

Soviet Politics of Memory in Southern Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna: Representation of the Past and Mythmaking during World War II

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Abstract

The incorporation of new territories into the Ukrainian SSR during World War II required reconstructing the local community's identity and shaping its historical memory through Stalinist ideology. This article examines the features of Soviet memory politics in Ukrainian territories through the examples of Southern Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna, which were annexed in 1940 due to the military campaign against Romania. The study's objectives were to determine the influence of Soviet ideology on the representation of the past, characterize the ways that the official memory was shaped during World War II, and analyze historical myths that spread throughout the official and historical discourse. The main historical images, which Soviet ideologists formulated in official statements, historical works, and propaganda in periodicals, have been extracted using historical discourse analysis. Comparative historical analysis has identified similarities and differences in interpreting the abovementioned regions' pasts. It is pointed out that the historical arguments and concepts used by the Soviet power to justify the annexations became the foundation for the historical discourse. The article analyzes the introduction of the myth of "long-suffering lands" into historical narratives, which interpreted the Soviet territorial conquests as the liberation of oppressed peoples. It has been established that the representation of Southern Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna's pasts corresponded to the Soviet concept of "Ukrainian people's reunification." However, the distinction between these regions' ethnic composition and historical development influenced the politics of shaping historical memory.

Keywords: politics of memory, Soviet ideology, Southern Bessarabia, Northern Bucovina, World War II.

Introduction

The annexation politics of the Soviet Union during World War II was accompanied by the inculcation of Stalinist ideology and the construction of a new Soviet identity. The shaping of historical memory as an essential component of identity building involved the creation of "ideologically correct" versions of the official historical past that would legitimize the Soviet regime.¹ Western

¹ Tiitu Kreegipuu and Epp Lauk, "The 1940 Soviet Coup-d'État in the Estonian Communist Press: Constructing History to Reshape Collective Memory," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2007): 43.



Ukraine, Southern Bessarabia, Northern Bukovyna, and Transcarpathia had different historical destinies before their incorporation into the Ukrainian SSR. However, the Soviet power interpreted the process of their annexation as “Ukrainian people’s reunification within a single Ukrainian Soviet state.” In this context, Soviet politics of memory towards Southern Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna is of considerable research interest. Both lands belonged to various countries through several historical periods, but Romania incorporated them both during World War I. The population of these borderland regions was polyethnic, varied in socio-economic level, and had unique cultural traditions. Therefore, Soviet ideologists created historical images that would be aligned with the collective memory of the population and, at the same time, narratives about their common historical ties with Ukraine.

Given the different approaches to explaining the politics of memory, the author defines it as a political activity that creates, spreads, and preserves common images about people’s historical past. It includes not only constructing and consolidating historical meanings in the collective memory but also deconstructing and forgetting them. Among the different levels of memory, scientists have labeled one type as institutional² or official memory,³ which means the interpretation of historical events, the shaping of images of the past, and their representation by state institutions or political elites. Researchers have emphasized that institutional (official) memory can influence other types (collective and individual) but not wholly dominate them.⁴ In addition, the politics of memory is mainly the result of dialogue and compromise between political elites representing various public interests in democracies. At the same time, political elites often try to manipulate the historical past to justify their political ideology and gain, legitimize and retain power. It is especially true for undemocratic countries, where power has a monopoly on the mechanisms of historical memory construction.

² Richard Ned Lebow, “The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe,” in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. R. N. Lebow, W. Kansteiner, and C. Fogu (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006): 8.

³ Jeffrey K. Olick, “What Does It Mean to Normalize the Past? Official Memory in German Politics since 1989,” *Social Science History* 22, no. 4 (1998): 547; Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “The Passing of Time and the Collective Memory of Conflicts: The Case of Israel and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus,” *Peace & Change* 37, no. 2 (2012): 255; Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard, “A Theory of the Politics of Memory: The Policies of Memory and Commemoration,” in *Twenty Years After Communism*, ed. M. Bernhard and J. Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 8.

⁴ Olick, “What Does It Mean,” 555; Lebow, “The Memory,” 15.

The Soviet regime, characterized by the Communist Party's monopoly on political participation, total control over the media, education, and science, and the use of terror to silence dissenters, had limitless opportunities to shape historical memory. The politics of memory in the USSR was an essential and integral part of Soviet propaganda, which used all the necessary resources to create a "homo sovieticus." Professional historians, journalists, writers, artists, and other intellectuals, together with the party apparatus (particularly the central and regional departments of propaganda and agitation), produced narratives about the historical past that followed Stalinist ideology. In the 1930s, this ideology changed radically, turning from the "world proletarian revolution" to the "construction of socialism in one country" and from proletarian internationalism to National Bolshevism. David Brandenberger has identified the emergence of the concept of *Russocentric Etatism* as one of the essential characteristics of Stalin's National Bolshevism.⁵ It called the Russians "first among equals" in the "friendly" family of Soviet peoples. The rehabilitation of the imperial past, selective integration of Russian pre-revolutionary military, political and cultural figures into the Soviet heroic pantheon, and the creation of historical narratives emphasizing the unique role of Russians in the development of the Soviet state and the history of other Soviet peoples became priorities of Stalinist memory politics. Similar changes occurred in the official historical memory of Soviet Ukraine: on the one hand, national heroes were restored; on the other, new Ukrainian narratives appeared that showcased a relationship with Russian historical heritage.

According to Serhy Yekelchuk, the annexation of Western Ukraine lands in 1939 influenced the shaping of historical memory in Soviet Ukraine. At the same time, he has pointed out the contradictions between the Soviet center and Ukrainian historians when interpreting Western Ukraine's incorporation.⁶ In this view, the annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna in 1940 helped strengthen the concept of "Ukrainian people's reunification" in official Soviet discourse.

This article determines similarities and differences in interpreting Southern Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna's pasts and characterizes the Soviet politics of memory in the territories annexed during World War II. Using the discourse analysis method for different texts (e. g. official statements, historiography,

⁵ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002): 43-62.

⁶ Serhy Yekelchuk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 24-25.



newspaper articles), the author has identified the influence of Stalinist ideology and mythmaking on the shaping of historical memory in the context of “Ukrainian people’s reunification.”

Legitimation of the Annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna in the Official Soviet Discourse

The incorporation of the Russian Empire’s historical heritage into Stalinist ideology strengthened the claims of Soviet leadership in its former territories. The Russian Empire’s slogan of “gathering Russian lands” in World War I was practically adopted by the USSR before World War II. For this reason, the “Bessarabian question,” which remained unresolved between the USSR and Romania, became actual. According to the Paris Protocol of 1920, Bessarabia was passed to Romania, but the Soviet government did not accept the decision and considered this territory disputed. The Soviet Union’s territorial interest in Bessarabia on the eve of World War II was confirmed in an additional secret protocol in a German-Soviet non-aggression pact known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. However, the expansionist plans of the Stalinist leadership later spread to Northern Bukovyna.

On June 26, 1940, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR Viacheslav Molotov put forward the ultimatum for the return of Bessarabia and the transfer of Northern Bukovyna to the Romanian envoy in Moscow Gheorghe Davidescu.⁷ The territorial claim to Bessarabia was based on several contradictory facts. First, the document pointed out that in 1918 Romania forcibly occupied this territory viewed as part of the “Soviet Union (Russia).” It means that Soviet diplomats laid claim to the former Russian empire’s territory, so far as the USSR had been formed *de jure* only in 1922. Second, the document accentuated that Romania had broken down the “age-old unity” of Soviet Ukraine with Bessarabia, which Ukrainians had predominantly inhabited. It is worth pointing out that the share of Ukrainians was 19.6%, and the percentage of Moldovans was 47.6% in the Bessarabian Governorate at the end of the 19th century; Ukrainians predominated only in Khotyn County, whereas their percentage was 20 to 25% in the southern part of Bessarabia, Ackerman and Izmail Counties.⁸ Finally, highlighting the USSR’s military power growth, the Soviet government called for “the necessity of establishing sustainable peace

⁷ “Mirnoe razreshenie sovetsko-rumynskogo konflikta po voprosu o Bessarabii i severnoi chasti Bukoviny (soobshenie TASS),” *Sovetskaia Ukraina*, June 29, 1940, 1 [in Russian].

⁸ L. S. Berg, *Naselenie Bessarabii. Etnograficheskii sostav i chislennost’ (S 10-verstnoi etnograficheskoi kartoii)* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, 1923): 42-45 [in Russian].

between countries” and claimed the “return of Bessarabia to restore justice.” In turn, the demand for the transfer of Northern Bukovyna was based on ethnic principles, namely the common historical destiny, language, and ethnic composition of the region’s population with Soviet Ukraine; however, this territory was never part of the Russian Empire. What is more, Soviet diplomacy explained the fairness of the transfer of Bukovyna as an act of compensation – “a minor way of indemnification to the USSR and the Bessarabian citizens by Romania’s 22-year rule in Bessarabia.”⁹

Romania was in diplomatic isolation and at risk of military conflict, so its government agreed to evacuate its troops from the demanded territories. During the military campaign (June 28 — July 3, 1940) the Soviet army occupied the territories of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna. Statements in the Soviet press about the advance of troops without incident were untrue, as there were armed clashes between Soviet and Romanian troops near Reni, Herța, Cornești, Pârlița, and Bălți, killing and wounding on both sides.¹⁰ The rapid advance of the Soviet troops was interpreted by official propaganda as “a new bloodless victory” for Stalin’s diplomacy. Central and regional newspapers published Soviet-Romanian diplomatic correspondence to prove the legality of the Soviet “peace campaign.” Materials on Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna appeared regularly in the Soviet press. Their goals were to legitimate Soviet annexation and to portray the official image of the newly annexed lands to the Soviet people.

The day after the Soviet invasion, *Pravda*, the major newspaper of the Communist party, published an editorial representing the official arguments for the annexation. It predominantly repeated reasons from the diplomatic note of June 26. However, another argument added to the official explanation of the Romanian territories’ annexation was the “liberation of the working people from capitalist slavery.”¹¹ The article portrayed the abrasive character of colonial oppression and exploitation, the economic decline of Bessarabia, the illiteracy of the population and its material and cultural impoverishment, and the constant class struggle during Romanian rule.

On the same day, periodicals published a summary of information on Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna. *Pravda* and the government newspaper *Izvestiia* highlighted the “unjust detachment” of Bessarabia from Soviet Russia

⁹ “Mirnoe razreshenie,” 1.

¹⁰ O. P. Kryknitskyi, “Viiskova operatsiia Chervonoï armii z aneksii Pivnichnoi Bukovyny i Bessarabii (cherven - lypen 1940 r.),” *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal* 1, (2009): 153-154 [in Ukrainian].

¹¹ “Da zdravstvuiut Sovetskaia Bessarabiia i Sovetskaia Bukovina!” *Pravda*, June 29, 1940, 1 [in Russian].



and described the consequences of Romanian rule: the destruction of industry, high mortality rates (including those caused by epidemics), high illiteracy rates, and mass emigration. The situation in Northern Bukovyna was explained in only a few sentences, which mentioned the expropriation of peasant lands and the national oppression of Ukrainians. In contrast to the Romanian territories, the propaganda presented a thriving Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, formed by the Soviet authorities in 1924 from certain districts of Odesa and Podolsk provinces adjacent to the Dniester River.¹² *Sovetskaia Ukraina*, the newspaper of the Ukrainian SSR's republican authorities, defined Bessarabia as a region that had been transformed into a colony of "Romanian boyars." They reduced it to a "center of starvation, poverty, epidemics, lack of culture"; suppressed the uprising of Bessarabian peasants and workers in a bloody manner; distributed lands to kulaks, bureaucrats, officers, and gendarmes; and pursued violent and unnatural Romanianization, antisemitic policy, and political terror against the population.¹³ To enhance the emotional perception, the author — when referring to impersonal "letters from Bessarabia" — described the inhumane methods of torturing of people by the Romanian Siguranța (secret police). It is worth noting that the Soviet periodicals often referred to Romanian documents, statistics, and newspaper articles, but the authenticity of these sources is questionable. Such records, letters, and memoirs of the region's inhabitants were regularly published as various materials to substantiate the "atrocities of the Romanian boyars" against the working people. The anti-Romanian campaign in the Soviet press eased at the end of July 1940 but did not stop.¹⁴

According to Vladyslav Hrynevych, the region's local citizens generally welcomed the Soviet army and expressed dissatisfaction with Romanian social and national politics.¹⁵ At the same time, the Soviet leadership secretly sent to these territories sabotage and reconnaissance groups, which were supposed to "prepare the population for the meeting of the Red Army."¹⁶ Soviet propaganda

¹² "Bessarabiia i severnaia chast' Bukoviny (Spravka)," *Izvestiia*, June 29, 1940, 3 [in Russian].

¹³ V. R., "Bessarabiia (Spravka)," *Sovetskaia Ukraina*, June 29, 1940, 3 [in Russian].

¹⁴ Ewa M. Thompson, "Nationalist Propaganda in the Soviet Russian Press, 1939-1941," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 2 (1991): 398.

¹⁵ V. A. Hrynevych, "Chervona armiiia u viinakh i viiskovykh konfliktakh 1939-1940 rr.: viiskovo-politychni, ideolohichni ta sotsialno-psykhologichni aspekty," *Problems of Ukrainian History: Facts, Judgments, Searches*, no. 10 (2003): 363 [in Ukrainian]; Kryknitskyi, "Viiskova," 155-156.

¹⁶ V. Khadzhyradiava, "Operatsiia Chervonoii armii v Bessarabii ta Pivnichnii Bukovyni (28 chervnia — 5 lypnia 1940 r.)," in *Ukraina v Druhii svitovii viini: pohliad z XXI st. Istorychni narysy*, vol. 1, ed. V. A. Smolii et al. (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2010): 198 [in Ukrainian].

skillfully used welcoming meetings of the community with Soviet soldiers and locals' testimonies to demonstrate the "liberation" campaign of the Red Army. Military parades took place on July 3–5 in Chernivtsi, Chişinău, Bender, and Ackerman. In his address from July 3, Georgii Zhukov, the Soviet commander of the Southern Front, pointed out towards the Bessarabian population's common historical destiny, language, and ethnic composition with Soviet Ukraine and welcomed the region's return to the "Soviet Motherland."¹⁷ Authorities organized rallies and meetings across the country in honor of the "liberation of the working people in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna." The press published congratulations from workers, peasants, and intellectuals from various parts of the Soviet Union in support of government's politics.

Thus, the image of the USSR as a country — "liberator of the oppressed working people" was constructed in the collective consciousness of Soviet society. Soviet leadership and propaganda of the times used similar narratives during the annexation of Western Ukraine, Western Belarus, and the Baltic states. Moreover, suppressing facts of military preparations for a possible war with Romania and political blackmail, the authorities represented the solution to the "Bessarabian question" as a victory for a peaceful and just Soviet policy in contrast to war between Western capitalist countries.¹⁸ The USSR's territorial acquisitions in 1939–1940 also legitimated the victims of the "construction of socialism in one country." In particular, the official Soviet discourse identified the military weakness of the young Soviet state as a critical factor in the Romanian annexation of Bessarabia in 1918. Therefore, the peaceful solution to the "Bessarabian question" was interpreted as a consequence of the USSR's military and economic power growth, a tangible result of the "work, efforts and sacrifices" of the Soviet peoples for the benefit of the Motherland, and an incentive for Soviet patriots to commit "new exploits."¹⁹

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR considered the question of the annexed territories' administrative status on August 2, 1940. The Soviet Parliament created the Moldavian SSR and included Northern Bukovyna and Khotyn, Ackerman, and Izmail Counties in the Ukrainian SSR. According to deputies, such a territorial division would contribute to the "reunification" of both Moldavian and Ukrainian peoples within the Soviet state, which the liberated territories' population awaited impatiently. Soviet authorities invited a delegation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna representatives to the Supreme Soviet's

¹⁷ Hrynevych, "Chervona," 364.

¹⁸ "Novaia pobeda mirnoi politiki SSSR," *Izvestiia*, June 29, 1940, 1 [in Russian].

¹⁹ "Da zdravstvuiut," 1.



session to present the voice of “reunited” peoples. The speakers gave speeches in their respective national languages (Moldovan from Bessarabia and Ukrainian from Bukovyna) and supported Parliament’s decision.²⁰

Thus, the Soviet government took the ethnic criterion as the basis for the administrative division of the new territories, breaking historical ties within the regions. In particular, Bessarabia, previously imagined by the Soviet leadership as a single historical region, was split into three parts: 1) Central — the Moldavian SSR, a new national republic whose population was targeted by Soviet politics of Moldovan national identity construction; 2) Northern — Khotyn County, which was included in the Chernivtsi oblast together with Northern Bukovyna; 3) Southern — Ackerman and Izmail Counties formed the Ackerman oblast.

“Reunited Lands”:

Different Ways of Historical Memory Construction

The national factor by which the Stalinist leadership justified the expansionist claims in 1939–1940 influenced the official politics of memory. In addition, the combination of master narratives such as the “great Ukrainian people’s reunification” and “liberation of working people from capitalist oppression” in public discourse helped reinforce a positive image of Soviet power among the population. Therefore, Soviet ideologists had to scientifically prove and popularize the statement about common ethnic origin and the ongoing historical ties between Soviet Ukrainians and the newly annexed lands’ population. However, the realities of ethnic composition did not fully coincide with the Soviet government’s notions and wishes. For instance, 10% of the population of Chernivtsi in the early 1930s was Ukrainians — fourth only to Jews (38%), Romanians (27%), and Germans (14.5%).²¹ Unlike the Chernivtsi oblast, where Ukrainians predominated, the Ackerman oblast did not have an absolute majority in any ethnic group.

Soviet intellectuals — historians, ethnographers, and writers — were entrusted with inventing the new history of Southern Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna. During the first period of Soviet rule (1940–1941), scientific journals, party periodicals, and special propaganda publications published

²⁰ *Sed’maia sessiia Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR [1-go sozyva], (1 avgusta — 7 avgusta 1940 g.): stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: OGIZ, 1940): 49-53 [in Russian].

²¹ Svitlana Frunchak and Lynne Viola, “The Making of Soviet Chernivtsi: National ‘Reunification,’ World War II, and the Fate of Jewish Czernowitz in Postwar Ukraine” (PhD diss., University of Toronto (Canada), 2014): 87.

numerous historical essays on Bessarabia and Bukovyna. These narratives were similar in their ideological bias, lack of references to historical documents, inclusion of factual mistakes, manipulation of historical facts, and sometimes outright falsifications. As part of the Soviet propaganda machine, historiography represented the processes of annexing new territories exclusively within the concept of “Ukrainian people’s reunification” and Stalin’s historical discourse.

The concept of “reunification” presupposed the existence of a common origin and ancient historical ties between the people of the annexed regions and Soviet Ukraine and their breaking due to specific events. Such an ancestral homeland was identified as Kyivan Rus’, and ethnically these lands were considered Slavic, inhabited by Ulychians and Tivertsians. Historian Naum Nartsov even claimed the autochthony of the Slavic tribes, which had settled in Bessarabia and the Danube Principalities since the 2nd century AD.²² The myth of Kyivan Rus’ as “a cradle of three fraternal peoples” included the idea that all lands belonged to the early Slavic state and its successor, the Galicia-Volyn State, in the so-called area of “the Old Russian nation” — the common ancestor of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. Ievhen Odryna, a lecturer at L’viv University, in articles for the newspaper *Vil’na Ukraina*, called Bukovyna and Bessarabia “our primordial lands,” but first as Ukrainian and second as Rus’-Ukrainian.²³ Historians described the princely times for these territories as a period of economic growth and cultural explosion. The Tatar-Mongol invasion was considered an event that dissected them from the Ukrainian homeland for centuries. However, the Rus’ language and the Orthodox Church maintained unity with the Ukrainian lands.

Nevertheless, differences in the historical past and ethnic composition of the newly annexed territories did not allow Soviet ideologists to shape a unified model of interpretation of the past. Northern Bukovyna, where Ukrainians were ethnically dominant and had historical and cultural ties to Eastern Galicia, was represented as an “age-old Ukrainian land.” Moreover, Soviet historians and ethnographers identified the Bukovynian population as monoethnic. Other ethnic groups, which played a significant role in the region’s ethnocultural development, either were not mentioned (Jews and Germans) or were portrayed as colonialists (Romanians and Poles). The authors of the historical-geographic essay *Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna*, the primary

²²N. Nartsov, “Istoricheskie sud’by Bessarabii i Moldavii (Kratkii ocherk),” *Istoriik-marksist* 9, no. 85 (1940): 85 [in Russian].

²³Ie. Odryna, “Istorychna dolia Besarabii,” *Vil’na Ukraina*, June 30, 1940, 3 [in Ukrainian]; Ye. Odryna, “Spokonvichna nasha zemlia,” *Vil’na Ukraina*, July 4, 1940, 3 [in Ukrainian].



source of information about the new territories for school teachers, considered Northern Bukovyna a territory that was inhabited mainly by Ukrainians, who "...in language, everyday life, examples of national dress... were little different from the people of Volyn and Podillya."²⁴ Leningrad Museum's ethnographers distinguished two groups of Bukovynian Ukrainians — Podolians and Hutsuls. Soviet propagandists would later use the image of the Hutsuls as an "exotic and romanticized branch" of Ukrainians to illustrate Soviet Bukovyna.²⁵

Thus, the shaping of historical memory in Northern Bukovyna was based on the national model through an analogy with the Western Ukrainian lands captured in 1939. Numerous propagandistic materials and newspaper articles expressed the inseparable historical and cultural ties between Northern Bukovyna and Ukraine, including its western lands. Ukrainian writer Dmytro Kosaryk called Northern Bukovyna and Eastern Galicia "long-suffering sisters."²⁶ Historians of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR incorporated the historical past of Northern Bukovyna into the all-Ukrainian historical process in *History of Ukraine: A Short Course*, published at the end of 1940. They described the history of Bukovyna rather fragmentarily but analyzed it conjunctly with the history of Galicia.²⁷ Soviet memory politics paid significant attention to the popularization of the Ukrainian national movement in Bukovyna in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The symbol of the Bukovynian cultural renaissance became Iurii Fedkovych (1834–1888), whose poetic writing was promoted in the same way as Ivan Franko's in Western Ukraine. Soviet authorities made the Ukrainian writer Olha Kobylyanska (1863–1942) a true living legend of Bukovyna. In November 1940, a street and one of the schools in Chernivtsi were renamed in her honor,²⁸ and the Kobylyanska Literary Memorial Museum was opened in 1944.

Soviet ideologists integrated Khotyn county, a historical part of Bessarabia predominantly inhabited by Ukrainians, into a single ethnocultural region with Northern Bukovyna. They pointed out at the linguistic and cultural similarities between the Ukrainians of Khotyn and the Podolians of Bukovyna.²⁹ For

²⁴G. Medvedenko and I. Starovoitenko, "Besarabiia i Pivnichna Bukovyna (Istoryko-heohrafichni narys)," *Komunistychna osvita* 8 (1940): 36 [in Ukrainian].

²⁵Frunchak, "The Making," 126.

²⁶Dmytro Kosaryk, "Bukovyna. Narys z istorii bukovynskoho narodu," *Radianska Bukovyna*, August 14, 1940, 3 [in Ukrainian].

²⁷S. M. Belousov et al., eds., *Istoriia Ukrainy. Korotkii kurs* (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Akademii nauk USSR, 1940): 252-253, 261 [in Ukrainian].

²⁸V. M. Botushanskii, ed., *Chernivtsi: Istoriia i suchasnist (Iuvileine vydannia do 600-richchia pershoi pysemnoi zghadky pro misto)* (Chernivtsi: Zelena Bukovyna, 2009): 227 [in Ukrainian].

²⁹Frunchak, "The Making," 125-126.

instance, *Radyanska Bukovyna* used a photo of the Khotyn Fortress as the main image in the article *On the History of Bukovyna*, published by Chernivtsi State University historian A. V. Kryachun³⁰.

However, there were also attempts to represent the history of Bessarabia as part of Ukraine. In particular, Nartsov considered Ukrainians and Rusyns (descendants of East Slavic tribes) to be the indigenous population of the Prut and Danube interfluvial area, which had inhabited these lands even before establishing control over them by the Moldavian Principality. Moreover, he made the interrelation between these ethnic groups and Ukrainians, who “constituted the majority of the population in Khotyn, Ackerman, Izmail and other Bessarabian counties.”³¹ The historian identified Bessarabian Moldovans as “a largely assimilated Ukrainian population resided here from all eternity.”³² Nartsov’s version of Bessarabian history sought to prove the direct ethnic connection between Bessarabian people and Ukrainians. Nevertheless, it did not gain currency in Soviet historical discourse.

Soviet historiography characterized Bessarabia as a polyethnic province economically linked to Tsarist Russia since its incorporation in 1812 until the Romanian occupation in 1918. Therefore, the party’s ideologists never sufficiently substantiated the “reunification” of Southern Bessarabia with the Ukrainian SSR. Above all else, the reason was the lack of symbolic resources. In contrast to the situation in Northern Bukovyna, national heroes and events, which would have tightly associated the regional historical memory with Ukrainian national memory, were almost non-existent. For instance, *History of Ukraine: A Short Course* devoted only a few sentences to describing the history of Southern Bessarabia prior to June 1940.

Therefore, given the lack of such Ukrainian symbols, the Soviet power began to shape a Russocentric model of historical memory, the central narrative of which was the imperial myth of the Russian army, headed by the General Alexandr Suvorov, storming the Izmail fortress on December 22, 1790. Suvorov was included in Stalin’s Soviet heroic pantheon and was glorified throughout the country. Moreover, this narrative was related to the region’s collective memory (on the eve of World War I, the Izmail community planned to erect a monument to Suvorov). Until the end of 1940, the historical narratives about Bessarabia contained brief references to Suvorov’s assault. Intense interest in this event coincided with its 150th anniversary, influencing the region’s symbolic

³⁰ A.V. Kryachun, “Z istorii Bukovyny,” *Radyanska Bukovyna*, June 8, 1941, 3 [in Ukrainian].

³¹ Nartsov, “Istoricheskie,” 87.

³² Nartsov, “Istoricheskie,” 90.



space. In December 1940, the Ackerman oblast was renamed *Izmail oblast*, and its administrative center was moved to Izmail. The central city's avenue, the village, the collective farm, and one of the Izmail oblast's districts were named after Suvorov. Professional historians, including Nikolai Korobkov³³ and Natalia Polonska-Vasilenko,³⁴ contributed to the popularization of the imperial myth. In 1941, *Mosfilm* began filming *Storm on Izmail*.³⁵ On the eve of Bessarabia's reunification anniversary, *Pridunaiskaia Pravda* published a brief historical essay on Izmail. The author described Suvorov's assault as the main event in the city's history and emphasized the "Ukrainian-Russian nature" of Izmail in the 19th century.³⁶

In July 1941, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna were returned to Romania due to the Nazi-Soviet war. Their Sovietization was interrupted. In early 1944, before the expulsion from the Ukrainian territories of the Nazis, Mykola Petrovskii, the leading historian of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, published a brief survey that finally formulated the concept of "Ukrainian people's reunification." He described Ukrainian history as a struggle for national reunification and union with the Russian people. The historian considered Northern Bukovyna and all of Bessarabia as Ukrainian lands, which shared a history during Kyivan Rus' times, and pointed out the constantly increasing Ukrainian population on these territories. For instance, the author asserted that during the Austrian capture of Bukovyna, *Ruthenians* (Ukrainians) had constituted two-thirds of its population. He also defined the territory incorporated into the Russian Empire under the Bucharest Treaty of 1812 as the "part of the Ukrainian lands in Bessarabia."³⁷ The following year, M. Petrovskii issued several historical references to "reunited lands" but did not include Bessarabia. In essence, Bessarabian history became the study object for Soviet Moldavian and Russian historians, not Ukrainian.

Authorities entrusted Ivan Polosin, a professor at Moscow University, with writing the official history of the Izmail oblast. *Pridunaiskaia Pravda* published Polosin's article on the eve of the anniversary of "liberation from

³³ N. M. Korobkov, "Vziate Izmaila (1790 god)," *Istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 4 (1941): 24-39 [in Russian].

³⁴ N. D. Polonskaia-Vasilenko, "Shturm Izmaila," *Znamia Sovetov*, December 22, 1940, 3 [in Russian].

³⁵ "K predstoiashim s'emkam novogo khudozhestvennogo fil'ma 'Shturm Izmaila,'" *Pridunaiskaia pravda*, June 19, 1941, 3 [in Russian].

³⁶ I. Kravchenko, "Izmail. Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk," *Pridunaiskaia pravda*, June 17, 1941, 2 [in Russian].

³⁷ N. N. Petrovskii, *Vossoedinenie ukrainskogo naroda v edinom Ukrainskom Sovetskom gosudarstve* (Moskva: OGIZ — Gospolitizdat, 1944): 46-47 [in Russian].

fascist invaders.” In contrast to Petrovskii’s pro-Ukrainian narrative, Polosin described Izmail’s past in the context of Russian history. His writings about the region’s history began in Scythian times. The author emphasized the multinational “Bessarabian people,” the liberation of Bessarabia from the Ottoman yoke by the “Russian people,” and the building of the “Russian Izmail city.”³⁸ At the same time, Polosin’s article contained statements about “Ukrainian people’s reunification” and defined the Bessarabian territory as the “primordial land” of Ukraine.³⁹ Nevertheless, central episodes of his narrative were the storming of the Izmail fortress in 1790 and the liberation of the Izmail region by Soviet troops in 1944, which were directly related. Similarly, this connection was established in Izmail’s symbolic space when a monument to Suvorov was unveiled on the anniversary of the city’s liberation on August 26, 1945.

Soviet ideologues thus decided to use various models of constructing the historical memory for “reunified” lands despite the attempts of Ukrainian historians to integrate them into the context of Ukrainian history. Therefore, there were certain contradictions between the Ukrainian and Russian historical narratives about Southern Bessarabia: the former emphasized the Ukrainian composition of the region’s population, while the latter highlighted the decisive role of the Russian people in its history. It is important to note that both approaches did not correspond with historical reality.

“Long-suffering Lands”:

The Myth of Enslavement, Struggle, and Liberation

The transformation of Stalin’s ideology towards what is defined by scholars as National Bolshevism did not mean a renunciation of the concept of class struggle. Ideologists synthesized national narratives with a class approach, which was the basis for Soviet history’s periodization. The October Revolution was the decisive event in Russian and World history, which was viewed through the prism of revolutions and wars as turning points in the class struggle.⁴⁰ However, in addition to the working people’s fight against the exploiters, the struggle for national liberation became an integral component of the Stalinist ideological metanarrative.

³⁸ I. I. Polosin, “Izmail (Istoriia oblasti i goroda),” *Pridunaiskaia pravda*, August 24, 1945, 3 [in Russian].

³⁹ Polosin, “Izmail,” August 26, 1945, 4.

⁴⁰ V. I. Chekanov, “The Formatting of Space and Time in Totalitarian Historical Discourse (on the Example of Soviet Historiography).” *Analele Universității din Craiova - Seria Istorie* 40, no. 2, (2021): 97.



Interpreting the past of the “reunited” lands, Soviet politics of memory formed the myth of the “long-sufferance” of the population, which was violently separated from the Motherland and suffered from social and national oppression. Myth, as a component of metanarrative, has contributed to a simplified understanding of the social reality shaped by ideology. The existence of an evil conspiracy against the community, the presence of a savior who can release the community from this threat, and the coming of the golden age are the main themes of myths.⁴¹ The myth of the “long-suffering lands” had a similar plotline: being violently captured by the enemy and the heavy fate of the people; the heroic efforts of the fight for freedom and an act of liberation; and the beginning of the prosperity era in the Soviet state. With some differences, the power used this narrative for all the “reunited” lands.

Kosaryk systematically introduced this myth into the Soviet historical discourse on Northern Bukovyna. The author portrayed the region’s past with such words as: “The Bukovynian Carpathians and the Subcarpathian hills were changed into a bloody piece of Europe until recent years, and the local community can safely be called long-suffering. Wars were not stopped here for many years; military campaigns were damaging the fields, were devouring cattle, were burning human settlements, were impoverishing the people.”⁴² The historical destiny of this land was interpreted as a series of invasions: Tatar, Wallachian (Romanian), Turkish, Austrian, and Romanian. The devastating wars ended after the region’s incorporation by the Habsburg Empire. However, the consequences of its colonial rule were villeinage, starvation, cholera, and national oppression. The author emphasized the Bukovynian people’s constant struggle, which took various forms. Its members always maintained close ties with Ukraine, including “battle” (participation in the Cossack-peasant uprisings of the 16th and early 17th centuries and the liberation war led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky), “revolutionary” (Opryshki’s movement and rebellion of Lukjan Kobyltsia), and “cultural” (national revival in the 19th century). At the same time, the author concealed the truth about the spreading of the Ukrainian national idea in Bukovyna during World War I and the Ukrainian National Revolution and condemned the activity of Ukrainian nationalists in Bukovyna as treacherous.

Bessarabian history was covered similarly, except when describing the Russian Empire’s rule. Despite the feudal serfdom system of Russian tsarism,

⁴¹ Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 4.

⁴² Kosaryk, “Bukovyna,” August 13, 1940, 3.

historians pointed to Russia's progressive influence on Bessarabia's economic and cultural development,⁴³ and the incorporation of Bessarabia into Russia was considered "less evil than the Turkish yoke."⁴⁴ This interpretation completely matches the "lesser evil" formula introduced into the Stalinist official discourse on the past.⁴⁵

It is worth noting that Soviet propaganda chose heroes who personified the people's struggle in "reunited" lands according to the appropriate shape of historical memory. Oleksa Dovbush and Lukjan Kobylitsia, the Ukrainian peasant movements' leaders, became symbols of Northern Bukovyna. Instead, Grigorii Kotovskii — a native of the Moldavian town Hâncești, a criminal offender, a Soviet commander, and one of the initiators of the Moldavian ASSR — became a symbol of the resistance against the tsarist regime in Bessarabia.⁴⁶

Romanian rule was portrayed as the greatest disaster for Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna. "These miseries in twenty years exceeded everything Bukovyna had suffered during the five centuries," wrote Kosaryk.⁴⁷ Historians tried to prove official statements about the unjust and anti-national nature of the Romanian occupation. The Romanian incorporation of these lands was interpreted as a conspiracy by the imperialist Triple Entente against the Soviet state.⁴⁸ Academic articles and historical essays repeated propagandistic narratives about economic devastation, forced Romanization, and various "atrocities" committed by the occupiers, the "Romanian boyars." Like the "Polish Szlachta," this image personified an external enemy that possessed class and national nature. The detailed historical research of Romanian boyars' rule in Bessarabia was a monograph by Anatolii Dolnik that was made in wartime.⁴⁹ It was based on many statistical materials but, according to Soviet ideological rhetoric, compared the Romanian imperialist rule in Bessarabia with the "thriving" Moldavian ASSR. The author constructed the image of a victim from the Bessarabian population, describing the proletariat and peasantry's hardships from economic exploitation and tax oppression, the inhumane

⁴³ Nartsov, "Istoricheskii," 91.

⁴⁴ Medvedenko, G., and Starovoitenko, "Bessarabiia," 27.

⁴⁵ Yekelchik, *Stalin's Empire*, 20.

⁴⁶ Iurii Dold, "Virnyi syn moldavskoho narodu," *Komsomol'skiy propahandyst*, no. 7 (1940): 52 [in Ukrainian].

⁴⁷ Kosaryk, "Bukovyna," August 16, 1940, 3.

⁴⁸ B. Shtein, "Iz istorii pervonachal'nogo perioda grazhdanskoi voiny (konets 1917 g. — nachalo 1918 g.)," *Istoriik-marksist* 4-5, no. 80-81 (1940): 35 [in Russian]; A. Manusevich, "Istoriia zakhvata Bessarabii Rumyniei," *Istoriicheskii zhurnal* 8 (1940): 91 [in Russian].

⁴⁹ A. Dol'nik, *Bessarabiia pod vlast'iu rumynskikh boiar (1918–1940 gg.)* (Moskva: OGIZ — Gospolitizdat, 1945) [in Russian].



working conditions, the people's impoverishment due to unemployment, the forced emigration, the "beggarly" living conditions, the increase in the disease and mortality rates, as well as the prohibition of native languages, the rise of illiteracy and the cultural decline, mass murders and violence by *Siguranța*.

Soviet ideologues interpreted local anti-Romanian conflicts and protests as arguments in support of the Bolsheviks by the working people. However, their statements did not correspond to the truth. For instance, official propaganda, together with Soviet historians, repeatedly referred to the decision of the Chernivtsi People's Council in November 1918, which allegedly had proclaimed Northern Bukovyna's accession to Soviet Ukraine.⁵⁰ Actually, the People's Council recognized the supreme authority of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic.⁵¹ They also attributed the Bolshevik nature to the Khotyn uprising of 1919.⁵² Communist propaganda created the image of the Tatarbunar rebellion of 1924 as a symbol of the anti-Romanian 22-years struggle. However, the rebellion was actually initiated by the Soviet secret services and the Communist International with the communist underground of Bessarabia.⁵³

The culmination of the Soviet myth of "long-suffering lands" was the act of liberation by Soviet troops, which was expounded as the realization of the "people's 500-year dream"⁵⁴ — returning to the Motherland and uniting with the "fraternal consanguineous Russian people."⁵⁵ Propaganda described the year of Soviet rule as the beginning of a "golden age" for "reunited" Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna. The Nazi invasion, another "intense suffering," interrupted it. Fascist Germany was designated as the new archenemy, and its collaborators were Romania and "Ukrainian-German nationalists." The second act of "liberation" by Soviet troops in 1944 obscured the first event through its symbolic meaning. Unlike the "bloodless liberation" of 1940, it already included new heroic narratives of the Soviet Great Patriotic War myth. They were just reflected in commemorative practices and the new places of memory.

⁵⁰ Oleksandr Krytsevyi, "Narodne Viche 1918 roku," *Radianska Bukovyna*, April 6, 1945, 3 [in Ukrainian]; Medvedenko, G., and Starovoitenko, "Besarabiia," 31.

⁵¹ Oleksandr Dobrzhanskyi and Volodymyr Staryk, *Zmahannia za ukrainsku derzhavnist na Bukovyni (1914–1921 rr.). Dokumenty i materialy* (Chernivtsi: Chernivetska oblasna drukarnia, 2009): 233-234 [in Ukrainian].

⁵² S. Markov, "Rumynskii proizvol v Bessarabii (1918 g.)," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 4, no. 101, (1940): 67 [in Russian]; Nartsov, "Istoricheskie," 95.

⁵³ Vitalie Ponomariov, "Considerații privind implicarea serviciilor secrete sovietice și a Cominternului în organizarea rebeliunii de la Tatar-Bunar," *Plural. History, Culture, Society* 7, no. 1 (2019): 43-59.

⁵⁴ Kosaryk, "Bukovyna," 4.

⁵⁵ Petrovskii, *Vossoedinenie*, 85.

Conclusions

Soviet official narratives legitimized the military campaign against Romania in 1940, by presenting the Soviet Union as the liberator of peoples from class and national oppression. The justice of the annexation was explained by Romania's illegal occupation of Bessarabia in 1918 and by the historical, ethnocultural, and linguistic similarities between Ukrainians of Northern Bukovyna and Soviet Ukraine. Constructing the image of the enemy represented by "Romanian boyars," the propagandists portrayed the economic exploitation of the working people, the inhumane living conditions of local citizens, the politics of national discrimination, and the political terror by the Romanian authorities. Following official narratives, Stalinist ideologues created a new version of Southern Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna's history based on the class struggle and the concept of "Ukrainian people's reunification within a single Ukrainian Soviet state." It included the following scheme of historical development: the common origin and being part of Kyivan Rus' and its successor, the Galicia-Volyn State; separation from the historical homeland, and a long-suffering fate under the rule of the invaders, the worst of whom were the "Romanian boyars"; the community's constant struggle against invaders; the liberation and "long-awaited reunification." However, the Soviet politics of memory regarding the annexed territories varied significantly, using the national Ukrainian model in Northern Bukovyna and the Russocentric model in Southern Bessarabia. The national model, which was constructed by analogy with Western Ukraine, emphasized the monoethnic composition of the Bukovynian population and excluded other ethnic groups from public discourse. In turn, imperial narratives about the military glory of the Russian people were inculcated in Southern Bessarabia, contradicting the concept of reunification. These models were finally established in the historical discourse after the Soviet regime's return in 1944 and became the basis for constructing the historical memory of the local community.

Rezumat

Alipirea noilor teritorii la RSS Ucraineană în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial a necesitat reconstrucția identității comunităților locale și modelarea memoriei istorice prin intermediul ideologiei staliniste. Acest articol examinează caracteristicile politicii sovietice a memoriei în teritoriile ucrainene prin intermediul exemplurilor Basarabiei de Sud și Bucovinei de Nord, anexate în 1940 ca urmare a campaniei militare împotriva României. Obiectivele studiului au fost de a determina influența ideologiei sovietice asupra reprezentării trecutului, de a caracteriza mo-



durile în care a fost modelată memoria oficială în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial și de a analiza miturile istorice răspândite prin discursul oficial și istoric. Principalele imagini istorice, pe care ideologii sovietici le-au formulat în declarațiile oficiale în lucrările istoriografice și în propaganda din presa periodică, au fost extrase cu ajutorul analizei discursului istoric. Analiza istorică comparată a identificat similitudini și diferențe în interpretarea trecutului regiunilor menționate mai sus. Se subliniază faptul că argumentele și conceptele istorice folosite de puterea sovietică pentru a justifica anexările au devenit fundamentul discursului istoric. Articolul analizează introducerea mitului „ținuturilor îndelung suferinde” în narațiunile istorice, care au interpretat cuceririle teritoriale sovietice ca fiind eliberarea popoarelor asuprite. S-a stabilit că reprezentarea trecutului Basarabiei de Sud și al Bucovinei de Nord corespundea conceptului sovietic de „reunificare a poporului ucrainean”. Cu toate acestea, distincția dintre compoziția etnică și dezvoltarea istorică a acestor regiuni a influențat politica de modelare a memoriei istorice.

Cuvinte-cheie: politica memoriei, ideologie sovietică, Basarabia de Sud, Bucovina de Nord, cel de al Doilea Război Mondial.

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