

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

<https://www.e-ir.info/2022/01/30/the-outpost-of-ukraine-the-role-of-dnipro-in-the-war-in-the-donbas/>

NICHOLAS KYLE KUPENSKY AND OLENA ANDRIUSHCHENKO, JAN 30 2022

This is a preprint extract from *Ukraine's Outpost: Dnipropetrovsk and the Russian-Ukrainian War*, edited by Taras Kuzio, Sergei I. Zhuk And Paul D'Anieri. A free version of the book is available from E-International Relations

On 3 May 2014, fans of two competing football clubs – FC Dnipro and Lviv's FC Karpaty – gathered in the centre of Dnipropetrovsk to promote a march *Za yedynu Ukrayinu* ('For a United Ukraine'). Less than a month after the seizure of government buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk by pro-Russian separatists and just weeks after the government's launch of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), the march was organised at a crucial juncture for the city. Many worried that the escalating violence in the east could spill into the Dnipropetrovsk region at a moment's notice. Indeed, Dnipropetrovsk was typically included in discussions of a 'New Russia' (*Novorossiya*) buffer state, even though polling suggested that support for unification with Russia was extremely low (Plokhly 2015, 341–342; O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2017, 125).

The fans marched down the main thoroughfare of the city, Karl Marx Prospect, along the city's famous embankment, and ultimately arrived at the *Parus* Hotel, a half-completed and long-abandoned eyesore on the banks of the river. With hundreds of litres of blue and yellow paint, a few dozen marchers scaled the 17-story building, and, by evening, they turned one of *Parus* drab concrete faces into a massive Ukrainian coat of arms, the largest *tryzub* in the world ('Fanaty 'Dnepra' preobrazili' 2014). A month later, a flash mob commemorated those who were killed during the Euromaidan Revolution protests by illuminating the *tryzub* (trident) with torches (Dnepropetrovtsy 2014; Dnepropetrovsk 28 iunia 2014). And then in July, fifty volunteers organised by the Dnipro Ultras scaled the hotel to paint the other face of the building in the colours of the Ukrainian flag (Gostinitsu 'Parus' 2014; see figures 5.1 and 5.2).

The choice of the *Parus* (the 'sail') as a site to signal the changes in Ukraine's political winds was not coincidental. The longest-running construction site in Ukraine, *Parus* was originally a pet project of Leonid Brezhnev, the adoptive son of the city whose ascendance to power gave rise to the 'Dnipropetrovsk clan' of Soviet politicians (Zhuk 2010). According to the original plans, the building was designed to be a luxury hotel for party conferences and foreign delegations to the city, the 'symbol of the golden age of prosperity under Brezhnev.' Construction began in the mid-1970s; however, problems in financing caused the construction to drag into the 1980s. In 1987, the project completely stalled when the building was 80 per cent complete. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the *Parus* was looted and stripped of its useful materials, and residents of the city long began to view the hotel as a 'symbol of the unrealised dreams of the Soviet era' (Iasko 2019).

Thus, the transformation of the *Parus* Hotel from a perpetual reminder of Dnipropetrovsk's lost Soviet glory into a brightly coloured billboard signifying the city's optimism, patriotism, and strength is one of many examples how the threat of war in the east provoked a radical change in the city's spirit and urban spaces. Indeed, as Sophie Pinkham aptly observed, 'now the hotel would have to be finished: demolishing the building would look like the destruction of Ukraine itself' (Pinkham 2016, 262). No longer clinging to its past laurels as the 'Rocket City,' Dnipropetrovsk not only received a new name: since 2016 the city changed its name to Dnipro to remove the legacy of one of the

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

organizers of the Holodomor, Hryhorii Petrovskyy, in the wake of the 2015 Decommunisation Laws (Oliinyk and Kuzio 2021, 7). It also embraced a new identity since the start of the war – *forpost Ukrayiny* (outpost of Ukraine) – a metaphor which reflects its strategic role in both defending and protecting the Ukrainian state.

Originally a German military term, *forpost* carries both offensive and defensive connotations. On the one hand, a *forpost* can refer to a unit of soldiers situated in an advanced position, which places them on the front line in the event of an attack or allows them to warn their comrades about an enemy advance. At the same time, a *forpost* also signifies a fortification or fortress in an advanced position, which provides protection from the dangers outside its walls. And these dual meanings of Dnipro's new identity – both as the city best suited to support the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) and the city most capable of offering refuge from it – were broadly embraced as the conflict escalated.

While the change in Dnipro's civic identity was swift, its origins remain a source of scholarly debate. Yuri M. Zhukov has focused on the 'opportunity cost' of rebellion, which he argues was highest in the Dnipropetrovsk region and lowest in the economically vulnerable Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which were 'heavily dependent upon trade with Russia' (Zhukov 2016, 2). However, Quentin Buckholz has argued how 'elite preferences' proved to be more determinative than economic factors or 'mass popular attitudes,' especially in Kharkiv and Dnipro (Buckholz 2019, 152). Indeed, many have shown how the city's powerful oligarchs and a vocal minority of Euromaidan Revolution activists were the primary actors fuelling Dnipro's transformation into a 'bastion of civic Ukrainian nationalism' (Zhurzhenko 2014, 11; Portnov 2015b, 729). Andrii Portnov has been the most forthright in crediting Ihor Kolomoyskyy and his associates in the Privat Group Borys Filatov and Hennadiy Korban with 'creating Dnipropetrovsk's "pro-Ukrainianness"' (Portnov 2016). Silviya Nitsova also has shown how Kolomoyskyy's support of the state inspired small- and medium-sized businesses to provide materials and funds for the war effort (Nitsova 2021, 20). While Orysia Kulick has emphasised that it is best to understand how a 'perfect storm' of circumstances – including the collapse of central authority, the delegitimation of the Party of Regions, and the annexation of Crimea – convinced the city's businessmen to prevent 'a cascade of destabilizing acts' (Kulick 2019, 354), she too acknowledges Kolomoyskyy's central role. In fact, for Ilya Gerasimov, that Dnipro's elite was made up of Russian-speaking but pro-Ukrainian Soviet Jews, or 'Russo-Jewish-Banderites,' is a testament to the 'new Ukrainian hybridity' of the 'Dnipropetrovsk phenomenon,' the emergence of a coalition of Ukrainians of hyphenated or hybridized identities who were inspired by the Privat Group's model of civic nationalism (Gerasimov 2014, 34–35).

Our study does not speculate on the origins of Dnipro's surge in 'local patriotism' (Portnov 2015a, 66). Instead, it chronicles and analyses the public discourses of civic nationalism that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the war and crystallised in the years since. What we are interested in is how Dnipro's residents came to understand their decisive role in the defence of the country and how they came to spontaneously articulate these experiences in verbal and visual forms. Drawing upon representations of Dnipro's role in the war in the local and national media, memory institutions, and urban spaces, we argue that the city's new political identity cannot merely be reduced to 'the result of successful crisis management' on the part of the Privat Group (Portnov 2015a, 70), even if Kolomoyskyy's actions were definitive in the earliest days of the war. In the months and years that followed, the metaphor that Dnipro was the 'outpost of Ukraine' proved to be a particularly effective new myth, one with the power to signify both strength and compassion and synthesize a wide array of civic activity: volunteering to fight, caring for IDPs, healing the wounded, and facilitating new social relations.

The Evolution of a Metaphor

Many have observed that the individual most responsible for deciding the fate of the city was the oligarch Kolomoyskyy (Gerasimov 2014; Wilson 2014; Zhurzhenko 2014; Portnov 2015a; Portnov 2015b; Portnov 2016; Sakwa 2015; Buckholtz 2017; Kulick 2019; Nitsova 2021). Early on, Kolomoyskyy and his associates in the Privat Group in January 2014 demonstrated public support for the Euromaidan Revolution by projecting coverage of the protests in Kyiv on the side of the shopping mall Passage (Kulick 2019, 366). After becoming governor of Dnipropetrovsk region in March 2014, Kolomoyskyy launched an all-out campaign to ensure that separatist sentiment did not spread beyond the Donbas. He personally subsidized the Ukrainian Air Force, offered a \$10,000 reward for the capture of a pro-Russian separatist, and backed the creation of the highly effective Dnipro battalion

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

(Sakwa 2015, 128; Portnov 2015a, 67; Kulick 2019, 382–385). For these reasons, many have argued that the Maidan itself represented a ‘major victory of Dnepropetrovsk over the Donbas’ in the triumph of Kolomoyskyy’s clan over the one controlled by ousted President Viktor Yanukovich (Sakwa 2015; Portnov 2015a, 66). Indeed, as one member of a Kolomoyskyy-funded militia commented, Dnepropetrovsk was ‘just lucky to get a better oligarch’ (Baczynska 2014).

It was in the wake of these interventions that Dnepropetrovsk began to be known as the (*forpost Ukrayiny* (outpost of Ukraine) because of its strategic role in stemming the tide of the pro-Russian activity. ‘Sergei Taruta in Donetsk can’t manage to control the situation,’ one Dnepropetrovsk resident commented in April 2014, ‘but Kolomoyskyy in a short amount of time turned the neighbouring Dnepropetrovsk into a *forpost* of Ukrainian statehood’ (Boris Filatov 2014). In May, fans of the Dnipro Football Club mobilized the phrase to channel the team’s civic pride into a victory on the football pitch. ‘We are living through the very peak of historical time. Dnepropetrovsk has become the *forpost* of the Ukrainian state,’ the letter reads: ‘Leave everything on the field [...] for Dnepropetrovsk.’ (Fanaty ‘Dnepra’ obratilis’ 2014).

Local media outlets picked up references to the ‘outpost’ image in the national and international press. After former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger argued that Ukraine must be a bridge between Russia and the West — ‘not either side’s outpost against the other’ — the journalist Iurii Romanenko responded by rebuking Kissinger and making the case that the ‘outpost’ identity was a positive one: ‘[Ukraine must] only be an outpost,’ he writes. ‘Only a wall. Only a moat with crocodiles and crucified boys for intimidation. Only a complete cure for schizophrenia’ (Kissinger 2014; Romanenko 2014). At the same time, local organizations used the term in their names and branding, such as the Dnipro-based NGO Forpost, and rehabilitation centre Forpost HELP, which provide legal and psychological assistance to soldiers and IDPs (Forpost-Centre 2021).

By 2015, the term began to appear in scholarship about the war when the historian Andrii Portnov suggested that Dnepropetrovsk had become the *forpost* of Ukraine (Portnov 2015a, 65). It also made its way to the highest levels of national politics. Former President Leonid Kuchma began to use the term (To, chto Aleksandr Vilkul vydvynul sebia 2015). And President Petro Poroshenko used it frequently in his speeches about the city. ‘The Dnepropetrovsk region was and will remain the outpost of Ukrainianness,’ he said during one visit in 2015 (Bilovyts’ka 2015; Rybal’chenko 2015; Babenko 2017). Thus, while other cities such as Kharkiv and Mariupol also have been called outposts in the conflict (Petрак 2015, Poroshenko 2018), even Poroshenko has suggested that Dnipro’s early ‘decisive position’ to resist the ‘Russian spring’ earned it the right to be the ‘main outpost of Ukraine’ (Babenko 2017).

Thus, beginning in the spring 2014, the *forpost* metaphor was used and reused in the press and came to be picked up by a diverse group of individuals and organisations who mobilised it to describe four interrelated but distinct aspects of the city’s new identity: Dnipro’s role as a city-defender, city of refuge, city-hospital, and city of love.

City-Defender

The first meaning of Dnipro’s identity as the ‘outpost of Ukraine’ came from its identity as the ‘city-defender’ (*gorod-zashchitnik / misto zakhysnyk*), a formulation that was often used to the roughly 20,000 soldiers from the region who were mobilized to fight in the ATO and the 559 who lost their lives between 2014 and 2018 (Vpervye traditsionnoe 2018; Voytsekhovska and Yakushenko 2018). One of them was Petr Sirota, an engineer from Dnepropetrovsk’s National Mining University (now, the Dnipro Polytechnic National Technical University) who in the spring of 2014 felt that his technical expertise might be of some benefit on the front. After serving as a volunteer for a few uneventful months at a checkpoint away from the front, Sirota came back home; however, he ultimately had a change of heart after attending a speech in Dnepropetrovsk delivered by Mikhail Saakashvili. After Saakashvili reminded the residents of the city that ‘if Ukraine holds back this aggression, it will defend both itself and Europe,’ Sirota remembers experiencing the overwhelming feeling of responsibility to take up arms and return to the conflict. ‘I’ll go myself,’ he said: ‘You won’t stop me from defending my country’ (Andriushchenko 2014e, 16). What is significant about Sirota’s narrative is the spontaneity in which he came to feel that he was in a unique position to change the course of history. As part of Dnepropetrovsk’s cadre of engineers – the legacy of the city’s ‘Rocket City’ days – he indicates that he was sure his skills could help defend his city and country. Furthermore, during a moment

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

of doubt, his desire to take up arms was rekindled at the thought that living in Dnipropetrovsk gave him the unique opportunity to make a difference and play a meaningful role in the affairs of the nation, if not the continent.

Many of the volunteers who came to the front in the early days of the war remembered that the ranks had a clear contingent from Dnipropetrovsk, such as Taras Litkovets from Lutsk. The assistant dean of the history department at the Lesya Ukrayinka East European National University, Litkovets fought in the Donbas in 2015. 'Around 70 per cent of the battalion were Russian speakers. Most of the guys were from Dnipropetrovsk region and from Dnipro itself,' he said. This observation is backed up by statistics about the number of fallen soldiers, for the Dnipropetrovsk region has suffered the highest number of casualties (*Zahybli hromadyany Ukrayiny za mistsem narodzhennya v mezhakh Ukrayiny 2021*). Litkovets also added: 'Dnipro had a special, good standing among the soldiers. Everyone knew that the city has fantastic doctors and a wonderful attitude towards servicemen' unlike some cities, such as Kharkiv, where he often preferred to walk around in civilian clothes to not be identified as a soldier (Andriushchenko 2017, 13). Indeed, even before the Euromaidan Revolution, Dnipropetrovsk was a city with strong patriotic sentiments, which only grew in intensity after the war. From 2013 to 2015, the per centage of residents of the Dnipropetrovsk region who answered the questions 'I love Ukraine' and 'I feel Ukrainian' grew from between 88.8 to 92.8 per cent and 85 to 90.1 per cent [BK1] (Bureiko and Moga 2019, 151).

City of Refuge

Meanwhile, residents in the Donbas caught in the crossfire began to escape the violence by coming to Dnipropetrovsk, which led to its reputation as a city of refuge. While this specific formulation was not frequently used, it can be identified in the many accounts of individuals who fled the war. Initially, these individuals were referred to as 'refugees' (*bezhenets / bizhenets*) and are commonly called 'resettlers' or 'relocatees' (*pereselenets / pereselenets*); however, Ukraine eventually adopted the term 'internally displaced person' (IDP, or *vnutrishn'o peremishchena osoba*) (Kabanets 2019, 5). One of the first IDPs was Iryna Stepanova, an engineer from Slovyansk, who fled to the city in May 2014 after her religious community was targeted by pro-Russian separatists. 'The route to Dnipropetrovsk (about 231 kilometres) took us twenty hours,' she remembers: 'When I finally saw Ukrainian flags, we started crying' (van Metre, Steiner, and Haring 2017, 17). And Stepanova was not alone. Many recalled that they felt free, safe, or protected only after arriving in Dnipropetrovsk.

From the earliest days of the conflict *Dopomoha Dnipro* (Dnipro Aid) became the primary coordinating centre helping the IDPs, the first wave of which were primarily women, children, and the elderly (Kabanets 2019, 17). Elena Nesterenko, a Chinese-language teacher from Luhansk, came to Dnipropetrovsk in July 2014 after her neighbourhood came under fire. She took cover in her basement, where she managed to calm herself by studying Chinese language and philosophy. Having given up on the dream of teaching Chinese in Luhansk, Nesterenko hoped to share her love of Chinese culture with the residents of her host city (Andriushchenko 2014c).

Another IDP, the 85-year-old Anna Baulova, came to Dnipropetrovsk Aid from the village of Zuhres in the Donetsk region. 'I remember the Great Patriotic War well,' said Baulova: 'We also hid in the same way then. Only for some reason we were less afraid then. I guess it's because we were young' (Andriushchenko 2014b, p.4). When her area was bombed, she took cover in a basement, where there were a few other pensioners who remembered World War II. Initially, they intended to wait out the conflict and 'softly sang war songs' to distract themselves from the bombings; however, Baulova concluded that 'one war a lifetime is enough' and left for Dnipropetrovsk.

By the fall of 2014, the number and nature of the IDPs began to change as more Donbas residents came to realize that the conflict would drag on (Kabanets 2019, 17). Lyudmila Khapatko, one of the coordinators at Dnipro Aid, said that the organisation was taking in as many as 60 IDPs a day in the wake of the attacks on the cities of Mariupol and Avdiyivka (Andriushchenko 2015b). By spring, the need for assistance was so high that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) opened a second Ukrainian headquarters in Dnipropetrovsk that would cover all Eastern Ukraine (Andriushchenko 2015a).

Amidst the chaos and upheaval, some of the IDPs from the first wave began to find a sense of purpose in helping those from the second, like Tatiana Gladkova, who had arrived from Novoazovsk in August 2014. Even though much

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

of her time was occupied with finding a stable source of work, Gladkova nonetheless volunteered in her free time at Dnipro Aid, where she was proud to 'help those like me, other resettlers' (Andriushchenko 2015b). At the centre, Gladkova helped invigorate an arts and crafts workshop where IDPs could learn how to produce handcrafts and, most importantly, 'get rid of stress' (Andriushchenko 2015c, 15). One of the IDPs who especially valued the workshop was Irina Terekhova, who came from Luhansk. Initially, Terekhova thought she would be able to quickly return to her home and business, but she found herself in a 'heavy emotional state' when she struggled to find 'something to distract herself' from the realities of resettlement. At the workshop, she took great pleasure from making children's toys and stuffed animals, often painted in patriotic colours, and the collective began selling their wares at a local market to support wounded soldiers.

Yevheniya Shevchenko, another coordinator at Dnipro Aid, was particularly impressed with the generosity of many of the IDPs: 'Some want to donate blood for the soldiers wounded in the ATO. [...] Others get involved with the work of the coordinating centre. Yet others organise charitable fairs to help the soldiers. It's like balm for the soul. You see that all your efforts aren't in vain, that the world around you, even if slowly, is getting better. And then your belief in the bright future gets stronger, the strength to go on and do good appears' (Andriushchenko 2015d, 25). In this respect, she began to feel that her work as a volunteer was complementary to those fighting on the front lines. 'The soldiers in the ATO are giving their lives for my safety. I won't go to fight, but I have the power to take care of the resettlers,' she said: 'This is my small fight for peace' (Andriushchenko 2015d, 25).

While many IDPs expressed their gratitude at the hospitality of Dnipropetrovsk's residents, others were blamed for the economic problems of the city. 'When I moved to Dnipropetrovsk, I only met positive people on my journey,' said Lyudmila Yermak: 'But many encountered people with negative attitudes towards them. Like, because of you there's no jobs and the rent is too high' (Andriushchenko 2016, 2). As a result, Yermak was moved to ease the tensions between the city's residents and the new arrivals and, as such, organised a series of roundtables so that the community could frankly discuss the cultural and economic issues standing in the way of a smooth integration. The difficulty of finding sustainable work and adequate housing were the most pressing struggles, but the events also sought to break down negative stereotypes many held about IDPs. One of the claims that was often made was that the IDPs have helped strengthened the economic stability of Dnipropetrovsk, though a group of scholars at the University of Birmingham found that there was not convincing evidence to suggest that IDPs had a positive effect on 'increased consumer demand' or 'faster economic growth' in their host communities (Kuznetsova, et. al. 2018, 4).

Sophie Pinkham has reported that some Dnipropetrovsk residents felt that those from the Donbas had a 'strong sense of entitlement,' were 'aggressive,' and could not be trusted because they were 'simply another kind of people' (Pinkham 2016, 259). Similarly, the volunteers at Dnipro Aid also cited examples of conflicts when IDPs arrived and expected more provisions than the centre could provide. Oftentimes, skirmishes took place because the IDPs had recently survived heavy shelling and showed up in a state of shock. Others, the coordinators reported, are 'professional provocateurs, who instilled in the displaced people unpleasant feelings. They said that Ukraine needs to be wiped off the face of the earth, that Ukrainians should be exterminated, [that] Obama bombed us, and we're being pacified with buckwheat' (Andriushchenko 2015d, 25). Yet, Shevchenko insisted that the vast majority were good, sympathetic, and positive.

Another Dnipro-based organisation that actively helped the IDPs is the Human Rights Group *Sich*. Founded by Dmytro Reva, Andrii Denysenko, and Oksana Tomchuk in the summer of 2014, *Sich* aims to provide comprehensive legal assistance to victims of the war: soldiers and their families, IDPs, the families of missing persons, former hostages, victims of torture, volunteers, and civilians in the conflict areas (Pravozakhystna hrupa Sich 2019). Nina Panfilova, one of their clients, turned to the group for help after her house in the Donetsk region was destroyed in a bombing and all her possessions were engulfed in a subsequent fire. 'That night we were warned about the danger. We hid in one of the basements. By morning I discovered that my apartment was destroyed,' Panfilova said: 'Nothing is left, except to live in a basement.' After she appealed to *Sich*, however, her case seeking monetary compensation for her losses is one of a few awaiting judgments in the Supreme Court of Ukraine (Andriushchenko 2018b). Another client of *Sich* is Valentina Buchok, a former electrician at Donetsk Regional Energy who was abducted during one of her shifts, humiliated and tortured, and then held as a prisoner of war for nearly a year. '[A member of the Donetsk People's Republic] decided that I was a spy,' Buchok remembers: 'They threw a cellophane bag over my head and

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

handcuffed my hands behind my back. And they tortured me for twenty hours, trying to get me to confess to murder' (Andriushchenko 2018a). After she was released during a prisoner exchange, Buchok began to seek monetary compensation for her period of captivity, including back pay from her employer since she was captured performing her duties at work. In 2018, *Sich* took her case before the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled in her favour (Ekspolonena boyovykiv 'DNR' 2019). *Sich* also works closely with their partner, the NGO *Forpost* and rehabilitation centre *Forpost* HELP, which was founded in early 2015 and provides psychological support to approximately 70 individuals affected by the war each month (V Dnepre otkryli Tsentr 2016).

The City-Hospital

As IDPs and POWs turned to Dnipropetrovsk as a refuge from the violence in the east, those wounded in the combat zone also frequently ended up in the city's Dnipropetrovsk Military Hospital or I. I. Mechnikov Hospital, one of Ukraine's leading trauma centres. From the earliest days of the conflict, many recognized that the city's doctors were helping soldiers return to the battlefield and saving the lives of the most gravely wounded, which transformed Dnipro into a 'city-hospital' (*gorod-gospital'/misto-shpital*), a term typically used during World War II to describe cities where injured soldiers were sent for treatment and rehabilitation.

It was largely at the Mechnikov Hospital where the city's doctors gained local and national fame for their life-saving procedures. Founded in 1798, the hospital has over 2,000 employees, including 400 physicians, who see over 40,000 admitted patients and about 300,000 outpatients a year (Likarnya Mechnykova 2019). At the start of the war, many of Mechnikov's physicians were drawn to the metaphor of Dnipropetrovsk as the 'outpost' of Ukraine and began to frame their work in support of the soldiers arriving from the front in these terms (Stolyarova 2014). 'The Mechnikov doctors remain a trusted *forpost*,' remarked the head of medicine Serhiy Ryzhenko: 'Every day we are defeating death' ('Peremirye' 2015). 'The Mechnikov Hospital has become a real medical *forpost* of Ukraine and Dnipro,' a journalist remarked: 'Nearly every day the wounded are brought to the hospital, and the doctors carry out great deeds in saving the life and health of these people' (Tatyana Rychkova 2016). Indeed, the Mechnikov doctors have saved the lives of over 2,000 soldiers since the start of the war. 'Dnipropetrovsk has become the *forpost* of the country,' the deputy head of medicine at the hospital Oleksandr Tolubaev said during a blood drive for wounded soldiers: 'Two thousand defenders of Ukraine, real heroes have survived. Doctors, volunteers, donors – only together are we a force! The force of Dnipropetrovshchina!' (Bilan 2016).

Furthermore, Dnipropetrovsk also was one of the cities where soldiers on the front had access to mental health care. On 1 August 2015, the Dnipropetrovsk oblast State Administration opened a hotline for participants in the ATO. At its height, the centre was receiving as many as fifteen calls a day, many directly from the front. One of the psychologists at the hotline, Olha Korinchuk-Shtykova, remembered a typical scenario when one young soldier contemplating suicide called in. 'You understand, I'm tired. I can't do it anymore,' he said: 'There's no exit.' She described how 'a long conversation started. The young man talked about the hell that he has lived in for many months, about how he lost one friend after another... He finally started to cry and wasn't afraid to be weak. And then relief set in. The fighter recognised that he should value life and fight for peace for the sake of the bright future of his children in Ukraine. His role is invaluable' (Andryushchenko 2016a, 25). Again, for many ATO fighters, if the Donbas was associated with violence and danger, Dnipropetrovsk was associated with safety and care, both physical and mental.

The City of Love

Not everyone who came to Dnipropetrovsk from the front was in search of refuge or physical or mental care: many soldiers came to the city on leave to relax and, more often than not, go on dates. For this reason, Dnipropetrovsk often was represented as a city of love by local media outlets in human interest stories about soldiers.

One the individuals who came to Dnipropetrovsk for romantic reasons was Serhiy Ponomarenko, a retired lieutenant in the Ukrainian army who volunteered for combat and ended up in the ATO. His wife of twenty-two years, Svetlana, remained behind in Dnipropetrovsk. 'It was really hard for me to leave my family behind,' Ponomarenko said: 'I saw that my wife's eyes were tearing up. But I couldn't do anything else, to defend my native land is my debt. Who would if not me?' (Andriushchenko 2014d, 4). But as the fighting continued into the summer of 2014, the couple decided

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

that they wanted a religious ceremony in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, which required Serhiy to leave his post. Much to his surprise, his commander not only approved his leave but also granted leave to his comrades, all of whom escaped the combat zone for a day to attend the wedding.

Meanwhile, other soldiers serving on the front met their future wives in the city thanks to the Facebook group ATO Acquaintances (*ATOshni znayomstva*), a project launched by the Dnipropetrovsk resident Natalia Koval. An active participant in the Women's Volunteer Battalion, an organisation that delivered supplies to the front, Koval noticed that many soldiers were asking her to include the phone numbers of the women who prepared the packages or personally introduce them to women from the city. 'At first I took it all as a joke, but then, when I had more free time one day, I sat down and created the 'ATO Acquaintances' group on Facebook,' Koval said. Although Koval primarily envisioned the group to be a pleasant distraction for soldiers to pass the time when they were deployed, many began to use the site as a dating platform to find partners who shared their commitment to self-sacrifice (Andriushchenko 2016c, 4). 'Because of everything that has recently taken place in Ukraine, many of us have lost our familiar circle of friends or our families,' reads the description of the Facebook group: 'Every day we meet wonderful people — enchanting volunteers and fearless courageous fighters, who, unfortunately, are alone. Precisely for this reason we decided to create this group of acquaintances, both romantic and friendly. Everyone deserves happiness!' (ATOshni znayomstva 2019). In fact, after a year, five couples had been married, and today the group has over 82,000 members.

In short, from the beginning of the war in Donbas, Dnipro's role in the conflict has been deep and wide. It has sent troops to the front and served as a base for military operations. It has taken in IDPs and provided them with housing and elementary necessities. Its lawyers and advocates have helped veterans and victims receive legal status and monetary compensation. Its hospitals have saved the lives of the injured, and its psychologists have comforted the distressed. Finally, it has been a place of leisure — and even love — for demobilised soldiers, some of whom even met their future spouses in the city. And all these elements coalesced into the frequently used metaphor that Dnipro is the 'outpost of Ukraine,' both the defender of the state and the protector of the most vulnerable victims of the conflict in the east.

ATO Museum: Shock

Meanwhile, Dnipro's artists, curators, and filmmakers also have begun to integrate the region's post-Maidan identity into its public spaces, and the visual narratives that engage the 'outpost' metaphor similarly register a wide range of responses to the war, including shock (the ATO Museum), solemnity (Heroes' Square), and satire (the street art of Zdes Roy).

In February 2016, a group of activists and veterans began to collect artefacts from the front with the hopes of curating an exhibition about Dnipro's role in the war. After storing them in various garages around the city for months, they were allowed to put many of the objects on display in May in a park adjacent to the Dnipro National History Museum, which became the open-air museum *Shyakhami Donbasu* (Following the Roads of Donbas). 'In the exposition we showed everything that you really could see in the zone of military activity,' said Vladislav Sologub, a veteran and volunteer who helped create the 1,000-square-meter space: 'We tried to cram in as much as possible — from the ruins of the airport and the half-destroyed bus stop to elements of a fortification' (Muzei ATO v Dnepre 2016).

As a result, 'Following the Roads of Donbas' is a shocking space, one that brings the chaos, destruction, and violence from the front to the centre of Dnipro (see figure 5.3). Street signs are snapped off at right angles. City signs are peppered with bullet holes. Rusted out sheets of metal are penetrated by shrapnel. The decapitated turret of a T-64 tank used in the defence of the Donetsk airport languishes on the ground. A damaged medical evacuation vehicle used to transport the wounded from the battlefield is missing doors. A hastily assembled army checkpoint is the only structure that offers refuge from the chaos on the streets of Donbas. Inside the checkpoint, a message scrawled by a soldier on one of the walls tells us that *boyatsya bessmyslenno* ('it's pointless to be afraid'). On the ground, an overturned table lays on its side, an improvised extra layer of protection against errant bullets (see figure 5.4).

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

In Catherine Wanner's study of how the Euromaidan Revolution protests and war in Donbas are 'made material in urban public space,' she observes that Kyiv's commemorative practices primarily 'foster moods that accentuate tragedy, loss, and sacrifice,' which are designed to stoke feelings of outrage to encourage ongoing support for the war (Wanner 2019, 328). 'People might have died, and the protests might have ended,' Wanner writes, 'but the outrage that fueled them can endure when their deaths are understood in terms of sacrifice in the defence of the nation' (Wanner 2019, 331). We find something similar in the performative disorder of 'Following the Roads of Donbas.' On the one hand, the space transports you to the hellish streets of a Donbas at war, which provokes emotions of fear, disgust, horror, anger, and terror. On the other hand, it forces visitors to image what the streets of Dnipro might look like if the fighting would spill over the border. In doing so, the exhibition transforms Dnipro into Donetsk, if only for a half a block. In this respect, the space consciously constructs the impression of a perpetual – and imminent – threat, one that calls upon its viewers to prevent such a possibility. It also demands the feeling of gratitude towards the soldiers and volunteers who defended the city in the most chaotic days of the war. In fact, the only element within the exhibition that does not bear the signs of violence or trauma is a sculpture, entitled *Vdyachnist* (Gratitude), which represents a young girl from the Donbas offering an apple to an ATO soldier. Nearby, a mailbox installation, *List Soldatu* (A Letter to a Soldier), encourages visitors to mimic the gesture and send a card or a drawing to the front (Muzei ATO Dnipro 2019, 11).

'Following Donbas Roads,' however, was just the first in a series of installations that now has grown into the *Hromadianskyy podvikh Dnipropetrovshchyny v podyakh ATO* (Museum of the Civil Feat of Dnipropetrovshchyna in the Events of the ATO). The museum, in fact, goes by four different names, each of which offers a different interpretive frame for its collection. The first name one encounters when approaching from Yavornytskyy Prospekt (formerly Karl Marx Prospekt) is the Museum of the Civil Feat of Dnipropetrovshchyna in the Events of the ATO, which suggests that the museum's purpose is to chronicle and curate, for a local audience, the variety of ways that Dnipro's residents have changed and been changed by the war. The given English name of the museum, however, tells a different story: the Museum of Russian Aggression in the East of Ukraine. This title indicates that what a (likely foreign) visitor will encounter is not necessarily a positive story about the heroic contributions of the Dnipropetrovsk region, but a negative one about Russia's active military campaigns within Ukraine. Here, the English title implies that the broader region has been victimised by a single external actor. Yet, in much of its own promotional material, the museum often uses yet another name – Ukraine's First ATO Museum – which emphasises that the organisers of the museum were the first to recognise that the material culture of the conflict must be catalogued and preserved for posterity (Ukraine's First ATO Museum 2019). At the same time, it purports to tell the story of the whole Anti-Terrorist Operation, not just the contributions of the Dnipropetrovsk region. Finally, most residents of Dnipro avoid the mouthful that is its official name and are not even aware of its English name; instead, they opt for a shorter, more convenient version of the third title and simply refer to it as the *Muzey ATO* (Museum of the ATO). Again, visitors who arrive expecting to see the story of the entire war in Donbas might come away with the impression that the single most decisive factor in the war was Dnipro.

The ATO Museum opened to the public in January 2017 within a different museum – the Battle for the Dnipro Diorama – which allowed ATO activists to house indoor galleries in its entrance hall. Its central installation is the documentary film *Dnipro – Forpost Ukrayiny* (Dnipro – The Outpost of Ukraine 2017), which weaves together the ways the city has supported the war effort: sending troops, caring for the wounded, and accepting IDPs. Like the open-air museum, the film is a powerful, sensorially overwhelming experience, in part, because it is screened in a 360-degree panoramic theatre that immerses viewers in the traumatic realities of the war. Furthermore, the film makes ample use of point of view shots, which force the viewer into a restricted sensorial environment that creates a specific set of heavy-handed emotional and moral outcomes.

Its opening sequence sets the scene for what is to come. On the centre screen, a Ukrainian soldier on the outskirts of Donetsk hums a Cossack folksong as he solemnly prepares his weapon before battle (see figure 5.5). To the left, mothers and children cheerfully play on a playground in Dnipro. However, the peace and tranquillity are suddenly disrupted when loud bombs begin to fall on the right side of the screen. The viewer spins 180 degrees and sees a series of images of the destroyed Donetsk airport, which is located, we are told, just 240 kilometres from Dnipro. The logic of the sequence is clear: the only thing preventing death and destruction from raining down on Dnipro as well is the age-old resolve of the battle-tested Cossack spirit now embodied in a new generation of Ukrainian warriors.

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

Subsequent episodes build upon this narrative by using point of view shots to shock and then calm the audience. When the film deals with the annexation of Crimea, the theatre goes completely black. Bullets begin to penetrate the darkness on all sides, which creates the feeling that we, the viewers, are taking cover. Not knowing where the shooting is coming from can be disorientating, and the gun shots only grow louder and faster. Suddenly, we are rescued when images of volunteer soldiers running through trenches take us back into the light, and a graphic to the left tells us that over 25,000 citizens of the Dnipropetrovsk region participated in the war. In other words, this sequence dramatizes the motif of Dnipro as the 'city-defender' by first simulating the feelings of vulnerability and helplessness and then portraying the individual volunteers from Dnipro, who restore peace and order.

Another point of view shot puts viewers in the back of a medical evacuation vehicle. As we frantically race down a rural road, bombs nearly miss the van to the left and right, and the driver swerves and breaks to avoid the onslaught. The van eventually reaches a stabilisation point, where we are shown the graphic injuries of the soldier we were transporting: his ankle is so severely broken that we can see the bones penetrating through his skin, and his body is 80 per cent covered in burns (see figure 5.6).

In the foreground, we receive a text message telling us that the most severely wounded are being taken to the Mechnikov Hospital, and we see a helicopter with the soldier arriving in Dnipro, where a massive line of Dnipro residents have signed up to donate blood, some of which goes to the wounded soldier undergoing an operation to repair a badly mangled arm. Here, Dnipro's identity as the 'city-hospital' is fully on display, for the montage of the film shows, literally, how the blood of the city flows through the veins of the soldiers defending the nation.

Another sequence places the viewers in the back seat of a car that is slowly approaching a checkpoint out of Donbas. The car ahead of us is stopped, and its driver is being violently dragged out at gun point (see figure 5.7). The young couple in the front seat is anxious but composed, and if you turn 180 degrees, you notice that you are sitting next to a young girl, who nervously awaits the moment when we must face the guards. Our driver steps out of the car to show the contents of the trunk, and we wait, in silence, fixated on the anguished face of his young wife. Suddenly, he returns to the car, we drive away from the checkpoint, and the anxiety transforms into ecstasy as the car crosses into the Dnipropetrovsk region, where it is welcomed by the volunteers of Dnipro Aid. Again, the emotional resolution of a tense, sensorially immersive scene occurs when you are rescued by the people of Dnipro.

However, the metanarrative of the ATO Museum comes not from its content but its context. Its outdoor exhibition is located across from the tomb of the historian of the Zaporizhzhyan Cossacks Dmytro Yavornytsky. Its indoor galleries share space with the Soviet-era Battle of the Dnipro Diorama, a massive immersive work that tells the story of the Red Army's liberation of Ukraine from Fascist control. Thus, the spatial juxtaposition of the ATO Museum and these other symbolic spaces analogizes Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression to the continuation of the Zaporizhzhyan Cossacks' fight for freedom against the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany. 'The whole museum is one big symbol of Ukraine,' one museum worker commented: 'And like there once was a battle for the Dnipro, there is also a battle for the Dnipro today – it is our deed. And if Dnipro is standing – Ukraine is standing' (Desyateryk 2018).

In this sense, *Dnipro – Forpost Ukrayiny* fully dramatises the central narratives of the 'outpost' metaphor, and like 'Following the Roads of Donbas,' it is designed to provoke feelings of shock, fear, and horror at the atrocities committed in the Donbas and gratitude, indebtedness, and awe at the sacrifices of Dnipro and the Dnipropetrovsk region. However, in doing so, it risks alienating viewers with connections on the wrong side of the simplified binary between the heroism of the 'good' citizens of Dnipro and the barbarism of the 'bad' residents of Donbas. Its reliance upon an 'emotional narrative' to deliver 'affective engagement,' argues Elżbieta Olzacka (2019), 'hinders an objective assessment of the events.'

Heroes' Square: The Solemn

While the ATO Museum primarily relies on shock, *Skver heroyiv* (Heroes' Square) offers a more solemn approach to the constellation of associations contained in the 'outpost' metaphor. Formerly Lenin Square, this bright, well-maintained park surrounds the Dnipropetrovsk regional State Administration (OGA). This space played an important

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

role in the decisive days of the winter of 2014, when the square was briefly weaponised by the Yanukovych-appointed governor, who ordered the park to be flooded by fire hoses out of the fear that protestors would storm the building (Mitingi 2014; Dnepropetrovskuii OGA 2014). In the frigid January winter, the watered ended up freezing, which transformed the square into a massive, frozen lake that some compared to 'a moat around a medieval castle' (Andriushchenko 2014a). But today, the same space that once protected the Yanukovych administration now celebrates the heroism of those who fought to protect the city from his regime.

Heroes' Square features a series of distinct commemorative spaces whose narratives spill into one another during a stroll. The most prominent of them is easily Rocket Park (*Park raket*), a monumental installation that opened in October 2013. Rocket Park is an overt celebration of Dnipropetrovsk's Soviet industrial past. It features three rockets: the 8K11, the 8K99, and the Cyclone-3, which rises nearly 130 feet into the sky. They represent the city's role in ushering the Soviet Union from the military threats of the Cold War to the peaceful exploration of space (Park raket 2013; see figure 5.8).

While admiring the rockets, you immediately notice a long series of stands that contain the names, photographs, and memories of the hundred protestors shot on the Maidan and to those who lost their lives fighting in the Donbas (see figure 5.9). This is the *Aleya pamyati heroyiv Nebesnoyi Sotni i ATO* (Alley to the Memory of the Heavenly Hundred and ATO Heroes). This public memorial is a series of interconnected cork boards, which allow residents to staple or tack their own tributes to the fallen. When many of the pictures and poems began to disintegrate over time, volunteers systematically replaced these sections with weather-resistant placards (Alleia geroev 2017).

The Alley of Heroes is a visually fluid space without a single aesthetic centre. But precisely because this is a more democratic memorial, it has become a type of sacred space passionately protected by the residents of the city. In her study of Kyivan memorials, Wanner observed that 'ritualized mourning converts mundane things initially placed around the shrines to protestors (such as paving stones, gas masks, tires, helmets, and make-shift shields) into sacred objects to evoke a righteous, yet violent, David and Goliath-like struggle' (Wanner 2019, 332). Similarly, when vandals tore down pictures from some of the stands in the Alley of Heroes, Yuriy Golik, an adviser to the Dnipropetrovsk governor, turned to Facebook to furiously rebuke the *negodiai* (wretches), calling them *nelyudey* (nonhumans) who should be 'immediately sent to the front' (Vandaly 2017).

Among the most poignant memorials are those dedicated to the Ilyushin Il-76 plane that was shot down outside of Luhansk on 14 June 2014; 40 of the crew were paratroopers who belonged to the 25th Separate Dnipropetrovsk Airborne Brigade (see figure 5.10). Framing their portraits is a text that reads, 'paratroopers do not die, they go to heaven.' Below the placards stands an anonymous handwritten poem, a lyric written in the voice of one of the paratroopers to his wife. Its final stanza reads:

Know that our company has not disappeared.
We all ascended to heaven.
For after all we're not simple foot soldiers,
We can handle any height.

*Знай, не исчезла наша рота,
Мы все на небо вознеслись,
Ведь не простая мы пехота,
Нам по плечу любая высь* (see figure 5.11).

Here, the poem inverts the tragedy of a plane crash and replaces it with an image of a triumphant flight into heaven, a sentiment that echoes the motif of flight across the alley in Rocket Park. In other words, the symbolic logic of Rocket Park creates a spatial and political hierarchy that draws in the Alley of Heroes: at the bottom are the smaller Cold War ICBMs representative of violence and destruction, the taller, Brezhnev-era Cyclone-3 symbolizing peaceful space exploration reaches higher in the sky, but the self-sacrifice, courage, and heroism of the post-Maidan paratroopers far supersedes the reach of the now-useless rockets of the past and ascend all the way to heaven.

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

In May 2017, the city opened a second section of the alley — the Heroes' Memorial — which is specifically designed to remind foreign visitors about Dnipro's contributions to the defense of Ukraine (Lyakh 2017; see figure 5.12). Set off from the main sidewalks of the park, the Memorial evokes the feeling of a graveyard, for the names and portraits of those who lost their lives are printed on illuminated black glass panels in the dimensions of a standard tombstone. The panels remind passers-by that 'Heroes Never Die' in English, French, German, Hebrew, and Ukrainian (see figure 5.13). In the centre of the Memorial is cobblestone preserved from Kyiv's Hrushevskyy Street, which materially transfers the spirit of the revolution from the streets of the capital to the outpost of the country. Likewise, its central panel draws attention to the fact that Sergei Nigoyan, a resident of Dnipro, was one of the Heavenly Hundred and among the first to give his life.

Furthermore, the Heroes' Memorial is in dialogue with yet another commemorative space, the Monument to the Victims of the Chornobyl Catastrophe (see figure 5.14). The monument consists of an imposing arch, which represents the billowing nuclear explosion, and a bird that has fallen from the sky because of its wing scorched by the radiation. The Chornobyl memorial registers the irreparable damage done to the nation through an image of a grounded, disfigured bird; however, through the juxtaposition and intermingling of spaces, the eternal flight of the Heavenly Hundred and Dnipro's paratroopers symbolizes the resurrection of a national spirit brought down by tragedies of the past. In this respect, Dnipro's Heroes' Square manages to appropriate and re-signify the other memorials to the city's past. Without the war in Donbas, the park would end up mourning the city's lost Soviet glory and the great national tragedy of the nuclear disaster. Instead, the Alley of Heroes memorialises the sacrifices of the city in a way that makes them inheritors and redeemers of the country's past triumphs and tragedies. Recently, the state oblast administration added one more symbolic space to Heroes' Square: an inclusive playground for children with disabilities.

'Many people associate Dnipro with the space industry or with the ATO Museum,' said Yuriy Holik: 'We really want the city to become a certain type of space where people can socialise and interact. We're building an inclusive park for this.' (Dnepr stanovitsia inkluzivnym 2018). Here, Holik's comment reveals the essential tension within the 'outpost' metaphor: whether the civic pride of Dnipro comes from its offensive role in fighting off Russian aggression or its humanitarian role in protecting the vulnerable.

Zdes Roy: The Satirical

Holik isn't alone in his desire to play up Dnipro's welcoming side. If you walk to the corner of Heroes' Square, you will see one of the most prominent murals of the Dnipro-based graffiti artist Zdes Roy, whose work may exert the single biggest influence on the urban landscape of the city. While Roy's early work was an open challenge to the city's authority, he began to take up civic themes when the war in Donbas broke out, including what is perhaps his best-known mural *A Girl Alone* (see figure 5.15).

The mural depicts a young girl sitting atop an abandoned brick house, now overrun by weeds. In the foreground, a quote by Christian Morgenstern in Ukrainian translation reads: *Dim — tse ne tam, de ty zhyvesh, a tam, de tebe rozumiyut* (Home is not where you live, but where you're understood). *A Girl Alone* was sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and is a tribute to Dnipro's willingness to open its arms to the IDPs (Roy 2018). The mural succeeds in acknowledging the longing for home, sadness, and trauma of the city's residents who had not planned to move to Dnipro, a narrative often lacking in other representations of the city's heroism.

In his other work, Roy's Dnipro murals represent high-minded civic subjects using visual language taken from lowbrow or popular culture, often with an aesthetic that echoes another Roy — the pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. In August 2016, with a commission from the MEDINUA clinic he completed a 23-foot mural on Dmytro Yavornytsky Prospect *Supermural* (see figure 5.16) dedicated to Dnipro's superhero doctors;

The idea was to represent the superpowers of doctors, who sometimes accomplish impossible things for humanity,' he said. 'This art is dedicated to all the doctors, who, daily, or at least one time in their lives, have saved somebody's life (Roy 2019b).

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

While the theme of *Supermural* undoubtedly resonates with Dnipro's post-Maidan spirit, Roy is hesitant to verge into chest-thumping patriotism, and he rarely frames his own work within the context of the war. In fact, much of his street art consists of covering up Dnipro's post-Soviet blight with brightly coloured images inspired by Western pop culture. He transformed an unsightly dumpster on the city's famous embankment into a minion from the film *Despicable Me* (Bondarenko 2016). He painted over the old gates of a children's club using images from the *Simpsons* (see figure 5.17). And he enlivened the unadorned side of an outbuilding with Walter White and Jesse Pinkman from the TV series *Breaking Bad* (see figure 5.18). While none of these murals explicitly engage with the political realities of contemporary Dnipro, a closer look reveals that they share a common colour palate: the yellow and blue that emerged overnight on seemingly every surface of the city, like the *Parus* Hotel. In fact, the *Simpsons* mural was commissioned by the children's club, whose only demand was that the art object should have 'a yellow colour scheme' (Roy 2019a). Here, we can see the slippage between the patriotic desires of the client, who ordered a mural in one of the national colours, and the aesthetic choices of the artist, who opts for an image from Western, not Ukrainian, popular culture. Roy's Facebook and Instagram accounts include several examples of his use of yellow and blue for political purposes, including his graffiti of a *tryzub* in neon colours on a Dnipro underpass and his mural behind the entrance sign to Mariupol painted in patriotic colours (Roy 2014; Roy 2016a).

If Dnipro signalled its new identity by transforming its drab Soviet-era urban spaces into Ukrainian flags, street art by Roy plays with and parodies this phenomenon. And we can understand the meanings of this parody in several internally contradictory ways. On the one hand, since the Ukrainian national colours represent fields of grain and a clear blue sky, the paradigmatic landscape from the Ukrainian steppe, his murals may imply that Ukraine has always been an integral part of the Western visual landscape (see figure 5.19); it just took the threat of war and the surge in local patriotism to create the conditions to see it.

Similarly, we might also view this gesture as Roy inserting Ukraine into Western mass culture, perhaps just as the Euromaidan Revolution has compelled the country to turn to Europe and the United States. Yet, that his favourite archetypes tend to be drawn from American consumer culture suggests a critical attitude towards the commodification of Dnipro's awakening of civic nationalism, even as he has fundamentally altered the visual language of Dnipro's urban landscape. 'My work used to be patriotic. I tried to support this theme as much as I could so that people wouldn't forget what is happening in the east,' he said: 'But with time my opinions changed. I heard a lot from friends and acquaintances that were in the hot spots in the Donbas. And things there are not like they represent it in the media. A lot of what is happening in the war is business, and local people are suffering because of it' (Roy 2019c). Thus, read from this perspective, Roy's thesis is the following. The yellow and blue that has covered the city and has inspired patriotic fervour is no different than the chemically pure meth served up by Walter White and Jesse Pinkman: once you take a hit, you're hooked, but the high is ephemeral, and behind all of it is a dangerous gang of self-interested criminals making money off everyone.

Conclusion

In short, there were many factors that influenced Dnipro's sudden surge of patriotism and embrace of its new identity as the 'outpost of Ukraine.' Much has been made of Kolomoysky's role in financing the Anti-Terrorist Operation, in part as a way of protecting his business holdings and expanding his political influence; however, the spontaneous and creative ways that residents of the city picked up and developed this identity should not be seen as an epiphenomenon of the Privat Group's business strategy. The 'outpost' metaphor became an organisational principle for a wide range of civic activity: serving in the army, providing shelter to the homeless, caring for the wounded, creating spaces to remember the dead, and producing images to inspire the city to turn towards a brighter European future and away from its Soviet past.

References

Alleia Geroev Nebesnoi Sotni v Dnepre teper' budet novyi vid. (2017). www.Gorod.dp.ua, 20 February. <http://bit.ly/2PbMLNO>

Andriushchenko, Elena. (2014a). 'Skver vozle Dnepropetrovskoi oblgosadministratsii kommunal'shchiki prevratili v

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

ozero.' *Facebook*, 20 February. <http://bit.ly/33UJAHS>

Andriushchenko, E. (2014b). 'Ia snova begu ot voyny.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 9 July.

Andriushchenko, E. (2014c). 'Mir – eto [?][?].' *Dnepr vechernij*, 24 July.

Andriushchenko, E. (2014d). 'Voin Svety.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 1 August.

Andriushchenko, E. (2014e). '45 dnei v ATO.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 22 August.

Andriushchenko, E. (2015a). 'Na chuzhoi storone zakona.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 15 January. <https://bit.ly/2My4nlh>

Andriushchenko, E. (2015b). 'V poiskakh mira.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 29 January.

Andriushchenko, E. (2015c). 'Masterskaia schast'ia.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 30 January.

Andriushchenko, E. (2015d). 'Liubit', kogda tebia nenavidiat.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 13 February.

Andriushchenko, E. (2016a). 'Lekary po telefonu.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 11 February.

Andriushchenko, E. (2016b). 'Net pereselentsev, est' – my.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 16 February.

Andriushchenko, E. (2016c). 'Koval' – kuznets schast'ia.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 24 March.

Andriushchenko, E. (2017). 'Cherez Dnepr — na voynu.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 2 March.

Andriushchenko, E. (2018a). 'Donetskaia plennitsa.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 28 February. <http://bit.ly/2Bxq4vO>

Andriushchenko, E. (2018b). 'Bez doma — vne zakona.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 5 July. <http://bit.ly/2o7LjKH>

ATOshni znayomstva. (2019). *Facebook*, 9 October. <http://bit.ly/33MS9v1>

Babenko, Iuliya. (2017). 'Petro Poroshenko: 'Vklonyayus dniptyanam za te, shcho misto zalyshayetsya holovnym forpostom Ukrayiny.' *Nashe misto*, 2 March.

Baczynska, Gabriela. (2014). 'Kiev pins hopes on oligarch in battle against eastern separatists.' *Reuters*, 23 May. <https://reut.rs/33okJCO>

Bilan, Olga. (2016). 'Bolnitsa Mechnikova snova zhdet donorov krovi.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 18 February. <https://bit.ly/2OMKBUV>

Bilovytska, Nataliya. (2015). 'Dnipropetrovshchyna – tse forpost Ukrayiny.' *Uryadovyi kuryer*, 28 March. <https://ukurier.gov.ua/uk/articles/dnipropetrovshina-ce-forpost-ukrayini/>

Bondarenko, Anna. (2016). 'Strit-art po-dnepropetrovski.' www.Gorod.dp.ua, 18 April.

<http://bit.ly/2Jo3NEN>

Boris Filatov: Liudi rozdeleny neponimniem, a tseli u vsekh pokhozhi. (2014). *Dnepr*

vechernij, 28 April. <http://bit.ly/32BFZoz>

Buckholz, Quentin. (2019). 'The Dogs That Didn't Bark: Elite Preferences and the Failure of Separatism in Kharkiv

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

and Dnipropetrovsk.' *Problems of Post-Communism*, 66, 3: 151–160.

Bureiko, Nadiia and Teodor Lucian Moga. (2019). 'The Ukrainian-Russian Linguistic Dyad and its Impact on National Identity in Ukraine.' *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71, 1: 137–155.

Desyateryk, Dmytro. (2018). '“Poky stoyit” Dnipro – stoyit’ Ukrayina’: Rozмова pro pershyy u krayini Muzeo ATO.’ *Den*, 21 June. <http://bit.ly/2P9Jw9E>

Dnepr stanovitsia inkluzivnym: v skvere Geroev stroiat park dlia detei s osobymi potrebnościami. (2018). *Dnipropetrovska oblastna derzhavna rada*, 29 March. <http://bit.ly/35VyZ81>

Dnepropetrovsk 28 iunia fleshmob gostinitsa ‘Parus.’ (2014). *Novyny Dnipropetrovska*, 4 July. <https://bit.ly/2VlCuPt>

Dnepropetrovskuiiu OGA opiat obnesli koliuchehei provolokoi. (2014). *Unian*, 20 February. <https://bit.ly/2IPWXHP>

Dnepropetrovtsy ‘zazhgut’ gerb na nedostroennom otele ‘Parus.’ (2014). www.Gorod.dp.ua, 23 June. <https://bit.ly/2qc4VVj>

Dnipro – Forpost Ukrayiny. (2019). Directed by Yevhen Titarenko and produced by Natalia Khazan. <http://bit.ly/2plx7yJ>

Dnipropetrovskyy Parus rozmalyuvaly yak derzhavnyy prapor. (2014). www.freeDnipro.tv, 14 July. <http://bit.ly/2JIZxpq>

Ekspolonena boyovykiv ‘DNR’ zayvlyaye pro vyavlennia poztiashky na podvirya svoho budynku na Donechchyni. (2019). *Radio Svoboda*, 23 October. <http://bit.ly/33T4uxN>

Fanaty ‘Dnepra’ obratilisk komande. (2014). *Dnepr vechernij*, 9 May. <https://bit.ly/2pouXnU>

Fanaty ‘Dnepra’ preobrazili gostinitsy ‘Parus.’ (2014). www.Gorod.dp.ua, 5 May. <https://bit.ly/2oKdTsq>

Forpost-Centre. (2021). www.forpost-centre.org

Gerasimov, Ilya. (2014). ‘Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum.’ *Ab Imperio*, 3: 22–44.

Gostinitsy ‘Parus’ razrisovali v tsveta gosudarstvennogo flaga. (2014). www.Gorod.dp.ua, 14 July. <https://bit.ly/2Mdv4f5>

Iasko, Vlada. (2019). ‘Simvol ushedshei epokhi: istoriia zabrosheanoi gostinitsy ‘Parus’ v Dnepre.’ www.opentvmedia, 20 September. <https://bit.ly/31h9zy2>

Ivanov, Ivan. (2017). ‘Master graffiti Zdes Roy: Goni k svoei mechte, kak poezd.’ www.49000.com.ua, 28 April. <http://bit.ly/2N4xVGa>

Kabanets, Yuliya. (2019). *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Kyiv: Lost in the City or Agents of Change? A Case Study of Refugees in Towns*. Medford, MA: Feinstein International Centre, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. <https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/RITReportKyivUkraine.pdf>

Kissinger, Henry A. (2014). ‘To Settle the Ukraine Crisis, Start at the End.’ *Washington Post*, 5 March. <https://wapo.st/2P5C3sj>

Kulick, Orysia. (2019). ‘Dnipropetrovsk Oligarchs: Lynchpins of Sovereignty or Sources of Instability?’ *The Soviet*

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

and *Post-Soviet Review*, 46, 3: 352–386.

Kuznetsova, Irina, Mikheieva, Oksana, Gulyieva, Gulara, Dragneva, Rilka, and Mykhnenko. Vlad. (2018). *The Social Consequences of Population Displacement in Ukraine: The Risks of Marginalization and Social Exclusion*. Birmingham: The University of Birmingham.

Liakh, Kristina. (2017). 'V Dnepre otkryli unikal'nuiu Alleiu pamiaty geroev ATO.' *Informator*, May 12. <http://bit.ly/2JeCRaK>

Likarnia Mechnykova. (2019). 'Pro nas.' www.Mechnikova.com. <https://bit.ly/2p0RzuN>

Mitingi v Dnepropetrovske 26 ianvaria: narodnoe veche i protesty vozle OGA. (2014). *Telekanal 34*, 26 January. <https://bit.ly/33ysJku>

Metre, Lauren Van, Steiner, Steven E., and Haring, Melinda. (2017). *Ukraine's Internally Displaced Persons Hold a Key to Peace*, Washington, DC: Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/ukraine-s-internally-displaced-persons-hold-a-key-to-peace/>

Muzey ATO Dnipro. (2019). Dnipro: Muzey ATO.

Muzei ATO v Dnepre: ekskursiia po 'goriachim tochkam' Donbassa. (2016). www.vgorode.ua, 27 May. <http://bit.ly/31llrZh>

Nitsova, Silviya. (2021). 'Why the Difference? Donbas, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk After Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution.' *Europe-Asia Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1912297>

O'Loughlin, John, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov. (2017). 'The Rise and Fall of 'Novorossiya': Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeastern Ukraine.' *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 33, 2: 124–144.

Oliinyk, Anna and Taras Kuzio. (2021). 'The Euromaidan Revolution, Reforms and Decommunisation in Ukraine.' *Europe-Asia Studies*, 73, 5: 807–836.

Olzacka, Elżbieta. (2019). 'The ATO Museum in Dnipro – Between Trauma and Propaganda.' *Transregional Academies*, 3 July. <http://bit.ly/2JdwEfa>

Park raket otkrylsia v Dnepropetrovske. (2013). *Novosti kosmonavtyki*, 30 October. <http://bit.ly/35Zxbeo>

Peremirie: za nedeliu – 17 ranenykh so strashneishimi travmami. (2015). *Dnepr vechernij*, 23 October. <https://bit.ly/2BrgHhb>

Petrak, Dmytro. 'Yak Mariupol' peretvoryvsya na 'forpost Ukrayiny.'" www.depo.ua, 25May.

<http://bit.ly/33ObE6j>

Pinkham, Sophie. (2016). *Black Square: Adventures in Post-Soviet Ukraine*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Plokyh, Serhii. (2015). *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books.

Poroshenko, Petro. 2018. 'Kharkivshchyna – spravzhnii forpost Ukrayiny.' *Facebook*, 30 September. <http://bit.ly/35OGfml>

Portnov, Andrii. (2014). 'Dnepropetrovsk. Tam, gde nachinaetsia Ukraina.' *Gefter*, 27 June. <http://bit.ly/2P7AH0k>

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

Portnov, Andrii. (2015a). 'The Heart of Ukraine'? Dnipropetrovsk and the Ukrainian Revolution.' In: Andrew Wilson ed., *What Does Ukraine Think?* London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 62–71. https://ecfr.eu/publication/what_does_ukraine_think3026/

Portnov, A. (2015b). 'Post-Maidan Europe and the New Ukrainian Studies,' *Slavic Review*, 74, 4: 723–731.

Portnov, A. (2016). 'Chomu Kharkiv i Dnipropetrovsk ne staly Donetskom i Luhanskom?' *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 4 February. <https://www.istpravda.com.ua/%20chapters/2016/02/4/148912/>

Pravozakhystna Hrupa Sich. (2019). 'Istoriya ta misiya.' www.sich-pravo.org. <http://bit.ly/35V4NtO>

Rybalchenko, Vladimir. (2015). 'Dnepropetrovshchina ostaetsia forpostom ukrainskosti.' *Golos Ukrainy*, 28 March. <http://www.golos.com.ua/rus/article/253324>

Romanenko, Yuriy. (2014). 'Ukraina – forpost ili most?' *Dnepr vechernij*, 12 November. <https://bit.ly/2MiDMZp>

Sakwa, Richard. (2015). *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. New York: I. B. Tauris.

Stoliarova, Larisa. (2014). 'Pomoch ranenym.' *Dnepr vechernij*, 28 May. <https://bit.ly/2W1mGCP>

Roy, Zdes. (2014). 'Tryzub.' *Instagram*, 29 September.

Roy, Z. (2016a). 'Mariupol City.' *Facebook*, 30 July.

Roy, Z. (2016b). 'Segonia chetverg, operatsionnyi den.' *Facebook*, 26 August.

Roy, Z. (2017). 'Red Neck Style.' *Instagram*, 16 May.

Roy, Z. (2018a). 'Mural dlia OON.' www.Zdesroy.com, 26 July.

Roy, Z. (2018b). 'Heisenberg Coffee Lab.' www.Zdesroy.com, 26 July.

Roy, Z. (2019a). 'Simpsons.' www.Zdesroy.com.

Roy, Z. (2019b). 'Supermural.' www.Zdesroy.com.

Roy, Z. (2019c). WhatsApp message to Nicholas Kyle Kupensky, 23 October.

Rychkova, Tatiana. (2016). 'My obespechim bolnitsu im. Mechnikova sovremennym oborudovaniem i sdelaem ee dostupnoi dlia gorozhan,' *Dnepr vechernij*, 11 July.

To, chto Aleksandr Vilkul vydvynul sebia kandidatom v mery, ia schitaiu eto khoroshei novost'iu, – Leonid Kuchma. (2015). www.Gorod.dp.ua, 11 September. <https://gorod.dp.ua/news/108324>

Ukraine's First ATO Museum. (2019). *Facebook*.

V Dnepre otkryli Tsentri psikhicheskogo zdorovia i travmaterapii Forpost HELP. (2016). www.Gorod.dp.ua, 15 December. www.gorod.dp.ua/news/126234

Vandaly oskvernili Alleiu geroev ATO v Dnepre. (2017). *Dnepr vechernij*, 28 July. <http://bit.ly/2ob7w1h>

Voytsekhovska, T. V. and V. V. Yakushenko, eds. (2018). *Memorial Book of Soldiers from Dnipropetrovsk Region Who Fell in ATO*. Dnipro: ART-PRESS.

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in the Donbas

Written by Nicholas Kyle Kupensky and Olena Andriushchenko

Vperve traditsionnoe podniatie flaga proshlo ne v Kieve, a v Dnepre — Petr Poroshenko. (2018). www.Gorod.dp.ua, 23 August. <https://gorod.dp.ua/news/149476>

Wanner, Catherine. (2019). 'Commemoration and the New Frontiers of War in Ukraine,' *Slavic Review*, 78, 2: 328–335.

Wilson, Andrew. (2014). *Ukraine Crisis: What it Means for the West*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Zahybli hromadyany Ukrayiny za mistsem narodzhennya v mezhakh Ukrayiny. (2021). *Knyha pamyati polehlykh za Ukrayinu*. <http://www.memorybook.org.ua/indexfile/statbirth.htm>

Zhukov, Yuri M. (2016). 'Trading Hard Hats for Combat Helmets: The Economics of Rebellion in Eastern Ukraine,' *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 44, 1: 1–15.

Zhurzhenko, Tatiana. (2014). 'From Borderlands to Bloodlands.' *Eurozine*, 14 September. <http://bit.ly/33OQdIK>

About the author:

Nicholas Kyle Kupensky is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages at the United States Air Force Academy, where he teaches Russian and Foreign Area Studies. His research focuses on the aesthetics of industrial landscapes in Soviet Ukraine, and his work has appeared in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, *Nationalities Papers*, *Ukrayina moderna*, *Muzeinyi vistnik*, *Slovo*, and *H-Ukraine*.

Olena Andriushchenko is an award-winning international journalist from Dnipro, Ukraine, where she wrote for the newspaper *Dnepr vechernii* and was the director of the press centre and anchor of the talk show *The Press Centre Reports* at Open TV Media. She is currently the director of EA Global Media, where she produces the social media talk show *The Ukrainian Dream* and has contributed to *Voice of America*, *Ukrainian People*, and multiple regional and national Ukrainian news outlets.