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Anti-Soviet Propaganda in the Press of the Military Administration Zone during the German Occupation of Ukraine (1941–1943)

Vitaliy M. Korol ^{a, b, *}, Tetiana I. Shut ^a

^a Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A. S. Makarenko, Sumy, Ukraine

^b Sumy State University, Sumy, Ukraine

Abstract

The article is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of anti-Soviet and anti-Russian propaganda in the occupation press within the Military Administration Zone of Ukraine during 1941–1943. It characterizes the goals, methods, and regional specifics of the Nazi informational manipulation of the local population. The study highlights the core narratives, historical precedents, myths, and ideologemes deployed by the occupiers to shape Ukrainian mass consciousness.

Nazi ideological indoctrination through the local press was intense and utilized a wide variety of genres. Readers were constantly reminded of the crimes of the Soviet regime and emphasized that human life had no value for the Bolshevik regime. The notion was reinforced in the public consciousness that communist ideologues and leaders regarded the population under their control solely as raw material for a grandiose, mad experiment concocted by Jews. Such anti-Bolshevik ideological processing was supposed to encourage local residents to cooperate with the Germans in the fight against the communists and the USSR.

Anti-Soviet narratives were combined with anti-Russian propaganda. Past injustices by the Russian state were persistently recalled. The national feelings of the people and their post-colonial complexes – formed during their life within a multinational empire, with the USSR proclaimed as its new incarnation – were exploited. A crucial role was played by the thesis of the civilized Europeanness of Ukrainians and their foreignness to a wild, Asian Russia. In this context, the Third Reich's war with the Soviet Union was framed as a “civilization vs. barbarism” type of conflict. The purpose of this propaganda was to leverage the patriotism of the local population, induce them into collaboration, and provoke a Ukrainian-Russian confrontation. The ultimate goal of this information warfare can be seen as undermining the great-power ideology of Moscow.

Keywords: World War II, Ukraine, German occupation, Military Administration Zone, Nazi propaganda, newspapers.

1. Introduction

World War II, like any other armed conflict, was fought not only in battles using conventional weapons. The struggle in the information sphere was no less fierce. Both sides sought to exert ideological and psychological influence on the population as effectively as possible, as it constituted one of the most critical resources for waging war. During the German occupation of Ukraine, the press established by the Nazis became one of the pivotal components in this “battle for the hearts and minds of the people.”

The relevance of this study is driven by the fact that information warfare plays an increasingly significant role in today's post-industrial information society, amid the rapid

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: zholud.zholud@gmail.com (V.M. Korol)

development of television, communication media, and computer technologies. Under these conditions, the efficacy of such warfare expands, increasingly superseding physical confrontation or serving as its primary phase. Consequently, examining the ideological and psychological struggles of a defining period in the history of Ukraine and the world, such as World War II, takes on paramount importance.

The Nazi regime in occupied Ukraine exhibited distinct characteristics across different zones of occupation. This also applied to publishing and the organization of propaganda. However, most scholars focus their attention on studying the functioning of German propaganda in the *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*. At the same time, the relevant activities of the occupiers in the Military Administration Zone remain less studied. Yet, even within the scope of completed studies, several dimensions require additional examination. Specifically, this underscores the need for a comprehensive examination of how Nazi anti-Soviet propaganda converged with the anti-Russian ideological conditioning of the population in Eastern Ukraine. This is precisely the purpose of the presented article.

2. Materials and methods

The primary source base for this study comprises materials from the wartime occupation press across three of the five Ukrainian oblasts that fell within the Military Administration Zone in 1941–1943, specifically: Sumy, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv.

The following newspaper binders were processed:

- from Sumy oblast: *Sumskyi Visnyk* ("Sumy Herald"), *Vidrodzhennia* ("Revival," Romny), *Golos Okhtyrshchyny* ("Voice of Okhtyrka Land"), *Novyi Chas* ("New Time," Shostka), and *Vyzvolennia* ("Liberation," Konotop);

- from Kharkiv Oblast: *Kharkivianyn* ("Kharkivite"), *Nova Ukraina* ("New Ukraine," Kharkiv), *Ridnyi Krai* ("Native Land," Bohodukhiv), *Biuletyn Valkivskoi raionnoi upravly* ("Bulletin of the Valky District Administration"), and *Kostiantynohradski Novi Visti* ("Kostiantynohrad New Tidings");

- from Chernihiv Oblast: *Ukrainske Polissia* ("Ukrainian Polissia," Chernihiv), *Nizhynski Visti* ("Nizhyn News"), *Visti Pryluchchyny* ("Pryluky Land News"), *Novyi Shliakh* ("New Way," Oster), and *Visti Ostershchyny* ("Oster Land News").

German archival documents – previously collected, organized, and translated by V. Dashichev and V. Kosyk – also served as an essential component of the source base ([Dashichev, 1973](#); [Kosyk, 1993](#); [Kosyk, 1999](#); [Kosyk, 2000](#)).

The research methodology is based on the principles of historicism, objectivity, and a systematic approach. General scientific (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction) and special historical (historical-genetic, historical-systemic, retrospective, comparative-historical) methods were used in combination, as well as elements of hermeneutics and content analysis.

3. Discussion

During the Soviet period, objective research on this issue was impossible due to the dictates of official communist ideology, as well as due to severe restrictions on access to the occupation press and archival funds. Historians began to work thoroughly on this topic only after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Notably, a comprehensive analysis of the information space in occupied Ukraine has been conducted by O. Salata and D. Tytarenko ([Salata, 2020](#); [Tytarenko, 2023](#)). V. Nesterenko has directly investigated the institutional organization of the Nazi propaganda system within the Military Administration Zone ([Nesterenko, 2016](#)). The exploration of specific Nazi propaganda currents and the press coverage of select topics has been a focal point for several contemporary historians, with significant contributions from N. Handrabura, O. Honcharenko, and A. Ivanenko ([Handrabura, 2014](#); [Honcharenko, Ivanenko, 2023](#); [Kazakov, 2024](#)). Using the Chernihiv Oblast as a case study, O. Kyrychenko examined the correlation between the operations of the occupation press and the resurgence of local national cultural life ([Kirichenko, 2019](#)). Concurrently, M. Horokh, I. Hridina, and Ye. Protsenko focused on the use of political cartoons addressing the events of 1941–1943 within the legal press of the Military Zone ([Horokh, 2021](#); [Hridina, Protsenko, 2018](#)).

K. Berkhoff stands out among Western scholars who have investigated the issue of German propaganda within occupied Ukrainian territories ([Berkhoff, 2004](#)). His work contains an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and practices of Nazi indoctrination implemented through print media

and radio. The studies by R. Brandon, W. Lower, and T. Snyder are dedicated to analyzing how propaganda supported the Nazi campaign to exterminate the Jewish population in Ukraine (Brandon, Lower, 2008; Lower, 2005; Snyder, 2010). German historian R.-D. Müller emphasized that within the Military Administration Zone, a pragmatic approach was adopted toward propaganda among the local population in order to induce active collaboration (Müller, 2012).

Nevertheless, despite substantial scholarly interest in this issue, important lacunae persist regarding the mechanisms of Nazi anti-Soviet and anti-Russian propaganda deployed in the Military Administration Zone of occupied Ukraine.

4. Results

Immediately after the capture of eastern Ukraine in the fall of 1941, the Germans, along with the formation of occupation administration bodies, also made efforts to create newspapers under their control in the cities of the region. The main task of these publications was to participate in the creation of an information space in the occupied territory, through which it would be possible to conduct systematic agitation and propaganda work among the local population. This was necessary so that the population would not resist the occupation and economic exploitation of the captured territory, but rather be loyal and collaborate with the Nazis.

The occupation newspapers under study were published from the end of 1941 to August 1943, when the front line had already moved to the territory of Left-Bank Ukraine. Typically, newspapers were published once or twice a week. A higher frequency of publication was observed exclusively in major urban centers like Kharkiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv, though only during certain timeframes in 1942. The circulation of these media outlets ranged from several hundred to several tens of thousands of copies and, obviously, depended largely on the place of publication, the technical capabilities of printing, and the availability of materials.

On the German side, the publication of newspapers within the Military Zone of Ukraine was controlled by Propaganda Battalion *U* (Ukraine). The materials printed on the pages of the occupation press of Sumy, Chernihiv, and Kharkiv regions were provided by the Germans, reprinted from other press, or were written by local Ukrainian authors involved in collaboration. The use of pseudonyms and the signing of articles with initials were widespread practices. In many instances, the authorship and provenance of these materials were omitted, making their identification exceptionally difficult. However, in any case, the content of the publications had to meet the requirements of German censorship, through which all newspapers were required to pass. At the bottom of the final page, most newspaper issues featured a German imprint formula indicating the local authority's clearance to print: "*Mit Genehmigung des Stadtkommandanten*" ("With the permission of the city commandant"). Later, this text was replaced by the alphanumeric codes *U4*, *U5*, or *U6*, which designated the specific propaganda detachment from Propaganda Battalion *U* responsible for the publication at that given time.

Anti-Soviet propaganda was most prominently presented in the press during the occupation period. The main directions and principles of ideological indoctrination of the population were determined even before the attack on the USSR. Thus, a directive dated June 6, 1941, issued by Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Operations Staff of the High Command of the German Armed Forces, outlined key bullet points for propaganda efforts in the occupied territories, including the following:

- Germany's enemy is not the peoples of the USSR, but exclusively the Jewish-Bolshevik Soviet government and the Communist Party, which strives for world revolution;
- German troops have arrived not as enemies, but as liberators from the unrestricted violence and tyranny of the Soviet regime..." (Dashichev, 1973: 194).

The Germans sought to completely demonize the communist regime in the eyes of the people, exposing its misanthropic, bloody nature. Particular attention was paid to the topic of the Famine of 1932–1933. This aligns to some extent with the additional propaganda guidelines for Ukraine issued on December 16, 1942, by Alfred Rosenberg, Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, which instructed: "It is necessary to awaken memories of the Famine of millions, and of the twenty-year continuous struggle of the Bolsheviks against Ukrainian peasants, who were once conscious landowners" (Kosyk, 1999: 38).

Initially, accounts of the Holodomor were written in an overtly emotional tone, and authors either did not venture to estimate the total number of famine deaths or, alternatively, cited a figure of over 8 million victims without providing any arguments (Nastav..., 1941: 1). Somewhat later, readers of *Sumskyi Visnyk* were presented with an article titled "Remember the Horrific Numbers!

(The Truth About the Famine in Ukraine in 1932–1933),” which was reprinted from *Golos* – a Berlin-based newspaper for *Ostarbeiters*. In this publication, an anonymous author, referring to official Soviet statistics, argued that this tragedy was exclusively artificial in nature and noted: “...at the end of 1932, 1,504,600 people died of famine in Ukraine, and in the first half of 1933, 3,317,000 people.” The total number of people killed during the Holodomor, according to the estimates given in the article, was 4.8-5 million people. To demonstrate the scale of those events, the following figures were cited: “...about 23,000 people died per day in Ukraine. This is nearly 1,000 every hour, 17 every minute – a person died every 3.5 seconds” ([Zapamiataite..., 1943: 3](#))

Separately, the cynicism of the Soviet authorities was emphasized, which blocked assistance from international organizations and forced witnesses of terror (in particular, German colonists) to misinform the world community about the real state of affairs in the country ([Sosnovyi, 1942: 2-3](#)).

Eastern Ukraine, whose population suffered severely from Stalin's policies in the late 1920s and 1930s, provided ample material for anti-Soviet articles and stories published in local newspapers. Thus, one can read about the horrific facts of the inhumane treatment of peasants during dekulakization. For instance, one publication provided extensive details about the search, looting, and brutal murder of a peasant by communists in front of his family in a village within the Shtepivka district ([Vlada..., 1941: 1](#)).

Repressive Soviet policies were also a sore subject. It was noted that in Sumy alone, more than 10 thousand citizens were arrested or interrogated ([Persnyi..., 1942: 1](#)). There were also mentions of the horrific conditions endured by prisoners: “P. Milchenko... tells us that when he was thrown into a cell (this was in the cursed year of 1938), although it was designed for 20 to 25 people, there were 200 prisoners inside” ([Nezadovolennia..., 1941: 4](#)). One article, detailing the absurd persecutions of citizens by Soviet authorities over the slightest pretexts, recounts how an instructor lost his job at the Sumy Mechanical Engineering Technical School. His sole offense was answering a question from his students by explaining the natural biological mechanism behind the protein-deficiency edema that plagued starving people in 1933 ([Pravda..., 1941: 1](#)).

The literary works published in the occupation periodicals undeniably carried ideological undertones, most frequently focusing on how the ruthless Soviet totalitarian system destroyed ordinary, everyday people, upending their lives and personal happiness. For example, the story “Over the Precipice” by M. Martynenko, published in the newspaper *Sumskyi Visnyk*, recounts the NKVD's arrest and execution of a young engineer who was accused of “economic counter-revolution” following a purely technical workplace accident. The pregnant wife of the executed man was fired from her job and deprived of her home. The story ends with the widow's words to her infant: “And when you grow up, I will teach you not only to love, but also to hate” ([Martynenko, 1942: 4](#)).

The newspapers under study published materials that described the life of prisoners in Stalin's camps in the permafrost of the north, about their suffering from cold, malnutrition, disease and hard work ([Huchnyi, 1942: 2-3](#)). Information about the excavated mass graves of NKVD victims in Katyn, Vinnytsia, and Odessa was published. The number of dead found here was estimated by the Germans at several tens of thousands of people ([Tsarynnyk, 1943: 1](#)).

The war was presented by the Nazis as a forced preventive act against the inevitable attack of the brutal Stalinist regime on Europe. The following words from a speech by Adolf Hitler were cited: “...at the time when I began the reconstruction of Germany, Bolshevism had already been systematically arming itself for ten years on a truly titanic scale, with the sole purpose of attacking Europe. What would have happened to the German people and to Europe if the new German armed forces had not stepped forward as a shield at the very last minute on June 22, 1941, saving Europe?” ([Nimetski..., 1943: 2](#)). The blame for the invasion of the Soviet Union was placed entirely on the Soviet side. As evidence, reports cited a captured secret staff map detailing Red Army military operation plans against Germany, which was dated April 1941 ([Dokumentalni, 1942: 1](#)).

There were also stories about the alleged brutal murders of German prisoners of war by Red Army soldiers under the leadership of commissars who cut out the eyes and tongues of captured Wehrmacht soldiers ([Bilshovytski nedoliudky, 1942: 1](#)). According to Nazi propaganda, Red Army commanders shot their own wounded during retreats to prevent them from being captured by the Germans. Conversely, it was emphasized that the German command valued every single soldier and would always attempt to rescue them at any cost ([Vsikh, 1942: 2](#); [Pikluvannia..., 1942: 2](#)).

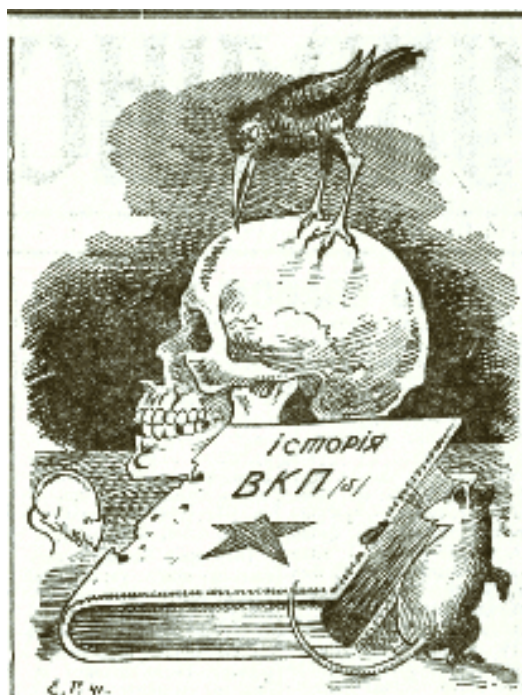


Fig. 1. Caricature from the newspaper *Ukrainske Polissia* (No. 14, December 10, 1941) [Book title “History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)”]

Articles about the negative social, cultural, and moral changes caused by Soviet policies also found their place in the columns of occupation newspapers. The Bolsheviks were accused of destroying spirituality and the traditional family model. As noted, raising children and adolescents through communist children's and youth organizations rather than by their parents resulted in them becoming estranged from their families, rejecting parental authority, and turning into “obedient tools in the hands of Bolshevism,” reduced to an animalistic state (Zruinuvannia..., 1942: 2).

In the opinion of the authors of the publications, the promotion of sexual promiscuity among young people had the same goal. The active work of Alexandra Kollontai was mentioned, who allegedly, through her reports, writings, legislative initiatives, and her own example, incited women to sexual depravity (Khf. D., 1942: 4).

Particular attention was paid to combating the everyday consequences of Soviet upbringing, which were labeled as the “filth of Sovietism”. In the feuilletons, young people were portrayed as lacking basic ethical norms: prone to vandalism in city gardens and contempt for the work of others. This uncouthness was blamed on the influence of the Komsomol and the Pioneers, and escaping this civilizational pit required adopting German standards of behavior: discipline, politeness, and cleanliness (Shvaika, 1942: 2).

The newspapers also sharply criticized the Soviet style of management – lots of meetings, chatter, and a lack of a sense of honor. Instead, readers were urged to adhere to German habits: punctuality, politeness, and a sense of duty. Even the change in linguistic etiquette – the address *dobrodii* (“gentleman/sir”) instead of *tovarysh* (“comrade”) – was presented as a return to European civilization, although the press admitted that many local leaders had not yet rid themselves of the disease of Soviet irresponsibility (Kulturnist..., 1942: 1).

Similar theses about the need to abandon the Soviet way of life were expressed by O. Yurchenko in his publication in the newspaper *Nizhynski Visti*. The author emphasized that transforming society requires not only mastering new rules but also deep, long-term internal work: “To become truly free, we still have a long way to go. This is a path of struggling against the numerous remnants and traces of Asian-Bolshevik depravity, professional, public, and personal demoralization, indifference, selfishness, slavish groveling before the ‘powers that be,’ and a callous, dismissive attitude toward the common people.” This approach shifted the emphasis from everyday life criticism to the political level. The rejection of Soviet habits was interpreted here as a necessary condition for the restoration of personal dignity and social normalization of life within the country (Yurchenko, 1942: 3).

Occupation publications also drew attention to the deep degradation of science under Bolshevik pressure. Examples were provided of ideological interference even in the exact sciences; for instance, algebra textbooks were barred from publication unless they contained mandatory elements of Communist ideology (Yurchenko, 1942: 3).

It was emphasized that such destructive processes were accompanied by a rapid reduction in staff sources: in some scientific institutions, in 1937 alone, the number of specialists decreased by 75 %.

According to authors of the time, such measures aimed to replace genuine scholarship with ideological dogma, transforming the educational and research sectors into tools of political control stripped of academic freedom. This state of affairs was contrasted with German order, and the arrival of the occupying forces was proclaimed as the only chance for the revival of Ukrainian science and culture (Yak bolshevyky..., 1942: 4).

An interesting tool for influencing the public's consciousness was the publication of so-called anti-Bolshevik folklore. Collections of folk ditties, anecdotes, and songs that ridiculed forced collectivization, dispossession, and Stalinist policies in general regularly appeared in the columns of occupation newspapers. In particular, through popular satire, the press sought to fix in the mass memory the image of Soviet power as a source of famine and poverty. This allowed propaganda to appear not as a German-imposed ideology, but as a reflection of the true feelings of the Ukrainian peasantry (Karlo, 1943: 3).

In addition to folklore, the genre of ironic letters to high-ranking officials, in particular, for example, to Molotov, was used to discredit the Soviet leadership. Such texts ridiculed the official rhetoric regarding the Soviet government's concern for the people. Instead, the authors cited examples of mass terror, mentioned the consequences of the Holodomor, and the repressive activities of the penal authorities. Through feuilletons, Soviet reality was contrasted with German working conditions, where the deportation of young people to the Reich was presented not as coercion, but as an opportunity to gain professional experience and escape the Soviet shortage of prospects. This technique allowed for manipulation of the perception of the occupation, portraying it as an alternative to a system that destroyed human destinies (Vilnyi, 1943: 2).

Anti-Semitic publications were also closely linked to anti-Bolshevik propaganda. The pages of the occupation press constantly emphasized the link between Communist ideology and Jewry. It was claimed that "...the Jew Marx distorted the great idea of socialism and turned it into a deceitful phrase, alluring to the foolish, but useful to the Jews..." (Zhydy..., 1942: 2). It also pointed to the extremely large number of Jews among the leaders and functionaries of the Soviet government, as well as among the NKVD officers (Zhydy v Kyievi, 1943: 2). It was claimed that in the Soviet Union, Jews had a higher standard of living than representatives of other nations, and in addition to better jobs, they also received better and more comfortable housing (Chomu zhydy..., 1942: 1; Bilshovytske..., 1941: 2). According to the logic of Nazi propaganda, the worst atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks in the country were driven by Jewish initiative.

Yet, the Jewish people were not the only group the occupation propagandists tied to the Soviet regime; they continually linked it to Russian imperialist politics as well.

For a long time, the anti-Russian indoctrination of the population in occupied Ukraine was viewed through the simplistic cliché of "fanning interethnic strife among the peoples of the USSR." Dictated by outdated ideological frameworks, this approach failed to capture the true nature and substance of this specific propaganda effort. There is a need to pay closer attention to certain features of this information war, namely: the propaganda campaign waged by the occupying media against Moscow as an imperial and civilizational center, and against Russian culture as a universal imperial culture, which was combined with the proclamation of Ukrainians' inherent belonging to the Western world.

The roots of this lie in the memorandum of *Reichsleiter* A. Rosenberg dated April 2, 1941 (at that time he headed the NSDAP's foreign policy department). First, this document proclaimed the necessity of dismembering the USSR and, specifically, separating Ukraine from it. Second, it recognized a certain European identity in Ukraine: "Kyiv was the main center of the Varangian state, which belongs to the Normans. However, following the Tatar rule, Kyiv resisted Moscow for a long time. Contrary to what Moscow's history claims, its national life... was built upon a rather strong tradition." Third, the plan was to establish a German-controlled Ukrainian political entity that would be hostile to Moscow and remain in a state of constant confrontation with it (Kosyk, 1993: 495-496).

Despite criticism of A. Rosenberg's plans for Ukraine by A. Hitler and the rest of his entourage, the ideas of this memorandum were adopted for waging information warfare.

Among the main directions and principles of the ideological indoctrination of the population – as defined by the aforementioned June 6, 1941 directive from A. Jodl – also was the thesis that propaganda must facilitate the dissolution of the Soviet Union into separate parts (Dashichev, 1973: 194).



Fig. 2. Caricature from the newspaper *Vyzvolennya* (No. 20, February 14, 1942). [The caption under the drawing reads: "The Union of Soviet Republics is gradually disintegrating."]

The Ukrainian issue was one of the key factors in destroying the Soviet Union from within; therefore, the directives of A. Rosenberg dated December 16, 1942, explicitly stated: "It is necessary to incite hatred toward Moscow – and not only toward Bolshevism, which is to blame for the country's current, terribly poor situation – but also hatred toward everything Great Russian in general, against which Ukraine fought during the time of Khmelnytskyi and later alongside Charles XII" (Kosyk, 1999: 38). However, it is not known which Khmelnytskyi was referred to in this text – Bohdan or his son Yurii. Perhaps there was a confusion in Ukrainian surnames, and in fact the Nazi ideologist meant Hetman Ivan Vyhovskyi, who really defeated the Russian troops near Konotop in 1659. However, the content of the above Rosenberg directive is already quite clear.

It should be noted that in April 1944, when the Germans were irreversibly losing Ukraine, the use of the thesis regarding Ukraine's European identity was articulated with increasing clarity in new press directives: "The awareness that the Ukrainian people belong to Europe must be particularly reinforced through the press and propaganda" (Kosyk, 2000: 60).

Furthermore, it is necessary to mention another factor in the ideological conditioning of the population in the occupied territories of Ukraine, and its eastern region in particular. Representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia with nationalist and anti-communist beliefs were widely involved in the editorial offices of occupation publications. As researchers have established, during the occupation, underground OUN groups were active in cities in eastern Ukraine, trying to use the local press by publishing their materials there, which were permitted by German censorship (Ivanuschenko, 2006; Khobot, 2010).

Ukrainian nationalists were also interested in anti-Russian propaganda, since the thesis of Ukraine's belonging to the Western European cultural community was one of the keys among their

ideological principles. Dmytro Dontsov, the founder of Ukrainian integral (“active”) nationalism, viewed Ukraine as Europe's outpost against centuries of aggressive Russian expansion, which was rooted in “Muscovite messianism.” As early as 1921, he noted: “In this eternal struggle of ours against the chaos in the East, in defense – within our own statehood and culture – of the entire culture of the West, lies precisely the Ukrainian national idea, which must serve as the foundation of our political program” (Dontsov, 1921: 75).

Thus, it is necessary to state the fact of the coincidence of interests on the part of the German occupation administration and Ukrainian nationalists in conducting ideological indoctrination of the population through the media in this direction. Naturally, each side had its own ultimate goal and motivation, and sought to exploit the other for the time being. However, while the OUN members genuinely considered Ukraine to be a part of Western civilization, Hitler and the Nazi leadership actually viewed only the Galician Ukrainians as Europeans, owing to their long-standing integration into the Austrian state (Kosyk, 1999: 230-232).

Thus, the publications under study reflected the core tenets of the aforementioned directives and attitudes. On the one hand, cultural and technical Western (mainly German) achievements were depicted through various means. Articles and reports about prominent German artists and scientists were published, emphasizing the perfection of internal relations in German society, and speaking of its greatness and prosperity. The Western culture of the population was idealized. All this was to be confirmed by photos that were constantly published in publications.

On the other hand, the original backwardness of Russia, its savagery, was emphasized. Some Russian successes in certain industries were explained only by elementary imitation of the West. In light of this, even the *Ostarbeiter* program was presented as a benefit – one through which young people would not only acquire prestigious, modern professions but also learn the German language and engage with an advanced European culture.

Alongside critiques of Russia, newspaper pages presented theories regarding the kinship between Ukrainians and Germans: “More than 1,500 years ago, the Ostrogoths established a Germanic state along the banks of the Dnieper. Many Ukrainians are descendants of those Goths, which is why you can understand the German soul far better than other nations can” (Ukrainskyi, 1942: 1). One can even come across a statement such as: “Finally, the wall between the Aryans of the West and the Aryans of the East has fallen...” (A. M., 1942: 2). In this way, propaganda asserted a racial kinship between the Ukrainian and German peoples.

The press also sought to convince readers of the organic connection between Ukraine and Western Europe in the cultural and artistic spheres. The Ukrainian literary process was clearly viewed by the press within the framework of the Western European one.

In April 1943, the newspaper *Vidrodzhennia* published an extensive article by its editor-in-chief, Associate Professor I. Romanchenko, titled “The Significance of German Literature in the Development of Ukrainian Writing.” It was later reprinted in the almanac *Romen Tsvite* (“Chamomile is Blooming”). This article examines in detail the influence of German literature and the Germans themselves as a decisive factor in the work of such writers as Taras Shevchenko, Mykola Gogol, Ivan Franko, Olga Kobylanska, Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi, and Lesia Ukrainka (Romanchuk, 1943a: 3; Romanchuk, 1943b: 40-45).

Similarly, it was argued that the traditions of German classical music exerted an extraordinary influence on the work of prominent Ukrainian composers, notably Mykola Lysenko and Mykola Leontovych (S. V., 1942: 4).

The propaganda effort extended beyond the arts, attempting to prove an intellectual alignment in other spheres too. Specifically, it provided lists of 18th and 19th centuries Ukrainian figures (H. Skovoroda, M. Berezovsky, D. Bortniansky) whose work and education were inextricably linked to Western European centers. Within this framework, Russia was cast as a predatory entity that expropriated the accomplishments of Ukrainian geniuses, claiming them as its own. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik destruction of Kyiv's architectural monuments – such as St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery and the Church of the Tithes – was presented as definitive proof of Asian barbarism, aimed at the ultimate erasure of Ukraine's European identity (Choho koshtuiut..., 1942: 3).

An important component of the determined propaganda strategy was the coverage of the systematic destruction of the Ukrainian intellectual fund by Moscow. In an article titled “How the Bolsheviks Destroyed Ukrainian Culture,” published in the Bohodukhiv newspaper *Ridnyi Krai*, the author emphasizes that the Soviet regime had engaged in the methodical elimination of the

most prominent figures of Ukrainian culture since 1918. The names of repressed figures who had European fame were listed in detail, and it was emphasized that Russia destroyed precisely those who embodied Ukraine's connection with the Western world. A particular focus was placed on the tragic fate of S. Rudnytskyi, the founder of Ukrainian geography, and Academician M. Hrushevskiy, whose deaths were framed as the result of deliberate exhaustion and persecution by Moscow chauvinists (O. A. D., 1942: 2).

Based on the large number of German loanwords in the Ukrainian language, the contributors to *Sumskyi Visnyk* concluded that this linguistic feature reflected a perpetual affinity of Ukrainians toward German culture (Pokaznyky..., 1942: 3).

The philological analysis of so-called “winged words” served as another instrument to demonstrate this kinship. The publications explained to readers that the presence of classical aphorisms and Latin sententiae in Ukrainian testified to its integration into a superior European culture. Writing for the newspaper *Visti Pryluchchyny*, Candidate of Historical Sciences V. Pukhtynskiy emphasized that these sayings did not arrive in Ukraine by way of Russia. Instead, they came directly through Western universities and the religious and cultural contacts established with Europe during the Renaissance and Reformation (Pukhtynskiy, 1943: 2).

Emphasis was further placed on language policy as an instrument of de-Bolshevization. Writing for the Kharkiv newspaper *Nova Ukraina*, the author argues that the Ukrainian language constitutes “a part of European culture miraculously preserved from Asian influences,” while Russian serves as a tool for “Moscow dissolution.” The campaign against Russian loanwords and *surzhyk* (mixture between Ukrainian and Russian languages) was thus framed not as a mere linguistic question, but as a political mission to overcome spiritual captivity (Boiko, 1942: 1-2). According to authors from other occupation periodicals, the Soviets permitted Ukrainians to keep their language merely as a vehicle for the easier dissemination of Bolshevik ideas (“political literacy”), while the true substance of their culture was substituted with alien values (O. A. D., 1942: 2).

It was emphasized that Ukrainians have a much higher level of culture than Russians and are significantly different from them (Barylo, 1942: 3). Memoirs of the Danish envoy Justus Juel, who resided in Moscow and visited Ukraine between 1709 and 1711, were reprinted from German-language publications. These memoirs noted the striking similarity between the Ukrainian population's way of life and that of Western Europe. In contrast to the educated, decent, and tidy Ukrainians, their Russian coreligionists were depicted as savages: “The tsar's entourage behaves shamelessly. They shout, whistle, and spit right in people's faces...” (Ukraintsi ta moskovity, 1942: 2; K. V., 1942: 4).

Differences in traditional approaches to farming between Ukrainians and Russians were also noted: “In their (Ukrainian peasants') blood, there is no aptitude for the 'nomadic' agriculture that was so frequently introduced in the collective farms, nor do they share the Moscow tradition of the ‘tax-bearing commune’ – an association whose purpose was to make it easier for Moscow despots to ‘pump out’ tribute” (Ya. S., 1943: 2).

The period when Ukraine was under Russian rule is considered by the authors of the publications to be a period of national decline and cultural degradation. The pages of the newspapers described numerous injustices inflicted on the Ukrainian people by Russian imperialism: from the destruction of Baturyn to the overthrow of the Ukrainian People's Republic.

Drawing upon the works of Western thinkers, the propaganda promoted the concept of two waves of German civilizational influence on Ukraine: the first being the “Gothic-Ukrainian” state of the third and fourth centuries, and the second being the “Norman” era of Kyiv. The latter was interpreted not as a Rus state, but as a ‘Norman-Ukrainian’ state which, owing to Germanic blood and ties with Western Europe, ensured the cultural flourishing of the region. Russia appeared in this narrative as an aggressive Asian power that had turned Ukraine into its thrall (Daibi, 1943: 4).

For ideological reasons, many printed materials specifically mentioned the figure of Ivan Mazepa. The military and political alliance between the Hetman and Sweden King Charles XII was viewed as an example of Ukraine's past Western orientation: “It is precisely this great Hetman, Ivan Mazepa, who serves as the finest evidence that Ukraine has always belonged to Europe, that Europe has always oriented itself toward her and sought an ally in her for the defensive battle against Mongol Moscow” (Stalin i Pushkin, 1942: 2).

A historical parallel was drawn, which was supposed to give Ukrainians another motive for collaboration. In an article written on behalf of the officers and soldiers of Ukrainian Liberation

Army (a collaborationist military formation), regret is expressed: "...For us, the defeat of the Swedes and the Cossack army at Poltava is a colossal national tragedy, a bloody wound on the body of the Ukrainian people that has been painfully felt for two centuries" (Shliakh..., 1943: 2). Regarding the battalion itself, it was stated that it "... fights for the return to Ukraine of its national rights and its ancient connection with the West" (Ukrainske Vyzvolne, 1943: 1).

This thesis was further developed within the wider body of occupation literature, which framed Bolshevism not as an isolated occurrence, but as the direct and most destructive embodiment of Russian imperialism. Commentators argued that Moscow aimed to reduce Ukrainians to a faceless ethnographic mass stripped of historical memory. They highlighted that the Bolsheviks intentionally distorted history in schools to make Ukrainians forget their ancestry, presenting the arrival of Germany as the sole opportunity to restore the ties to the West that had been broken following the Battle of Poltava (Bolshevyzm i ukrainska..., 1941: 1).

Historical parallels were drawn even within the context of 19th century events and were utilized to construct an image of an ancient brotherhood in arms. As some publications demonstrated (specifically, a German-authored piece titled "Cossacks in Berlin," reprinted in *Kostiantynohradski Novi Visti*), the propaganda revitalized the events of 1813, when Cossack regiments formed in Ukraine participated in the liberation of Berlin from Napoleon's forces. The authors asserted that "just as Ukrainians had aided the Germans 129 years prior, the German army was now liberating them from Moscow's oppression" (Kozaky..., 1942: 2).

The arrival of German troops in 1941 was presented as yet another historical revenge for past defeats and a direct continuation of Germany's military assistance in 1918, when the institution of the Hetmanate was restored on Ukrainian territory (Istorychnyi..., 1942: 2). The press acknowledged that in 1918, the Central Powers had been driven primarily by economic ("bread") interests and military calculations. In contrast, A. Hitler's new policy was proclaimed as a transition to European leadership in the East, where Ukraine was to become not merely a source of raw materials, but a protected part of the European legal sphere, liberated from Moscow's pressure (V. Ch., 1942: 1-2).

Occupation writers further leveraged Ukraine's legal history as a potent argument for the country's institutional integration into the Western world, presenting Magdeburg Law as foundational proof of its European character. According to the text of a publication in the Oster-based newspaper *Novyi Shliakh*, the expansion of German legal norms into medieval Ukraine was viewed as a civilizational contribution that integrated Ukrainian cities into a single Western legal sphere. The author emphasizes that the introduction of self-government, independent courts, and an autonomous order was a consequence of the German colonization movement to the East dating back to 12th century. Thus, propaganda reconstructed the image of Ukraine as a state historically based on Western principles of law, which radically distinguished it from Moscow's despotism (M. V-ch, 1942: 2).

The authors of occupation publications persistently promoted the thesis that Muscovy stole Ukraine's name. By appropriating the name Rus, which originally belonged to Ukrainian lands, it tried to provide its imperial ambitions with false historical depth and legitimacy. Russia appeared not as the legitimate successor to the Kyivan state, but as a usurper country that – through the distortion of concepts and the appropriation of another's identity – sought to negate Ukrainian subjectivity, transforming it into a subordinate element of its own state mythology (Chuzhi..., 1942: 3).

Readers were assured of Russia's long-standing hostile intentions toward the whole of Europe. To support this claim, the propaganda invoked the Testament of Peter I and the "General Political Thoughts" of Catherine II's favorite, Platon Zubov, which allegedly formulated strategic plans for "the subjugation of all Europe." The publications stressed that Moscow's ambitions for aggressive expansion to the West persisted regardless of any political regime change: "And this identical barbaric Muscovy, formerly White and currently Red, has for entire centuries subjugated numerous Eastern nations possessing illustrious pasts and ancient cultures, while at the same time straining every nerve to either forge a 'Russian Europe' or orchestrate a world revolution" (Moskoviia..., 1942: 1-2).

The stories about the aforementioned historical claims of Moscow logically continued in the analysis of the geopolitics of the time: it was claimed that in 1941 Stalin prepared a colossal military machine for the final conquest of Europe (Nimechchyna..., 1943: 1).



Fig. 3. Propaganda illustration in *Sumskyi Visnyk* (No. 51(72), April 29, 1942) [The caption on the drawing reads: “Germany unites the peoples of Europe against Bolshevism”]

Printed propaganda disseminated across the Sumy oblast in 1942 stressed that the conflict was fought explicitly “for the existence or non-existence of European nations,” framing A. Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union as a campaign of liberation (DASO. F. R-2446. Op. 1. Spr. 2: 33). By proclaiming the presence of a common, hazardous enemy, the propaganda promoted the idea of the vital necessity of cooperation between Ukrainians and the German side for the sake of a shared struggle against the Russian threat. Moreover, according to the assertions of Nazi propaganda, the war was being waged not by Germany alone, but by “all of free Europe,” to which, it was claimed, Ukrainians also belonged.

5. Conclusion

Thus, overall, Nazi ideological indoctrination through the local press was intense and utilized a wide variety of genres. Readers were constantly reminded of the crimes of the Soviet regime and emphasized that human life had no value for the Bolshevik regime. The notion was reinforced in the public consciousness that communist ideologues and leaders regarded the population under their control solely as raw material for a grandiose, mad experiment concocted by Jews. Such anti-Bolshevik ideological processing was supposed to encourage local residents to cooperate with the Germans in the fight against the communists and the USSR. But while angrily criticizing the Soviet totalitarian system, the Nazis in no way mentioned that their own totalitarianism had no less than the same sins, but, of course, in a different form and manifestation.

Anti-Soviet narratives were combined with anti-Russian propaganda. Past injustices by the Russian state were persistently recalled. The national feelings of the people and their post-colonial complexes – formed during their life within a multinational empire, with the USSR proclaimed as its new incarnation – were exploited. A crucial role was played by the thesis of the civilized Europeanness of Ukrainians and their foreignness to a wild, Asian Russia. In this context, the Third Reich's war with the Soviet Union was framed as a “civilization vs. barbarism” type of conflict. The purpose of this propaganda was to leverage the patriotism of the local population, induce them into collaboration, and provoke a Ukrainian-Russian confrontation. The ultimate goal of this information warfare can be seen as undermining the great-power ideology of Moscow.

By skillfully manipulating information and distorting or presenting facts in a one-sided manner, the occupiers achieved their goals to some extent. However, the question of the effectiveness of German propaganda in occupied eastern Ukraine still requires further research.

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