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Source: *Russian Review*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Oct., 1996), pp. 638-660

Published by: [Blackwell Publishing](#) on behalf of [The Editors and Board of Trustees of the Russian Review](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/131868>

Accessed: 13/04/2011 08:47

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# The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity

AMIR WEINER

World War II was a watershed in the articulation of political and ethnonational identities within the Soviet polity. The myth of the war became a point of departure in the self-identity and conduct of large segments of the population and the body politic, including those whose identity was allegedly shaped by the profound transformations of the Civil War, collectivization and industrialization. The experience of the war became a yardstick by which identity, meritocracy and status were measured throughout the Soviet polity, superimposing a new set of tropes onto prewar categories.

Regardless of the general awareness of the mythical place that the war had come to occupy in the public and private spheres of Soviet society, the prevalent interpretation of the impact of the experience of the World War II on Soviet society and politics has been to marginalize it either as merely a continuation or as a temporal disruption of prewar structured policies. The primary voices in the Soviet historiographical discourse have argued for the primacy of socioeconomic structures and have subscribed to the view that the experiences of the 1920s and early 1930s constituted the formative and enduring moments in the Soviet polity.<sup>1</sup> Within the di-

For their helpful comments and suggestions the author thanks Keith Baker, Peter Holquist, Stephen Kotkin, Yuri Slezkine, Ronald Suny, and Julia Erwin-Weiner.

<sup>1</sup> See the influential article by Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Stalin and the Making of a New Elite," *Slavic Review* 38 (September 1979): 377–402; idem, "Postwar Soviet Society: The 'Return to Normalcy,' 1945–1953," in *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, ed. Susan J. Linz (Princeton, 1985), 129–56; idem, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York, 1994), 313–20, where the entire postwar era is summarized in five pages and the argument for continuity in the countryside after the early 1930s is based on scanty and rather impressionistic accounts; Moshe Lewin, "The Civil War: Dynamics and Legacy," in *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War*, ed. Diane Koenker et al. (Indiana, 1989), 399–423; and idem, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, 1988).

chotomy drawn between socioeconomic structures and the political-ideological domains the war was condemned to the fate of a surface disturbance of the Braudelian *longue durée*, limited to a handful of monographs mainly by students of Soviet high politics.

Understanding the role the war played in the articulation of Soviet political identities entails a shift in focus to the politics of myth. Whereas the Marxist eschatological metanarrative provided the Soviet polity with historical meaning by situating it in the context of a perceived human destiny, it was legitimized by certain myths, such as those of the Civil War, the industrialization drive and the Great Patriotic War, which related it to concrete historical situations. These mythical representations were often referred to as historical turning points and constituted frameworks for meaning that ordained them with a structure for understanding and accepting change.<sup>2</sup> These myths, however, were subjected not only to periodic redefinition, but, as happened to most of the prewar ones, to repudiation. The changing fate of core Soviet myths, along with our *ex post facto* knowledge that the myth of the Great Patriotic War outlived the polity itself, calls for an examination of the web of factors intrinsic to the making of a viable and enduring myth, starting with its interaction with the lived experience and expectations of those upon whom it is supposed to operate, and proceeding then to the mechanism that sustains and subverts its hold on the constituency.

First, as Hayden White and Clifford Geertz assert, the shared belief in the adequacy of myth and ideology to the representations of the reality whose meaning they purport to reveal is a precondition to the cohesion and stability of the community. Erosion of this belief sets in motion a severe crisis of legitimacy and a profound change in social and political association, as happened to the military ethos of the Civil War era during the early days of the war or with the crumbling ability of the true believers to suspend disbelief in official representations in the wake of the Terror.<sup>3</sup> The logic of the postwar setting was indeed closely tied to its history: representations of the postwar scene were articulated through sets of predispositions shaped in the course of preceding experiences.<sup>4</sup> The routinization of the Revolutionary ethos within the Soviet system, if only its operational value, triggered by the growing temporal distance from the Great Events and the confusion within the elite caused by such key policies as collectivization and the Terror, confronted the Soviet body politic with a serious blow to its traditional belief system on the eve of the war. The focus on the perception of the myth's credibility among the elite is sharpened

<sup>2</sup> On the articulation and practices of Bolshevik Marxist eschatology see Igal Halfin, "From Darkness to Light: Student Communist Autobiographies in the 1920s," *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* (forthcoming). Leszek Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth* (Chicago, 1989), offers the most insightful theoretical treatment of the structure and role of myth. See also the excellent studies by Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton, 1995); and Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 142–46, 162–64; Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987), x.

<sup>4</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, 1981), 204–25; and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977), 72–95.

in light of the absence of exposure to a viable and attractive alternative from without.<sup>5</sup>

Second, if the initial appeal for and of a new myth draws its power from the erosion of the old ones, its endurance and status rely to a large degree on the political power of the social group with which it is associated. Changes in the political fortune of the articulators and transmitters of the myth often lead to a reevaluation of the myth, or at least some of its components, as seen through the fate of Civil War ethos and heroes. The hegemonic status of the Myth of the War can be traced not only to the Soviet state and its propaganda machine but equally, if not more so, to the identity of the articulators of the Myth in the localities, the peasant-soldiers, for whom the war turned into an autobiographical point of reference and a point of departure.<sup>6</sup>

This somewhat populist assumption, unlikely at first glance in the context of the highly stylized Soviet system, requires a closer look at the mechanism which allowed for particularistic expressions. Two central patterns of the Soviet system were highly relevant. The first was that of personal bonding in the making of elites. Students of the postwar non-Russian republics, in particular, noticed that the Soviet system was marked by weak (impersonal) structures and strong (personal) ties. Common background and experiences prevailed in the formation of elites and political alliances.<sup>7</sup> Second was that which Jean-François Lyotard perceptively termed the deliberative character of Soviet totalitarianism. Public discourse in Soviet political culture was the chosen setting for exercising ultimate control over the individual. The politics of terror, noted Lyotard, "far from dispensing with deliberation and its institutional organization, in fact demands it. For this organization alone carries to the limit the responsibility each person (as both representative and represented) has regarding each of the genres of discourse necessary for a political decision . . . in principle, a complex deliberative organization leaves open the way that one phrase or genre of

<sup>5</sup> In their discussion of the viability of dominant myths both Steven Kotkin and Richard Wortman establish convincingly the link between perceptions of viable competing myths in the international arena and the cohesion of the ruling elites at home. Just as the global crisis of the 1930s elevated the appeal, cohesiveness and steady course of the Soviet messianic drive at home, so did the rhetoric and imagery of the French Revolution and the diminishing influence of Russia in Europe trigger the erosion of belief among the Imperial Russian elite. See Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995); and Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*. Indeed, when Stalin summed up the lessons of the war in his election speech on 9 February 1946 he celebrated it as an affirmation of the primacy of the socialist economic system and ethnonational structure of the Soviet Union. See "Rech na predvybornom sobranii izbiratelei Stalinskogo Izbiratel'nogo okruga goroda Moskvy," in I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 3 vols., ed. Robert H. McNeal (Stanford, 1967), 3 (16):4–7 (an extension of I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 13 vols. [Moscow, 1946–51]).

<sup>6</sup> Referring to the impact exercised by "the kind of history that common men carry in their heads," Carl Becker noted that it was particularly noticeable "in times of excitement, in critical times, in time of war above all. It is precisely in such times that they form (with the efficient help of official propaganda!) an idealized picture of the past, born of their emotions and desires working on fragmentary scraps of knowledge gathered, or rather flowing upon them, from every conceivable source, reliable or not matters nothing." See Carl Becker, "What Are Historical Facts?" in *Detachment and the Writing of History: Essays and Letters of Carl L. Becker*, ed. Phil L. Snyder (Ithaca, 1958), 61–62.

<sup>7</sup> John A. Armstrong, *The Soviet Bureaucratic Elite: A Case Study of the Ukrainian Apparatus* (New York, 1959); Boris Lewytzkyi, *Die Sowjetukraine, 1944–1963* (Cologne, 1964); T. H. Rigby, "Crypto-Politics," *Survey*, no. 50, (1964): 192–93; Michael Urban, *An Algebra of Soviet Power: Elite Circulation in the Belorussian Republic, 1966–1986* (Cambridge, 1989).

discourse is linked to another.”<sup>8</sup> The deliberative character of the body politic produced not only a highly stylized delineation of the discursive parameters. The drive for maximized control, embodied by the appropriation of particularistic and counter-narratives by the party-state, entailed the institutionalization of particularistic expressions. In given situations, institutions such as the ethnonational formations and kolkhoz democracy were the realm where the negotiation between the universal and particularistic representations produced the symbolic space for the construction of some of the most viable of Soviet myths, myths which eventually outlived the polity itself.<sup>9</sup>

This essay analyzes the transformation of the experience of World War II into the dominant Soviet myth as it took place within the local party organization in the eastern Ukrainian province of Vinnytsia.<sup>10</sup> In light of the region’s recent history, Vinnytsia is particularly important for the study of the permeation of the myth of the war within the party elite. The exhumation of mass graves by the Germans in the region in 1943 and subsequent allegations of the NKVD’s responsibility for the massacre invites a close examination of the impact of the Terror on the articulation of local political identities in Eastern Ukraine. A second factor was the presence of a substantial number of local Jewish Communists who survived the Rumanian occupation or returned from evacuation to the rear and service in the Red Army. The integration of the unique Jewish tragedy into the universal narrative of Soviet suffering and the denial of the Jews’ contribution at the front calls for an examination of the delineation of particularistic spaces within the Stalinist body politic. The analysis begins with the delineation of the official discourse followed by the articulation of particularistic images and ends with the outcome of the negotiation among these visions.

### **DELINEATING THE PARAMETERS OF A DISCOURSE: THE STORY AS IT SHOULD BE TOLD**

On 2 October 1945 the secretaries of the *raikoms* (Communist party district committees) in the Vinnytsia region received an unusual letter from Mikhail Stakhurskii, the first secretary of the *obkom* (regional committee). In his letter, Stakhurskii wholeheartedly recommended the public reading of Valentin Ovechkin’s novel, *With Greetings from the Front*, in the first meeting of each *raikom* with the party activists. The activists were expected to immediately familiarize themselves with the story, and Stakhurskii recommended picking a reader who could read clearly so that all

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982–1985* (Minneapolis, 1992), 55–56.

<sup>9</sup> The presence of particularistic spaces in the Soviet system received, so far, little attention in Western historiography. Two rare exceptions are the studies by Barrington Moore, *Soviet Politics—The Dilemma of Power* (Cambridge, 1950), esp. 339–40, concerning the role of kolkhoz democracy; and Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53 (Summer 1994): 414–52.

<sup>10</sup> The permeation of the myth throughout the population at large and the transformation of the countryside in particular is discussed in Amir Weiner, “Myths and Identities: The Second World War and the Construction of Collective Identities in the Vinnytsia Region, 1943–1975” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York, 1994), chap. 2.

present would understand. "It would be good," he wrote, "if one of the leaders acquaints himself with the story in advance and be prepared, if needed, to comment."<sup>11</sup>

What could be the appeal of a novel that was distinguished by its call for compassion for a party boss with a reputation for rudeness and vengeance, who was notorious even by current standards?<sup>12</sup> The publication of Ovechkin's short novel was, indeed, a major literary event, but unlikely to be a major concern for a party boss busy with the restoration of the regional economy and the party machine in the wake of the war.<sup>13</sup>

Stakhurskii's initiative apparently sprang from the biographies and conduct of both himself and Ovechkin's fictional hero, Captain Spivak. The resounding similarity between the real-life and fictional heroes pointed to a phenomenon whose implications went beyond the narrow literary boundaries. From July 1945 until March 1951, Stakhurskii ruled Vinnytsia with an iron fist.<sup>14</sup> In spite of a successful career in the Central Committee in Kiev on the eve of the war, it was his military career and exploits that Stakhurskii chose to advance in public and private alike. Stakhurskii was, indeed, distinguished by the wartime rank of lieutenant-general which he held as a member of the Military Council of the First Belorussian and Second Ukrainian fronts, but he was never a career officer.<sup>15</sup> Stakhurskii often referred to himself as a "general in reserve," and, for a while after his arrival to the region, was addressed as "secretary of the *obkom*, Lieutenant-General Stakhurskii."<sup>16</sup> The highly visible military profile that Stakhurskii cultivated reached the point where his rivals in the party complained that he presented himself at conferences as "a member of the Military Council of the front and not as a representative of the party organization."<sup>17</sup> Throughout his reign in Vinnytsia, Stakhurskii systematically cultivated the image

<sup>11</sup> Partiinyi arkhiv Vinnyts'koi oblasti (PAVO), f. 136, op. 13, d. 35, l. 9.

<sup>12</sup> See the consistent complaints of officials in the lower ranks against Stakhurskii's rude conduct, and the Central Committee's comments in *ibid.*, op. 12, d. 202, l. 71; and Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Hromads'kykh ob'iednan' Ukrainy (TsDAHOU), f. 1, op. 23, d. 2681, ll. 114–16, and d. 2727, ll. 1–6; and *ibid.*, op. 46, d. 2285, l. 9, and d. 3817, ll. 2, 6, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Valentin Ovechkin, *Z frontovym pryvitom* (Kiev, 1946). The novel was originally published in Russian in the May 1945 edition of the journal *Oktiabr'*. The Russian edition was circulated in 100,000 copies, and the Ukrainian edition in 25,000. It triggered a wide response in the press, though it is not clear whether other leading officials followed Stakhurskii's initiative.

<sup>14</sup> Stakhurskii was sent to Vinnytsia to restore order in the party organization and revive its viability as an administrative organ in the countryside after the indecisive tenure of Gavril Mishchenko. For accusations leveled at Mishchenko on the occasion of his demotion from the position of delegate to the USSR Supreme Soviet, 29 October 1945, see, Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniia dokumentov noveishei istorii (RTsKhIDNI), f. 17, op. 45, d. 2007, l. 221.

<sup>15</sup> Except for the period of the Second World War, Stakhurskii served in the Red Army only in 1919–23 and 1925–27. In 1937, Stakhurskii already headed the Department of Agriculture of the Central Committee in Kiev, and in 1939 was appointed as deputy in the People's Commissariat of Agriculture of Soviet Ukraine (TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 46, d. 3786, l. 56).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the letter by the regional chief of the NKVD, August 1945, PAVO, f. 136, op. 13, d. 48, l. 23. See also TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 23, d. 4170, ll. 13–14.

<sup>17</sup> The verification of these specific allegations, which was sent to the Central Committee in Kiev in January 1946, refuted the charge that Stakhurskii did so in all conferences and meetings, yet it cited at least one such occasion, a meeting with the command of the 27th Army, which was stationed in Vinnytsia (TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 23, d. 2727, l. 3).

of an ideal-type Bolshevik: an iron-fisted general, defender of the Motherland, and electrifier of the countryside.<sup>18</sup>

Stakhurskii found his popular counterpart in Ovechkin's fictional hero, Captain Spivak. Of peasant origin, Spivak began his career as a shepherd, but rose from there to be first a tractor driver, then a kolkhoz party organizer, and, on the eve of the war, a *raikom* instructor in Poltava. The war brought not only hardships but also officer's rank. Even more relevant was Spivak's resolve to return to his native village instead of pursuing a military career.<sup>19</sup> Throughout long monologues and discussions with Petrenko, his battalion commander and an agronomist in his village, Spivak advanced the notion of army veterans as the people most suited for postwar tasks. In his kolkhoz, for example, all three field brigadiers were lieutenants and senior lieutenants. "They departed as privates and sergeants, but returned as officers. One lost his hand, another is on crutches, but they maintained their dignity. They wear uniforms. When answering questions in the management meetings, they stand up shaved, smart. And the chairman, a captain, is also an invalid."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the demobilized officers possessed the practical answers to the formidable tasks that lay ahead. When Spivak and Petrenko decided to write a letter to the *raikom* secretary to offer their thoughts and advice, they were motivated by the belief in their ability to jump-start the stalled system quickly and efficiently. Relating to new inexperienced cadres "who need help in every step," the two concluded that "it is possible to speed things up. It is possible to return people to prewar life within ten years, but it is also possible within three years."<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Ovechkin's heroes conveyed an intentional rejection of the prewar memories and habits as a guiding past. The war was a conscious point of departure from this past. Reflecting on their own qualifications as civilian leaders ("From one battalion one can enlist kolkhoz chairmen and brigadiers for three *raions*"), the *frontoviki* concluded that one should "take a look how many new names showed up with us during the war. People who led regiments and battalions at the beginning of the war now lead armies and fronts. One cannot live all the time by the old memories."<sup>22</sup>

That the Ovechkin episode was the rule, rather than the exception, is made even clearer when we turn to works that were conventionally considered to be more typical of the postwar "kolkhoz literature." Stakhurskii's self-image did not evolve in a vacuum. In fact, it intersected with an ideal-type from popular literature to such a degree that one can hardly distinguish between the two. A barrage of popular novels on the postwar countryside celebrated a new hero: the demobilized officer who transferred his zeal from the front to pursue the electrification of the backward countryside. As

<sup>18</sup> See biographical sketches of Stakhurskii in the *oblast'* paper during the election campaign of January–February 1946 (*Vinnyts'ka pravda*, 12, 19, and 30 January 1946; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 23, d. 2740, l. 43). Such was also the perception of rank-and-file Communists who, as late as 1949, still viewed Stakhurskii as "a general in civilian uniforms, one who inspired fear" (interview with Boris Halfin, 18 February 1994, Kiryat Gat, Israel).

<sup>19</sup> Ovechkin, *Z frontovym pryvitom*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–56.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, 127–28.

a rule, the character of the relentless veteran was contrasted with that of a laid-back bureaucrat, most likely one who avoided the front and adapted a “soft” and conservative approach to the tasks of reconstruction. Also as a rule, the veteran cut through red tape with iron will and voluntarist enthusiasm. This genre of kolkhoz literature came under harsh scrutiny by contemporary Soviet literary critics, already before Stalin’s death. The pastoral and romanticized portrayal of kolkhoz life was condemned as detached from reality, deliberately ignorant of actual difficulties, and encouraging of bullying methods in the countryside.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the validity of this line of criticism was never in doubt, it missed a crucial point. Such works had a large and receptive real-life constituency. Just as these literary-propagandist products aimed at the creation of new ideal-types, they simultaneously reflected a popular self-image of many of the veteran-turned-civilian leaders. As such, these textual representations of the war codified major political phenomena of the postwar scene.<sup>24</sup>

The acuteness of this phenomenon is highlighted when we examine Semen Babaevskii’s *Cavalier of the Golden Star*, the epitome of the genre, and the novel that drew the harshest criticism. One is struck by the almost identical collisions between Babaevskii’s fictional Sergei Tutarinov, the decorated veteran-turned-chairman of a district soviet executive committee, and his predecessor Khokhlakov, and between the real-life Stakhurskii and Burchenko, the chairman of the Regional Soviet Executive Committee.

In his story Babaevskii juxtaposed a young and enthusiastic demobilized officer with an aging and cautious apparatchik. The world view and practices of the young veteran, Sergei Tutarinov, were drawn solely from the front. For his opponent, Khokhlakov, who got used to cozy formalism and the network of cronies, such a phenomenon was an assault on his secure environment. When the two clashed over an ambitious plan to build a hydroelectric station, Khokhlakov snapped: “I think that the noise of war is still filling your head. You seem to think you have only to want something and you’ll get it.” Sometime later Khokhlakov complained on the combat-like style of Tutarinov, who “simply drove down to that kolkhoz and started giving orders as if he was in his tank company. But this is not a tank company, this is a kolkhoz!” Tutarinov’s response was anything but apologetic: “Where did you get such a convenient theory of ‘don’t worry, don’t bother.’ Every slacker will smother you with kisses for this! What more could he want? A quiet life.”<sup>25</sup>

The rhetoric and politics of Babaevskii’s Kuban Cossack *stanitsa* found its real-life counterpart in Vinnytsia. Although Stakhurskii was not a novice to party life, he, like the fictional Tutarinov, owed his meteoric rise to a high commander who spotted his talents.<sup>26</sup> The unusual promotion to the rank of lieutenant-general was

<sup>23</sup> See the sarcastic comments by Alexander Shtein at a writers’ conference in 1947, as cited in Konstantin Simonov, “Zadachi sovetskoi dramaturgii i teatral’naia kritika,” *Novyi mir*, 1949, no. 3:191; Vladimir Pomerantsev, “Ob iskrennosti v literature,” *ibid.*, 1953, no. 12:218–45; and Fedor Abramov, “Liudi kolkhoznnoi derevni v poslevoennoi proze,” *ibid.*, 1954, no. 4:210–31.

<sup>24</sup> This aspect of Soviet literary discourse is best treated in Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1981).

<sup>25</sup> Semen Babaevskii, *Kavaler zolotoi zvezdy*, in his *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1979), 1:221, 462–63.

<sup>26</sup> Vasilii Kostenko, then the secretary of Komsomol of the Ukrainian Communist party, described

perceived as confirmation of the view of civilian life as a military front and approval of assault-like leadership methods. Stakhurskii charged his arch-rival Burchenko, who objected to the electrification campaign on practical grounds, with being a "reactionary character, a Potemkin-village ideologue," and he accused the regional committee of being "an institution where conservatism flourishes and every stimulating initiative is killed."<sup>27</sup> In a damning letter addressed to Khrushchev personally, Stakhurskii implicitly contrasted his own combative and effective style with Burchenko's spineless and indecisive conduct. "[Burchenko] does not lead the executive committee and the departments," retorted Stakhurskii,

but, on the contrary, the fulfillment of the directives of the Central Committee of the party and the government is objectively delayed by his spinelessness and liberal approach to any deficiencies. He guides the meetings of the *ispolkom* in such a manner, that any combat resolution is allowed to drop. . . . There is no precision, purposefulness and energy in his work. [Burchenko] tends to follow rather than lead [*sklonen k khvostizmu*]. In speeches he often resorts to demagoguery, seeks to exert cheap authority. All of the so-called "offended" find shelter and sympathy with him.<sup>28</sup>

In the aftermath of the war, the Stakhurskii-Tutarinovs carried the day as the officially endorsed ideal-type of political leader. Whether fiction imitated politics, or vice versa, the resounding similarity suggests that they combined to create and propagate a powerful political myth. For party leaders who returned from the front, representations of war were the prism through which they viewed civilian life, and a major instrument with which they cemented their political power and authority.

### DELINEATING THE PARAMETERS OF A DISCOURSE: THE QUEST FOR PURITY REDEFINED

If literary and autobiographical representations of the war outlined the official expectations for postwar conduct, then the simultaneous scrutiny of the wartime record of Communists marked the criteria for membership in the body politic. By July 1947 party organizations from the Central Committee down to the district committees verified the wartime conduct of some 82,373 Communists who had survived the German occupation, in the largest and most obscure purge of the postwar era.<sup>29</sup> The

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Stakhurskii as a "natural force." According to Kostenko, Marshal Rokossovskii was so impressed by Stakhurskii's indefatigable working capability at the Stalingrad front that he asked Stalin to promote the latter, who was at the rank of captain at the time, to a lieutenant-general. Stalin consented. Interview with Vasilii Semenovich Kostenko, 23 March 1993, Kiev, Ukraine. For Rokossovskii's praise of Stakhurskii's wartime performance see his memoirs, Konstantin Rokossovskii, *A Soldier's Duty* (Moscow, 1985), 214.

<sup>27</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 23, d. 4170, l. 14, and, op. 46, d. 2285, l. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., op. 62, d. 1739, l. 185. When a Central Committee instructor looked into the rivalry between the two in June 1947, he concluded that, due to his long tenure in Vinnytsia, Burchenko [like the fictional Khokhlakov], "got used to people, to the situation, and began to lose his edge in work" (ibid., op. 46, d. 2284, l. 33).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., op. 23, d. 4093, l. 20. Since the verification process was never discussed in public, it remained practically unknown. The Central Committee decision from 1 November 1943 that ordered the verification was first mentioned in an academic work some sixteen years later, without elaboration. See Petliak, F. A., "Vosstanovlenie i ideino-organizatsionnoe ukreplenie partiinykh organizatsii Ukrainy posle ee osvov-

centrality of this verification process in party life is underlined when compared with other categories of purge during this period. By the end of 1946 the Ukrainian party *obkoms* reviewed 7,938 expulsion decisions by the *raikoms* for reasons such as drunkenness, failure to pay membership fees, criminal offenses, and so on. At the same time, the *obkoms* reviewed 48,890 decisions by the *raikoms* on the party status of Communists who remained on the occupied territory.<sup>30</sup>

The *partiinosť* of rank-and-file Communists had come to be defined by the indisputable proof of an individual's combat valor. Passivity in the armed struggle against the occupiers disqualified a person from membership regardless of circumstances and personal background. The Communist was measured by the highest standards: guilt was based on omission as much as on commission.<sup>31</sup> Pragmatic considerations were subordinated to the zealous pursuit of verification of Communists both under fire and under occupation. The purge took precedence over other urgent needs, such as the rebuilding of the virtually extinguished party organization and the dire need for experienced cadres.

The purge was launched before the region had been completely liberated, and long before the commencement of mass demobilization.<sup>32</sup> Despite the virtual non-existence of party organization, all participants in the first meeting of the *obkom* on 5 April 1944 agreed to the immediate start of mass verification.<sup>33</sup> Two months later, in response to the numerous signs that the verification had virtually stopped enrollment in the party, whose primary cells desperately needed personnel, the first secretary of the *obkom* told the plenum that "the ranks of our party will not be replenished in the near future," and added in disdain: "So who shall we admit? Those who resided in the occupied territory?"<sup>34</sup> The secretary for cadres did not mince words either. "None of those people who remained in occupied territory," he told the plenum, "were taken prisoners, or were with the partisans, is permitted to request the district military committees to retain them. Such people must be drafted into the army."<sup>35</sup>

While the regional organization contained a mere 5,470 party members in October 1944 (about 25 percent of its prewar composition), it also registered for verification 3,546 Communists who had remained in occupied territory. The slow pace of the actual verification and the high rate of expulsions practically guaranteed the exclusion of those Communists from party life.<sup>36</sup>

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bozhdeniia ot nemetsko-fashistskoi okkupatsii, (1943–1945 gg.)," in *Voprosy istorii KPSS perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, ed. F. P. Ostapenko (Kiev, 1961), 135. For the original decision see TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 6, d. 698, ll. 1–3.

<sup>30</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 23, d. 4095, ll. 5, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Of the 2,267 Communists who were expelled by the Vinnytsia *obkom* between 1944 and 1947 due to their wartime conduct, 2,044 (90.16 percent) were charged with passivity in the armed struggle against the invaders.

<sup>32</sup> The verification of railway workers in the region began in February 1944 after the liberation of Koziatyn, a major railway junction. The Red Army completed the liberation of the region only by the end of March.

<sup>33</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 22, d. 161, ll. 7–9.

<sup>34</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 44, d. 1650, l. 79. For signs of the stagnating impact of the verification see TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 23, d. 4214, l. 23, op. 46, d. 2285, ll. 37, 39, and d. 4076, l. 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 59–60.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, op. 23, d. 811, ll. 16–19. Of the 2,770 cases in hand, the *raikoms* reviewed 894 cases, expelled

The primacy of wartime experience in party life is further confirmed by testing the validity of the argument that the party leadership had a hidden agenda. Skepticism regarding the credibility of the officially proclaimed targets of the purges had deep roots in the party's history.<sup>37</sup> The fate of Jewish Communists under verification served as a litmus test in light of the universal resentment that confronted the Jewish community. At a time when official anti-Semitism was gathering momentum and popular outbursts against Jews were on the rise, it seemed only logical that Jews would be driven *en bloc* out of the party.<sup>38</sup> In Vinnytsia such prospects seemed even more likely given Stakhurskii's anti-Semitic views and the stubborn struggle that the local Jewish community waged against him. In an unpublished letter to *Pravda* dated 19 September 1946, a group of local Jews accused Stakhurskii of guiding an anti-Semitic campaign and driving Jewish Communists out of the region. The letter underlined the centrality of the war experience in the articulation of identities and perceptions of individuals and groups alike. Not only did the Jews complain that Stakhurskii referred to them as "weevils" and "jackals," but they also charged that

for some reason [he] is "deeply convinced" that, to a man, all Jews were in Tashkent and not one of them has fought! It would do him no harm to know that every [Jew] of draft age was at the front and fought fairly well for the motherland, no worse than other nationalities of our immense motherland. It is a fact that the performance by the Jews was distinguished and [their] heroism at the front was not at the bottom among the peoples of the USSR.<sup>39</sup>

Baptism by fire, then, was perceived to transcend all other criteria, including even membership in the "indigenous population." The Jews followed with an example of a demobilized Jewish officer, who was denied admission to legal studies on the grounds that only the indigenous population was eligible for admission. "It is not difficult to imagine," wrote the authors,

the bewilderment of this comrade, when his great grandfather, grandfather, father, and he himself were born, lived and continue to live in the Vinnytsia region. He shed blood for this land and after all that he is a Jew, not a member of the "indigenous population." Who knows, after all that, what the standards are for establishing membership in the indigenous population?<sup>40</sup>

704 and reinstated 190. The *obkom*, which mandatorily reviewed the *raikoms'* decisions, reviewed only 102 cases, of which it approved 61 expulsions and 38 reinstatements.

<sup>37</sup> Ever since Preobrazhenskii demanded at the Thirteenth Party Congress in May 1924 that a spade be called a spade and that the real targets of the current purge be revealed, the prevalent interpretation of the process entailed, if only partially, a notion of Machiavellian manipulation by the leadership against opposition groups. See *Trinadtsaty s'ezd RKP(b). Mai 1924 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1963), 192–93.

<sup>38</sup> For representations of the war and Holocaust within the Jewish community in the Vinnytsia region and among the population at large see Weiner, "Myths and Identities," chap. 3.

<sup>39</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 23, d. 4170, ll. 2–4. The letter was directed by the editor of *Pravda* to the secretary of cadres of the Ukrainian Central Committee in 10 April 1947. A year later these charges were repeated, this time by the *Izvestiia* correspondent in Vinnytsia. In a letter of 18 August 1947 the correspondent emphasized that "decorated *frontoviki* who returned to their former jobs were not reinstated on the order of comrade Stakhurskii only because they were Jews" (*ibid.*, I. 16).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 16.

Ultimately, however, the postwar anti-Semitic wave did not seem to have a unique impact on the decisions on the party status of Jewish Communists. The decisions of the *obkom*'s bureau which ruled on the party status of Communists based on their wartime conduct did not reveal a certain bias. Indeed, following Stakhurskii's appointment, the rate of expulsion of Jewish Communists increased from 66 percent to 75 percent. This 9 percent increase, however, did not exceed the overall rate of expulsions in this same period, which rose by 8.5 percent, from 76.3 percent to 84.8 percent; moreover, the expulsion rate for ethnic Ukrainians who remained in occupied territory rose by 14.7 percent, from 71.6 percent to 86.3 percent.<sup>41</sup>

In some cases, the *obkom* displayed utter indifference to the fate of Jews under the occupation. In others, the wartime experience of Jews clearly played in their favor. Hence, the *obkom* showed compassion when it reinstated Rakhil Masniak, a party member since 1940, who was expelled for falsifying a party document. After she was evacuated to the Chkalovsk region, Masniak apparently concealed her Jewish origin and name in her personal file and replaced it with Ukrainian ones. Such a violation of party rules led automatically to expulsion, and Masniak was in fact expelled by the Kryzhopil' *raikom*. In her appeal to the *obkom*, Masniak explained her action as a result of her "past woes, having lost her sixteen-year-old son and the persecution of the Jews by the Fascists (the murder of utterly innocent people and burying children alive)." The *obkom* then overruled the *raikom*, and reinstated Masniak with merely a reprimand.<sup>42</sup> The *obkom* also expelled non-Jewish Communists who participated in the persecution of the Jewish population, underlining that their conduct "compromised the title of Communist."<sup>43</sup> At the same time, despite the *obkom*'s awareness of personal traumas, people who were locked in concentration camps were charged with passivity in the struggle against the occupiers, and expelled on the grounds that they "did not live up to the calling of a Communist."<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the primacy of the wartime credentials was evident in the *obkom*'s decisions on the party status of Jewish veterans. Iosif Groisman, to cite one them, was expelled by the Tul'chyn *raikom* for refusing to take a job in the countryside. Following his demobilization in December 1945, Groisman was offered work either as an agricultural agent or as a chairman of a kolkhoz board—unlikely jobs for a Jew. Groisman declined on the grounds of lack of familiarity with rural economic work. The *obkom* took into consideration Groisman's military record, including his service throughout the entire war and his decorations, and reinstated him with only a reprimand.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The percentage of Ukrainians expelled correlated to their share in the total number of Communists who were subjected to verification of their wartime conduct in Vinnytsia during this period (88.7 percent). These calculations are based on the examination of 2,828 protocols of decisions of the *obkom*'s bureau, from March 1944 to December 1947.

<sup>42</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 45, d. 2002, ll. 269–70.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 50, d. 255, ll. 11–12. In some cases, aid to the Jewish population was cited as one of the reasons for reinstatement in the party (RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 45, d. 2002, ll. 3–4; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 50, d. 88, l. 35).

<sup>44</sup> See, for examples, RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 45, d. 2008, l. 10; and TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 50, d. 108, l. 11.

<sup>45</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 50, d. 251, ll. 3–4.

In this sense, the paradox of a continued and relatively high percentage of Jews in the party, in spite of the mass influx of non-Jews into the ranks and the growing anti-Semitism, directs attention not only to the primacy of combat exploits in deciding membership in the postwar body politic but also, more intriguingly, to the mechanism that allowed for the preservation and promotion of particularistic interests and images within the highly stylized parameters of the Soviet polity. This phenomenon is clarified by the following tales.

### DELINEATING THE SYMBOLIC SPACE FOR PARTICULARISTIC IMAGES

In March 1950 the Vinnytsia *obkom* recommended awarding Ivan Bezv posthumously the Order of Lenin. The *obkom*'s official account of the underground activity during the occupation identified Bezv as the organizer and leader of the first Bolshevik underground organization in Vinnytsia. On 21 July 1955 the City Soviet Executive Committee named a street after Bezv.<sup>46</sup> Those actions would have seemed natural if only for one fact: by that time Bezv was still a former party member in disgrace. Bezv joined the party in 1928, after seven years of service in the Red Army, for which he volunteered in 1919 at the age of sixteen. In 1938 he was expelled from the party for concealing his father's past as a White officer and for writing a recommendation for a person exposed as an "enemy of the people." However, on the eve of the war, Bezv accepted an offer by the party and the NKVD to stay in the soon-to-be-occupied town of Vinnytsia and organize underground activity. Sometime later, the Germans exposed the underground organization, and by the end of 1942 had executed Bezv, his wife and other underground activists.<sup>47</sup> At the time of his death, Bezv had still not been reinstated in the party, nor even rehabilitated. Only a year before his posthumous award as Hero of the Soviet Union by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1965, Bezv was rehabilitated and reinstated into the party.<sup>48</sup>

What could induce the *obkom* to take such an apparently risky measure, and, moreover, what enabled it to pursue policies in defiance of the central line? Searching for signals from above does not take us too far. Indeed, already in the summer of 1942 a score of popular plays by leading Soviet writers suggested the possibility of redemption for an imperfect political past. At the center of short stories by Tolstoy

<sup>46</sup> The final version of the *obkom* report on partisan and underground activity in the Vinnytsia region was issued on 16 April 1950 and sent to the Central Committee in Kiev. See TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 22, d. 153, ll. 2–3; PAVO, f. 425, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 66–67; and Derzhavnyi arkhiv Vinnytskoi oblasti (DAVO), f. 151, op. 9, d. 673, ll. 10–11.

<sup>47</sup> Bezv's father served in the Red Army in 1918, but after being captured by the Whites in 1919 he joined them at the rank of an officer. For his service with the Whites, Bezv's father was convicted and imprisoned between 1922–24 and again in 1931 for eight years. According to the rehabilitation protocols, Bezv lost contact with his father after 1919. This account draws on materials from the files of Bezv's expulsion and posthumous rehabilitation and reinstatement in the Party in April 1964 (PAVO, f. 136, op. 10, d. 151, ll. 2, 5–6, and op. 59, d. 173, ll. 1–14); and the biographical sketch of Bezv that Burchenko drew in his memoirs, *Reid k luzhnomu Bugu* (Kiev, 1978) 19–20.

<sup>48</sup> *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, no. 20, 19 May 1965, 4. A note from 1962 argued that Bezv was reinstated into the party prior to his assignment to underground work "in order to enhance . . . his fighting spirit and enable him to deal with the remaining Communists as equal" (DAVO, f. 5243, op. 1, d. 111, l. 8). This claim appears unfounded in light of the elaborated process of Bezv's posthumous reinstatement into the party in April 1964.

and Leonov were characters who redeemed their political crimes by volunteering for the patriotic cause. Significantly, however, they were killed off by the authors at the end. One had to be dead in order to rejoin the political body.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, although Stalin assured the delegates of the Eighteenth Party Congress in March 1939 that “the edge of our punitive organs and intelligence service is no longer turned to within the country but to without, against external enemies,” the reading of the Terror as a legitimate tool for the eradication of undesirable segments of Soviet society had not been altered yet. To the contrary, several popular representations still celebrated that event.<sup>50</sup>

A partial answer lies in another affair which was developing simultaneously, only this time on a national scale. In the summer of 1952 the L’viv-based journal, *Zhovten’*, published several chapters from Dmitrii Medvedev’s book on the Vinnytsia underground, *Na beregakh iuzhnogo Bugu*. There was nothing exceptional in the publication of this literary-documentary account, already a leading genre on the Soviet literary scene, except for the fact that its real-life heroes were all expelled from the party as collaborators and impostors. And, indeed, shortly after, on 24 January 1953, Medvedev came under harsh attack in the press. The political significance attached to the case was evident when the original attack, which appeared in the local *Vinnyts’ka pravda*, was reissued in *Literaturnaia gazeta*. Medvedev, charged the authors, chose to rely on the accounts of certain “rogues” who had nothing to do with the actual struggle against the Germans, a fact that did not stop them from fabricating accounts, portraying themselves as the organizers and leaders of the underground. The hero of the book, Trofym Kychko, was expelled for these actions from the party. Moreover, followed the allegation, in Medvedev’s account “the activity of the Vinnytsia underground [was] depicted in isolation, apart from the guiding influence of party leadership.” Medvedev, however, refused to recant, or to change his version. In spite of a reputation for independent-mindedness and bravery that dated to his career as a chekist and a commander of a partisan parachute detachment, Medvedev was politically savvy enough to realize the danger of his actions.<sup>51</sup> The suppression of Fadeev’s *Molodaia gvardiia* was too recent to be ignored.<sup>52</sup> Posthumous eulogies

<sup>49</sup> Leonid Leonov, “Nashestvie,” *Novyi mir*, 1942, no. 8; Alexei Tolstoy, “Stranaia istoriia,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 28 August 1942.

<sup>50</sup> I. V. Stalin, “Otchetnyi doklad na XVIII s’ezde partii o rabote TsK VKP (b), 10 marta 1939 g.,” in *Sochineniia* 1 (14):395. Nevertheless, *Front*, the well-known play by Oleksander Korniiuchuk that was published in *Pravda* between 24–27 August 1942 and, according to Korniiuchuk, was initiated by Stalin himself, endorsed the “sharp turn taken by the Central Committee” (namely, the Terror) to remove the vain ignoramuses from managerial posts in industry. See Korniiuchuk, *Front* (Moscow, 1942), 22. Shortly after the publication of the play, Korniiuchuk told Alexander Werth that the “general idea” of the play had been given to him by Stalin. See Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941–1945* (New York, 1964), 423.

<sup>51</sup> In his review of the first edition of Medvedev’s book, which served also as Medvedev’s obituary, Petro Vershyhora, the famous partisan commander and author, underlined that Medvedev was well aware of the probable consequences of his actions. See P. Vershyhora, “Zhizn’ v bor’be,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 17 December 1957.

<sup>52</sup> In 1945, Alexander Fadeev, a prominent writer and at that time the secretary of the Executive Board of the Union of Soviet Writers, published a novel about the Komsomol underground in Krasnodon, Donbas. Although the book was well received and won a First-Class Stalin Prize in 1946, a year later it was subjected to harsh criticism, mainly for its alleged downplaying of the party’s role in planning and guiding the underground organization in favor of spontaneity and youthful enthusiasm. Fadeev was obliged

by former comrades-in-arms attributed Medvedev's persistence to his civil courage and honesty, tracts that should not be dismissed out of hand.<sup>53</sup> Medvedev himself, however, offered a hint toward a more institutional direction. It seemed more than a coincidence that in his preface to the novel, Medvedev mentioned *Molodaia gvardiia* as an example of books on the war that "are eagerly snatched away by the new generation of readers which does not have recollections of itself in the year of 1941; for many of them *Molodaia gvardiia* was the first book they read on their own."<sup>54</sup> When Medvedev protested the party's handling of the Vinnytsia affair in a series of letters to the Central Committee throughout 1950–51, he concluded that the doubts cast on the real-life heroes of his story, were nothing less than heresy. "To charge that, because Hitler's staff was in Vinnytsia, there could not have been an underground, is an insult to Soviet people, and most of all to Communists," argued Medvedev.<sup>55</sup> In letters to relatives of the fallen underground activists, Medvedev went so far as to compare the tactics of the denouncers to those of foreign agents, a politically charged term in Soviet political vocabulary.<sup>56</sup> A little over a year later, and in spite of the unchanged status of the people in disgrace, the editorial board of one of the leading Ukrainian-language journals decided to publish Medvedev's tale. When Medvedev finally gained a partial rehabilitation for Kychko and company, he paid a visit to Vinnytsia, where, according to his biographer, he was recognized in the streets, and "strangers approached him, shook his hands and thanked him for all that he had done to restore the good reputation of hundreds of people from the lies of a small group of slanderers."<sup>57</sup>

Although in his letter Medvedev went out of his way to emphasize that the affair was not of a personal character but rather of a "principal political essence," these aspects appeared institutionally intertwined. The emphasis on personal bonding and the sense of power that came with it was underscored by another Hero of the Soviet Union, Petro Vershyhora, who, like Medvedev, was a partisan commander turned to writing after the war. In 1948, Olga Dzhigurda, who served as a military doctor on a battleship during the war, published her diary, "Teplokhod 'Kakhetia,'" in the literary journal *Znamia*.<sup>58</sup> Dzhigurda's recollections were realistic to the point of challenging some of the official myths of the wartime experience. Panicked soldiers, pregnant servicewomen and other unflattering moments of the war were openly dis-

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to introduce corrections in this spirit in the second edition, issued in 1951. The affair drew broad attention, and is well documented. See Harold Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946–1959* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), 42–45, 148–49; and Alexander Werth, *Russia: The Post-War Years* (New York, 1971), 338–39.

<sup>53</sup> In 1961 an editorial preface to Medvedev's book admitted that the work had "required not only great labor, but also civil courage; when Medvedev went to work on the book, there was much that was unclear in the history of the Vinnytsia underground and several of its participants were subjected to unjustified accusations." See the editions of 1961 (p. 2), and 1962 (p. 2).

<sup>54</sup> Dmitrii Medvedev, *Na beregakh iuzhnogo Buga* (Moscow, 1957), 5. This comment was omitted from the preface to the 1962 edition, published in Kiev, yet fully restored to the 1987 edition.

<sup>55</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 84, d. 4042, l. 31.

<sup>56</sup> DAVO; f. 5243, op. 1, d. 128, l. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Teodor Gladkov, *Ostaius' Chekistom!* (Moscow, 1987), 124.

<sup>58</sup> Olga Dzhigurda, "Teplokhod 'Kakhetia': Zapiski voennogo vracha," *Znamia*, vol. 1 (1948): 3–86; *ibid.*, vol. 2, 22–79.

cussed. Quite expectedly, the initial publication of the diary attracted a barrage of criticism. Less expected was the equally spirited defense of Dzhigurda by veterans, high-ranking officers and rank-and-file soldiers. Dzhigurda's account, which was harshly condemned in the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta* and *Zvezda*, gained support in a series of meetings which one observer appropriately portrayed as "not simply a literary meeting, but a broader public demonstration."<sup>59</sup> When Vershyhora defended Dzhigurda in the pages of *Zvezda*, he asserted the moral right of veterans to write the history of the war as *they* had seen it. "I shed enough blood for our people," one *frontovik* told Vershyhora, "to have the right to see their shortcomings and defects."<sup>60</sup> The writing and publication of unfiltered memoirs were, according to Vershyhora, nothing less than the exercise of a political right by those who earned that right with their blood:

Understandably, such a huge movement of force, will and characters, as was the war, led millions of people—true patriots of our motherland—to reflect a lot. *The defenders of the fatherland have the moral right* to share with contemporaries these thoughts. . . . It is difficult to overestimate the significance of books such as *Kakhetia*. Besides the direct conscious use and aesthetic satisfaction, *they could play a significant role in the formulation of the history of the Great Patriotic War*.<sup>61</sup>

Vershyhora's rebuttal, in this light, did not amount to, nor was it intended as, a subversion of the hegemonic discourse. Rather, carving a space for veterans to voice their own versions of the wartime experience was designed to prevent the marginalization of their experience; it was also an expression of their desire to belong and participate. The realization of this urge would find its most viable mechanism in personal networks, the predominant form of Soviet political association.

## WAR, ETHNICITY AND PERSONAL BONDING

The study of the Vinnytsia elite yields two main patterns of socialization through wartime experience and ethnicity.<sup>62</sup> These two patterns coincided to produce two

<sup>59</sup> Matthew P. Gallagher, *The Soviet History of World War II: Myths, Memories, and Realities* (New York, 1963), 121. Among the speakers who stood up for Dzhigurda were the editor of *Krasnyi flot* and the deputy chief of the Political Administration of the Navy.

<sup>60</sup> Petro Vershyhora, "O 'byvalykh liudiakh' i ikh kritikakh," *Zvezda*, 1948, no. 6:106. To sharpen this point, Vershyhora implicitly drew the distinction between baptized-by-fire veterans and behind-the-desk servicemen. Criticism of Dzhigurda's portrayal of panic and fear under fire could come only from those who have never experienced it. "Besides, they [the fighters], often got scared under bombs. I don't know about comrades Lifshits and Knipovich [Dzhigurda's critics], but I, for example, until the very end of the war did not forget how to be afraid before enemy bombs" (ibid.).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 108 (emphasis added).

<sup>62</sup> The steady Ukrainianization of the leading cadres in the midst of an official crackdown on the slightest perceived expressions of Ukrainian separatist sentiments attracted the attention of observers of the postwar Ukrainian scene. Interpretations referred to this as a phenomenon of inertia, resulting from the return of a critical mass of ethnic Ukrainians from the front. John Armstrong and Yaroslav Bilinsky agree that the war played a major role in setting this course either by mass influx of demobilized Communists or the entrenchment of partisan leaders whose familiarity with local conditions seemed useful for the postwar tasks. See Armstrong, *The Soviet Bureaucratic Elite*, 16–17; and Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic: The Ukraine after World War II* (Princeton, 1964), 233. These valid assumptions, however, gloss over the strong prescribed ethnic undertone which shaped the local political arena.

clearly demarcated groups.<sup>63</sup> The first and numerically larger group consisted of ethnic Ukrainians who served at the front during the war. About half the Ukrainian veterans joined the party after the onset of the Terror, but had already joined the elite circle before the war.<sup>64</sup> The second group consisted of ethnic Russians, of whom only half saw active service during the war. These officials were party veterans but new to the local scene. Two thirds joined the party before the commencement of the Terror and almost all arrived in Vinnytsia after the liberation of the region in March 1944.<sup>65</sup>

The marginalization of noncombat service coincided with the resentment toward officials who returned after having been evacuated to the Soviet rear. Eventually, this resentment amounted to a tacit criticism of Russian officials who arrived from the rear. As one might suspect, open expressions of ethnic resentment among the party elite were out of the question, yet the single piece of evidence available is a telling one. On 2 February 1947 the first secretary of the Vinnytsia *obkom* was informed of a conspiracy to remove Kalashnikov, the first secretary of the Iaryshiv *raikom*. The leader of the plot, the second secretary, Andrei Lupokh, was quoted as telling other secretaries who supported him: "We'll kick out all the Russians, and install our own people."<sup>66</sup> If the first secretary of the *obkom*, Gavril Mishchenko, could not be as blunt, his attitude toward the Russian evacuees differed from that of Lupokh only in its more restrained tone. When Mishchenko addressed the plenum of the *obkom* in December 1944, the tacit criticism of the outsiders was clear enough:

Every single Communist must understand that the methods of work that we employed before the war, or the methods of work that we have been using during the war in the eastern regions of the Soviet Union, where there were no Germans, [are of no use in the present conditions]. Nevertheless, there are many comrades among us arriving from the eastern regions who are familiar [only] with those forms of work and leading party organizations in conditions that are different from those we face now in the territory previously occupied by the Germans. It must be understood that the implementation of mechanistic methods of work from Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, Chkalovsk and Cheliabinsk regions, is absolutely impossible, and at present they are absolutely unacceptable for us in Ukraine.<sup>67</sup>

A report from the Cadres Department in July 1947 showed that this division within the party between Ukrainian veterans and Russian evacuees had become institutionalized. Newly arrived veterans, who comprised the majority of the regional *nomenklatura*, were portrayed as inexperienced but "quick to learn." In contrast, the

<sup>63</sup> The study is based on the analysis of 138 *spravki* of all *obkom* and *raikom* secretaries, following the elections of October 1948 (TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 46, d. 3786, ll. 25–162).

<sup>64</sup> Of 96 ethnic Ukrainians, 72 fought in the war, 42 joined the party after 1935, and 54 held positions at the level of at least head of department of *raikom/raispolkom* before the war.

<sup>65</sup> Of 38 ethnic Russians, only 20 fought in the war, 25 joined the party before 1935, and only 3 held leading positions in Vinnytsia before the war.

<sup>66</sup> PAVO, f. 136, op. 13, d. 124, l. 8. Lupokh himself was Ukrainian, a native of a village in the Iaryshiv district. He joined the party only in May 1941, and served as a commissar in the war. See TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 62, d. 231, ll. 152–154, 165.

<sup>67</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 44, d. 1651, ll. 119–20.

second group of officials who arrived from evacuation and had longer tenure in their jobs were described as unsuitable for the tasks of the postwar era.<sup>68</sup>

The regeneration of the party proceeded along the lines of ethnic affiliation and combat exploits. The annual reports by the cadres departments at the *obkom* and *raikom* levels regularly recorded their share of decorated veterans in the *nomenklatura*.<sup>69</sup> By 1949 the war generation had already established itself as the single largest group in the regional *nomenklatura*. The visibility of the newcomers was demonstrated publicly at the Eighth Regional Party Congress in January 1949, where 52 percent of the delegates had joined the party during and after the war, and 63.4 percent were participants in the war.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, the relative share of Ukrainians in the *nomenklatura* increased steadily, from 58.5 percent in 1945 to 72.2 percent in 1949. The share of ethnic Russians dropped by more than half, from 33.3 percent to 16.3 percent. Five years after the liberation of the region, representations of the war have already defined a lasting self-image and the model of regeneration for the local elite. At the regional and the district levels, which were less prone to direct intervention from Moscow, these images were both a means of expression of ethno-national pride within an identifiable political culture and a means of fortifying political status.

## WAR AND THE CHANGING SYMBOLIC FACE OF THE BODY POLITIC

Although the Soviets maintained an uncompromising adherence to several iron principles, mainly the rejection of a capitalist market economy and the establishment of one-party rule, they refrained from fixing a static set of cultural representations. Repudiation of certain myths, policies and their celebrated ideal-type figures, on purely pragmatic grounds, had been institutionalized in Soviet political culture. In the mid-1930s this elasticity, which owed its presence partially to the absence of an authoritative definition of what constituted capitalist culture, allowed for the introduction of a new set of cultural codes.<sup>71</sup> In 1942, *Front*, a popular play ordained by Stalin, did not limit itself to scolding the performances and personalities of Red Army commanders of the Civil War generation but proceeded to renounce the entire ethos of that great Revolutionary event as romantically naive, irrelevant and an outdated model for the Soviet polity.

Less pronounced, however, was the impact of the constant reshaping of the pantheon of heroes on the level of elite belief in the official myth. Signs of the struggle of the true-believers to suspend their disbelief in official representations accompanied the policies of the Great Transformation from the outset. In the rural province of

<sup>68</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 23, d. 4423, l. 71.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., d. 4422, l. 33. In 1946 the *obkom* cadres department emphasized that more than half of the *obkom nomenklatura* fell into the new category: 850 were decorated once, 488 twice, and 851 thrice. The rate grew higher the lower the level in the hierarchy, especially with the wave of demobilization underway. In late May 1947, 281 of the 304 members of the *nomenklatura* in the Koziatyn *raikom* were decorated veterans (ibid., d. 1562, l. 29).

<sup>70</sup> PAVO, f. 136, op. 29, d. 1, ll. 247–51.

<sup>71</sup> For the vagueness, though not to be confused with impotence, of the codification of “socialist culture” owing to the imprecision in conceptualizing its “bourgeois” counterpart see Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 180–92.

Vinnytsia, signs of disbelief in the official narrative appeared during collectivization. Voicing alarm at the catastrophic results of the pace of collectivization—a policy that he nevertheless endorsed in principle—a zealous party member confronted in a letter to the Politburo in Moscow the erosion in belief caused by the incomprehensible reconstruction of the Bolshevik pantheon of heroes. Addressing the exclusion of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Rykov, Rakovskii, Sosnovskii, and others, the devout Communist, who did not provide his full name, referred to the former as the wisest people of the country, the best leaders of the Revolution, struggle and victory, the direct and beloved colleagues of Ilich [Lenin]. “The question arises,” he followed, “How could they stop being revolutionaries after Ilich’s [death]? In my opinion, we should not even entertain such a thought. All the dismissed comrades remained revolutionaries.”<sup>72</sup>

The mutual processes of erosion in a cohesive belief system and the search for a meaningful guiding past and ideal types was punctuated by the Terror. In the February–March 1937 Plenum of the All-Union Central Committee, none other than the zealous Pavel Postyshev expressed his own disbelief that one of his subordinates, an apparatchik with perfect Revolutionary credentials, had “suddenly” become a Trotskyist in 1934.<sup>73</sup>

For a great many of the articulators of the Myth of the Great Patriotic War, the Terror meant more than the destruction of heroes under whose shadow they were introduced to the Bolshevik Idea. Mikhail Stakhurskii is said to have escaped being purged in 1937 by the skin of his teeth.<sup>74</sup> Dmitrii Medvedev, a career chekist and the author of the Vinnytsia underground story and its disgraced heroes, nearly became a victim of the terror in the fall of 1937 and was forced into retirement at the age of thirty-nine. Like the fallen Bevez, it was family ties to “hostile elements” which nearly brought down Medvedev.<sup>75</sup> Like for two other legendary, and better-known, Heroes of the Soviet Union, Konstantin Rokossovskii and Semen Rudnev, combat exploits were not necessarily a reaffirmation of their Bolshevik credentials, nor even a means of rehabilitation. Rather they were a point of departure from a past to which no one could or wanted to refer.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> The yearning for guiding figures found its expression in the eulogization of Lenin, who, “as a matter of fact, we do not have figures equal to [Ilich]. . . . However you consider it, comrades, it is my view that if Ilich were alive, the country would not have reached such a desperate situation” (PAVO, f. 136, op. 3, d. 4, ll. 75–78).

<sup>73</sup> Postyshev concluded that Karpov, the person to whom he referred, had always been an enemy. This, however, was omitted by Khrushchev when he cited Postyshev’s comment in his de-Stalinization speech at the Twentieth Party Congress, and thus Postyshev entered historiography as a principled opponent of the Terror. See J. Arch Getty, “The Politics of Repression Revisited,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta Manning (Cambridge, 1993), 56 n.65; Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. Strobe Talbott (Boston, 1971), 629–30. Other accounts argue that the announcement of the trial of the military command on charges of treason, especially of Marshal Tukhachevskii, appeared to be a watershed in the ability of many to suspend disbelief in the official version (Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 345–46).

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Vasilii Semenovich Kostenko, 23 March 1993, Kiev, Ukraine.

<sup>75</sup> Medvedev’s biographer refers to the repression of his brother, Alexander, who was also in the NKVD ranks, and had repercussions on Medvedev’s career (Gladkov, *Ostaius’ Chekistom!* 50).

<sup>76</sup> Semen Rudnev, the commissar of the Kovpak partisan formation, was a career serviceman who was jailed for two years before he was released and retired to his hometown in 1939. Rudnev was killed

The erasing of the Terror from the political memory of the Vinnytsia party elite is best captured by the following tale. Having returned from a raid into occupied Vinnytsia in August 1943, Dmitrii Burchenko, the commissar of the Lenin partisan brigade, composed a report addressed to Khrushchev on the situation in the region. Referring to the political mood of the population, Burchenko wrote Khrushchev that in order to discredit Soviet power,

the Germans blow the horn about facts allegedly “disclosed” by them of the mass murder by the NKVD organs of the Ukrainian population in the city of Vinnytsia between 1937–39 and in 1941. This propaganda began soon after the seizure of the city of Vinnytsia and continues also at present. From time to time the excavation of cemeteries and mass graves is carried out, photographs are published, testimonies [are published] of relatives, who allegedly identified their close relatives, their personal belongings and other materials. All the newspapers published by the Germans in Ukraine spread similar information.<sup>77</sup>

“This propaganda is not successful,” Burchenko assured Khrushchev, “since the population is convinced that all the photographs are of victims of the mass extermination of Jewish and other populations, organized by the Germans themselves.” Burchenko was referring to the exhumation of the mass graves, which contained some 9,439 corpses, by the Germans and the local authorities in May 1943.<sup>78</sup> As a veteran of the Vinnytsia party machine, who was already an *obkom* secretary at the height of the Terror, Burchenko was familiar with the mass executions and the identity of their perpetrators. Although at the time many of the identified victims were executed as “enemies of the people,” by 1943 the event was removed from Soviet political memory even in a confidential correspondence between two of its perpetrators and beneficiaries.

Similarly, whereas until the very eve of the war, class was still the central motif

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in the famous raid to the Carpathians in 1943, and instantly became one of the most celebrated symbols of the partisan struggle. Rokossovskii saw a meteoric rise in the ranks of the Red Army until he was arrested in August 1937. He was released in 1940 and reinstated to the high command. His highly successful performance in the war was symbolically rewarded when he was chosen to lead the Victory Parade in Moscow on 24 June 1945.

<sup>77</sup> PAVO, f. 425, op. 2, d. 11, l. 6.

<sup>78</sup> The Germans indeed used the exhumation of the mass graves to discredit Soviet power within and without the occupied territories by establishing an international investigation commission, as they did shortly before in Katyn. However, if Soviet responsibility for at least part of the executions is fairly established, the identification of the victims as solely Ukrainians appears misleading. Only 679, a mere 7.2 percent of the corpses, were identified by nationality, of whom there were 490 Ukrainians, 28 Poles and 161 of “unknown nationality.” An editor of *Vinnits'ki visti*, the local newspaper in occupied Vinnytsia, confirmed that although among the corpses there were Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, and Poles, the published reports spoke only of Ukrainians (*Harvard University Refugee Interview Project, 1950–1951*, #548). *Vinnits'ki visti* began reporting on the exhumations immediately upon their commencement on 24 May 1943, and continued throughout August of that year. See *Vinnits'ki visti*, 1943, passim. For a brief account by a German reporter see Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Zhovtnevoi revoliutsii sotsialistichnoho budivnytstva Ukrainy, Kiev, f. 3206, op. 2, d. 71, l. 85; and Ihor Kamenetsky, ed., *The Tragedy of Vinnytsia: Materials on Stalin's Policy of Extermination in Ukraine during the Great Purge, 1936–1938* (New York, 1989).

in the articulation of self-identities, in 1944 this urge had virtually disappeared.<sup>79</sup> The adaptation of the war as a self-ordained point of departure was best captured in a letter by Mitia Khludov, a nineteen-year-old soldier, who belonged to a well-known Moscow merchant family which suffered greatly during the early years of the Bolshevik regime. "I am proud to tell you," Khludov wrote to Alexander Werth,

that my battery has done wonders in knocking the hell out of the Fritzes. Also, for our last engagement, I have been proposed for the Patriotic War Order, and, better still, I have been accepted into the party. Yes, I know, my father and my mother were *burzhuis*, but what the hell! I am a Russian, a hundred percent Russian, and I am proud of it, and our people have made this victory possible after all the terror and humiliation of 1941; and I am ready to give my life for my country and for Stalin; I am proud to be in the Party, to be one of Stalin's victorious soldiers.<sup>80</sup>

In Vinnytsia, scores of more fortunate servicemen who survived the war lived to experience the institutionalization of Khludov's boast in party life. Many of them were reinstated into the party in spite of having committed various offenses that would have otherwise led to automatic expulsion. Between April 1944 and December 1947 the *obkom* reinstated at least ninety-one members who had been expelled by the *raikoms* for violations that ranged from observing religious rites to criminal offenses such as embezzlement and theft of grain from kolkhozes. As a rule, Communists who committed such violations and had not served at the front were expelled. The guiding criteria in reversing the *raikoms'* decisions were service in the Red Army and governmental awards. Such was the case of Slava Marchuk. A party member since 1925, Marchuk was demoted from the post of kolkhoz chairman and expelled from the party by the Khmil'nyk *raikom* for poor performance and for profiteering. Reversing the expulsion, the *obkom* bureau wrote:

Comrade Marchuk deserves expulsion from the party, but, having learned that he long served in the Red Army ranks, was at the front, and was awarded six orders and medals—[the bureau] orders the reversal of the decision by the bureau of Khmil'nyk *raikom* from 26 August 1947 and the reinstatement of Marchuk as a member of the CPSU.<sup>81</sup>

At a time when the campaign to regain control over the kolkhoz peasantry reached its climax and violators of lesser crimes were expelled, the *obkom* found it sufficient to attach merely a "severe reprimand" to Marchuk's personal file.

Wartime exploits compensated also for religious offenses. Even though the authorities intensified their antireligious campaign in the region and expelled scores of Communists charged with religious offenses, decorated veterans maintained their party status. At least eighteen veterans who had been expelled for participating in religious ceremonies, mainly the baptism of babies, were allowed back into the party.

<sup>79</sup> See Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubny (1931–1939)," *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* (forthcoming); and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *Journal of Modern History* 65 (December 1993): 745–70.

<sup>80</sup> Werth, *Russia at War*, 763.

<sup>81</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 50, d. 377, l. 9. For similar cases see *ibid.*, d. 159, l. 61, d. 257, ll. 13–14, and d. 260, ll. 12–13.

Grigorii Lutskov, to cite one example, baptized his son and was expelled by the Ulaniv *raikom* in August 1946. Shortly after, however, the *obkom* overturned this decision and reinstated Lutskov, citing his service in the Red Army between 1936 and 1944 and his discharge as an invalid at the rank of captain.<sup>82</sup>

The primacy of wartime credentials was evident even in cases classified as political violations, particularly ties with people who were categorized as “hostile elements.” Ivan Klimov, a demobilized invalid, not only married the daughter of a former *starosta* but also organized a campaign among the kolkhozniks for the rehabilitation of his father-in-law. As one may suspect, the Chernivtsi *raikom* expelled Klimov for his “ties to hostile elements, for protecting and defending a former Rumanian *starosta* and for his nonparty conduct.”<sup>83</sup> The *obkom*, referring to Klimov’s status as a decorated invalid, reinstated him with only a severe reprimand.

### THE PARTICULARIZATION OF A MYTH

The cult of the war seemed only to intensify as the Soviet Union moved away from both the October Revolution and the war itself. This development went hand-in-hand with the denunciation and removal of such key elements of the Stalinist regime as the Cult of Personality and the mass terror, the partial acknowledgment of the crisis of the command economy, and the routinization of other fundamentals of the Revolutionary ethos.<sup>84</sup> The war was rapidly becoming the main prism through which the Revolutionary ethos was viewed. Here, the negotiation between the universal and particular visions accelerated the remodeling of the Bolshevik master narrative after its new legitimizing myth. When the kolkhoz assemblies were convened in February 1947 during the campaign to revitalize kolkhoz life and economy, the peasants, rather than submit to an imposed appointment by the *raikom*, forced the district authorities to conduct an election for the new leadership. They managed to do so mainly by appealing to recently demobilized officers. That was how one of them, Fedor Belov, found himself and his army comrades as the embodiment of kolkhoz democracy. Referring in his diary to the meeting at which he was elected, Belov noted that he

did not know that the kolkhoz members could criticize not only B. [the outgoing chairman] but also the *raion* authorities so fearlessly and angrily as they are doing. It is obvious that democracy is not yet crushed in the kolkhozes. . . . The kolkhoz members were in full control of the meeting and did not even consider the suggestions of the representatives of the *raion* party committee . . . [they] elected me chairman unanimously. To my great surprise, they allowed me personally to elect the board of managers.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 50, d. 199, ll. 16–17. As with criminal and intraparty offenses, there were individual exceptions to this rule, especially when the subjects of verification systematically engaged in religious rites, or in additional violations. Vasilii Krasil’nik, a decorated veteran, was not saved by his wartime record after he got married in church and engaged in selling kolkhoz products in Western Ukraine (ibid., d. 201, l. 26, and d. 204, l. 14).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., d. 115, l. 16.

<sup>84</sup> For the impact of these developments on the structuring of Soviet rituals see Christopher A. P. Binns, “The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and the Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System,” *Man*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1980): 171–72.

<sup>85</sup> Fedor Belov, *The History of a Soviet Collective Farm* (London, 1956), 27.

At the end of the day all the top posts in the village passed into the hands of former front-line officers. In a given situation, the peasants' particularistic urge to belong and participate in the political process joined with the officers' personal bonding to institutionalize the myth of the war in the Soviet system. The constant presence of the veterans, their enduring prestige and grip on local positions of power, guaranteed the endurance of this particular myth. Referring the commemoration of May Ninth, the new focal event in the postwar calendar in the early 1950s, a former educator in Vinnytsia, himself a veteran, recalled:

The Ninth of May was celebrated beautifully and widely, with enthusiasm. On this day I led the students [approximately 800] to the mass graves with wreaths of flowers. It was moving. The children listened to stories of those invited, who were sometimes illiterate and simple people, who tried to piece together who was buried there and how they got there. . . . Victory Day was celebrated in a much more spiritual and better way than November 7th or May 1st. The holiday had a very intimate character. Officers in reserve kissed soldiers in service, everyone recalled memories from the war, and was amazed to still be alive.<sup>86</sup>

These developments, as we have seen above, had a distinctive resonance throughout the Ukrainian Republic, especially in the eastern provinces, where the widespread perception of being particularly victimized by the Revolutionary ethos went hand-in-hand with the entrenched Soviet policy of ethnic particularism. There the war's legacy resonated largely as the unification of Ukrainian land and people for the first time. This core representation of the myth ordained the war with a comprehensible and tangible sense of generational continuity in the life of that community. The war has been represented as the event which helped realize the historical necessity of bringing together a previously fragmented community. Hence, the plot of some of the most popular wartime memoirs and novels took place in the newly acquired territories of western Ukraine, thus familiarizing the readers with the new areas of the unified Republic.<sup>87</sup> Years after the end of the war, on Soviet Army Day, school children in Vinnytsia commemorated the event by recitation of such songs as this:

Throughout the centuries the rough Carpathians have sadly called to  
The roar of the speeding current of the Dnieper:  
We have one language, We have one mother  
Our fate must be one.  
The sunny dream of the people was realized  
Stalin warmed the Carpathians with his kindness.  
Praise, friends, the long desired freedom,  
Praise, friends, the unification of brothers.  
In Poltava the silver poplars rustle  
In L'viv the music of the chestnuts echoes  
From now and forever we have one fate  
We have one leader and one path.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Boris Halfin, letter to author, 29 April 1995.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Petro Vershyhora, *Liudi s chistoi sovest'iu* (Moscow, 1946); and Medvedev, *Na beregakh iuzhnogo Bugu*.

<sup>88</sup> The entire scenario was composed by the local ethnographer, N. N. Priszehniuk. See his personal archive in DAVO, f. 5105, op. 1, d. 115, ll. 2–25 (song is from l. 9).

The Ukrainianization of the myth of the war reached its completion when the town of Vinnytsia commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of World War II. The thrust of the commemorative acts and reflections was the continuity established between the sacrifice and heroism of the Ukrainian war generation and the creation and defense of newly independent Ukraine. In a lead interview for the special issue of the regional newspaper, *Panorama*, General Petr Shuliak, the commander of the Transcarpathian Military District, repeatedly emphasized that the horrendous sacrifice and fighting legacy of Ukrainians during the war set a proper tradition for present-day patriotism and statehood. "We have no right to forget our own history, the heroic sacrifice of those who fought for a sovereign state. The glorious tradition of older generations must be regenerated in the deeds of the present defenders of the young Ukrainian state," concluded Shuliak.<sup>89</sup> The war had been fully Ukrainianized.

The myth of World War II, in this light, occupies a unique place between the formation and the disintegration of the Soviet polity. On one hand, the supraethnic, cross-ethnic aspect of the myth provided the polity with a previously absent integrating theme and folded into the body politic large groups that previously had been excluded. At the same time, the symbolic space for the articulation of particularistic, albeit not antagonistic, visions, delineated by the primacy of personal bonding and the deliberative character of the Soviet polity, ended up structuring discourses that articulated particularistic identities.

<sup>89</sup> *Panorama* (Vinnytsia), 11 May 1995.