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History Education as a Form of Value Indoctrination in Soviet Lithuania

Abstract

In the 1960s Soviet regime in Lithuania introduced through education a concept of “a new man”. This “new man” represented the idealistic vision of the Soviet citizen, thus he had to be indoctrinated with the specific set of values. History as a value-oriented discipline at schools, including both humanitarian and social dimensions, can be understood as one of the most appropriate school subjects for such totalitarian formation of a new man. The aim of this paper is to distinguish principal values, which were introduced to the school children at schools of late Soviet Lithuania (1957-1988) during history education. It is pivotal to note, that Soviet control in Lithuania is understood as an occupational and suppressive regime. Also, it was a regime of idiosyncrasies, so the contents of the aforementioned educational materials are analyzed in two-layered principle – the direct instructions regarding the lifestyle, values, and opinions appropriate to Soviet citizens and more subtle (through symbols, images, and politics of national Communism) indoctrination. This paper raises a hypothesis that Lithuanian break up with the Soviet Union in 1990 has left traces in current Lithuanian education because it was recreated mostly by the same people, who were instructed in the Soviet value system. People educated as “the new Soviet men” created a new Lithuanian history education curriculum, thus aspiring to prompt “a new Lithuanian man”.

Keywords: education, history, Soviet regime, Lithuania, textbooks

Introduction

In the 1960s Soviet regime in Lithuania introduced a concept of promoting a new man through education. This “new man” had to represent the ideal vision of the Soviet citizen, so he had to be indoctrinated with the specific set of values. This idea was neither new nor controversial at that time – it had been already proposed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s (Martin, 2001; Grant, 1979). However, it extended to the Lithuanian field of education only in the 1960s, because after the second Soviet occupation in the year 1945, it required almost two decades for the experimental reformed educational system (especially regarding history education) to be introduced to the public (Pilkauskas, 1965, pp. 49-51). The period of 1945-1957 was a specific, so-called “limbo” period in Soviet Lithuanian history education. At that time all materials from the non-Communist Lithuanian interwar period were considered ideologically unfit for the education of the Soviet citizen. Nevertheless, new materials came to life very slowly due to the harsh economic and social conditions after the Second World War and during the partisan war (1945-1953) for independent Lithuania.

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primary values, which were introduced to the schoolchildren in schools of late Soviet Lithuania (1957-1988) during history lessons. In Soviet Lithuania as in most other Soviet republics alike, there were separate educational programs and textbooks for explaining World history, history of the Soviet Union and history of Soviet Lithuania. These three groups of textbooks released in Soviet Lithuania and programs for education at schools in Soviet Lithuania are analyzed in this paper while seeking to identify formal value indoctrination of the new Soviet man in Lithuania. It is meaningful to note, that in this context the Soviet government in Lithuania is understood as an occupational and suppressive regime. It was also a regime of idiosyncrasies, so the contents of the aforementioned educational materials are analyzed in two-layered principle – the direct instructions regarding the lifestyle, values, and opinions appropriate to Soviet citizens and more subtle (through symbols, images, and politics of national communism) indoctrination.

The lack of spontaneity

While talking about the educational system of any state or any period, firstly, it is significant to note it never exists in a social vacuum. The educational system represents a compromise between specific ideological aims and apparent needs of the society of that time. Theoretically, in the well-functioning state, whose authorities are ready to discuss the needs of its people, the educational system reflects ideas and understanding of most of the society. At the same theoretical level Soviet regime in Lithuania by the Soviet government itself was not considered as an occupational regime. The Communist ideology was represented by the government as a project for an ideal society.

However, the practice was indeed considerably conflicting. It is clear, that there was a dichotomy between the goals of the Soviet educational system and the needs of occupied Lithuanian people. In this context the crucial issue I aim to emphasize is the orientation of teaching towards fiction and simply ignoring reality. The general line of educational narrative presented the will of Lithuanians to remain a part of the Soviet Union whilst Lithuanian society, in general, understood itself as an occupied nation and state. Soviet government, unlike many of the democratic governments in the world, did not try to obscure the fact, that they regarded the educational system as a means to spread their ideology in society.

This fact was even highlighted and other purposes of the educational system regarding the value formation matters had been ignored (Grant, 1979, p. 26). History in the education of Soviet society was used both as the way of developing a specific Soviet lifestyle – the fight between the bourgeois and proletariat comprised the main line of historical narrative. It served as a means of creating an understanding of the unspontaneous and self-determined images of the history and that of daily life as well. Fundamental Communist ideals unrelated directly to historical description and important only for value indoctrination were incorporated into historical textbook narrative, especially while promoting Communism as a sole ideal way of living: “the human being is differed from the animals only by his work” (Jurginis, 1961, p. 5) or about the generalized history before the Communism: “all people were alike in their harsh and miserable lives” (Jurginis, 1961, p. 7). Textbooks of the history of Soviet Lithuania highlighted the birth of the socialist nation as a modern and better-developed construct of society. The socialist nation of Lithuanians through formal

textbook narrative became highly attached to the Soviet Union and Communist ideology: “socialist Lithuanian nation was formed after socialism had been established. It founded a historically new national community, which is currently able to resolve complex issues of creation of communist society” (Navickas & Žepkaitė, 1981, p. 143).

As follows, the first and prime value we recognize in the historical narrative of Soviet history textbooks is the stability and lack of spontaneity. Historically based on ideas of Marxism and Leninism everything was explained by interconnected events, which are like a flow of the river – they lead from one to another fostering an illusion, that the current situation is determined by history (and not by people). In this way society or nation is considered irresponsible for the events in their country, region or the world – and the creation of irresponsible masses led by the leaders, who understand so-called historical “flow” begins there.

Simplification of life and simplification of reasoning

Soviet history education programs emphasized the simplification of historical narrative and this idea of simplification was introduced as catering to the needs of students¹. Methodological regulations for teachers also highlighted presentation of the most significant historical event or fact separately from any contextual information and teachers were encouraged to provide simplified generalizations². The basis of soviet history education programs represented the knowledge of selected historical facts that worked as a specific simulation of truth. The role of history teacher as a passive mediator of textbooks materials was also minimized because programs constantly suggested “instructing pupils to learn part of the understandable text from the textbooks at home”³. So only strictly sanctioned history textbooks remained as the core required element of history education. Although researcher of Soviet republics education in Caucasia, V. Rouvinski, notes that methodological recommendations for history teaching in separate soviet republics encouraged teachers to employ supplementary materials and thus it enabled broader understanding of local histories in comparison to the general history of Soviet Union (Rouvinski, 2007), it is frequently unclear if and how teachers indeed exploited this possibility.

In that respect, we must acknowledge the importance of the teacher’s personality, his or her ideological inclinations and fear of the regime as well. As history teaching was understood as a necessary ideological weapon, historians and history teachers even after destalinization were considered by the Communist Party as potentially ideologically dangerous people. This resulted in that they had been monitored and controlled more strictly than teachers of other subjects.

To such a degree, although local history education programs enabled teachers to improvise a little bit more, the constant control from the Party made this possibility only an illusion of freedom, which was self-censored by cautious teachers themselves.

¹ Vidurinės bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos programos. Istorija. V-XII kl., 1988. p. 8.

² Vidurinės bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos programos. Istorija. V-XII kl., 1988. p. 8.

³ Vidurinės bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos programos. Istorija. V-XII kl., 1988. p. 10.

Ethnoculture instead of the culture

Soviet doctrine used ethno-national elements in Soviet Lithuanian history education programs, which stated that history had to develop “respect for national pride and national culture” and at the same time “fight against nationalist elements”⁴ or “discipline students in the spirit of peace and collaboration, against discrimination and racial inequality, genocide and fascism”⁵. Both Lenin and Stalin established in their works a separation between unwelcome nationalism of “ruling-nations” and legitimate nationalism of “victim-nations” which shall pass as Communism will become universal (Martin, 2001). The dichotomy of these two notions of nationalism was used in the educational programs for history in Lithuania (“spirit of Soviet patriotism and socialist internationalism”⁶ or “Soviet patriotism as a higher level patriotism”⁷) as well as in the textbooks, where only those Lithuanian cultural achievements were emphasized that were considered as coherent with the universal plan of socialist state (for instance, “works of S. Stanevičius and S. Daukantas encouraged to respect mother-tongue and own nationality, to learn about ones past” (Jurginis & Pilkauskas, 1967, p. 41). While the so-called negative nationalism was suppressed, we can distinguish the use of the Lithuanian national element as a facade for a successful boasting of Soviet ideology. These two elements were constantly represented as interrelated. This specific use of Lithuanian national elements in other spheres of daily life to promote newly formed Soviet Lithuanian identity has been already noticed and discussed by several Lithuanian researchers (Vaiseta, 2014; Streikus, 2018; Putinaitė, 2019).

Victimization and the need to be rescued

If we would look at the history textbook of Soviet Lithuania as a work of fiction (as it was) or simply as to the narrative presented in the novel, and we would like to distinguish main characters of the narrative, we would certainly notice, that not Lithuanians, whose history supposed to be represented, were the main actors of this story, but Russians as a nation (not Soviets *per se*). According to this narrative Russians saved Lithuania not only in 1940 and in 1944, but in various historical periods and circumstances, thus 1940 became a symbolical date in this continuation of historical events. So the events of the year 1940 was legitimized as a historically determined “coming together”. Lithuanians remained the victims in this narrative, determined to be where they were at that moment and unable to execute any independent decisions. However, Soviet Lithuanian history textbooks, as still oriented towards only Lithuanians, could be considered as more subtle on the presentation of the historically determined ethnical hierarchy. If we would compare them to the textbooks of the general history of the Soviet Union, it would represent how the game of Soviet history politics was played in practice – in the same textbook narrative, it stated that “Russian nations have learned a lot from each other”, and then in the further text it indeed explained (or *Soviet-plained*) who learned from who – “The books of great Russian writers, works of the progressive

⁴ Aštuonmečių, vidurinių ir vakarinių (pamaininių) mokyklų programos. Istorija. IV-XI kl., 1978. p. 3.

⁵ Vidurinės bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos programos. Istorija. V-XII kl. 1988. p. 5.

⁶ Vidurinės bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos programos. Istorija. V-XII kl., 1988. p. 5.

⁷ Aštuonmečių, vidurinių ir vakarinių (pamaininių) mokyklų programos. Istorija. IV-XI kl., 1981, p. 14.

scholars became more available to the educated masses of all nations living in Russia” (Golubeva & Geleršteinas, 1978, p. 85). In this context, it is significant, that both in history education programs and history textbooks there was a division between the Russian nation as a hero (singular) (“The old Russian nation constitutes the basis for the three brotherly nations – Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians”⁸ or “The fight of the Russian nation and Baltic nations with the aggression of German and Swede feudalism”⁹) and Russian nations (plural) as victims to be saved and educated (“the importance of the progressive Russian culture to the development of culture of Russian nations”¹⁰). Thus, it was firstly eliminating cultural independence of so-called Russian nations and then – denying the idea of their political independence.

The constant fear of the “other”

Every so often in the Soviet textbooks “the other” was clearly identified as a German and sometimes it remained under the mysterious cover of “the foreigner”. This “foreigner” in the vocabulary of the Cold War could suggest anyone on the other side of the Iron Curtain. I believe the term *schizophrenic history* is the best one to describe this part of Soviet history education which aimed to install the fear of the “other” in the society whilst creating a unified and thus easily controlled and predicted society. In the textbooks, there was a constant emphasis on “...the common fight of nations from our State against foreign aggressors”¹¹. And if this fight was presented more widely, Germans remained the fiercest historical enemies – from aggression based on religious inclinations in the 14-15th centuries to the fights for the Lithuanization of Klaipėda district against Germanization of the area, and of course the fights against Germans in the two world wars of the 20th century¹². These territorial and cultural conflicts certainly were important while talking about the Lithuanian-German relationship in the course of history. However, their intentional representation as the most brutal conflicts in Lithuanian history added to the prevailing grand narrative of Soviet Union history, where the Russian nation must save Lithuanians (as well as others) from the foreign aggressors from the West¹³. It is paradoxical, considering the Cold War status, but in the diverse ideological contexts of Wild West than in American history, the peculiar kind of Wild West existed as an idea in the Soviet Union as well.

Next to the image of the foreign enemy in Soviet history education stood an unprecedented kind of enemy – the idea of the enemy as anyone who is richer, more powerful (but not in the Soviet government) and differs from the idea of proletarian society. There was a mistrust built regarding anyone who lived considerably better than their neighbors, suggesting, that it was impossible without foul deeds. And in Soviet society, this kind of mistrust genuinely had a basis. However, it is questionable, if we can speak about the comparable situation before the Soviet regime in Lithuania as it was presented in the Soviet period textbooks: “In this

⁸ Vidurinės bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos programos. Istorija. V-XII kl., 1988, p. 30.

⁹ Vidurinės bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos programos. Istorija. V-XII kl., 1988, p. 31.

¹⁰ Vidurinės bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos programos. Istorija. V-XII kl., 1988, p.41.

¹¹ Aštuonmečių, vidurinių ir vakarinių (pamaininių) mokyklų programos. Istorija. IV-XI kl., 1983, p. 13.

¹² Aštuonmečių, vidurinių ir vakarinių (pamaininių) mokyklų programos. Istorija. IV-XI kl., 1978, p. 77.

¹³ Aštuonmečių, vidurinių ir vakarinių (pamaininių) mokyklų programos. Istorija. IV-XI kl., 1983, p. 13.

society (pre-Soviet) the financially stronger one always hurt the weaker” or “the wealthy noblemen wanted to be liked by Tsarist government no matter what” (Jurginis, 1957). In that manner, everyone was instructed to look cautiously at the achievements of others and at the same time hide personal achievements in order not to be qualified as the “other” in society.

Conclusion

To summarize, we can distinguish five principal directions for formal value indoctrination in late period (1957-1988) history education in Soviet Lithuania through textbooks and educational programs:

1. Lack of spontaneity. This factor is common to all totalitarian ideologies; it only proves that Soviet ideology is not exceptional in totalitarian contexts.
2. Complexity as the unwanted characteristic of the intelligent citizen.
3. Deculturization via ethnoculturization.
4. Introducing inferiority complex of self-victimization and a value of the “big brother” in this context.
5. Constant fare of the “other”. The Russians were presented not as the “other”, but as the savior or allegedly better version of “the other”.

These identified points of Soviet “new man” value system can be seen as starting points for the analysis of the idea of *homo sovieticus* as a specifically ideologically inclined man in Lithuania after the 1990s.

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