

Ethnolinguistic Nationalism in Lithuania

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Abstract: *This work considers the role of language in the Lithuanian nationalist movement from the mid-nineteenth century until the creation of the Republic of Lithuania in 1919. It first considers the nature of nationalism as a concept, the construction of national identity, the symbolic role of language in identity construction, and how national identity is operationalized in determining foreign policy choice. It then applies the outlined theories of nationalism to the words and actions of Dr. Jonas Basanavičius, the man widely considered the most influential figure of the Lithuanian national movement. This is done through textual analysis of excerpts from his most influential publication, the Lithuanian-language nationalist periodical Aušra, and his numerous comments on his writings and the Lithuanian national movement. This study proposes that Basanavičius's proposal of language as the defining characteristic of the Lithuanian nation permitted Lithuanian nationalists to succeed in establishing an independent state because language was a uniquely malleable variable that allowed Lithuanians to compete against numerically superior, better historically positioned opposition in the fight for an autonomous national homeland.*

Keywords: nationalism, ethnolinguistic nationalism, Lithuanian nationalism

Introduction

Midway through the nineteenth century, the political landscape of Eastern Europe was in the slow beginnings of a region-wide disturbance. Local intellectuals and political actors, chafing under the assimilationist policies of the Russian Empire, sought ways of finding and asserting independence. The process of independence began slowly, restricted by repressive Russian laws. As opposition coalesced, discussions of independence and opposition gradually shifted from the privacy of upper-class salons to public streets and squares. As is the case with many revolutions that develop over the span of decades, the face of the movements and their espoused aims evolved with each successive generation's leadership and challenges.

The process of challenging Russian rule occurred in a number of ways. New newspapers and publishing groups provided a forum for nascent nationalist literature and gave opposition figures the opportunity to spread anti-Russian rhetoric to a wide audience. Historians and writers revisited their countries' histories and reinterpreted historical facts to create and support new nationalist narratives. Initially, due to a ban on printing in local languages, these discussions used Russian. Activists first challenged for the right to publish in languages other than Russian, then later fought to include local languages in early education. As the communities of Eastern Europe became linguistically separate, the direction of the independence discourse changed; the revolutionaries who established the first independent modern Lithuanian state in the twentieth century conceived of their community and language in terms fundamentally different from those of their progenitors. No longer did non-Russian Eastern European groups desire greater autonomy within the existing framework, but rather sought a new, independent system.

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The opposition movements that began in earnest in the early nineteenth century would see the dissolution of the Russian Empire and led to the foundation of national identities that exist to this day. In analyzing this period, scholars frequently focus on predominantly political and social concerns. Language, if discussed at all, is often presented as an epiphenomenon of cultural changes driven by political movements and concerns. This, however, undervalues the symbolic value of language in the construction of group identity. Indeed, language is, in many ways, the most malleable symbolic driver of nationalist movements.

This work employs a constructivist approach to analyze the role of language in the Lithuanian nationalist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century until the establishment of the Republic of Lithuania in 1918. It focuses specifically on the work of “the father of the Lithuanian nation,” Jonas Basanavičius, and the nationalist periodical he wrote and edited, *Aušra*, during the period of Russia’s press ban against the Lithuanian language. Basanavičius and *Aušra* have been chosen as areas of particular focus because Basanavičius was involved in every step of the Lithuanian independence process, from negotiating the nature of the national identity itself to negotiating for the creation of an independent state.

It is important to note that I am not suggesting that language is the single dominant driver of national movements; rather, I am asserting that language has a more complex role in influencing group identity than it has previously been granted in the scholarship of nationalism and that it played a unique role in Lithuania’s development from a disjointed minority nationality into a modern state. It is also important to note that, in the context of nationalism, the idea of the language’s uniqueness can be real or perceived, for if an actor perceives that their language is unique and assigns their speech group a unique perspective and then acts on that assumption, whether the initial perception was accurate or not does not influence the actor’s course of action. Considering language in this way opens a new avenue through which scholars can understand the growth of ethnolinguistic sentiment in multilingual areas and how that sentiment is operationalized politically.

Theoretical Framework for Nationalism Analysis Identity, Defined and Operationalized

As this study analyzes the effects of language in the creation of national identity and how the results of that process affects foreign policy choice, it is first necessary to define how “identity” is framed. Consistent with Ted Hopf’s definition in *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 & 1999*, identity at its most basic level can best be understood as a form of cognitive shortcut for processing new information.¹ Through defining the Self, an individual is able to better assimilate new information in a meaningfully bounded rational framework with the individual’s value structure as the central point of reference. The values at the center of this framework are negotiated at both the individual and societal levels—the expressions of individual identity shape the creation and recreation of discourse and a social cognitive structure, while the individual’s identity is simultaneously “constrained, shaped, and empowered by the very social products [it has] a hand in creating.”²

¹ Ted Hopf, *International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow; 1959 & 1999*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 2.

² Hopf, *International Politics*, 2.

The mutual exchange between the individual and the larger society in creating discourse and establishing social cognitive structure make the study of identity relevant to understanding a state's (or group's, in the case of Lithuanian nationalist leaders before statehood was achieved) foreign policy choices. Hopf argues that states' positions in the international arena are influenced heavily by domestic politics and cannot be separated from the domestic process of negotiating group identity and establishing a social cognitive structure. This process of defining the Self within the state will inevitably color the state's determination of what traits could be perceived as either threatening or positive in the Other, which could take the form of any other state, group, or organization independent of the Self.

In Hopf's own words, "an individual's identity acts like an axis of interpretation, implying that she will find in the external world what is relevant to [her] identity."³ Additionally, the tendency to find in the external world that which is meaningful to the existing internal identity structures is not necessarily a conscientious decision, but the result of the inherent human desire to maintain order and predictability. This can be as true of states as of individuals, as states will change their perceptions of their neighbors by measuring their neighbors' actions through the paradigm of their own identity.

As the Self on a national level is the result of a web of individual identities interacting, it is best understood as a movement through flux rather than as a fixed, immutable entity. As the Self incorporates new information and is faced with new realities posed by a changing group of Others, it revisits and recreates the discourses that shaped its initial understanding of the relationship with the Other to accommodate the changed situation. In this way, states' identities can change and develop in a manner similar to those of the individuals who compose them.

Of the factors that influence the creation and negotiation of national identity, Hopf asserts that language plays a central role. Language, working in a manner parallel to that of identity, serves as a cognitive tool that provides conceptual categories through which external stimuli can be situated in an intersubjective reality; importantly, Hopf argues that "there is no knowledge of the "real" world outside of [the] categories" supplied by the confluence of identity and language.⁴ This should not be understood as a philosophical position denying the existence of objective reality, but as a statement that an individual cannot step outside of their own identity structure to perceive an entirely objective reality. Similarly, an individual's expression of the objective is limited to the tools provided to them by their linguistic capacities.

Hopf's analysis shows that as the Self incorporates new information into its identity discourse, it will situate Others along a continuum of therapy to nihilation.⁵ At one end of the continuum, an Other in a state of therapy with the Self is judged to be in accordance with the Self's core values and vision for the future; an example of this would be the relationship between the US and the UK—while each state perceives the other as an Other, neither perceives the other as an adversary. On the other end of the continuum, an Other in a state of nihilation in relation to the Self is judged to be incompatible with the Self's values and vision for the future; an example of this would be the adversarial relationship between the US and North Korea, as both states perceive the other to be an existential threat not just physically, but ideologically as well.

As language is one of many variables that resulted in Lithuanian nationalists ultimately pushing to leave the Russian Empire entirely, its impacts ought to be understood as part of a

³ Hopf, *International Politics*, 5.

⁴ Hopf, *International Politics*, 6.

⁵ Hopf, *International Politics*, 8.

greater net of influences rather than in an isolated manner. In an attempt to accomplish this, I focus on whether a greater focus on language as a unifying national element pushed the Lithuanian community closer to a point of nihilation or therapy in regard to their relationship with the Russian Empire, consistent with Hopf's definitions of identity, therapy, and nihilation.

The Nation's Origins

As this study concerns the formation of national identity, it is first necessary to define what is meant by "nation." In his 1983 seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson described the nation as a political community that is simultaneously imagined, inherently limited and sovereign.

The nation is imagined in that it is impossible for all of the members of even a small nation to know (or even heard of) every other fellow-member, yet each member has determined that they share a communal, "horizontal comradeship" felt with equal measure toward all their fellow-members.⁶ Gellner describes the phenomenon of national identity by saying that "Nationalism is not the awakening of nation to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist."⁷ It would be simplistic, however, to reduce invention to fabrication and thus implicitly suggest an inherent falsity to national narratives. Indeed, as Anderson argues, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" in that the members of the community must develop a sense of communal Self through which fellow-members whom they do not know personally may be measured.⁸ The fact of the community being imagined, then, does not cheapen the emotional bonds of the individual to the abstraction of the nation or to their fellow-members.

Anderson argues that the nation is limited in that every nation has a set of finite boundaries (not just territorial, but cultural as well) that separate the Self from the Other.⁹ Additionally, nationalists do not attempt to expand membership in their nation to the entirety of mankind, as would be the case with religious fundamentalists; rather, the nation's boundaries are established and acknowledged by the members of the community. Finally, the nation is sovereign in that its members hold no entity's legal authority as superordinate to that of the nation. Anderson traces the origin of this sovereignty to the separation of church from state in the Enlightenment—as the state's laws were no longer measured by clergy as being adequately or inadequately representative of religious dictates, there became no higher power than that vested in the nation.

The concept of nation is also based in a fundamentally different understanding of the social manifestation of time than the forms of political identity that preceded it. The Church's understanding of time formerly centered on the concept of simultaneity—the conception of past and future existing simultaneously (on the level of consciousness) in an instantaneous present.¹⁰ In this sense, the community, understood primarily through its religious affiliation, existed in a defined moment between past and future. This conception changed over time, however, to an understanding of time as transverse rather than simultaneous. The practical implication of this

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, [Kindle Cloud Reader version], 1983, 5.

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

¹⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24.

was the situation of the nation as a solid sociological entity either moving up or down history, therefore losing much of the immutability inherent in the previous religious conception. With the loss of simultaneity comes an insecurity in the nation's process along the timeline of history, which provides an effective method of inspiring commitment to the nation and participation in it—time does not exist in a stasis, so the nation's members must be committed to advancing the nation towards its zenith.

Central to this change is the cultural and intellectual influence of humanism. As Auerbach explained the changes in Europeans' perceptions of their relation to time and the past, "With the first dawn of humanism, there began to be a sense that the events of classical history and legend and also those of the Bible were not separated from the present simply by an extent of time but also by *completely different conditions of life*. Humanism with its program of renewal of antique forms of life and expression creates a historical perspective in depth such as no previous epoch known to us has possessed: the humanists see antiquity in historical depth, and, against that background, the dark epochs of the intervening Middle Ages...[This made impossible the] re-establishing [of] the autarchic life natural to antique culture or the historical naiveté of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."¹¹

The separation Auerbach describes not only effected post-humanist perceptions of time, but permitted the construction of the imagined past vital to the development of national identity. When the past is conceptualized as having an ethereal

Anderson suggests that these factors, while central to any national movement, were uniquely effective in the nationalisms that reshaped the European political landscape between 1820-1920 in that the recent history of the French Revolution and the revolutionary movements of the American colonies provided a model that allowed European nationalists a great degree of clarity in defining their objectives from the outset of their movements. In Anderson's words, "The 'nation' thus became something capable of being consciously aspired to from early on, rather than a slowly sharpening frame of vision."¹²

Anderson's description of the nation is particularly applicable to this study in that its position of the nation's invented nature (keeping in mind that "invented" in this context does not necessarily connote a cynical falsity) provides an analytical basis from which the process of the Lithuanian nation coming to define itself can be understood.

Ethnonationalism

In the introduction to his collection of essays on ethnonationalism, Walker Connor quoted British statesman Sir Ernest Barker on the origins of the modern nation in the consciousness of the community:

"The self-consciousness of nations is a product of the nineteenth century. This is a matter of the first importance. Nations were already there; they had indeed been there for centuries. But it is not the things which are simply 'there' that matter in human life. What really and finally matters is the thing which is apprehended as an idea, and, as an idea, is vested with emotion until it becomes a cause and a spring of action. In the world of action

¹¹ Auerbach as cited in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25-27.

¹² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 69.

apprehended ideas are alone electrical; and a nation must be an idea as well as a fact before it can become a dynamic force.”¹³

Barker thus describes the nation as an entity that is not essentially determinative, but that is primarily concerned with the self-identification of a people with the image of a group’s past, present, and future. This is relevant in understanding, in Conner’s words, that “political self-expression was a necessary concomitant of cultural consciousness.”¹⁴ In this, Conner suggests that the political will of a people coming to define themselves as a nation is necessarily and intrinsically linked to that people’s sense of cultural being—nationalism is, in this way, the political manifestation of a cultural sense of being.

Traditionally, much scholarship criticized the role of culturally felt history as irrational and therefore not worth considering.¹⁵ Conner refutes this supposition by drawing a distinction between the *nonrational* and the *irrational*—while the irrational actively opposes logic, the nonrational is in no way concerned with the logic of its positions. Conner proposes that nationalism is better understood as a nonrational philosophy than an irrational one; while national actors and members of the nationalist community create imagined histories that are not necessarily reflective of historical fact, they do so to appeal to nonrational motivations rather than to try to fit their country’s history into a rational historical narrative that justifies their political ends. Conner explains this further when he criticizes “the intellectual’s discomfort with the nonrational” as ignoring “the vital distinction between fact and perceptions of fact” by engaging in an uncompromising “search for quantifiable and therefore tangible explanations” of every political movement.¹⁶

To better understand the areas that Conner feels are often overlooked in traditional political science scholarship, Conner suggests the importance of studying forms representative of “deep-felt passions” rather than purely academic sources; these would include poetry and other forms of creative writing, extending to speeches, pamphlets, programs, and other forms of what is often dismissed as nationalist propaganda.¹⁷ Conner notes that it is not important whether the authors of these documents truly believed in the authenticity of what they were espousing; rather, it was important that through their materials, their audiences felt a visceral connection to an imagined past that brought an intangible mass instinct to the point of political activism.

Making an imagined historical antecedent be felt powerfully enough to inspire the masses of the nation to action is a process. Conner describes the early part of this process as the “prenation”—in this stage, the core tenets by which the nation defines itself is in the process of construction and is highly malleable.¹⁸ There is little or no real political power in the prenation, as it exists mostly in the ideological realm and is most frequently constrained to the realm of the intellectuals who propose and develop it as a concept. If the ideals that the nationalist leaders propose find fertile ground in the mass of the population they include in their definition of the nation, then the group begins to move to the classification of “nation,” which Conner

¹³ Baker as cited in Walker Conner, *Ethnonationalism: The quest for understanding* [Kinder Cloud Reader version], 1994, 4.

¹⁴ Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 5.

¹⁵ Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 75-76.

¹⁶ Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 76.

¹⁷ Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 76.

¹⁸ Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 79.

understands as the national consciousness which has attained political power or legitimacy. By making this distinction, Conner creates a space for understanding the reshaping of historical narratives that is so common in nationalist movements. Early nationalist literature, like that of Jonas Basanavicius (which is discussed in greater depth later in this article), ought to be understood as crucial to the definition of the prenation rather than as the cynical twisting of historical fact to support purely political ends.

The process of a prenation becoming a nation depends on the advocates of the prenation's ability to successfully express the prenation's potentiality to develop meaningful political power. On a practical level, and particularly applicable to the discussion of the development of nationalism in Lithuania and the value of the language in that development, Conner also posits that the presence of a definable geographic "homeland" greatly strengthens the connection of the individual to the imagined community;¹⁹ while it is not absolutely necessary that the community have a territory to be a nation with political power (the Jewish community, for example, lacked an internationally recognized territorial component before the establishment of the state of Israel, but nonetheless exerted political influence as a religious nation), the homeland provides a convenient scaffolding about which the more ethereal characteristics of community can be constructed and supported in the prenational stage.

Which characteristics leaders of a homeland prenation consider essential to their group varies situationally, but are, by the nature of the nation, invariably exclusive of populations that may be in the homeland territory but do not fit the prenation's criteria for membership in the as yet realized nation. In general, individuals of ethnonational minorities "manifest substantially less affection toward the state than do members of the dominant group."²⁰ While Conner here specifically refers to minorities within an already established state, the same potential tension can be extended to the nation and prenation. The characteristics the national leaders choose as essential have tremendous power to either accommodate or alienate, depending on each individual in the territory's connection to them. In light of this, language can be considered one of the characteristics most readily lent to accommodating a great number in that the act of speaking a language does not require the adoption of any set of ideals and languages can be learned, therefore allowing the individual to join the majority structure. This was true in the case of Lithuania, where the language played a crucial role in expanding the reach of the nation.

The Role of Printed Language in the Prenation and Nation

In addition to providing a theoretical framework for understanding the origins of national identity and its operational qualities, Anderson also describes the processes through which this identity is first proposed, later propagated, and finally accepted as unequivocal truth. On a practical level, the printing press (propaganda and literature, more broadly) has proven to be the most influential medium for transmitting national sentiment.²¹ Anderson specifically references the Protestant Reformation as a clear example of the influence of print material. Before print-capitalism and greater literacy enabled a wider portion of the population access to literary materials, the Catholic Church was able to consistently defeat any opposition as a result of its centuries-old lines of communication and established hierarchies that enabled quick and

¹⁹ Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 78.

²⁰ Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 81.

²¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 47.

coordinated response to often disjointed, languid opposition. It was not a coincidence that Martin Luther's 1517 challenge to Papal authority (coming shortly after the invention of the printing press) proved to be the first broadly successful movement, as Luther's theses "had been seen in every part of the country within 15 days" of their original posting to Wittenberg's chapel door.²²

In this form of proto-nationalism (understanding religious affiliation as a form of nation), Luther and the Protestant thinkers who followed him unwittingly created a model for future nationalist leaders to follow. Their insistence on publication in the vernacular and distribution to the common man introduced previously marginalized or non-aligned populations to the political equation and thus upset traditional power dynamics, obligating the landholding elite to compete with ideas from the lower classes in ways they had never before had to consider. Concurrent with the sudden increase in power of the printing press, the vernacular language began to be put under greater scrutiny as a shift began to occur away from the conception of language as either a simple local attribute or a mechanism of the state. The example of the Protestant Reformation showed that language could be presented as a core element of group identity: what made Protestants Protestant was that they could read the Bible themselves, and what enabled them to read the Bible themselves was access to material in their vernacular languages.²³

Even in attempting to counter the influence of Protestant publications with publications of their own, the Catholic Church and its aligned nobility contributed to the development of the printed vernacular language as a vehicle for political transformation. Indeed, at the beginning of the printing process, dialects in all European states were innumerable and often unintelligible; in France, for example, it would not be realistic to assume that a speaker of Île-de-France French would understand a speaker from Normandie, or vice versa. As demand for printed material increased, however, the need for a standardized common tongue that would permit distribution of literature to all corners of a country with equal effect rose in kind. Over the course of years of Protestant writings and Catholic rebuttals across the borders of the European kingdoms, a gradual literacy base was being developed in a form of language that was formerly unheard of—a vernacular that was at once at use among the common man and the nobility, and suddenly worthy of appearing in print and being considered as having inherent worth for expressing political concerns.²⁴

As discussed by Conner, the import of the seemingly insignificant propaganda pamphlets that are now recognized as the standard fare of any nationalist movement is truly consequential. Anderson's analysis of the consequences of the Protestant Reformation support Conner's criticism of traditional scholarship as being overly dismissive of propagandist documents—concerning nationalist literature, it is not necessarily what is being said that is of primary importance, but in the way it is being said and to whom. In the case of vernacular languages, the very act of using the language in publication serves as a political statement. The core change that permitted a shift in the perception of language was what Anderson termed "the primordial fatality of *particular* languages and their association with *particular* territorial units"—in other words, the truth language of the Church, considered in its time to have universal significance, was replaced in favor of a significantly more localized form of linguistic identity.²⁵ The

²² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 41.

²³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44.

²⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 41-47.

²⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 45.

vernacular's elevation to the point of being considered appropriate for use when dealing with holy texts marked a fundamental change in the vernacular's perceived prestige.

The Success of Ethnolinguistic Nationalism in Lithuania

As previously discussed, a central theme of nationalist movements is the communal recollection of an imagined past. It is through the elucidation of murky historical patrimony that a nation comes to define itself in its contemporary context; therefore, in examining the development of the nationalism of a particular group, it is first necessary to understand the past from which the group perceived its actions to have arisen.

In the case of Lithuania, the romantic historical past is embodied in the medieval Grand Duchy and the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. For the Lithuanian nationalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these entities came to symbolize the autonomy and self-determination that they felt they were denied as subjects of the Russian Empire, and while they did not seek to recreate the organization (they were fearful of falling under the dominance of the more widely prestigious Poles), both the Grand Duchy and the Commonwealth provided material for the construction of an imagined past.

While there were a number of nationalist writers and publications in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in this section I focus on the work of Dr. Jonas Basanavičius, specifically his early publications in the nationalist journal *Aušra*. I have chosen to analyze Basanavičius and *Aušra* specifically because of the universal acknowledgment of the centrality of both Basanavičius and *Aušra* to the history of the Lithuanian nation.²⁶ Basanavičius is known variably as “the father of Lithuania’s national rebirth” and the “father of the Lithuanian nation,” as he was the first Lithuanian nationalist author to gain a widespread readership. He became the most influential contributor to the discussion of Lithuanian national identity by the time the movement gained a wide following toward the end of the nineteenth century, and *Aušra* was the most widely-distributed publication in Lithuanian during the time of the Lithuanian press ban.

This chapter’s primary focus is not to state the historical facts of the territory that now constitutes the state of Lithuania, but to explain which historical characteristics nationalist leaders found to be valuable to pursuing a nationalist agenda, why those factors were particularly appealing, and how nationalist leaders leveraged those factors for political gain. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to the collection of tribes that inhabited the territory in question during the medieval period as “Lithuanian tribes” to avoid the repetitious “tribes that inhabited the territory of what would become the Lithuanian state,” but these tribes were in no way unified for the majority of their history.

Special attention is paid to language, as this study considers language the most malleable and ultimately influential of the variables that went into forging the national identity that eventually led to the successful establishment of autonomous Lithuanian rule of Vilnius and its environs.

“Lithuania,” from Antiquity through the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

²⁶ Jonas Puzinas, “Dr. Jonas Basanavičius: Founder,” *Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 23(3), 1977, http://www.lituanus.org/1977/77_3_01.htm.

Archaeologists know little of the populations that inhabited the territory that is now Lithuania before the mid-12th century. Most mention of the Lithuanian tribes from this period comes in the form of records from their neighbors (the Danes and Ruthenians in particular), who frequently raided them and demanded tribute from them. There is also mention of Lithuanian territories as having paid tribute to the Kievan Rus in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but no specific characterizations of the people who inhabited these territories exists.²⁷

There is little concrete information, then, to identify the characteristics of the groups that inhabited Lithuanian territory before conversion of the Lithuanian leadership to Christianity; considering this, the nationalists of the nineteenth century made little reference to this period in their later writings, electing to refer to the pre-Christian Lithuanian tribes merely as “the ancients.” The gaps in the historical record, however, begin to be filled in at the time of the coronation of King Mindaugas, who succeeded in uniting the numerous Lithuanian tribes to become the first Grand Duke of Lithuania.

King Mindaugas’s rule provided an ideal beginning point for the construction of a national myth for a variety of reasons. First, Mindaugas was the first Grand Duke of Lithuania—in other words, he was the first to unite the disparate Baltic tribes of the region into one political entity, creating cohesion where there were before few uniting characteristics. Secondly, Mindaugas was Christian and had received official support and recognition from Pope Innocent IV upon his coronation in 1253. In return, Mindaugas and the united Lithuanian tribes participated in a series of crusades against the Tatars. While these campaigns were not militarily significant, they were culturally significant in that they proved Lithuanian commitment to membership in the Christian, Western world (this was particularly strongly felt by Jonas Basanavičius, who is discussed at greater length later). The positive relationship between the Lithuanian tribes and Christendom, however, was short-lived, as the murder of Mindaugas by rival pagan warlords resulted in the almost immediate dissolution of the political unity he brought. Following Mindaugas, the Lithuanian tribes resumed being a fractious group for the next century until they were united by Grand Duke Jogaila in the mid-fourteenth century.²⁸

Although Jogaila was not a Christian at birth, he quickly realized the value of conversion when faced with the possibility of having to face strong crusading armies and having to contend with opposition from the Teutonic knights. Jogaila accomplished the transition into the Christian world through marriage into the Polish royal family.²⁹ With the marriage of Grand Duke Jogaila to Polish princess Jadwiga at Krewo in 1385, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland were united for the first time. Having attained a greater degree of stability through alliance with Poland, Lithuanian leaders could dedicate more time toward legislation and edicts; it is in this period that the precedence of a Lithuanian language as a tool of governance was born.³⁰ Chancery Slavonic was used not only by the common people, but also in the Grand

²⁷ Audrone Bliujenie and Florin Curta, “Exotic lands, quixotic friends: Eastern Lithuania and the Carpathian Basin in late antiquity and the early middle ages (AD c. 380 to c. 620),” *Medieval Archaeology*, 55, 2011, 32.

²⁸ Darius Baronas, “The encounter between forest Lithuanians and steppe Tatars in the time of Mindaugas,” *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 2006, 8.

²⁹ Timothy Snyder, *The reconstruction of nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*, Yale University Press, 2003, 19-25.

³⁰ Aliaksei Kazharski, “Belarus’ entry into international society: Between a small nation-state and big narratives,” *Memories of Empire and Entry into International Society*, 2017, 16-19.

Duchy's royal court, churches, and in all royal edicts. Ironically, the language that Lithuanian nationalists would later claim to be the antecedent to modern Lithuanian was, in reality, a dialect of Ruthenian, and an unimportant one at that—despite later nationalist attempts to characterize Chancery Slavonic as important to the fabric of the Grand Duchy, it was in reality quietly replaced by Polish by the mid-fifteenth century in the royal court. By the time the Lublin Union established the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569, no official government documents were still written in Chancery Slavonic or translated to Chancery Slavonic. The period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth itself contained little material for exploitation by nineteenth century Lithuanian nationalists, as Lithuanian culture was largely subsumed by the more prestigious Polish language and tradition. It wasn't until the final partitioning of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 that the question of a Lithuanian language reemerged on a regional level, as Russian competed with Polish as the language of administration and institutions.³¹

Regardless of the reality of the Grand Duchy's history or Chancery Slavonic's importance, the very existence of the kingdom provided Lithuanian nationalist leaders with the necessary material to construct a narrative of national continuity through antiquity and the middle ages. Certainly, Jonas Basanavičius later seized on this history and joined it to the modern Lithuanian language to foment nationalist sentiment against the Russian Empire.

Characteristics of Lithuanian Territory during Russian Rule

From the time of Russia's participation in the Third Partition of Poland in 1795 until 1863, Russian Imperial rule could be described as lenient by most imperial standards.³² To control the large number of ethnicities and religious identities under Russian authority, the Russian Empire was not initially inclined to attempt enforcing religious homogeneity. While Orthodoxy was certainly preferred, there were no punishments imposed on citizens who were not Orthodox. This was most evident in the presence of large Islamic populations in the Lower Volga region and the tolerance of Lutheranism in the Baltic region. In both of these cases, the Imperial government neither discriminated against nor actively attempted to convert the local populations.

Additionally, the Russian Empire was frequently willing to grant conquered populations a fair degree of freedom in determining local governance; there was a semi-autonomous Catholic Polish Kingdom in areas of present-day Lithuania, Belarus, and Right Bank Ukraine, for example.³³ Initially, then, the Russian Empire was content with maintaining a hands-off style in regards to its possessions abroad.

This stance changed abruptly with the January Uprising of 1863 (Trumpa, 1963). As a large number of participants in the revolution were of Lithuanian origin (and particularly because many of those who had participated in the attempted revolution had served in the imperial army and had previously been considered loyal subjects), Russian authorities immediately looked to curtail the privileges of minority ethnic groups within the Empire to diminish the likelihood of

³¹ Tadeusz Kamusella, "Germanization, Polonization, and Russification in the partitioned lands of Poland-Lithuania," *Nationalities Papers*, 41(5), 2013, 817.

³² Serhiy Bilen'kyi, *Romantic nationalism in Eastern Europe: Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian political imaginations*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012, 8.

³³ Bilen'kyi, *Romantic nationalism*, 5.

revolt or communication between potential collaborators. To target Lithuanians, the Russian government decreed that any printing in the Lithuanian language would be forbidden indefinitely, effectively banning the publication of any nationalist material.³⁴ The relatively sudden change of the Russian government from acting with respect for local languages, religions, and traditions caused a rift between the imperial government and its subjects that would be exploited by nationalist authors deliberately breaking the press ban.

Territorially, most of modern-day Lithuania was not composed by a majority population of Lithuanians. Where Lithuanians did reside was mostly sparsely populated tracts of forested land on the western fringes of the territory along the banks of the Baltic Sea. This fact heavily influenced Lithuanian nationalism and national history: primarily, it rendered any claim to the two major urban centers toward which Lithuanian nationalists aspired, Kaunas and Vilnius, nearly impossible to claim based on population. Ethnic Lithuanians did not compose even a plurality of the population of Vilnius in 1897, well into the first publication and dissemination of Jonas Basanavičius's first works and *Aušra*'s initial period of distribution.³⁵

In addition to the challenge posed by the ethnic composition of the territory in question, Lithuanian nationalists also had to contend with the existing political structure imposed by the Russian Empire. The Russian Empire had initially intended to reduce tension in the highly diverse territory by separating the ethnicities present into separate governorates—notably, the predominately Lithuanian Kovna Governorate's territory did not include Vilnius or any of its environs, and was restricted to the sparsely populated territory in the northern and western stretches of the country. Even the accession of Kaunas as the capital of the Kovna Governorate did not come without opposition from Poles, who formed a sizable minority in the surrounding area and a plurality in the territory to the immediate south.³⁶

The challenges of population and political reality meant that constructing a nationalist narrative based on the claim of a numerically superior population to their inhabited territory untenable. As such, Basanavičius had to focus on less tangible measurements around which a distinctly Lithuanian claim could be organized. In addressing this, language presented a unique opportunity—by establishing the language as the core of Lithuanian identity and presenting Vilnius as the ideal seat of that linguistic community, Lithuanian nationalists were able to negate the importance of population in establishing a claim to Vilnius and Kaunas as rightfully Lithuanian, as there was a sizable minority of Lithuanian speakers in both cities.³⁷

It also helped Lithuanian nationalists that their minority status made the more sizable populations vying for control of the territory, such as the Poles, initially discount the possibility of a legitimate Lithuanian competition. Indeed, the lack of Lithuanian ethnic presence in all of the territory's major urban centers made it hard to conceive of an organized political movement, and few Polish and Russian leaders considered the possibility of unrest or organization in the hinterlands of the north and west reaching Vilnius or Kaunas. This gave Basanavičius and his colleagues a degree of anonymity with which to plan and organize that most nationalist movements do not enjoy: while publishing in Lithuanian was banned and Russian authorities kept tight control of urban areas, little attention was paid to the portions of territory in which Basanavičius was planting the seeds of a Lithuanian nationalism that would come to pose a

³⁴ V. Trumpa, "The 1863 revolt in Lithuania," *Lituanus*, 9(4), 1963, 10.

³⁵ Snyder, *The reconstruction of nations*, 71.

³⁶ Snyder, *The reconstruction of nations*, 71.

³⁷ Jonas Basanavičius, "Aušra, 1," *Aušra*, 1883, 12.

legitimate challenge to Polish and Russian control of Vilnius by the first decade of the twentieth century.

Challenges to Russian Rule and Construction of National Identity Basanavičius's Characterization of the Lithuanian Nation

Of all those who played a part in the construction of Lithuanian national identity, there was no more influential than Dr. Jonas Basanavičius. The depth of his impact on the Lithuanian nation was best expressed by Jonas Puzinas on the fiftieth anniversary of Basanavičius's passing in 1927: "his work was so all-encompassing that it would be impossible to thoroughly cover all aspects of his productive life. It was Basanavičius who rekindled the consciousness of the Lithuanian nation, founded the first truly Lithuanian-language newspaper, *Aušra*, [and] ardently fought for the freedom of his homeland."³⁸

Basanavičius was born in the rural hamlet of Ozkabalai in Vilkaviskis County on 22 November 1852, miles from the border of the present-day Kaliningrad Oblast in Lithuania's southwest corner. After completing a primary education in Lithuania, he travelled to Moscow to enroll in Moscow University's Faculty of History and Philology in 1873 before transferring to the Faculty of Medicine in 1874. This was Basanavičius's first experience of the Russian Empire in a context separate from that of his home county—in his time in Moscow, he met with like-minded Lithuanian students who felt equally out of place in the Russian capital. Together, they began practicing publishing techniques and discussing the effects of the Lithuanian press ban. It was during this stage that Basanavičius began to prioritize the Lithuanian language as a central element of Lithuanian nationalism, although he initially did little to put this sentiment into action, as he passed most of the next two decades travelling through the western portions of the Russian Empire in his professional capacity as a hospital administrator.³⁹

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the region in which Basanavičius spent his childhood was dotted with remnants from the relatively unknown Baltic cultures of antiquity. Basanavičius grew to develop an ideology of connection to the ancient culture he felt the mounds represented and saw the Lithuanians of his day as the mound builders' ethnic progeny. Reflecting on his childhood and its influence on the development of his nationalist ideology, Basanavičius, stated:

"Together with tales about the crusaders [of Mindaugas's era], the mounds held a fascination for me since my earliest days. Close to Ozkabalai, in the fields of Piliakalniai village stands a beautiful mound. Since my youth I had begun paying visits to this large and very beautiful mound, which brooding in an area of untold beauty and peacefulness, stands on the shore of Aista river. In my youth one heard tales of bewitched beautiful maidens imprisoned in the mound; the mound itself was supposedly piled up with hats and baskets...I later became acquainted with the Pajevonis mound, later yet with the Kaupiškis mound, near the Prussian border, and with the mounds at Rudamina, Lakynai, and others. On these hills, I can confidently assert, my Lithuanian consciousness was confirmed."⁴⁰

³⁸ Puzinas, "Dr. Jonas Basanavičius," 1.

³⁹ Puzinas, "Dr. Jonas Basanavičius," 5.

⁴⁰ Basanavičius as cited in Puzinas, "Dr. Jonas Basanavičius," 6.

This connection grew through his young adulthood, inspiring him to begin collecting and recording Lithuanian peasant folklore while pursuing his primary education in the nearby urban center of Marijampole. Given the absence of concrete historical evidence, Basanavičius sought to reconstruct the identities of the ancient “Lithuanians” (what existed in the region was really a connection of tribes that were only connected inasmuch as they were all Baltic and pagan; any unifying nomenclature would suggest a cooperation and mutual recognition that cannot be proven) by exploring the folkloric tradition of the peasantry, where he thought the core of the nation was most purely represented.

In 1882, a unique opportunity presented Basanavičius with the first real opportunity to disseminate his vision for a Lithuanian nation. A new posting in Prague, where there was no ban on writing in the Lithuanian language, allowed him to begin working on what would eventually be published as the first edition of *Aušra* the following year. Basanavičius spent 1882 writing and editing *Aušra*, including a mixture of nationalist essays and a collection of Lithuanian folklore and poetry, the first time many of the stories were written down. Using social connections he had developed during his education, Basanavičius succeeded in having *Aušra* published in Germany before being smuggled into Lithuania by a group that would become known as the “knygnesiai”—the book smugglers.⁴¹

In accomplishing the feat of “rekindling” the Lithuanian nation’s consciousness, Basanavičius recognized the impressive power of the Lithuanian language as a unifying force, and the sophisticated web of book smugglers allowed Basanavičius to spread his message through the territory of Lithuania quickly. The first edition of *Aušra* included an enumerated list of the aspirations of the Lithuanian nation:

- “1. Through the ages our nation had undergone such derision and subjugation, that one can only marvel that it is still in existence today.
2. In the olden days Lithuanians inhabited an area twice its present size; today Lithuania is but a shadow of the ancient state.
3. Today, enlightened men familiar with our life and its tribulations, unanimously state that those neighbors under whose yoke our people live are determined that we, if not today then in a year or two, would become Germans or Slavs.
4. But we are people as good as our neighbors, and we desire to enjoy all the rights endowed to all mankind, just as our neighbors seek them for themselves.
5. Among these rights, the first one would be for Lithuanians in Lithuania to receive their learning and education in Lithuanian schools.
6. Today, we clearly see that foreign-language schools usually turn Lithuanians into foreigners.
7. We ourselves must concern ourselves with contemporary matters.
8. That which we are not offered by the schools, we must supply ourselves.
9. Our primary concern will be to inform other Lithuanians about the events of ancient times and the works of our honorable ancestors, whose works and whose love of our beloved homeland we have forgotten—we ourselves do not now which parents’ children and grandchildren we are.

⁴¹ A.E. Senn, “Tsarist authorities and Lithuanian book-smuggling,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 11(4), 1980, 334-340.

10. If every good son respects his parents, and the parents of his parents, then we too, Lithuanians of today, should follow the good example set by the sons of ancient Lithuania.
11. Therefore, we must first know their ancient lifestyle, their nature, their ancient beliefs—their works, their concerns, their cares.
12. Understanding their lives, we will better understand them, and having understood them, we will understand ourselves.”⁴²

Basanavičius’s list is significant for a number of reasons. First of all, it is a clear statement of the nationalists’ intention to establish Lithuania as a separate nation, even if that goal is not yet translated explicitly into a demand for independent governance. This is apparent from the narrative of dispossession presented in the first item of the list and the characterization of the Lithuanian people as a group who have been illegitimately dispossessed of their rightful, historical territory. In addition to this, Basanavičius suggests an element of miracle in the nation’s survival during the era of its “derision and subjugation.” This lends an aspect of religious legitimacy to the national narrative. The Lithuanian people survived the attempts to dispossess and efface them because, according to Basanavičius, they were meant to survive—the cause of their independence was legitimate and pure, and they are justified in seeking the restoration of what historically had always been theirs. In this way, Basanavičius played on one of the elements Anderson identified as central to the role of the nation in identity formation: the nation as sovereign, imbued with an almost religious reverence and sanctity.

Secondly, Basanavičius identifies a crucial Other to be used as a foil to the Lithuanian identity in the form of “Germans and Slavs.” As the territory Lithuanian nationalists asserted to be theirs was in reality a highly ethnically and linguistically diverse region, Basanavičius and his colleagues recognized the importance of creating a measure of differentiating Lithuanians from their neighbors to such a degree as to justify arguing for political separation. The use of Germans and Slavs as opponents of the Lithuanian nation also reinforced the narrative of dispossession and created a sense of urgency through the threat of encirclement—according to this perception, the fragile, downtrodden Lithuanian nation faced existential threats from all directions, as the Germans tried to claim their ancestral homeland from the west, the Poles from the south, and the Russians from the east. As Hopf outlined in his analysis of Soviet national identity in the mid-20th century, this construction of the Other is vital to the establishment of a stable sense of Self.⁴³

Basanavičius legitimizes his claims of Lithuanian exceptionalism by grounding them in an imagined historical past beginning in antiquity. As previously discussed, the actual historical record is not particularly revelatory of the characteristics of the populations that inhabited the territory that is now occupied by the Lithuanian state—indeed, Basanavičius himself never explicitly defined what the “ancient” Lithuanian society that he felt the modern community ought to aspire actually looked like or did. Here, Conner’s work is valuable in assessing how Basanavičius’s argument proved so influential despite its almost complete lack of historical precedent. For those who identified as Lithuanian nationalists already, the suggestion of continuity with an imagined past (regardless of how contrived or tenuous that connection may be) justified their beliefs in the uniqueness of their community and its right to political expression. For those Lithuanians whom the nationalists sought to convince to join the

⁴² Basanavičius, “Aušra, 1,” 3-7.

⁴³ Hopf, *International Politics*, 7.

nationalist cause, the situating of Basanavičius's struggle for recognition as the most recent development on a national timeline spanning from the Lithuanian tribes' imagined glories through the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lent an air of legitimacy to the campaign for political autonomy. The historical veracity of Basanavičius's interpretation was irrelevant; the nonrational appeal of the narrative was sufficient to inspire action.⁴⁴

From items three through six of the list, Basanavičius explicitly links the survival of the Lithuanian language to the survival of the nation and asserts that attempts to educate Lithuanian children in a language other than Lithuanian constitutes a deliberate attempt to divorce them from their true Lithuanian identity. The very act of not being raised in speaking Lithuanian constituted a threat of turning the future generation of Lithuanians into Germans or Slavs, and fundamental human rights demand that Lithuanians have the opportunity to teach their own youth in schools of their design.

The explicit linking of the nation to the Lithuanian language is also important in that the language is the single concrete detail describing the modern character of the Lithuanian nation presented in *Aušra*. At this point, as the census information showed, there was very little reason to believe that those who identified as ethnic Lithuanians had any legitimate claim to the territory by measure of population.⁴⁵ Moreover, the Lithuanian populations that could be identified were frequently spread wide distances apart and not unified in any meaningful way. Defining membership in the nation linguistically allowed Lithuanian nationalists to bridge geographic gaps between otherwise isolated communities through a claim to linguistic brotherhood. Basanavičius also successfully integrated previously diverse speech communities and varying dialects by writing in a standardized Lithuanian language, the first of its kind. Formerly, there were three distinct dialects grouped under the umbrella of "Lithuanian"—Aukštaitijan, Samogitian, and Samogallian, along with a number of minority dialects spoken in the German-controlled Lithuania Minor.⁴⁶

Aušra's publication and distribution bridged the gaps between these communities by presenting the Lithuanian speech community as unified, despite the reality of its diversity territorially and linguistically. Basanavičius also deftly avoids causing dissent within the Lithuanian community by not giving preference to any single dialect over another—indeed, his construction of a unified Lithuanian language included syntactic elements of the majority Aukštaitijan and Samogitian dialects while preserving the more antiquated lexicon of the dialect spoken in Lithuania minor.⁴⁷ In this way, Basanavičius's writing was closest syntactically to the majority of his readership, while simultaneously offering the opportunity to link the modern creation of a common Lithuanian tongue to an imagined historical past by preserving the older lexicon.

Initially, this strategy was intended to secure Lithuanian nationalists a position in the growing contest for possession, both socially and politically, of Vilnius as a capital for the desired autonomous state. Certainly, there was a legitimate case to be made for small farming communities in isolated provinces to be considered Lithuanian ethnic strongholds; however, ethnic Lithuanians as a percentage of overall population diminished rapidly within cities. As Snyder noted in his discussion of how Lithuanian nationalists came to control Vilnius, "for half a

⁴⁴ Conner, *Imagined Communities*, 75.

⁴⁵ Snyder, *The reconstruction of nations*, 78.

⁴⁶ Snyder, *The reconstruction of nations*, 51.

⁴⁷ Arnoldas Piročkinas, "Jonas Jablonskis—naujų žodžių kūrėjas," *Verba Magistri*, 2000, 2-12.

millennium before [Lithuania's Independence Act], Lithuanian was neither the language of power in Vilnius nor the language spoken by most of its inhabitants...the language spoken in a third of its homes was Yiddish; the language of its streets, churches, and schools was Polish; and the language of its countryside was Belarusian."⁴⁸

The remedy to the reality of trying to organize a numerically inferior population diffused through a wide section of territory was the application of a uniquely malleable principle of linguistic identity. Notably, in none of his writings does Basanavičius go so far as to say that the Lithuanian language is relevant to identity only if an individual grows up speaking it or speaks it as a primary quotidian language—because the language itself is presented as a vessel of national meaning, anyone in the region with the capacity to learn the language has the possibility to be considered a member of the Lithuanian community. Again, Snyder remarks that for Basanavičius and his compatriots, “people in and around Vilnius who seemed to be Poles or Belarusians were Lithuanians who happened to speak Polish or Belarusian. In the right circumstances, ethnographic Lithuania could expand.”⁴⁹ Compared to the national identities against which the Lithuanian nationalists were competing, namely Polish and Belarusian national activists, the Lithuanian model was by far the most flexible and applicable through a wide range of situations.

Through the lens of group identity, Basanavičius also engages in meaningful myth making through the essentialist characterization of the Lithuanian language and his linking it to the medieval and ancient past. In reality, “Lithuanian” was not a single language, but the umbrella term for what was at the time of Basanavičius's birth a wide collection of dialects, not all of which were mutually intelligible.⁵⁰ In fact, the development of a standardized form of Lithuanian was the work of nationalist sympathizer Jonas Jablonskis. In outlining a standard form of Lithuanian, Jablonskis deliberately chose to combine the Western Aukštaitian dialect (spoken in the southwest portion of the country, the same dialect spoken by Basanavičius) with elements of Prussian Lithuanian specifically because each of the two dialects had maintained more archaic phonetic patterns.

Establishing a deliberately archaic-sounding form of the Lithuanian language and framing that language as a link between the Lithuanian community of the nineteenth century and the imagined glories of Lithuania's antiquity proved a highly successful, mobile ideology—within twenty years of *Aušra*'s first publication, the Lithuanian community had been sufficiently organized to inspire the Great Seimas of 1905, which eventually led to Lithuanian nationalists voting to pass the Act of Independence from the Russian Empire in 1918.⁵¹ “When we have turned into dust, if the Lithuanian language stands strong, if through our toils the Lithuanian spirit is restored, then even in these graves we will rest easier, happier.”⁵²

Conclusion

From the time of *Aušra*'s first publication in 1883 to the beginning of the twentieth century, there were few major developments in Lithuanian nationalism. In general, *Aušra*'s

⁴⁸ Snyder, *The reconstruction of nations*, 22.

⁴⁹ Snyder, *The reconstruction of nations*, 52.

⁵⁰ Piročkinas, “Jonas Jablonskis,” 2.

⁵¹ Algis Krupavičius, “Lithuania,” *The Palgrave Handbook of Social Democracy in the European Union*, 2013, 488.

⁵² Basanavičius as cited in Puzinas, “Jonas Jablonskis,” 5.

readership grew slowly but consistently and succeeded in fomenting a desire for Lithuanian political representation. Throughout this time, Basanavičius spent most of his time writing and editing the periodical while organizing salons to discuss issues of Lithuanian identity and to organize plans for exercising opposition to Russian rule.⁵³

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, Basanavičius's consistent efforts had grown the political presence of the Lithuanian community significantly. He was elected by other members of the Lithuanian community to serve as chair of the Great Seimas, a congress of Lithuanian nationalist leaders intended to discuss how to achieve autonomous rule and ensure control of Vilnius as a future capital of an independent Lithuanian state. While the first Seimas did not produce any significant legislative results, it was the first meeting of Lithuanian nationalists in an official setting and the first time they had brought their intentions into the public sphere.⁵⁴

Additionally, the growing unity of the Lithuanian community forced the Russian Empire to abandon the press ban a year before the Seimas in 1904 out of fear of inciting an uprising of the sort that occurred in 1863. In this way, Basanavičius's writing succeeded not only in creating a Lithuanian identity that appealed to a wide enough audience to inspire participation in its success, but also successfully opposed Russian Imperial policy that would curtail the growth of that nation. Following the revocation of the press ban, Basanavičius was joined by a number of other authors in printing consistently about the need for an independent Lithuanian state. Having consolidated the conceptualization of the nation, the Lithuanian nationalists succeeded in operationalizing that identity to exert political influence despite the fact that they remained vastly outnumbered by the "Germans and Slavs" Basanavičius warned about in the early 1880s. Ultimately, Basanavičius's work in building the concept of the Lithuanian nation led to the final establishment of the independent Republic of Lithuania in 1918, the first sovereign, independent Lithuanian state.

In the time before Jonas Basanavičius's contribution to the Lithuanian national movement, the Lithuanian community was a small, spread out group. On the surface, the Lithuanians were the weakest ethnic entity in the Baltic region in the mid-nineteenth century—they were outnumbered, they were surrounded by more powerful, numerous, and influential cultures, and they lacked a unifying national narrative around which they could organize and exert political influence.

To use Hopf's language, they had plenty of Others, but they had not constructed a national Self. The contribution of this self was Basanavičius's major contribution to the Lithuanian nationalist movement: he was the only writer to recognize the unifying power of a common language and to have the foresight to shape membership in the community in a broad enough way to permit the group the chance to expand its membership and overcome the geographic barriers that it faced.

⁵³ Synder, *The reconstruction of nations*, 52.

⁵⁴ Krupavičius, "Lithuania," 489.

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