

# Everyday Nationalism at a Time of Change: The Cossack Image in Dnipro, Ukraine

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***Abstract:** When is banal nationalism most salient? How does the need to change narratives trickle down to the level of everyday institutionalization? What is the role of war in generating seemingly banal changes? This paper uses the city of Dnipro, Ukraine as a case study of how war accelerates the process of national identity formation. The paper argues that the rejection of the Soviet past and the embracing of Ukraine's identity as the "Cossack nation" was happening regardless of developments after 2014, but that the Maidan revolution and the subsequent conflict accelerated those developments. This is reflected at the level of changes to numerous banal "flaggings" (Billig, 1995) of Cossack/Ukrainian identity throughout the city of Dnipro: in the coat of arms, the name of the city and region, monuments and memorials, and street names. Based on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2018, the authors show how Cossack heroes come to replace Soviet ones in ways rendered intelligible through the concept of "banal nationalism."*

**Keywords:** Ukraine, Nationalism, Symbols, Banal Nationalism, Cossacks

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How does war and conflict affect seemingly banal changes? How does the need to impose narrative change on a society trickle down to the level of the everyday? Michael Billig juxtaposes “hot” and “banal” nationalism (choosing ethnonational conflicts such as those in the former Yugoslavia to exemplify the former) but there is no logical reason why the two cannot exist simultaneously. Granted, the former might grab our attention more than the latter but there is no reason why the two cannot exist simultaneously. Examining the use of banal nationalism in “nationalizing nations” (Brubaker, 1996) in time of war is thus likely to offer us a plethora of insights into the relationship between war and banal nationalism. Nationalist “flaggings”, in Billig’s (1995) term, are all around us and permeate the societies in which we live. A nationalizing nation offers us the chance to see everyday nationalism where it logically should be at its most salient- at the point of evolution of a new national identity. This paper argues that war accelerates the pace of change in new nations, facilitating the evolution of new national identities. It makes this argument through a case study of changes in the city of Dnipro, Ukraine.

These questions are important for both theoretical and empirical reasons. Theoretically, scholars have hitherto been reluctant to apply Billig’s concept to non-Western societies and non-democratic nations (Goode, 2017). Yet because nationalism in the stable (his word is “established”) nations is so rarely “hot,” we do not have the opportunity to observe everyday nationalism in formation. As a former part of the Soviet Union- and one where democracy is still far from institutionalized- Ukraine offers us the opportunity to expand the number of cases. More abstractly, analyzing societies in transition enables us to view changes in real time and whether “hot” and “banal” nationalism can exist simultaneously. The undeclared war in Ukraine’s eastern region of Donbass has given a new impetus to narratives affirming Ukrainian difference from Russia, but these are ignored in part due to the “hot” conflict. Indeed, in some ways the case study suggests a different way to explore what Mark Beissinger (2001) called periods of “condensed history.” Beissinger argued that periods in which events occurred in close proximity to each other could be considered “condensed history” (his example is the revolutions at the end of the Soviet Union). A similar case could be made for the impact of conflict on national identity and states. Some scholars (e.g. Peterson, 2002) have noticed that national identities can be the product of periods of conflict. With its rapid transition from post-Soviet state to truly independent status during war, Ukraine is a good case in which to evaluate this notion.

Empirically, the question is also important, as Ukraine is currently fighting an “Anti-Terrorist Operation” in the Donbass region which borders Dnipropetrovsk. A region under martial law as of December 2018 due to the seizure of Ukrainian vessels by Russian naval forces (Krasnolutska & Verbyany, 2018), if the war spreads there is a good chance it will spread to Dnipropetrovsk region. Indeed, this was one of the regions in which Russian operatives tried (but failed) to instigate pro-Russian uprisings in 2014, thanks in part to the *blokposty* (checkpoints) which were manned by volunteers after the Revolution of Dignity. Given the future uncertain path of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the future possible loyalties of the people in the region is of the utmost importance. For both theoretical and empirical reasons, then, developments in the city of Dnipro, Ukraine are important.

The city itself is a good case study as a microcosm of broader changes affecting all Ukrainian society in the wake of the annexation of Crimea and the undeclared war in the country’s east. A Russian-speaking region, it has recently undergone a large number of changes designed to create new historical memories which Ukrainianize the city and make it more attuned to a common national identity. Indeed, the name of the city was, until 2015, Dnipropetrovsk (which is still the name of the surrounding region) although changed to simply “Dnipro.” The ending of “Dnipropetrovsk” referred to the Communist Grigory Petrovsk, one of the leading architects of the *Holodomor*- the artificial famine under the Soviets which killed an estimated five million Ukrainians. Due to such negative associations, the city was renamed. While there are other cities in Ukraine that are experiencing similar processes of nationalization, Dnipro is one of the cities undergoing the most profound senses of cultural re-alignment.

This paper argues that Billig’s (1995) concept of “banal nationalism” helps us comprehend most of the changes in post-2014 Dnipro. Since the outbreak of the war in neighboring Donbass, a revolution against images and signs of the Soviet and Russian Imperial past has overtaken Ukraine. Partially replacing the “little Russian” narrative of the past has been the image of the strong and independent Cossack state. The city of Dnipro, a center of the Ukrainian space industry and closed in Soviet times, is near the center of Ukraine’s “Cossack myth” (Plokhly, 2012). The next section therefore reviews the concept of “banal nationalism” and juxtaposes it to more overt forms of nationalism. Second, the paper provides a history of events in Ukraine centered around 2014 and the corresponding law outlawing symbols from both the Nazi and Soviet eras. The third section examines the controversy over the name of the city and the region as emblematic of the

accelerated efforts to create a new national identity. Fourth, the paper analyzes the changing names of public monuments and street names within the city, changes which would probably have occurred anyway but did so much faster due to the war. In part for historical reasons, Dnipro is emerging as one of the centers of the new Ukrainian/Cossack identity. The final section concludes.

Much of the paper is based on Arnold's ethnographic fieldwork conducted over the summer of 2018 in the regions of Dnipro and Zaporozhia. This includes interviews with members of the city council, including the director of the "Dnipro ethnographic parks" project. The archaeological project works to unearth the remains of the Cossack past in the region, which at one time was home to five different Cossack fortresses. Arnold was fortunate enough to visit one such archaeological dig in the summer of 2018. Further, the authors conducted other interviews with members of the city council over the internet at a later time. These interviews produced many references to websites and suggested articles from the local news. All told, the data offered many important insights on the evolution of a new Ukrainian nationalism, both "hot" and "cold" in different dimensions.

### **The Banality of Nationalism**

In the age of Trump, Le Pen, and Brexit it has become common to associate nationalism with negative outcomes, particularly when counterposed to the related term "patriotism." Yet what is often overlooked is the ubiquity of nationalism in our daily lives. American schoolchildren, for instance, recite the pledge of allegiance every day and live in a world where the Stars and Stripes can be seen everywhere. This section therefore situates the research project in the literature. First, it elaborates on the concept of "banal nationalism," notes its occurrence in classic theories of nationalism, and summarizes work that builds on Billig's work. Second, this section reviews the literature on the new nationalism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, arguing that it is a particularly appropriate venue in which to examine changes in nationalist discourse. The next section offers a brief history of Ukrainian nationalism, with special focus on the 2014 "revolution of dignity," the war, and changes made thereafter.

Billig's (1995) concept of "banal nationalism" is juxtaposed to so-called "hot" nationalism which he saw at the time in places such as the former Yugoslavia. Criticizing the implication that nationalism is a force outside of the dominant nations, he argues that "in a world of nation-states, nationalism cannot be confined to the periphery" (Billig, 1995: 5) and that, in fact, the supposedly

“established” nations of the West themselves manifest nationalist ideology. They do so in a subtler (or perhaps just less overt) way, to be sure, such that phenomena re-creating national identity are rendered commonplace and banal. Indeed, “in the established nations, there is a continual ‘flagging’, or reminding, of nationhood.... In so many little ways, the citizenry are reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” (Billig, 1995: 8). Flags left unwaved do not need to be waved in part because their relevance and meaning are assumed values. Identifying some of those practices by which nations can be simultaneously flagged and remembered is his concern for the rest of the book.

One such way in which nations can enforce the reality of their existence is through the control of language. Defining certain mannerisms and ways of speaking as “high,” Billig (1995:31) cites Haugen in claiming that the “the word ‘dialect’ did not gain its linguistic meaning until the early modern period.” The formalization of language, including standardization of place names, is one of the basic ways in which nations “flag” objective phenomena so as to remind us of their existence. Similarly, practices of “deixis” (where “to understand the meaning of a deitic utterance, listeners have to interpret it from the position of the speaker” -Billig, 1995: 106) renders uncontroversial the existence of the nation.

Another way in which nations daily recreate themselves is through what Billig calls “enhabitation.” He writes, “one might describe this process of routine-formation as *enhabitation*: thoughts, reactions, and symbols become turned into routine habits and, thus, they become *enhabited*. The results is that the past is enhabited in the present in a dialectic of forgotten remembrance” (Billig, 1995: 42 His emphasis). The unnoticed significance of symbols on the flag, the monument by which one passes daily, and the famous national heroes pictured on currency are but three of the myriad of examples. While it should be mentioned that other theorists of nationalism (e.g. Anderson, 1983) have also drawn attention to the way in which states make meaning specifically in the case of nationalism, Billig’s work is an extension of his logic. For Anderson, the tomb of the unknown soldier is the manifestation of nationalism, as no-one advocates a tomb for the unknown Marxist.

A similar system of flagging the reality of the nation lies at the heart of Gellner's (1983) work on the creation of modern nationalism. More than anything else, Gellner insists, it is the modern school system which furnishes its subjects with identity as they seek to learn about the history of their culture. Yet in learning about "their" culture, students learn that the world is subdivided- by nature or some other force- into preternatural categories and that 'they' have a single unified history which can be projected back onto history. Billig (1995: 71) recognizes as much when he argues that "national histories tell of a people passing through time- 'our' people, with 'our' ways of life, and 'our' culture. Stereotypes of character and temperament can be mobilized to tell the tale of 'our' uniqueness and 'our' common fate." Public memorials serve to institutionalize and stabilize that history outside of the formal school setting.

Other scholars have sought to build on Billig's concept of "banal nationalism." For instance, Sumartojo (2017) discusses public features as "flaggings" of the nation in every day life, stating that "...a postal address, local council area, parliamentary constituency or named landscape feature all have official and national meaning" (Sumartoio, 2017: 198) Sumartojo discusses the nation as *experiential*. That is to say that the nation is not just an imposition of political power or a collection of symbols and ideologies or even a social construction, but it is an experience, a lens through which we perceive and sense the world. This sensory process is a notion "...that attends to how we trace through, perceive and make sense of it as part of our everyday worlds" (Sumartojo, 2017: 199). She contends that banal nationalism is simultaneously subtle and overt. She recounts her average morning routine, wherein she passes by active and passive nationalist sentiments. The most overt is when she passes by a series of restaurants, identifying them (and their cuisine) by their nationality (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Italian, etc).

Still, even Sumartoio is writing within the limits of what Billig (1995: 8) calls "the established nations." By "the established" nations, he really means those situated in the West, including Australia. Goode (2017) provides an account of banal nationalism in Russia, arguing that "...I seek to bridge between 'banal' and 'everyday' nationalism to account for the disconnect between public and private patriotisms in Russia" (Goode, 2017: 123). He finds that, while official attempts to commandeer the nationalist juggernaut do exist, when the state does try to do so it is deemed inauthentic. Perversely, this drains the meaning from these practices and achieves the opposite of what was intended.. Indeed, "if 'banal' nationalism as a concept involves the extent to which individuals are unaware of the constant flagging of the nation in their daily lives and

routines, my interviews in Russia suggest that the Kremlin may have achieved the opposite. Respondents viewed the state's patriotic practices as relatively obvious" (Goode, 2017: 129-130). Goode attributes this retreat into private nationalism to the novelty of Russian experience as a nation-state for the first time in its history and as a way in which semi-authoritarian regimes can try to manufacture legitimacy.

Billig (2017) acknowledges some of the criticisms of "banal nationalism" and responds to them. Critics charge that Billig's account is ethnocentric, limited to the West, and pessimistic about the positive impact of nationalism. He (2017: 32) agrees with the charge that his work has "ethnocentric presuppositions, which express a Western bias against the non-Western world." Both Western and non-Western nations reproduce themselves with banal and non-banal nationalism. While his original work is limited to the West, the later volume contains chapters on how Asia, Latin America, and Africa institutionalize the practices of nationality in a way that renders them banal. Finally, he does not deny that nationalism can play a positive role in our politics- not least in delimiting who 'the people' are in a manner that makes them less than all of mankind. However, "the assumptions of nationhood and the dominance of the national 'imaginary' have not just produce exclusive communities but they have, in effect, blocked out alternative ways of imagining the political past and present."

One area of the world particularly well-suited for the study of nationalism is the Former Soviet Union. Until 1991 part of a unified state which claimed to govern in accord with the dictates of "scientific" Communism, nationhood put another ideological system back on the menu. Indeed, acknowledging that "the Soviet Union was not conceived or institutionalized as nation-state" (Brubaker, 1996: 28), Brubaker goes further to expand on a triad of factors in Eurasia which shape the region's politics: national minorities, nationalizing nations, and external homelands. Of these three, the most important for us are the "nationalizing nationalisms [that] involve claims made in the name of a 'core nation' or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole" (Brubaker, 1996: 5). Even though "nationalizing nations" may be multiethnic entities, a core nation (in the sense of Smith's [1986] "ethnic core") offers the repository of stories, memories, and symbols on which the nation will be constructed.

This concept has been used to explain several questions in Eurasia. Henry Hale (2005: 64), for instance, argues that "the most important reason why Russia survives whereas the USSR broke apart is that the latter contained a core ethnic region as part of its ethnofederal structure whereas

the former did not.” The subdivisions of the Russian Federation into Krai, Oblasts, and ethnic Republics have kept Russian nationalists divided and unable to mount barriers to collective action. Pain (2016) calls this “imperial nationalism” which designates a special space for ethnic Russians within the state structure and continually re-creates the phenomenon of Russian citizens’ subjectivity as subjects. Some experts (e.g. McFaul, 2014) argued that Putin’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a bid to commandeer the longing of the Russian “core” nation for territorial expansion and greatness as a way of maintaining popularity.

Other puzzles on which the concept of “core nation” can help shed light include the adoption of language laws in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. These laws required ethnic Russians living in these territories to learn the new ‘official’ language (which was from an entirely different language family) in a relatively short space of time, or be denied citizenship (Laitin, 1998). The institutionalization of the eponymous group’s language in these states made possible a clean break with the Soviet past. However, linguistic proximity in Ukraine (and Belarus) meant that creating a sense of separateness and distinction was more difficult in the case of these societies than for their Baltic brethren. Indeed, Ukraine contains a large number of those who choose Russian as a first language. For a long time considered simply “little Russia” and looked at with a certain condescension by Russians, the creation and re-creation of a Ukrainian identity is an ongoing project.

All of which means that the case of Ukraine, and Dnipro in particular, is fascinating for study. Ukraine is a case where national identity is still in transition from the rival ideological system of Soviet and Communist internationalism. Similarly, Ukraine is famously a “torn” country, rent East from West by ideological and cultural divisions (Huntington, 1993). It is thus a fascinating case in which to view the confrontation of two differing narratives over the country’s history and how the war with Russia has generated changes even at the level of banality. Furthermore, the democratic legacies of the Cossacks (Plokhii, 2012) suggest that an evocation of their image as the founding myth for Ukraine- a myth built with increased rapidity in the post-Maidan era- suggests interesting avenues for the future of that society. For these reasons, then, the next section gives a brief account of Ukrainian history.

## Ukrainian history and the Cossack myth

The Cossack legacy has been at the center of attempts to construct Ukrainian distinction from Russia. Although Russia has its own Cossacks (some of whom are descended from those in Ukraine- see Arnold, 2014), the meaning and valence of the archetype is different in the two countries. This section catalogues how the image of the Cossack has become central to Ukrainian national identity, especially in the post-Maidan revolution era. The emergence of a Ukrainian/Cossack identity would probably have occurred anyway, but did so much faster due to the revolution and war. To demonstrate this, it provides a very brief history of the Cossacks and their historical claims to be forebears of Ukraine. It then turns to Ukraine in the post-Soviet era and particularly on the events of 2014 in Ukraine's Maidan square. The nationalizing mission of Ukraine is most evident in the passage of the 2015 law "on the conviction of Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of the Promotion of Their Symbols," a law which lays the foundation for the renaming currently underway throughout the country and especially in this region. The changes themselves are the subject of the next two sections.

Historically, Cossacks were the closest thing Ukraine had to an "ethnic core" (Smith, 1986). Originally the descendants of runaway serfs, the Cossacks established state-like entities in what we today call Ukraine by the seventeenth century. Two entities in particular stood independent of foreign control: the Zaporozhian *Sich* (Cossack encampment or fortress) and the Cossack proto-state, the Hetmanate. It was the first Hetman, Bogdan Khmel'nyt'ski, who in 1649 established the Hetmanate, "an exercise in state-building [which was] a unique achievement of the Ukrainian Cossacks" (Gerus, 1982: 24). The Hetmanate quickly turned to Muscovy for protection against the neighboring Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Khmel'nyt'ski signed the Treaty of Pereislav in 1654 which marked the official "union" of the two states. It was in ostensible 300-year commemoration of this treaty that Khrushchev transferred Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 (though see Kramer, 2014). The Ukrainian Cossacks rebelled frequently against their Russian overlords, with perhaps the most notable being the 1708 revolt led by Hetman Ivan Mazepa.

After Mazepa's rebellion the authorities kept Cossacks on a much shorter lease. Indeed, Catherine the Great razed the *Sich* in 1774. In response to another rebellion of the Cossacks, Catherine deported *en masse* most of the loyal Zaporozhian Cossacks to the frontier on the Kuban river (see Plokhii, 2012: 28-46 for more details). Memories of Cossack autonomy and democratic

traditions continued to exist even as Cossacks formed an integral part of the Imperial armies. They fought in many of Russia's wars, including the 1812 fight against Napoleon and the occupation of Paris. Mazepa himself became a romantic figure celebrated across all Europe, including in the work of Byron. Taras Shevchenko and Gogol also lionized the role of the Cossacks as forebears of the Ukrainian nation. Although there were other Cossack hosts in Russia, the Hetmanate is remembered as the first attempt to construct an independent Cossack state in Europe.

It was thus a natural legacy to use when attempting to establish an independent nation of Ukraine in 1918. Indeed, "the modern Ukrainian nation, which emerged from the ruins of the Russian Empire during the revolution of 1917, employed the Cossack myth.... to legitimize its new state. In 1918 it revived the Cossack rank of hetman for its leader and chose for that office a descendant of one of the Cossack hetmans of the early eighteenth century" (Plokhii, 2012: 4). Of course, Ukrainian independence was not to survive the Russian civil war. When the Red Army proved victorious, they pursued a policy of de-Cossackization in the region, including in parts of Ukraine (Holquist, 1997). In practice, this policy meant removing Cossack memories from the land in a manner which today we might call "ethnic cleansing" and which members of the Cossack diaspora remember as "genocide."

Yet the memories proved resilient and so, when Ukraine became an independent country for the second time in 1991, the Cossack image was also important. Perhaps even more so than in the nineteenth century, "the Zaporozhian Cossacks and their legacy were at the center of political and cultural struggles in the Ukraine that fundamentally determined the processes of nation-building and state-building in modern Ukraine" (Sysyn, 1991: 846). Cossack imagery, statues, and memorials institutionalize the new Ukrainian identity and there are streets named in Kiev for Mazepa and Khmel'nyt'sky. Further, the Ukrainian national anthem calls the people of that country "brothers of the Cossack nation." In Ukraine the image of the militant Cossack was already emergent as the foundation of national identity, but the adoption of it was accelerated by the revolution and subsequent war.

This, in part, explains why when the protests on the Maidan broke out in November 2013 people dressed in Cossack costume to defend the crowds of protestors. The classic image of the Ukrainian Cossack is highly stylized, where men have a fully shaven head apart from a single lock of braided hair coming from the apex of the crown in a style known as an *osoledits*. This image is

the basis for the derogatory Russian insult *Khoklii* when referring to Ukrainians.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the self-defense units that were organized in Kiev's Maidan Square in 2014 were organized as "hundreds," in imitation of the Cossack hundreds of old (Samooborona Maidanu, 2014). Indeed, following the Maidan revolution, the permanent "self-organizing defense forces" were also organized as "hundreds."

When the Yanukovych regime finally fell in February 2014, however, the Ukrainian authorities became keen on removing Russian and Soviet influence from the country, accelerating the process of identity formation. Importantly, this extended to the symbolic realm as laid out in the 2015 law, "On Conviction of Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of their Symbols." The law "defines the legal basis for elimination of symbols of the communist totalitarian regime." In particular, point 4 clarified that:

"4) the symbolism of the communist totalitarian regime - a symbol that includes:

a) any representation of the state flags, coats of arms and other symbols of the USSR, the Ukrainian SSR, or other Union or autonomous Soviet republics within the USSR, the so-called "people's democracy" states: the People's Republic of Albania (Socialist People's Republic of Albania), the People's Republic The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Socialist Federal Republic of) the Republic of Yugoslavia) and the socialist republics that were part of it, except those that are current (operating) flags or emblems of the countries of the world;

b) the hymns of the USSR, the Ukrainian SSR (USSR), other Union or autonomous Soviet republics or their fragments;

c) flags, symbols, images or other attributes in which a combination of a sickle and hammer, a sickle, a hammer and a five-pointed star, a plow (rula), a hammer and a five-pointed star are reproduced;

d) the symbols of the communist party or its elements;

e) images, monuments, memorabilia, inscriptions devoted to persons who held senior positions in the communist party (the position of the secretary of the district committee and above), persons who held senior positions in the supreme bodies of power and administration of the USSR, the Ukrainian SSR ( USSR), other Union or autonomous Soviet republics, authorities and regions, cities of republican subordination, employees of Soviet state security bodies of all levels;

e) images, monuments, memorabilia, inscriptions devoted to events related to the activities of the Communist Party, the establishment of Soviet power in the territory of Ukraine or in certain administrative-territorial units, persecution of participants in the struggle for Ukraine's independence in the XX century (except monuments and memorials associated with the resistance and expulsion of Nazi invaders from Ukraine or the development of Ukrainian science and culture);

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Frank Sysyn for pointing this out.

e) images of the slogans of the Communist Party, quotations of persons holding positions of leadership in the Communist Party (the position of the secretary of the district committee and above), persons holding senior positions in the supreme bodies of power and administration of the USSR, the Ukrainian SSR (USSR), other Union or autonomous Soviet republics, authorities and regional authorities, cities of republican subordination (except for quotations related to the development of Ukrainian science and culture), employees of the Soviet bodies of state security of all levels;

e) the names of the regions, districts, settlements, districts in the cities, squares, boulevards, streets, lanes, descents, fares, avenues, squares, squares, quays, bridges, other objects of the toponymy of settlements, enterprises, institutions, organizations, which used the names or pseudonyms of persons who held positions in the Communist Party (the position of the secretary of the district committee and above), the supreme bodies of power and administration of the USSR, the Ukrainian SSR (USSR), other union or autonomous Soviet republics, worked in the Soviet bodies of state security, and also the names of the USSR, the Ukrainian SSR, and other union or autonomous Soviet republics and derivatives from them, names related to the activities of the Communist Party (including party congresses), the annals of the October Revolution of October 25 (November 7) 1917” (Verkhovna Rada, 2015)

In accordance with this law, the Ukrainian government began renaming cities, towns, villages, and administrative districts across Ukraine. For example, the Verkhovna Rada (2016) agreed to rename “the village of Leninsky Apostolovsky district to the village of Grushivka” and “village Lenin's Memory of the Kukovitsa Village Council of the Mensky District to the village of Zagorivka.” While there are too many renamed places to possibly mention them all here, all those scheduled to be replaced or already replaced belonged to top Communist officials or referenced notions from the Communist era- Lenin, Gorky, Dzerzhinsky, the Komsomol, Oktyabrskoe, Kommunarke, and so forth.

It is this background which is vital for understanding the renaming underway in Ukraine and how Billig’s notion of “everyday nationalism” can help understand its importance. Although the law suggests (and practice demonstrates) that this renaming is going on all across the country, one city in particular stands as a good case study of this process, the city of Dnipro. Dnipro sits on historically Cossack land, close to the mouth of the river Dniester and the island of Hortitsa, the site of the Zaporozhian *Sich*. Indeed, the Dnipropetrovsk region contains five *sichs*, ancient Cossack fortress-sites which today are host to archaeological excavations (one of which Arnold visited in 2018). This factual history makes possible the claiming of a special pedestal in the new Ukrainian Pantheon. The next section examines the names of the city and region as exemplars of changes rendered explicable by the concept of “banal nationalism.”

## **Istanbul, not Constantinople**

Before the Maidan revolution and the pronouncement of the law outlined in the previous section, the city of Dnipro was named “Dnipropetrovsk,” and indeed the region of which the city is the administrative capital still goes by this name. Debates over changing the name of the region are currently underway, however, and their fate remains open. Such a change would require amending the constitution, which names the constituent subdivisions of Ukraine and so requires a significant amount of time compared to changing the name of the city. This section argues that both the seemingly banal renaming of the city and the region mark the acceleration of a process of national identity formation already underway before the revolution.

Officially, the city that today we know as Dnipro was founded in 1776, although sources suggest that date may have been changed from 1787 in order to celebrate Brezhnev’s tenure as General Secretary (Repan, 2017: 46). The earliest known permanent settlement on the site appears to have been a fortress used as a toll-station for those seeking to cross the river Dnieper. When first founded, the city was given the name “Ekaterynoslav” or “glory to Catherine [the Great].” It was renamed “Dnipropetrovsk” in 1926 in honor of the Ukrainian Communist Grigory Petrovsky, a signatory to the treaty which created the USSR and who was himself a controversial figure.

Petrovsky was controversial as the architect of collectivization in Ukraine and the subsequent famine in 1931-2 which Ukrainians remember as the Holodomor. The famine killed an estimated five million Ukrainians, although some scholars argue that Petrovsky pleaded with Stalin to alleviate the suffering of his people when he learned of the problems caused by collectivization. The movement against Petrovsky’s legacy actually predated the Maidan revolution significantly, as in 2009 a monument to the Communist in Kiev’s prestigious Europe square was taken down by order of then-President of Ukraine Victor Yushenko (Khotin, 2009). Still, the moves against Petrovsky’s legacy did not reach full fever pitch until after the passage of the 2015 law.

The city was renamed “Dnipro” presumably on account of its proximity to the main river in Ukraine. Other candidates included “Dniproslava,” “Sicheslav,” and “Peresinny” although there was no shortage of proposals (interview Dnipro 1, 2018). The term “peresinny” is an ancient name for the settlement which stretches back to the times of Kievan Rus’. The Ukrainian and Russian languages share the word “slava” (meaning “glory to”) and “sich” means “fortress” or “encampment.” It is a particularly apposite name for the city following the 2014 revolution and the important role of the city in preventing Russian-backed separatists from continuing their

agitation for uprisings in all of what Putin described as “Novorossiya” (the historical name given by Catherine the Great to the lands of what today we call southern Ukraine). While the city did not end up with this name, the region may yet do so.

It is notable, however, that the city did not convert back to its Tsarist-era name of Ekaterynoslav. Presumably, the associations with the Russian Empress who rendered impossible the prospect of early Ukrainian autonomy was too problematic. This stands in marked contrast to the Kuban Cossacks in Russia (themselves descendants of Ukrainian stock) who told one of the authors in 2007 that they were trying to bring back the former name of the city of Krasnodar, Ekaterinodar or “Catherine’s gift” (interview with Kuban Cossack 1, 2007). Indeed, in the center of Krasnodar there is a memorial to Catherine the Great thanking her for giving the land to the Cossacks (Arnold, 2014). This was not to be the last name given to the city, however.

In 1797, one year after the death of Catherine the Great, her son Paul issued a decree that renamed the city “Novorossiysk” or “new Russia.” The renaming of the city was actually accompanied by a merging of a neighboring province with that of Ekaterinoslav to make an entire “New Russia” province (dp.vogorode.ua, 2016). This was the origin of the term Putin used in his March 18 2014 speech justifying the annexation of Crimea. For that reason, there was no serious discussion of giving the city this name. Tsar Paul sought to undo the liberalizing legacies of his mother, but the name was returned to “Ekaterynoslav” by her grandson Alexander I. While one might argue that the name given to a city is of only peripheral importance, this very example highlights the importance of “flagging” in everyday phenomena.

The symbols of the city had changed some time prior to the war breaking out. In 2001, wishing to establish a new identity for the city, the authorities commissioned the design of a new coat of arms. Figure 1 shows the emblem for the Dnipropetrovsk city and region in the Soviet era (on the left) compared to the new emblem for the city developed after the attempted uprisings throughout “Novorossiya” (on the right). The new emblem is in the colors blue and yellow (the colors of Ukraine), which many consider patriotic colors. The symbols involved- the arrow and the scimitar- are symbols of the region’s martial Cossack heritage. While the new identity of the region was not aggressively pushed before the war, there was an uneasy coexistence between Soviet and Cossack-era symbols. After the start of war in the country’s east, however, rejection of the Soviet/Russian legacy at a symbolic level became a national demand.

## [FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE]

This is borne out again in the controversy over the name of the Dnipropetrovsk region which surrounds the city of Dnipro. Although the city was renamed, the region was not, and debates are underway over the replacement name. On 27 April 2018, a group of deputies led by Andriy Denisenko in the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, submitted draft law 8329 on changing the name of the region to “Sicheslavskaya,” a name which translates as “glory to the [Cossack] fortress.” Such a change would require amending article 133 of the Ukrainian constitution. According to the author of the proposed change, “The acquisition of a name by the region, which corresponds to the Ukrainian historical tradition, organically connects the current stage of the state with the UPR era and the time of the Cossacks” (Dnepr Chas, 2018). Such a renaming would indeed connect the region to its claimed Cossack past, but this was not the first use of the term in modern Ukrainian history.

Indeed, at the time of the Maidan revolution in 2014 many other mini-Maidan encampments arose around the country and in different cities, including Dnipro. Yet the protestors in Dnipro did not style themselves as the “Dnipropetrovsk Maidan”, but did as the “Maidan Sicheslav-Dnipro.” According to their website, the organization was founded by Victor Romanenko to 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013 with several hundred people. The NGO itself was registered in the Ministry of Justice only in April 2014 and since that time has held public meetings, held to account public officials, and partnered with state organizations for public benefits (msdnipro.com, n.d.).

The concept of “banal nationalism” therefore helps us render intelligible the renaming of both the city of Dnipro and the region of Sicheslav/ Dnipropetrovsk. Both are emblematic of an attempt to embrace the Cossack legacy to an even greater extent and at a faster pace. In seeking to break free of the Russian and then Soviet past, the regime has, of necessity, to highlight the only useful historical legacy it has- that of the Cossack past. These changes are obvious now, though in time they will surely retreat to become banal “white noise.” Other banal changes to the city of Dnipro are also present in the names of public places and public statues, both of which are explored in the next section.

## **The Banality of Change in Dnipro, Ukraine**

Accompanying the changes in the name of the city and the proposed changes to the name of the region was a wholesale reconfiguration of the normative basis of the city. The narrative of Cossack inheritance which was to form the basis for the reconfigured Ukrainian nation would provide a new platform for memorials and public places in the city. It is probable that these changes would have happened anyway without the revolution and the war, but those events sped such changes along. This section details those changes, arguing that the interweaving of the Cossack narrative into the city's fabric demonstrates this accelerated pace. It first examines memorials and then turns to the names of public places.

Memorials in Dnipro reflect the normative concerns of the time in which they were constructed. In the Soviet period, there were numerous statues of Lenin and Marx, as was typical of most Soviet cities. There was indeed a statue to the Cossack leader, Bohdan Khmel'nyt'sky, was to his role as the unifier of Russian lands rather than the leader of the Cossack Hetmanate. These statues remained in place well into the new millennium. Some locals had argued that although the Soviet history of the city was not its best feature, it was nonetheless authentic Dnipro history which needed to be preserved (interview with Dnipro 1, 2018). All this was to change, however, in 2014.

During the Maidan revolution in Kiev statues which venerated leading Communists were removed from the symbolic landscape of the city. A similar process occurred in Dnipro even before the passage of the May 2015 law mandating the removal of Soviet symbols. On 21<sup>st</sup> February 2014, activists destroyed the monument to Lenin in Lenin Square, a symbol of Soviet and then Russian imperialism. According to reports, the statue was "torn down and hacked to pieces" (Unian.info, 2015). While the activists removed the visage of the statue in February, it was not until June of the same year that the city authorities were able to remove the base of the statue and eradicate all traces of the Soviet past (TSN.ua, 2014).

The removal of just one statue from the city was not to satisfy, moreover. Another two statues of Lenin were also removed over the subsequent year, when the war in Donbass was at its height. On June 27 2014 workers used a crane to take a stone Lenin head off a plinth and transport it to a local museum. A third statue met its end in April 2015 when 15 workers used a rope and an truck to topple and remove a statue from the suburb of Predneprovsky (Unian.info, 2015). Similar

extirpations of the Soviet legacy were occurring all over the country. Table one provides evidence of how far-reaching such a purge of Soviet monuments was in Dnipro.

[FIGURE TWO ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE]

Table One provides the most thorough list of removed public symbols of the Communist era in the city of Dnipro available. The list dates from 2017 and was kindly provided to the author by a contact in the Dnipro city government. It was created to aid in the development of a park of the totalitarian period which is planned for creation soon by the Dnipro Development Agency branch of the city council. The list itself contains solely monuments and memorials under the jurisdiction of the city authorities, not those on the property of national government agencies. Statues and memorials on lands owned by the ministry of education or justice, for instance, are not recorded here. The source who provided the list estimates that perhaps twenty objects have been omitted due to this restriction, but even so the list is impressive for the sheer number of items that have been removed.

Those removed monuments have not been replaced by statues of Ukrainian heroes, as in other Ukrainian cities (interview with Dnipro 1, 2018). In very few cases have they been destroyed (and in some instances stolen), but by far the dominant fate of many relics of the Communist era is that they have either simply been ignored or placed in storage to prevent looting. In Arnold's ethnographic work in the region in July 2018, it was explained to Arnold that this was a product of the war and not necessarily the revolution itself. The separation from Russia would be made final and absolute by the extirpation of a narrative which had previously overlain the city: that of the Russians stepping in and defending Ukrainians as little brothers. Nor was it just statues and memorials, however, but even the names of public places as well. Soon after the Maidan revolution, the aforementioned Lenin Square was renamed to the Square to the Heroes of Maidan.

Indeed, the revolution and war caused many streets to be renamed in Dnipro. It is not possible to give all the changed streets and public squares in this paper. So far-reaching have been the changes that the Dnipro city authorities have released an app for a mobile phone to help citizens navigate through the new nomenclature. The streets chosen for analysis were those of main

thoroughfares or notable avenues, and only the most salient are examined here. Table two lists those streets with their current and former names.

[TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE]

The first item in the table is the renaming of Karl Marx street- itself a habitual name for city center-streets in the Soviet Union. Instead of naming the street after the forefather of Communism, the new authorities in Dnipro changed it to commemorate Dmytro Yavornytsky. Yavornytsky was “a leading expert on the history of the Ukrainian Cossacks” (Plokhii, 2012: 191) who died in Dnipropetrovsk. Yavornytsky was a particular specialist on the Zaporozhian Cossacks and became director of the Ekaterinoslav museum in 1902. Although he began work in Moscow, Yavornytsky became chair of the department of Ukrainian studies at the Dnipropetrovsk Institute of People’s Education in 1925. To this day, Yavornytsky holds an important position in the consciousness of ordinary Dniprans (internet encyclopedia of Ukraine, 1993) and Figure Four shows an explanatory plaque in English and Ukrainian that one of the authors took when he visited Dnipro in 2018. Renaming the most important street in the city for Yavornytsky was a direct attempt to institutionalize a new Cossack identity for the city of Dnipro.

[FIGURE FOUR ABOUT HERE]

Another salient street renaming occurred on Karl Liebknecht avenue, which became Hruschevsky street. Liebknecht was a German Communist who founded the Spartacus League along with Rosa Luxembour and was killed in the uprising of 1919. Hruschevsky was “Ukraine’s most prominent twentieth-century historian and the first head of the independent Ukrainian state during the Revolution of 1917” (Ploky, 2012: 88). Hruschevsky had taught at Lviv university before the First World War when it was located in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and had “laid the foundations for Ukrainian nationhood by supplying the country, still divided by imperial borders, with a new narrative: eight volumes of Hruschevsky’s monumental *History of Ukrainian-Rus’* were published between 1898 and 1917” (Ploky, 2012: 89). In these works, an integral role was played by the Cossacks who were presented as both predecessors and portents of the future Ukrainian nation. That one of the main streets in Dnipro is now named after him instead of a

famous Communist figure is testimony to how changes necessitated by the covert war with Russia had to be institutionalized at the level of the everyday.

Likewise, other parks and squares named respectively for Lenin and the founder of the NKVD (the predecessor of the KGB) Felix Dzerzhinsky were renamed “Novokodats’kii.” The name, which translates as “New Kodak,” is a reference to the ancient Cossack city of Novy Kodak that existed in the area in the sixteenth century (interview with Dnipro 1, 2018). Novy Kodak was little more than a trading post in its prime. It is sanctified and declared worthy of exultation- or at least of being the name of a square in a city- by the imprint of the venerated Cossack past. The displacement of historical figures from the Soviet era and their replacement with figures of Cossack provenance is further evidence of the ripple effects that war in the country’s east generate back on the nation’s domestic self-image.

In a similar way to the renaming of the Dnipropetrovsk region, the Lenin Embankment was renamed to the “Sicheslav” embankment, explicitly referencing the Cossack heritage of the region. The provenance and meaning of the term “sicheslav” was discussed in the previous section. Similarly, the street “Artema” was renamed “sichovykh stritsev.” A regular Soviet-era street name was changed for one honoring the glory of the “men of the sich,” giving further evidence of the connection between the Cossack image and Ukrainian nationalism. Once again, the Soviet legacy of the Second World War was also evident in the rejection of the name “Heroes of Stalingrad” street. This street was renamed for Bogdan Khmel’nyts’ki, a Ukrainian Cossack hero and the first Hetman.

While the Cossack image was important for the renaming of some of the most important streets in Dnipro, many were also renamed either for Cossack figures too minor to have available information or for non-Cossack figures entirely. Two exceptions bear this out. First, of the most notable exceptions, for example, was the renaming of Marshall Zhukov street. Zhukov was famously the military commander in charge of the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War and a Soviet hero. The street was renamed “Geroiv Dnipro” [heroes of Dnipro] in honor of the people who had repressed the attempted uprising in the city in 2014. As one of the interviews related “we say in this country that the Maidan was made by Kyivites and Galicians, but we Dniprans rescued the country from the Russians” (interview participant 2, 2018). In other words, the narrative changed to celebrate the new statement of difference from Russia.

The other example comes from Leningradsky Prospekt, which was renamed for Yaroslav the Wise. Yaroslav was a prince of Kievan Rus from the 11<sup>th</sup> century who had been important in the settlement of the lands of Rus'. Interestingly, the veneration of Yaroslav demonstrates that not all parts of the common Russian-Ukrainian legacy were to be rejected but seemingly only those that bore the imprimatur of Russian imperialism. The implication is that the renaming of the streets was more about venerating and institutionalizing a nascent Ukrainian identity as the Cossack nation than it was a wholesale rejection of the common greater Rus' heritage of the two nations. The changes to the seeming ephemera of the city- the name, the region, the monument, the street names- would probably have occurred anyway, but the revolution and the war speeded up the adoption of such changes and the evolution of the Ukrainian nation.

### **Conclusion**

Ukraine's identity as "the Cossack nation" preceded the revolution and the war, but its development was accelerated by those events. This paper argued that changes at the level of "banal nationalism" demonstrate this shifting basis for nationalist narrative. At the same time, it observed that the emergence of banal nationalism slips by unnoticed, at least in part, because "hot" nationalism attracts attention much more effectively. For this purpose, the city of Dnipro, Ukraine, with the war in the neighboring Donbass region provides an excellent case study. While attention is (rightly) focused on preventing the conflict from spreading and seeking ways to speed its end, the subtler changes occurring in the narrative of the Ukrainian nation slip by unnoticed. The self-image as the "Cossack nation" is not new in Ukraine and it has indeed been one of the cornerstones of the notion that Ukrainians constitute a separate nation from Russia at all. Yet the rebranding of the city of Dnipro as well as monuments, memorials, streets, and squares since the outbreak of the war represents a more thoroughgoing and comprehensive mental embrace of Cossack ancestry than any point before. Everyday nationalism in a Brubakerian "nationalizing nation" offers an insight into larger social and political processes.

This paper demonstrated that proposition in several ways: Changes to the name of the city and the region in which is located; the development of a coat of arms for the city; the removal of symbolic reminders of the Communist past; and the rebranding of streets which formerly had celebrated Soviet figures. All these signs and "flaggings" served to remind Ukrainians (in a way that could be simultaneously forgotten) that they were not truly independent but to some extent

reliant on their Russian neighbors. After the 2014 Russian-instigated conflict in Donbass and attempts to incite insurrection throughout “Novorossiya,” the Cossack past has emerged as a powerful alternative foundation for Ukrainian national identity.

It is, of course, important to recognize the limits of what a single case study can tell us. For instance, it would be interesting to see if the same institutionalization of the Cossack idea is underway, particularly in Western Ukraine. Parts of the country that do not benefit from the legacy of either the Zaporozhian Cossacks or the Hetmanate (and, indeed, were parts of other countries just over 100 years ago) may have different narratives. Although the authors have good reason to believe that the Cossack legacy also informs the nationalist narrative in Western Ukraine, such a notion would be strengthened by the inclusion of a comparative city for analysis. Similarly, future research showing the relative importance of the Cossack image in national Ukrainian sources (in a similar fashion to Hopf, 2002; 2005) both before and after the events of 2014 would give empirical backing to a conjecture of this work. The image of the martial Cossack is undoubtedly important, however, for the city of Dnipro and will only become more so in the future as the subtle changes of recent times become banal.

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Figure One



Figure 2: Former head of the Karl Marx statue in Dnipro, Ukraine



Figure 3: plaque on the renaming of a street

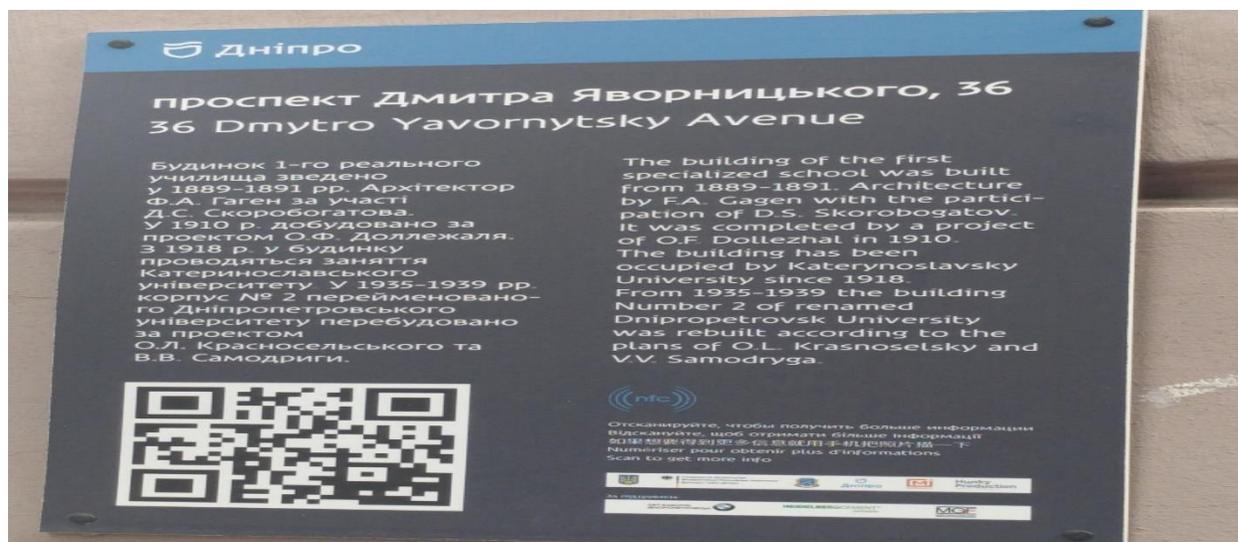


Figure 4: Renamed street “Old Cossack Way”



Table One: Accounting of monuments in Dnipro, Ukraine

Type of object	Total Number	Destroyed	In Storage	Stolen	Not destroyed	Unknown or no information
Monument	20	2	13	0	1	4
Memorial Plaque	25	2	5	2	1	15
Tank monument	1	0	0	0	1	0
Decorative shelving	2	0	1	0	0	1
Obelisk/Pylons	3	0	3	0	0	0
TOTAL	51	4	22	2	3	20

Table Two: Sample list of renamed streets.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Previous Name</b>	<b>Current Name</b>
Street	Karl Marksa Ave	Dmytra Yavornytskoho
Street	Karla Libknekhta Street	Mykhailia Hrushevskoho Street
Street	Leningradsky Prospekt	Kniazia Yaroslava Mudroho Street
Street	Marshall Zhukova	Geroiv Dnipro
Street	Naberezhna V.I. Lenina	Sicheslavaka Naberezhna
Street	Heroes of Stalingrad	Bohdan Khmel'nyt'sky Street
Street	Artema	Sichovych Stritsiv
Street	Ulyanoskaia	`General Volevacha
Park	Im. Lenina [Lenin Park]	Novokodats'kii
Square	Dzerzhinskogo	Novokodats'kii
Square	Zhovtneva Square	Soborna Square