

Chapter 2

Russian History Textbooks in the Putin Era: Heroic Leaders Demand Loyal Citizens

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Heroic Leaders: Introduction

In the history of Soviet Russia and its post-perestroika period two leaders, Stalin and Putin, stand out as the most influential figures in reshaping the image of the nation and winning the hearts and minds of millions of Russians. The nostalgic revival of Stalin and the elevation of Vladimir Putin as a national hero in the state controlled media have affected all spheres of Russian society, especially history and civic education. This chapter examines how current day Russian history textbooks have become a critical instrument in promoting a valorized and uncritical representation of Stalin and Putin.

Playing an ultra-nationalistic card and using the concept of an unique Russian destiny and its special mission in the world, Putin has promoted anti-democratic tendencies by establishing personal control over virtually every sphere of life: economy, culture, education, sciences, mass media, and sports. This control also depends upon his ability to reconstruct and rewrite the past through a manipulation of patriotic language and imagery. The national history curriculum in the Soviet times and today has been oriented towards fulfilling its major social goal of developing pride in Russia' past and present and shaping school students into loyal Russian citizens,

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especially by utilizing the Russian notion of *hero* to achieve this type of loyalty to the state.

The use of the Russian cultural concept of *hero* is therefore of particular interest to us in our examination of Russian high school history textbooks today. Through a critical analysis of how language and visual imagery are used to construct the heroic identities of Stalin and Putin in textbooks we argue that these discursive practices aim to create faithful citizens in the present.

Literature Review

Our analysis of Russian textbook representations of Stalin and Putin is informed in part by Western and Russian scholarly research about these two political figures. There have been numerous studies about Stalin. Our own research has built upon those studies that focused on his rise to power and the brutal methods he used to maintain absolute control over the Soviet society. Grounding his book in statistical and archival materials Khlevniuk (2016) highlights Stalin's personal role in mass murders and the expansion of the vast GULAG network of slave labor camps across the Soviet Union. Kotkin's research (2014) has provided valuable insights about the effects of absolute power on Stalin's public and private self. Graham's work (1993) shed light on Stalin's infusion of Marxist ideology into Soviet research and in the process retarded Soviet advances in the biological sciences through his support of Lysenko and also purging those researchers who did not sufficiently espouse a Soviet party line.

Recent scholarship has also expanded our understanding of the ways Stalin was able to exercise control over Soviet life. His manipulation of religious symbols to enhance his control over Soviet life was the focus of research conducted by Ilizarov (2013) and Kurlyandskii (2011). The work of Khaustov and Samuelson (2010), and Conquest (2008) uncovered new archival sources documenting the scale of mass murder during the Stalinist era as well as the legacies of these crimes for Russia today.

The scholarship about Vladimir Putin continues to grow every year, especially relating to his actions aimed at suppressing civil liberties and human rights. Several researchers have examined how Putin has been able to create an authoritarian regime while often employing the rhetoric of democratic reform (Chebankova 2013; Dawisha 2014; Zygar' 2016). Malinova's (2015) examination of Putin's state decrees, official documents, and speeches reveals his attempts to suppress discussions about events in Russian history that draw attention to abuses of power and violations of human rights by Soviet and contemporary Russian political leaders. In a similar vein Goscilo's work on the creation of President Putin as a national symbol and an iconic figure in Russian society directly pertains to our own examination of Russian history textbooks.

Research into national history textbook narratives has provided an important foundation for our own study. In this regard Wertsch's work (2002, 2004) on the role

of schematic narrative templates has been instrumental in how we have approached the representations of Stalin and Putin in Russian textbooks. His recognition of the role national cultural motifs play in shaping collective memories has direct bearing on our own examination of the hero concept in relation to Stalin and Putin. Similarly, more recent research into how national history textbooks attempt to shape students' understandings of the past through the use of dominant cultural narratives (Barton and Levstik 2008; Carretero 2011; Foster and Crawford 2006) have been relevant to our own work, especially in how national myths are used to construct loyalty to the nation state in the present. In the field of Russian history textbook analysis similar studies about engendering loyalty to the state have been conducted by Korostelina (2013), Nelson (2015), Volodina (2005), and Zajda (2013, 2015).

Our own research has laid the groundwork for the study we discuss in this chapter. In the Russian context Tatyana Tsyrlina-Spady has examined the role patriotism and nationalism play in the development of Russian history textbooks (Tsyrlina-Spady and Lovorn 2015; Lovorn and Tsyrlina-Spady 2015). Alan Stoskopf has explored the ways political violence has been embedded in the dominant narratives of American history textbooks (Stoskopf and Bermudez 2016). This present study builds on this previous work in new ways through a critical discourse and visual analysis of the heroic depictions of Stalin and Putin in current day Russian history textbooks.

Research Design

Research Question and Purposeful Sample

Our interest in the ways Russian history textbooks attempt to exert social control of its citizenry is guided by the following research question: How do the lexical and visual representations of Stalin and Putin as heroes in current Russian history textbooks attempt to shape loyal citizens in the present? We have chosen two textbooks to conduct this examination. Both textbooks have practically the same title: *History of Russia: Beginning of the 20th Century to the Beginning of the 21st Century*. Grade 10 (2016) but have two different teams of authors led by A.V. Torkunov and O.V. Volobuev respectively and published by separate publishing houses.¹

¹In keeping with Russian state policy approved books in school subjects for assigned grade levels have the same title.

Theoretical Framework

Critical theory and social semiotic perspectives inform our examination of the two textbooks. Critical theory's attention to how dominant socio/political/economic interests structure and maintain their privileged status (Darder et al. 2016; Felluga 2015; Tyson 2014) is particularly relevant to our inquiry. The processes by which powerful elites exert domination over subordinate groups are both multifaceted and vary in how they are expressed in different cultural contexts (Ashcroft et al. 2013). In our own work we seek to better understand how the social messaging embedded in Russian history textbooks perform ideological² functions that serve to enhance and solidify the centralization of power for the present day government of Vladimir Putin. The ability of a political regime or any dominant center of power to achieve compliance among a wider population often relies on methods of persuasion found in discourses³ familiar to a particular society (Billig 1987). Therefore, for our analysis this means closely parsing through the language and imagery of persuasion, which often is presented as 'benign' or 'neutral' but in fact seeks very specific social and self-aggrandizing ends.

With our focus on the lexical and visual representations of *hero* in Russian textbooks, we make use of social semiotic theories. Semiotics as a field of inquiry has focused on how sign systems communicate both explicit and implicit meanings to readers and viewers of these signs (Chandler 2007; Rogers 2011). Signs are embedded in all forms of human communication from speech, written text, visual imagery, sounds, postures, etc. Depending on a particular cultural context the signing that occurs in diverse forms of human communication relies on semiotic codes that trigger recognizable cognitive and emotional associations by those who experience them (Kress 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). The field of social semiotics emphasizes how signs and their use in communication "do not just represent the world, but constitute it" (Machin and Mayr, p. 19).

We draw upon social semiotic perspectives when examining the symbolic and coded importance of language and visual imagery surrounding the Russian concept of *hero* in Russian history textbooks. The use of particular metaphors, word choices, and visual design elements in the construction of the hero concept represent semiotic resources employed for a social purpose. The semiotic choices made by the authors in the textbook accounts representing the past regime of Stalin and the current administration of Putin therefore help the reader place these figures into a recognizable discourse that triggers familiar associations by the reader. Our work

²Our use of the term *ideological* refers in the broad sense to worldviews on how society should be organized. In this article it is associated with how dominant views of the ruling regime communicate what the natural order of Russian society should be.

³The term *discourse* has been defined in multiple ways by researchers in the social sciences and humanities. In this article we employ the term to mean "a particular representation of the world" (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 219) done through "the social activity of making meanings with language and other symbolic systems" (Lemke 1995, p. 7).

examines how these representations occur and their possible meanings for Russian high school students today.

Critical theoretical and social semiotic perspectives enable a precise analytic approach for our work. Their respective emphases on understanding the ideological uses of power in dominant discourses and the ways text and image communicate culturally laden messages to readers of Russian textbook narratives go to the heart of our investigation.

Data Analysis

We have utilized a qualitative data analytic approach (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Maxwell 2013) to the lexical and visual textbook data pertaining to the concept of the Russian *hero*. Applying a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA)⁴ sequence of *emic* and *etic* coding has allowed us to unpack and lift up for critical examination the social and political purposes of language and image. With our analytic focus on the Russian concept of *hero* we have employed the semiotic codes of *savior*, *unifier*, and *leader* to analyze how this concept is discursively used to arrange words and images to accomplish socio/political purposes. We base on the following code descriptions:

- ***Hero as Savior:*** The hero revives the spiritual mission of the Russian people through the hero's defense of religion in the daily lives of its citizens and the promotion of culture and science in the society at large.
- ***Hero as Unifier:*** The hero promises to maintain the unity of the people in the face of internal and external enemies who seek to sow discord and doubt toward the authority of the state.
- ***Hero as Leader:*** The hero always reveals firm and absolute leadership in order to safeguard timeless Russian virtues and to protect the health of nation, and steer a course toward greater Russian glory in the world today and the future.

In this chapter we demonstrate how the above analytic approach has taken place, the central findings that arose from that approach, and the implications of this work for educational research and pedagogical practice.

Findings

Three findings emerged from our analysis of the textbook representations of Stalin and Putin as national heroes. They are:

⁴MCDA recognizes that the analysis of communicative acts is not applied to only words but also includes visual, aural, and gesturing data. It still is rooted in a critical discourse tradition that is concerned with the linkages between symbolic expressions, cultural context, and power relations.

1. Alternating depictions of Stalin's heroic stature in the two textbooks enhance loyalty to Putin's heroic leadership in the present.
2. The two textbook representations of Stalin's policies of state sanctioned murder and false imprisonment serve to justify and obscure Putin's own violations of civil liberties and human rights today.
3. Opposition to the leadership of Stalin and Putin is portrayed as unpatriotic and injurious to the strength and welfare of the Russian nation.

We will now explain how the semiotic codes of *leader*, *unifier*, and *savior* were discursively employed in both textbook accounts to promote a particular ideological agenda. While we draw attention to the similarities and differences in the heroic depictions of Stalin and Putin in the two accounts, we emphasize in our summative comments that both books attempt to remake the past in order to insure compliance to the political regime of Vladimir Putin in the present.

Textbook 1. Torkunov (Ed.), 2016

Stalin

Throughout the textbook Stalin is portrayed as a strong leader who amassed power while Lenin's health declined. The very unconvincing statement that "Stalin was one of those who Lenin relied on in his struggle for leadership" (Part 1, p. 111) is supported by an undated photo of the meeting of the Council of People's Commissars (Part 1, p. 47). Here, Stalin is shown directly behind Lenin as if his closest ally, looking more alert and powerful than practically anyone else. However, the accompanying textbook account does not even mention his name, although it provides a detailed description of the importance of Trotsky and Dzerzhinsky (p. 46–49). As Khlevniuk (2016) indicates, "Stalin was not a leader of the revolution. But as one of the Bolshevik executives... he had important responsibilities. He followed Lenin, and this defined his role in the revolution" (p. 86).

The account argues that the Party almost immediately experienced "a regime of the sole power of Stalin, called 'Master' by every member of the Political Bureau," "a coryphaeus and a strategist," and "a teacher and a friend of the youth" (Part 1, p. 144). As a result, "in press, over the radio and during mass public events there was formed a cult of Stalin" (p. 144). However, the blame for this cult creation is shifted from the leader to the bureaucracy, stating only that Stalin "did not prohibit [it] when his name was given to cities, squares and streets..." (p. 144).

The most positive depiction of Stalin as a heroic leader is revealed in the description of his role in World War II. In fact, the Red Army was unprepared for war due to Stalin's decision "not to provide [Germany] any reason to accuse Russia of [violating the] non-aggression treaty" (Part 2, p. 12). That decision cost the nation hundreds of thousands of military and civilian deaths during just the first days of the war, and 4 473,820 during the first six months, according to the latest published

research data (Krivosheev et al. 2010) but this is downplayed in the text. The account is silent about Stalin's disappearance from public view for the first critical days of the invasion but acknowledges that he "became Supreme Commander" (Part 2, p. 12) soon afterwards, and brought the nation to its triumphant victory in the war that "on the part of the USSR was *just, liberating, and anti-fascist*" (Part 2, p. 13).

Besides his depiction as a victorious military leader Stalin also is represented as a leader who nurtured his people and their physical health through the development of a national sports system. The textbook recalls the story when, in 1936, tens of thousands of athletic young people, appearing in the largest annual sports parade at Red Square "simultaneously demonstrated the basic elements of popular USSR sports," chanting, "Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood!" (Part 1, p. 163).

Such a glorification of the national hero is not only lexically shaped but is also visually constructed. The textbook includes more illustrations of Stalin than of any other Soviet or Russian political leader during the last hundred years of the nation's history. To enhance the image of Stalin as a heroic unifier, the textbook mixes fact and fiction. For example, the account rightly names Lenin as the one who "initiated the resolution," which "in reality became a weapon against the dissent in the Party" (Part 1, p. 110). The text asserts that Stalin, preoccupied with maintaining the unity of the nation, applied this resolution in November 1927, and as a result, "over 2,000 active oppositionists were expelled from the Party. Many of them were sent into exile" (Part 1, p. 112).

However, the textbook also claims that it was due to Stalin that,

Many [oppositionists] managed to receive forgiveness after they announced their readiness to subordinate to the party majority. Only Trotsky and his closest allies remained the most uncompromising. At the beginning of 1928 Trotsky was exiled to Kazakhstan and some-time later he was kicked out of the USSR (Part 1, p. 112).

The textbook fails to mention that Stalin had many of the "oppositionists" arrested again, as well as ordered the assassination of Trotsky in Mexico in 1940. Clearly, including such facts in the textbook account might have allowed student readers to question the dominant narrative.

While touching upon state sanctioned arrests and murders, the textbook discursively evades the human ordeal of those who were victims of these crimes. For example, it states, "Tens of thousands [of] participants [in] anti-Soviet meetings, representatives of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois, were deported to Siberia and other remote areas of the USSR" (Part 1, p. 145). The paragraph that comes next is even more illustrative, acknowledging, "After the period of mass repressions was over, Stalin did not claim himself guilty but accused the NKVD officers [of] violating the law. The executors of his criminal orders were punished" (p.145). One gets no sense of the degree and scale of human suffering in this use of language. The focus is instead shifted to Stalin as a hero-unifier, ready to protect the people in the face of enemies seeking to sow discord and doubt the authority of the state.

Another role ascribed to Stalin is that of the hero-savior before, during, and after World War II, who revived the sense of a spiritual destiny in the Russian people

through his defense of religion in the daily lives of Russians and the promotion of culture and science in the broader society. The textbook does not only proclaim that the rebirth of religious beliefs during the war was a very positive trend but also identifies Stalin as the one who initiated the process, giving no explanation of the actual reasons and simply ignoring the fact that in his youth Stalin himself was trained to become a priest, which contributed the usage of the terms *creator* and *father* when he is referred to as the savior of the Soviet people.

In his particular role as a father figure for the country Stalin is literally the face behind a cultural revolution. This revolution is defined, on the one hand, as “a significant increase in the educational level of the populace and its exposure to the cultural achievements,” and, on the other, as “the undivided dominance of Marxism-Leninism in the spiritual life of the society” (Part 1, p. 156). The textbook uses the term *spiritual* multiple times, intermixing Marxist and religious meanings without offering the reader any explanations, which solidifies the image of Stalin as a hero-savior of the nation. Furthermore, the textbook shows Stalin as a figure who helped revive the Russian Orthodox Church in Soviet society, which once again contradicts the historical record.

This textbook employs a more positive, less informative, and a significantly reduced critical approach in its portrayal of Stalin, who is represented as the Party unifier, a spiritual savior, and a powerful leader of a new and mighty nation. When mentioning Stalin’s crimes and atrocities, the account uses neutral and banal language that serves to create a more positive response to Stalin’s actions. Overall, the account underscores the sense that Stalin had no other choice but to take power into his own hands in order to steer Soviet Russia towards a more glorious future. This depiction of Stalin skillfully lays the groundwork for Putin’s imminent arrival.

Putin

The portrayal of Vladimir Putin starts with a quote from President Yeltsin’s resignation speech on December 31, 1999 stating, “Russia should enter the new millennium with new politicians, new faces, and new, smart, strong, and energetic people” (Part 3, p. 76). This description introduces the reader to why Yeltsin chose Putin,

In [the] summer [of] 1999, V.V. Putin was approved in the position of Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. The decisive measures to keep Constitutional order in Chechnya, his fight with terrorists, his visits to the hot spots, his consistent and firm position in defending the unity of the country made him the most popular national politician in a very short period of time (Part 3, p. 77).

From his first steps on the national stage, Putin is shown to be a firm and resolute leader, one who can “reinforce Russian statehood” through introducing his own plenipotentiary representatives in the federal districts, reforming the Federation Council and creating the “United Russia” political party (Part 3, pp. 77–78). He is depicted as a hero-unifier who can protect the State from its enemies, such as terrorists and separatists, in order to safeguard enduring Russian principles and values.

The account acknowledges that the President's actions are almost unanimously supported among "the State Duma political forces" and "federal troops" (Part 3, p. 78), "new regional bodies of governance," and even "the Chechen population" (Part 3, p. 79).

In his role as a unifier, Putin is portrayed as making every effort to create a civic society in Russia by bringing together all public groups to establish a dialogue. For example, while delivering his keynote address at the Moscow Civic Forum in 2001, Putin praised the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) affirming that the "voice of the citizens should be one of the most decisive" (Part 3, p. 86). The textbook further states that one of goals "of the President's activities was to provide for the public unity and accord. Without splitting the society into "ours" and "theirs," – supporters and opponents of reforms – [Putin] managed to implement a number of measures that helped to consolidate the society" (Part 3, p. 78).

Mentioning "ours" and "theirs" and describing Putin's attempts to keep the nation together sends a subtle and powerful message that implies previous leaders, such as Stalin, fabricated enemies, as compared to Putin who made every effort to embrace different social circles. The image of Putin created by the textbook stands in stark contrast to what we know about the many Russians who have been forced into exile, imprisoned for criticizing his policies, and murdered (Browder 2015; Dawisha 2014; Hill and Gaddy 2015; Roxburgh 2012). All of these acts of repression are not mentioned in the text.

This silencing of dissent is also illustrated in how the textbook tries to explain the harassment of NGOs, "which happened to receive financial support from private corporations and from abroad" (Part 3, pp. 86–87). They are officially labeled as "foreign agents" and many have been banned from working in Russia. The textbook chooses to simply describe such organizations as those who "preferred to criticize power instead of establishing a dialogue with its representatives and build joint activities to find and satisfy people's needs" (Part 3, p. 87). Again, this is a sanitization of the truth and a whitewashing of reality. The account never calls attention to the 2012 law, which reintroduced the term "foreign agent," and as a result significantly reduced humanitarian assistance coming from the West.

The apotheosis of the presidential fame and glory and his readiness to safeguard timeless Russian virtues is demonstrated in the textbook through the account of the political situation in the Crimea. A long quote from Putin's Address to the Federal Assembly on March 18, 2014, completes the last chapter of this history textbook and is supposed to serve as a solid proof of his role as a national hero-unifier and leader:

Practically everything in the Crimea is permeated with the shared history and pride. It is the ancient Chersoneses where Holy Prince Vladimir was baptized. Vladimir's spiritual heroism – a shift towards Christianity – predestined common cultural, values', and civilizational basis which unites the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. ... Each of these places is holy for us; they are symbols of the Russian military glory and unprecedented prowess (Part 3, p. 106).

The religious tone and language of this passage is introduced earlier in the chapter when Putin is depicted as a hero-savior; the message is supported both textually and visually. For example, the textbook states, “at the beginning of the 21st century the relationship between the Power and the Church was built on the mutual desire to revive the greatness of Russia” (Part 3, p. 89). This statement is well illustrated by a photo of the President’s meeting with the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Kirill (Part 3, p. 103). Putin’s smiling face and body language, together with a relaxed posture of the Patriarch, demonstrate a very positive and friendly atmosphere of this meeting. Although placing Putin in the left corner of the picture – closer to the reader – and separating the Patriarch from the viewer by the table, leaves no doubt who, in fact, holds the power.

Putin also is represented numerous times as the leader who cares deeply about the promotion of culture and science and the development of such critical social spheres as education, “affordable housing,” and “the agrarian and industrial complex” (Part 3, p. 84). Again, his efforts in this regard are unanimously supported by all segments of the population – “best teachers and teachers’ teams” and “working mothers” (p. 84), and also by “philanthropic foundations, scientific, cultural and ethnic communities, environmentalists and human rights activists, staffing schools and business associations, women’s and youth organizations, trade unions...” (Part 3, p. 86).

There is no critical representation of President Putin in the textbook. Instead, it reinforces his image as a strong leader, unifier, and savior, one that strengthens traditional Russian values of Orthodoxy, protects the national unity, encourages patriotism, promotes culture and science, and enables the Russian people to move forward into a greater Russian glory.

Stalin and Putin as Russian Heroes

The representation of both leaders in Torkunov’s textbook includes a number of similarities and differences. Stalin is shown as a strong leader, savior, and unifier of all the Soviet people. Although cruel and unrestrained in his words and actions, Stalin is portrayed as acting under the pressure of severe circumstances; this is accomplished through the vague and understated language when referring to his crimes. This reasoning prepares the way for Putin to appear as the next powerful authority figure, who also is surrounded by enemies. Unlike Stalin he remains a force for good and does not commit any mistakes or crimes. Putin strives to secure national borders and protect ethnic Russians. Shifting his attention to the spiritual revival of the nation and enhancing its international reputation marks him as an ideal national hero worthy of veneration.

Textbook 2. Volobuev et al. (2016)

Stalin

Volobuev's textbook depicts Stalin's rise to power in a less flattering light than Torkunov's account. This is first evidenced when the text attributes Stalin's accession to power as largely due to Lenin's illness. At the same time the textbook emphasizes how Stalin was able to use the popular image of Lenin to advance his own consolidation of power. By skillfully manipulating Lenin's ideas, even coining the term "Leninism" and declaring that "socialism could win in one individual country" (p. 95), Stalin managed to destroy all opposition and gained the reputation of "a strong-willed, goal-oriented, and dangerous politician" (p. 95) who would stop at nothing to defeat his enemies and secure control of the Party and the nation.

While the textbook points out that Stalin developed a cult of personality, it also acknowledges that he was a powerful leader, reiterating the famous quote from his official biography, "Stalin is a worthy follower of Lenin's deeds, or as it is said in the Party today, Stalin is Lenin today" (p. 113). Among the multiple antagonists who Stalin had to defeat, imprison, and/or eliminate were not only individuals but also disparate groups such as "Kronstadt sailors" (p. 90), "anti-Soviet elements" (p. 91), "the kulaks" (p. 100), "NEP men and new bourgeoisie" (p. 118), "unreliable intelligentsia" (p. 126), and "Western enemies" (p. 100). As in the Torkunov's account, much of the text here uses some familiar Soviet era phrases, such as *enemies of the people* who worked at the direct instructions of *foreign intelligence services*, which is almost identical to Putin's use of *foreign agents*. Thus, the textbook subtly sets the stage for Putin who is depicted as successful in restoring power and prestige to the country but without his negative qualities and destructive actions of Stalin.

The visual images that accompany textbook representations of Stalin appear to create a more positive depiction of him in contrast to the written text. For example, two posters are placed side by side (p. 88) in the textbook. Lenin's hand is pointing toward Stalin, as if indicating he will inherit his power. At the same time the figure of Stalin holding the wheel of the U.S.S.R. ship of state supports his overall image as a hero leader who is able to steer a course toward greater Russian glory.

Another representation of Stalin as an established and powerful leader is a photo of Lenin and Stalin in 1922 in Gorky (p. 91). Soviet censors have probably altered this photo and the textbook uses its cropped version. Stalin and Lenin are in fact sitting on different chairs but in the cropped version it is impossible to see. By doing this the censors emphasized how close Lenin and Stalin were to one another. As David King argues in *The Commissar Vanishes* (2014), Stalin was just inserted and his image was 'improved' in many officially promoted photos, which could also be the case here. Stalin's well-lit white jacket projects him as a strong and energetic leader, while Lenin appears more passive and restrained.

The textbook goes on to depict Stalin's political genius for unifying the country when he suggested, "Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Transcaucasia [should be brought]

into the RSFSR as autonomous republics... and in this way build an unitary state which would narrow down their rights... Lenin called the idea of ... autonomy fundamentally misguided, insisting on the equal union of republics" (p. 92). Thus, with the absence of an explanation into Lenin's reasoning the textbook prepares the reader for a transition to modern Russian leadership, implying how different the course of history could have been if the nation had only followed Stalin's strategy to keep the Russian central government's dominance over all the Soviet republics.

As much as the symbolism of a strong leader and the nation's unifier runs throughout the entire book in text and images, Stalin's heroic stature always comes with flaws. For example, when discussing World War II, the authors make clear that "Stalin is guilty before the country and the people for the repressions against the Army management, for [what happened in] 1941–42, and for the tremendous human losses during the war" (p. 203). Describing the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, the textbook account uses a photo of a demolished monument to Stalin lying on the ground.

While portraying Stalin as a savior who promoted science and culture in society at large, the textbook again juxtaposes his great achievements and his faults. For example, the work of the Soviet people, primarily workers and engineers, in their efforts to achieve a high level of industrial progress, is characterized as an enormous success that then triggered "labor enthusiasm" (p. 120). The account quotes Stalin, who used to say labor in the USSR became "a matter of honor, glory, valor, and heroism" (p. 120). Even more 'heroic' was the work of Soviet physicists who successfully created a nuclear bomb, thermonuclear weapons, and ballistic missiles (p. 212), although it is never mentioned that most of them were special prisoners held in secret research and development laboratories within the Soviet Gulag labor camp system (Ozerov 1971). The textbook account only acknowledges that "the atmosphere in a number of research fields remained extremely difficult" (pp. 212–213), and creates a very negative description of the activities of Trofim Lysenko who set back Russian research in the field of genetics.

In relation to Stalin's stance toward religion and spirituality, the textbook provides only a muted criticism of his policies. It states that under Stalin the arts "glorified the heroism of the Soviet people, their high moral principles, and spiritual richness" (p. 214) but it does not fully portray the role that Stalin himself had in the oppression of religion. While only briefly mentioning the negativity towards religion during Stalinist times, the tone of the textbook changes and becomes much more accusatory when describing the forceful and cruel persecutions of church and religion during the Khrushchev regime.

The language of this textbook represents a more elaborate and, on the surface, a more critical account of Stalin, whose negative character traits and historical mistakes are mentioned, while at the same time emphasizing his tremendous achievements in the building the power of the Communist Party, creating a greater sense of national unity, and demonstrating his absolute leadership in Soviet domestic and foreign policy. However, the textbook's visual portrayal of Stalin is, on the whole, favorable. While the favorable images blunt the impact of the text's depiction, this

paradox becomes more understandable when we examine how the heroic image of Putin is constructed in relation to Stalin.

Putin

As in Torkunov's textbook, Volobuev also provides an uncritical and celebratory account of Putin as a heroic leader. He is presented as a strong authority figure and a hero-unifier whose mission is to protect his people from internal and external enemies. Putin is shown as a hero capable of holding together the nation by strengthening the "United Russia" Party (p. 319), being respectful to war veterans, being mindful of the younger generation, and taking care of the State Duma (Russian Parliament). Putin furthermore is depicted as the embodiment of energy and power, under whose leadership the Russian army "ousted the fighters from Dagestan and defeated separatists on the territory of Chechnya" (p. 319).

The image of President Putin driving a new Russian Lada-Kalina automobile in 2010 (p. 328) symbolized his leading and unifying position among his people. It is reinforced a few pages later by another driving experience. This time it is with President George W. Bush at the wheel of an old Russian Gas-21. Putin is in the passenger seat (p. 337). While demonstrating informal and friendly relations between the two superpowers' leaders, the textbook, nevertheless, cautions the reader about the existence of "the tough competition – for markets, for investments, and for political and economic influence. So in this fight, Russia should remain strong and competitive" (p. 336).

The account leaves no doubt that only President Putin can keep Russia united and strong. This impression is reaffirmed by the contrasted representation of the current Prime Minister and former President Dmitry Medvedev together in an undated photo (p. 318). Here, Putin's body language and his gloomy expression of discontent and mistrust, as well as an obvious desire to draw away from the table, while Medvedev bends towards him, signal how the current President feels about his closest political ally. Putin is visually strong while Medvedev is weak, conveying a clear choice to the reader about who is more suitable to lead the country.

The textbook also portrays Putin as a hero-savior of the Russian people. During his presidency the nation witnessed "a religious revival as a spiritual phenomenon in the life of the country" (p. 345). It emphasizes that "the State needs to have a firm foundation in the moral requirements that are reassured in the minds and behavior of the believers" (p. 345). The account indicates a positive role of religion in the social education of today's youth, omitting any reference to Article 14 of the RF Constitution proclaiming Russia as a secular state.

The President also is shown as the one who returned democratic freedoms to the nation, especially in culture and sciences, demonstrating that every sphere of life in modern Russia is unaffected by ideology and that this should be considered an important achievement of Putin's policy. The textbook recounts, "if, during the Soviet time science was squeezed into the narrow frame of dialectic-materialistic theory" (p. 348), then now there exists a "pluralism of opinions" and "a number of

competing research theories or hypotheses” (p. 347). As a result, social sciences, education, and Russian culture remain free from their “ideological shackles” (p. 350). Yet, in actual Russian society today these shackles still seem apparent when textbooks in mathematics are banned for being unpatriotic (Gazeta 2014) or books are burned because they have been published with funds from foreign foundations (Obozrevatel 2016).

This image of an enlightened modern hero-savior and powerful leader ignore unpleasant realities in Russian society today, such as the censorship of Russian mass media or the political murders of journalists, human rights activists, and representatives of the opposition (Gessen 2012; Zygar', 2016). None of these events ever appear in the textbook. Although some previously concealed abuses from earlier Soviet history are now admitted, such as the mass murder of over 20,000 Polish military and intelligentsia in 1940, it highlights the recurring tendency of Russian textbooks during the Stalin era and today to suppress the authoritarian nature of the current regime in power. That is clearly the case in both Volobuev's and Torkunov's accounts, where President Putin is depicted as a powerful heroic leader capable not only of rejuvenating the spiritual mission of the Russian people but also of reviving former Russian glory and restoring its position as a world superpower.

Stalin and Putin as Russian Heroes

Once again this textbook's coverage of Stalin and Putin serves to orient the reader to the primacy of Putin as the heroic leader most important for student readers to remember. Stalin's depiction is used to highlight the new and improved version of a Russian hero. As noted, both leaders share positive qualities of the archetypal Russian hero as a leader, unifier, and savior of the country. Stalin, though, is lacking; he uses power to aggrandize himself at the expense of the best interests of the nation, whether it be his mistakes in managing the economy or his heavy-handed approach in dealing with opposition to his leadership. Putin has no such flaws. By constructing a somewhat flawed heroic figure in Stalin it allows the reader to appreciate even more fully a newer hero and one who also is a steward of eternal Russian virtues.

Summative Perspectives on the Findings

As noted in our analysis above, both Stalin and Putin are depicted as powerful leaders, saviors, and unifiers of the Russian state and its people. While the portrayal of Stalin varies from positive and uncritical in Torkunov's textbook to a somewhat more critical representation in Volobuev's textbook, both accounts still use their respective portrayals of Stalin to enhance an unblemished depiction of President Putin as the heroic leader Russia needs and deserves in the twenty-first century.

Both textbooks characterize the opposition in Soviet times as injurious to the political regime and national stability. Current day opposition is similarly represented as unpatriotic and weakening the glorious Russian nation, which justifies violations of civil liberties and human rights occurring in the present. Altering historical data and deliberately falsifying the description of Stalin's fight against the opposition, the accounts use different lexical and visual devices to sanitize the human suffering and scale of abuses during the Soviet era. If Stalin makes political mistakes and needlessly incurs the loss of many lives while making the Russian nation strong and secure, Putin is a hero who does not make mistakes or commit crimes against the people.

It is clear both textbooks are unanimous in representing the political trajectory of the current Russian president as moving from one success to another. This type of ideological messaging has important implications for history and civic education in an increasingly intercultural and transnational world.

Discussion

The traditional Russian cultural trope of hero, emerging in early mythology and further developed during Czarist times, gradually moved to the Soviet reality and finally segued into the post-perestroika era. With the hero concept came the enemy. People always fight against demons and they cannot live without gods and heroes (Jung 1959). This discourse of demons and gods, national heroes and enemies, lives on in contemporary, Russian history textbooks.

By employing the semiotic codes of *savior*, *unifier*, and *leader* we analyzed how this concept of a hero was constructed lexically and visually to accomplish political purposes. Our study identified the discursive practices employed by the textbooks' authors to convey powerful ideological messages to the reader. When applied to the representations of Stalin and Putin, these practices attempted to shape current day students into faithful and loyal citizens.

When Stalin and Putin are portrayed as hero-leaders, they are turned into mythic monuments, as if they were fated to revive the Russian religious spirit, restore the country's military and cultural glory, protect the nation from internal and external enemies, and secure the physical health of its people. The size and significance of these heroic goals and the hubris of national pride justifies any crime against individuals and groups in order to protect the greater public good; this is one of the most important ideological messages conveyed to students.

This messaging is first seen in the heroic representation of Stalin in both textbook accounts. The vast amount of peer reviewed research, memoirs, archival materials, documentaries, and direct access to the Internet make it impossible to keep Stalin's massive atrocities a secret, but that is what is being done in both textbooks. The veneration of Stalin and the textbook emphasis on heroic sacrifices during World War II deflect attention from the policy mistakes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Soviet regime. It is no wonder then that the Kremlin recently

made it illegal to publically “infringe the historical memory of the WWII events” (President of Russia 2014, par.3). As Orwell predicted, the one “who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell 1950, p. 34).

To control the present, textbook authors use different ways to control perceptions of the past. This is most striking in the silencing and sanitizing of massive crimes against humanity during the Stalin era and also with the consolidation of a dictatorial state by Putin’s regime today. To appeal to young minds, the books also utilize familiar modern terminology as seen in the depiction of Stalin’s achievements in industrialization found in Torkunov’s book. Occasionally, there are rhetorical questions asked about the cost of the war victory and other achievements, but there is no attempt to develop critical thinking skills among student readers. In both textbooks Stalin emerges as a hero of significant value who preserved the nation, put an end to all its internal and external enemies, and forced the world to respect Russia; he is a leader, a unifier, and a savior. To different degrees both textbooks mention his mistakes and allude to crimes, which make him somewhat of a wounded hero.

This depiction of Stalin sets up the reader for a new hero of a different caliber. President Putin possesses the positive qualities attributed to Stalin, but he is free from any of Stalin’s crimes or atrocities. He is a true moral exemplar, a savior of Russian physical and spiritual health, and a modernizer of sciences, an expert in culture, and an athletic icon of today’s generation.

A characteristic feature of both textbooks is the uncritical description of Putin as a powerful leader worthy of veneration. Each account includes an exhaustive chapter about Russia during the first fourteen years of the twenty-first century. This by itself raises a number of questions for the educational and academic community as to whether the aforementioned period can be considered history, or whether placing a description of a current national leader and his politics into the federal curriculum and textbooks is even appropriate.

What is occurring in officially sanctioned Russian history textbooks is reminiscent of the Soviet era when Stalin authored and edited the *History of the Communist Party* textbook. While not a direct author, it is clear Putin oversees what is permissible content in Russian history textbooks today. In April 2013, while responding to questions in his direct TV line with the nation, Putin stated that the younger generation should have a feeling of “connection with the heroes from the past” (mir24.tv, April 25, 2013). He might have added that a connection to heroes of the past would solidify an appreciation of his own heroic stature in the Russia of today.

Both history accounts remind educational researchers and practitioners of the ideological intent behind the silencing of historical events for adolescent readers. Many key events that are widely known and still actively discussed at national and international levels are left unstated, such as the military crimes by the Soviet Army in Europe in 1944 and 1945, the inhumane conditions of GULAG prisoners, the sadism and torture used in the Lubyanka prison to extract confessions, the lives of numerous children taken during the Beslan school siege, and the political murders of the renowned oppositionists like Galina Starovoitova or Boris Nemtsov. These are only some of the events that have been excised from both of the Russian

textbooks. To have included them in the accounts would have undermined the legitimacy and heroic stature of both Stalin and Putin.

Conclusion

As the above findings demonstrate, the significance of this research extends beyond a critical examination of Russian history textbooks. Certainly, greater attention being paid to what is occurring in the remaking of the past and present in Russian textbooks is needed. While this might not have an immediate impact on opening up an honest and sober discussion by teachers, students, and the general public in Russia, more investigations into how national narratives operate to shape civic identities in the present lay the foundation for a more informed Russian citizenry in the future.

At the same time our analytic approach and the findings from our study of these two Russian textbooks offer a cautionary note for all researchers and educators in history and civic education. The tendency to construct simplified and valorized national narratives is not unique to Russian history textbooks. All too often textbooks around the world serve to legitimize national institutions and centers of power by constructing a past that leads to an uncritical acceptance of the nation state in the present. This is done through the skillful use of a nation's semiotic codes that are familiar to contemporary readers in a particular country. For our study we focused on the Russian concept of *hero* through the use of semiotic codes familiar to Russian citizens today: leader, unifier, and savior. Other nations have their own time honored cultural tropes. As researchers, we have both an educational and an ethical obligation to illuminate how those semiotic codes can be manipulated to obscure and romanticize a past in order to create a compliant citizenry today.

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