

FLAGGING NATIONALISM: THE POWER OF FLAGS IN
SOVEREIGN INCORPORATION & SEPARATISM

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Political Science
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science

May 2024

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Garrett Raver for the degree of Bachelor of Science
in the Department of Political Science to be taken June 2024

Title: Flagging Nationalism: The Power of Flags in Sovereign
Incorporation & Separatism

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Flags have been globally recognized as a visual representation of sovereignty throughout the entire world. They are the visual embodiment of what Benedict Anderson called an “imagined community” as they serve as crucial markers of identity, as well as represent a nation’s history, ideals, and aspirations. Cases within this work will consist of the countries of Ukraine and India, respectively. There are two ways in which flags are used in a specific society. This thesis will look at these two areas: the top-down approach in which a larger state-led effort is trying to assimilate a group of people, and the second being a bottom-up approach in which communities create these symbols to show their difference from some other entity. This thesis will demonstrate that flags are calculated in their meaning and symbolism and within that, also show that flags are deeply meaningful to the communities that create and adopt them.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. James Conran for finding time to meet on Zoom while he transitioned to his new job in the United Kingdom. I would also like to thank Dr. Ian McNeely for taking a larger role in crafting my thesis while adapting to this change. To all my friends and family, thank you for listening to me talk about weird flag politics for over a year. To my thesis prospectus professor – Dr. Carol Paty – thank you for not laughing at me when I said I wanted my thesis to be about flags. Lastly, thank you to Dr. Sheldon Cooper for making flags fun.

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Literature Review	9
The Role of National Symbols	10
Chapter 2: India Case Study	14
British Raj	14
The Swaraj Flag	15
Indian Independence	23
Chapter 3: Ukraine Case Study	27
Medieval Europe	27
Soviet Russification	28
Soviet Ukraine	31
Independent Ukraine	37
Conclusion	40
Bibliography	42

List of Figures

Figure 1. The flag of the Viceroy of India (1858-1947)	14
Figure 2. The Swaraj flag designed by Gandhi (1921-1922)	17
Figure 4. The Swaraj Flag (1922-1947)	19
Figure 5. The Flag of India (1947-Present)	24
Figure 6. The Ukraine Flag (1848-1917, 1991-1992)	28
Figure 7. The flag of the Soviet Union (adopted: 1922- relinquished: 1991)	29
Figure 8. The Ukrainian Soviet Republic Flag (1917-1918)	31
Figure 9. Flag of the American Colonies (1707-1776)	32
Figure 10. The flag of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (1919-1950, edt'd: 1929,1937)	33
Figure 11. The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic Flag (1950- relinquished 1992)	35
Figure 12. A picture of Ukrainian flags in the Revolution on Granite	38

Introduction

A flag is a necessity for all nations... It will be necessary for us Indians to recognise a common flag to live and to die for.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Vexillology, or the study of flags, is a relatively new and innovative field of study. Historians and political scientists alike have discussed and debated the events preceding and following sovereignty movements through the lens of political activism. This thesis aims to address the significant role of flag design and its usage in these movements.

The literature review is chapter one. The structure of this thesis will draw on two main texts, *Imagined Communities* and *Invented Traditions*. Anderson, Hobsbawm, and Ranger have set out to try and explain how groups of people create a sense of community and togetherness. Creating this sense of community is paramount in terms of independence battles. Additional works help justify the reasoning for such a thesis focused upon flags and their meanings. Two case studies make up the bulk of this thesis: India and Ukraine.

India found itself in a constant battle for independence over British rule for nearly ninety-years. Throughout this time the particularities of when a nationalist flag is introduced, how it is introduced, and how pro-independence movements utilized this flag show the importance behind the current flag of India and its meaning. The transition from British colonial rule to Indian independence proves critical in understanding the evolution of national symbolism. In adopting a new national flag, India demonstrates the broader reclamation and interpretation of their own cultural and historical identity after colonial rule.

Under British rule, a flag featuring the Union Jack and the Star of India topped by the royal crown of Queen Victoria represented the people of India. The symbols emphasized the

sovereignty of Britain and portrayed India as merely a vessel for British governing. At the International Women's Conference in Berlin, Germany in 1921, alternative symbols began to emerge in India's fight for independence. In following those events Mahatma Gandhi designed and adopted the Swaraj flag while incorporating new symbolism to the colors and incorporating the charkha (spinning wheel). This flag was a significant break from traditional colonial symbols and became a powerful emblem of unity and resistance during the 1923 Flag Satyagraha – an event that served as both a protest of British repression and a display of Indian solidarity.

The eventual independence of India culminated in the adoption of the new, and current flag in 1947. The flag embodies India's aspirations for secularism, unity, and self-rule by drawing on historical and cultural elements of India. This adoption represents the “invention of tradition” in the post-colonial context, where nations create new symbols for purposes of continuity and reimagining of the past to help foster a unified future. Because of this, the Indian flag serves as both a national emblem as well as the country's struggle for independence and its journey in defining its own destiny.

The evolution of national symbolism in post-Soviet Ukraine is also significant. The redefinition of Ukrainian national identities demonstrates the broader reclamation of Ukraine's culture and history following decades of Soviet influence. Once again, the “invention of tradition” provides a valuable framework for exploring this.

The blue and yellow bicolor flag, endorsed by the general Ukrainian Rada (Council) as early as 1848, marked a significant moment for self-identification within the bounds of the Ukrainian state. This flag was crucial in asserting to those who tried to claim Ukraine as their own, that Ukraine was sovereign. After the Russian Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks started a campaign to eliminate imperial symbols and introduce new, communist symbolism. The

integration of Ukraine into the Soviet Union saw further manipulations of Ukrainian symbols to align with Soviet ideals – yet there was some leeway for Ukrainians to hold onto their former identities. Amidst the chaos of the soviet socialist republics in the 20th century, Ukrainian nationalists began to reclaim and define the old symbols and flags that had represented their identity under a different time. The re-emergence of the blue and yellow flag after Ukrainian independence in 1991 symbolized a return to national roots whereas the flag of India tried to pull from history and create a new sense of unification. This resurgence, on the onset looks to be a restoration of historical symbols. This is a profound statement of self-determination and unity. The national identity was found through the far distant past, rather than the more recent and Soviet past.

Further contributions bolster the argument that flags are not merely pieces of cloth but potent political expressions that can construct identities. This analysis will bridge the observed gap in existing literature regarding the politics of flag design and the significance in nationalist movements. Through the detailed case studies of India and Ukraine aided by the rich literature review, this thesis will showcase how each nation’s struggle for independence and their subsequent efforts to create a cohesive national identity are intrinsically tied to their respective flags.

Additionally, this thesis will also highlight the practical uses of flags in political movements and reflect on the symbolic interplay between tradition and reimagining to create a unified future. By providing a theoretical backdrop for understanding how flags function as elements in a state's narrative of nation-building, the following will show complex dynamics through discourse in national symbolism.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

National flags serve as powerful symbols that represent the identity, history, and aspirations of a nation.¹ Throughout history, flags have signified political power, marked territory, and evoked emotions in various cultural and political contexts.² This literature review explores the settings and contexts where people fly national flags, focusing on the overlapping and conflicting moments that their use creates. The review will draw on an extensive annotated bibliography of studies and the foundational books *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson and *Invented Traditions* by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* posits that nations are socially constructed entities, imagined by those who perceive themselves as part of the same group.³ In this sense, national flags play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and unity among individuals. Anderson's work enables us to understand how national flags function as visual representations of shared imagined communities, allowing people to identify with a collective despite the vast differences in their individual backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. Anderson's theoretical framework helps explain why flags are so significant in shaping national identity and promoting a sense of unity and pride.

On the other hand, *Invented Traditions*, written by Hobsbawm and Ranger, delves into the notion that many traditions we perceive as ancient and authentic are, in fact, relatively recent

¹ Sh.Kh.Mamatalieva, "THE FLAG IS THE STATE SYMBOL, THE PRIDE OF THE NATION," *PEDAGOGIYAR huquqiy, tibbiy, ijtimoiy, ilmiy jurnal* 11, no. 3 (November 30, 2021): 68–71, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5824564>.

² Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia et al., "Socio-geographical and Socio-philosophical Approaches to the Study of Vexillological Problems," *Humanitarian Vector* 15, no. 2 (April 2020): 121–30, <https://doi.org/10.21209/1996-7853-2020-15-2-121-130>.

³ Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London New York: Verso, 2016).

inventions.⁴ These invented traditions serve the purpose of legitimizing certain social, political, and cultural practices and establishing a sense of continuity with the past. In the context of flags, this anthology helps us understand that the symbolism and significance we ascribe to flags are not necessarily inherent but are often constructed and propagated through various means, such as education, media, and public rituals.

By incorporating the insights from Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Hobsbawm and Ranger's *Invented Traditions*, the thesis can delve deeper into the settings and context in which national flags are flown. The case studies will look at the complexities of national identity formation and various factors that contribute to the multiple and conflicting meanings attached to flags. This comprehensive approach facilitates a better understanding of the role flags play in contemporary society and the political, social, and cultural implications of their usage.

The Role of National Symbols

Flags play a significant role in political and social contexts, reflecting and reinforcing social and political divisions.⁵ In Northern Ireland, flags have been used to assert power and control over public spaces, particularly during periods of conflict. Similarly, the use of the Gadsden Flag and the Confederate Battle Flag in recent political movements in the U.S. and abroad demonstrates the enduring power of flags in contemporary society and the importance of understanding their evolving meanings.⁶ Additionally, the use of flag emoji in online political communication reveals the importance of visual elements in political communication research.⁷

⁴ E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Canto Classics (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵ Dominic Bryan, "The Material Value of Flags: Politics and Space in Northern Ireland," *Review of Irish Studies in Europe* 2, no. 1 (March 20, 2018): 76–91.

⁶ Anne M. Platoff and Steven A. Knowlton, *Old Flags, New Meanings*, 2022, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/75v7n8h2>.

⁷ Ankit Kariryaa et al., "The Role of Flag Emoji in Online Political Communication," April 2022, <https://kops.uni-konstanz.de/handle/123456789/49307>.

Successful flag design can contribute to fostering national pride and unity.⁸ The role of flags in shaping national identity is evident in cases such as Australia, where the Australian national flag and the Aboriginal flag represent distinct aspects of the country's identity.⁹ Flags also play an important role in the construction of political and cultural identities, as seen in the Puerto Rican flag's historical and cultural significance.¹⁰ Historical flags have been repurposed to convey new meanings in contemporary contexts. The study of early modern Dutch marine paintings provides insights into the use of flags as signifiers of identity, power, and alliance in the early modern period.¹¹

To further aid in the sense of building national symbolism to a new nation, it is wise to look at additional studies to consider the broader implications of the role of flags. Flags are not just mere pieces of fabric but imbued with the emotions and meanings that individuals can rally behind. Callahan and Ledgerwood demonstrate how the presence of symbols can lead to individuals viewing a collection of people as more unified or initiated than others. These studies posit that the perception one group has of another is intrinsically tied to the symbolism put out by those groups.

In regions with contested identities, flags often become focal points for conflict. Flags reflect national loyalties and histories. For a space as contested as Northern Ireland, for example, responses to the Irish tricolor vs the Union Jack may uncover a larger range of psychological underpinnings. The British people find their own flag to be satisfying and hopeful, whereas the

⁸ Thomas Le Bas, "It Takes a Whole Country to Raise a Flag : A Thesis Submitted by Thomas Le Bas in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Design at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand : 2016" (Thesis, Massey University, 2016), <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/14725>.

⁹ Tracey Mee, "Australian National Identity: Somewhere Between the Flags?," *University of Wollongong Thesis Collection 2017*, January 1, 2018, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses1/248>.

¹⁰ Carlos A. Morales-Ramirez, "The Puerto Rican Flag - A Study in Vexillology," *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 3, no. 3 (October 10, 2018): 42–67, <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.03.03.4>.

¹¹ David Onnekink, "The Language of the Sea: Flags and Identities in Early Modern Dutch Marine Painting," *Early Modern Low Countries* 4, no. 1 (June 14, 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.18352/emlc.126>.

Irish would disagree. For Northern Ireland, they are moderate towards their approach of thought even though they are a part of the United Kingdom. This was once again evident when all three parties expressed their uneasiness and annoyance with the Irish flag seen. One could argue the harshness of the words “uneasy” and “annoyed” when compared to “satisfy” and “hope” but even on a different scale wherein the British very highly identify their flag as satisfying and moderately identifies the Irish tricolor as uneasy, those from Northern Ireland fall in the middle.¹²

This study investigates how group identity symbols, such as national flags, impact perceptions of group entitativity, threat, and competence. Entitativity refers to the perception of a group as a single, cohesive entity. The “identification” refers to the process of recognizing and associating the group with its symbol, which in turn affects perceptions of entitativity and other attributes. Responses to the Union Jack and the Irish tricolor. The Union Jack and the Irish tricolor, as symbols, have high salience of homogeneity of unity amongst those who live in the respective countries. The inclusion of Northern Ireland shows that – given the complex historical and political landscape – both these flags hold significant meaning for their citizens. Both flags are highly regarded in their own nations and are not as regarded in the opposite, but for the space between them (Northern Ireland) the respective flags have a moderate perception of unifying power.

The point is not to compare the ideas of Northern Ireland to the country of India or Ukraine, but to help reinforce the idea that flags are potent symbols even years after conflicts.

¹² Shannon P. Callahan and Alison Ledgerwood, “On the Psychological Function of Flags and Logos: Group Identity Symbols Increase Perceived Entitativity,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 110, no. 4 (April 2016): 528–50, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000047>.

These studies demonstrate how symbols can influence governance, even in the most basic thoughts, social interactions, and political landscapes.

Chapter 2: India Case Study

In exploring the evolution of national symbolism in post-colonial India, the transition from British colonial rule to independence serves as a crucial point of analysis. The shift in symbols, particularly the adoption of a new national flag, can be understood through the lens of Hobsbawm and Ranger's insights regarding the “invention of tradition.”

British Raj

Under British rule, the authorities assigned a specific flag to India that conformed to Western heraldic standards.¹³ The British designed this flag to mark India's place within the British Empire and assert British sovereignty through a popular symbol. This structure was common for all territories under British domination, typically combining the Union Flag, the royal crown, and a region-specific emblem.



Figure 1. The flag of the Viceroy of India (1858-1947)

For India, in 1863, Queen Victoria accorded a distinctive banner to the Indian viceroy after being declared Empress of India. In response to the British-Indian Army mutiny in 1857, the British formalized their sovereignty over the Indian country. This banner – a symbol that helped usher in

¹³ Western heraldic standards included a sort of elongated banner in which some color (usually pertaining to the sovereign nation in charge [i.e. Britain]) and some emblem (usually pertaining to the identity of those who live in a certain area [i.e. India]).

the change from the East India Company to British Raj – was blue, featuring the Union Flag and the Star of India, capped by the royal crown, symbolizing the consolidation of India.

This flag¹⁴ is illuminating because, by definition and by British flag code, it was never the official flag of the British Raj. This flag, instead, was officially for use by the Viceroy of India; however, it quickly became an official use for governors as well as official use in the 1928 and 1932 Olympics. Furthermore, the fact that the British crown looks as if it is atop the star of India indicates to both the British imperialists and Indian people who is in charge – the crown. The symbolism of this flag is to give a certain amount of salience to the Indian nation, but also show that they are still effectively no more than a single vessel through which the nation of Britain governs.

The Swaraj Flag

Indian nationalist and subsequently the first woman to be president of the Indian National Congress, Sarojini Naidu (known for her role in creating the Women’s Indian Association and starting the women’s suffrage movement in India) remembered where she was when she thought of what the Indian flag should look like. While Naidu was in Paris watching the celebration of the end of World War I she was struck by the unrolling of the French Tricolor flag. She remembered this moment in a speech to the Constituent Assembly in 1947 where she had said, ““When will India have her own flag?””¹⁵ The Indian aid to the British military in World War I became a watershed moment in acceptance and expansion of the Indian nationalist movement – and thus Indian pride grew with a larger focus on nationalism.

¹⁴ The official flag of British Raj is not important to this thesis because its perception was never large enough to warrant backlash. Indian nationalists who would protest the British flag would do so by defacing the Viceroy flag, as it was the flag that adorned the top of government buildings.

¹⁵ Sarojini Naidu, “Speech before the Constituent Assembly, in The Framing of India’s Constitution,” 1947.

At the 1921 International Women's Conference in Berlin, Germany Indian nationalism started defying the flag of British Raj. Forty-two nations participated in a flag parade. This caused the Indian delegation to rush to an answer. The all-female delegation improvised a national flag by tearing strips of clothes off their saris, anchoring their decision 'so that our country should not be humiliated for the lack of a national banner.'¹⁶ This alone is symbolic enough of a movement to describe the ever-yearning need Indians wanted in terms of independence. To add, the sari is a symbolic piece of cloth for Indian women. Saris have been tied to the rite of passage for young women¹⁷ and the traditional role of women¹⁸ in India. The destruction of symbolic clothing was weighed against the creation of a national flag, and these women erred on the side of the flag. The face of peaceful Indian nationalism swelled with pride from the demonstration of self-empowerment. Mahatma Gandhi wrote in a weekly pro-independence newspaper where he said, in response to the tearing of traditional Indian saris.

A flag is a necessity for all nations. Millions have died for it. It is no doubt a kind of idolatry which it would be a sin to destroy. For a flag represents an ideal. The unfurling of the Union Jack evokes in the English breast sentiments whose strength it is difficult to measure. The Stars and Stripes mean a world to the Americans. The Star and the Crescent will call forth the best bravery in Islam. It will be necessary for us Indians — Hindus, Mahomedans, Christians, Jews, Parsis, and all others to whom India is their home — to recognise a common flag to live and to die for.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ainslie Thomas Embree, "India's Search for National Identity," *Studies in World Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

¹⁷ Charu Suri, "The Story of the Sari in India and Beyond," *History*, September 24, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/the-story-of-the-sari-in-india>.

¹⁸ Shauna Wilton, "Bound from Head to Toe: The Sari as an Expression of Gendered National Identity," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 12, no. 1 (2012): 190–205, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9469.2012.01153.x>.

¹⁹ Gandhi, Mahatma, *Young India (1919-1922)*.

Through these words Mahatma Gandhi's adoption of the Swaraj flag shifted Indian national symbols. Breaking away from traditional heraldic iconography, Gandhi placed a charkha (spinning wheel) in the center of the flag. This flag was to be made of white khaddar (hand-woven cotton cloth), which had gained symbolic significance during the Swadeshi movement as a protest against the importation of English manufactured cloth, which was devastating Indian textile producers using more traditional methods. The colors of the flag – green and red – represented the dominant Muslim and Hindu communities.^{19, 20} This flag emphasized the social harmony necessary in a pluralist society. An important note is that pre-independence, roughly 10% of the Indian population were Muslim while the vast majority (80%) were Hindu. Ten percent is not an insignificant amount of the population, and Gandhi could have easily left out the meaning of the color green in this flag, yet he saw that it was imperative to bring together all creeds to protest the British government.

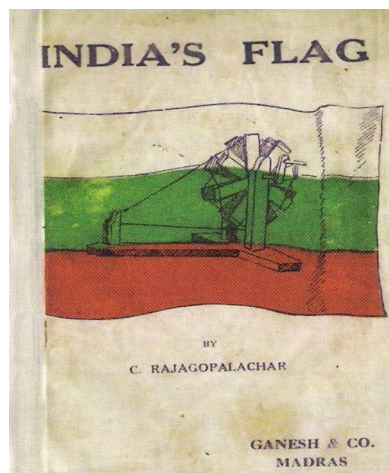


Figure 2. The Swaraj flag designed by Gandhi (1921-1922)

First pictured in the Indian nationalist newspaper "Young India."

²⁰ The top-third of this tricolor looks to be white (and in reality it was) but at the point of design in 1921 Gandhi had not yet given the white color any meaning.

This flag could have shown just red for the Hindu community, but Gandhi's form of protest included all people, not just Hindus. Additionally, within Gandhi's newspaper article he considers flags of nations as a sort of idolatry to destroy it. Just as people idolize national heroes and religious figures, Gandhi is giving flags the same amount of symbolic weight. Nations as a concept have a governmental order, some sort of independence from foreign reign, and rules to abide by. In this quote, Gandhi is making the case that a national flag is just as powerful to a nation as a person, figure, or idol would be. Pride, no matter one's political beliefs, are imbued into a nations flag and provide a backdrop for which one does all their work under.

The contrasting histories of India and Barbados, reflected in their flags, offer insightful perspectives on post-colonial identity formation. India's flag, with the Charkha, emphasizes self-reliance and a break from foreign control through a symbol embedded in the nation's struggle for independence. The flag evokes India's path to freedom and a strong push for self-governance. In contrast, Barbados' flag, with the severed trident, symbolizes a peaceful transition from colonial rule, saying, "at Independence, the head of the trident is severed, diplomatically representing the separation, without revolt, from the former colonial ruler."²¹



Figure 3. The Flag of Barbados (1966-Present)

²¹ Patricia Mohammed, "Taking Possession: Symbols of Empire and Nationhood," *Small Axe* 6, no. 1 (2002): 31-58.

The difference between these two nations shows how the nature of a country's path to independence can influence the symbols it chooses to represent its national identity. India did not break off peacefully from British rule, and their flag serves as a forceful reminder that through the charkha and the use of khaddar India wants to be self-governing. The Indian and Barbadian flags comparison reveals how nations contract and communicate their sovereignty and values through these visual emblems. For India, their flag was made for and by the people of India, not some foreign nation.

Escalating nationalist sentiments across the globe exploded in the latter years of World War I. Intensification on the international scale was happening in the context where nations, new and old, were asserting their identities. In 1921, Gandhi's previous design from Figure 2 was altered to what is seen in Figure 4.

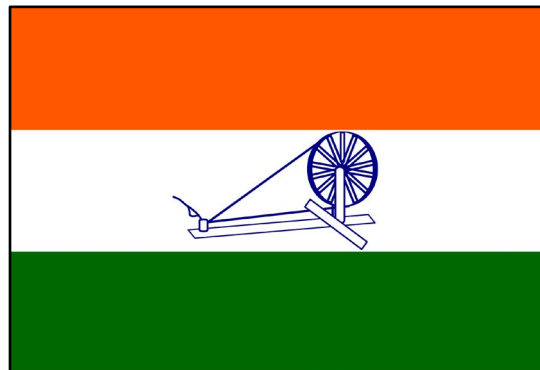


Figure 4. The Swaraj Flag (1922-1947)

The Swaraj flag was officially adopted by the Indian National Congress in 1931 but was created nine years prior as denoted.

The previous “non-color” of white became the center color and as per Gandhi's rule of organizing the greatest possible number of people, all other religious organizations that were not covered by the red (saffron) for Hinduism and the green for Islam found symbolism in the white – per a later *Young India* article.²² These changes were a move that, although added more

meaning and more religion, helped make the flag more encompassing of all those who wanted independence.

The first point of contention between the British rulers and the Indian nationalists took place in August, where the new British Viceroy, Lord Reading, declared his intention to continue to use the Union Jack in India and to ban the Swaraj flag from official government use.²²

However, this only fueled the flames of Indian nationalism and by December, the flag described as a protest symbol to British rule was flying at the annual session of the Nationalist Congress in Ahmedabad, the center of nationalist activities.

All four of the preceding incidents – the Viceroy’s refusal to adopt the Swaraj flag, the notes from Naidu in Paris, improvising a flag during the IWC, and the newspaper article from Gandhi all led to S. Jammalal Bajaj’s actions. Chairman of the reception committee of the Indian National Congress, Bajaj, went to visit Nagpur and defied the ban placed by Lord Reading on the Swaraj flag. This effectively started the Flag Satyagraha in Nagpur by challenging the British colonial authorities wherein from April to August 1923 the significance of the Swaraj flag in India's struggle for independence was bolstered.²³ This movement, marked by a confrontation between local British authorities and Congress volunteers, was a response to the British repression of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar, Punjab. The protest in Nagpur, a significant center of cotton production and a hub of nationalist activity, reflected the growing sentiment against British rule and the adoption of indigenous symbols of nationalism.²⁴

²² Arundhati Virmani, “National Symbols under Colonial Domination: The Nationalization of the Indian Flag, March-August 1923,” *Past & Present*, no. 164 (1999): 169–97.

²³ LT CDR K. V. SINGH, *Our National Flag* (Publications Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 1991).

²⁴ For clarification, the word “Satyagraha” is defined as a passive political resistance that became most commonly used by Mahatma Gandhi. The Flag Satyagraha is emblematic of India’s struggle for independence, illustrating the profound interplay between the symbolism of the national – at this time protest – flag and the broader principle of Satyagraha.

The undertone of the Flag Satyagraha is the emotional weight this non-official flag held, a global superpower on the tailwinds of winning a war, while Indians continued to associate this emblem with their struggle for freedom. The local government's handling of the Flag Satyagraha faced criticism within the Central Provinces Legislative Council – an advisory body for the provincial states of India that was mainly composed of Loyalists to the British and led by the British Parliament. Indian members criticized the government's stance on the flag agitation and the burden it placed on state expenditure due to the influx of prisoners.¹⁴ These debates highlighted the growing dissatisfaction with British administrative policies and the symbolic power of the Swaraj flag as a rallying point for nationalist sentiments. The transformation of national symbols in India from British-imposed emblems to indigenous symbols like the Swaraj flag was not just a shift in iconography but a manifestation of the country's quest for independence and self-identity.

The Flag Satyagraha saw widespread participation, with around 900 volunteers reportedly jailed, and the British newspaper "The Times" noting up to 1500 arrests by the end of the movement. This mass mobilization, drawing volunteers from across British India, underlined the unifying power of the Swaraj flag as a national symbol. However, not all pro-independence movements were in favor of the use of this flag. While some parties celebrated the break from British rule, while others thought this break was too quick and ill-schemed in the long run. Moderates were cautious to adopt a flag which symbolized self-governance, whereas Revolutionaries and Extremists alike supported it. Others thought that the official adoption following the Swaraj flag looked to be hasty and unplanned which – to some – could harm India's long-term interests. Oddly enough, other than the arrests by the British authorities, the Viceroy did very little and actually allowed this flag to fly by their Indian subjects.

The difference of opinion among Indian nationalists influenced the attitudes towards the national flag, reflecting their broader political goals and visions for independence. India's flag pays homage to the tricolors that came before it – the French, notably – which represents a form of republicanism and a commitment to the republic. This choice was significant as it distinguished India from the British – who are a monarchy. India's flag design, through the Charkha and the distinct three colors emphasized the nation's dedication to unity and self-reliance.

The British must have thought inaction was the most non-confrontational. However, the Flag Satyagraha transcended its immediate context to become a central element of the national movement. The Swaraj flag, designed to encompass all those who were seeking Indian independence became just that – a nationalist emblem encapsulating the aspirations of self-rule. This is apparent, as the National Indian Congress (NIC) swiftly commanded that the Swaraj flag fly over any official function – and for the NIC this meant two things. The more apparent, this flag became intrinsically tied to the political action of seeking Indian independence – the less apparent is that the NIC moved to further their exposure to all living in India. They hosted their congress in different cities, and as such the Swaraj flag went with – showing its colors for a possible new set of people in each Indian city. The collective action of non-violent resistance to a colonial power in the context of a mundane symbol can only serve to make that symbol more powerful.

The future of Indian nationalism now included not only factions from the Indian Congress but also Indian newspapers and a greater force of Indian women. Women who had been indifferent before would now be risking further humiliation on an international stage as they had been in Berlin. The Nagpur Satyagraha drew national attention and became a rallying

point for various segments of the Indian population. These events brought Indian independence closer. The Swaraj flag would imbue an Indian identity that the British imperial system aided in giving meaning. The colonial state's reaction to the emergence of the swaraj flag, in conflict with their own imperial flag, gave credence to the movement they sought to suppress. The British authorities thereby elevated a mundane symbol into a potent emblem of national aspirations.

Indian Independence

Shortly after Indian independence the Indian flag – known today and seen in Figure 5 – was adopted on July 22, 1947. The country's newfound autonomy and cultural identity are reflected in it. The flag consists of three horizontal stripes of different colors: saffron, white, and green. Each color holds significant symbolism:²⁵

- Saffron represents courage and sacrifice, embodying the spirit of the nation's struggle for independence.
- White symbolizes peace and truth, reflecting India's core values.
- Green stands for faith, fertility, and the land, highlighting India's relation to its agrarian roots and the importance of its physical geography.

At the center of the white band is the Ashoka Chakra, a 24-spoke wheel in navy blue. This symbol is derived from the Ashoka Pillar at Sarnath, signifying the spread of Dharma (righteousness) and the perpetual nature of change in life. The inclusion of the Ashoka Chakra was a nod to India's ancient heritage and the principles of justice and righteousness espoused by Emperor Ashoka, a revered figure in Indian history. The transition to the new flag can be understood through Hobsbawm and Ranger's discussion of the 'invention of traditions'.

²⁵ The Constituent Assembly of a Free India, "Flag Code of India," Revised; May 22, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060522102724/http://pib.nic.in/feature/feyr2002/fapr2002/f030420021.html>.

According to their work, to establish a sense of continuity with a suitable historic past, new symbols and traditions are often created. In India's case, the adoption of the flag was part of a broader effort to reclaim and reinterpret its history and cultural identity in the aftermath of colonial rule.



Figure 5. The Flag of India (1947-Present)

The selection of symbols for the flag was not arbitrary, but a deliberate choice to drop the various religious meanings in favor to represent the values and aspirations of the newly independent and secular nation. National symbols often serve as tools for nation-building, fostering a sense of unity and common identity among the population. The Indian flag, therefore, was a vital component in the construction of a post-colonial national identity – distancing the nation from the colonial past while simultaneously drawing on historical and cultural elements unique to India.

Harkening back to Callahan and Ledgerwood (2016), for the UK, the perceived dissemination and growth of the Indian nationalist flag is a sign of protest becoming more threatening to the status quo and appearing more formidable to outsiders on the national stage.¹² Whereas other nations, detached from independence movements can give support to those movements by acknowledging their existence and giving them a sort of sovereignty. The United States saw the movement and shift of the political landscape and opened their first embassy for

Indian relations a year prior to Indian independence. Without common messaging, a large violation of human rights, or a particularly salient protest symbol, it would be hard for any group of people to find their reputation on the international level.

The case of the Indian flag fits nicely within the above-noted study in which India was leveraging a symbol to project to the rest of the world an image of unity – and in this case, against the United Kingdom. Beyond the role of language and the plurality of religions, the society that binds India today was united by a common goal against a sovereign nation, finding solace through symbolism.

Similarly, the UK's control over India represented a significant period of colonial dominance. The British Empire imposed its symbols, such as the Union Jack, and governance structures upon India. Indian independence in 1947 marked a significant withdrawal of British power and influence. This transition was not only a political and administrative shift but also a profound change in the symbolic landscape of the country of India. India's adoption of its own flag and national symbols was a critical step in establishing a separate identity, distinct from its colonial past.

The United Kingdom experienced the erosion of their power and influence in a region they once controlled. This process involved not only the physical withdrawal of their control but also a symbolic relinquishment, as the newly independent state adopted symbols that reflected their unique identity and values – and not that of the former influencer. In both Ukraine and India, the previously dominant states had lost part of their erstwhile territories during the emergence of new national narratives in these regions.

The creation of new symbols in Ukraine and India can be seen as an act of reclaiming sovereignty and establishing a distinct national identity, separate from the influence of their

former rulers. This symbolic transformation is a crucial aspect of the post-independence narrative for both countries, signifying their transition from being a part of a larger empire to becoming independent nations with their own distinct identities.

Chapter 3: Ukraine Case Study

On March 15th, 1917, the Russian Empire was over. Czar Nicholas II had abdicated his throne and in due time, the Bolsheviks had the right to set up the next, and newly communist, government. For many new nations, nationalism and determining national symbols is of the utmost importance to bring together factions. Vladimir Lenin and the rest of his new government focused on two important legacies: The destruction of symbols of the Russian empire and the creation of new symbolism.²⁶ In the case of the early Soviet Union, the adoption of the hammer and sickle as a central emblem held paramount importance in this endeavor. After the fall of the Russian empire many ethnic groups who considered themselves to be separate entities from them tried to reclaim their territory such as the Polish, Latvians, and Ukrainians. This is where the tension between Ukrainian nationalists and Russian Soviets began, rooted – for this thesis – in a history of sovereign, recognized flags.

Medieval Europe

The case for an independent Ukraine following the 1917 Russian Revolution dates to the Slavic tribalism period of the 12th Century and the historical chronicles of Halychyna (eng: “Galicia”). During the time of Ruthenia, King Yuri I of Galicia adopted the golden lion as an ode to the ferocity of his might. Over the next century the following noblemen continued forward with King Yuri I’s golden lion until Salome-Euphrosyne (daughter of the then Prince of Ruthenia) described the coat of arms to be a golden lion with a blue background. Although blue has meaning today, from all historical sources it seems as if blue was picked just to compliment the golden lion. These colors continued to the subsequent medieval Kingdom of Galicia–

²⁶ Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Volhynia. The flag's colors, blue and yellow, were approved by the General Ukrainian Rada in 1848²⁷ as symbols for Ukrainians residing in Halychyna. The symbolism spread to territories under Russian Empire control in the early 20th century, and the blue-and-yellow flag served as the state flag of an independent Ukrainian state from 1917 to 1921.²⁸



Figure 6. The Ukraine Flag (1848-1917, 1991-1992)

The “sky-blue” and yellow flag of Ukraine has been officially adopted twice, but the legitimacy and current standing on this flag is that it should not be used by the government yet has been.

Soviet Russification

Back in 1917, the Bolsheviks, cognizant of the need for a clean break from the imperial past, embarked on a deliberate campaign of symbolic deconstruction. This involved the systematic eradication of symbols associated with the defunct Russian Empire. The destruction of the two-headed eagle, the imperial flag, and statues venerating past monarchs became emblematic rituals of the revolution. The obliteration of these symbols wasn't merely the destruction of dissent; it was a revolutionary act signaling the birth of a new political order. When speaking of the Soviet Union, it is imperative to recognize the nuanced regional expressions within this vast federation. The adoption of the Hammer and Sickle as the emblem of

²⁷ Лідія Борисівна Кротенко, “Time for Ukraine: Ukrainian National Symbols, Life Style, Personalities,” 2018, <https://enpuir.npu.edu.ua/handle/123456789/25803>.

²⁸ Ukraine lost its independence in 1917, however government officials for a free-Ukraine and a Ukrainian government in exile still used the old blue and yellow flag.

the Soviet Union ushered in an era of visual symbols that transcended national borders. From a red field that was picked to honor the Paris Commune of 1871²⁹ each Soviet republic sought to infuse its unique identity into the broader Soviet narrative.



Figure 7. The flag of the Soviet Union (adopted: 1922- relinquished: 1991)

The transformation of national symbols was not limited to the removal of the old; it involved the careful creation and dissemination of new symbols that encapsulated the values of the Bolshevik ideology. The hammer and sickle emblem, representing the unity of the industrial workers and peasants, was not just an insignia but a powerful tool for indoctrination and the embodiment of the new Soviet ethos. The emblem's integration into all facets of Soviet life, from flags to official documents, was a testament to the regime's intent to create a cohesive identity that transcended the diverse nationalities and cultures within the USSR. The red color, which was traditionally associated with Easter and resurrection in Russian culture prior to the Paris Commune, was repurposed to signify the rebirth of the nation under a new communist ideology.³⁰ This rebranding of national symbols was instrumental in fostering a collective allegiance to the Soviet state and its socialist ideals, effectively subsuming individual national identities under a singular Soviet banner.

²⁹ Jay Bergman, "The Paris Commune in Bolshevik Mythology," *The English Historical Review* 129, no. 541 (2014): 1412–41.

³⁰ Venetia Newall, "Easter Eggs," *Folklore*, December 1, 1968, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0015587X.1968.9716604>.

There are also broader implications of these symbolic changes, highlighting how they facilitated the Soviet state's control and legitimacy across its vast territories. The deliberate replacement of local and national symbols of short-lived republics with those of the Soviet ideology was a clear strategy to centralize power and integrate the republics into a unified state framework. This symbolic homogenization was complemented by other measures, such as the renaming of cities and the introduction of Soviet holidays, further embedding the Soviet identity into the everyday lives of the Union's citizens. The transition from spontaneous demonstrations to state-orchestrated celebrations, such as May Day, outlined the transformation from a diverse imperial landscape to an assortment of ethnonationalist unified states through the ideology of communism. These changes were not merely cosmetic but represented a profound shift in the societal fabric, aiming to align the diverse populace with the Bolshevik vision of a communist society.

Within the evolution of Soviet symbolism, there is the emblematic representation of individual republics. The flag of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic emerges as a compelling chapter in this narrative. Marked by distinct colors and symbols, it encapsulates the complex interplay between overarching Soviet ideals and the regional nuances of Ukrainian identity. The adoption of the flag in the Ukrainian SSR was not merely a visual choice but a profound articulation of the synthesis between Soviet solidarity and Ukrainian distinctiveness. To understand the Flag of the Ukrainian SSR is to look into the interwoven threads of Soviet unity and Ukrainian individuality, the difference between central authority and regional autonomy.

Soviet Ukraine

During the time of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent Ukrainian–Soviet War (1917-1921), the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkSSR) initially emerged. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Bolsheviks defeated the independent Ukrainian People's Republic and established the Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) initially governed this entity before it transitioned into the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1918. The flag of this republic (in Figure 8) emblazoned with the pre-Soviet regional Ukrainian flag on the canton.



Figure 8. The Ukrainian Soviet Republic Flag (1917-1918)

Throughout this period, Ukraine engaged in multiple conflicts, including the Ukrainian War of Independence, involving various nationalist, anarchist, and separatist forces that primarily opposed Soviet Russia and the Ukrainian SSR. Eventually, the Ukrainian SSR joined as one of the four founding members of the Soviet Union in 1922 and signed the *Treaty on the Creation of the USSR*.³¹ The flag shown in Figure 8 can be usefully compared to that of the British crown and the American colonies almost 141 years prior.

As early as the 1707 the nation of Britain had started the process of creating flags for all their overseas territory. While designing these flags the royal crown decreed for the flags of these

³¹ Sophia Wilson, review of *Review of THE EMERGENCE OF UKRAINE: SELF-DETERMINATION, OCCUPATION, AND WAR IN UKRAINE, 1917-1922*, by Wolfram Dornik et al., *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 35, no. 1/4 (2017): 539–42.

nations to be emblazoned with the Union Jack in its canton. The rest of the field was to be decided by the territories themselves. Figure 9 shows the flag used by the American colonies. What is intriguing is the perception that the British and the Soviets had over their sub-colonial counterparts.

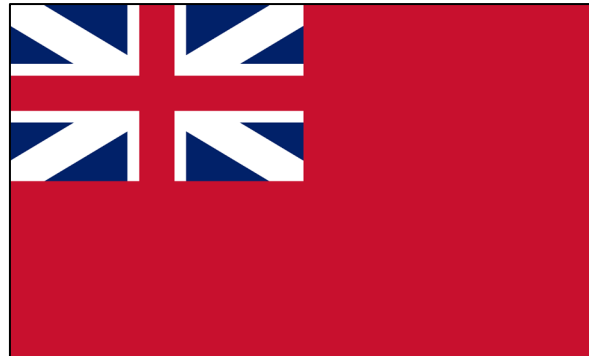


Figure 9. Flag of the American Colonies (1707-1776)

The then Union Jack displayed in the canton upon a field of red.

The British showed their proprietorship and governance by putting their national flag in the canton – or top left corner – of their colony’s flag. When it came time for the Soviet Union to differentiate the flags of their soviet republics their first move was to put the smaller countries flag in the canton upon the red field, that for them was symbolic of communism. This is a small, but powerful way to show this power dynamic. At least at conception the British felt an equal rationale with the American colonies, it was an extension of Britain. The Soviets had to remind and literally consume the Ukrainian identity it looks as if it is trying to escape the USSR flag altogether.

By 1919 the flag of Ukraine had dropped the blue and yellow canton in place of a canton that read, “Y.C.C.P.” an acronym for *Ukrayinskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Sovetskaya Respublika*

(Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic) in the Russian language.³² This change echoes the changes that the Bolshevik regime started by dismantling symbolism of old vestiges. Russian Soviets were purging the symbolism of the Romanov dynasty, whereas Ukrainian Soviets were purging Romanov, Habsburg, and even independent symbols which included the Ukrainian bicolor.



Figure 10. The flag of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (1919-1950, ed't'd: 1929,1937)

From 1929 to 1950 the flag of the UkSSR was simply tweaked and edited to make it align with Soviet flag code. Two minor edits were made; the first by removing the gold outline in the canton of the flag, the second by adding in the hammer and sickle below the letters that stand for the nation. The shift away from Ukrainian symbolism in the canton follows closely to the Soviet pressure against Ukrainian nationalists siding with the Third Reich during WWII. Although not all, many nationalist groups worked and aided the Nazi Regime in the belief that if Germany won the war, it would crumble the Soviet Union and Ukraine would be independent. The Soviets saw this move towards fascism as antithetical to the Soviet project. In 1945, after the second world war, the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic became a founding member of the United Nations. Geopolitically this moment was met with backlash from the western countries as the entry of Ukraine and Belarus as founding members helped secure the ratification of the Soviet Union's assumption on to the United Nations Security Council.

³² Presidium of the Extraordinary XIV Congress of Soviets, of the Ukrainian Soviet, and Socialist Republic, "Конституція (Основний Закон) Української Радянської Соціалістичної Республіки | LIGA."

There is no rule that flags need to be unique from other nations, but supranational organizations have tried to regulate this before. Through cases like Liechtenstein and Haiti having identical flags and Romania and Chad having the same problem, the Olympics, and the United Nations – respectively – have served at trying to mitigate this from occurring. In the case of Liechtenstein and Haiti it was not until the 1936 Summer Olympics that the government of Liechtenstein noticed their blue and red bicolor was identical to Haiti’s and just one year later added a crown on to their standard flag so that confusion would not continue.³³ Haiti would follow suit with their own flag design choices. For the case of Romania and Chad, the United Nations requested for one of the two nations to change their blue-yellow-red tricolor, but both countries have continued to refuse to change. Even so far as the former Romanian president Ion Iliescu said, “The tricolour belongs to us. We will not give up the tricolour.”³⁴

With these two more recent cases in the periphery, it is easy to understand that, based on the interconnectedness of all the Soviet Republics, when the United Nations requested that Ukraine and Belarus change their flag because of its similarities to the USSR, they complied swiftly. By decree of the Chairman of the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR their new flag was adopted in 1950 stating a change to Article 125 of their constitution,

The state flag of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic is a cloth that consists of two horizontally arranged colored stripes: the upper red color, which is two-thirds of the width, and the lower azure color, which is one-third of the width of the flag, with an image in its upper corner, at a distance of one third of the length from the

³³ DK Publishing, *Complete Flags of the World* (Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2008).

³⁴ BBC Monitoring, “‘Identical Flag’ Causes Flap in Romania,” April 14, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3626821.stm>.

shaft, a golden sickle and a hammer and above them a five-pointed star framed by a golden border. The ratio of width to length is 1:2³⁵

This new flag was unique. It was an emblem that evoked not only the Soviet struggle, but also the Ukrainian nationalist identity. The “azure” color (Ukrainian word: лазурового) was meant to be evocative of the banner of Bohdan Khmelnytsky³⁶ – a Ruthenian nobleman that helped secure the free Cossack state of Ukraine. The importance of this change is notable because it reopened a door that was previously closed by the Soviet Union. The changes made to Article 125 of the UkSSR constitution effectively redraws the line on dissidents in Ukraine. The action of the Soviet Union endorsing the re-entry of nationalist symbols of these soviet republics through each flag plays into the hand of nationalist revolutionaries in each country.³⁷



Figure 11. The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic Flag (1950- relinquished 1992)

The blue of this soviet flag harkens back to a pre-soviet time, a time in which the government of Ukraine was not Ukrainian at all. Prior to the Russian Revolution the modern-day borders of Ukraine were largely under the dominion and control of the Russian Empire with parts in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The blue stripe being added to the UkSSR flag created a sort of

³⁵ Mikhail Sergeevich Grechukha, “On the Approval of the Decrees of the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR ‘On the State Coat of Arms of the Ukrainian SSR’ and ‘On the State Flag of the Ukrainian SSR’ | LIGA: LAKON,” July 5, 1950, <https://ips.ligazakon.net/document/T500003?an=19>.

³⁶ V. Sokolov, “Flags of the Ukrainian SSR,” accessed May 5, 2024, <http://www.vexillographia.ru/ukraine/UkSSR.htm>.

³⁷ This thesis is not trying to say that the change of these flags to include national symbols led to the eventual uprising of national revolutionaries and the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union, but simply positing that this change allowed for a greater number of people to be privy to nationalist ideals.

“ethnicism” where Ukrainians history was recognized. On the other hand, the above symbols were forced upon the Ukrainian people. Bureaucrats and Soviets in other countries made these decisions and it was not well received by Ukrainians. Just as the case of India before this, small insular protests began to spread through Ukraine in the 1970s, with some particularly focused on these prior Soviet, and pre-soviet flags.³⁸

On January 21, 1973, in a small city outside Ternopil a group of local Ukrainian students decided to change the flag of the UkSSR (Figure 11) out with the old Ukrainian blue-yellow bicolor (Figure 6) as a symbol of protest to the local government. Four old Ukrainian flags were hung in the city square, and posters were plastered to the outside of city buildings. The larger message of this resistance was to bring attention to 55 years prior when the fourth General Assembly of the Central Rada in Kyiv gave self-governance to the country of Ukraine. The reason why Ukrainians needed to become aware of an event that took place in their country’s history is because of the policy of Russification. Immediately after the Russian Revolution – aligned with the USSR flag in Figure 8 – Soviets allowed for an amount of Ukrainian nationalism, but through over time, Soviet authorities targeted Mykola Skrypnyk, the minister of Education in the 1930s. The Soviets pressured Skrypnyk to halt many historical teachings which included the universal declaration from the fourth General Assembly.³⁹ The following morning the local Committee for State Security or KGB inquired to locals as to the happenings at the city center. A local security guard for the cinema’s words became that of legend. While denying any knowledge he said, “In the evening I watch your flag, and in the morning, I watch our flag.” This simple sentence, one that divides “your” and “our” through the design, color, and look of a flag

³⁸ Andriy Kvyatkovskiy, “Unknown Standard Bearers. Yellow-Blue against Red,” *Исторична правда*, July 29, 2011, <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/columns/2011/07/29/48180/>.

³⁹ John Kolasky, *Education in Soviet Ukraine: A Study in Discrimination and Russification* (Peter Martin Associates, 1968).

became a protest sentence that could be said to soviet officials to show your dissent to their union. Through the words of a Ukrainian security guard and the actions of a rebellious group of teens it is evident that through division of symbolic meaning, the Ukrainian nationalists had broken through to the everyday Ukrainian. Ukrainian nationalists were able to “Other” the Russian soviets. Not only is this particularly important for inventing traditions, but also for imaging communities. Having an “us” that is opposed to a “them” draws a literal line. Ethnically, Russians and Ukrainians are far similar than different, but moments in which “your flag” becomes different than “our flag” serve to the greater idea that flags are not just there to fly in the wind but are active forms of communication for nations. Lastly, the security guard didn’t say “my flag,” he said, “our flag.” Rebellion movements gain strength when they suggest or demonstrate that their words carry more weight than those of an individual. “Our” is a collective possessive determiner. In saying “our flag” it makes the statement more threatening to the governing officials who are trying to prevent a loss of support.

Independent Ukraine

The final form of protest that civilians of the UkSSR developed against their government took place in Kyiv. General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev’s policy of perestroika (which means restructuring) gave greater power to local governments. Through this ability to decide without the Soviet stamp of approval Lithuania was the first to re-instate their former national flag, prior to the end of Soviet-rule in 1988. Anti-Soviet sentiment was incredibly intense and eastern European nations with greater autonomy had citizens requesting and protesting for some semblance of national pride, identity, and democracy. First the town of Stryi raised the old bicolor above their city center, followed by Ternopil, and the Lviv. All eyes shifted to the

Revolution on Granite⁴⁰ where over 100,000 students were gathered – a portion on a hunger strike – to protest Soviet rule, fight for Ukrainian independence, and ask for the reinstatement of the old Ukrainian flag. The picture of Figure 12 shows the emblem they were protesting under. It had been reported that the majority of these protestors were college-aged students. Through the othering of the Soviet group against the Ukrainian independence movement a symbol that had been outlawed since 1917, and rarely seen passed 1921 when the Ukrainian government in exile stopped putting out issues, was a unifying banner. These students⁴¹ could not have been alive during the Russian Revolution, but the sheer meaning – imbued or forced – upon the old Ukrainian standard flag ushered in the new era of a free and independent Ukraine.



Figure 12. A picture of Ukrainian flags in the Revolution on Granite

The picture was taken by a fellow protester by the name of Serhiy Marchenko which shows dozens of outlawed Ukrainian flags held by students protesting (c. 1991)

The Ukrainian flag's salience in modern contexts is multifaceted, representing not only the nation's natural beauty and agricultural wealth but also its struggle for independence and sovereignty. The official government website of Ukraine has a whole webpage dedicated to images of the flag with the ending quote that the flag of Ukraine is, “A symbol of gratitude,

⁴⁰ Paulina Codogni, “The 1990 Revolution on Granite: Lessons from the First Maidan - Paulina Codogni, 2023,” July 11, 2023, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/08883254231172384>.

⁴¹ Olga Onuch, “The Legacy of The Revolution On Granite,” April 10, 2017.

bravery, unity, future. A symbol of independent Ukraine and free Ukrainians.”⁴² The flag's resurgence during significant political movements, such as the Revolution on Granite, shows its role as a unifying symbol of resistance against external pressures, particularly during periods of national crisis. The flag embodies Ukraine's aspirations for freedom, serving as a potent emblem of national identity and resilience in the face of challenges.

The Ukrainian flag's azure and golden yellow colors carry deep historical roots and symbolic meanings, from medieval emblems to symbols of national liberation and modern assertions of sovereignty. The Soviet Union's efforts to homogenize national symbols under its regime had lasting impacts on the post-Soviet states, prompting a reclamation of national identities through historical flags post-dissolution. The Ukrainian flag stands as a testament to the nation's enduring spirit of independence, serving as a rallying point for unity and resistance in contemporary Ukraine.

⁴² The Official Government of Ukraine, “Flag of Ukraine: History and Meaning,” Official website of Ukraine, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://ukraine.ua/faq/flag-of-ukraine-history-and-meaning/>.

Conclusion

By exploring the historical and contemporary implications of flags in India and Ukraine, this thesis highlights the potency that these symbols have in uniting and dividing – to inspire loyalty or dissent, and to craft new narratives or reinforce old ones. Flags are not mere pieces of cloth, but a sort of symbolic clothing for a nation, laden with immense value with the capability of evoking the deepest of emotions and mobilizing collective action. Flags have and can continue to serve as pivotal elements in the dialogue of national identity and sovereign aspirations.

In India, the transformation from a colonial symbol to the representation of independence created by Gandhi in the Swaraj flag reveals a deliberate effort to reclaim and redefine national identity. What was once a symbol for subjugation, reborn as a banner for secularism, unity, and self-determination. In Ukraine, the evolution of the flag outlines its role as a medium in which the populace continually asserted its meaning and distinctiveness. The Ukrainian flag's re-adoption after the fall of the Soviet Union actively rejected their Soviet past and reclaimed its historical symbols. Resonating with people through periods of oppression and resurgence, the Ukrainian flag epitomizes their continued struggle for political and cultural sovereignty.

By analyzing the flags of these two nations, this thesis hopes to help bridge the gap in scholarly literature, wherein academia could and should understand how national symbols like flags function. Flags are dynamic tools that are both shaped by and themselves help shaped for political dynamics. These cases exemplify how flags can hold the aspirations, the resilience, and the spirit of these nations in their pursuit for independence. It becomes clear that the power of flags extends far beyond a visual presence. Flags are catalysts in the formation of imagined communities, instrumental in the invention of traditions, and crucial in articulating national

narratives. This thesis illuminates the significance of flags in their historical context and also their continued relevance in the contemporary landscape.

The exploration of flags within this thesis reaffirms their status as deeply profound and evocative symbols with the ability to influence the course of history. Nations will continue to grapple with questions of identity, sovereignty, and self-determination and flags will remain at the heart of these conversations, symbolizing the hopes and challenges of communities around the world.

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