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"Well-Known and Sincerely Loved": Banal Nationalism, Republican Pride, and Symbolic Ethnicity in Late Soviet Ukraine

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Abstract

This article argues that the late Soviet period saw a new form of Ukrainian nationhood emerge, one based less on ethno-historical commonalities than on territorial and institutional cohesion. Combining Michael Billig's notion of "banal nationalism" with Alexei Yurchak's analysis of "hyper-normalized authoritative discourse," it shows that Soviet Ukrainian leaders reproduced the assumption of Ukrainian nationhood even as they deprived it of concrete political and cultural content. While First Secretary Petro Shelest still promoted ethno-historical topoi alongside pride in Ukraine's republican quasi-statehood, his successor Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kyi preferred an image of Ukraine as a productive economic space free of ethnic specificity. Late Soviet Ukrainian banal nationalism left traces in everyday life, whether in sports reporting, school curricula, or in a specific visual language combining institutional emblems with politically empty ethnic symbols. During perestroika, late Soviet banal nationalism was appropriated and instrumentalized first by the national-democratic opposition, and later by "national communists."

Keywords: Ukraine, Soviet, propaganda, nationalism, banal nationalism, 1970s

In the 1970s, most outside observers saw Ukraine as a firmly secured part of the Soviet Union. Few experts predicted that millions of Ukrainians would soon rally behind a national protest movement, much less that Ukraine would achieve independent statehood within two decades. As late as 1983, the Czech writer Milan Kundera was convinced that the Ukrainian nation was "slowly disappearing."[1] Indeed, Soviet Ukraine was experiencing intense centralist pressure and cultural russification. While the republican party leadership under First Secretary Petro Shelest (in office 1963–72) had patronized certain forms of Ukrainian-language culture, the party's grip tightened when he was replaced by Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kyi (in office 1972–89), a loyal acolyte of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. In 1972, some of Ukraine's best-known critical intellectuals were arrested, and several of them were condemned to long sentences in prisons and labor camps.[2]

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[1] Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," in Yoeri Albrecht and Mathieu Segers, eds., *Re:Thinking Europe: Thoughts on Europe: Past, Present and Future* (Amsterdam, 2016), 209. In researching this article, I profited from a Postdoc. Mobility fellowship of the Swiss National Science Foundation, as well as an Open Research Laboratory Associateship at REEEC, University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

[2] Simone Attilio Bellezza, *The Shore of Expectations: A Cultural Study of the Ukrainian Shistdesiatnyky* (Edmonton, 2017), 282–94. Several of these arrests predated Shelest's resignation as First Secretary.

The linguistic russification of the republic's population made strides. According to Soviet census data, the number of ethnic Ukrainians who knew Russian as a second language grew by several million between 1970 and 1979, while the number of primarily or exclusively Russian-speaking Ukrainians also rose, particularly in the east and south.[3] The Ukrainian-language share among the books published in the republic sank from 38.2 percent (3,112) to 26.7 percent (2,414).[4] The Russian language became increasingly dominant in party work, at public events, and in the press. It is thus understandable that Ukrainian popular memory has tended to describe the 1970s and early 1980s as a time of denationalization during which Soviet Ukraine became less Ukrainian.[5]

When Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost enabled open debates in the second half of the 1980s, however, Ukraine's national-democratic opposition quickly became a political force to reckon with. More strikingly, by 1990, a large share of the republic's communist cadres proved willing to support demands for the republic's sovereignty within a renewed Soviet Union, and later for full-fledged independence.[6] When Ukrainians got to vote in a referendum about independence in December 1991, approval was overwhelming. At a turnout of 84 percent, 92 percent of voters supported the proclamation of an independent Ukrainian state. The developments of 1989 to 1991 suggest that national modes of self-identification struck a note with a high share of Soviet Ukraine's inhabitants, mobilizing far beyond the committed circles of national-democratic dissidents.[7] Even formerly loyal communists, most of whom had little interest in the cultural canon of pre-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism, came to see nationality as a legitimate basis for statehood.

Historians of postwar Soviet Ukraine have long suspected that this proclivity to switch allegiance to national statehood was linked to Soviet ideology. Several studies have demonstrated that despite the Stalinist turn away from 1920s *korenizatsiia* policies, some expressions of Ukrainian nationhood were not only tolerated, but even encouraged by the regime—a regime that, for all its proclaimed internationalism, continued to rely on a nationally defined pseudo-federal order. Amir Weiner and Serhy Yekelchyk have pointed to the Second World War as a turning point for the integration of Ukrainian nationhood into Soviet ideology, while Zbigniew Wojnowski has analyzed how ideologues emphasized differences with the neighboring Warsaw bloc states to construe Ukrainians as a model Soviet nation.[8] Turning to state structures, Andrew Wilson has stressed that Soviet republican institutions and symbols "provided important consolidation points for Ukrainian national identity" despite their political irrelevance.[9] Yet, few studies have so far fleshed out how exactly the Brezhnev-era Soviet leadership transformed conceptions of nationality, how

[3] Bohdan Krawchenko, "Ethno-Demographic Trends in Ukraine in the 1970s," in Bohdan Krawchenko, ed., *Ukraine after Shelest* (Edmonton, 1983), 109–15.

[4] Myroslav Shkandrij, "Literary Politics and Literary Debates in Ukraine 1971–81," in Krawchenko, *Ukraine after Shelest*, 55–72.

[5] For a short example, see the entry on Volodymyr Shcherbyts′kyi in the *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*: Roman Senkus, "Shcherbytsky, Volodymyr," *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, at www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CS%5CH%5CShcherbytskyVolodymyr.htm (last accessed February 14, 2025).

[6] See Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: State and Nation Building* (London, 1998), 28–31.

[7] For various ways to explain mass support for independence, see Roman Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 2000), 317–20; Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge, Eng., 2002), 190–98; Serhii Plokhy, *Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe* (New York, 2018), 285–316.

[8] Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, 2001); Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto, 2004); Zbigniew Wojnowski, *The Near Abroad: Socialist Eastern Europe and Soviet Patriotism in Ukraine 1956–1985* (Toronto, 2017).

[9] Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 4th ed. (New Haven, 2015), 147. See also Oleksandr Hrytsenko, *"Svoia mudrist′": Natsional′ni mifolohiï ta "hromadians′ka relihiia" v Ukraïni* (Kyiv, 1998), 153–55; Markian

it increasingly deprived them of political significance, and why they were nevertheless re-politicized during perestroika.

How, then, did an apparently denationalizing state continue to reproduce nationality? In his influential study of late Soviet culture, Alexei Yurchak has argued that Soviet propaganda of the post-Stalin period saw the emergence of "hypernormalized authoritative discourse"—a formulaic way of writing and speaking, full of semantically empty ideological phrases, predictable terminology, and unwieldy grammatical structures. Largely deprived of concrete meaning, this "wooden" language assumed a purely performative function, serving to affirm the stability and legitimacy of the regime.[10] Yurchak, working with materials from the union's Russian core, paid little attention to the ways in which nationality was built into Soviet authoritative discourse.[11] However, nationality was in fact a central category of the "wooden" language of Soviet propaganda in the non-Russian union republics. In the Brezhnev period, it underwent a similar semantic desubstantialization as Marxist-Leninist slogans. Nationality had to be invoked regularly but authors paid attention to divorce it from political claims, or even strong claims to cultural specificity, for that would be classified as "bourgeois nationalism."[12] Unlike the sclerotization of socialist ideology, this ossification of nationality discourse was hardly an accident but belongs in the context of the anticipated merger of Soviet nations into a unitary Soviet people.[13]

Whether by design or not, official Ukrainian nationhood in the Brezhnev period came to resemble what British social theorist Michael Billig has described as "banal nationalism" in late-twentieth-century capitalist societies. Billig points out that once nation-states are established, their politicians and their media keep reproducing nationhood by "flagging" it in unpolitical, unobtrusive ways. Whether through the display of national flags and graphic symbols or through discursive references to "our country," "*the* government," and "the national interest," citizens of a modern nation-state are constantly reminded that they belong to a nation. According to Billig, "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."[14] Crucially, Billig's "banal nationalism" is compatible with internationalism: it implies that one's own nation is one among many, that the entire world is objectively divided into nations and that every person "has" a "national identity."[15] As the sociologist Siniša Malešević has shown, such inconspicuous nationalism needs to be organizationally "grounded" in state institutions, which due to the mere fact of their existence constantly reproduce nationhood.[16] Where this is the case, Malešević finds, nationalism becomes strong precisely because "nationhood is universally perceived to be normal, natural and ubiquitous."[17]

Dobczansky and Simone Attilio Bellezza, "Bringing the State Back In: Studying Ukrainian Statehood in the 20th Century," *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 3 (May 2019): 335–40.

[10] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2006), 24–26, 47–54, 61–63, 256.

[11] On this lacuna see Juliane Fürst, "On the Cusp of Change?: Thoughts on the Roundtable about the Brezhnev Years," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2024): 615.

[12] Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 441.

[13] See Anna Whittington, "Forging Soviet Citizens: Ideology, Identity, and Stability in the Soviet Union, 1930–1991" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2018).

[14] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995), 8.

[15] Ibid., 63, 83–87.

[16] Siniša Malešević, *Grounded Nationalisms: A Sociological Analysis* (Cambridge, Eng., 2019), 8–11, 276–79. For an institutionalist analysis of Soviet nationalities policy, see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996), 23–54.

[17] Malešević, *Grounded Nationalisms*, 159.

This condition was fulfilled in postwar Soviet Ukraine, where nationalist assumptions became deeply embedded in the officially promoted worldview, even as political leaders tried to deprive them of all concrete political and cultural content.[18] Republican party leaders constantly reproduced the category of nationality in two forms:[19] first, in an institutional-territorial mold free of ethnic connotations, by expressing pride in the quasi-statehood, territoriality, and economic prowess of the national republics.[20] Second, by representing selected ethnic symbols detached from their original (often rural) social context and emptied of political meaning.[21] Such seemingly depoliticized forms of nationhood helped normalize the idea of a Ukrainian nation among the non-nationalist sectors of the population. They also held potential for re-politicization, creating a formal template for the return of "hot" nationalism in times of crisis.[22]

A caveat is in order. In the Brezhnev period, banal "flagging" of Sovietness was obviously much more prevalent than emblems of nationhood and republican quasi-statehood. Soviet Ukrainians—like all Soviet citizens—were constantly bombarded with propaganda praising the Soviet state, displaying the iconic shape of its huge territory, waving its red flags, depicting its Lenin busts and stars and hammers and sickles. Symbols of Sovietness were everywhere in Soviet everyday life, from newspaper heads via public buildings to parades and holiday celebrations. But unlike Ukrainianness, and nationality more generally, Soviet symbolic repertoires were inseparably linked to the hegemonic communist ideology and therefore automatically fell into discredit when the latter ceased to be taken seriously amidst economic crisis and political collapse. Nationality, meanwhile, could easily be separated from communism.

In the first section of this article, I will sketch the development of Soviet nationality policies from interwar *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) to the banal nationalism embraced by republican leaders in the Brezhnev period. The ensuing sections will scrutinize the authoritative discourse of nationality in the programmatic statements of Brezhnev-era party leaders in order to then demonstrate how this ideological pattern played out in daily newspaper reporting, education, and visual propaganda. Finally, the last section will detail how first the national-democratic opposition of the perestroika period and then "national communist" party officials made use of Soviet banal nationalism to couch their political demands in a language acceptable to state authorities, and how they ended up filling the empty vessel of Brezhnev-era nationality with new ideological content.

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[18] "Nationalism" is here understood broadly as the view that humanity a) can be neatly divided into socio-cultural groups called nations, which b) are relevant to political legitimacy. See the classic definition in Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass., 2006), 1–7.

[19] Andriy Zayarnyuk and Ostap Sereda similarly distinguish two modes of officially sanctioned nationality in late Soviet Ukraine: nostalgic folklorism and a "territorial civic sense of Ukrainianness." See Andriy Zayarnyuk and Ostap Sereda, *The Intellectual Foundations of Modern Ukraine: The Nineteenth Century* (London, 2023), 160.

[20] This institutional-territorial nationhood bore some similarities to what theorists have described as "civic nationalism" as opposed to ethnic conceptions—however, this terminology is hardly suitable for a coercive system with few possibilities for citizens' involvement. See the critical discussion in Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 132–46.

[21] Adrienne Edgar has linked such developments to urbanization: as people of various origins moved to culturally Soviet urban environments and assimilated linguistically, their official nationality often manifested itself in little else but attachment to a few ethnic symbols understood to belong to the cultural heritage of a community of descent. Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples: Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia* (Ithaca, 2022), 83–84, 179–80. Edgar cites Herbert Gans's theory of symbolic ethnicity: Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1979): 1–20.

[22] See John Hutchinson, "Hot and Banal Nationalism: The Nationalization of 'the Masses,'" in Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism* (London, 2006), 295–306.

From Ukrainization to Banal Nationalism

From the beginning, the Soviet state was characterized by the uneasy cohabitation of a supranational ideology and the recognition of nationhood as a basis for political legitimacy. The Bolsheviks institutionalized nationality both territorially and as a personal attribute. Soviet territorial nationhood consisted of several tiers of territorial units, from the fifteen union republics down to national village soviets, each unit defined as the polity of its respective "titular nationality." Barring the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (an outlier in several respects), the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was the largest and economically most important of these national territories. Personal nationality, meanwhile, introduced as a statistical census category at the inception of the Soviet order, became a legal component of individuals' personal status when the government introduced internal passports in 1932, and was made inheritable in 1938.[23] Crucially, the Soviet passport category of nationality was divorced from spoken language. Thus, passport Ukrainians who assimilated to Russian-language Soviet culture remained categorized as Ukrainians.[24]

Ukraine played a central role in the institutionalization of the Soviet nationality regime. Here as elsewhere, the Bolsheviks were surprised by the mobilizational capacities of nationalist parties during the revolution. The 1919 uprising of the Ukrainian peasants against grain requisitions and russification policies was a crucial factor in convincing Lenin that he could not ignore national sensibilities.[25] Thus, the Soviet state vigorously supported Ukrainian-language culture during the 1920s. Ukrainization offered social mobility to ethnically Ukrainian political and administrative cadres and, despite the passive resistance of many teachers, produced mass literacy in Ukrainian at least in rural regions. However, the 1930s spelled catastrophe. Ruthless collectivization policies and grain requisitions culminated in the Holodomor of 1932–33, which killed an estimated 3.3 million Ukrainians. Meanwhile, the Stalinist state carried out violent repressions against Ukrainian Party leaders and nationally minded cultural elites. Their project of establishing an autonomous communist culture in Ukraine lost out to a more centralist vision that more easily accommodated Russian-Ukrainian bilingualism.[26]

Still, the foundations of the Soviet federalist order remained in place even as Stalin weakened many of the korenizatsiia policies of the 1920s. Nor were they abolished when Soviet propaganda increasingly began to emphasize the unity of the "Soviet people" (*sovetskii narod*) during and after World War II, downplaying the particularities of individual nationalities in favor of the supposedly supra-ethnic (in reality, usually Russocentric) culture that all inhabitants of the Union were now meant to share.[27] Indeed, historians and party ideologues constructed a teleological narrative that portrayed Ukrainians as a great nation in their own right, albeit one historically destined for eventual "reunification" with their Russian brethren.[28] The victory in the war provided Soviet Ukraine with a powerful myth of origin. State propaganda celebrated the annexation of Galicia, Volhynia,

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[23] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 23–54.

[24] See Volodymyr Kulyk, "Soviet Nationalities Policies and the Discrepancy between Ethnocultural Identification and Language Practice in Ukraine," in Mark Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin, eds., *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 2014), 202–21.

[25] Andrea Graziosi, *Bol'sheviki i krest'iane na Ukraine, 1918–1919 gody: Ocherk o bol'shevizmakh, natsional-sotsializmakh i krest'ianskikh dvizheniiakh* (Moscow, 1997), 169–72; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, 2001), 78–79.

[26] Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 75–124; Matthew D. Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue: Language, Education, and Power in Soviet Ukraine, 1923–1934* (Toronto, 2014); Olena Palko, *Making Ukraine Soviet: Literature and Cultural Politics under Lenin and Stalin* (London, 2021).

[27] See David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); Whittington, "Forging Soviet Citizens."

[28] Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory*.

and Transcarpathia—formerly ruled by Poland and Czechoslovakia—as a unification of Ukraine's territories within the communist state, thus folding Ukrainian nationhood into a narrative of Soviet loyalty.[29] The celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Russian-Ukrainian Treaty of Pereiaslav in 1954 was an important milestone for the propagation of this narrative and of the image of the Ukrainian SSR as the *secunda inter pares* among the Soviet republics.[30] These late Stalinist ideological premises of Soviet Ukrainianness and Ukrainian-Russian relations essentially remained unchanged until the perestroika years, providing the post-Stalinist state with an ethnic legitimation.[31]

Moreover, the postwar Ukrainian SSR acquired several new outward attributes of unified nationhood and statehood. The genocidal violence and ethnic cleansing of the war had resulted in an ethno-linguistically more homogenous population than Ukraine had ever had in its modern history.[32] Following the annexation of Galicia and Transcarpathia, the nominally atheist Soviet state also pursued the forced "reunification" of Ukraine's Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches, thereby unifying the republic's religious landscape.[33] Alongside the Soviet Union and the Belarusian SSR (but not the Russian SFSR), the Ukrainian SSR was a founding member of the United Nations in 1945—a diplomatic move that guaranteed Stalin three seats instead of one in the UN General Assembly.[34] Simultaneously, a republican ministry of foreign affairs was established, giving Ukraine a subordinate but visible representation in international affairs.[35] While such formal innovations did not affect established hierarchies of power, Ukraine's bureaucratic elites welcomed the enhancement of their republic's prestige by these "constitutional trappings."[36]

By the 1960s and 70s, the "Friendship of the Peoples" doctrine stressed the leadership of the Russians, who had purportedly helped the other Soviet nations free themselves from the shackles of feudalism and capitalism.[37] Stretching their dialectic reasoning to the utmost, Soviet ideologists of this period claimed that the "flourishing" (*rastsvet*) of Soviet nationalities would somehow lead to their "convergence" (*sblizhenie*) or even "merger" (*sliianie*).[38] Even though centralists within the party repeatedly demanded the replacement of national-territorial federalism by an economically based order, the system survived the constitutional revision of 1977 with the backing of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev.[39] The national republics continued to provide local party leaders with an institutional power base but at the same time subjected them to popular pressure to carry out nationalizing policies in the cultural sphere.[40] In particular in republics with a history of independent statehood in the revolutionary period, many people felt that the "titular" nationality was

[29] Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 334–37, 348–49.

[30] Yaroslav Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic: The Ukraine after World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1964), 18–19.

[31] Wojnowski, *The Near Abroad*, 11.

[32] See, for instance, George Liber, *Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1914-1954* (Toronto, 2016).

[33] Kathryn David, "One Ukraine, Under God: Church, State, and the Making of the Postwar Soviet Union" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2020).

[34] Theofil I. Kis, *Nationhood, Statehood, and the International Status of the Ukrainian SSR/Ukraine* (Ottawa, 1989), 1–2, 56–60.

[35] Olga Bertelsen, "Political Affinities and Maneuvering of Soviet Political Elites: Heorhii Shevel and Ukraine's Ministry of Strange Affairs in the 1970s," *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 3 (May 2019): 394–411.

[36] Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic*, 282.

[37] Moritz Florin and Manfred Zeller, "Soviet Transnationalism: Urban Milieus, Deterritorialization, and People's Friendship in the Late Soviet Union," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2018): 142–43.

[38] Whittington, "Forging Soviet Citizens," 213–15.

[39] Gerhard Simon, *Nationalismus und Nationalitätenpolitik in der Sowjetunion: Von der totalitären Diktatur zur nachstalinschen Gesellschaft* (Baden-Baden, 1986), 356–69.

[40] Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge, Eng., 2013), 238–44, 360–61.

entitled to representation among the republic's cadres and support for the national language.[41] Thus, republican leaders found themselves constrained to maneuver between popular and institutional expectations of fostering nationality and the central authorities' worries about the temptations of "bourgeois nationalism." The rhetoric of late Soviet banal nationalism was one way to overcome this dilemma.

Ukrainianness With and Without Ethnicity

The ideological statements of two First Secretaries of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Petro Shelest and Volodymyr Shcherbyts′kyi, demonstrate a shift in discourse that helps understand the emergence of Soviet Ukrainian banal nationalism. Ukrainian public opinion has traditionally described the former as a sympathizer and promoter of national culture and the latter as a russifying centralist of the stagnation period. While this view is not completely wrong, historians have arrived at a more nuanced picture, and an analysis of both politicians' writings reveals both differences and continuities between their visions of the Ukrainian SSR.[42] While Shelest's presentation of Soviet Ukraine included some vivid ethnohistorical elements alongside pride in its republican quasi-statehood, Shcherbyts′kyi's was almost completely deprived of the former.

Both Shelest and Shcherbyts′kyi took cues from the central leadership. General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, who had grown up in Ukraine and initiated his party career in the Dnipropetrovs′k and Zaporizhzhia regions set the tone in a 1967 speech commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Soviet power in Ukraine. Accompanied by "thunderous, long applause," he announced that "Ukraine is well-known and sincerely loved in our country."[43] While utterly banal, the statement is telling. Brezhnev confirmed that the Soviet worldview acknowledged the existence of a Ukrainian territorial unit, and that the republic was meant to be an object of affection. In his speech, the General Secretary briefly sketched four ways of conceptualizing the republic. First, he enumerated the "gigantic successes" of Soviet Ukraine in the economic sphere: industrial production had increased 48-fold since 1917, agricultural production threefold. Ukraine produced nine times more electricity than in 1940 and extracted 97 times more gas.[44] Second, he constructed a line of tradition from "progressive" Ukrainian pre-revolutionary cultural figures such as Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Lesia Ukraïnka to the establishment of Soviet rule, not without (wrongly) mentioning the congruence of their ideas with those of "Russian revolutionary democrats" such as Vissarion Belinskii or Nikolai Chernyshevskii.[45] Third, he touched upon Ukraine's enormous sacrifice and heroism during WWII. And finally, he stressed that all of Ukraine's successes were due to its firm integration into the Soviet Union and the close cooperation of its population with other Soviet nations: "Ukraine is now connected to the other Union republics by a million threads."[46]

All these points were rooted in older, Stalinist conceptions of Soviet Ukrainianness. Brezhnev's lieutenants in Ukraine would continue to recycle them, but a shift in emphasis

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[41] Claire P. Kaiser, *Georgian and Soviet: Entitled Nationhood and the Specter of Stalin in the Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY, 2022), 9–13, 24, 164.

[42] See, for example, Iu.I. Shapoval, "V.V. Shcherbyts′kyi: Osoba polityka sered obstavyn chasu," *Ukraïns′kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, no. 1 (February 2003): 118–29; Oleh Bazhan, "Do pytannia pro 'ukrainofil′stvo' pershoho sekretaria TsK KPU Petra Shelesta," *Istoriia Ukraïny. Malovidomi imena, podiï, fakty* 37 (2011): 215–46; Iu.I. Shapoval, *Petro Shelest* (Kharkiv, 2013); O.A. Iakubets′, "V. Shcherbyts′kyi ta ideolohiia: Do pytannia shchodo prychyn 'Malanchukivshchyny,'" *Ukraïns′kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, no. 5 (October 2014): 107–25.

[43] L.I. Brezhnev, *Leninskim kursom: Rechi i stat′i* (Moscow, 1970), 2:158.

[44] Ibid., 2:157.

[45] Ibid., 2:159. See Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory*, 100–1, 110, 131, 139–40, on the Stalinist origins of this particular myth.

[46] Brezhnev, *Leninskim kursom*, 2:162–63.

is discernible between Shelest and Shcherbyts'kyi. In 1970, Petro Shelest published his Ukrainian-language panegyric to the republic, "Our Soviet Ukraine!," which quickly sold 100,000 copies. The first part of the book consisted of a historical sketch, in which Shelest praised the historically progressive role of the Zaporozhian Cossacks and their struggle against the national and social yoke of their Polish and Tatar feudal lords. In doing so, he reproduced nineteenth-century Ukrainophile topoi, even as he condemned Ukrainian "bourgeois nationalist" historiography.[47] At the same time, he framed the Ukrainian SSR as an organic result of Ukraine's own history, as the apogee and incarnation of the nation's centuries-long struggle for freedom. For him, Soviet Ukrainians—portrayed in national-ist fashion as a collective individual with shared interests—were "the rightful heirs to democratic Ukrainian culture."[48]

Though filled with communist clichés about the unity of Soviet nations and the benefi-cial effect of Soviet rule on the Ukrainian economy, Shelest's text flirted with the notion of Ukrainian statehood, even going so far as to praise the Ukrainian SSR as "one of the most developed states (*derzhav*) of the world."[49] Shelest simultaneously appealed to a certain pride in the republic and reaffirmed its unflinching loyalty to the Soviet order: "Everyone who lives in Soviet Ukraine loves her and proudly says: 'my Ukraine,' 'our Ukraine.' This is completely natural and appropriate.... Ukraine is an inalienable part of the great Soviet Union. It is in the family of Soviet republics that she became so powerful and highly developed."[50]

The book culminated in an extended tour of all Ukraine's regions, imagining a geograph-ical unity "From the thick forests of Polissia down to the Black Sea, from the Carpathian heights to the Donets'k steppes."[51] In the following sketches about each oblast, vignettes on the region's history were combined with praise of the local accomplishments of Soviet rule. In the case of L'viv oblast, for example, this resulted in a wild mixture of pre-revolutionary misery (feudalism and poverty in the villages, murderous bourgeois nationalists), national glory (the foundation of L'viv by thirteenth-century prince Danylo, Galicia's nineteenth-century writers), revolutionary history (Ivan Franko's translation of chapters from Karl Marx's *Capital*, the Communist Party of western Ukraine), triumphs of Soviet industrial-ization (the L'viv bus factory, the coal pits of Chervonohrad), and rising standards of living (universities, museums, and green squares in the city, tv antennas in the village).[52]

Shelest, who had risen to power in the comparatively liberal climate of the Thaw, pre-sented Ukrainian ethno-historical topoi, a unified territory, and even the formal possibility of statehood as unproblematic elements of the Soviet "federal" order. However, in the ultra-centralist 1970s, some of them could be weaponized to accuse the author of disloyalty. Two years after the publication of his book, Shelest was dismissed from the republican lead-ership, and in 1973, the journal *Komunist Ukraïny* severely criticized him for idealizing the Cossack past. In an atmosphere of extreme economic and cultural centralism, his republican pride, economic autonomism and national-historical sympathies had become suspicious to Moscow.[53]

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[47] P.Iu. Shelest, *Ukraïno nasha radians'ka* (Kyiv, 1970), 20–25. Although the book was probably ghostwritten, it is generally assumed to reflect Shelest's personal worldview.

[48] Ibid., 82.

[49] Ibid., 74.

[50] Ibid., 5.

[51] Ibid., 76.

[52] Ibid., 248–55. See Tarik Cyril Amar, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City Between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* (Ithaca, 2015), 185–220, on the postwar industrialization of L'viv and its ideological significance.

[53] Yaroslav Bilinsky, "The Communist Party of Ukraine after 1966," in Peter J. Potichnyj, ed., *Ukraine in the Seventies* (Oakville, Ont., 1975), 251–52; Shapoval, *Petro Shelest*, 69–71, 96–115.

Seven years after Shelest's book, his replacement Volodymyr Sherbyts'kyi published his own brochure about Soviet Ukraine.[54] Shcherbyts'kyi likely saw the text as a response to Shelest and made sure that it depicted Soviet Ukraine in accordance with his own, more centralist ideas.[55] It is symptomatic that it was published in Russian in Moscow before a Ukrainian version came out the following year. If Shelest's book had included large amounts of "wooden" language and formulaic quotations from Lenin, Shcherbyts'kyi's brochure hardly contained anything else. Where Shelest had enthused about Cossack history, Shcherbyts'kyi barely wrote about Ukraine's ethnic past at all.

Like Shelest, Shcherbyts'kyi presented Soviet Ukraine as the ultimate realization of the Ukrainian people within the Soviet family of nations. However, in his account, progress emanated exclusively from the center: "The victory-bearing October revolution also became a historical turning point in the fate of the Ukrainian people. Its centuries-old dream of emancipation, of the unification of all Ukrainian lands in a unified socialist state, was realized."[56] If Shelest had sketched a genealogy of Ukrainian strivings for freedom, Shcherbyts'kyi's praise of his republic refrained almost completely from naming concrete historical peculiarities. While emphasizing the republic's economic successes, he never forgot the mantra that Ukraine owed everything to the other republics and particularly to Russia. Shelest had occasionally strewn in such statements for balance, Shcherbyts'kyi obsessively repeated them over and over. "The workers of Ukraine," he assured his readers, "have convinced themselves that only thanks to their unity and tight friendship with the Russian people, the mutual aid of all the brotherly peoples of the USSR, have they been able to bring to a victorious end their struggle of many years for freedom, equality, and social justice."[57]

The category of nationality in this kind of discourse was almost empty of ethno-historical content, but it was still there. The very make-up of the Soviet Union guaranteed the reproduction of references to "the Ukrainian people," the national republic, its territory, and even nationally defined culture. Take a statement such as the following: "For the workers of Ukraine, as for all Soviet people, there is no higher feeling than the feeling of a united family, the feeling of Soviet patriotism and internationalism, there is nothing holier than our beautiful, great, multinational Homeland."[58] While the sentence denies all specificity of Ukraine's population—they are the same as other Soviet people, they only have feelings for the Soviet Union and for internationalism—it still designates them as "workers of Ukraine."

While more cautious than Shelest, Shcherbyts'kyi, too, occasionally described the Ukrainian SSR as a nation-state *sui generis*. In a 1977 speech at a celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of Soviet power in Ukraine, he said that "in the dawn of October the Ukrainian people united all its ancestral lands in one socialist state," describing the postwar expansion into western Ukraine as liberation from both social and national oppression.[59] Even more than Shelest, however, Sherbyts'kyi conceptualized the Ukrainian SSR above all as an economic space, praising the number of tractors produced in the republic, the recent successes in mechanization, industrialization, and agriculture, as well as the ongoing construction of the Chornobyl nuclear plant.[60] This was hypernormalized nationality discourse at its best.

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[54] V.V. Shcherbitskii, *Sovetskaia Ukraina* (Moscow, 1977).

[55] According to his collaborator Aleksandr Vlasenko, Shcherbyts'kyi did not write this brochure on his own but energetically edited and improved it. See A. Vlasenko, *V.V. Shcherbitskii i ego vremia* (Kharkiv, 2009), 58–59.

[56] Shcherbitskii, *Sovetskaia Ukraina*, 15.

[57] Ibid., 24.

[58] Ibid., 71.

[59] V.V. Shcherbitskii, "Pod znamenem Oktiabria—k novym sversheniiam," *Pravda Ukrainy*, December 24, 1977, 2.

[60] Shcherbitskii, *Sovetskaia Ukraina*, 26, 34ff., 44, 50.

This kind of banal national flagging without ethnic content was typical of Soviet Ukrainian authoritative discourse during the 1970s. It was ubiquitous at all kinds of anniversaries and party ceremonies and can be found in speeches and editorials printed on such occasions in *Pravda Ukrainy*, the Russian-language daily of the Ukrainian Communist Party and the republican government. For instance, in a 1972 special issue dedicated to celebrating Soviet Ukraine, Oleksandr Liashko, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, placed an editorial that reproduced all of the officially promoted stereotypes about the republic:

> "From the immense steppes of Donbass to the evergreen Carpathians, from sunny Crimea to the woods of the Chernihiv region lies Soviet Ukraine, one of the fifteen union republics of the USSR. Its area is about 604,000 square kilometers—a territory larger than any European country. Ukraine's mineral resources, her fertile cornfields and blossoming orchards, her broad and abundant rivers are inexhaustible. This is a land of powerful industry, highly developed agriculture, outstanding popular talent, and delightful songs. And everything our republic has achieved, everything that constitutes her fame and pride, the 48-million Ukrainian people owes to the Leninist Party of Communists, to the socialist order, to the friendship of Soviet peoples."[61]

Liashko's opening sentences have it all: the boilerplate imagined geography, the stress on abundant resources and a developed economy (as well as the tired cliché of Ukrainians' talent for lyrical song), the ritual expression of gratitude to the party and the other Soviet nations and, finally, a comparison of size to put Soviet Ukraine on one level with west European nation-states and hint at its quasi-statehood. The remainder of the article was dedicated to the republic's economic prowess. Naming such enterprises as the Zaporizhstal′ steel plant, the Kharkiv tractor factory, and the Dniprohes hydroelectric station, Liashko went on to brag that the industrial production of Ukraine in 1971 corresponded to nine Ukraines of 1940. "We are proud," he declared, "that the first computers, artificial diamonds, the world's largest airplanes were born specifically in our republic. Ukraine delivers a fifth of the grain produced in the USSR."[62]

Extolling the economic potential of Ukraine's various regions, Soviet Ukrainian propagandists created an imaginary economic geography that presented their republic as the avantgarde of the world's allegedly most productive state. Based on state institutions and economic territoriality rather than ethno-cultural symbols, this rhetoric tried to instill republican patriotism and pride in the achievements of one's own sub-state.[63] This propagandistic tendency was in line with the attempts of both Shelest and Shcherbyts′kyi to improve the status of their resource-rich and highly industrialized republic within the Soviet economic system. Like all Soviet republican leaders, both were keen for Ukraine to be allocated more investments from the all-Union budget, to decrease exports, and to approach economic self-sufficiency.[64] Thus, the Soviet Ukrainian party leadership saw the

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[61] A.P. Liashko, "V sozvezdii respublik-sester," *Pravda Ukrainy*, special issue 1972, 1. See also Liashko's longer brochure: A.P. Liashko, *Ukrainskaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika* (Moscow, 1972).

[62] Liashko, "V sozvezdii respublik-sester."

[63] This rhetoric bore the marks of the early Soviet competition between the "ethnographic paradigm" and "economic paradigm" of territorial delineation, a tension ultimately eased by the assignation of economic specializations to national territories in the 1920s. See Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY, 2005), 62–98.

[64] Shapoval, *Petro Shelest*, 73; Vlasenko, *V.V. Shcherbitskii i ego vremia*, 20–21. The classic account of this "localism" among regional party leaders is Jerry F. Hough, *The Soviet Prefects: The Local Party Organs in Industrial Decision-Making* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), esp. Ch. 12. See also Nataliya Kibita, *Soviet Economic Management under Khrushchev: The Sovnarkhoz Reform* (London, 2013).

promotion of republican pride as beneficial to their interests in the competition between republics within the "federal" system. The Soviet national-federal system inextricably linked this economic localism with nationalist rhetoric.[65]

Economically grounded republican patriotism was not unique to the Ukrainian SSR. On the contrary, it was easily replicable and could be found in propaganda produced in all national republics.[66] Shcherbyts′kyi's 1977 brochure was part of a series on the Soviet republics published under the names of the republican leaders. While slightly different in style and emphasis, each of them presented a locally adapted narrative of economic and societal progress from a gloomy pre-Soviet past to a bright socialist present, interspersed with professions of gratitude to the party and the brotherly nations. For instance, Dınmūhammed Qonaev extolled Soviet Kazakhstan as a culturally developed socialist nation and a union-wide leader in metallurgy, grain production, and livestock farming, contrasting these successes with the purported backwardness of pre-Soviet nomadic society and colonial exploitation under tsarism (which he wisely differentiated from Russia as such).[67] Lithuania's Petras Griškevičius rhapsodized about his republic's highly specialized chemical and machine industry as well as its modern meat production, a huge improvement from the poverty of the interwar "bourgeois" republic.[68] Petr Masheraŭ's account of Soviet Belarus read even more like a business report, harping on endlessly about the republic's output of dairy products, potatoes, tractors, and refrigerators.[69] Qonaev also employed quasi-state rhetoric, declaring that "us Kazakhs, like the other equal nations of the Soviet Union, have first acquired our statehood thanks to the October Revolution," and that Kazakhstan's "enormous territory" could "accommodate Great Britain, France, West Germany, Spain, Austria, the Netherlands, and Denmark at the same time."[70]

Yet, if all national republics were economic units, the economy was not equally central to their self-presentation. Ukraine's republican leaders were aware that because of the republic's importance to the overall Soviet project, the perceived cultural closeness to Russia, and the history of anti-Soviet nationalist resistance, they had less leeway than their comrades elsewhere to pursue a nationalizing program. Therefore, the rhetoric of economic prowess and republican quasi-statehood was the most suitable idiom for their aspirations. With low rates of cultural assimilation among populations whose cultural distance from Russia was universally recognized, the postwar republican leaderships of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia went considerably further in promoting ethno-cultural visions of nationhood.[71] Meanwhile, Russian nationality, while often identified with culture per se, was less institutionalized than the titular nationalities of the union republics. Therefore, the central authorities wavered between the advertisement of a semantically weak (indeed, often

[65] Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Dialectics of Nationalism in the USSR," *Problems of Communism* 23, no. 3 (May 1974): 11.

[66] See Jonathan Raspe, "Constructing Soviet Nations: Industrialization and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan and Belarus, 1940–1990," (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2024), 407–24.

[67] D.A. Kunaev, *Sovetskii Kazakhstan* (Moscow, 1978).

[68] P.P. Grishkiavichus, *Sovetskaia Litva* (Moscow, 1978).

[69] P.M. Masherov, *Sovetskaia Belorussiia* (Moscow, 1980). Masheraŭ, like Shelest, was known to protect writers in his republic; like Shcherbyts′kyi, he was very cautious with regard to the national language. See Natalya Chernyshova, "Between Soviet and Ethnic: Cultural Policies and National Identity Building in Soviet Belarus under Petr Masherau, 1965–80," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2023): 545–84.

[70] Kunaev, *Sovetskii Kazakhstan*, 7.

[71] Maike Lehmann, *Eine sowjetische Nation: Nationale Sozialismusinterpretationen in Armenien seit 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 2012); Erik Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (New York, 2016); Krista A. Goff, *Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus* (Ithaca, 2020); Kaiser, *Georgian and Soviet*.

implicit) Russianness and support for the proudly ethno-cultural Russocentrism promoted by nationalist intellectuals.[72]

Encountering Banal Nationalism in Everyday Life

It is not a coincidence that Soviet Ukrainian propaganda was often in Russian. Deprived of a strong ethno-cultural component, late Soviet banal Ukrainianness worked best in the all-union language. According to Soviet ideologists of the 1970s, only the Russian language was suitable for unlimited functionality in a modern society, and accordingly Russian dominated in the economic and political sphere.[73] At the same time, Soviet federalism guaranteed the status and prestige of Ukrainian as a national language of high culture.[74] Despite the rising share of Russian-language publications, Ukrainian literature continued to be published. Ukrainian-language theaters were considered very good, and the Kyiv opera house performed in Ukrainian translation.[75] While party leaders usually made their speeches in Russian, they sometimes threw in a slogan in Ukrainian.[76] Even in the industrial cities of south and east Ukraine, where the language was hardly in use, Ukrainian retained its symbolic function on public signs, posters, and official documents. For example, the coat of arms of mostly Russophone Dnipropetrovs′k displayed the city's name in Ukrainian.[77] Thus, late Soviet Ukraine kept promoting the Ukrainian language as a (politically neutral) symbol of Ukrainianness, but no longer as a means of communication for all spheres of social life. Ordinary people seem to have internalized this perception. In Soviet censuses during the 1970s, many linguistically assimilated Ukrainians claimed to be Ukrainian-speakers, even though they used Russian more frequently, suggesting that they saw the category of "native tongue" as a symbolic component of, or even a proxy for their official nationality.[78]

The Ukrainian language also remained present, albeit increasingly marginal, in the republic's media landscape. The newspaper *Vechirnii Kyïv* was popular even in families where no Ukrainian was spoken, reaching a circulation of 344,000 copies by the 1970s. A similar newspaper was established in predominantly Russian-speaking Kharkiv in 1969, though by the 1980s the print runs of both papers were reduced to favor the Russophone press.[79] Radio in the republic broadcast local news and music in Ukrainian, even as the share of Russian-language broadcasts was rising in the eastern oblasts. The bilingual republican television channel, established in 1972, tended to represent Ukrainian-language culture mostly in a rural-folkloric mode.[80]

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[72] On these debates, see Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998); Nikolay Mitrokhin, *Die "Russische Partei": Die Bewegung der russischen Nationalisten in der UdSSR 1953–1985* (Stuttgart, 2014); Jonathan Brunstedt, *The Soviet Myth of World War II: Patriotic Memory and the Russian Question in the USSR* (Cambridge, Eng., 2021).

[73] Simon, *Nationalismus und Nationalitätenpolitik*, 382.

[74] This is a fundamental difference between even the most russificatory phases of the Soviet regime in Ukraine and tsarist policies.

[75] Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic*, 157.

[76] Note, for instance, Brezhnev's "*Khai zhyve Radians′ka Ukraïna!*" (Long live Soviet Ukraine!) in his 1967 speech. Brezhnev, *Leninskim kursom*, 2:167.

[77] Kulyk, "Soviet Nationalities Policies," 212; Andrii Portnov, *Dnipro: An Entangled History of a European City* (Boston, 2022), 307–8.

[78] The same goes for other non-Russian nationalities. See Rasma Karklins, "A Note on 'Nationality' and 'Native Tongue' as Census Categories in 1979," *Soviet Studies* 32, no. 3 (July 1980): 415–22. As late as in a 2006 survey, the share of Ukrainians declaring Ukrainian as their native language was still significantly higher (55.3 percent, with 11.3 percent declaring Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism) than that of those declaring it as their everyday language (35.5 and 23.5 percent, respectively). See Kulyk, "Soviet Nationalities Policies," 203, 206.

[79] Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*, 88, 93, 288.

[80] Iurii Kahanov, *Konstruiuvannia "radians′koï liudyny" (1953–1991): ukraïns′ka versiia* (Zaporizhzhia, 2019), 176–77, 184–85, 212–17.

Late Soviet banal nationalism left its traces even in the less obviously propagandistic day-to-day coverage of republican media. *Pravda Ukrainy* would often refer to Kyiv as "the capital of Ukraine." It regularly reported on the activities of the republic's government, its Communist Party, and other republican institutions, such as the Red Cross, the Academy of Sciences, or the Writers' Union of the Ukrainian SSR. Daily and monthly reports of the Ukrainian Weather Office announced that "a cyclone will pass over the territory of Ukraine," that current temperatures were higher than the norm "in the entire republic," or that "January is expected to be a bit colder than average in the northeast of Ukraine; on the remaining territory of Ukraine it will be moderately cold."[81] Here, the territory of the Soviet republic was treated as a geographical unit relevant to meteorological developments, mirroring one of Michael Billig's classic examples of banal nationalism in the British media.[82]

Similarly, Ukrainianness regularly became visible in spectator sports, yet another typical arena of banal nationalism.[83] *Pravda Ukrainy* often singled out the achievements of Ukrainian athletes and teams ("representatives of our republic") when reporting sports results. In 1972, for instance, the paper proudly announced the successes of "the best of the ten-million-army of athletes of the republic" at the Munich Olympics. Twenty-two athletes from Ukraine had won fifteen medals.[84] During the Spartakiads of the Peoples of the USSR, when athletes officially competed under the flag of their republic, the paper cautiously celebrated Ukraine's successful boxers, gymnasts, weightlifters, or chess players.[85] The state-managed Ukrainian soccer teams also allowed for acceptable forms of local and republican pride among Ukrainian fans. First Secretary Shcherbyts'kyi himself was known to be a fan of Dynamo Kyiv and the team, wildly successful during the 1970s, became popular with supporters all over Ukraine because it was successfully challenging the Moscow teams. In their letters to the club, some fans spoke of Dynamo as if it were a national team.[86] The west Ukrainian team Karpaty L'viv, peaking in the late 1960s and mid-1970s, also attracted a cult following, with fans who flirted with anti-Soviet nationalism and anti-Russian resentment.[87] Writing in *Pravda Ukrainy* in 1974, the Ukrainian Soccer Federation president expressed pride in the "broad representation of Ukrainian soccer among the country's strongest clubs"—six of sixteen teams in the highest league were from Ukraine—but, reproducing a typical rhetorical turn, declared that their highest responsibility was providing players for the Soviet national team in international competitions.[88]

Soviet Ukrainian schoolchildren were regularly reminded of their republic's Ukrainianness. While the share of Russian-language schools rose to over 40 percent over the 1970s, most of those taught compulsory (if often ridiculed) classes in Ukrainian language and literature.[89] Moreover, a 1959 resolution had introduced the teaching of

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[81] L. Eremenko, "Pogoda v ianvare," *Pravda Ukrainy*, December 31, 1972, 4; A. Dymskaia, "Pogoda v dekabre," *Pravda Ukrainy*, December 3, 1974.

[82] For Billig, treating meteorological events within a state as "the" weather is typical of banal "homeland-making." Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 116–117.

[83] Ibid., 119–25.

[84] Sergei Belov, "Bogatyrskaia estafeta," *Pravda Ukrainy*, special issue 1972, 3.

[85] A. Zonenko, "Spartakiada v nashei zhizni: Govoriat luchshie sportsmeny respubliki," *Pravda Ukrainy*, July 17, 1979, 4; M. Georgiev, "Nachali s mirovykh rekordov," *Pravda Ukrainy*, July 24, 1979, 4; "Zamechatel'nyi uspekh," *Pravda Ukrainy*, July 24, 1979, 4.

[86] Manfred Zeller, "'Our Own Internationale,' 1966: Dynamo Kiev Fans between Local Identity and Transnational Imagination," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 1 (2011): 53–82.

[87] William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), 235–37.

[88] O. Oshenkov, "Prolog k sezonu," *Pravda Ukrainy*, April 6, 1974, 4.

[89] Kahanov, *Konstruiuvannia "radians'koï liudyny,"* 86–87.

republican history into the curricula of all union republics.[90] The republican government commissioned several editions of textbooks in both Ukrainian and Russian that treated Ukraine's history up to the nineteenth century (for the seventh and eighth grade) and in the twentieth century (nineth and tenth grade).[91] Such textbooks followed the conventions of Soviet historiography, reproducing stereotypical narratives of class struggle and Russian-Ukrainian unity, but they also portrayed ethnic nations as history's main actors.[92] While republican history was often badly taught, the textbooks did provide pupils with the building blocks of a national-historical teleology by introducing them to such classical themes of Ukrainian history as medieval Rus′ or early modern Cossackdom—although the narrative had to remain compatible with the Russocentric framework of shared East Slavic heritage.[93] In their presentation of the recent past, they mirrored the proclamations of republican leaders about the economic and cultural blossoming of the technologically modernized republic.[94]

Finally, Soviet banal Ukrainianness also created its specific visual language. In a process parallel to the hypernormalization of Soviet propaganda language, visual propaganda also underwent stylistic standardization in the post-Stalin period.[95] Visual depictions of Ukrainianness mirrored textual descriptions. On the one hand, new symbols of institutional-territorial nationhood and republican statehood appeared, on the other, ethnic markers were coopted as politically empty symbols. An example of the former is the flag of the Ukrainian SSR. While the interwar version had hardly been distinguishable from that of other Soviet republics, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet allowed the republics to integrate "national particularities" of the republic into their flags in 1947. Consequently, the Ukrainian SSR added an azure stripe to its red flag with the hammer, sickle and star, making it more recognizable.[96] In the 1970s, this flag was hoisted alongside the union flag at important republican party functions or at meetings of republican leaders with foreign dignitaries, such as when Shcherbyts′kyi and Liashko met France's president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.[97] It was frequently printed on propagandistic posters and postcards (Figure 1).

In a similar case of institutional state symbolism, in 1949 the Ukrainian SSR was the first union republic to receive its own anthem, which began to be played at all state functions. The lyrics had been purged of all references to Ukrainian history, which were replaced by a host of Leninist clichés and an emphasis on the importance of the Russians within the Soviet brotherhood of nations. The melody bore striking similarities to the all-Union anthem. And yet, Ukrainians recognized the anthem as a new emblem of Ukrainian quasi-statehood.[98]

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[90] Whittington, "Forging Soviet Citizens," 187–89.

[91] Mischa Gabowitsch, "Visuals in History Textbooks: War Memorials in Soviet and Post-Soviet School Education from 1945 to 2021," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 99–128. I thank Mischa Gabowitsch for providing a longer, unpublished version of this article.

[92] Jan G. Janmaat, "Identity Construction and Education: The History of Ukraine in Soviet and Post-Soviet Schoolbooks," in Taras Kuzio and Paul D'Anieri, eds., *Dilemmas of State-Led Nation Building in Ukraine* (Westport, CT, 2002), 171–89; Wojnowski, *The Near Abroad*, 141–42.

[93] For a contemporary's testimony, see Kahanov, *Konstruiuvannia "radians′koï liudyny,"* 83.

[94] F.E. Los′, ed., *Istoriia ukrainskoi SSR: posobie dlia 9-10 klassov*, 5th ed. (Kyiv, 1972), 162–98.

[95] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 55.

[96] "Zakon Ukraïns′koï Radians′koï Sotsialistychnoï Respubliky pro zatverdzhennia Ukaziv Prezydiï Verkhovnoï Rady Ukraïns′koï RSR 'Pro Derzhavnyi herb Ukraïns′koï RSR' ta 'Pro Derzhavnyi prapor Ukraïnskoï RSR,'" July 5, 1950, at web.archive.org/web/20170525084522/http://search.ligazakon.ua/l_doc2.nsf/link1/T500003.html (last accessed February 14, 2025).

[97] "Ot″ezd Prezidenta Frantsii iz Kieva," *Pravda Ukrainy*, October 18, 1975, 1. See also the photograph in *Pravda Ukrainy*, January 31, 1979, 1.

[98] Serhy Yekelchyk, "When Stalin's Nations Sang: Writing the Soviet Ukrainian Anthem (1944–1949)," *Nationalities Papers* 31, no. 3 (September 2003): 309–26.
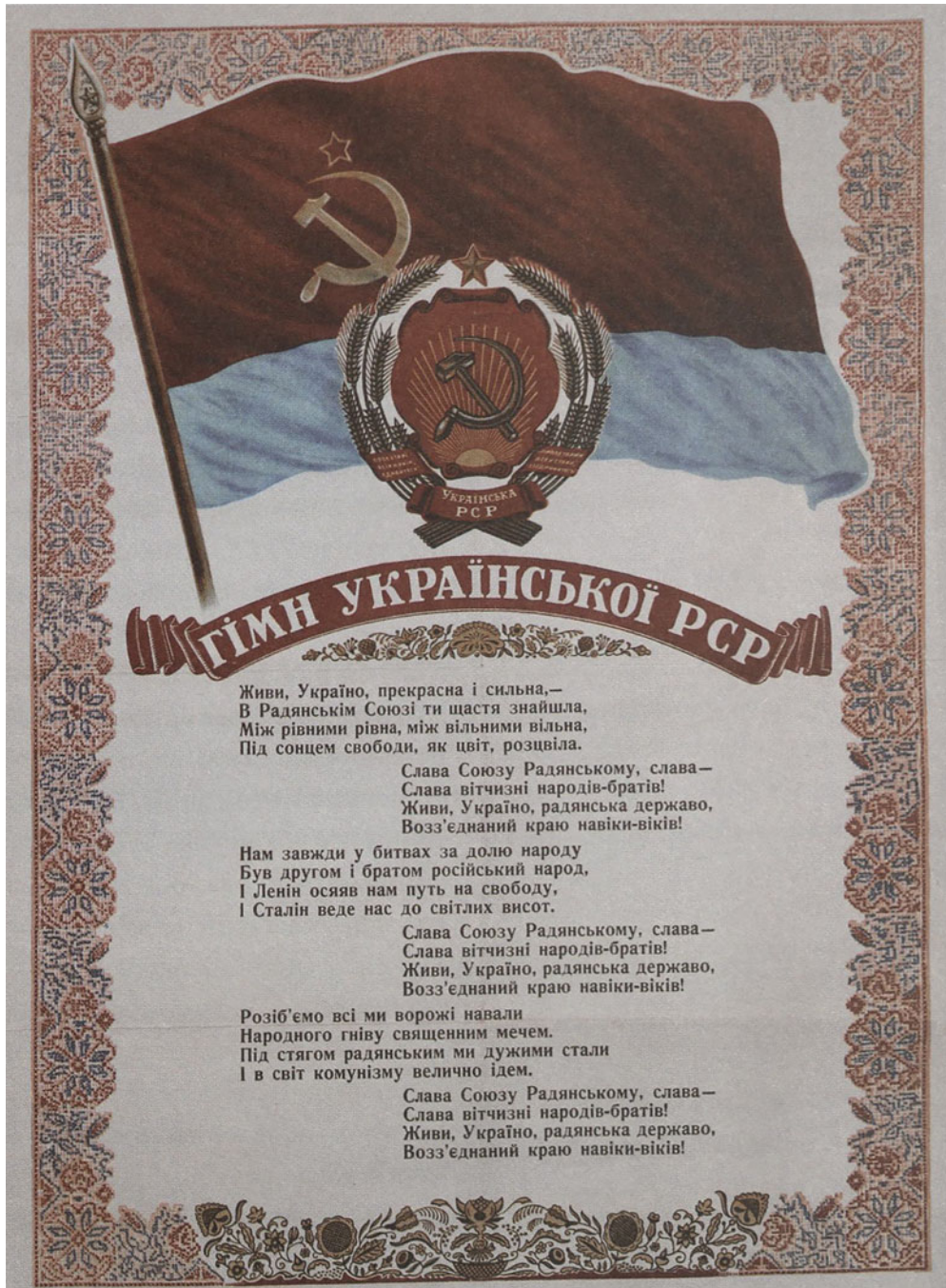
Figure 1. The anthem and flag as new "institutional" national emblems of the Ukrainian SSR introduced after World War II. Note the embroidered pattern in the background as a nod to Ukraine's folk traditions. Poster by O. Zaslavs'kyi, 1950. Source: Vasyl' Kosiv, *Ukraïns'ka identichnist' u hrafichnomu dyzaini 1945–1989 rokiv* (Kyiv, 2019), 123. Original in the Vernads'kyi National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv.

Lines from the anthem, such as *Zhyvy Ukraïno, prekrasna i syl'na* ("Live, Ukraine, beautiful and strong") or *Zhyvy Ukraïno, radians'ka derzhavo* ("Live, Ukraine, Soviet state") were printed on posters alongside other republican symbols.

The map of Soviet Ukraine itself, the outline of its 604,000 square kilometers, became a visual marker of republican territoriality. For instance, a 1969 publication on the Ukrainian SSR's geography featured maps of the republic's fuel industry, its power plants, metallurgy, and wood-processing industry, as well as the cultivation of wheat, sugar-beets, sunflowers, potatoes, and so on.[99] Besides reinforcing the perception of Ukraine as a unified economic space, these and other maps showed the republic detached from all neighboring territories, almost like an island, helping to impress the shape of the postwar borders on Ukrainians' mental maps. Thus, the silhouette of Soviet Ukraine became what Benedict Anderson has termed the "map-as-logo," whereby a territory's geographical shape becomes a reproducible and instantly recognizable graphic symbol of the nation. Like the Asian colonies described by Anderson, the map of Ukraine "appeared like a detachable piece of a jigsaw puzzle," potentially capable of standing on its own.[100] Indeed, the shape of Ukraine's territory in its postwar Soviet borders continues to be one of the most emblematic markers of Ukrainian statehood today, especially since Russia's repeated military aggression against its territorial integrity (Figure 2).

Alongside these symbols of republican quasi-statehood, there were also emblems of Ukrainianness based on a banal representation of ethnic heritage. In the context of the 300-year Pereiaslav anniversary celebrated in 1954, Soviet propagandists standardized the depiction of Ukraine and Russia as two separate human figures.[101] Several posters to commemorate this event showed two men or two women standing in harmony next to each other or shaking hands—representing "brotherly nations" or "sister republics," respectively. The Ukrainian figure on these posters, as well as on almost all other allegorical depictions of Ukraine as a human figure, was usually wearing an embroidered shirt (*vyshyvanka*) or an entire national costume and, if it was a woman, a wreath of flowers on her head. Russian figures were usually shown to be blond and sometimes blue-eyed, whereas Ukrainian figures had dark brown hair and brown eyes.[102] While female Russian figures were usually also depicted wearing folkloric peasant garb, Russian men tended to be dressed in modern suits or work overalls, representing their imagined role as ethnically unmarked modernizers. Such metaphorical depictions of Ukrainian-Russian friendship were rooted in the Soviet iconographic tradition that displayed personifications of the proletariat and the peasantry side by side to symbolize the Bolshevik alliance between city and countryside.[103] In this sense, the visual tradition codified in 1954 is emblematic of the Soviet Union's

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[99] V.P. Zamkovoi, S.V. Kalesnik, *Sovetskii Soiuz: Geograficheskoe opisanie v 22-kh tomakh. Vol. 8: Ukraina. Obshchii obzor* (Moscow, 1969). There was even a map of Ukraine's industry in 1913, projecting the postwar borders of the republic back into a time before its foundation.

[100] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London, 2006), 175. On the iconic quality of the Soviet map itself, see Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, "'A Sixth Part of the World': The Career of a Spatial Metaphor in Russia and the Soviet Union (1837–2021)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 349–80.

[101] See Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory*, 156; Vasyl' Kosiv, *Ukraïns'ka identichnist' u hrafichnomu dyzaini 1945–1989 rokiv* (Kyiv, 2019), 232–33.

[102] The same long-standing ethnic stereotype had been taken up and statistically "proven" by early-twentieth-century Ukrainian racial anthropologists. See F. Volkov, "Antropologicheskie osobennosti ukrainskago naroda," in F.K. Volkov, ed., *Ukrainskii narod v ego proshlom i nastoiashchem,* vol. 2 (Petrograd, 1916), 427–54.

[103] See Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, 1999), 26, 79, 83–84, 121–23.
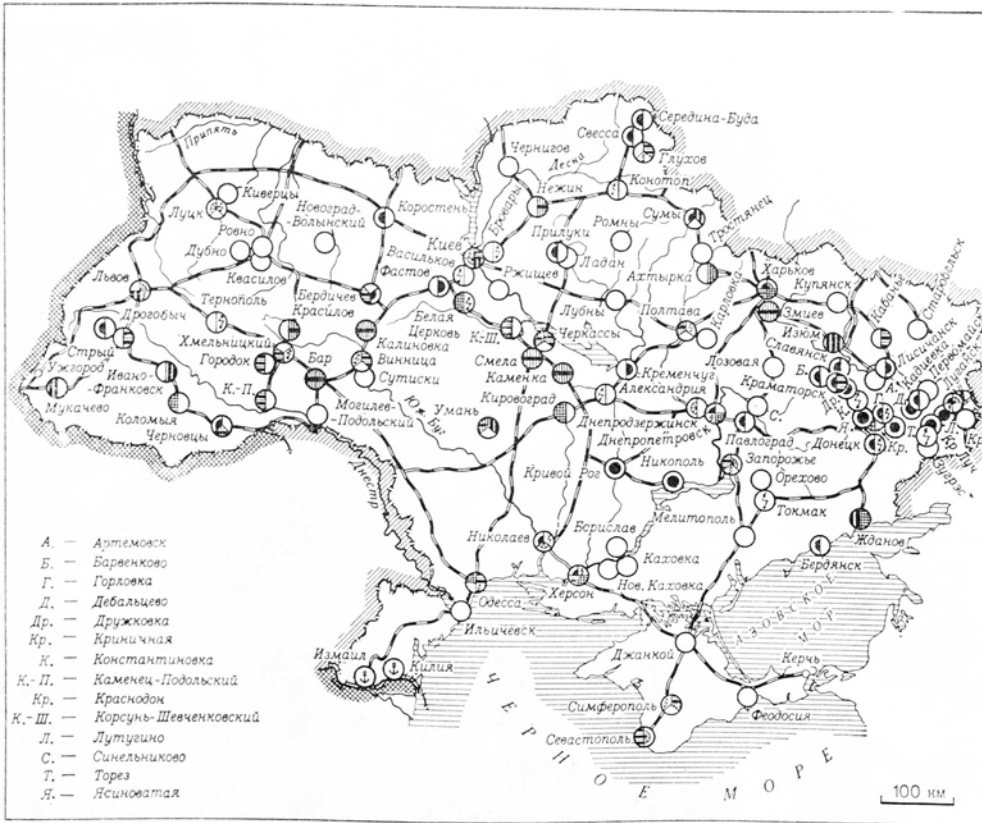
Figure 2. The "map-as-logo": Maps such as this one showing Ukraine's machine industry both depicted the Ukrainian SSR as a coherent economic space and helped turn the shape of Ukraine's postwar territory into a symbol of nationhood. Source: P.V. Zamkovoi et al., *Ukraina: obshchii obzor*, Sovetskii Soiuz, geograficheskoe opisanie (Moscow, 1969), 210.

ideological move away from a class-based toward an increasingly nationality-based social order.[104] (Figure 3).

The symbolic use of Ukrainian peasant garb and the depiction of a stereotypical Ukrainian phenotype are good examples of how the late Soviet state tried to "drain nationality of its content even while legitimating it as a form."[105] The visual language of Soviet propaganda selectively coopted ideologically loaded ethnic markers and turned them into symbols no longer meant to bolster ethno-political claims, conveying no message except the simple fact of Ukrainianness—like Billig's "unnoticed" flag. The *vyshyvanka*, for instance, had already been a preferred symbol in the national movement of the nineteenth century, an element of peasant clothing worn by the Ukrainophile urban intelligentsia to demonstrate their political allegiance to the country's peasant majority.[106] On Soviet posters, its depiction was increasingly standardized and deprived of regional ethnographic

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[104] See Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 435, on the Stalin-period shift of the term *smychka* from a class alliance toward an above-class union between the nations.

[105] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 24.

[106] See Serhy Yekelchyk, "The Body and National Myth: Motifs from the Ukrainian National Revival in the Nineteenth Century," *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 7, no. 2 (1993): 31–59.

Figure 3. "Glory to our Free Fatherland, Reliable Bulwark of the Friendship of Peoples": Propagandistic images produced for the 300-year anniversary of the Treaty of Pereiaslav standardized the allegorical depiction of Ukraine and Russia as two sisterly or brotherly figure, with Ukraine characterized by embroidered clothes, dark hair, and dark eyes. Poster by Koretskii, Ivanov, Savostiuk, and Uspenskii, 1954. Source: *Ne boltai! Collection*.
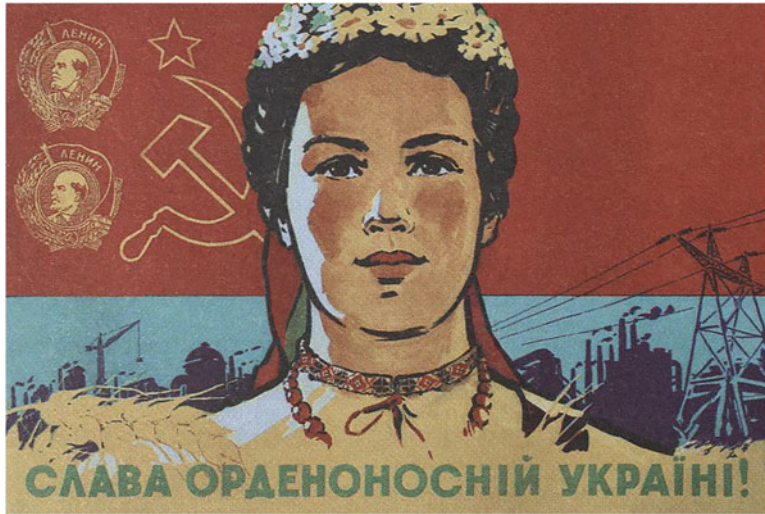
Figure 4. "Glory to Order-Bearing Ukraine": In a typical late Soviet combination of ethnic and non-ethnic national symbols, this poster celebrates the republic's reception of two Lenin orders (in itself an example of fossilized ideology). It depicts a wreathed dark-haired woman in *vyshyvanka* against a background of industrial technology, grain ears, and the Soviet Ukrainian flag. Poster by Hanna Valiuha, 1967. Source: Vasyl' Kosiv, *Ukraïns'ka identichnist' u hrafichnomu dyzaini 1945–1989 rokiv* (Kyiv, 2019), 200. Original in the Vernads'kyi National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv.

specificity, reduced to an ethnic symbol of generic, folkloric Ukrainianness.[107] In contemporary Ukrainian, this kind of ethno-kitsch based on pseudo-traditional Cossack and peasant elements has become known as *sharovarshchyna*.[108]

Such stereotypical "flaggings" of Ukrainianness—the republic's flag, the shape of its borders, the *vyshyvanka* worn by a dark-haired person—remained present on propagandistic posters and postcards throughout the 1960s and 70s. Some of these images were stylistically innovative, moving away from the socialist realism of the 1954 models. Reflecting the propagandistic depiction of the republic as a highly productive economic space, many images combined ethnic and institutional-territorial markers with symbols of agricultural productivity (above all, ears of grain) and of industrial progress (power stations, cranes, or the atomic symbol). By the 1980s, ethnic symbols became less frequent on propagandistic posters, with the depiction of Ukrainianness increasingly focused on the republican flag.[109] (Figure 4).

Refilling the National Form with National Content

Brezhnev-era banal Ukrainianness belongs in the context of what has been described as the period's "hyperstability," whereby the party's ideological line became ever more predictable. This, in turn, allowed for the consolidation of collective identities that could

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[107] As Vasyl' Kosiv has noted, some early postwar posters correctly depicted local embroidered patterns in great detail. Meanwhile, posters of the 1960s and 70s saw an increasing generalization and stylization of peasant dress. Kosiv, *Ukraïns'ka identichnyist*, 140–51.

[108] See V.S. Iermolaeva and Iu.I. Nikishenko, "Iavyshche 'sharovarshchyny': Poshuk definitsiï," *Magisterium* 68 (2017): 27–31.

[109] Kosiv, *Ukraïns'ka identichnyist*, 216.

suddenly become politically activated under the changed conditions of perestroika.[110] Indeed, Ukrainian critics of the Soviet regime had recognized the subversive potential of the republic's quasi-state institutions long before perestroika. Ivan Dziuba, directly addressing Shelest and Shcherbyts'kyi in his famous 1965 critique *Internationalism or Russification?* complained that "the actual national and political position of the Ukraine does not correspond to its formal constitutional position as a state."[111] Dziuba argued for a return to what he saw as the genuine Marxist-Leninist policies of the 1920s, and his pamphlet sharply criticized the preponderance of the Russian language in ever more social spheres as well as the Ukrainian republic's economic dependency on the central authorities in Moscow. Taking Soviet propaganda about Ukraine's republican statehood at its word, Dziuba lamented "administrative divisions that remain a formality" and "the doubtful sovereignty of the government of the Ukrainian SSR over the territory of the Ukraine," concluding that the republic's government neglected its duties toward the Ukrainian people.[112] In doing so, he shrewdly applied a strategy reminiscent of dissident "legalism" to the field of nationalities policy.[113] Unsurprisingly, the authorities considered his statement unacceptable, and Dziuba had to recant his criticism in 1973.[114]

When the stifled political climate of the 1970s and early 1980s gave way to more open debates, similar arguments resurfaced. Established in 1989, the People's Movement of Ukraine for Perestroika (Rukh), first advocated the democratization and re-nationalization of the existing structures rather than a total break with the system. An early program named the goals of "turning the Ukrainian SSR into a state ruled by law" and "the realization of the declared rights of the Ukrainian SSR as a sovereign union republic." Besides demands for democratic elections and ecological improvements, the statement also stressed the importance of "the republic's economic sovereignty." At the same time, Rukh took up Dziuba's proposals to fill the republic's national form with new content, asking for the introduction of the Ukrainian language as a compulsory subject in all the republic's schools and for a gradual transfer to Ukrainian-language lecturing at universities.[115] While the group's apparent acceptance of existing state structures was likely tactically motivated, it shows that the Rukh leaders still believed in the expediency of articulating their demands in the acceptable idiom of the Soviet national-federal order.[116]

Even as the national-democratic opposition tried to instrumentalize the reality of Soviet Ukrainian quasi-statehood, oppositional students and intellectuals began to advocate publicly for official recognition of the pre-Soviet national symbolic repertoire, primarily the yellow-blue flag and the trident coat of arms. Arguing against government perceptions of these emblems as nationalistic, they pointed out that they dated back to Kyivan Rus'. Moreover, they insisted that neither the flag nor the anthem *Shche ne vmerla Ukraïna* (Ukraine has not Died Yet) had been popular among the interwar Organization of Ukrainian

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[110] See Boris Belge and Martin Deuerlein, "Einführung: Ein goldenes Zeitalter der Stagnation? Neue Perspektiven auf die Brežnev-Ära," in Boris Belge and Martin Deuerlein, eds., *Goldenes Zeitalter der Stagnation? Perspektiven auf die sowjetische Ordnung der Brežnev-Ära* (Tübingen, 2014), 13–15.

[111] Ivan Dziuba, *Internationalism or Russification?: A Study in the Soviet Nationalities Problem* (London, 1968), 5.

[112] Ibid., 14, 201.

[113] On the interrelated strategies of legalism and recourse to Leninist principles, see Benjamin Nathans, *To the Success of Our Hopeless Cause: The Many Lives of the Soviet Dissident Movement* (Princeton, 2024), 195–99.

[114] Bellezza, *The Shore of Expectations*, 292.

[115] "Prohrama narodnoho rukhu Ukraïny za perebodudovu," *Vil'na Ukraïna*, April 1989 (samvydav, article reprinted from *Literaturna Ukraina*, February 16, 1989), 3 (Tsentr doslidzhen vyzvol'noho rukhu, elektronnyi arkhiv, at https://avr.org.ua/, last accessed May 4, 2025).

[116] Compare the dissidents in the Ukrainian Helsinki group, who as early as 1977 called out Ukraine's republican statehood as nothing but a "delusion on paper." Ukraïns'ka Hromads'ka Hrupa Spryiannia vykonanniu Helsinks'kykh Uhod, "Ukraïna lita 77-oho," February 15, 1977, in Taras Hunchak and Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraïns'ka Suspil'no-Polytychna Dumka v 20 Stolitti: Dokumenty i Materiialy* (New York, 1983), 3:308.

Nationalists, which, due to its anticommunism and integral nationalism, remained the bugbear of the republican authorities.[117] The opposition's increasing reliance on non-Soviet imagery resonated with many Ukrainians even as others were irritated, such as a Russian-speaking coalminer at the Rukh congress in September 1989, who sympathized with the movement but claimed not to understand the symbolism of the room's decoration.[118]

By 1990, the national-democratic opposition abandoned the strategy of appealing to Soviet federal structures and openly demanded an independent nation state.[119] Meanwhile, the leadership of Ukraine's Communist Party, disappointed by Moscow's mishandling of the Chornobyl accident and the increasing exclusion of the Ukrainian Party elites from central decision-making, rallied behind the republican institutions. Leonid Kravchuk, who became Chairman of the Republic's Supreme Soviet in July 1990, proved very capable of maneuvering between Brezhnev-era and national-democratic concepts of Ukrainianness. As the former director of the Republican Party's ideology department, Kravchuk was well-versed in the authoritative discourse of Shcherbyts′kyi-style banal nationalism, but he had the political instinct to understand the rising appeal of the opposition's more muscular version. In July 1990, almost all communist deputies in the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR joined the democratic opposition in passing a declaration of state sovereignty.[120] While this was a politically momentous decision, the rhetoric that accompanied it only necessitated a subtle shift from the quasi-state rhetoric of the republic's Brezhnev-era leaders. Laying claim to the people's will, the Supreme Soviet's declaration announced that the Ukrainian SSR would be "a sovereign national state ... within the existing boundaries" in which "the people of Ukraine are the sole source of state authority."[121] In August 1991, the attempted coup in Moscow weakened the central government and shattered hopes of rebuilding a democratic union. Only three days later, an overwhelming majority of communist deputies, encouraged by Kravchuk, voted for the national-democratic draft declaration of Ukrainian independence, a decision sanctioned by the popular referendum of December 1991.[122]

Ukraine's transition from a Soviet republic to an independent state has been described as a "grand bargain" between the republic's (national) Communist Party elites and the national-democratic opposition movement. The former retained their hold on power in return for their firm support of independence.[123] Given this genesis, it is no surprise that independent Ukrainian statehood represented a compromise between late Soviet institutional-territorial conceptions and the vision of the national-democratic independence movement. Many of the official emblems of the state were changed to symbolize the break with the Soviet past and the return to a pre-Soviet tradition of statehood. These prominently included the yellow-blue flag, the trident coat of arms, and the anthem, which

[117] KGB note "O spekuliatsiiakh po povodu ukrainskoi natsional′noi simvoliki," December 19, 1988, published in Paweł Kowal, Georges Mink, Iwona Reichardt, Adam Reichardt, and Kateryna Pryshchepa, eds., *Three Revolutions: Mobilization and Change in Contemporary Ukraine* (Stuttgart, 2019–2022), 3:61–63; Bohdan Iakymovych, "Istorychna dovidka pro ukrains′ku natsional′nu symvoliku: Herb, prapor, himn," *Vil′na Ukraina*, April 1989 (samvydav), 4 (Tsentr doslidzhen vyzvol′noho rukhu, elektronnyi arkhiv).

[118] Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine, from Chernobyl′ to Sovereignty: A Collection of Interviews* (New York, 1992), 32.

[119] See, for instance, "Za samostiinu Ukraïnu," *Vil′ne slovo* no. 10 (1990), 1; "Meta—derzhavna nezalezhnist′ Ukraïny," *Vil′ne slovo* no. 12 (1990), 2 (Tsentr doslidzhen vyzvol′noho rukhu, elektronnyi arkhiv). Like Rukh, but several months earlier, Lithuania's Sąjūdis, Latvia's Tautas Fronte, and Estonia's Rahvarinne moved from a pro-perestroika and pro-sovereignty platform towards advocating independence. See Una Bergmane, *Politics of Uncertainty: The United States, the Baltic Question, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York, 2023), 38–62.

[120] See Wilson, *The Ukrainians*, 163; Serhii Plokhy, *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* (New York, 2014), 54–57.

[121] Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine (1990), in Olena Palko and Manuel Férez Gil, *Ukraine's Many Faces: Land, People, and Culture Revisited* (Bielefeld, 2023), 267–68.

[122] Plokhy, *The Last Empire*, 161–70.

[123] Wilson, *The Ukrainians*, 174–84.

replaced their Soviet Ukrainian equivalents. Meanwhile, many of the Soviet institutions of Ukrainian nationhood—republican borders, republican ministries, the republican academy of sciences, and so forth—survived the collapse of Soviet central authority in 1991 and provided the institutional backbone for the newly independent republic.

Under Kravchuk's presidency, government institutions largely replaced Soviet Ukrainian accounts of the republic's history by national-democratic narratives, centering the anti-Soviet memory of the Holodomor while also beginning to rehabilitate the interwar Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.[124] However, there were also continuities. After years of being exposed to Soviet-endorsed elements of Ukrainian history such as Shevchenko, Hetman Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi, or rebellious Zaporozhian Cossacks, the first post-Soviet generation could continue to see such figures as emblematic of Ukrainian history, gradually learning to unmoor them from the communist ideological context.[125] Kravchuk's successor, Leonid Kuchma, promulgated laws dedicated to the republic's foundational myth of a special role in the "great patriotic war" and even supported a celebration of the former republican leader Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kyi.[126] His historical speeches often implicitly blurred the lines between the Ukrainian and the Soviet fatherland.[127] Having won the presidency in 1994 largely thanks to the votes of Ukraine's eastern and southern regions, Kuchma—the Russian-speaking former industry manager—catered to these voters' (assumed) tastes by rehabilitating features of Soviet Ukrainian banal nationalism.

The east-west divide on Ukraine's electoral map of 1994 is thus perhaps better understood as a competition between two different modes of Ukrainianness than as a divide between a Ukrainian nationalist camp and a pro-Russian camp, as many western observers at the time believed.[128] Late Soviet banal nationalism had affected the self-perception of Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the east and south more than that of west Ukrainians, among whom nationalist modes of thinking had become a mass phenomenon even before the advent of Soviet power. Banal, institutional-territorial Ukrainianness was more attractive than "hot" ethno-cultural Ukrainianness for all those inhabitants of Soviet Ukraine who were either Ukrainian by passport nationality but Russian-speaking and Soviet in outlook, or who belonged to one of the republic's other nationalities. It enabled them to self-identify as Ukrainians without buying into the symbolic repertoires of pre-Soviet Ukrainian nationalism. To the dismay of many national-democratic intellectuals, 1990s Ukraine was politically dominated by what Mykola Riabchuk called "creole" elites, whose cultural-political outlook integrated many elements of late Soviet banal nationalism.[129] But retrospectively, the continuity of this vision may have contributed to the shift toward a more civic nationhood in post-Soviet Ukraine. After 1991, a significant percentage of Russian-speaking and ethnically Russian inhabitants of Ukraine began to self-identify as Ukrainians without drastically changing their linguistic and cultural habits, and the term "Ukrainian" increasingly came to refer to citizenship irrespective of ethnicity.[130]

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[124] Georgiy Kasianov, *Memory Crash: Politics of History in and around Ukraine, 1980s–2010s* (Budapest, 2022), 89–91.

[125] Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Washington, DC, 2010), 313.

[126] Kasianov, *Memory Crash*, 92, 292. On the Soviet Ukrainian myth of World War II, see Weiner, *Making Sense of War*.

[127] Viktoriia Sereda, "Osobennosti reprezentatsii natsional'no-istoricheskikh identichnostei v ofitsial'nom diskurse prezidentov Ukrainy i Rossii," *Sotsiologiia: Teoriia, metody, marketing*, no. 3 (2006): 195, 202.

[128] See, for example, "Genau andersherum," *Der Spiegel* no. 27, July 3, 1994; "Wieder Sklaven Rußlands," *Der Spiegel* no. 29, July 17, 1994.

[129] See Mykola Riabchuk, *Vid Malorosii do Ukraïny: paradoksy zapizniloho natsiietvorennia* (Kyiv, 2000).

[130] On these developments, see Volodymyr Kulyk, "Identity in Transformation: Russian-Speakers in Post-Soviet Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 1 (2019): 156–78; Volodymyr Kulyk, "Is Ukraine a Multiethnic Country?," *Slavic Review* 81, no. 2 (2022): 299–323.

Similarly, one may conjecture that local versions of the same phenomenon were more impactful in those republics with little experience of modern nation-statehood and a high share of ethnically Russian and linguistically russified inhabitants than in those where earlier instances of statehood and nationalist politics had already caused large segments of the population to self-identify along national categories. This has left marks in the ideologies embraced by such countries' post-Soviet regimes. In Belarus, Aliaksandar Lukashenka has promoted a state-oriented, Russophile, and largely Russophone version of Belarusianness that reproduces many elements of late Soviet banal nationalism, including a flag and anthem modeled on those of the Belarusian SSR.[131] Nūrsūltan Nazarbaev's concept of the Kazakhstani people, a supra-ethnic community that nevertheless integrates Kazakh ethnolinguistic elements, has even been described as a local reproduction of the Brezhnev-era "Soviet people."[132] In both cases, the regime's conceptions appear to have resonated with parts of the population during the 1990s, providing another example of how elements of Soviet banal nationalism survived the death of the overarching communist ideology.

Thus, once socialist slogans lost all meaning, "the well honed and long practiced language of nationalism" proved to be the most resilient element of Soviet authoritative discourse.[133] Having established nationality as a universal, unavoidable category of identity in the interwar period, the postwar Soviet state increasingly deprived it of concrete cultural and political content. Nationality became a semantically empty category, a vessel capable of being filled with new, potentially anti-Soviet meaning. The Soviet federalist state structure made it impossible to remove the underlying assumption of the existence of nations and their national territories from authoritative discourse. No matter how often communist leaders, propagandists, or journalists repeated the mantra that members of any particular nationality were "just like all Soviet people," they could not deny that they existed as such, as per the state's own categorization. Linguistic russification and political centralism could only go so far. Only abolishing the institutionalization of nationality would have stopped its ongoing normalization,[134] and such a step would likely have triggered major protests among a population increasingly used to a nationality-based order.[135] Therefore, the national-federal institutions and the rhetoric of Soviet banal nationalism survived all centralist attacks and, by the time of perestroika, became powerful instruments in the hands of both oppositional activists and Republican Party leaders.

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[131] Grigory Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 8 (December 2003): 1241–72; Nelly Bekus, *Struggle over Identity: The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness"* (Budapest, 2010).

[132] Assel Tutumlu and Zulfiya Imyarova, "The Kazakhstani Soviet Not? Reading Nazarbayev's Kazakhstani-ness through Brezhnev's Soviet People," *Central Asian Survey* 40, no. 3 (July 2021): 400–19.

[133] Quotation from Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment," 451.

[134] On abortive attempts to de-institutionalize ethnicity under Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Andropov, see Şener Aktürk, *Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey* (New York, 2012), 211–13, 219–23. Shcherbyts′kyi, too, may have toyed with this idea. During the discussion of the 1977 constitution, he allegedly supported proposals to abolish the (purely formal) right of union republics to secede and perhaps even the establishment of a unitary state. See Kis, *Nationhood, Statehood*, 25–26.

[135] Protests erupted even against relatively minor infringements of the nationality regime, such as the attempt to weaken the official status of the Georgian language, the replacement of the Kazakh First Secretary Qonaev by a Russian, or the downgrading of titular language teaching in Ukraine and Belarus. See Kaiser, *Georgian and Soviet*, 166–75; Anna Whittington, "An Anxious Unraveling: Perestroika and the Fracturing of the Soviet People," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2024): 513–45.