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THE POWER OF IMAGERY: THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF THE UKRAINIAN SSR LOCAL NEWSPAPERS OF THE EARLY 1930S

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Summary. *Along with textual articles, the local press of the Ukrainian SSR in the early 1930s often contained visual elements, which, despite their poor quality, had enormous propagandistic potential. These newspapers were predominantly targeted at the rural population and communicated with their audience in a direct and prescriptive manner. Moreover, because of strong censorship, they were never illustrated by images that would reflect the actual socio-economic problems and thus compromise the Soviet regime. Therefore, the aim of this article is to define the major types of images that were published in the raion (i.e., province) level newspapers of the Ukrainian SSR and explore the messages they conveyed. In particular, by using the animal code and referring to well-known idioms, caricatures shaped the image of both domestic ('kulaks', priests, etc.) and foreign (Western capitalist countries) enemies. In contrast, numerous portraits of*

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the communist chiefs and the most productive workers, both male and female, constructed the gallery of role models for the readers. At the same time, the basis of the newspapers' visual content was the staged group portraits and photographs of people at work and industrial landscapes, depicting an idealized 'communist paradise' – a pseudo-reality of rapid and successful economic changes. The newspapers also utilized the images of Soviet and Western weapons and/or military personnel, trying to keep the readers in a state of readiness for possible military aggression without simultaneously causing panic. In addition, monumental, complex, and multi-layered illustrations, similar to traditional political posters, were often included in the press issues devoted to the State holidays. Many of them featured the images of a perfect Soviet man or woman, and embodied the greatness of the USSR. Finally, the emotional, simple, and straightforward visual language of the Ukrainian SSR raion press aimed to mobilize the population for selfless work "in favor of their socialist Motherland" and actively support the Soviet Government's policies.

Keywords: *local press, Ukrainian SSR, propaganda, visual language, photography, Holodomor, newspaper.*

Vaizdinių galia: vaizdinė vietinių Ukrainos SSR laikraščių kalba XX a. 4-ojo dešimtmečio pradžioje

Santrauka. *XX a. 4-ojo dešimtmečio pradžioje Ukrainos SSR vietinė spauda, be tekstinių straipsnių, dažnai spausdindavo vizualinius elementus, kurie, nepaisant prastos kokybės, turėjo didžiulį propagandinį potencialą. Šie laikraščiai, skirti daugiausia kaimo gyventojams, su savo auditorija bendravo tiesioginiu ir nurodomuoju tonu. Be to, dėl griežtos cenzūros jie niekada nebuvo iliustruojami vaizdais, atspindinčiais realias socialines ir ekonomines problemas bei taip kompromituojančiais sovietinį režimą. Todėl šio straipsnio tikslas yra ištirti Ukrainos SSR rajonų (t. y. provincijos) lygmens laikraščiuose vyravusius publikuotus vaizdinius tipologiniu bei komunikaciniu aspektais.*

Tyrimo išvados leidžia teigti, kad pasitelkiant gyvūnų simbolizmą bei žinomas idiomias, taip pat karikatūras buvo formuojami tiek vidaus („buožių“, kunigų ir kt.), tiek išorės (Vakarų kapitalistinių šalių) priešų įvaizdžiai. Tuo tarpu komunistų vadų ir produktyviausių darbuotojų (tiek vyrų, tiek moterų) vaizdais skaitytojams buvo kuriami sektinų pavyzdžių įvaizdžiai. Tuo pat metu laikraščių vizualinio turinio pagrindą sudarė

inscenizuoti grupinių portretų ir dirbančių žmonių nuotraukos bei pramoniniai vaizdai, rodantys idealizuotą „komunistinį rojų“ – pseudorealybę, turėjusią atspindėti neva sparčius ir sėkmingus ekonominius pokyčius. Laikraščiuose taip pat buvo naudojami sovietinių ir Vakarų ginklų ir (arba) karinio personalo atvaizdai, siekiant išlaikyti skaitytojų pasirengimo galimai karinei agresijai būseną, tačiau nekeliant panikos. Be to, monumentalios, sudėtingos ir daugiasluoksnės iliustracijos, primenančios tradicinius politinius plakatus, dažnai buvo įtraukiamos į spaudos leidinius, skirtus valstybiniams minėjimams. Daugelyje jų buvo vaizduojami tobulai atrodantys sovietiniai vyrai ir moterys, atspindintys SSRS didybę. Galiausiai galima teigti, kad vietinei Ukrainos SSR rajonų spaudos vizualinei kalbai buvo būdingas emocingumas, paprastumas ir betarpiškumas, kurių tikslas – mobilizuoti gyventojus nesavanaudiškam darbui „savo socialistinės Tėvynės labui“ ir aktyviai remti sovietų valdžios politiką.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: vietinė spauda, Ukrainos SSR, propaganda, vizualinė kalba, fotografija, Holodomoras, laikraštis.

INTRODUCTION

Printed mass media were a significant means of propaganda in the USSR. The Communist regime developed a complex network of newspapers, which functioned at many different levels – from the periodicals widespread throughout the Soviet Union (like *Pravda* or *Izvestiya*) to the wall newspapers published at industrial plants or collective farms. They formed a solid vertical structure, in which larger newspapers coordinated the work of smaller ones and even were accountable to the authorities on their behalf¹. In this context, the local press (newspapers of *raions* (i.e., districts/provinces) and *oblasts* (i.e., regions)) is particularly interesting since one of its main tasks was to popularize the communist ideology among the population. Such press wrote about personalities, events, places, and realities that its readers knew very well, which made propaganda more appealing to the people.

1 For example, as stated in the *Direktivnii list Kul'tpropu №37 redaktsiyam tsentral'nikh ta oblasnikh gazet* [eng. *Directive letter of Kul'tprop to the editors' offices of the central and regional newspapers No. 37*] from December 17, 1932, the oblast-level newspapers were responsible for reporting about the work of the *raion* and large-circulation press to the oblast Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine. Source: State Archives of Chernihiv Region (Ukraine), f. P-3621, inv. 1, case, 3, sheet 6.

The early 1930s were the period of the most rapid development of the local printed media in the Soviet Union. On August 11, 1930, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) adopted the resolution “On the reorganization of newspaper network in connection with the liquidation of okrugs”², which obliged the local authorities to establish a newspaper in every newly created administrative unit – *raion*. As a result, in the Ukrainian SSR only, as of January 1, 1932, there were 377 *raion*-level newspapers³. Moreover, according to the Soviet statistical data, in 1928, only 117 Ukrainian-language newspapers existed in the Ukrainian SSR, while, in 1933, there were already 1,721 of them⁴.

However, since the middle 1930s, the number of printed media in the Ukrainian language started decreasing. For example, from 1,721 Ukrainian-language newspapers in 1933, their number sharply reduced to 922 in 1938. The general number of newspapers in all languages published in the Ukrainian SSR also decreased from 2,037 in 1933 to 1,570 in 1938⁵, which means that some newspapers switched from Ukrainian to Russian. Also, this striking decline reflects the final curtailment of the Ukrainization policy (it was introduced in the middle 1920s) and shows the extensive Russifying tendencies.

In this article, the authors focused on the visual language of the *raion* (province) level newspapers, whose target audience was primarily the rural population of the Ukrainian SSR. The *raion* press published official documents of the State and local authorities, re-printed articles from the larger media, collected and printed the reports of the so-called “workers’ and farmers’ correspondents” (*robsilkors*). The latter worked at the State institutions, collective farms, industrial sites, etc., and sent brief news posts about the achievements and problems of their enterprises to the editors’ offices. During the middle and late 1920s, the communist government supported the *robsilkors*’ movement as a way of making printed media closer to the people’s masses, but, starting from the middle 1930s, local newspapers contained fewer *robsilkors*’ reports because of the strengthening totalitarianism tendencies and centralization of media.

2 *O partiynoy i sovetskoj pečati: sbornik dokumentov*. Moscow: Pravda, 1954, p. 400.

3 KOLIASTRUK, Olha. Presa v radyanskij politichnij sistem 20–30-tych rr. XX st. *Naukovi zapiski Vinnits’koho derzhavnogo pedahohichnogo universitetu im. M. Kotsyubins’koho. Seriya: Istorija*, 2003, vol. 5, p. 110.

4 *Kul’turnoje Stroitel’stvo SSSR. Statisticheskij sbornik*. Moscow, Leningrad: Gosplanizdat, 1940, p. 220.

5 Ibid.

K. Romanenko, in her analysis of the photography content of the Soviet printed media of the early 1930s, emphasized the technical problems (old equipment or lack thereof, lack of printing industry professionals, etc.), which led to the poor quality of the images in the large national newspapers, such as *Pravda*⁶. To a much larger extent, the same problems were relevant for the local press. However, the fact that many *raion*-level newspapers still contained images probably means that the editorial offices may have considered visual content to be a substantial element of the publications.

The State utilized the local press as a means of disseminating its policies and directives to the population. By analyzing the content and tone of these newspapers, researchers can gain insights into the extent of the State control over information and the ways in which propaganda was being used to shape the public perception. Therefore, the **aim** of this article is to determine the major types of the Ukrainian SSR local press images of the early 1930s and to investigate what propagandistic messages they were conveying. We concentrated on the most common genres of images we found in the newspapers: caricatures, portraits, idyllic images, and poster-like illustrations. The authors studied both images directly related to the textual content and those unrelated to it.

The **research methods** include art history, local history, and thematic content analysis. The art history method allowed us to interpret the visual elements of the illustrations, while paying attention to their symbolic meaning, stylistic features, and genre characteristics. Local history was used to correlate the published visuals with the historical realities of the regions where the newspapers were disseminated, taking into account the socio-economic context of the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions. Thematic content analysis was employed to classify the images according to their subjects and intended messages (e.g., creation of enemy images, construction of role models, depiction of industrial achievements). While studying the illustrations, we did not focus extensively on the technical aspects of their production (such as the types of clichés used); however, we acknowledge that technological constraints – such as poor paper quality and limitations in the availability of color or tonal printing – affected the form and impact of the visual materials.

As a primary source, we used the *raion*-level newspapers that were printed from 1931 to 1934 and are currently stored in the newspaper collection of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. 100 of approximately 110 newspapers

6 ROMANENKO, Katerina. Photomontage for the Masses: The Soviet Periodical Press of the 1930s. *Design Issues*, 2010. vol. 26, no. 1, p. 29–39.

that functioned in these regions during the early 1930s (see the explanation below) were reviewed, while ten were selected for more detailed analysis. The selected press represents both Northern (forest) and Southern (forest steppe) *raions* of the two regions. The first group includes the newspapers of Snovsk (*Sotsyialistichnii Nastup*), Koriukivka (*Bilshovitskii Shliakh*), Nizhyn (*Nove Selo*), Bakhmach (*Prapor Komuni*), and Borzna (*Kolhospnik Borzenshchyni*)⁷ *raions*, while the second one is represented by the Tarashcha (*Holos Kolhospnika*), Kaniv (*Sotsyialistichna Peremoha*), Korsun (*Leninskim Shlyakhom*), and Pryluky (*Pravda Priluchchyni*) *raion* newspapers. This geographical distinction is important because Northern and Southern territories were different economically (by the level of collectivization and the level of mortality during the Holodomor) and culturally (which is related to different natural environments). At that time, Kyiv and Chernihiv regions combined covered a territory of about 118,900 km² in the Northern and central parts of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which amounted to approximately 26.7% of the whole Ukrainian SSR territory⁸.

Although all of the periodical publications cited were printed in Kyiv and Chernihiv regions, the overall discussion is relevant for the local Ukrainian SSR press in general⁹.

The article does not cover the so-called 'large-circulation newspapers' that were edited by either designated editorial offices (for example, at a plant or a railway station) or by so-called 'mobile editorial teams' which prepared special issues dedicated to a specific collective farm or agricultural campaign (such as sowing campaign in spring or grain procurement campaign in autumn). Such materials were also often prepared by the editorial teams of *raion* newspapers.

As of early 1932, Kyiv Region consisted of 98 *raions*, and Kyiv and Zhytomyr city councils¹⁰. In turn, Chernihiv Region was created on October 15, 1932. This newly established region consisted of 29 *raions* that formerly belonged to Kyiv

7 Nizhyn, Bakhmach, and Borzna *raions* are located in the Southern part of the forest zone, close to the forest steppe ecosystems. See: Ploky, Serhiy. Mapping the Great Famine. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 2015–16, vol. 34, no. 1/4, Map 8; KUBIJOVIC, Vovodymyr (Ed.) *Atlas of Ukraine and adjoining countries*. Lviv: Ukraïnskyj vydavnycyj instytut, 1937, p. 5.

8 ASATKIN, Oleksandr (Ed.) *Narodne gospodarstvo USRR (statistichnii dovidnyk)*. Kyiv: Derzhavne vidavnistvo "Narodne gospodarstvo ta oblik", 1933, p. 8.

9 For more on the unification of the Ukrainian press during the interwar period, see: KOLI-ASTRUK, Olha. *Presa USRR v konteksti politiki ukrainizatsii (20-30-ti roki XX st.)*. Kyiv: Institute of History of Ukraine, 2003. Kyiv. The Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. Dissertations fund, p. 196.

10 *Korotkii statistichno-ekonomichnyi dovidnyk Kiivskoi oblasti 1932 roku*. Kyiv: Vidannia organizatsiinogo komitetu Kiivskoi oblasti, [1932], p. 2–6.

region and seven *raions* of Kharkiv region. Moreover, on October 15, 1932, two other *raions* were transferred from Kyiv Region to Kharkiv Region, while seven *raions* of Vinnytsia Region were added to Kyiv Region. Therefore, as of late 1932, Kyiv Region consisted of 74 *raions* and two city councils. This administrative division, with minor changes, remained in place until January 1935¹¹. In total, after October 15, 1932, these two regions had 110 districts and two city councils.

As of 1933, the vast majority of these districts had functioning district newspapers (in some cases, between 1931 and 1933, they were reorganized, renamed, or had their editorial offices relocated from one town or village to another depending on administrative changes in the *raions*). Therefore, there were about 110 *raion* newspapers in Kyiv and Chernihiv regions during the period studied.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Scholars who studied the Soviet Union press mostly focused on central newspapers, such as *Pravda* or *Izvestiya*, for example, from the perspectives of their layout, speech and tone¹², or gender representation¹³. They also analyzed how the newspapers influenced the behavior and system of values of their readers¹⁴. A comprehensive study on Soviet propaganda of the late 1910s and 1920s was conducted by P. Kenez, who examined how censorship was introduced in the printed media¹⁵.

Outlining the change of approaches to the study of Soviet press, A. Willimott mentioned the growing interest to the newspapers as an integral part of the USSR citizens' everyday life¹⁶. He also wrote, "[...] different regional publica-

11 KORINNYI, Mykola (Comp.) *Administrativno-teritorialnii podil Kiivshchiny 1918–2010 roki: dovidnyk*. Bila Tserkva, 2010, p. 37–43.

12 LENOE, Matthew E. Agitation, Propaganda, and the "Stalinization" of the Soviet Press, 1922–1930. *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies*, August 1998, no. 1305. 111 p.

13 CHATTERJEE, Choi. Soviet Heroines and the Language of Modernity, 1930–39. In: Ilić, Melanie (ed.). *Women in the Stalin Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 49–68.

14 BROOKS, Jeffrey. Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press, 1921–1928. *Slavic Review*, 1989, vol. 48, no. 1, p. 16–35.

15 KENEZ, Peter. *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 308 p.

16 WILLIMOTT, Andy. 'Read all about it' Soviet press and periodicals. In: Gilbert, George (ed.). *Reading Russian Sources: A Student's Guide to Text and Visual Sources from Russian History (1st ed.)*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020, p. 147–162.

tions can offer an insight into the specific experiences of the different peoples”¹⁷, emphasizing the importance of taking the local press into account. Another potential research scope he briefly mentioned is the use of typographic elements to visualize statistical and, more broadly, numerical data; however, he did not discuss the use of illustration in general.

The local press was the object of interest for A. Rassweiler, who considered newspapers of Dnieper Hydroelectric Station dam construction as a source of information about the workers’ daily life¹⁸. Several scholars used Soviet local newspapers’ publications as sources for studying local aspects of historical events, especially the Holodomor¹⁹ and wider Soviet policies towards the Ukrainian SSR²⁰. More in-depth analysis was done by O. Koliastruk, who traced the processes of Ukrainization and development of the newspapers network in the Ukrainian SSR, and defined the techniques used by editors in their work with information²¹.

The propagandistic potential of the Ukrainian SSR local printed media of the 1930s still remains quite a marginalized topic for research. It was briefly discussed in the articles by O. Koliastruk²², M. Tymoshyk²³, I. Yakubovskyy and S. Starovoi²⁴. Nevertheless, none of these scholars directed their attention specifically on the visual component of the newspaper content.

The potential of Soviet visual sources for decoding “both mental and political history through the symbolism and values of a time and place” was considered

17 Ibid., p. 159.

18 RASSWEILER, Anne. The Local Press as a Source: Dneprostoi newspapers. *Russian History*, 1985, vol. 12, no. 2/4, p. 327–347.

19 BORIAK, Hennadii. *Sources for the Study of the Great Famine in Ukraine*. Cambridge: Ukrainian Studies Fund, 2009. 55 p.; LUKIANETS, Kateryna. Radyans’ka raionna presa Chernihivshchini u 1932–1933 rokakh: dzhereloznavchii aspekt. *Siverianskyi litopys*, 2020, no. 4, 131–141.

20 YEFIMENKO, Hennadii. *Natsionalno-kul’turna politika VKP(b) shchodo radyanskoi Ukraini (1932–1938)*. Kyiv: Institute of History of Ukraine, 2001, 304 p.

21 *Dissertation manuscript*. Koliastruk, Olha. *Presa USRR v konteksti politiki ukrainizatsii (20–30-ti roki XX st.)*. Kyiv: Institute of History of Ukraine, 2003. 275 p. Kyiv. The Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. Dissertations fund.

22 KOLIASTRUK, Olha. Presa v radyanskii politichnii sistemi, p. 104–110.

23 TYMOSHYK, Mykola. Mistseva presa yak chinnik komunizatsii ta denatsionalizatsii ukrainskoho sela dovoyennoi dobi. *Siverianskyi litopys*, 2016, no. 4, p. 164–178.

24 YAKUBOVSKYY, Ihor; STAROVOIT, Svitlana. Uryadovi postanovi na shpaltakh raionnoi presi 1932–1933 rr. yak zasib formuvannya vikrivlenikh uyavlen’ pro orhanizatoriv holodomoru (za materialami hazet Kyivskoi ta Chernihivskoi obl.). *History Pages*, 2023, no. 57, p. 255–269.

by C. Le Fall²⁵. In addition, she covered the role of the genre as a lens for uncovering the meaning of the image and its authors' intentions. In this article, while also focusing on different genres of newspaper illustrations, we shifted the attention to the possible intentions of the editors who selected the particular images for publication²⁶. Since the majority of images on the press pages are anonymous, the reconstruction of individual ideas of every artist would be impossible.

Many historians centered their analysis on communist propagandistic posters. For instance, V. Bonnell explored visual representations of power in the broader Soviet visual culture (posters, holiday displays, and monuments) from the perspective of iconography of a worker, a woman, a leader (*vozhd'*), and an enemy. Her analysis is based on the idea that images can function similarly to the language, becoming a means of communication. These linguistic analogies are also relevant for our research and will be used to examine the social and political context behind the newspaper illustrations²⁷.

S. Kruk also developed an iconographic perspective of Soviet visual propaganda, by focusing on Lenin and Stalin monuments²⁸. In turn, A. Pisch studied the archetypes behind Stalin's personality cult²⁹, while L. Chonghoon considered the heroic visualization of ordinary people as a way of engrafting new values³⁰.

In turn, K. Romanenko scrutinized the photo montage type of illustrations in early 1930s Soviet magazines for women on more practical issues concerning the creation and printing of the images of this genre³¹. She came to the conclusion that, very commonly, the use of photo montage was caused by pragmatic – and not propagandistic – reasons.

25 Le Fall, Claire. Visual culture as evidence of the Soviet past. In: GILBERT, George (ed.). *Reading Russian Sources: A Student's Guide to Text and Visual Sources from Russian History* (1st ed.). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020, p. 164.

26 Ibid.

27 BONNELL, Victoria E. *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 363 p.

28 KRUK, Sergei. Semiotics of Visual Iconicity in Leninist "Monumental" Propaganda. *Visual Communication*, 2008, vol. 7, iss. 1, p. 27–56.

29 PISCH, Anita. *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929–1953: Archetypes, Inventions and Fabrications*. Acton ACT: ANU Press, The Australian National University, 2016, 516 p.

30 CHONGHOON, Lee. Visual Stalinism from the Perspective of Heroisation: Posters, Paintings and Illustrations in the 1930s. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 2007, vol. 8, nos. 3–4, p. 503–521.

31 ROMANENKO, Katerina. Photomontage for the Masses, p. 29–39.

Another highly specific type of imagery that appeared on the newspaper pages quite frequently was caricatures. An extensive scholarship on this matter includes the works devoted to specific artists, such as Boris Efimov³² or Vladimir Lebedev³³, philosophical implications of these images³⁴, the satirical instruments they employed³⁵, and the everyday life phenomena they reflected³⁶. Nevertheless, none of these publications considers how caricatures functioned in the context of the low-level local press.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The late 1920s and early 1930s were the period of the fastest and most productive development of the Soviet press network. These years are marked with significant changes in the newspaper content caused by the need to support new policies (industrialization, collectivization, dekulakization, etc.) and mass campaigns in agriculture (e.g., the sowing campaign and grain procurements) and industry (the udarnik movement). Moreover, Ukrainian newspapers of 1932 and 1933 concealed mass mortality during the Holodomor. Simultaneously, the editors' offices took part in committing the genocide by publishing the 'black lists' of the villages and organizing special groups that helped the local authorities to perform the unrealistic grain procurement plans by confiscating food from people's houses.

At the same time, the population was pressured to subscribe to newspapers, as evidenced by numerous appeals published on their pages and by editorial

- 32 GOODWIN, James. Boris Efimov's Early Soviet Drawings and the Hazards of Political Caricature. *Experiment*, 2022, vol. 28, no. 1, p. 245–273; NORRIS, Stephen M. The Sharp Weapon of Soviet Laughter: Boris Efimov and Visual Humor. *Russian Literature*, 1 July–15 August 2013, vol. 74, iss. 1–2, p. 31–62.
- 33 MISLER, Nicoletta. A Public Art: Caricatures and Posters of Vladimir Lebedev. *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Summer, 1987, vol. 5, p. 60–75.
- 34 HELA, Oksana. Karikatura yak simulyakr: konstruyuvannya obraziv intelihentsii radyanskimi satirichnimi vidannyami u 1922–1991 rr. *Aktual'ni problemi vitchiznyanoi ta vsesvitnoï istorii*, 2019, vol. 22, p. 44–52.
- 35 ETTY, John. *Graphic Satire in the Soviet Union: Krokodil's Political Cartoons*. University Press of Mississippi, 2019. 266 p.
- 36 DAVIES, Christie. Political ridicule and humour under socialism. *European Journal of Humour Research*, 2014, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 1–27; EREMEEVA, Kateryna. and Volynets, Natalia. A Worker, a Victim, a Consumer: Images of Women in Soviet Satire. In: *Heinrich Boell Stiftung*, Kyiv, Ukraine, 22 October 2021. [accessed 28 June 2024]. Access through Internet: <<https://ua.boell.org/en/2021/10/22/trudivnytsya-zhertva-spozhyvachka-zhinochi-obrazy-v-radyanskiiy-satyri> />; Stoliar, Maryna. *Sovetskaya smekhovaya kultura*. Kyiv: Stylus, 2011, 302 p.

offices' complaints – also printed in the newspapers – about their inability to meet the distribution quotas set by the authorities. As stated by V. Motuz, “[...] Soviet newspapers were often distributed among the population by force. The extent of their distribution often did not reflect their actual popularity. The Party leadership understood well that, without readability, the newspapers' role as Soviet agitators would be significantly weakened. Therefore, as early as the 11th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), all communists were required to be readers and subscribers of at least one Party newspaper. Moreover, each Party member was obligated to organize a group of non-Party subscribers.”³⁷

Within this framework, newspaper visuals were of crucial importance for the communist authorities, as a significant share of the readership was illiterate. By 1926 census data, only 44.88% of the Ukrainian SSR population was able to read and write (literacy rate was 58.12% among men and 32.37% among women)³⁸. Nevertheless, even among fully literate individuals, the textual content of the Soviet press may have posed challenges to comprehension, given its equivocal language, intricate terminology, abundant abbreviations, and frequent lack of coherence. As stated by M. Jaryc about the *Rabochaya Gazeta*, “Drawings, which form part of the text, further augment the ‘readability’ of this prototype of the workmen’s press”³⁹.

However, the functions of illustrations were not limited by a simple explanation of publications. Along with amplifying textual messages, images were often independent and full-fledged parts of the newspaper issues.

To fill the newspapers with visual elements, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the regime attempted to create a network of professional photo correspondents and amateur photographers. Their work was to be coordinated by the All-Union State Literature, Illustration, Photo and Publishing Trust *Soyuzfoto*, founded in 1930. The first volume of its official magazine *Proletarskoe Foto* contained the article “Photograph Helps to Build Socialism”. It described the tasks which photography and photographers should perform in times of drastic changes: “Under the circumstances of socialism building, photography is in close contact with the press. Photography, as well as the press, has the task

37 MOTUZ, Valeriia. Vpliv radyans'koi presi na svidomist' ukrains'koho selyanstva v 20–30-kh rr. XX st. *Naukovi zapiski Vinnitskoho derzhavnogo pedagogichnoho universytetu im. M. Kotsyubinskogo, Seriya: Istoriya*, 2009, issue 15, p. 86.

38 Vozrast i gramotnost naseleniya SSSR. Vol. 7 of *Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya 17 dekabrya 1926 g.: kratkiye svodki*. Moscow: Izd. TsSU Soyuza SSR, 1928, p. 41.

39 JARYC, Mark. The Press in Soviet Russia. *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1933, vol. 22, no. 33, p. 530.

to be “not only the collective propagandist and collective agitator but also the collective organizer”⁴⁰.

Together with photographs, *Soyuzfoto* released other types of imagery for newspapers, magazines, books, etc. The majority of local newspapers’ visuals of the early 1930s contain the copyright of this agency. By establishing the state monopoly, the Government got a powerful instrument of censorship and control over the illustrations, much stronger than it had over the textual publications in the local press.

However, *Soyuzfoto* was not the only agency that provided the newspapers with the visual content. For example, the archives of Chernihiv region have preserved a collection of illustrations issued by the *Ukrainian Clichés Bureau*. The Bureau offered the Chernihiv city newspaper *Chervonyi Stiah* two series of clichés for illustrating the *robsilkors*’ publications. This editor’s office also received the offer to buy illustrations from Moscow⁴¹. As we can see, the newspapers did not create many authentic images and photos but, instead, often reproduced the provided materials.

It must be noted that the period under study was characterized by a generally difficult situation for the Ukrainian SSR population, including in those regions where the newspapers studied were published. In particular, according to recent research, the mortality rates from the Holodomor were the highest in the forest steppe zones of Kyiv and Chernihiv regions⁴².

Political upheavals that were happening in the USSR during the late 1920s and early 1930s included collectivization and dekulakization. The first policy dismantled the traditional forms of rural economy and introduced collective farms (*kolkhozes*) that were effectively under full control of the Communist regime. During this time, a significant portion of the population also fell victim to repressions carried out under the pretext of the so-called dekulakization⁴³.

40 YEVENOV, S. *Fotografiya pomogaet stroit' sotsializm* [Photography Helps to Build Socialism]. *Proletarskoye foto*, 1931, no. 1, p. 3.

41 *List-propozytsiya vid byuro literaturno-ilyustrovanoho obsluhovuvannya druku “PRESS KLY-SbE”*. State Archives of Chernihiv Region (Ukraine), f. P-676, inv. 1, c. 29, sh. 122.

42 For more on regional specifics of the Holodomor, see: WOLOWYNA, Oleh, et al. Regional Variations of 1932–34 Famine Losses in Ukraine. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 2016, 43, nos. 3–4, p. 175–203; PLOKHY, Serhiy. Mapping the Great Famine. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 2015–16, vol. 34, no. 1/4, p. 385–428.

43 For more on the historical background of the Holodomor, see: SHAPOVAL, Yuri, and OLYNYK, Marta D. The Holodomor: A Prologue to Repressions and Terror in Soviet Ukraine. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 2008, vol. 30, no. 1/4, p. 99–121; BASCIANI, Alberto. From Collectivization to the Great Famine: Eyewitness Statements on the Holodomor

In the materials analyzed in this research, illustrations were used both to explain or clarify the text presented in the article and independently of the text on the page (most often, such illustrations were accompanied by captions).

The quality of the paper on which the newspapers were printed was generally poor, as well as the quality of the images, which affected the visual perception of the printed materials. Additionally, some of the newspapers under study occasionally changed their format or printed several issues not on newsprint, but on thicker, low-quality dark-colored paper, which was likely incompatible with the printing equipment. As a result, this led to an even poorer print quality for both the visual and textual content of the newspapers⁴⁴.

CARICATURES

Caricatures, which were one of the biggest groups of Soviet local press graphics, created their own special ‘code’, which helped to understand their images and senses. Among the most common plots in the caricatures devoted to the agricultural campaigns and policies, many referred to the images of animals, such as dogs. For instance, a communist activist could be depicted as a dog on a leash in the kulak’s hands⁴⁵. Other types of animal images were a crayfish⁴⁶, a turtle⁴⁷, a snail⁴⁸, or an ox⁴⁹, which illustrated the reports about the

by Refugees from the Ukrainian SSR 1930–1933. *Holodomor Studies*, 2011, vol. 3, nos. 1–2, p. 1–27; KUL’CHYTS’KYI, Stanislav. The Holodomor of 1932–33: How and Why? *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 2015, vol. II, no. 1, p. 93–116.

⁴⁴ Poor quality of the paper in the press of the 1920s and 1930s was discussed in: VAS’KIV, Mykola. “Presa USRR do XV rokovin Zhovtnia” Mikhayla Agufa yak dzerkalo vidavnychoi galuzi v Ukraini u 1920-kh rokakh. *Integrovani komunikatsiyi*, 2019, no. 2 (8), p. 89–95; VAKULCHUK, Olha. *Bagatotirazhni gazety Ukraini yak fenomen radyans’koyi presi (1917–1941 rr.)* [Dissertation manuscript]. Kyiv: The Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, 2022. 427 p.; KOLIASTRUK, Olha. Presa v radyanskii politichnii sistemi 20–30-kh rr. XX st. *Naukovi zapiski Vinnits’koho derzhavnogo pedahohichnogo universitetu im. M. Kotsyubyn’skoho. Seriya: Istoriya*, 2003, vol. 5, p. 104–110.

⁴⁵ Na povodku u kurkulya. *Bilshovytskii Shliakh (Koryukivka)*. 1932, sichnya 25, no. 10 (88), p. 2.

⁴⁶ Nahorodzhuiemo ordenom “RAKA”. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*, 1932, kvitnya 24, no. 79, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Kholmenski tempi. *Bilshovitskii Shlyakh (Koryukivka)*. 1932, sichnya 18, no. 7 (85), p. 1.

⁴⁸ U Tahanchi, Potashni, Berkozivtsi, Popivtsi, Pylyavi, Kovalyakh sivba buriakiv dosi zlochynno zatyahuietsya. *Sotsiialistichna Peremoha (Kaniv)*, 1932, chervnya 1, no. 54 (99), p. 2.

⁴⁹ Pozbutysya volyachikh ta cherepashykh tempiv. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 6, no. 15 (206), p. 1.

collective farms lagging behind and/or 'blacklisted'. These images are the visual representation of verbal idioms 'turtle's tempos', 'oxen's tempos', and others meaning 'slow', and they did not necessarily require additional textual explanation.

The principle of the visualization of idioms and wordplays was the basis of numerous newspaper caricatures. For example, on March 28, 1933, *Holos Kolhospnyka (Tarashcha)* published the image⁵⁰ of a collective farm official sleeping inside of a winnower under bright sunlight. The title explains its sense – they “are waiting for the sun to scorch their napes”, by referring to an idiom which means “when push comes to shove”. Without this additional explanation, the caricature would have been almost impossible to understand.

In addition, political cartoons sometimes featured human figures with exaggerated body parts and/or other recognizable characteristics. For example, the attributes of a kulak were a big fat belly, moustache, and sacks with grain. His 'helpers', e.g., officials of the village council, party, and collective farms, were depicted in much simpler clothes, but usually with a cunning look on their faces. Interestingly, one of the caricatures of Russian origin features an image of a kulak with an added explanation to make the perception of the picture easier⁵¹, although most Ukrainian illustrations did not provide any extra clarification.

Another caricature that appeared in many newspaper issues (for example, in the *Prapor Komuny (Bakhmach)* of January 16, 1932) depicts a person (activist or head of the village council) smoking a pipe in front of the sign “The plans are performed for 97%”⁵². In the background, there is a figure of a kulak seating over the sacks full of grain. By such satirical images, the press encouraged the activists to take the grain away from people even after the grain procurement plans were almost performed, e.g., to overfulfil them. Moreover, they marked both 'malicious saboteurs' and the activists who did not pay enough attention and enthusiasm to the performance of the party tasks as the enemies. The same caricature was published in *Pravda Pryluchchyny (Pryluky)*⁵³ on January

50 Tyukhtiiiv z “Pluhu” sivba zakhopila znenatska. *Holos Kolhospnyka (Tarashcha)*. 1933, berezhnya 28, no. 23 (348), p. 2.

51 Vidstali sil'rady, za dopomohoyu “spravzhnykh i taiemnykh radnykiv” – kurkuliv khlibozahotivlyu ne vykonaiete. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 4, no. 14 (205), p. 1.

52 Partoseredok ta sil'rada s. Tinitisi, vikonavshi plyn khlibozahotivli na 97%, po oporunistychnomu samozaspokoilisya. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, sichnya 16, no. 45, p. 1.

53 Khai inshi zahotovlyayut, nam uzhe dosit – mirkuyut' upovnovazheni RPK Lazutin ta Yashchenko. *Pravda Pryluchchyni*. 1932, sichnya 20, nr. 8 (1010), p. 1.

20, 1932 – that is, four days after its publication in *Prapor Komuny* – and other newspapers. Supposedly, several regional press editors' offices received this cliché at the same time and almost simultaneously introduced the informational campaign for the full implementation of the grain procurement plans.

The only way to adapt cartoons to the local realities and particular publications was their titles. They often included the names of people, their occupations, places where they worked and pointed out exactly what they were doing wrong. Despite satirical images themselves being impersonal, by adding this information, the press directly pointed out the enemies and evoked hatred towards them.

Satirical images about international affairs were relatively rare, but they also used the language typical for Soviet caricatures. Their methods were dehumanization through the images of animals (for instance, USA and Japan, “arguing while dividing China,” were shown as predators in *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)* of February 16, 1932)⁵⁴ or different kinds of weapons (Western countries depicted as a plane, a machine gun, a cannon, and a tank “at the negotiations table” in *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)* of February 27, 1932)⁵⁵.

One more type of newspaper cartoons about international politics is the images based on the contrast between ‘us’ and ‘them’. These images usually compared the life in capitalist countries, especially in the USA, and the life in the USSR, showing the struggles of the ordinary people in the non-socialist countries, such as poverty, unemployment, absence of political freedoms, etc. The USSR was normally represented by a strong worker, while the Western states were depicted as misshapen human-like creatures.

In general, caricatures in the Ukrainian SSR regional newspapers mocked people and states considered as ‘enemies’. Local enemies were those not working enough to favor their ‘socialist Motherland’ (the two most frequently used images were kulaks and ‘lazy’ officials). They were depicted as funny and miserable, and the main strategy of shaping the enemy image was disrespect and ridicule. At the same time, the texts of the articles mostly incited readers to fight against them. In contrast, enemies from abroad (hostile capitalist states) were shown as dangerous for peaceful Soviet citizens. These two different strategies of making the enemy images through the dissemination of the stereotypes were aimed at consolidating and mobilizing society.

54 PASSh i Yaponiya ne miryatsya pid chas rozpodilu Kitayu. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 16, no. 19 (210), p. 2.

55 Na zhenevskii konferentsii nezrozumila propozitsiya. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 27, no. 24 (215), p. 2.

PORTRAITS

The majority of ‘serious’ newspaper illustrations are the numerous portraits and photographs of the Soviet ‘chiefs’ – mostly Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin. Less often, the portraits of Vlas Chubar (1891–1939), Stanislav Kosior (1889–1939), Pavel Postishev (1887–1939), and other leaders of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine were included. On the one hand, these portraits represented the source of political power itself, accompanying both their addresses and some new legislation. On the other hand, they legitimized the information given in the newspaper as sheer and infallible.

Among other images of people, one can notice numerous portraits of ‘udarnik’ workers, both local (*Kolhospnyk Borzenshchyny*, October 15, 1932)⁵⁶ and, more frequently, from other regions, particularly Russia. These workers were depicted as role models for the readers and embodied the best characteristics of a ‘new Soviet man’, such as hard, selfless work “for the good of the State”. Taking into account the fact that some of these portraits appeared in almost every *raion* newspaper, the regime endeavored to glorify some workers and farmers already in the early 1930s. However, since there was no popularization of their personalities by any other propaganda means, this process was visibly different from the legendary Stakhanov’s movement, which started later, in 1935.

Speaking about the pantheon of new communist heroes, the Soviet propaganda praised their actions and dedication, which were self-denying to the point that they seemed unreasonable. For instance, under the title “The country must know its heroes”, the *Leninskym Shliakhom* newspaper from Korsun on April 17, 1932, published two portraits of kolkhoz members from Novo-Odesa *raion*⁵⁷. One of them was guarding the collective farm threshing house and did not leave his post even when his house was burning down. “He wanted to rush there, but there is the kolkhoz bread the community entrusted him to protect, the bread the kulak is encroaching on”, the correspondent explained the guard’s motivation. The superiority of the collective over the individual and treating the collective as always endangered were major ‘talking points’ of the Soviet propaganda of the early 1930s. In addition, given the fact that many people survived during the Holodomor by stealing grain from kolkhoz fields and/or warehouses, the actions commended in the cited article can be perceived in a very different ethical meaning.

56 Prilit do Kharkova litaka “ANT 14”. *Kolhospnik Borzenshchyni*. 1932, zhovtnya 15, no. 93 (106), p. 4.

57 Kraina povinna znati svoikh heroiv. *Leninskim Shlyakhom (Korsun)*. 1932, kvitnya 17, no. 38 (212), p. 2.

In contrast, the press rarely featured portraits of local Communist authorities (heads of collective farms, chairmen of party cells, etc.) from the villages and towns where the newspapers were edited. This can be explained by the fact that the authorities of lower levels changed very frequently – i.e., they were appointed for their positions for a short period and were soon directed to other positions in other villages or towns. For instance, during the ten months of 1933, Pavel Postyshev, Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine and the First Secretary of the Kharkiv Regional Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, changed 327 secretaries of the *raion* party committees, 249 secretaries of the *raion* executional committees, and 158 representatives of *raion* control commissions⁵⁸. A frequently changing administrative system also provided for high staff turnover rates.

Sometimes, the newspapers published portraits of people from the territories where they were disseminated. Mostly, these were propagandistic staged photographs about the “happy life of kolkhoz members”. For instance, Nizhyn *raion* newspaper *Nove Selo* contained photos entitled “Udarniks of Shevchenko artel – Maltsev M. and Maltsev F. repair agricultural equipment in Lypiv Rih village in Nizhyn raion” (January 19, 1932)⁵⁹. However, the page with this photo has no mention of the named village. Similarly, subsequent issues of the newspaper contained numerous images from this village. It seems that a photographer had been working there for some time; therefore, his photos were available in the editors’ office, and the printing house created the necessary clichés. Later, *Nove Selo* published⁶⁰ several photos from the Chervoni Partyzany (en. *Red Partisans*) commune (contemporary Volodkova Divytsya village). Consequently, the modest number of available photographers and graphic artists, especially in villages, can explain the lack of local visual material.

Thus, both personified and depersonalized portraits appear in the newspaper materials under study. Primarily, portraits of party officials are personified, although they are not always labeled; sometimes they are presented alongside materials related to Lenin or Stalin. Portraits featuring the *Soyuzfoto* logo were

58 MACE, James. Politichni prichini holodomoru v Ukraini (1932–1933 rr.). *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1995, no. 1, p. 44.

59 Udarniki artili im. Shevchenka – Mal'tsev M. ta Mal'tsev F. remontuyut s.-h. remanent S. Lipiv Rih na Nizhenshchini. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, sichnya 19, no. 8 (199), p. 4.

60 For example, Remontuyut sivalku (komuna Chervonykh partizaniv, Nizhenshchina). *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 4, no. 14 (205), p. 1.; Krashchi konyukhi komuni “Chervonikh partizaniv”: zлива napravo Ponomarenko A., Dyakonenko S. ta Prostantinov M. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 14, no. 18 (209), p. 2.

not always provided with standardized captions. Some images include the names and/or locations of the individuals depicted, while others lack this information and are accompanied only by general captions⁶¹.

Moreover, individual (personal) portraits mainly feature party officials, but portraits of local officials, police representatives, and leading peasants (so-called 'udarnik workers') also appear. Group portraits in the materials examined are found both with captions identifying those depicted and without such identification.

IDYLLIC IMAGES

The basis of the newspapers' visual content was standard images, represented predominantly by urban landscapes and staged group portraits. They have very little informational or documentary value. Their aim was not to illustrate the life of a particular village or town but rather to show the Soviet reality in general. Sometimes, these images were not accompanied by any titles, captions or explanations. Not only did they illustrate a phenomenon the text was about but also visualized the alternative actuality the communist newspapers promoted. For example, the *Snovsk raion* newspaper contained an image entitled "The earth thanked the collective farmworkers for their udarnik's work by good harvest"⁶². It depicts an idyllic situation when two well-dressed men (wearing jackets!) inspect the new harvest on the field. This image was published in the newspaper issue on July 21, 1933, when thousands of Ukrainians were dying of man-made starvation every day.

S. Kruk, who analyzed Leninist propaganda in urban architecture, painting, and sculpture of the 1920s from the perspective of iconic signs, highlighted that the Bolsheviks understood art in the flow of the Russian Orthodox philosophy tradition, which treated icons as reflections of reality and identified the painted denotations with their real equivalents⁶³. Similarly, according to the rules of 'socialist realism' (the only allowed artistic movement in the USSR), Communist art had to depict idyllic future to make it real. In turn, V. Bonnell noted a similar way of representation of reality in Soviet political posters portraying female villagers, "...the smiling woman tractor driver appeared in post-

61 For example, Gotuyuchis' do sivby – remontuyut' traktora. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 23, no. 22 (213), p. 2.

62 Nalivsya kolos vistihli khliba. *Sotsiyalistichnii Nastup (Snovsk)*. 1933, lipnya 21, no. 69 (240), p. 1.

63 KRUK, Sergei. Semiotics of Visual Iconicity...

ers not as an accomplished fact but as an indication of what should be, as an incentive to make it happen”⁶⁴.

Widely circulating images of the “female udarnik feeding chickens” or “kolkhoz members sowing the fields” had the same meaning. People shown in such images are constantly working. Since one of the main aims of Communist newspapers was to increase labor productivity, they praised the dedication and even self-sacrifice expressed in the terms of overfulfilling the plans and working hard for the Soviet state and the ‘whole Soviet nation’.

In contrast to idealistic images, textual publications in local newspapers told predominantly about current problems and struggles on the way to the “bright Soviet future”. They were emotional, and they were intended to mobilize the population for fighting the domestic enemies, who were seen as the obstacle to universal prosperity.

Another example of idyllic photos is the ones that show agricultural machinery used in collective farms throughout the Soviet Union. They convinced the farmers that the USSR is a strong, powerful and wealthy state with advanced technologies, and created an illusion that technical progress is possible only in the case of the collective type of farming. However, Ukrainian farmers had already used agricultural machinery for cultivating the fields way before collectivization, especially during the NEP (new economic policy) times, when, within a short period of the comparatively free market, hard-working and proactive farmers managed to accumulate some money and buy the equipment. Moreover, the enthusiasm towards technical progress had been a very distinctive sentiment of the Bolshevik culture.

Many idyllic illustrations originated from the cities and villages of Donbas (for example, “Slaviansk agro-combine. Female udarnik woman feeds chickens”⁶⁵. As Donbas was the center of industrialization in Ukraine, numerous photographers and graphic artists worked there to capture the process of ‘Socialist construction’. At the same time, they documented the life of collective and state farms in this region. These photos and graphic images, printed in local periodicals throughout Ukraine, show the agriculture of Donbas as a desirable economic and social model for other parts of the country.

In turn, photos and graphics of industrial objects acquainted farmers with the big ‘victories’ of industrialization. In addition, they explained the money

64 BONNELL, Victoria E. *The Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art...*, p. 67.

65 Slavyanskii agro-kombinat. Udarnytsya hoduie kurei. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, lyutoho 9, no. 54, p. 1.

payments which farmers were forced to make from their salaries. Two illustrations can be used as an example: “Kuzbass – Kemerovo. On the photo: construction of the powerful electric station”⁶⁶ and “Luhanske – Luhanbud. On the photo: builders of the rolling department prepare the rebars for pouring concrete”⁶⁷. They were located on the page with the central slogan “Let’s give new resources to the state for performing the five-year plan. Let’s make the one-time payments fully and on time”. The article⁶⁸ on this page tells how one can pay this fee. Therefore, in the context of the respective textual information, such images urged the farmers to give their money for the construction of industrial infrastructure.

However, many images of industrial objects were not accompanied by the appropriate and informative titles explaining their origin and ideological context (such as propagandistic slogans). Simultaneously, the same illustration printed in several newspaper issues could have different titles. As a result, they reduced both their documentary and ideological potential, but still created in the mass consciousness an impression about the whole Soviet Union as a country employing avant-garde technologies.

Furthermore, numerous illustrations warned about the military danger from abroad. The newspapers published images of the new weapons⁶⁹ and caricatures about the refusal of the Western countries to disarm⁷⁰. At the same time, the press showed photos of Soviet soldiers. Such images were often also intensified by the textual content. For instance, the image of a scout horseman on the meeting of the demobilized is entitled with the slogan “Be ready to defend the Country of the Councils”⁷¹, calling for constant vigilance under the circumstance of a potential military aggression. Also, photos of regular military units were being published (“The Red Army soldiers of the N. regiment study a

66 Kuzbass–Kiemerovo. Na foto: budova potuzhnoi teploelektrotsentrali. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, lyutoho 9, no. 54, p. 2.

67 M. Luhanske–Luhanbud. Na foto: armaturnyki hotuyut armaturi dlya zalivki betonu valtsiuvalnoho tsekhui. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, lyutoho 9, no. 54, p. 2.

68 Odnorazovii zbir na hospodarske ta kulturne budivnitstvo. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, lyutoho 9, no. 54, p. 2.

69 Ameryka hotuietsia do “rozzbroiennia. Na foto: proba novikh harmat. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, lyutoho 27, no. 61, p. 2.

70 Na zhenevskii konferentsii nezrozumila propozyitsia. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 27, no. 24 (215), p. 2.

71 Do oboroni kraini rad – bud’ hotovii. Na foto: “Rozvidnik” (taboru TSO-Aviyakhemu u Vasishevi). *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*, 1932, zhovtnya 21, no. 27 (135), p. 2.

machine gun”) together with the explanations that “in case of an attack against us, the Red Army will make the last striking blow to the international predators from the bourgeois camp”⁷². The newspapers had to keep a shaky balance between the militarization of society and preventing people from panicking about the possible war. The rural population was prone to rebellions and riots, and the quickly disseminating rumors about a foreign aggression in the nearest future could have led to the destabilization of the situation in Ukrainian villages.

Along with the topic of militarization, local newspapers wrote about the poverty and troubles of the capitalist countries, and illustrated them by the appropriate images. At the same time, they completely ignored the actual problems of the Soviet State. For example, a demonstration of the unemployed in the United Kingdom (which was referred to as *Great Britain*) with demands for the bread and job⁷³ is described in the newspaper under the striking title “A Hungry Crusade in London”⁷⁴. It was at exactly the same time that mass mortality of the Holodomor in Ukraine was in full swing.

POSTER-TYPE GRAPHICS

A significant difference between the traditional political posters and propagandistic illustrations for small newspapers is that the latter were much more primitive because of two important factors: the technical level of the printing equipment, and the specific audience of the provincial press. V. Bonnell argued that the posters connected with collectivization were oriented more towards the urban than rural population, and they aimed to get the support of the new harsh agricultural policies⁷⁵. In contrast, newspaper illustrations promoted these policies directly among village residents. However, since they were produced by professionals who lived in cities, these images still happened to have some mistakes caused by the lack of understanding of rural life.

Graphic images of the poster type usually illustrated the slogans and contained all the typical concepts of the propagandistic graphics, for example, an overly masculinized strong man, who was either a worker or a soldier, located

72 Chervonoarmiitsi N-ho polku vivchayut kulemet. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 23, no. 22 (213), p. 1.

73 Demonstratsiya bezrobotnikh. Na foto: Demonstranti nesut' plakati, shcho vimahayut khliba ta roboti. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, listopada 7, no. 32 (140), p. 6.

74 Holodnii pokhid na London. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, listopada 7, no. 32 (140), p. 6.

75 BONNELL, Victoria E. The Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art...

in the foreground. These two categories were seen by propaganda as the basis of the USSR security and prosperity. In the *Holos Kolhospnyka* (*Tarashcha*) issue from May 1, 1933, the background for the armed soldier portrait is an industrial plant – i.e., the armed man is protecting the economy of his country⁷⁶.

Speaking about female iconography, V. Bonnell noted that she was “struck by the frequency of the female images” in the political posters of the early 1930s in comparison with the 1920s⁷⁷. The same can be stated about newspaper illustrations. Such a change is caused by the fact that Bolshevik authorities needed extra workforce for agriculture and industry, and women, who were traditionally responsible for the household, became involved in public production. Under the slogans of making women free from their home enslavement, the communist regime made them work both at home and in the collective farms or industrial enterprises. The local press did not devote much space to women’s problems, but women appeared in the newspaper illustrations quite frequently. Noticeably, they were portrayed both as workers and as collective farm members.

Multi-layered compositions, which were quite rare in the local press but typical for posters, were, as a rule, devoted to the military topic. For example, the image depicting the First of May parade in Moscow in *Leninskym Shliakhom* (*Korsun*) of May 11, 1934, features a portrait of K. Voroshilov observing the parade, images of the infantry and motorized artillery marching along the street, and warplanes over the Kremlin⁷⁸. This particular image embodied the military might of the whole USSR.

Other frequently used images that ‘migrated’ to the press from political posters were the fist (the ‘strong hand’ that rules the State) and a padlock (the protected borders of the country). They were typical concepts for totalitarian propaganda and appeared in the posters of many different non-democratic regimes.

Propagandistic images with more symbolic elements rarely appeared in the publications, since they were more difficult to perceive. They often were accompanied by abstractive slogans. As an illustration, one can use an image of a mill, the blades of which contained signs with the mistakes in ‘kolkhoz work’, such as “Mismanagement, formalism, wrong organization of work and irresponsi-

76 1. Travnya–boiovii ohlyad sotszmahannya i udarnitstva. *Holos Kolhospnika* (*Tarashcha*). 1933, travnya 1, no. 36 (361), p. 1.

77 BONNELL, Victoria E. The Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art...

78 Pershotravnevii parad v Moskvii. *Leninskim Shlyakhom* (*Korsun*). 1934, travnya 11, no. 68 (533), p. 2.

bility – this is the mill we have to destroy in kolkhozes” (*Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*, February 1, 1932)⁷⁹.

Newspaper issues devoted to the most important Soviet holidays and their front pages are also worth a mention. Their visual design was much brighter than usual; they often contained huge graphic images. For instance, they featured complex compositions consisting of several elements (a dark figure of the State leader, a hydroelectric station, an armed soldier, and a canon on the background⁸⁰). Such visuals often included crowds of people at the demonstrations, and, therefore, were structurally similar to propaganda leaflets or posters.

Moreover, designers used the elements of iconographic composition (multiple levels, ‘nimbus’ made from numbers or slogans, the reverse perspective, and so on). The iconographic page design was used in the *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)* issue of November 10, 1932, devoted to the 15th anniversary of the Red *militsiya* (the military police of the Soviet Union)⁸¹. Photographic portraits of police officers in oval frames (‘medallions’) are located close to the edges of the page and in its center. The portraits of Four Evangelists and other saints on the covers of ancient Bibles and Gospels were traditionally positioned in the same way.

CONCLUSIONS

The Ukrainian SSR local newspapers of the early 1930s used a wide range of visual methods to convey ideological guidelines to the population. The photographs, graphics, and caricatures in the press of *raions* ‘worked’ for ideological purposes in combination with textual publications. The general aim of the regional press content could be described by the concept of ‘mobilization of the masses’. Therefore, the newspapers’ correspondents and/or editors never took a neutral or passive position towards the events and situations they described. They were passionate about changing whatever the Government considered wrong and a little bit less but still enthusiastic in praising the ‘correct’ things. Hard selfless work and active support of all Soviet policies were the ideas the press promoted in the first place.

79 Bezghospodarnist’, formalizm, nepravyl’ na orhanizatsyia pratsi ta bezvidpovidal’nist – os’ tsei mlin treba zlikviduvati v kolhospakh. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, lyutoho 1, no. 13 (204), p. 2.

80 Pyatnadtsiatii Zhovten’. *Prapor Komuni (Bakhmach)*. 1932, listopada 7, no. 32 (140), p. 1.

81 Palke vitannya stiikomu bortsevi za okhoronu radyanskoho prava ta hromadskoho ladu robotniche-selianskii chervonii militsii. *Nove Selo (Nizhyn)*. 1932, listopada 10, no. 121 (312), p. 1.

Due to the lack of professional and amateur graphic artists and photographers, images were rarely produced in the same village or town where the newspaper was being published. Instead, the State-level *Soyuzfoto* trust and several other agencies provided the local press editors' offices with the standardized illustrations and clichés they needed. Such a state of things also facilitated the censorship and other inspecting authorities regarding the supervision of the visuals in the newspapers – such images were already agreed upon at a higher level.

Because of the poor printing equipment and poor quality paper, the small regional newspapers were able to publish only relatively primitive images. The best graphics and photographs they contained (the ones with the complex structure and montaged images) were in most cases related to the military topic, as it was critical for propaganda, or to the biggest Soviet State holidays.

The visual language of local newspapers was clear and precise. Primarily rural audiences required straightforward and simple messages, which referred to strong emotions. Caricatures were the most appropriate tool for such communication. They developed the images of both domestic and foreign enemies, predominantly 'kulaks' and hostile Western capitalist states. Political cartoons did not have space for any 'grey zone' and divided everything into black and white. Caricatures exploited the set of easily recognizable images based on the stereotypes, which they developed.

The newspaper graphics resembling traditional political posters also used stereotypical images showing the Soviet people. The perfect USSR citizen was either a worker or a soldier ready to fight for his Homeland. Female iconography included both women who worked in the industry and in the collective farms. Such role models for women were strong and even aggressive, which did not fall in line with the common understanding of the female functions in the traditional society.

In turn, standardized images of industrial objects and exemplary farms were aimed at impressing the readers with the economic power and might of the USSR. They also created idealistic notions about Soviet workers and farmers as those stoutly constructing the 'Communist paradise'. This process was 'looked upon' by the highest authorities, represented by their portraits on the newspapers' pages.

Finally, compared to 1929–1932, in 1933 the number of illustrations in the regional newspapers gradually decreased, and this reduction continued further. Simultaneously, the press printed fewer and fewer reports about the local events, and the newspapers were slowly but steadily turning into platforms for

the publication of official documents and statistics about the fulfillment of the agricultural and industrial plans. The press lost its functions as the medium of mass communication and became one of the state management instruments.

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Author contributions

Mykhailo Kostiv: conceptualization, methodology, writing - original draft, writing - review & editing.

Tetiana Soproniuk: investigation, writing - original draft, writing - review & editing.

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