian noble opinion feared most during the Four Years' Diet (*Sejm Czteroletni*). The situation was both tense and vague. The dramatic change in the military and political situation in Eastern Europe that occurred in the years 1787–8 put an end to Russia's monopolistic control of Polish-Lithuanian political life. Thanks to that, it was possible to convene, for the first time since 1776, a confederate diet which would not be subject to *liberum veto* and therefore be able to pass some reforms without Catherine II's consent. The euphoria accompanying this political emancipation was coupled with anxiety about Russia's possible counteraction. Given that for the moment Russia was embroiled in hostilities elsewhere while the reform of the Commonwealth seemed to be supported by Prussia, direct military action was not very likely. But the absence of easily definable symptoms of Russian assertiveness did not soothe noble opinion but led only to the outburst of other spectres. As was described many years later by Teodozy Brodowicz:

We concluded then that His Royal Majesty, being in agreement with the Empress, wants to create chaos in the whole of Poland; that Muscovy struggling against the Swede and Turk is not able to invade Poland now, so in the meantime she wants to wipe the Poles out with a peasant rebellion; that the King uses for that purpose the local Ruthenian bishop who shall order his clergy to incite the peasants in the parishes; that this bishop as a courtier and a sworn royal secretary perceives that action as his duty and a proof of his loyalty to the King; that at the end of the day Muscovy will turn her energy against us and take the rest of our land.³

okazało, / iż już *rendez-vous* chłopstwo sobie dało, / aby nas wyrznąć w sam dzień Wielkiej Nocy. / Ach, przebóg, czemuż nie mamy pomocy /od was? ... Lecz tylko ją obiecujecie, / a w skutku dotąd żadnej nie dajecie', [Franciszek Jaxa Makulski], *Bunt ukraińskie czyli Ukraińca nad Ukrainą uwagi z przydanym kazaniem w czasie klującego się buntu*, in *Materiały do dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, ed. Janusz Woliński, Jerzy Michalski and Emanuel Rostworowski, i (Wrocław, 1955), 419–20.

³ 'Na tym pierwszym zjeździe postanowiliśmy: że Król Jegomość jedno rozumiejąc z Imperatorową chce kraj polski zamieszać; – że Moskwa, z Szwedem i Turczyнем wojną zabawna, nie mogąc teraz do Polski wkroczyć, chce tymczasem Polaków buntem chłopskim wypłenić; – że Król używa do tego biskupa tutejszego ruskiego, żeby swemu duchowieństwu zalecił buntować chłopów po parafiach; – że

Rumours of this kind had circulated in the Commonwealth since November 1788 (with numerous precedents in the 1770s⁴), but it was only in April 1789 – when it was publicised that the Wyleżyński noble family had been assassinated by their own house servants – that these transformed into genuine moral panic in which Ruthenian priests (both Orthodox and Uniate), alleged Zaporozhian Cossacks, as well as Russian peddlers and other vagrants were cast as typical early modern folk devils⁵ held responsible for the envisaged peasant rebellion perceived as an enormous massacre of nobles, Latin Catholics and Jews. Eventually, nothing of the kind happened and it is difficult to judge now whether this was due to the efficacious preventive actions of the noble authorities or whether it had not all been merely an outburst of mass hysteria.

Be that as it may, it is clear that neither the noble opinion of the time, nor that of later historians⁶ possessed any substantial evidence for the existence of a Russian-inspired conspiracy among the peasantry

ten biskup, jako dworski człowiek i sekretarz królewski przysięgły, wykonanie tego zlecenia wziął za obowiązek wierności Królowi należącej; – że potem za dobitkę Moskwa cały swój impet obróci i kraj do reszty zabierze', Teodozy Brodowicz, *Widok przemocy na słabą niewinność srogo wywartej* (Lvov, 1861), 17–18.

⁴ Emanuel Rostworowski, *Sprawa aukcji wojska na tle sytuacji politycznej przed Sejmem Czteroletnim* (Warsaw, 1957), 161–76.

⁵ On moral panics and folk devils see Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London and New York, 2002); Chas Critcher, *Moral Panics and the Media* (Maidenhead, 2009); Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Hoboken, 1994); David Lemmings and Claire Walker (eds.), *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2010).

⁶ For the most comprehensive treatment of the topic see Walerian Kalinka, *Sejm czteroletni*, i (4th edn Warsaw, 1991), 303–58; Vladimir Antonovich's [Ukr. Volodymyr Antonovych] introduction into *idem* (ed.), *Arkhiv Yugo-Zapadnoi Rossii Izdavaemyi Komissiyu dlya Razbora Drevnikh Aktov Sostayashchei pri Kievskom, Podol'skom i Volynskom General-Gubernatore*, pt. 3, vol. v (Kiev, 1902), 1–99; Eugeniusz Sakowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w Polsce w epoce Sejmu Wielkiego, 1788–1792* (Warsaw, 1935), 85–164; Aleksy Deruga, 'Kościół prawosławny a sprawa "buntu" w 1789 roku we wschodnich województwach Rzplitej', *Ateneum Wileńskie*, xiii, 2 (1938), 175–269; Kamil Paździor, 'Polityka Sejmu Czteroletniego wobec Kościołów wschodnich', unpublished PhD thesis presented at the University of Silesia (Katowice, 2001), 18–145; Richard Butterwick, *Polska rewolucja a Kościół katolicki 1788–1792*, trans. Marek Ugniewski (Cracow, 2012), 390–416; it must be noted, however, that Richard Butterwick's book appeared in Warsaw only in March 2012, so I did not manage to consult it before finishing this article (the

of the Ruthenian Palatinates and that almost all (if not all) persons investigated and convicted in relation to the alleged conspiracy were innocent victims. The fears of 1789, catalysed by a number of isolated incidents, were fuelled mainly by the negative images of the lower strata of the Ruthenian community and the south-eastern borderlands of the Commonwealth. In this article I will attempt to delineate one aspect of this complex imagery: the representations of the Ruthenian peasantry as savages, as they could have functioned within the noble semiosphere of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.⁷ I will also try to position the representations in question within the wider context of early modern European discourses of social and ethnic domination. I shall focus on two classical motives, the rebellious populace and cruel savagery, trying to elucidate their functions by contextualising them in the Polish-Lithuanian republican tradition captured at the very moment of digesting the Enlightenment ideology of progress. This, I believe, may prove a valuable contribution not only to our understanding of such topics as the late eighteenth-century noble consciousness or the political dynamics of the Four Years' Diet, but also the nineteenth-century dissolution of the Commonwealth allegiance into a number of competing national identities (Polish, Ukrainian, Imperial Russian, etc.). First, however, I would like to offer an introductory sketch of the complex realities of the Ruthenian Palatinates in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

English shorter version of this book: *The Polish Revolution and the Catholic Church. 1788–1792: A Political History* [Oxford and New York, 2012]).

⁷ 'So any one language turns out to be immersed in a semiotic space and it can only function by interaction with that space. The unit of semiosis, the smallest functioning mechanism, is not the separate language but the whole semiotic space of the culture in question. This is the space we term the *semiosphere*. The semiosphere is the result and the condition for the development of culture; we justify our term by analogy with the biosphere, as Vernadsky defined it, namely the totality and the organic whole of living matter and also the condition for the continuation of life', Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2000), 124–5.

II

Late eighteenth-century Ruthenian or the Southern palatinates⁸ covered the region of the Crown of Poland⁹ which in the nineteenth century was to become identified as the western part of the Ukrainian national space. What is more, it seems that also in the seventeenth century the name 'Ukraine' was applied occasionally to denote the whole of the Ruthenian lands of the Crown.¹⁰ However, in late eighteenth century Polish-language use 'Ukraine' meant only the palatinates of Bratslav and Kiev. 'Ruthenian palatinates' had a much wider meaning than the then 'Ukraine', including also the palatinates of Podolia, Volhynia, Red Ruthenia and Belz.¹¹ The narrow understanding of the name 'Ukraine' is visible in a statement by Mateusz Butrymowicz, a deputy from Pinsk County, who claimed in April 1789 that rumours were circulating that the peasantry was to rebel 'in Volhynia and in the Ukrainian palatinates'.¹² Clearly, Volhynia is presented here as an entity separate and of order equal to the 'Ukrainian palatinates'. On the other hand, Mateusz Butrymowicz perceives Volhynia as closely related to Ukraine, which is quite logical because they both fall into the Ruthenian palatinates. The consistency and stability of

⁸ 'Southern Provinces' as synonymous to the Ruthenian palatinates can be found in Warsaw, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych (hereafter: AGAD), Archiwum Sejmu Czteroletniego (hereafter: ASC) 1, p. 451: Session 87, 2 April 1789; AGAD, Zbiór Popielów (hereafter: ZP), 414, p. 229: Stanislaus Augustus (hereafter: HRM) to Augustyn Deboli 9 May 1789; the name *provinces méridionales* was still in use as late as 1863 as it is attested by [Stefan Buszczyński], *La Pologne et ses provinces méridionales: manuscrit d'un Ukrainien publié avec préface par Ladislas Mickiewicz* (Paris, 1863).

⁹ The Crown of Poland (Pol. *Korona Królestwa Polskiego*; hereafter: the Crown), that is, the Kingdom of Poland, as opposed to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with its own set of Ruthenian-populated lands.

¹⁰ Natalia Yakovenko, 'Choice of Name versus Choice of Path: The Names of Ukrainian Territories from the Late Sixteenth to the Late Seventeenth Century', in Georgiy Kasianov and Philipp Ther (eds.), *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography* (Budapest and New York, 2009), 133–40.

¹¹ A few instances of such use: AGAD, ASC 1, p. 82: Session 74, 12 March 1789; ASC 1, p. 163: Session 76, 16 March 1789; ASC 1, p. 401: Session 85, 31 March 1789; ZP 414, p. 153: HRM to Deboli 1 April 1789.

¹² 'Od kilku już miesięcy przepowiadano nam było o mającym wybuchnąć buncie chłopstwa naszego na Wołyniu i w województwach ukraińskich', AGAD, ASC 1, p. 532: Session 89, 16 April 1789.

this category is also evident from the fact that Wojciech Poletyło, the castellan of Chełm, in an argument about tax privileges of the Ruthenian palatinates referred to them as one 'Ruthenian Province',¹³ although, strictly speaking, they belonged to the much larger Province of Lesser Poland. Evidently, the consistent identity of the Ruthenian lands of the Crown was stronger than any parliamentary regulations. As a consequence, all nobles from the Ruthenian palatinates, regardless of their actual native language and confessional affiliation, could be called 'our Ruthenian brethren' (Pol. *bracia nasi Rusini*).¹⁴

The Ruthenian palatinates were a classical case of borderland.¹⁵ First of all, they were bordering on foreign realms, which meant that in the earlier periods their inhabitants had to live in constant fear of plundering raids. And although at least from the 1770s on this was no longer the case, the old imagery of the Southern Provinces as the bulwark of Poland and her 'chivalric exercise' still functioned and conditioned the perception of the region.¹⁶ Thanks to the fact that the Ottomans were the only regional power actively opposing Russia, the noble opinion attitude towards the Muslim neighbours oscillated between mild sympathy and outright enthusiasm.¹⁷ Consequently,

¹³ AGAD, ASC 1, p. 424: Session 86, 2 April 1789.

¹⁴ Thus Jacek Jezierski, castellan of Łuków, AGAD, ASC 1, p. 82: Session 74, 12 March 1789.

¹⁵ '... a space in which no one cultural or political force is able to exercise uncontested hegemony and in which one is likely to encounter discursive economies that incorporate (but do not assimilate) the influences of various cultural traditions and political interests. Borderlands are thus often home to hybrids, entities that combine some or all available influences in distinct, often alarming ways. A hybrid incorporates and embodies the tensions of ungovernable and so irresolvable self-other dichotomies confined in a single entity, be it biological, textual, or economic', Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, 2009), 149; cf. 'contact zone', Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York, 2003), 5–7.

¹⁶ Jacek Kolbuszewski, 'Legenda kresów w literaturze polskiej XIX i XX w.', in Wojciech Wrzeński (ed.), *Między Polską etniczną a historyczną* (Wrocław etc., 1988), 48–50; Ludwika Ślękowa, 'L'image des confins du sud-est dans la littérature des XVIe et XVIIe siècles', in Daniel Beauvois (ed.), *Les confins de l'ancienne Pologne: Ukraine, Lituanie, Biélorussie. XVIe–XXe siècles* (Lille, 1988), 21–31.

¹⁷ For obvious reasons it is not possible to develop this fascinating problem here. I can only cite the exceptionally warm welcome given to the last Ottoman envoy to the Commonwealth in 1777 (see Jan Reychman, *Orient w kulturze polskiego*

after the *Koliyivshchyna* of 1768 the memory of the rebellious Ruthenian peasantry remained the only threat that could be still maintained as legitimate in the region. The decidedly negative character of the historical memory associated with the Ruthenian palatinates and their peasantry is clearly visible in an itinerary book prepared most probably by Bishop Adam Naruszewicz for Prince Stanisław Poniatowski, king's nephew: most records deal with the seventeenth-century Cossack wars. The Borowica locality is an especially suggestive example:

Here in the year 1650, when the mutinous peasantry incited by Kryvonis (Krzywonos), Chmielnicki's subaltern, was killing their masters, Aleksander Czetwertyński, proprietor of the place, was tyrannously tormented to death: first, they raped his wife and slaughtered his children in his presence and only then did his own serf, a miller, saw him through.¹⁸

The importance of the relatively distant Chmielnicki (Ukr. Khmel'nyts'kyi) Uprising was enhanced and updated by the recent experience of the *Koliyivshchyna* which remained a crucial point of reference in any discussion about the Ruthenian palatinates, especially Ukraine.¹⁹ It was even believed that the *Koliyivshchyna* resulted in a complete extermination of the nobility in Ukraine and it was only under the aegis of the great lords that nobles could return there in the second half of the

oświecenia [Wrocław, 1964], 25–35) and numerous gestures of goodwill during the Four Years' Diet (e.g.: AGAD, ASC 1, p. 546: Session 90, 17 April 1789; ASC 2, p. 148: Session 104, 15 May 1789; *ibidem*, pp. 146–7; Cracow, Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich [hereafter: BCz], MS 957, p. 75).

¹⁸ 'Tu w roku 1650, gdy od Krzywonosy, subalterny Chmielnickiego, zbuntowane chłopstwo własnych zabijało panów, Aleksander Czetwertyński, dziedzic miejsca zbyt tyrańskim zameczony sposobem, najprzód bowiem w oczach jego żonę zgwałcono, potem dzieci wyrznięto, na ostatek własny jego poddany mielnik piłą go na połowę przeciął', AGAD, Archiwum Publiczne Potockich, 86: Pamiętnik podróży dla Jaśnie Oświeconego Książęcia Jegomości Stanisława Poniatowskiego generała lejtnanta wojsk koronnych, marszałka Rady Nieustającej, p. 239.

¹⁹ A few examples: AGAD, ASC 1, p. 387: Session 84, 30 March 1789; ASC 1, p. 528: Session 89, 16 April 1789; ASC 1, p. 544–6: Session 90, 17 April 1789; ASC 1, p. 566: Session 91, 20 April 1789; ASC 1, p. 561: Session 92, 21 April 1789; ASC 2, p. 32: Session 99, 5 May 1789; ZP 414, p. 144: HRM to Deboli 25 March 1789; Stanisław Staszic, *Przestrogi dla Polski z terażniejszych, politycznych Europy związków i z praw natury wypadające. O statystyce Polski, krótki rzut wiadomości* (Warsaw, 1916), 51–2; [Stanislaus Augustus and Filippo Mazzei], *Lettres de Philippe Mazzei et du roi Stanislas-Auguste de Pologne*, ed. Czesław Madajczyk, Armando Saitta et al. (Rome, 1982), 255–6.

1770s.²⁰ By and large, the historical memory of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility contributed to the persistence of the image of Ukraine and her less exposed Ruthenian hinterland as a dangerous frontier where an insurmountable gulf divided the citizens from their subjects.

The Ruthenian palatinates were also a religious borderland.²¹ Christians coexisted there with Jews and Karaites, whereas Muslim visitors, both from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire, were nothing unusual. Christian communities inhabiting the region were very diverse as well: Roman Communion, represented by Latin, Greek (Uniate) and Armenian hierarchies, clashed with the Russian Orthodox Church. Eastern (Greek, Slavonic and Armenian) tradition mingled with the Western (Latin) one. Preponderance belonged to the Uniates,²² whereas the Orthodox, their main competitors, numbered no more than three hundred thousand followers in the whole Commonwealth²³ and in the Ruthenian palatinates there existed only one pocket of dense Orthodox population around the town of Śmiła (Ukr. Smila) in the Kiev palatinate.

Uniatism itself was an exemplary borderland hybrid entity combining the Eastern Slavonic rite with allegiance to the Bishop of Rome. Uniate priests catered mostly, but not exclusively, for the Ruthenian peasantry and as a consequence they were associated with this social group and perceived as inferior to the Latins.²⁴ On the other

²⁰ Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, 'Podróż po Wołyniu, Podolu aż do Odessy w roku 1818', in *idem, Juliana Ursyna Niemcewiczka podróże historyczne po ziemiach polskich od 1811 do 1828 roku odbyte* (St Petersburg, 1859), 266: 'Długo Polacy nie znali ważności Ukrainy, lubo tyle krwi za nią wyleli. Pierwszy Szczęsny odważył się ciągle w nią mieszkać i przykładem swoim wielu innych pociągnął!'; Stanisław Poniatowski, 'Souvenirs du Prince Stanislas Poniatowski', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, ix, 4 (1895), 493: 'Alors aucun seigneur polonais n'osait aller et moins encore demeurer dans ses contrées, à cause des grands massacres qu'y avaient commis les paysans sur leurs maîtres, sans distinction, et quelquefois trop injustes'.

²¹ For a useful analysis of another confessional borderland in the Commonwealth see Richard Butterwick, 'How Catholic was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Later Eighteenth Century?', *Central Europe*, viii, 2 (2010), 123–45.

²² A suggestive map illustrating the density of Uniate parish network in the Commonwealth can be found in Jerzy Kłoczowski, 'Mapa religijna Ukrainy w długim trwaniu historycznym', in Bogumiła Berdychowska and Ola Hnatiuk (eds.), *Polska – Ukraina: Osadczuk* (Lublin, 2007), 29–37.

²³ Sakowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w Polsce*, 7.

²⁴ Ludomir Bieńkowski, 'Organizacja Kościoła Wschodniego w Polsce', in Jerzy Kłoczowski (ed.), *Kościół w Polsce*, ii: *Wiek XVI–XVIII* (Cracow, 1969), 1032; it

hand, there was a number of reasons for which the nobles clung to the Uniate Church: its services were cheap and easily available; Uniate offices and benefices were quite attractive, especially for the middling sort of nobility; last but not least, genuine attachment to the Ruthenian heritage must have been an important factor as well. It is no wonder then that there still existed numerous noble families 'renowned for their attachment to the Roman Catholic religion of the Eastern, that is Uniate, rite, as well as their patriotic sacrifices'.²⁵

On the one hand then, the Ruthenian Church in the second half of the eighteenth century was much less Ruthenian than one hundred years later in Galicia: between 10 to 20 per cent of the parish priests were noble in origin, whereas higher Uniate offices were held almost exclusively by nobles, often born to Latin Catholic families. Although the language of the Uniate liturgy was Church Slavonic, the leaders of this Church preferred to write and publish in Polish and Latin.²⁶ This is not to say that the Uniates were 'Polonised', as this would assume that we possess a valid definition of eighteenth-century 'Polishness'; I would rather suggest that, as put by Barbara Skinner, there existed a separate Uniate identity, heterogeneous in nature and defined mainly in opposition to the Orthodox.²⁷

On the other hand, however, it has to be underlined that the nobility of the Ruthenian palatinates was still much more Ruthenian than is usually accepted by Polish scholarship. Obviously, they

was still the same in the 19th century, as is attested by Bernadetta Wójtowicz-Huber, *"Ojcowie narodu": duchowieństwo greckokatolickie w ruchu narodowym Rusinów galicyjskich (1867–1918)* (Warsaw, 2008), 87.

²⁵ '... znanej od dawna ze swego przywiązania do religii rzymskokatolickiej według obrządku wschodniego, czyli unickiego, nie mniej jak ze swego patriotycznego poświęcenia', as it is worded in manuscript memoirs by a nephew of the future Primate of Poland, Jan Paweł Woronicz, which I quote after Małgorzata Nesteruk and Zofia Rejman, 'Wstęp', in Jan Paweł Woronicz, *Pisma wybrane*, ed. *eaedem* (Wrocław, Warsaw and Cracow, 2002), p. v; relative cheapness and availability of the Uniate services is described by Bieńkowski, 'Organizacja Kościoła Wschodniego', 928–9, 949–51.

²⁶ Deruga, 'Kościół prawosławny a sprawa "buntu"', 206; Bieńkowski, 'Organizacja Kościoła Wschodniego', 894–5, 971–2, 1031–2.

²⁷ Barbara Skinner, *Western Front of the Eastern Church: Uniate and Orthodox Conflict in 18th-Century Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia* (DeKalb, 2009), 58–64, 215–16, 225, 228, though the author's thesis that the Uniate-Orthodox conflict was politicised needs to be further refined, because at this stage it seems a bit vague.

were Polish in the sense that they were nobles of the Polish Crown, citizens of the Commonwealth, members of the Polish-Lithuanian body politic. But participation in this early modern civic nation was something completely different to what it meant to be Polish from the nineteenth century on. First of all, as I have tried to show above, many Ruthenian nobles were still active participants of the Uniate Church, the very institution that was to become the hub of the Ruthenian national revival in the following century. Secondly, many nobles were Ruthenian-speaking. Juliusz Słowacki in his drama *Sen srebrny Salomei* [The Silver Dream of Salomea] portrays a young noble girl from Ukraine who is ashamed of her blind grandma, because she speaks only ‘the peasant tongue’.²⁸ It seems reasonable to assume that the nobility as a whole was bilingual and even the great lords brought up in this region had some command of Ruthenian: it was believed for example that Stanislaus Augustus was able to understand Ruthenian peasants when he visited Ukraine in 1787.²⁹ Be that as it may, communities of Ruthenian-speaking nobility existed in Galicia as late as the closing years of the nineteenth century and there is evidence suggesting that such people boasted their Ruthenian identity without abandoning their ‘political Polishness’.³⁰ Surely Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski did so when he claimed at the diet in Warsaw that his expertise in Ruthenian matters resulted from the fact that he was Ruthenian himself.³¹ There is a good deal of aristocratic know-it-allness in this statement, but we should never underestimate the importance of pedigree awareness in the noble mentality. Many nobles of the Ruthenian palatinates might have been Polish-speaking Latin Catholics, but the fact they had preserved and cultivated the memory of their distinct origins must not be disregarded, especially as regional identities were so much stronger and much more political in the Commonwealth than they are nowadays in

²⁸ Juliusz Słowacki, *Sen srebrny Salomei*, Act I, vv. 745–59.

²⁹ Adam Naruszewicz, *Dziennik podróży króla jegomości Stanisława Augusta na Ukrainę i do innych ziem koronnych roku 1787 dnia 23 lutego rozpoczętej, a dnia 22 lipca zakończonej* (Warsaw, 1788), 143–7.

³⁰ Jaroslav Grytsak (also: Hrycak), *Prorok u svoi vitchyzni: Ivan Franko i його spil’nota (1856–1886)* (Kiev, 2006), 53–7; Krzysztof Ślusarek, *Drobna szlachta w Galicji 1772–1848* (Cracow, 1994), 136–7.

³¹ Sakowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w Polsce*, 88.

Poland.³² Lastly, it is interesting to note that the very court documents produced during the moral panic of 1789 reveal the extent to which petty nobles socialised on a daily basis with the Ruthenian peasantry. They frequented the same inns, holding convivial conversations and exchanging thoughts of the omnipresent rumours as to the impending rebellion.³³ All this at a moment of enormous emotional tension when one would have expected a sharp polarisation between the nobles and the peasants. The language of those conversations, as they are written down in the sources, is a mix of Polish and Ruthenian and it seems that neither side had difficulty in using it. The identity of the Ruthenian nobility was yet another complex borderland hybrid: a dynamic phenomenon adaptable to variable situations.³⁴ In fact, the gulf dividing the citizens from the subjects was not so formidable. For some reasons, however, the representations dominant in the public life of the Commonwealth pictured the Ruthenian peasants as creatures of a wholly different order. I shall try to delineate this image now.

III

Since ancient times the lower strata were represented by European élite culture as uncouth and dangerous. Therefore, any attempts on their part to air their grievances could be interpreted as vacuous tumults of aggressive populace. For the men of quality they were *vulgus sordidior*,³⁵ 'a pure mass of bodies, stupid and full of effrontery, like a crowd of juvenile delinquents' and the only reasonable way to deal with them was a resolute use of violence, because as soon as they see they are treated as they 'deserve to be, they lose heart and

³² On the importance of local and regional dimensions in the noble politics of the Commonwealth see Andrzej Zajączkowski, *Szlachta polska: kultura i struktura* (Warsaw, 1993), 59–80; Teresa Zielińska, *Magnateria polska epoki saskiej. Funkcje urzędów i królewskich w procesie przeobrażeń warstwy społecznej* (Wrocław etc., 1977), 71–5, 168–9; Janusz Tazbir, *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce: rozkwit, upadek, relikty* (2nd edn Warsaw, 1979), 101–5.

³³ See e.g. Antonovich (ed.), *Arkhiv*, p. 3, vol. v, doc. CCLXVI, p. 495, doc. CCCXLII, pp. 681–2.

³⁴ On situational identity see Grytsak, *Prorok*, 56–7; cf. Božidar Jezernik, *Wild Europe: the Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers* (London, 2004), 191–2, 199–200.

³⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, XIV, 7, 6, <www.thelatinlibrary.com/ammianus.html> [Accessed 15 March 2012].

vanish from the scene'.³⁶ This classical label of the 'many-headed monster'³⁷ was continued in the early modern period and applied to both urban and rural commoners. As it was put in the early 1580s by Bishop Piotr Myszkowski, 'a peasant, if you give him a free rein, is *animal ferum et indomitum*'.³⁸

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth such imagery served also to justify the fact that only the nobles enjoyed civic and political liberties, whereas the remaining bulk of society was disenfranchised. As Bishop Naruszewicz put it:

In the ancient times, when our forebears were still ignorant and unlettered, it was suffered out of necessity or intrigue that our cathedrals and choir stalls, parishes and chapter houses, would be taken by foreigners and peasants. But it was changed by King Boleslav the Generous who precluded the Germans, Bohemians and other vagrants or commoners from taking prerogatives and benefices destined for the noble offspring in the clergy. Thenceforth, according to the royal charters and national statutes almost no bishop, no abbot, no prelate should be made, but from among the nobility, so that free equality of the estates [of nobility and clergy] is not soiled by admixtures of alien blood ...³⁹

This speech contains a number of features characteristic for the Polish-Lithuanian republican ideology. First of all, the commoners, put together with foreigners, are successfully 'othered' and excluded from the Polish-Lithuanian national community.⁴⁰ Their exclusion

³⁶ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 1974), 33–9, 50–3.

³⁷ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 27.

³⁸ Quoted after Waław Urban, *Epizod reformacyjny* (Dzieje Narodu i Państwa Polskiego, Cracow, 1988), 5.

³⁹ 'Pierwotne czasy w ciemnocie niepiśmiennych jeszcze antenatów naszych cierpiały wprawdzie z potrzeby częstokroć lub intrygi na katedrach i w stallach, w parafiach i kapitulacjach naszych cudzoziemce i chłopy. Lecz zarządził temu Bolesław Śmiały uchylając Niemce, Czechy i inne wędrowce z gminem pospolitym od prerogatyw i chleba synom szlacheckim w duchowieństwie nadanego. A odtąd prawie nikt na biskupa, nikt na opata, nikt na prałata według opisu statutów królewskich i praw krajowych wziętym być nie powinien, tylko szlachcic, aby równość swobodna stanów [rycerskiego i duchownego] nie brała skazy z obcej krwi przymieszeków ...', AGAD, ASC 1, p. 148: Session 76, 16 March 1789.

⁴⁰ As it was put by Jerzy Lukowski, *Disorderly Liberty: The Political Culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York, 2010), 20: 'To be "Polish" was to be noble'.

is indispensable for the proper maintenance of the 'free equality' between the rightful citizens of the Commonwealth: the knights and the prelates.⁴¹

Secondly, the admission of commoners and foreigners to higher ecclesiastical posts is presented as a symptom of 'Gothic' ignorance and its corollary, unlimited monarchical rule. Medieval kings were able to bestow honours and wealth arbitrarily upon persons by definition lacking the necessary moral and intellectual qualifications. Two sequences of associations are contrasted here: backward past – ignorance/barbarism – political bondage – plebeian arrivisme against developed modernity – education/enlightenment – civic liberty – nobleness.

As a consequence, disenfranchisement of the commoners, above all peasants, is held to be one of the tenets of the noble citizens' liberty. As it was put by Jan Dembiński in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, *plebeia libertas* led inevitably to the ruin of the republic. It should be of no wonder then that an apologist of the 'old republican ways', Crown Field Hetman Seweryn Rzewuski, stated that the day on which a serf was granted the right to sue his noble master would toll for the real end of Polish-Lithuanian liberty.⁴² A century earlier, in August 1672 Podolian nobles were hesitant about the Ottoman authorities' proposal to remain under their rule in the newly established Ottoman province of Kamieniec (Tur. *Kamaniçe eyaleti*). Due to the well-known Ottoman tolerance, the privileged position of Sunni Islam as the official religion was no cause for concern. What really horrified the Polish nobles was the discovery that for the Sublime Porte their serfs were, above all, subjects of the Ottoman emperor and the new authorities would not tolerate nobles' attempts to retain their erstwhile absolute power over the peasantry. This was a token of the oppressive oriental despotism and eventually most of the noble

⁴¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to decide whether Naruszewicz, who emphasised elsewhere that both nobles and peasants were descendants of Adam, revealed in this oration his real mindset or rather tried to satisfy his auditorium. For a presentation of 'pro-peasant' works by Naruszewicz see Mieczysław Piszczkowski, *Zagadnienia wiejskie w literaturze polskiego oświecenia: część pierwsza* (Prace Komisji Historycznoliterackiej – Polska Akademia Nauk. Oddział w Krakowie, 6, Cracow, 1960), 61–8.

⁴² Zofia Zielińska, *Republikanizm spod znaku buławy. Publicystyka Seweryna Rzewuskiego z lat 1788–1790* (Warsaw, 1988), 107.

landlords emigrated to return only after the conclusion of the peace of Karlowitz when Podolia was restored to the Commonwealth.⁴³

It is necessary to add yet another dimension to the way in which the noble opinion construed the peasants' disenfranchisement and subjection. Liberty was the key value of Polish-Lithuanian political discourse⁴⁴ and it was believed after Cicero that all living creatures strove for freedom.⁴⁵ What is more, it was often claimed that only free citizens can be regarded as full human beings. As it was put in the 1780s by Konstanty Bogusławski 'freedom is the gift that distinguishes men from nasty slaves and cattle'. Earlier, in the 1760s, *Monitor* published a satirical article pondering on 'the question as to whether the peasant is human at all, as he does not use reason'. By the second half of the eighteenth century this kind of argumentation was used mainly by the proponents of social reform,⁴⁶ but it could serve equally well to solidify inherently negative representations of the peasantry.

If liberty was such a natural and indispensable thing for every human being (actually, for every living creature), then it had to be expected that the Polish-Lithuanian serfs would try to cast off the noble yoke at all costs; that they would always perceive their lords as their oppressors; that they could never develop patriotic bonds with the country in which they were enslaved; that they would readily welcome both a foreign invader and an anointed tyrant, should they offer them liberation or at least an amelioration of their situation. Thus peasants formed an overwhelming mass of domestic enemies. As early as the 1570s Andrzej Wolan cited the example of Livonia where oppressed serfs were reported to have risen in support of the invading 'Muscovite tyrant' and wrought horrifying destruction.⁴⁷

⁴³ Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *Podole pod panowaniem tureckim. Ejalet Kamieniecki 1672–1699* (Warsaw, 1994), 58–9.

⁴⁴ Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas. Wolność w polskiej myśli politycznej XVIII wieku* (Gdańsk, 2006).

⁴⁵ Andrzej Wolan, *De libertate politica seu civili. O wolności Rzeczypospolitej albo słacheckiej* [1572], trans. Stanisław Dubingowicz [1606], ed. Maciej Eder, Roman Mazurkiewicz and Waclaw Uruszczak (Humanizm. Inedita, 3, Warsaw, 2010), 74–81.

⁴⁶ Władysław Konopczyński, *Polscy pisarze polityczni XVIII wieku (do Sejmu Czteroletniego)*, ed. Emanuel Rostworowski (Warsaw, 1966), 234–6, 365, 400, 423.

⁴⁷ Wolan, *De libertate*, 110–13.

Similar arguments were cited during the spring of 1789 when the fear of Ruthenian rebellion intertwined with sincere desire of lifting the enserfed peasantry. Jan Krasiński, a deputy from Podolia, argued:

Oh, yes, we should fear the rebellions, because such an unjust treatment will prompt them inevitably. What shall the peasant lose? Forfeiting his deplorable life he will end his suffering and poverty and diminish the number of victims. ... Will our forces suffice to protect us from the one that wants to tyrannise us? No, we will indeed need to use large numbers of those people who live without law and without fatherland. Guided by their blind obedience to our orders, they will risk their lives to defend those liberties which elevate us above them and reinforce their chains. Can we really trust such defenders who by changing their master replace oppressive thralldom with freedom?⁴⁸

However, it was not the foreign invaders, but the kings of the Commonwealth, allegedly dreaming of the *absolutum dominium*, that were the 'usual suspects' when it came to pondering the threat that the very existence of the enserfed peasantry posed to the republican liberty of the noble citizens.⁴⁹ Stanislaus Augustus was incessantly accused of such machinations from the very beginning of his reign: the most inventive conservatives claimed even that he wanted to incite the peasants to slaughter the nobility and then transform the Commonwealth into a totalitarian state modelled on ancient Sparta.⁵⁰ It is no wonder that the king was later blamed for orchestrating both the *Koliyivshchyna* and the expected peasant rebellion of 1789.⁵¹

As I have tried to prove above, all peasants, not only the Ruthenians, could be portrayed by noble culture as a rebellious rabble posing a serious threat to both the life and liberty of Polish-Lithuanian

⁴⁸ AGAD, ASC 1, p. 376-381: Session 84, 30 March 1789.

⁴⁹ Cf. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas*, 189-214; Lukowski, *Disorderly Liberty*, 20-1, 51, 106; Konopczyński, *Polscy pisarze polityczni*, 123; Zielińska, *Republikanizm*, 107-11.

⁵⁰ Emanuel Rostworowski, *Ostatni król Rzeczypospolitej: Geneza i upadek Konstytucji 3 maja* (Warsaw, 1966), 60, 68.

⁵¹ Jerzy Michalski, 'Propaganda konserwatywna w walce z reformą w początkach panowania Stanisława Augusta', *Przegląd Historyczny*, xliii (1952), 553, 560-1; Władysław A. Serczyk, *Koliszczyzna* (Zeszyty Naukowe UJ. Prace Historyczne, 24, Cracow, 1968), 128; Katarzyna Kossakowska, *Listy Katarzyny z Potockich Kossakowskiej kasztelanowej kamińskiej. 1754-1800*, ed. Kazimierz Waliszewski (Poznań, 1883), 198, 204-5; AGAD, ZP 414, 174: HRM to Deboli 18 April 1789.

citizens. But in the case of the Ruthenian palatinates yet another element was added : the incertitude of the steppe frontier where the two worlds met, where civil society had to face the riddle of savagery.

IV

As has been testified in the verse quoted at the very beginning of this article Franciszek Jaxa Makulski did not underestimate the threat posed by the expected Ruthenian peasant rebellion of 1789. Still, the way in which his native land was presented in the debates on this problem could not but irritate him: 'I have heard it frequently that Ukraine is a savage land where men differ little from bears'.⁵²

The Ruthenian palatinates, and Ukraine in particular, constituted a kind of Enlightenment *terre sauvage*, somewhat similarly to the manner in which the contemporary English and Lowland Scots imagined the Highlands of Scotland and their inhabitants.⁵³ As it was depicted by Stanisław Staszic, the majority of the Southern palatinates' population was made up of the 'Rabid Ruthenians', obscurantist religious fanatics, ready to rebel at Muscovite instigation, and then brandish skewered infants in a frenzy of barbarous joy.⁵⁴

In this section I will attempt to explore the negative representation of the Ruthenian peasants as fierce savages. Of course this motive does not exhaust the wealth of images associated in the noble semiosphere of the Commonwealth with Ruthenia. The focus will be here on the depictions of aggression, fanaticism and barbarity. I shall abstract this minus-valued aspect in order to make it clearly discernible. This does not mean however that there existed only the negative dimension. The very concept of savagery can serve as an illustrative example of inherent ambiguities of this kind of research.

⁵² 'Słyszałem pospolicie mówiących, iż Ukraina jest krajem dzikim, w którym ludzie bardzo mało od niedźwiedzi różnią się', Makulski, *Bunt ukraiński*, 379.

⁵³ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), 15, 86; Burke, *Popular Culture*, 32.

⁵⁴ 'Na jednym końcu [dwór moskiewski] jako głowa religii ruskiej zapalił fanatyzm i kazał pod imieniem Boga wyrząć w Polsce tych wszystkich ludzi, którzy nie są ruskiej religii. Jakoż w niedziel kilka wyrznięto około sto tysięcy osób różnej płci, różnego wieku, a najwięcej niewinnych onych niemowląt, które jeszcze schronić się nie mogły, a których wściekły Rusin po troje razem na jedną dziedę zbijał', Staszic, *Przestrogi dla Polski*, 51–2.

Savagery and savages were a recurrent theme of eighteenth-century European culture. Their importance does not need to be proven here. Suffice it to say that the negative vision of savagery construed as irrational, anarchic, backward and unnatural was coupled with the myth of noble savagery presented as pure, unspoiled and truly natural.⁵⁵ The roots of both vicious and noble savages can be traced back at least as far as classical antiquity and their continuous existence is attested throughout the middle ages and the early modern period. The multi-faceted character of representations of European savagery seems to be conditioned largely by their heterogeneity resulting from the interplay of various classical and popular traditions, such as, for example, Herodotus' portrayal of Scythians and northern European lore depictions of the Wild Man (Wodewose) with their subsequent renaissance and baroque hybrids and reworkings.⁵⁶

In consequence, savagery is very difficult to define, especially if one wants to adhere to the semantics of the early modern primary sources. Here I shall understand by this term simply an opposition to civilisation, although it must be noted that the later eighteenth century saw attempts to inscribe this concept into more complex models in which it would be differentiated, for instance, from barbarity. It seems, however, that this was not the dominant tendency in the European public sphere of the time.⁵⁷

The lack of civilisation is a very vague and wide-ranging notion as well, so I find it useful to follow here the characteristics of savagery listed by Pierre d'Avity in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. D'Avity termed those traits 'degrees' and ordered them hierarchically starting with the most important one and then descending to those less relevant. His list opens with irrationality followed by lack of agri-

⁵⁵ For a good presentation of this problem see David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, 2006), 31–47.

⁵⁶ W. R. Jones, 'The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xiii, 4 (1971), 376–407; Olive P. Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton, 1997), 33–5, 70–83; Janusz Pelc, *Kochanowski. Szczyt renesansu w literaturze polskiej* (3rd edn Warsaw, 2001), 238–42; Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas (eds.), *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1935), 287–90, 315–44.

⁵⁷ François Furet, 'Civilization and Barbarism in Gibbon's History', in Glen W. Bowersock et al. (eds.), *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (*Daedalus*, cv, 3 [1976]), 213–14.

culture and resulting subsistence on hunting-gathering; nudity; lack of neat, solid habitations; and finally lack of government. A Canadian scholar added to this list a couple of elements which she deemed to have been common in the early modern European depictions of savages: disorderly sexuality, cannibalism, filthiness and cruelty.⁵⁸

Doubtless, it is the representation of the Zaporozhian Cossacks which betrays the closest affinity with Classical figures of savages and their New World reincarnations. The Zaporozhians played also a significant part in the nobility's scenario of an expected Ruthenian peasant rebellion. It was believed that every unrest amongst the Ruthenian serfs was initiated by the appearance of the Cossacks from Zaporozhia.⁵⁹ Consequently, any person accused of being a Zaporozhian or maintaining contacts with Zaporozhia might have found himself in serious trouble, especially in the tense atmosphere of 1789.⁶⁰

The noble opinion associated the Zaporozhians with the worst things imaginable and suspected that the Russian government, and especially Prince Grigoriï Potëmkin, would orchestrate their incursion into the Commonwealth to thwart her political emancipation. In May of 1789 the news reached Warsaw from the Ruthenian palatinates that Muscovy had gathered fourteen thousand Zaporozhians and branded convicts with amputated noses and planned to flood the Commonwealth lands with them.⁶¹ Rumours had it also that Prince Potëmkin was planning to restore the Zaporozhian autonomy and was inciting the Little Russian peasantry to rise against the Russian noble landlords.⁶² Here the old republican fear of alliance between the ruthless tyrant and the rebellious populace is clearly visible.

Polish-Lithuanian representations of the Zaporozhian savagery seem to concur in broad outline with d'Avity's list supplemented by Dickason. The only element whose explicit presence I have not noticed in the Polish-Lithuanian depictions of the Zaporozhians is the lack of agriculture. Around the middle of the eighteenth century Benedykt Chmielowski stated only that they subsisted on fish, game

⁵⁸ Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage*, 66–70.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., BCz, MS 957, p. 730: Stanisław Szczęśny Potocki to the Governing Board of the Kiev palatinate, 4 March 1789.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Antonovich (ed.), *Arkhiv*, pt. 3, vol. v, doc. CCIII, p. 364; BCz, MS 956, p. 7.

⁶¹ AGAD, ZP 414, p. 235–6: HRM to Deboli, 13 May 1789.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 459: HRM to Deboli, 9 Sept. 1789.

and stolen goods but never denied they were able to cultivate land.⁶³ However, the question of agriculture seems to be closely related to that of alimentary primitivism. Jędrzej Kitowicz, who, as far as we know, never visited Ruthenia, wrote in his famous description of eighteenth-century Polish *mores* that the residents of the Zaporozhian Sich ate only greased millet and stockfish stew without spices. He reviled also the Zaporozhians' clothing as barbarous and slovenly and, on top of all that, accused them of sodomy, specifying that it meant both homosexual and zoophilic intercourses.⁶⁴ Bishop Naruszewicz added to this that the inhabitants of the coarse Zaporozhia did not have houses and had to live in shelters.⁶⁵

Deficient housing was an element endowed with especial political importance. Sedentary existence and the Christian faith were held to be pillars of the European civilisation,⁶⁶ so lack of either of them could serve as justification of aggression and dispossession. Emeric de Vattel, an eminent eighteenth century Swiss legal theorist, claimed that peoples who neglected to use their fertile soil to full advantage and choose instead the nomadic lifestyle 'deserve to be exterminated like wild beasts of prey'.⁶⁷ When Vasiliï Kapnist, a colonel of the regular Mirgorod Cossacks, had to explain to the Russian Governing Senate his encroachments on Zaporozhians' 'Free Lands', he claimed that it was not possible to violate their property rights because

the Zaporozhians, lurking in the steppe to thieve, make their quarters out of willow and cover them with reeds to provide protection from rain; when they move to new places these quarters are usually consumed by steppe fires.⁶⁸

⁶³ Benedykt Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny albo Akademia wszelkiej sciencyi pełna ...*, ed. Maria Lipska and Jan Józef Lipski (2nd edn Cracow, 1968), 484.

⁶⁴ Jędrzej Kitowicz, *Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III*, ed. Roman Pollak (2nd edn Wrocław, 1951), 330–34.

⁶⁵ Piszczkowski, *Zagadnienia wiejskie*, 67.

⁶⁶ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500 – c.1800* (New Haven, 1998), 11–28.

⁶⁷ Vattel cited the examples of the North American native peoples and Tatars, *ibidem*, 78–9; Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania: International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th–18th Century): A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents* (Leiden and Boston, 2011), pp. xv–xvi.

⁶⁸ Nataliya D. Polons'ka-Vasylenko, 'The Settlement of the Southern Ukraine (1750–1775)', *The Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S.*,

As Colonel Kapnist perceived the Zaporozhians to be at best a semi-sedentary people, he deemed that it was justifiable to question their property rights.

This cursory glance proves that such elements as disorderly sexuality, filthiness, lack of solid habitation, alimentary primitivism and deficient clothing are all present in the depictions of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

Another frequently attested element is anarchism. As it was explained by Benedykt Chmielowski, the only thing uniting the Zaporozhian Cossacks was their love of unrestrained freedom. 'Each of them is a hetman, each a commander'. They should not be considered a *gens distincta*, a separate people, but rather

a sewer, an aggregate or a dishonest company of ne'er-do-wells, fugitives, layabouts, scoundrels, priests' sons, brewers' assistants and Polish peasants.⁶⁹

This language resembles the way in which the Spanish frontier commanders described the Apaches in the second half of the eighteenth century. They also underlined Apaches' anarchism and this led them to disregard their enemies' communities and to see in them simply a 'mob of savages'.⁷⁰ If we remember that only civil societies meeting certain criteria can be considered as valid political actors, we will be able to understand that the emphasis put in those descriptions on anarchism and nomadism, as well as the use of such terms as 'sewer', 'dishonest company' or 'mob' – that it all serves to reduce the communities perceived as non-sedentary to a pre-social level of amorphous hordes that can be easily compared with the Hottentots.⁷¹

iv–v, 4(14)–1(15), (1955), 29–30; colonel Vasilii Petrovich Kapnist fathered Vasilii Vasilevich Kapnist, a Russian-language poet, who reportedly tried to persuade the Prussian government in 1791 to attack Russia and restore an independent Hetmanate, Bronisław Dembiński, *Tajna misya Ukraińca w Berlinie w r. 1791* (Cracow, 1896).

⁶⁹ 'Nie jest to jaka *gens distincta* w Polsce, ale raczej stek, zbiór i niepodściwa kompania hultajów, zbiegów, nierobów, łotrów, popowiczów, browarników, i chłopów polskich, swobodę i zdobycz lubiących, którzy w Dnieprze ryby, ponad Dnieprem ludzkie łowią chudoby, kóz dzikich i innych zwierząt bawią się i żyją strzelaniem', Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny*, 484–5.

⁷⁰ Weber, *Bárbaros*, 148: 'chusma de bárbaros'.

⁷¹ For the Hottentots fulfilling the function of pre-social nomads in the poetry of Kajetan Koźmian see Maciej Mycielski, "*Miasto ma mieszkańców, wieś obywateli*": *Kajetana Koźmiana koncepcje wspólnoty politycznej (do 1830)* (Wrocław, 2004), 220–1.

In this way they are deprived of their agency and transformed into passive objects of the civilising (or exterminating) efforts of expansionist statehood societies.⁷²

All the phenomena above mentioned resulted from the irrationality which had been identified by Pierre d'Avity as the essence of the savage condition. As it was put in the report of the Diet Select Committee appointed to investigate the rumours about the rebellion in 1789 (Pol. *Deputacja do Egzaminowania Sprawy o Bunty Oskarżonych*), the Cossacks were:

a people subjected to no regulations, disobedient even to Nature. ... They are subordinate to the mistakes of their inclinations which are not limited by any civil, moral or even rational rules; they are unpleasant and hardly bearable to themselves.⁷³

A disorderly and irrational (that is uncivilised) way of life is presented here as an act of disobedience towards Nature. To be human is to be rational⁷⁴ and to be rational is to be civilised, so to be human and stick to savagery is to act against the laws of Nature. The figure of the Noble Savage simply does not make sense. On the other hand, only irrational creatures would prefer to conduct such an unpleasant and degrading existence. Deficient humanity and the resulting continuous sufferings of the savages can serve also to explain their valour: knowing no true pleasures they do not really care about their lives and fear death.⁷⁵

Savages' irrationality is visible also in their conduct of war. They start it out of a mere desire for slaughter and destruction. In this light even clearly intelligible political communiqués can be interpreted as acts of mindless violence: 'In the town of Lisianka the rebels hanged together on gallows a priest, a Jew and a dog deeming that all three were of the same species'.⁷⁶ Repugnant as that crime was, it was

⁷² Cf. Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage*, 51–3.

⁷³ '... lud żadnym nie podlegający przepisom, samej nawet nieposłuszny Naturze ...; błędami skłonnościów rządzony, których nie ograniczały ani cywilne, ani moralne, ani nawet rozumu prawidła, sam sobie przykry i sam sobie dokuczny ...', *Relacja Deputacji do Egzaminowania Sprawy o Bunty Oskarżonych*, ed. Ignacy Tański (Warsaw, 1790), 8.

⁷⁴ Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage*, 29.

⁷⁵ Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny*, 485.

⁷⁶ 'W Lisiance miasteczku obwiesili razem na jednej szubienicy księdza, Żyda i psa, mając te trzy stworzenia za jeden gatunek', Jędrzej Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki, czyli*

obviously meant to give a clear message about the rebels' stance on a number of problems.

If the savages are able to inflict a defeat on civilised forces, it is because they are cunning enough to 'steal' the victory. However, in a real war, that is an ideal pitched battle, they cannot win with orderly European armies.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, as one Spanish commander complained at the beginning of the 1770s, the savages only seldom deigned to 'present themselves to fight face to face ... in convenient locations'.⁷⁸ Characteristically, when it is the Ruthenians that are deceived by commanders of the regular Russian military, Jędrzej Kitowicz does not perceive that as a 'stolen victory', but a legitimate stratagem and yet another proof of the contemptible gullibility of the irrational rebels.⁷⁹

Another characteristic symptom of savages' lack of reason is their rejection of true Christianity, that is Catholicism. The Ruthenian peasants' attachment to the Eastern Christianity was usually presented by the nobles as a result of religious fanaticism which was also blamed for the massacres of the non-Orthodox population.⁸⁰ Eastern Christianity, both Uniate and Orthodox, was often presented as a kind of special version of Christianity for the poor in spirit. In the spring of 1789 Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski opposed proposals of changes in the Ruthenian liturgy and official prohibition of pilgrimages to the Kiev Monastery in the Caves in the Russian Empire (then almost perceived as an enemy country), not because he did not find them useful and justifiable, but because he feared an explosion of religious fanaticism, as the Ruthenians 'are seduced mostly by the superficial matters' of liturgy.⁸¹

As Eastern Christians were believed to be so gullible and susceptible to confessional propaganda, one of the noble opinion's

historia polska, ed. Przemysława Matuszewska (2nd edn Warsaw, 2005), 177; the same story is present also in Makulski, *Bunty ukraińskie*, 388.

⁷⁷ Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny*, 485.

⁷⁸ Weber, *Bárbaros*, 144.

⁷⁹ Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki*, 178.

⁸⁰ [Ignacy Tański], *Treść z relacji od Deputacji Egzaminującej Oskarżonych o Bunty Stanom Sejmującym na sesji semotis arbitris dnia 26 marca r. 1790 uczynionej za rozkazem Deputacji Interesów Zagranicznych wyciągniona* [Warsaw, 1790], 8, 36; Staszic, *Przestrogi dla Polski*, 51–2; Makulski, *Bunty ukraińskie*, 377, 392; [Stanislas Augustus and Mazzei], *Lettres*, 255–6, Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki*, 177.

⁸¹ AGAD, ASC 1, 535: Session 89, 16 April 1789; ASC 2, 74: Session 101, 11 May 1789.

main concerns was that the Russian government would try to use the Ruthenians' allegedly exuberant fanaticism to wreak havoc in the Commonwealth⁸². Orthodox priests and vagrant monks (Pol. *czeryńcy*) were presented as agents of the Russian-inspired rebellion conspiracy. Stanislaus Augustus dubbed those vagabond monks 'a plague spreading in our country' and explained to Russia's ambassador that:

it is the most essential and immediately indispensable thing now to expel from our country those tramps who come from Wallachia or Muscovy and in order to get alms from our Ruthenian peasants spread some false news or even false documents or ukases, as they did twenty years ago.⁸³

Many priests and vagrant monks were arrested and investigated, some were executed, although there were officials who tried to stop the wave of persecutions, notably the Master-General of the Ordnance for the Crown (Pol. *Generał Artylerii Koronnej*) Stanisław Szczęsny Potocki, an unwavering sympathiser of Russia.⁸⁴ In Volhynia, deprived of an Orthodox population, the nobles' aggression was directed, paradoxically, against the Uniate clergy, as they were the closest thing to the Orthodox available at hand. A detailed exploration of sundry conspiracy theories circulating in 1789 in the Commonwealth lies beyond the scope of this article. What must be noted here is the fact that the Ruthenian peasantry was presented as completely void of agency: gullible and backward toys in the agile fingers of distant manipulators acting through their cassocked agents.⁸⁵ The enlightened and tolerant true Christianity of the noble citizens was juxtaposed

⁸² See, e.g., Tański, *Treść z relacji*, 30.

⁸³ '... że najesencjonalniejsza i najnaglejsza rzecz jest teraz, aby jakimkolwiek sposobem wywołać z kraju naszego tych włóczęgów, którzy to z Wołoszczyzny, to z Moskwy przychodząc w kraj nasz i chcąc do jałmużny dla siebie wzbudzić chłopów naszych ruskich, fałszywe wieści i fałszywe nawet jakieś papiery czyli ukazy rozsiewają, tak właśnie jak przed dwudziestu laty czynili', AGAD, ZP 414, 117–18; HRM to Deboli 7 March 1789; cf. [Stanislaus Augustus and Mazzei], *Lettres*, 228.

⁸⁴ BCz, MS 957, p. 46: Stanisław Szczęsny Potocki to the Supreme Military Board of the Commonwealth (hereafter: KWON), 19 Feb. 1789.

⁸⁵ Cf. Nikolai Kostomarov, *Poslednie gody Rechi-Pospolitoi* (St Petersburg, 1870), 203: 'Accustomed to perceive the Russian [i.e. Ruthenian] people as a mindless herd of cattle, they [nobles] did not accept that this people could have its own autonomous reason, and so whenever they noticed any symptoms of its national awareness, they always suspected some external provocation, either by the clergy or by the sly Muscovite'.

with the obscurantist and sinister false Christianity of the semi-savage Ruthenian peasants.

Similarly, in eighteenth-century Great Britain Protestantism was contrasted with the Catholicism of the New Assyria (France) looming dangerously over the British Israel. Catholicism was perceived there as a sinister and destructive ideology used by the enemies of Britain to spread subversion among the savage Scottish Highlanders and American natives and only special favours of the Divine Providence prevented God's Elect from falling down in those adversities.⁸⁶

Many elements of the same narrative were employed by the British to explain the difficulties they encountered in the 1930s in Burma. The unrest among the Burmese peasants was presented as a consequence of external manipulations aimed at complicating the overall political situation in the region. According to the narrative developed by the colonial officials, ignorant Burmese peasants, allegedly still submerged in the traditional 'Southeast Asian culture', were incited by external agents who promised them the arrival of *minlaung*, a divine pretender-king. Thus the resistance of the peasants was deprived of any political meaning, let alone legitimacy, and reduced to a backward fermentation, a kind of seasonal natural catastrophe typical for Burma and her underdeveloped population. Interestingly, the British cast as the agents of rebellion Buddhist monks who were presented as collaborators of the Bengali Revolutionary Association. Enlightened British rulers had to struggle against an ignorant people, manipulated by functionaries of a false religion, acting as representatives of even more sinister outside forces lurking in the background.⁸⁷ The similarity of the British interpretation of the Burmese rebellion to the Polish-Lithuanian interpretation of the expected Ruthenian rebellion is striking.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Linda Colley, *Britons*, 19–25, 29–31, 36, 42, 48, 53, 111–12, 170, 210; Troy O. Bickham, *Savages within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford and New York, 2005), 210–39.

⁸⁷ Mairii Aung-Thwin, *The Return of the Galon King: History, Law, and Rebellion in Colonial Burma* (Athens, OH, 2011), 47–56, 76–105, 216–26 or for a shorter overview *idem*, 'Genealogy of a Rebellion Narrative: Law, Ethnology and Culture in Colonial Burma', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, xxxiv, 3 (2003), 393–419.

⁸⁸ A comparative study of the early modern 'free states' and their citizens acting in the contexts of conquest and domination might prove very revealing. Apart from Poland-Lithuania and Britain also Venice, Genoa, the Netherlands and Sweden should be taken into account.

Although it was the Zaporozhian Cossacks that were the ideal *indios salvajes* of the Polish-Lithuanian mind, nomadic savages lurking in the steppe on the other side of the border and raiding Commonwealth territory, it is clear that the Ruthenian peasants subject to nobles' rule were also presented as a kind of domestic enemies, tamed savages who were always to be suspected as the potential collaborators of outside predators.⁸⁹ Jędrzej Kitowicz for instance believed that it was the local scum that were the 'semen and offspring' of Zaporozhian banditry. In the winter they hired themselves out as an unqualified workforce in Ukrainian inns, farms or distilleries, whereas in the summer they joined the Zaporozhian brigands (Haidamaks) raiding noble and Jewish households. Kitowicz left it undecided as to whether the Haidamaks more often overpowered the guards defending the noble houses or whether they acted in collusion with them.⁹⁰ The fact that almost all the servants trained and armed to protect the nobles, the so-called Manor House Cossacks (Pol. plur. *Kozacy horodowi*), were recruited from among the local peasantry and could switch sides at any moment (as it had happened with Ivan Gonta, the commander of Uman', a private city of the Potocki family), was especially worrying.⁹¹

The insurmountable moral chasm between the noble citizens and their Ruthenian subjects is illustrated by yet another episode recounted by Jędrzej Kitowicz. Once there was a noble who had a friendly relationship with one of his serfs. He even became a godfather to the peasant's children. During the *Koliyivshchyna* the peasant promised to hide and protect the nobleman. However, when the rebels were approaching their village, the peasant came to the hideout and told the nobleman that as he loves him so much he was going to kill him immediately on his own, so that no one else tortured him. And then he slaughtered the nobleman 'like a ram'. The peasant's statement is rendered in Ukrainian, perfectly understandable for any Polish reader, but enhancing the sense of otherness.⁹² The peasant's

⁸⁹ This interpretation is modelled after the dichotomy of *enemigos caseros* and *indios salvajes* proposed in Weber, *Bárbaros*, 85.

⁹⁰ Kitowicz, *Opis obyczajów*, 339–40; cf. Tański, *Treść z relacji*, 13.

⁹¹ Rostworowski, *Sprawa aukcji*, 33; Kalinka, *Sejm czteroletni*, 306.

⁹² '... rzekł do niego: "Moj kumeńku, kochaju tebe sercem i duszoju i dla toho, szczyoby tebe inszy ne muczył, ja tebe zarezu tak gładko, szczo i ne posmotrysz". To wyrzekłszy porwał szlachcica, obalił na ziemię jak barana i przerznął mu gardło', Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki*, 176.

behaviour, as recounted by Jędrzej Kitowicz, is a grotesquely caricatural distortion of humanitarianism. Similarly, the language he speaks can be construed as a coarse distortion of literary Polish. A savage's intellectual deficiency results in a moral catastrophe. In effect, the Ruthenian peasant is presented as a subhuman being.⁹³

As I have tried to prove in the third section of this article, the fear of the peasantry was widespread among the Polish-Lithuanian noble citizens, not only in Ruthenia. But in Ruthenia the sense of siege was especially nagging. As Stanislaus Augustus puts it:

suspicion and fear and circumspection are proportionate to threat, as there can be none more serious than that of a fanatic and murderous rebellion of three million Ruthenian peasants against one hundred thousand nobles.⁹⁴

Jędrzej Kitowicz provided a suggestive vision of the brutal life on the lawless Ukrainian frontier, in all probability representative of the way in which the noble opinion of the Greater Poland Province imagined this distant land:

no middling noble or Jewish tenant would spend the night at home, but at sunset everybody with their hearts in their mouths would go to the meadows, their valuables concealed and each of them hiding from the others: the husband from his wife, the wife from her husband, the mother from her children, the children from their parents and from each other, so that if caught and tortured no one would be able to reveal the hideout of his loved ones.⁹⁵

⁹³ It should be noted here that there are indeed testimonies of Ruthenian peasants rescuing their noble masters during the *Kolijivshchyna*, see Adam Moszczeński, *Pamiętnik do historii polskiej w ostatnich latach panowania Augusta III i pierwszych Stanisława Poniatowskiego* (Poznań, 1858), 151.

⁹⁴ '... podejrzenie i obawa i ostrożność są w proporcji niebezpieczeństwa, boć nie może być większe, jak powstanie fanatyczne i morderkie trzech milionów chłopstwa ruskiego na sto tysięcy szlachty', AGAD, ZP 414, p. 184: HRM to Deboli 22 April 1789.

⁹⁵ '... z pomiernej szlachty i chłopci tudzież arendarze Żydzi nicht w domu nie nocował, ale każdy przed zachodem słońca z duszą wynosił się w step, ukrywszy majątek i jeden kryjąc się przed drugim: mąż przed żoną, żona przed mężem, ojcem i matka przed dziećmi, dzieci przed rodzicami i sami przed sobą, ażeby znalezionej jeden z bólu nie wydał drugiego, gdyby go męczono i drugiego pytano', Kitowicz, *Opis obyczajów*, 332.

Noble households in Ruthenia were perceived as isolated strongholds within a sea of hostile peasantry. What is more, the resistance of those strongholds was more than questionable, as they were permeated with the presence of the Ruthenian servants recruited from among the peasants who were feared so much.

In this light it is easier to understand the violent reaction of one noble lady, the wife of Stanisław Kostka Pruszyński, the castellan of Ovruch, in 1789:

In her village Kuryłówka, peasant youths gathered, as is customary, to sing carols for their lady. ... When they arrived at her windows late in the evening and started singing, she got so scared with this sudden outburst of voices (as she had been preparing to go to bed) that she ordered her servants to disperse the crowd with rods.⁹⁶

The astonished peasants protested virulently at such an ill-treatment and the name of Ivan Gonta was heard in the course of argument. In the tense atmosphere of 1789 even a mention of this personage was deemed by the nobles a good enough reason to arrest and investigate their Ruthenian subjects⁹⁷ and in consequence thirteen persons from Kuryłówka were sentenced to death and executed in Dubno. Repugnant as it all seems to us nowadays, we should try to understand the reaction of Mrs Pruszyńska, surrounded in her manor house by a mob of noisy Ruthenian serfs, reportedly on the verge of massacring the nobles on Russian instigation.

Taking into account this sense of noble manor's isolation among the hostile semi-savage Ruthenian peasantry proves also to be helpful in explaining why it was the news of the Wyleżyński murder that sparked off the moral panic of 1789. A noble couple slaughtered in shady circumstances in their own beds together with their helpless female servants fitted perfectly the above described scenario of ruthless savages' incursion into the bucolic but highly vulnerable microcosm

⁹⁶ 'We wsi jój, Kuryłówka zwanej, parobcy i gospodarze młodszy zebrali się, jak zwyczaj, do pani kołędować. ... Kiedy kołędnicy późnym wieczorem pod okna jej przyszli i razem śpiewać zaczęli, ona tym nagłym okrzykiem złęknioma, ile już do wczasu się zabierając, kazała ich kijami z pod okien rozpędzić', Brodowicz, *Widok przemocy*, 20.

⁹⁷ See, e.g., Antonovich (ed.), *Arkhiv*, pt. 3, vol. v, doc. CCLXV, pp. 493–4, doc. CCCXXXIX, pp. 636–53; overall, Gonta's name appears in this collection of primary sources in 41 separate cases.

of the noble household. No wonder that it was followed not only by heated parliamentary debates, but also a wave of noble escapes from their Ruthenian residences.⁹⁸ Eventually, the fear spread to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which also had a substantial Ruthenian population. In April of 1789 Mrs Niemcewicz from the Palatinate of Brest-Litovsk implored her son Stanisław Ursyn Niemcewicz to come to her rescue, because she had been informed by some letters from Warsaw that the Ruthenian peasants in this Palatinate were going to slaughter the nobles.⁹⁹ The episode is very characteristic, as it shows that what was spreading at that time in the Commonwealth was not peasant unrest (Mrs Niemcewicz does not mention anything of the kind), but news of it (letters from Warsaw) and the resulting hysteria of the noble citizenry.

V

The negative representations of the Ruthenian peasantry as a mass of dangerous savages were vivid enough to spark off a moral panic that influenced strongly the political life in the Commonwealth of 1789. Certainly, there were also other factors instrumental in those events, such as the memory of the *Koliyivshchyna* and fear of Russian intervention. It should also be emphasised that the negative aspect of Ruthenia's image was always coupled by a number of very positive motives, for instance the tradition of the opulent *Roxolania* (Red Ruthenia), as portrayed by Sebastian Fabian Klonowic in the late sixteenth century.¹⁰⁰ This could be still employed in the public debate, as is attested by a row over taxation that took place in March of 1789. Images of Ruthenia's idyllic fertility were used by the deputies from Greater Poland to assault the Southern palatinates' taxing privileges.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ BCz, MS 957, p. 413: General Lubomirski's report from Volhynia to KWON, 11 April 1789; Kiev Palatine Józef Stempkowski to HRM quoted in [Bronisław Zaleski], *Korespondencja krajowa Stanisława Augusta z lat 1784 do 1792* (Poznań, 1872), 118.

⁹⁹ AGAD, ZP 414, 206: HRM to Deboli, 25 April 1789.

¹⁰⁰ Sebastian Fabian Klonowic, *Roxolania – Roksolania, czyli ziemie czerwonej Rusi* (Warsaw, 1996).

¹⁰¹ See, e.g., AGAD, ASC 1, 338: Session 83, 27 March 1789.

Also the very image of an uncivilised frontier could be endowed with a positive valuation. Thanks to its very barbarian amorphousness, this 'Wild South' would serve as a scene of spectacular investment and the laboratory of the Commonwealth's modernisation. That this way of thinking was not completely alien to the milieu of Stanislaus Augustus is attested by a collection of pictures advertising the riches of the Ruthenian palatinates which were prepared for Prince Stanisław Poniatowski by Jean-Henri Müntz, an erstwhile employee of Horace Walpole.¹⁰² Another very intriguing document is Nicolas Baudeau's project of establishing in Ukraine an exemplary physiocratic state under the Commonwealth's protectorate.¹⁰³

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Stanisław Trembecki managed to ably synthesise in his poem *Sofiówka* the image of a land flowing with milk and honey and the traumatic memory of the bloody peasant rebellions by inscribing it in an epic perspective of titanic confrontations reaching as far back as the Persian invasion of Scythia. Ukraine has been presented by the poet as the only viable fatherland for the Polish nobles after the collapse of the Commonwealth: stable Russian rule warrants peaceful development, whereas the cadavers of generations of fallen warriors serve as fertilizers of the exceptionally fecund Ukrainian soil.¹⁰⁴ It seems that kindred representations of bucolic opulence and fertility had every reason to flourish in the households of the Polish-Ukrainian landed class during the long *pax rossica* of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² See, e.g., a characteristic description of the surroundings of Derażnia: 'Beau pays, riche en toutes productions végétales et animales, mais mincément peuplé. ... Les habitants, la plupart d'extraction moldave, du rite grec. Tout le pays circonvoisin très fertile et bien varié, riche en eau et cocus ou cochenille qui se trouve aux racines du polygonum. Pays susceptible de grandes améliorations; présentement point de commerce que les affaires des Juifs qui ont tout le négoce en mains ...', [Jean-Henri Müntz], *Jana Henryka Müntza podróże malownicze po Polsce i Ukrainie (1781–1783)*, ed. Elżbieta Budzińska, trans. Henryka Martyniakowa (Warsaw, 1982), 64, 279.

¹⁰³ Konopczyński, *Polscy pisarze*, 414.

¹⁰⁴ Stanisław Trembecki, *Sofiówka*, vv. 1–40, in *idem, Pisma wszystkie. Wydanie krytyczne*, ed. Jan Kott, ii (Warsaw, 1953), 7–9; cf. Piszczkowski, *Zagadnienia wiejskie*, 111; Edyta M. Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 138.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Mirosław Ustrzycki, *Ziemiańscy polscy na kresach 1864–1914: świat wartości i postaw* (Cracow, 2006), 205–16.

Another element complicating the question of the Polish-Lithuanian attitude towards the Ruthenian peasantry is the Herderian turn that occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century in the European perception of nationhood. The *Volk* started to be perceived as depository of pure national identity whose core element became the national language.¹⁰⁶ In 1789 similar and kindred ideas were shared by representatives of many different political and social environments, such as Stanislaus Augustus, Hugo Kołłątaj, Stanisław Staszic, Ignacy Potocki¹⁰⁷ or even a staunch conservative and later enemy of the May 3rd Constitution Jan Suchorzewski, a deputy from Kalisz. In March of 1789 he urged his colleagues to impose new taxes citing an example of a patriotic peasant from Greater Poland who had offered all his savings for the new army of the Commonwealth. Here the peasant is no longer a rebellious and dishonourable 'other' plotting with foreigners, but an exemplary representative of the nation, an unassuming, and thus even more admirable, patriot.¹⁰⁸

In consequence, sentimentalised representations of peasants were transformed into a token quintessence of nationality, whereas fabricated elements of peasant culture were integrated into the treasury of national symbols. Later Wojciech Bogusławski claimed that only by staging in 1794 his famous Singspiel *Krakowiacy i górale* [Cracovians and mountaineers], devoted to the life of the Lesser Poland peasantry, did he succeed in endowing the Polish theatre with the quality 'of the utmost value to every nation – nationality'.¹⁰⁹

It seems then that at the end of the eighteenth century the early modern Polish-Lithuanian nation of noble citizens was being gradually transformed into a community that could potentially encompass all the inhabitants of the Commonwealth. However, the Ruthenian peasants posed a serious problem for those aiming at successful integration of

¹⁰⁶ Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 1999), 23–80; Burke, *Popular Culture*, 3–22; Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge and New York, 2003), 128–96; Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol*, 50–62, 78–81, 131–4.

¹⁰⁷ Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas*, 180–6; Lukowski, *Disorderly Liberty*, 156; Emanuel Rostworowski, *Legends i fakty XVIII wieku* (Warsaw, 1963), 294.

¹⁰⁸ AGAD, ASC 1, 163; Session 76, 16 March 1789.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted after Mieczysław Piszczkowski, *Zagadnienia wiejskie w literaturze polskiego oświecenia: część druga* (Prace Komisji Historycznoliterackiej – Polska Akademia Nauk. Oddział w Krakowie, 9, Wrocław, 1963), 39.

the broader Commonwealth nation. They spoke a different language and they were widely perceived as inherently aggressive and hostile. The memory of the tragic events of the *Koliyivshchyna*, represented as an apocalyptic massacre of two hundred thousand nobles, Jews and Catholic priests,¹¹⁰ served as a confirmation of this negative imagery. To some extent the savage Ruthenian brigands were a necessary ingredient of the noble citizens' identity, the other against whom they could define themselves,¹¹¹ especially when the traditional negative image of the peasantry as a whole started to erode. The juxtaposition of the Polish-Lithuanian noble citizen with the savage Zaporozhian brigand allows us to observe a series of binary oppositions: noble of birth – without pedigree, citizen – subject, free – anarchic, true Christian/Catholic – false Christian/schismatic, enlightened/rational – savage/guided by the lowest (base) instincts. In the late eighteenth century the representation of the Ruthenian palatinates in the Polish-Lithuanian semiosphere retained its frontier dimension. However, it was not a bulwark of Christendom, but a borderland of an enlightened well-ordered republic of nobles and a deserted steppe roamed by anarchic savages.

The importance of the 'Ruthenian savage' stereotype is further evidenced by what seems to be deliberate attempts on the part of the royal court to counter it: e.g., Stanislaus Augustus' ostentatious respect for the Uniate Church and Ruthenian peasants, as well as the bucolical description of the Cossack folklore penned by his full-time propagandist Bishop Naruszewicz.¹¹² In November of 1790 the diet ennobled in one go a large number of persons. However, there was only one man among them that could be with some effort identified as a peasant. It was Daniło Szczerbina, a Manor House Cossack from Kornin near Biała Cerkiew (Ukr. Bila Tserkva) who had saved the lives of many noble citizens during the *Koliyivshchyna*. What is more, this ennoblement was to be publicised all over the Commonwealth, as parish priests were required to include it in their sermons. Jędrzej Kitowicz related this act to the contemporary revolutions in France

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., [N.N.], *Czasy Stanisława Augusta Poniatowskiego przez jednego z posłów Wielkiego Sejmu napisane* (Poznań, 1867), 55.

¹¹¹ Cf. Colley, *Britons*, 5–6; Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol*, 55–6.

¹¹² Adam Naruszewicz, *Dziennik podróży*, 190–200: e.g. on Maundy Thursday of 1787 the King washed the feet of the local Ruthenian elder in Kaniów (Ukr. Kaniv).

and Brabant, as well as the 1789 fear of Ruthenian rebellion, but remained sceptical about its practical effects.¹¹³

Those attempts at restructuring the negative image of the Ruthenian savages resemble the efforts made by the British government after the final military defeat of the Jacobites to present the Scottish Highlanders as righteous and fiercely loyal supporters of the House of Hanover. Tartan, for instance, was forbidden in the Highlands, except for the Highlander regiments of the British army. Elements of the local culture were allowed to survive in a limited form, subjected to the interests of the state. Prime Minister William Pitt the Elder boasted that he had found ‘in the mountains of the North ... a hardy and intrepid race of men’ who ‘served with fidelity as they fought with valour’, always ready to conquer for the British monarchs ‘every part of the world’. Leaflets publicised heroic feats of James Campbell, a Highland officer who had killed nine enemy soldiers and lost his arm fighting for the House of Hanover in the battle of Fontenoy, otherwise regarded as a major victory of the Jacobite cause.¹¹⁴

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned before the close of the eighteenth century, so we shall never know, whether a similar state-sponsored fabrication of the Ruthenian culture could have proved successful in the long run. What is certain is the fact that a number of the eighteenth-century representations were passed on into the nineteenth century and petrified in the Polish culture, among others notably, the catastrophic vision of bloody Ruthenian rebellion.¹¹⁵

When Kajetan Koźmian wanted to warn the landed class about the dangers of their short-sighted policies on the peasantry (not only Ruthenian), he could not find anything more suggestive than the Chmielnicki Uprising and the *Kolijivshchyna*.¹¹⁶ Zygmunt Krasiński

¹¹³ *Volumina Legum*, vol. 9 (Cracow, 1889), 193; Jerzy Jedlicki, *Klejnot i bariery społeczne. Przeobrażenia szlachectwa polskiego w schyłkowym okresie feudalizmu* (Warsaw, 1968), 122; Kitowicz, *Pamiętniki*, 463.

¹¹⁴ Colley, *Britons*, 103–4, 119.

¹¹⁵ On the other hand those same motives were used also by the proponents of Ukrainian nationality who poached on the ground of the Polish and Russian culture, ably transvaluating the elements that fitted them, e.g. transforming the bloodthirsty savage Haidamaks into noble, if still somewhat savage, freedom fighters.

¹¹⁶ Mycielski, “*Miasto ma mieszkańców*”, 239–43; cf. Piszczkowski, *Zagadnienia wiejskie*, 59; George Grabowicz, ‘The History and Myth of the Cossack Ukraine in

in his *Psalm miłości* [The Psalm of Love] presented radical social activists as a kind of new Haidamaks acting in the interest of the Russian government, whereas Juliusz Słowacki in *Sen srebrny Salomei* with particular delight depicted a bucolical noble household ravaged by hideous Ruthenian rebels, producing one of the most repulsively thrilling accumulations of cruelty in the history of Polish literature.¹¹⁷ It seems that until 1846 the *Koliyivshchyna* remained a peasant rebellion *par excellence*. There is no doubt that the Galician Slaughter was a game-changing moment,¹¹⁸ but the image of the Ruthenians/Ukrainians as bloodthirsty savages is attested to as late as the twentieth century, both in the Polish and in the Russian cultural context.¹¹⁹

The representations of the bloodthirsty Ruthenian savagery were continuously employed by the participants of Polish culture throughout the nineteenth century, especially in arguments with the proponents of the rising Ukrainian national movement. Michał Harasiewicz noted that when in 1809 the conservative pro-Habsburg Greek Catholic ecclesiastics did not welcome enthusiastically the Polish invasion of Galicia (they perceived it as a vanguard of anti-Catholic French radicalism), the noble opinion again suspected that they would try to incite the peasantry to massacre the Latin Catholics.

Polish and Russian Romantic Literature', PhD thesis presented at Harvard University (Cambridge, MA 1975), 6, 49, 35–68, 366.

¹¹⁷ Słowacki, *Sen srebrny Salomei*, Act II, vv. 146–316.

¹¹⁸ See Marcelli Handelsman, *Ukraińska polityka ks. Adama Czartoryskiego przed wojną krymską. Rozwój narodowości nowoczesnej*, iii (Warsaw, 1937), 72, 108–12. Another question beyond the scope of this article is to what extent the importance attained by the Galician Slaughter in the Polish historical memory was due to the fact that it satisfied traditional noble expectations and fears in regard to the peasantry.

¹¹⁹ Obvious examples can be found in the short stories by Eugeniusz Małaczewski and in Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *White Guard*. Interestingly, nineteenth-century Russian élite culture presented the ethnic Ukrainians as *khokhly*: gullible, uncouth and somewhat savage peasants who are not inherently evil, but intellectually deficient, so the cunning enemies of Russia, Poles or Austrians, often manage to lead them astray. Analogously to the Poles, the Russians deprived the Ukrainians of agency; see Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol*, 1–2, 32–4, 77, 312; Andreas Kappeler, 'Mazepintsy, Malorossy, Khokhly: Ukrainians in the Ethnic Hierarchy of the Russian Empire', in Andreas Kappeler, *et al.* (eds.), *Culture, Nation, and Identity: The Ukrainian-Russian Encounter (1600–1945)* (Edmonton and Toronto, 2003), 168–75.

In effect, the new authorities launched limited persecutions against the Uniate clergy and detained its head.¹²⁰

At the beginning of the 1860s Volodymyr Antonovych still had to argue that he did not want to arm his nation with knives and scythes, but with a conscience and education. He also complained that his Polish opponents had denounced him to the Russian authorities as a leader of a new *Koliyivshchyna*.¹²¹ In Galicia the Haidamaks were feared as late as the second half of the 1870s when the Russo-Austrian rivalry in the Balkans intensified and large Russian military detachments approached the Austro-Hungarian borders.¹²² Once again, the spectre of Ruthenian rebellion was conjured by the looming shadow of the Russian Empire. Similarly, at the beginning of the 1880s the conversion of Greek Catholic peasants from the village of Gnylychky (Pol. Hniliczki) to Russian Orthodoxy was presented by both the Polish and Austrian media and authorities as evidence for the existence of a Russian spy network in the Galician Greek Catholic Church. The motives of the Gnylychky parishioners who were in conflict with the local priest were largely ignored.¹²³

The stability of the Polish noble representations of the Ruthenian rebellion is also visible in Zofia Kossak-Szczucka's description of revolutionised Volhynia:

On top of all that, Ruthenian house servants used to betray their masters everywhere. People who served for decades in the same manor house, who were regarded as most loyal and fully devoted, at the first noise of pogrom, those very same people, when called by their kith and kin, tore all the bonds and like a tamed wolf unable to master his suddenly awoken instincts, they joined the enemies, be it overtly or secretly. You could trust nobody, count on nobody. Paradoxically, the petty nobility that had always been disdained and turned away from, only seldom participated in the pogroms.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Michael Harasiewicz, *Annales Ecclesiae ruthenae gratiam et communionem cum s. Sede Romana habentis, ritumque Graeco-Slavicum observantis, cum singulari respectu ad dioeceses ruthenas Leopoliensem, Premisliensem et Chelmensem* (Lvov, 1862), 932.

¹²¹ Volodymyr Antonovych, *Moya spovid': vybrani istorychni ta publitsystychni tvory* (Kiev, 1995), 84, 89.

¹²² Grytsak, *Prorok*, 183.

¹²³ Wójtowicz-Huber, "Ojcowie narodu", 133–40.

¹²⁴ 'Na domiar złego rusińska służba domowa zdradzała prawie wszędzie swoich panów. Ludzie, którzy po kilkadziesiąt lat służyli w tym samym dworze, których uważano za najwierniejszych i całkiem oddanych, na odgłos wrzawy pogromu, na

We see here again the traditional noble vision of the Ruthenian rebellion: a manor house is surrounded (and in fact permeated) by rebellious peasantry who can never be trusted, because of their animal-like instincts. What is more, in times of emergency the haughty landowners have an opportunity to take to the traditional egalitarian solidarity of all the nobles, regardless of their economic standing. Thus the representations of the aggressive Ruthenian others serve to define and enforce the cohesion of the economically stratified nobility.

Of course it is not my purpose to deny here that Volhynia for the period 1917–20 experienced bloody ethnic and social confrontations. I just want to show that the old images of Ruthenian savagery present in the late eighteenth century primary sources were still used by the twentieth century Poles and that this old imagery was adjusted and imposed on new phenomena,¹²⁵ such as the revolutionary tempest in the Russian Empire and the rise of Ukrainian nationalism. To understand the ideological dynamics of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism it is indispensable to explore the early modern treasury of meanings and representations on which its ideologues drew. It seems for instance that long before the Ukrainian nation-builders started to develop their project in the nineteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian hegemonic culture had successfully othered the Ruthenians and their traditions and thus managed to banish them from the Polish City upon a Hill.

zawołanie bliskich i krewniaków, zrywali wszystkie krępujące więzy i jak wilk oswojony niezdolni pohamować budzących się nagle instynktów właściwej swojej natury, jawnie lub skrycie przechodzili do obozu wrogów. Nie można było dowierzać nikomu, opierać się już na nikim. Przez ciekawe zaś zrządzenie losu odsuwana i lekceważona szlachta zagonowa gdzieś tylko, w wyjątkowych razach, należała czynnie do pogromów', Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, *Pożoga. Wspomnienia z Wołynia 1917–1919* (2nd edn Warsaw, 1996), 42.

¹²⁵ Cf. Colley, *Britons*, 172, on the 'invention' of British fox-hunting.