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**SOVIET MYTHMAKING IN THE STALIN ERA: CONSTRUCTING THE MYTH OF “THE UKRAINIAN PEOPLE’S REUNIFICATION”**

**Abstract.** *The purpose of the research is to study the process of constructing the myth of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification” during the Stalinist period, its position and role in the Soviet mythology’s system, and its influence on the historical memory of the annexed Ukrainian territories’ community. The Methodology of the Research.* In the article there have been used contemporary methodological approaches that consider myth in interconnection with political ideology. They emphasize the role of myths, which are constructed narratives that convey particular meanings, values, and ideals of the community’s consolidation and mobilization and the formation of identity and collective memory. Historical genetic, historical systemic, and historical comparative methods, as well as methods of historiographical analysis and critical discourse analysis, were the methodological basis

of the research. **The scientific novelty** of the article is that the authors, for the first time, consider the idea of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification” as the Soviet myth, which formed a ground for the Soviet version of the annexed Ukrainian territories’ historical past. **The Conclusion.** The annexation of new Ukrainian territories in 1939 – 1940 required the Soviet regime’s legitimization. The constructed Soviet myth confirmed the historical right to these lands and interpreted the Soviet military campaigns as a mission to liberate oppressed peoples who wanted the reunification with Soviet Ukraine. During the Soviet-German war, the myth was based on the idea of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification”, which the Soviet ideologists considered an alternative to the concept of “a united and independent Ukraine”. The myth was intended to make the Ukrainians believe in the possibility of their being united only within the Soviet Union and under the patronage of the Russian people. Together with the legitimization function, the myth had identification, consolidation, and mobilization functions and was used as a tool of struggle against the Ukrainian liberation movement and the Uniate Church. In 1949 the large-scale myth’s ritualization indicated its final entrenchment in the Soviet mythological system.

**Keywords:** mythmaking, Soviet ideology, Ukraine, Stalinism.

### РАДЯНСЬКА МІФОТВОРЧИСТЬ У СТАЛІНСЬКУ ЕПОХУ: КОНСТРУЮВАННЯ МІФУ ПРО “ВОЗЗ’ЄДНАННЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОГО НАРОДУ”

**Анотація.** Метою статті є дослідження процесу конструювання міфу про “возз’єднання українського народу” в сталінський період, його місця і ролі у системі радянської міфології та впливу на історичну пам’ять населення анексованих українських територій. **Методологія дослідження.** Стаття ґрунтується на сучасних методологічних підходах, які розглядають міф у взаємозв’язку з політичною ідеологією, підкреслюючи його роль у консолідації та мобілізації спільноти, формуванні ідентичності й колективної пам’яті на основі сконструйованих наративів, що передають певні значення, цінності й ідеали. Методологічною основою дослідницького пошуку стали історико-генетичний, історико-системний та історико-порівняльний методи, а також методи історіографічного аналізу і критичного дискурс-аналізу. **Наукова новизна** статті полягає у тому, що автори вперше розглядають ідею “возз’єднання українського народу” як радянський міф, який складав основу радянської версії історичного минулого приєднаних українських територій. **Висновки.** Приєднання нових українських територій у 1939 – 1940 рр. потребувало легітимації радянського режиму. Сконструйований радянський міф підтверджував історичне право на ці землі та інтерпретував радянські воєнні кампанії як місію визволення пригноблених народів, які бажали возз’єднатися з Радянською Україною. Упродовж радянсько-німецької війни в основу міфу була покладена ідея “возз’єднання українського народу”, яка розглядалася як альтернатива концепту “соборної і незалежної України”. Міф мав сформувати у населення уявлення про можливість об’єднання українських земель лише в складі Радянського Союзу й під заступництвом російського народу. Крім легітимаційної, він виконував ідентифікаційну, консолідаційну й мобілізаційну функції, використовувався як інструмент боротьби з українським визвольним рухом та уніатською церквою. Масштабна ритуалізація міфу у 1949 р. свідчила про його остаточне утвердження в радянській міфологічній системі.

**Key words:** міфотворчість, радянська ідеологія, Україна, сталінізм.

**The Problem Statement.** The secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact’s publishing and denunciation at the end of the 1980s caused a rethinking of the consequences of the Soviet annexation of Ukrainian territories. However, narratives about the Ukrainian lands’ “reunification” during World War II maintained their dominant influence in official and historical Ukrainian discourses in the early decades after independence. Moreover, the Ukrainians’ divided memory of World War II was intensified by the state-level commemorations of the anniversaries of the particular Ukrainian territories’ “reunification,” the preservation of the relevant Soviet sites of memory, and the use of these narratives in political discourse. According to the authors, the firm rooting of the “reunification” idea in the collective memory should be considered a result of the Soviet mythmaking during the Stalin

era. Analysis of the myth of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification” allows the discovery of the mechanisms of the Soviet memory politics’ influence on collective consciousness and the factors of the Soviet mythologemes’ conservation in post-communist Ukrainian society.

**The Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** The understanding of myth in social and humanitarian sciences has evolved from a portrayal as the opposition to truth, rational thought, and historical thinking to being seen as essential to national identity formation, the preservation of collective memory, and the mobilization and consolidation of the community. Classical theories defined truth as the criterion for distinguishing between historical and mythical narratives. Still, contemporary theorists deny the definition of myth as an irrational and false representation of the past. Anthony Smith attributed the existence of common myths to the main features of a nation and considered collective mythmaking as an essential process in its formation (Smith, 1999, p. 115). George Schöpflin pointed out that myth is an instrument of the community’s self-definition and self-awareness, identity transfer, a simplified representation of reality in a communication process, cultural adoption and reproduction, strengthening of solidarity, and maintenance of memory (Schöpflin, 1997, pp. 22–28). According to Bo Stråth, myths do not just preserve collective memory but also assign limits to memory, defining what is possible and what is impossible to remember (Stråth, 2005, p. 260). Some scholars equated myths with collective or national memory, separating them from true individual memories or “mass personal memory” (Snyder, 2002, p. 50; Gildea, 2002, p. 59). Barbara Shatska did not associated collective memory with myth but accentuated the process of mythologizing of the past as part of a collective memory formation (Shatska, 2011, p. 98). At the same time, Duncan Bell emphasized the necessity to draw a clearer distinction between memory and myth and suggested a “national mythscape” instead of “national memory” (Bell, 2003, p. 75).

Chiara Bottici defined the narrative form as the main feature of the myth. Mythic narratives operate with figurative means, have a dramatic plot, demonstrate pathos, and always represent a certain morality. However, a narrative becomes a myth only after its acceptance by the audience (a social group or society) for which it was constructed. Therefore, a myth is a narrative that provides meaning and significance (Bottici, 2007, p. 179). Based on belief, the myth retains a significant symbolic power and has the status of sacred truth within the social group that accepts it. This acceptance depends not on the persuasiveness of the evidence but on the community’s need to feel that it is true (Archard, 1995, p. 478).

The scholars emphasized the connection between myth and ideology, considering myth as an “ideology in narrative form” (Wydra, 2008, p. 11) or an “ideologically marked” narrative (Flood, 2002, p. 42). Graeme Gill pointed out that a simplified representation of ideology was presented in a metanarrative, which allows meaning to be transferred in an accessible, symbolic form. Such a metanarrative is a communication vehicle between the political regime and the people. It consists of myths, which ensures its functioning and the transfer of its particular meanings to the community (Gill, 2011, p. 3).

According to Gerard Bouchard, ideology is a combination of reason and myth, the latter of which plays the role of its engine. He indicated six myth features: an archetypal basis, hybridity, emotionality, sacredness, instrumentality, and narrativity (Bouchard, 2017, pp. 24–25). The scholar compared the mythical system’s structure with a pyramid. It comprises a stable layer of master myths, which are long-lasting and slowly changing, and a layer of derivative myths, which are changeable, quickly adapting to new conditions and keeping the spirit of master myths (Bouchard, 2017, pp. 112–113). Moreover, a derivative myth can become the basis for

the rise of other myths, becoming the master myth in a new pyramidal structure. From the entire assemblage of master myths, one can single out national myths based on the features of a powerful collective experience and a strong connection with collective memory. These myths are like constellations that are tightly integrated clusters of sub-myths.

Ernst Cassirer was one of the first to reveal the conditions for the appearance, nature, and functioning of myths in totalitarian societies using the examples of Italian fascism and German national socialism. On one hand, a systemic crisis in Europe caused the emergence of a mythical consciousness to which society returned, abandoning rational thought. On the other hand, political myths were artificial constructions created by skillful and cunning artisans using new methods (changing the function of language, ritualizing political life, constraining and suppressing dissent, and influencing the imagination of the masses through prophecies). Finally, the emergence of the political myth resulted from the activity of modern politicians who combined rational and irrational roles. They became preachers of a new religion (*homo magus*) but proceeded very methodically (*homo faber*) (Cassirer, 1946, p. 282). Such a political religion represented a system of beliefs, myths, rituals, and symbols, which a powerful propaganda apparatus spread under a total monopoly through its communication channels. Ideology, therefore, turned into dogma and commandments, and political power took on a sacred essence. Thus, the sacralization of politics was one of totalitarianism’s fundamental features (Gentile, 2006, p. 47). It was based on the Manichean reception of the real world, where there was absolute good and evil. Such a primitive value matrix made it possible to interpret political reality as a constant struggle of good against evil, justifying the necessity of exterminating enemies for the community’s survival (Sviličić & Maldini, 2014, p. 731).

The Soviet mythological system was finally formed in the mid-1930s when Stalin’s vision of the communist state and society replaced Lenin’s one, without undergoing fundamental changes during this time. According to Mikhail Heller, myths became a powerful weapon used by the Communist Party to form the Soviet man (Heller, 1988, p. 226). He defined the following Soviet myths: (1) the myth of the new world’s creation (the myth of the revolution), (2) the myth of the state (it contained the myth of the party, the myth of the leader, and the myth of the people), and (3) the myth of the monolith, or unity (this also included the myth of the enemy, which encroached on this unity). According to Carol Barner-Barry and Cynthia Hody, the mobilization of society to achieve the idea of the Soviet utopia, the creation of a new type of person (“a builder of communism”), and the taking of symbolic control over people were the main functions of the Soviet mythology. Its master myths were the foundation myth (the myth of the Bolshevik revolution), the sustaining myth (the myth of the building of communism), and the eschatological myth (the myth of the world Communist revolution) (Barner-Barry & Hody, 1994, pp. 617–625). Gill identified six Soviet myths instead a single foundation myth: the foundation of the regime, the building of socialism, the nature of leadership, the internal opposition, the external opposition, and victory in the war (Gill, 2011, pp. 4–5).

Particular Soviet myths are of scientific interest in historiography – for instance, the myth of the revolution (Corney, 2004), the myth of “friendship of the peoples” (Tillett, 1969), and the myth of “the Great Patriotic War” (Weiner, 2001; Brunstedt, 2021). At the same time, the Ukrainian Soviet myths, including the myth of “the Ukrainian people’s reunification,” received little scientific attention. Among the studies on this issue, Serhy Yekelchuk described the formation of the Soviet mythologemes in the Stalin era (Yekelchuk, 2004). Although the issue of the Ukrainian lands’ reunion was widely presented in contemporary Ukrainian historical discourse (Humeniuk, 2004; Danyliuk & Mishchanyn, 2013), scholars primarily

focused on the issues of illegitimacy of the Soviet invasion of Western Ukraine (Kulchytskyi, 2009) and the influence of “reunification” on national identity (Hrynevych et al., 2004), historical science (Yusova, 2004), and post-Soviet nation-building (Zhurzhenko, 2013).

**The purpose of the article** is to examine the process of creating and spreading the myth of “the Ukrainian people’s reunification” (a full name is the myth of “the Ukrainian people’s reunification within a single Ukrainian Soviet state”) as a means of legitimizing the Stalinist regime in the annexed territories and constructing the Soviet identity. Supporting the thesis that the myth needs to be constantly updated, in the article there is described the “reunification” myth’s changes during the Stalinist period. Considering the complexity of the Soviet mythology system, the authors have revealed the connection of this myth with other master myths.

**The Results of the Research.** The transition of Stalinist ideology to National Bolshevism (Brandenberger, 2002) required the creation of new myths or the rehabilitation of the old imperial myths. These myths were intended to narrate the thousand-year history of the Soviet state, an organic part of which was Russian history. At the same time, Stalinist ideologues had to harmonize them with the master myths of the revolution and the building of communism, ultimately leading to their renewal. Therefore, a blurring between the Soviet and Russian histories allowed the Soviet leader to legitimize power in a broader historical context (Nemchynov, 2017, p. 88). The mythological systems of the Soviet republics also needed updating. National myths were, firstly, to accord with the Soviet master myths and, secondly, to indicate the connection between national history and Russian history and the role of Russia in the formation and development of each Soviet nation. Thus, the Soviet authorities invented new national myths of the subject peoples and entered their past into the all-Soviet metanarrative.

“Remembering the nation” in the Ukrainian SSR began after the Great Terror (Yekelchyk, 2004, p. 19). The national narrative was rehabilitated in 1938 – 1941, and Ukrainian national figures (Bohdan Khmelnytskyi, Taras Shevchenko, Danylo Halytskyi, and the others) were included in the Soviet heroic pantheon. The creation of new Soviet national myths coincided with the beginning of the USSR’s aggressive military campaign during World War II. The legitimation of the Stalinist regime in the annexed territories (Eastern Halychyna, Volyn, Northern Bukovyna, Southern Bessarabia, and later Zakarpattia) thus required a myth that would be consistent with the new version of the Soviet Ukrainian past.

Stalinist ideologues began constructing a legitimation myth from the beginning of the Soviet invasion of Poland. It justified aggression under the pretext of helping the Ukrainians and Belarusians living in Poland. Viacheslav Molotov, the head of the USSR Government, announced the official motives for sending the Soviet troops into Western Ukraine and Western Belarus on September 17, 1939. He stated that the collapse of the Polish state because of the war with Germany had caused probable threats to the safety of the Soviet Union and had put the “consanguineous Ukrainian and Belarusian brothers” in a hopeless situation. Therefore, sending troops was considered a “sacred duty to lend a helping hand” to these peoples, who had existed in Poland as “rightless nations.” Moreover, the Soviet army liberated not only the peoples of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus but also the Polish working masses from capitalist oppression and the “ill-fated war” (Molotov, 1939, pp. 5–6). Semen Tymoshenko, the commander of the Ukrainian front, ordered the troops to enter the territory of Poland to liberate the Ukrainians and Belarusians from the “Polish landowners’ oppression.” He proclaimed, “We are going to Western Ukraine not as conquerors, but as liberators...” (Tymoshenko, 1940, p. 115).

One of the first official explanations of the reasons for the “liberation campaign” was the article by the leading Soviet party historian Yemelian Yaroslavskii, “To whom we go to rescue,” published on September 19 in “Pravda.” It described the image of a “Polish nobility state” where the economic ruling class (Polish nobility – “szlachta” or “pany”) exploited the working people. The szlachta, in his opinion, was considered guilty of the collapse of the Polish state. The Ukrainians and Belarusians suffered the most in this state. Turning Western Ukraine and Belarus into “an internal colony,” Polish capitalists reduced the people to material impoverishment. Furthermore, the Poles implemented a forcible Polonization of national minorities (Yaroslavskii, 1939, pp. 23–31).

On October 27, 1939, the People’s Assembly of Western Ukraine, organized by the Bolsheviks, adopted the “Declaration on Incorporation of Western Ukraine into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.” On November 1, 1939, the Soviet Parliament adopted the law “On Inclusion of Western Ukraine into the USSR and its Union with the Ukrainian SSR.” Two weeks later, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR included the new territory by a corresponding law and “reunited the great Ukrainian people in a single Ukrainian state” (Zakon, 1939, p. 130).

Thus, the Stalinist regime legitimized aggression against Poland using the “liberation myth.” This myth had a typical dramatic plot that included mythologemes of (1) territory and common origin, (2) enemy, (3) persistent suffering, (4) heroic struggle, (5) savior, and (6) building a new life. Each of them actually was a particular myth that organically intertwined with others, forming a master myth.

The liberation myth substantiated the historical right to Western Ukraine and the nation’s age-old historical ties with the region’s community. Therefore, this myth was connected to the national foundation myth, which Stalinist ideologists were revising at that time. However, there were certain contradictions between historical narratives. On the one hand, central Soviet academic historians formulated the concepts of the “Old-Russian nation” and Kyivan Rus as a “common cradle of three brotherly peoples” (the Russians, the Ukrainians, and the Belarusians), who were the basis of the official Soviet interpretation of the East Slavic nation’s origin. They considered the ancient history of Western Ukraine as part of Russian history, denoting this territory as “originally Russian lands and a part of the Rurik empire” and the Galicia-Volhynia principality as “a natural continuance of South-Western Rus” (Grekov, 1939, p. 248; Picheta, 1939, p. 157). On the other hand, the annexation of new territories in 1939 – 1940 actualized the issue of Ukrainian people’s origin in the Ukrainian Soviet historical discourse (Yusova, 2004, p. 176). The Ukrainian Soviet historians highlighted the close connection between Western Ukraine and other Slavic lands but identified the Galicia-Volhynia principality as “the largest and most powerful principality in Ukraine” (Ohloblin, 1940, pp. 9–11).

The image of the enemy was central to the myth structure. For its design, mythmakers used the negative emotional background of the Western Ukrainian community toward Polish rule. These remembrances functioned as an anchor for mythical narratives. Therefore, the Polish szlachta was depicted as the primary enemy, the image of which contained several features. Firstly, it was abstract. The enemies were not individuals who pursued politics of colonial oppression but the economically dominant class, which included various strata of society from magnates and landlords to a petite bourgeoisie. Secondly, the enemy had class and national nature. The Polish szlachta pursued “national and colonial oppression” politics, exploiting the working people, prohibiting the national language, closing national schools, carrying on Polonization, and persecuting Orthodox Christians. Thirdly, the Polish szlachta

was portrayed as the “eternal enemy of the Ukrainian people,” who had claimed Ukrainian lands since Kyivan Rus.

In addition to the Polish szlachta, the “Western imperialistic states” posed a significant danger. They created an “artificial multinational” Poland after the end of the Great War and made it “an outpost in the fight against the young Soviet republic” (Semernin, 1939, pp. 44–45). Moreover, Poland was viewed as a “semi-colony of Anglo-French imperialism” (Babaiev, 1939, p. 50). The Soviet authorities considered “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists,” who were all the figures of the Ukrainian national movement opposing Bolshevik ideas and the union with Russia, and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church as internal enemies. They were represented as betrayers of the Ukrainian people who had helped to occupy Western Ukrainian lands.

The Soviet mythmakers depicted Western Ukraine’s past as persistent suffering of the people from Polish oppression. The “colonial” status of the community did not change until the Soviet army’s “liberation campaign.” It is worth noting that the term “Ukrainian people” only referred to its working class. The wealthy peasantry (“kulaks”) and other privileged classes were identified as “having lost connection with their people” and were “turning into tools of the Polish nobility in the denationalization politics” (Picheta, 1940, p. 123). Furthermore, the Soviet narratives described Western Ukraine’s working people as a homogeneous Ukrainian ethnic community, keeping quiet about other ethnic groups, primarily the Jews, who predominantly lived in cities.

The heroic struggle against the Polish szlachta was the main plot line of the Ukrainian metanarrative during 1939 – 1940. This “thousand-year” struggle contained several stages: Princely, Cossacks’, Cossack-peasants’, the Liberation War in 1648–1654, Peasant uprisings (the 18th century), the Anti-Polish struggle within the Austrian and Russian empires (the 19th century), the Soviet-Poland War (1918 – 1920), and workers’ struggles (1920 – 1939) (Sukhopalko, 1940; Picheta, 1940). Its goals were liberation from Polish oppression, return to the “family of brotherly nations,” and unity with Russia. Therefore, the most crucial episode of this struggle, including for Western Ukraine, was the Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s liberation war, which led to the “two brotherly peoples’ unity,” despite that Western Ukrainian lands still remained a part of Poland (Petrovskiy, 1939).

The “act of liberation” culminated in the myth’s dramatic plot. The Soviet invasion was named the “Red Army’s liberation march” and was interpreted as a “great liberation mission,” which the Soviet troops carried out by order of the party and the government (Sukhopalko, 1940, p. 41). Thus, this mythologeme corresponded to an eschatological myth about the Soviet state’s sacred role as the saviour of the enslaved working masses. Mythical narratives did not describe military battles between the Soviet and Polish troops, forming the illusion of their absence. At the same time, the heroism of the Soviet soldiers who “destroyed enemy nests that tried to resist” was emphasized (Abramov & Venskii, 1940, pp. 46–47). Instead of the characterization of the military campaign, the mythmakers focused on representing the Soviet troops’ friendly welcome by the local inhabitants (Bielousov, 1940, p. 105).

The liberation myth’s plot finished with an image of the new era. It was a life in the “new and free” family of the Soviet peoples, where the Western Ukrainian community was meant to build a “socialist society” and a culture “national in form and socialist in content” (Picheta, 1940, p. 127). It pointed at the myth’s mobilization function as characteristic of any myth.

In 1940 the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna due to diplomatic pressure and the military campaign against Romania strengthened the liberation myth’s influence on the collective Soviet consciousness. The official Soviet discourse used similar

mythologemes to legitimize the new “liberation march”: common origin; historical, linguistic, and cultural ties with Soviet Ukraine; the existence of an eternal enemy (in this case, “Romanian boyars”); continuous suffering of the people; and the constant and heroic struggle for freedom. The media welcomed “the liberated peoples” of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna on behalf of the people and thanked Stalin for his “wise and peaceful foreign policy” (Teumin, 1940, p. 31).

However, there were substantial differences in the “liberation” of new territories. Western Ukraine was occupied due to the military campaign, while the issue of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna was resolved diplomatically – although minor military skirmishes between the Soviet and Romanian forces did occur. Moreover, the USSR never recognized the Romanian incorporation of Bessarabia and claimed it as the Soviets’ rightful territory. Therefore, its annexation was interpreted as a “return to the Motherland.” In turn, the Soviet diplomacy demanded Northern Bukovyna as “a minor way of indemnification to the USSR and the Bessarabian citizens by Romania’s 22-year rule in Bessarabia” (Teumin, 1940, p. 2). In August of 1940, the Soviet parliament incorporated Northern Bukovyna and the Khotyn, Akkerman, and Izmail districts of Bessarabia into the Ukrainian SSR.

The Stalinist regime used the entire Soviet propaganda arsenal to create and spread mythical narratives. For example, the bibliographic guide on the first anniversary of “Western Ukraine’s Liberation” included 659 publications in 1939 – 1940 (monographs; academic articles; scientific; literary; and propaganda texts; articles in periodicals, etc.) (Hensorskyi & Tur’ian, 1940). The propaganda scope was similar in Northern Bukovyna and Bessarabia (Mandryk-Melnychuk & Kotsur, 2020). Propaganda and agitation departments issued brochures for local agitators, which contained basic historical information about the annexed territories, official texts, and literary works. Pedagogical journals published articles about the historical and geographical characteristics of the new lands, which teachers were then required to relay to their students (Medvedenko & Starovoitenko, 1940). In addition to a large amount of propaganda and historical writings, the Soviet press publicized various documents and local inhabitants’ memories as evidence of social and national oppression.

Propaganda included visual images, such as posters, illustrations, and photographs, that showed the people’s joy at the Soviet “liberation.” They illustrated the Soviet soldiers holding children in their arms or greeting peasants, who personified the image of the liberated Ukrainian people. The caricatures ridiculed the image of the enemy while similarly portraying “Polish szlachta” and “Romanian boyars” as working people’s exploiters. Cinematography played a significant role in visualizing Soviet mythical narratives for their further retransmission among the masses. Therefore, propaganda movies about each annexed territory (“Liberation of Ukrainian and Belarusian Lands from the Polish Szlachta’s Oppression and the Reunification of Brotherly Nations into a Single Family,” “On the Danube,” and “Bukovyna – Ukrainian Land”) were filmed in 1940.

Ritualization is a necessary element in working on a myth. If myth is a description, ritual is its articulation. Therefore, the ritualization of the liberation myth became an essential component of the Soviet celebration discourse in the annexed territories. The Red Army’s aggressive campaigns against Poland and Romania turned into celebrations of the enslaved peoples’ liberation. Throughout the country, authorities organized party meetings, demonstrations, rallies, and letters’ writings to support the liberated peoples and to approve the Stalinist government’s politics. The most significant event was a multi-thousand-person rally on the first anniversary of “Western Ukraine’s Liberation” and the



laying of a monument to Lenin in Lviv on September 17, 1940. Newspapers reported that 200,000 people had gathered at the rally (Samokhin, 1940, p. 1). The mass rallies' organizing aimed to demonstrate the unconditional people's support of the Soviet government and their sincere thankfulness for the liberation of Western Ukraine. Preparations for the first-anniversary celebration began in Southern Bessarabia and Northern Bukovyna in June of 1941, but the German invasion interrupted them.

Thus, the propaganda tried to persuade the local community of the Soviet campaigns' liberating nature and to demonstrate the prospects of new life in the "Soviet peoples' free family." The advancing mythical narratives shaped the image of the Soviet Union as a defender of the Ukrainian working people's social and national rights. De facto, the Soviet regime's actual politics radically differed from the constructed image. Stalin's "Revolution from abroad" brought Western Ukraine collectivization, confiscation of property, imprisonment, NKVD torture, executions, and deportations (Gross, 2002). Precisely this contradiction between the liberation myth and reality was nullifying the efforts of Soviet propagandists.

From 1939 to 1940, ethnic Ukrainian territories were incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR. The Soviet authority interpreted it as the achievement of the most crucial aim of the Ukrainian people – "reunification within a single state." It is worth noting that the concept of the "Ukrainian people's reunification" was a Soviet alternative to the idea of "United Ukraine" ("Soborna Ukraina"), the implementation of which in collective memory was associated with the Act of Unification of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the West Ukrainian People's Republic on January 22, 1919. However, Stalin's ideologists did not formulate the concept of "reunification" with the beginning of aggression campaigns. Therefore, the official Soviet discourse used different words to indicate the incorporation of new lands into the Ukrainian SSR: "unification" ("z'iednannia"), "reunification" ("vozz'iednannia"), and "inclusion" ("priednannia") (Bielousov, 1940, p. 97; Picheta, 1939, p. 155; Sukhopalko, 1940, p. 7).

After the annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, narratives about the "Ukrainian people's reunification" increasingly appeared in official Ukrainian historical discourses. At the end of 1940, the Institute of the History of Ukraine of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR issued the first systematic study of Ukrainian history according to the new paradigm. Its last chapter, "The Reunification of the Great Ukrainian People within the Single Ukrainian Soviet State," depicted "the great historical mission of the Soviet Union to liberate Ukrainian lands from foreign oppression" (Bielousov et al., 1940, p. 392).

The new concept of "reunification" had more integrative power than the idea of liberation from an abstract external enemy. It referred to the "golden age" – a mythical time when the Ukrainians lived together with their "consanguineous brothers," Russians and Belarusians, within a single "Old-Russian state." After its collapse and foreign invasions, reunifying these peoples was presented as the primary goal and a constant process, the first stage of which was the "unification of Ukraine with Russia" in 1654. The completion of this process in 1939 – 1940 and the beginning of a new "golden age" for the "liberated" territories was interpreted as a result of Stalin's politics. Thus, mythmakers used the realization of this "age-old historical goal" not only to legitimize the annexation of territories but also to strengthen Stalin's cult and to confirm the correctness of his course on "building socialism in one country".

Myths are dynamic constructs that constantly change over time. They must always be up to date, sustain emotional significance for the community and adapt to new contexts (Bottici, 2007, p. 183). The Soviet-German war significantly influenced the Soviet mythological system, including the liberation myth. The major historical enemy of the "fraternal Slavic

peoples” became the Germans, and the narratives about the Rus princes’ victory over the German “dog-knights” were included in the Stalinist metanarrative. The mythmakers also interpreted the reason for the “liberation” of Western Ukraine in 1939 differently, pointing to the threat of its enslavement by Germany (Voblyi et al., 1942, p. 203).

Furthermore, the image of the internal enemy, “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists,” substantially changed. Soviet narratives defined them as “Ukrainian-German nationalists” and the “fiercest enemies of the Ukrainian people,” who were entirely subordinate to the external enemy and aimed to renew the exploitation of the working people. The idea of an independent and united Ukraine was primarily dangerous to the Soviet ideology. The nationalist version of Ukraine’s past proved the right of the Ukrainian nation to be an independent state and emphasized the negative consequences of Russian rule and the Soviet power. Stalinist ideologues had to oppose this version with a concept that would prove the only possible way for the Ukrainian people’s historical development in the union with Russia. Therefore, the mythmakers based the updated myth on the “struggle for” (social and national freedom, the Ukrainian people’s reunification, and the union with Russia) instead of the “struggle against” (external and internal enemies).

Mykola Petrovskyi finally formulated the comprehensive concept of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification” in 1944. The historian contrasted it with the nationalist concept of “United Ukraine.” His grand narrative represented the Soviet version of Ukrainian history, which described the nation-building process as a constant struggle for reunification within a single state. However, each stage of this process was considered in the context of Russian history, emphasizing the strong historical ties between the two peoples and the intention of the Ukrainians to join the Russian state. “Without uniting with the Russian people, the issue of reunifying the Ukrainian people in a single Ukrainian state could not be resolved positively,” he noted (Petrovskii, 1944, p. 73).

Therefore, two reunification myths were constructed in the new Soviet mythology. The first one, the myth of the “reunification of Ukraine with Russia,” represented the common history of “brotherly peoples” from the time of Kyivan Rus, interrupted by the Tatar-Mongol invasion and restored after the conclusion of the Pereiaslav Treaty in 1654 by Bohdan Khmelnytskyi. It justified the incorporation of Ukraine into the Russian state and defined it as a historical regularity and a direct intention of the Ukrainian people. Before the beginning of the Soviet-German war, the official discourse characterized the conclusion of the Pereiaslav Treaty and joining Russia as a “lesser evil” compared to Polish and Turkish rule. During the war, this event already had a new interpretation as the “only right path” (Yekelchuk, 2004, pp. 36–37).

The second one, the myth of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification,” justified Stalin’s annexationist policy as the realization of Ukrainians’ historical right to unite within a single state. Although it was based on the actual historical intention of the Ukrainians, the myth strengthened the idea of the inability to create an independent state in their collective consciousness. It evoked in people a sense of constant gratitude to the Soviet government, the Communist party, Stalin personally, and the Russian people for “liberation and reunification” and motivated them to support friendly relations with the “great Russian people” and all the peoples of the USSR.

The myth of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification” was closely integrated into the Soviet mythic system and was based on the Soviet master myths: (1) the myth of the “golden age,” describing Kyivan Rus as a powerful state of the ancient East-Slavic people; (2) the myth of the “October Revolution,” noting that the unification of the Ukrainian lands became possible

only after the Bolshevik Party's victory and the establishment of Soviet power in Ukraine; (3) the myth of the leader, attributing the reunification process to Stalin's "wise politics"; (4) the myth of the enemy, interpreting the Ukrainian people's long-lasting separation as the result of external enemies' aggression and their conspiracy with internal enemies; and (5) the myth of the building of communism, depicting the economic and cultural revival of the "liberated" lands and the joyful and free life of its population. In addition, this myth was connected with national myths of the Ukrainian people's heroic struggle, the central one of which was the myth of the "reunification of Ukraine with Russia."

With the beginning of the Soviet counteroffensive and the return of Soviet power in Ukraine, the myth of the "reunification of Ukraine with Russia" played a crucial identification role for the population under German occupation. This is evidenced by Soviet commemorations, particularly the celebration of the 290th anniversary of the Pereiaslav Council in January of 1944. At the same time, party leaders' proclamations used the mythical narratives of the "Ukrainian people's reunification" as arguments for the return of the lands annexed in 1939 – 1940 and claims to other ethnic Ukrainian territories (Khrushchov, 1944, pp. 1–2).

The reunification myth was finally entrenched in the official discourse with the incorporation of Transcarpathian Ukraine in 1944 – 1945. Soviet narratives proved the historical right to this territory according to the traditional scheme, pointing to the historical ties of Transcarpathian Ukrainians with "consanguineous brothers," the people's social and national oppression by the "Hungarian magnates," the constant intention for "reunification" with the Ukrainians and union with the Russians (Voblyi & Stetsiuk, 1944; Petrovskyi, 1944; Bazhan, 1945). At the same time, they described the "nine-hundred-year struggle" of Transcarpathian Ukrainians for reunification, which contradicted the foundation myth. This was not the first time such appeared, but ideologues deliberately allowed them to exist to prove the unity of ethnic Ukrainian territories. The "reunification" of Transcarpathian Ukraine took place after the signing of the treaty between the USSR and the Republic of Czechoslovakia on June 29, 1945, although the Soviet authorities completely controlled political power in the region after the deployment of their troops at the end of October of 1944. One of the reasons for concluding this treaty was the community's intention for reunification, proclaimed in the Manifest of the First Congress of Transcarpathian Ukraine People's Committees on November 26, 1944. Although, the Soviet officials prepared the draft of the Manifest in advance, and higher-level Soviet leadership approved it (Mishchanyin, 2018, p. 99). This document contained all relevant official Soviet narratives, recognized the reunification as an act of historical justice, and portrayed the history of the "Transcarpathian-Ukrainian people" who "being separated from their Motherland Ukraine for centuries... were doomed to poverty and extinction" (Manifest, 1944, p. 2).

On June 29, 1945, during an address in the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR, M. Khrushchov informed the deputies of the signing of the treaty by the USSR and the Republic of Czechoslovakia and proclaimed the completion of all Ukrainian lands' reunification. He declared, "From now and forever, for the first time in its history, the Ukrainian people will be completely reunited within a single Ukrainian state" (Khrushchov, 1945, p. 1). At the same time, he accentuated the leading role of the party and Stalin in reunification, as well as the help from the "fraternal" Russian people. Thus, the Soviet leadership officially completed the "collecting" of Ukrainian lands.

The Soviet authorities used the concept of "reunification" not only to legitimize the annexation of Ukrainian territories. Stalinist ideologues formalized the liquidation of the

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church as “reunification with the Orthodox Church” (David, 2018; Datskiv & Kapitan, 2022). Waging a fight against the liberation movement in Western Ukraine, the Soviet power thus tried to deprive it of the primary ideological support, the Uniate clergy. Moreover, the resolution on the churches’ “reunification,” adopted at the Lviv Council in 1946, returned Greek Catholic Galicians to the Orthodox faith. Propagandists used its decision as an argument to confirm the mythologeme of the violation of Eastern Slavic peoples’ “old-age ties” by foreign rule and to explain the historical justice of reuniting the Ukrainian lands.

The Soviet authorities carried out a large-scale ritualization of the myth in 1949, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification.” Stalinist leadership set the new date of “reunification” on November 1, 1939, when the Supreme Soviet of the USSR had adopted the “Law on the inclusion of Western Ukraine into the USSR with its union with the Ukrainian SSR”. The invented anniversary celebration aimed to unite Ukrainian society around the idea of communism, to demonstrate the economic, political, and cultural achievements of the post-war development of Soviet Ukraine, and to illustrate support for the Soviet government in those annexed regions where the anti-Soviet national movement was active. That is why the main official anniversary celebrations were held in three cities at once – Kyiv, Lviv, and Uzhhorod. These celebrations included military parades, demonstrations by thousands of workers, monument layings, and memorial plaque unveilings. The celebration became not just a massive ritual but also a mobilization resource for increasing the collectivization’s pace, intensifying mass-political work, and implanting the Soviet cultural models in annexed territories. Furthermore, like most mass holidays of this period, the anniversary became a ritual of thanks to Stalin (Yekelchyk, 2014, p. 45).

Analyzing the official narratives during the celebration allows us to assert another renewal of the reunification myth. Firstly, in the conditions of continued struggle against the Ukrainian national movement and new ideological campaigns against the intellectuals, the internal enemy’s activity was represented as the primary cause of the separation of Ukrainian lands. “Bourgeois nationalists” were portrayed as betrayers to the Ukrainian people who “conspired with the imperialists and helped them turn the Western Ukrainian, Transcarpathian, and Bukovyna lands into colonies of capitalist states” (Khrushchov, 1950, p. 54). Secondly, the myth was supplemented with narratives about the “great victory” in World War II and post-war reconstruction successes. The Ukrainian historical Soviet discourse quickly reacted to changes in the official interpretation of reunification. The new narrative by Serhii Belousov considered the formation of Soviet Ukraine and the “reunification” of Ukrainian lands as a continuous process resulting from “the implementation of a wise Leninist-Stalinist national policy.” The final stage of this process was the fight against the “German-fascist invaders.” Therefore, the author defined the victory in the “Great Patriotic War” as a decisive factor in the Ukrainian lands’ unity. Finally, the narrative demonstrated the post-war five-year plan’s achievements in Ukraine, creating the illusion of a new “golden era” during which “the reunited people of Soviet Ukraine together with all the peoples of the Soviet Union would be coming to complete victory of communism” (Bielousov, 1951, p. 164).

Creating a new Ukrainian Soviet mythology was finalized by a grandiose celebration timed with the 300th anniversary of the Pereiaslav Treaty in 1654. It was named the “300th anniversary of the reunification of Ukraine with Russia”, and its preparation began in 1952. Although Stalin died in March 1953, the anniversary was held under the Stalin model of remembrance. “The last Stalinist festival,” as Yekelchyk named it (Yekelchyk, 2004, p. 154), was supposed to crystallize the master myth of the “unity between two fraternal peoples” in

the mass consciousness. The main official narrative was “Theses on the 300th anniversary of the reunification of Ukraine with Russia (1654 – 1954), “representing the new Soviet scheme of Ukrainian history. It was based on previous myths, condensing them into a single archemyth that approved the Ukrainian national history’s dependence on Russian history. The myth of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification” already emphasized the significant geopolitical meaning of Ukrainian lands’ reunification, namely Soviet Ukraine’s transformation into one of the largest states in Europe (Tezy, 1954, p. 3). Despite preserving the Stalinist model of Ukrainian national memory, the updated grand narrative did not emphasize Stalin’s role in reunification. Even before the official beginning of de-Stalinization, new historical works about “reunification” did not mention Stalin’s name.

**The Conclusion.** The myth of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification” was the Soviet political myth that occupied a central place in the official version of the annexed Ukrainian territories’ historical past. Its archetypal basis was the idea of uniting Ukrainian lands into a single state, which was a component of the Ukrainian national idea and one of the Ukrainian national movement’s primary goals. However, the Soviet mythmakers manipulated it to create narratives that would transfer meanings to the community corresponding to Stalinist ideology. They interpreted the annexation of new territories as a restoration of historical justice, emphasized the decisive role of the Bolshevik Party and its leader in the Ukrainian lands’ reunification, designated the help of the Russian people as a critical factor in achieving this goal, and instilled a belief that Ukrainians were unable to create a state and unify without a union with Russia.

The construction of a new myth underwent several stages, during which the myth changed its functional purpose. Initially, there was a liberation myth, which had a legitimization function and aimed to justify the annexation of Western Ukraine, Northern Bukovyna, and Southern Bessarabia in 1939 – 1940. It created the image of a primordial external enemy from whom the Soviet troops had to protect the “fraternal” oppressed population. During the Soviet-German war, the liberation myth was transformed into the reunification myth used during the incorporation of Transcarpathian Ukraine. Furthermore, it played an identification role, forming the alternative Soviet version of Ukrainian history as opposed to the concept of a “united and independent Ukraine.” The myth was a tool of ideological struggle against the Ukrainian anti-Soviet liberation movement and the Uniate Church, establishing them as internal enemies in Ukraine. The myth had a mobilizing function during its ritualization in 1949, after which it finally entered the Soviet mythological system.

The constructed myth was interlaced with other Soviet master myths, namely the foundation myth, the myth of the “reunification of Ukraine with Russia,” the myth of the “Great Patriotic War,” and the myth of the building of communism. It allowed the myth of the “Ukrainian people’s reunification” to entrench itself in the Ukrainians’ public consciousness for a long time. The prospect of further research is a comparative analysis of Soviet mythmaking in the annexed Ukrainian territories as a component of Stalin’s memory politics.

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