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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Living the last chapter of History': Anxiety as a force for rewriting history textbooks in Putin's Russia and before

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Abstract

In this article, I examine efforts to rewrite school history in Putin's Russia, efforts whose precedents in Russia can be traced back to the nineteenth century. I explore this process from the perspective of recent scholarship on 'collective future thinking' and demonstrate how a particular feeling – anxiety – shaped Russian and Soviet efforts to change history textbooks. I describe those created in Russia, focusing on their future component and the emotional message accompanying them. In contrast to some other countries, where narratives may be revised or replaced by new ones in accordance with the development of societies and political regimes, in Russia, there is evidence that previous narrative templates continue to coexist. The state may privilege one or another narrative primary in response to emotional pressures, and in some cases, this pushes people towards aggression and even death. I argue that anxiety about the future has forced the current Russian regime to initiate a school history rewriting in the midst of the Russia-Ukraine war, allowing the state to use collective memory to convince people to engage in a brutal conflict.

Keywords: collective memory; identity; mental time travel; school history; anxiety

March 24, 2022, a month after the Russia-Ukraine war started, Vladimir Medinsky, the former Minister of Culture and current Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation called for immediate revision of the history textbooks and 'mobilisation' of all resources in history education. That was, he said, because 'we are living in a history textbook' at the moment, and 'if we keep living as before, without being mobilized and readjusted [to the new reality], we will soon realize that this is the last chapter of our history' and 'the language in which it will be written might not be Russian' (Tsvetaev 2022). Anxiety about the future and efforts to change the past to affect the future lie behind the most recent 'history police' in Russia. But is this a new trend of Putin's time, or could we see similar anxiety that forced the state to rewrite school history before? In this paper, I will explore the phenomenon of future thinking, focusing on the emotions involved in imagining the future and how this relates to rewriting the school history in Russia starting in the nineteenth century.

Textbooks typically represent nations not from one static perspective but in terms of continuous time travel: on the pages of the history books, pupils are transferred from the

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present to the past, from the past to the present, or even from the future to the past. Such time travel implies chronologies that frame the conceptualisation of national memory, and the formulation of 'cognitive maps' for understanding and engaging with the world (Schissel and Soysal 2005). Revision of national narratives about the past may reflect changes in the present and/or a vision of the future and anxiety about it. It might seem that school textbooks tell us about our past, but they also are always aimed at educating the next generation properly and helping them become loyal members of a state capable of thinking about the future.

In this paper, I approach textbooks as a tool or means for emotional transference between the state and society. I will focus on the emotional motivation behind the twists and turns of the government's 'history police' in Russia. I assume anxiety about the future is an exceptionally important emotion in this regard. In the absence of a total change of political regime and state ideology, it has been behind Russian and Soviet authorities' changes in history textbooks.

Narrative texts play a fundamental role in forming Russian national consciousness, culture, and collective memory. Education – both at home and at school – is based to a significant extent on reading particular texts; texts with their specific language, worldview, and attitudes as an integral part of Russian culture and mentality. The list of literary texts required to be read by pupils in schools has undergone a little change since Soviet times and is still aimed at instilling specific national values (eg, patriotism, self-sacrifice, national pride, admiration of power), as well as a national narrative ('Russia's unique historical path', the 'Russian world', 'the holy mission of Russia', 'the mysterious Russian soul', and so forth). History textbooks, by contrast, have changed drastically compared to the Soviet period and the 1990s after the collapse of the USSR. These changes have involved both content and emotional dimensions.

My selection of particular textbooks to be analysed reflected several factors. First, during three centuries of Tsarist rule and the early Soviet time, history textbooks were limited to one or two books, thereby limiting my choice. As for the late Soviet time and post-Soviet epoch, the criterion for selection was the popularity of particular textbooks among school teachers. I tried to focus on those the most frequently used in schools since it potentially gives more of an inside picture of historical education in schools. It should also be mentioned that the educational system in Russia has changed drastically over time. In the Russian Empire, education was a privilege available for the higher classes only, and historical education was based on reading historical works; there were no history textbooks in their ordinary sense. I chose Karamzin's writings since it was the most popular historical book in the nineteenth century. The Russian Revolution of 1917 made education available for everybody; however, the Communist Party's effort to educate a vast mass of people as quickly as possible led to the establishment of short-term courses giving a general overview of history. At this time and in Stalin's time, there was a single Party-approved history textbook for all schools. There was no age limitation for these textbooks since the classes could be composed of people of different ages. In the late Soviet time and in post-Soviet Russia, I chose the textbooks for the high school (10th and 11th Grades) since they describe modern history (including major sensitive and troubled periods) and give a picture of the national future (a direction that was supposed to follow). Therefore, the textbooks for high schools were the target of the most frequent and drastic changes.

Studying the most recent changes in state politics towards historical education, I have also used the materials and instructions the school teachers received from the Ministry of Education last year. These instructions were aimed at helping teachers explain the Russian invasion of Ukraine properly. These sources have not been publicly disclosed and were supposed to provide guidelines for internal use. They are essential in understanding the anxiety and future thinking which drove the state to conduct the tremendous propaganda attack on schools.

In addition to textbooks and instructions for using them, other texts such as public speeches, addresses, regulations, and other official documents provide the context for my findings. In Russia, the industry of writing and publishing educational textbooks is government-regulated. For this reason, it is susceptible to changes in public discourse and emotional messages from the President. Thus, the 'voice of the state' as a primary 'customer' of rewriting history is always involved.

Literature review

The term *collective memory* refers to memories of past events that are shared by members of larger social groups (Halbwachs 1992, 1980). In contrast to history and historical accounts of the past, events represented in collective memory do not necessarily have to be factually accurate but can be biased and may thus consist of event interpretations that serve group identity projects (Hirst and Manier 2008; Wertsch and Roediger 2008). Collective memory and future thought have become topics of great current interest in memory studies. Recent research shows that the way people think about their personal and collective future is shaped by national, social, historical, and cultural factors. In Europe and the US, when people reflect on their personal past and look ahead to their personal future, they tend to focus on positive events in both cases. When asked about the past of a collective such as a nation, people also view things positively. But when people are asked to imagine the future of their nation, they often have a more negative view (Liu and Szpunar 2023; Yamashiro and Pashkov 2023). My research suggests that Russians' imagination of the future is not stably positive or negative, at least as reflected in official history textbooks. Instead, in recent years, the state has shifted its vision of the future from positive to negative, and this is reflected in school textbooks.

Wertsch (2021) has harnessed the notion of schematic narrative template – schematised underlying codes which contrast with specific narratives about historical events. In the case of Russia, he outlined a narrative template called the 'Expulsion-of-Alien-Enemies template'. This schematic underlying code shapes Russian understanding of multiple episodes of invasion, suffering, and eventual victory over enemies that have occurred over centuries. This and other narrative template I will describe have been relatively stable and have coexisted in Russia for centuries. However, in particular time periods, one of these narrative templates has come to prevail in discourse and can lead to significant social disruption. The trigger for these changes is to be found emotions that accompany them.

The emotional dynamic of societies and its effect on collective memory have received some coverage in the social sciences. The study of the irrational nature of Nazism's popularity in Germany contributed to the understanding of emotional dynamics in critical ways. Fromm contributed to this discussion by exploring the human roots of destructiveness (Fromm 1955, 1964, 1973). In contrast to rational choice theories that have focused on the 'logic of evil', Fromm pioneered an analysis of what Elias and Dunning (1986) would later call the 'quest for excitement' as a critical source of human irrationality and violence. Following Fromm and Scheff, McLaughlin argued that Hitler's individual psychopathology played an essential role in the irrational aspects of the mass appeal of Nazism and that Hitler's charisma can be explained by the 'emotional, not the cognitive, content' of his message (Scheff 1994; McLaughlin 1996). This 'emotional message' has been conveyed through speeches, media, and education, and it included a collective imagining of the national future.

'Political emotions', including anxiety (Staiger *et al* 2010; Eklundh *et al* 2017), have become central for understanding of socio-political phenomena and community life over the past several years. According to most commentators, the word 'fear' is used to refer to an immediate, objective threat while anxiety refers to an anticipated, but vague and subjective threat. Anxiety is described as a more generalised state while fear is more specific and immediate. The danger-object seems to be in front of us when in a state of fear while in a state of anxiety the individual is not consciously aware of what endangers her. According to Freud, 'anxiety relates to the condition and ignores the object, whereas in the word Fear attention is focused on the object' (Freud 1952, p. 103).

Bourke (2003) speaks of anxiety as a form of anaesthesia that penetrates all pores of social and political life, aiming to displace time. Eklundh *et al* (2017) speaking about the logics of anxiety, see a connection between time thought and anxiety. Anxiety, they stated, as a governing practice cancels political futures, but as a governing strategy of security, anxiety can be seen as the extreme end of the risk society where subjects give away their personal freedoms and civil, political, and human rights for the promise of a better life in the future (pp. 6–7).

As outlined below, in Russia's case, extreme anxiety has been an essential feature of Stalin's and late Putin's times. In both cases, anxiety was experienced not as an absence of the object of fear but the creation of a reality full of all sorts of objects of fear (capitalist states, the bourgeoisie, NATO, the West, traitors, collaborationists, betrayers, LGBTQ+, etc.). This blurring image of the enemy makes the impression that enemies are everywhere, and anybody can turn out to be this enemy. Eklundh *et al* (2017) argue that the lack of the future and overwhelming anxiety are what make the resistance practice possible (any future is better than no future). So far, in Russia, anxiety as a governing strategy has led only to apocalyptic models of social behaviour: self-sacrificing, paralysing, internal immigration, and total silence.

In an anxiety strategy, emotions have always been a significant force that encourages political leaders to undertake rewriting school history and make a particular national narrative prevail. The underlying aim has usually been to use a chosen narrative template to touch certain emotions and thus create a 'community of feelings' (extra-institutional political emotions) (Trošt 2019).

In Russia's case, the creation of such a 'community of feelings' has been challenging over the past century since Russian society experienced several deep traumas (the 1917 Revolution and the brutal civil war that followed, two world wars, Stalinist purges, the collapse of the USSR, etc.) and Russia has not overcome their consequences as it entered into the traumatising war in Ukraine. From this point of view, the state's attempts to construct a unified 'community of feeling' resemble not a dialogue but a collective spiritual session with ghosts from the past who are supposed to guide the nation through the past and present to the future. Such summoned ghosts are always accompanied by emotions, often 'ugly' ones, using Sianne Ngai's term (Ngai 2007).

Though several studies have been conducted about the role of emotions in learning (O'Regan 2003; Swan and Shih 2005; Papanastasiou and Zembylas 2008), the role of emotions in school history has not received much attention in memory studies so far. School textbooks have mostly been examined in terms of their connections with official national narratives. However, some recent researchers have emphasised the importance of exploring the emotional background of the narratives used in history textbooks. Thus, Tamara Trošt explored the role of joyful emotions in school textbooks of former Yugoslavia (Trošt 2019); Eemeli Hakokängäs and colleagues examining the school textbook illustrations of the Finnish Civil War touched upon the subject of emotions lying behind the choice of visual material used (Hakokängäs *et al* 2021). Analysis of the transformation of school curricula and revision of textbooks provides an opportunity to capture these emotional states of a society with its 'social and cultural preoccupations, its anxieties and trepidations' (Schissel and Soysal 2005). Recent work in memory studies highlights the notion that the vision of the future shapes how we make sense of the past, and depending on the nature of the future vision, our reconstructions of the past may differ (Szpunar and Szpunar 2016).

Anxiety versus Positive Future Models in Russian school history: Karamzin's and Pokrovsky's concepts

> 'Russia's past was admirable, its present is more than magnificent, and as for its future — it is beyond anything that the boldest mind can imagine!'
> Alexander von Benckendorff, head of the Secret Police in Imperial Russia (1836)

Karamzin's contribution

In the Russian Empire, education was a privilege of the higher classes, or –*dvorianstvo* usually by virtue of aristocratic rank but sometimes by wealth. Most other people were illiterate. Those who belonged to the *dvorianstvo* were home- or gymnasium-educated; they usually acquired extensive knowledge of ancient history, world history, and geography and could speak several European languages. The first comprehensive work dedicated specifically to Russian history, a work that created the Russian imperial narrative, was '*History of the Russian State*', a 12-volume national history by Nikolay Karamzin. Published at the beginning of the 19th century, '*History of the Russian State*' remained a reference book for most Russian higher classes and monarchies for many years. In providing his overview of Russian history, Karamzin used a sort of Russian Empire narrative formula: 'Russia was founded by victories and one-man management, perished from autocracy, and was saved by a wise autocracy' (Karamzin 1814). Following this logic, Karamzin presented the Russian Empire narrative template based on the following ideas: necessity of constant expansion as a holy mission of the Russian nation (the Russian Empire, and the Russian government in particular, have a sacred debt to enlighten, educate, and develop the neighbours in 'right' way). The role of the monarch is to be the wisest and most intelligent representative of the nation, something that involve ignoring 'national questions' (ie, viewing other nations as 'smaller brothers' of the Russia and not worth considering). And the last feature of this narrative template applied to the future: the best and the sole way to save Russia as a great power was to maintain the monarchy and the Russian Empire in perpetuity.

'*History of the Russian State*' was Karamzin's gift to Alexander I after the end of the Napoleonic wars in the early nineteenth century. The whole text focused on monarchs' decisive role in history and was an account of the future focused on the idea of inheritance. 'God only knows the future; however, following our logic, we are expecting peace, so desirable by nations and Monarchs, who want to govern for the benefit of people, for human morals, for virtue, Art and Science, for the State and private well-being', – Karamzin wrote in the Introduction (Karamzin 1816, p. 8). Quoting poet Alexander Pushkin, Karamzin's contemporary, '*History of the Russian State*', explained history in terms of 'a necessity of despotism and delights of the whip'.

After the Russian Revolution, wide-ranging educational reform was initiated when the Bolsheviks came to power. In their era, all social, cultural, political, educational, and scientific development had to serve only one goal – the world proletarian revolution. In imagining the future of socialism and internationalism, the whole concept of Russian history had to be revised. A massive literacy campaign was an essential part of the educational reform, and peasants and proletarians became the primary audience of school classes. The new narrative presented in history textbooks aimed to explain quickly and easily how classes have always been the main driver of progress – and how progress will lead to world socialism in the end.

Pokrovsky's contribution

Mikhail Pokrovsky, the leader of a new Soviet school of thought about history, was the author of the sole history textbook used at schools in the 1920s to the beginning of the 1930s. His '*Brief History of Russia*' was aimed to present a new narrative template: history as the history of people (not monarchs or other individuals, as stressed by Karamzin) fighting against the harsh climate and oppressors to build a society of universal equality and brotherhood. In this narrative template, the future played a highly significant role: the past and the present were part of a grand idea about the future, ie, a constant class struggle that must lead to the 'world proletarian revolution'. Russia was assigned the role of a pioneer who had to help other nations navigate their way to socialism. Class membership and the belief in socialism became the only proper social force that mattered. Pokrovsky's approach was strongly future-focused, sometimes romantic, and naive. In this concept, history was considered a tool for controlling the future. 'To know means to predict, and to predict means to be able to and to control. Thus, understanding the past allows us to control the future' (Pokrovsky 1920, p. 6).

The two distinct narratives used by Karamzin and Pokrovsky radically differed in their leading characters. However, they have one common point: both were focused on positive future thinking. The image of the future appeared to be stable, secure, and bright – both under autocracy in Karamzin's work and under socialism in Pokrovsky's book. Also, in both narratives, Russia has been integrated into the world, exchanging experiences with European states and America. Even in Pokrovsky's concept of history, the stigmatisation of capitalism coexisted with the admission of European and US technical progress.

A different approach: The 'besieged fortress' concept and anxiety and negative future thinking

A drastic change happened in the 1930s, with the consolidation of Stalin's rule and the increasing tension in Europe. Stalin was an extremely suspicious person (according to some experts, even paranoid) and had been living in 'fear and the certainty enemies surrounded him' (Khlevniuk 2015). Driven by these emotions, together with a firm belief in the centrality of class struggle – a model in which individuals count for nothing because they are mere cogs in the wheel of a more extensive historical processes – Stalin launched repression campaigns, stoking anxiety, suspicion, and fears in Soviet society.

The process of transferring these 'ugly emotions' from Stalin to Russian society went hand-in-hand with the transformation of history education. After the Revolution and up to the beginning of the 1930s, history received little attention in society. History was not even a component of the official campaigns against the old regime and implicitly entailed the rejection of the lessons of Russian history. In 1931, history was reintroduced as an independent classroom subject, and the complete revision of history teaching was initiated. A new history concept for schools was strongly connected with the development of a state-oriented patriotic ideology reminiscent of tsarist 'great power' (*velikoderzhavnye*) and russocentric traditions in the 1930s (Brandenberger and Dubrovsky 1998), something which Ryutin (1990) referred to as 'national Bolshevism'.

Starting in 1934, the campaign against 'Pokrovsky's school' led to the repression of its followers and a rewriting of the historical narrative. As a result of Stalin's revision of history, the '*History of the USSR: A Short Course*' by Andrey Shestakov appeared in 1937. After that, with some corrections, his historical approach remained the primary and sole official Soviet history up to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Shestakov's book, based on Stalin's views and emotions about history, presented a 'besieged fortress' narrative template: (1) Russia/USSR has always been a peaceful state, surrounded by insidious aggressive enemies who were jealous of Russia/USSR, and wanted to attack and destroy it; (2) since Russia/the USSR has always been a great power and not easy to oppose, its eternal enemies had to recruit collaborators who helped them to destroy Russia/USSR from inside; (3) the only way to oppose this existential threat was to follow the dictates of state power (tsars before and the Communist Party led by wise Stalin later) and to sacrifice everything for the country. Thus, it was decided that the party's co-opting of imperial charisma and even Russian nationalist imagery was the most expedient way to mobilise patriotic sentiment and loyalty in the face of the impending war in Europe.

Hence, the positive image of the future has been replaced by a view full of fear and anxiety. History was presented as the ongoing battle between genuine communists and their insidious enemies, and every Soviet citizen was charged with protecting the state from traitors, spies, and enemies. The USSR allegedly had no intention of attacking anybody and had no fear of threats. At the same time, it was always 'ready to hit back at warmongers', and students were to be on guard since 'the USSR is surrounded by countries, governed by capitalists, spies, and enemies that will keep trying to get into our country and harm us' (p. 207, 208). This updated version of history had completely different lessons than before, lessons based on a negative, anxious view of the future. The task was how to identify and destroy enemies: 'Those who know history will fight against the enemies of our Motherland and strengthen socialism more effectively' (p. 4).

In 1945, with the end of World War II, or the Great Patriotic War as it is known in Russia, suspicion and anxiety were not downplayed, but instead were intensified, as reflected in the 'anti-cosmopolitan' campaign (1948). In this view, achievements of Western scientists and artists were deemed harmful and were erased from all sources of information, including educational literature. Historical science was called 'part of the ideological front', where groups of 'rootless cosmopolitans' tried to spread anti-patriotic views on Soviet history (*Voprosy Istorii* 1949, no. 2, pp. 155–158). In this view distrust, fear, and anxiety were being transmitted across generations, poisoning society. One voice that questioned this tide was the Soviet experimental neurologist Ivan Pavlov, who warned against the danger of turning mass repression and total suspicion into a new normality. In a letter to Vyacheslav Molotov, one of Stalin's leading henchmen, Pavlov wrote: 'Those who are educated to participate in [this campaign], will hardly remain a human being, able to feel and think humanely' (Pavlov 1989, p. 98).

The narrative template outlined by Stalin and set out in Shestakov's book underwent minor changes over the decades. It was passed from generation to generation until the collapse of the USSR. After de-Stalinisation in the 1950s, the atmosphere of overwhelming fear was eliminated. However, the Khrushchev Thaw starting in 1956 did not impact the history textbooks as expected: the glorification of Stalin's person was erased, but the concept of a 'besieged fortress' and the intense anxiety of being attacked remained unchanged. Another essential feature of the historical instructions that remained until the USSR collapsed was the focus on sacrifice. Pupils were educated to believe that the highest form of courage is self-sacrifice for the Party and the state. Feats accomplished by the Soviet people during World War II and those by pioneers-heroes were set out as examples.

When it comes to representing the future and future threats, no significant changes emerge when comparing texts of the history textbooks published in the 1940s and the 1960s. 'American capitalists want to start a third world war threatening to use hydrogen and nuclear, bacteriological and chemical weapons as well as other means of mass extermination', – said the textbook of 1952 (Bazilevich *et al* 1952, p. 414). A book published 9 years later repeated: 'There were people who wanted to undermine nations' wish to live in peace. In America and other capitalist states, there are calls for a new war against the Soviet Union and other socialist countries' (Alekseev and Kartsov 1961, p. 152). Thus, capitalist states were represented as a central and constant threat to the USSR and socialist countries, a threat that encouraged less than a positive form of future thinking.

Following World War II, suspicion and anxiety were not unique to Soviet society: similar feelings were experienced by Europeans and Americans. The whole period of the Cold War was riddled with a 'red scare' on one side and an 'imperialistic scare' on the other. Against this background, the collapse of the USSR seemed to be a promising start that was supposed to bridge the divide between Russia and the West and create a new national narrative.

Anxiety and a troubling future: the inclusive concept of school history (the 1990s)

The 1990s was a challenging time for Russia: an era of tectonic shifts in domestic and foreign politics that launched a completely new era with enormous hopes and prospects. The pervasive 'wind of change' brought the gifts of democracy: freedom of speech, economic activity, religion, and political views – everything Russia had never experienced before. The works of previously repressed and banned authors became available to readers. These texts spurred discussions in Russian society and made people question the past. For instance, in the 1990s, the essay by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 'Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations', was published in Russian for the first time. In this essay, Solzhenitsyn called for a complete revision of Russian history, saying, 'For half a century now, we have acted on the conviction that the guilty ones were the tsarist establishment, the bourgeois patriots, social democrats, White Guards, priests, émigrés, subversives, kulaks … wreckers, oppositionists, enemies of the people, nationalists, Zionists, imperialists, militarists, even modernists – anyone and everyone except you and I! Obviously, it was they, not we, who had to reform' (Solzhenitsyn 1973, p. 106). He pointed out that the first step to recovering and rebuilding the Russian national image and making its future better than the past is to take responsibility and apologise to all its neighbours, having realised that 'there was no neighbor we have not offended'.

The same ideas of historical revision focused on taking responsibility for the past and recognising its 'sicknesses' also flooded the educational system. The main difference between the textbooks published in the 1990s and those of the Soviet time is the turn from monologue to dialog in school classes, from one state-approved truth to a diversity of perspectives. For the first time, an attempt was made to teach pupils to think critically and to draw their conclusions by choosing between the different views provided. This ability to think critically and reject blind pride for the state was supposed to prevent the repeat of tragic mistakes made in the past. In his introduction to the textbook '*Russian History in the 20th Century*', historian Igor Dolutsky emphasised that it is time to reject 'a patriotic laziness' and 'to stop loving our motherland with closed eyes and head bowed down' (Dolutsky 1996a, p. 6). The textbook included numerous quotes from various historical sources (documents, fiction, diaries, poems, etc.), often contradicting one another. The author offered students the opportunity to think by themselves and draw conclusions. Thus, in a chapter dedicated to the Russian-Japanese War (1904–1905), after talking about those fallen fighting for Russia, the following questions were proposed: 'Could one become a hero fighting in an unfair war? How do you think one should proceed in a situation when his/her country initiates an unfair war?' (Dolutsky 1996a, p. 95)

The textbooks of the 1990s introduced a new approach to the history of the Great Patriotic War and the role of the USSR in it. New books emphasised an equal impact of the Allies in the victory over Nazism and reminded readers that the war started in 1939 and the USSR participated in it from the very first day – but on Germany's side (Dolutsky 1996a; Kreder 1996). In '*Modern History of the 20th Century*', Alexander Kreder pointed out that among the Allies, only one totalitarian state – the USSR – did not bring liberation; on the contrary, it caused the strengthening of a totalitarian regime (Kreder 1996, p. 131). Dolutsky, in his textbook, rejected the Soviet tradition of blaming the Allies for delaying D-Day ('a second front', as it is called in Russia), recalling that 'it was we (even against our will) who joined Great Britain which had been fighting alone against fascist Germany for a year by that time. It was our country that should be considered "a second front"' (Dolutsky 1996b, p. 48).

Understanding history as the collective action of all nations, including their proud and shameful pages, allowed the pupils to envision the future as a shared responsibility of all people. Shared anxiety and fears in the face of this future have been a part of such future thinking. Kreder wrote: 'Looking back to the history of the 20th century, it is tough to reject pessimism. It causes the feeling of fragility and instability in people's lives. At the same time, the end of the century gives rise to cautious optimism [...] Humanity has rejected revolutionary utopians, and the 20th century taught us to resist the temptation of wishful thinking'. Among the global problems that make people feel anxious, Kreder listed the persistence of hotbeds of conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, the risk of nuclear proliferation, and the problem of climate change (Kreder 1996, pp. 294–295).

Dolutsky's anxiety about the future concerned retreating back to totalitarian, authoritarian, or nationalist regimes. At the end of his textbook, he warned pupils by quoting the Russian bard poet Alexander Galich, who cautioned against the danger of following those who say they know exactly what and how it must be done since it always ends with another form of dictatorship (Dolutsky 1996a, p. 459). In Galich's words:

> No matter what, do not be the scared
> nether plague, nor jail or hail
> Fear the one who says,
> 'I do know what must be done!'[1]

Dolutsky also cautioned against writing history as it is unfolding. However, he could not resist this temptation: in the revised version of his textbook in 2001, a new chapter concerning Putin coming to power was included. In this chapter, Dolutsky emphasised that a considerable number of seats in the Parliament of a new Russia had been taken over by former Soviet nomenklatura made up of powerful people in the state hierarchy, including the president himself. Moreover, he quoted an expert who considered Putin's coming to power as a coup. This did not go unnoticed because the times were changing.

In sum, the textbooks of the 1990s were a first attempt to implement an entirely new narrative approach characterised by inclusiveness and admitting historical responsibility. Russia was presented as a sick country, suffering from constant national narcissism, Napoleonism, an inferior complex, and denial of guilt. In this narrative, the responsibility for the crimes committed in the past was not only brought up but was put onto people equally as to the political leaders. From this perspective, the future was not romantic or idealised but an effort at collective healing of wounds, which – if accomplished – was supposed to prevent repeated trauma and even lead to collective recovery.

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[1] In origin: Не бойтесь тюрьмы, не бойтесь сумы,
Не бойтесь мора и глада,
А бойтесь единственно только того,
Кто скажет: "Я знаю, как надо!"

From positive to negative future thinking: Anxiety and school history under Putin

> We can't allow anyone to impose a sense of guilt on us!
>
> Vladimir Putin, 2007

Putin's first presidential speech – the address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation – on July 8, 2000, was called 'What sort of Russia we are building'. It aimed to list the main priorities for the new Russia. Putin began by blaming the previous administrations for relying on foreign advisors, foreign credits, and investments that, from his point of view, made Russia weak and dependent. The time to return to previous power and glory was coming now, declared Putin. He also emphasised that 'accurate information about the events occurring in our country is now the question of both our image and national security' (Putin 2000).

Putin came to power when the war in Chechnya was still ongoing, and the Russian army was fighting against 'Chechen separatists and terrorists', as the pro-government mass media called them. Speaking about information as a sort of 'weapon' which can be used against Russia, Putin expressed great concern and anxiety that such information attacks could be an existential threat to the nation. In his view, the perspective on the 1990s' reforms as initiated and dictated by the West was being implemented in mass consciousness and becoming increasingly popular in Russia. Correspondingly, the blame for Russia's inability to jump into the prosperous, democratic future immediately was put on Europe and the States, and those who benefited from the 'Western advice, help, and credits' (Putin 2000). Books, including textbooks, published with the financial support of foreign foundations and organisations, were targeted.

In 2003, Putin latched on to several denunciations of 'harmful' history textbooks used in Russian schools. Russian authorities and mass media publicly criticised those by Igor Dolutsky and Alexander Krener and 24 other books published under the Open Society Foundation's support.[2] George Soros was personally blamed for 'buying off the Russian young people' and for 'propaganda of harmful Western views on history' by sponsoring educational literature. During a meeting with Russian historians the same year, Putin appealed to 'cleanse' the school textbooks of 'ideological waste', saying that the textbooks were not supposed to be the arena for a 'new political and ideological fighting'. New textbooks, Putin said, – should mobilise an intense sense of patriotism and pride for the country's history. The textbooks published under the Open Society Foundation's support were excluded from the school literature list approved by the government. In an interview, Igor Dolutsky reacted to this change in the state narrative, saying that 'the state wanted to educate obedient executors who would enthusiastically cry out to announce their true patriotism and would voluntarily die being run over by tanks' (Dolutsky 2003).

Putin's administration came to the idea that there was no way to construct a 'new bright future' for Russia based on guilt, shame, or even reflection on its past and present.

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[2] After the collapse of the USSR, Russia faced substantial economic instability. Science and the educational system suffered from a lack of finances. Many scientists lost their jobs; there was no money for writing and publishing school literature. Under these circumstances, some European and US foundations provided sponsorships and funding for supporting science and education in new democratic Russia. The Open Society Foundation was one of them. In the former Soviet Union, Soros gave $200 million between 1993 and 1994 to support some 30,000 scientists who had lost official research funding. Foundations across the network funded the production of new school textbooks with a new focus on critical thinking.

The attitude towards the country's history in terms of a diseased history (something postulated by the authors of the textbooks of the 1990s) has been replaced by the constant glorification of Russia, rejection of guilt or shame, and the diminution of other countries and their accomplishments. The first attempt to implement a new state narrative about glorious Russia with the prospect of becoming a superpower was '*Modern History of Russia: 1945-2006. A Manual for Teachers*' by Alexander Filippov (2007a). Although this book was intended for history teachers, not for pupils, it is worth analysing since it was issued to give clear instructions on the 'correct' perspectives on Russian history.

In this book, the author did not hesitate to whitewash Stalin and justify the repressions of Soviet citizens. The short section about the post-war repressions started with the following statement: 'Because of the Cold War with the West, there was no room for democratization of the society in the USSR' (p. 36). The repressions themselves were described very shortly, without details and without focusing on Stalin's personal role in them. The author briefly mentioned that a 'Series of ideological campaigns aimed to stop any dissidence and implement the "party" (read "Stalin's") point of view in culture, art, and science, swept over the country' (p. 37) and then the author said that the Party elite suffered greatly from these repressions (p. 37). After reading such things, pupils could get no accurate impression of the character of post-war repressions, Stalin's personal responsibility for them, the number of victims, and the ordinary people involved.

The USSR, in general, is now presented as being in a state of general prosperity and universal justice. According to Filippov, 'The Soviet Union was not a democracy. However, it was an example of the best and fairest society for millions worldwide […] For more than 70 years, the internal politics of Western countries regarding human rights has been improving under the considerable influence of the USSR – a great power that managed to carry out a social revolution and won the cruelest of the wars' (Filippov 2007a, p. 6).

The need to glorify the past was declared by Putin in 2007 when during his presentation at the All-Russian Conference for Teachers of Humanities and social sciences, he said: 'We can't allow anyone to impose a sense of guilt on us -those who are blaming us should look at themselves first!' (Putin 2007). Filippov instantly picked up this theme. However, the image of the future presented in textbooks became an issue. In Filippov's book, Russia's future still seemed less than clear. For a solid and prosperous state, the analysis of consequences and a systematic approach in the state's decision-making is required in the opinion of Filippov (2007a, p. 484). The young generation was supposed to continue the constant struggle of the Russian people to be among those who 'would make history rather than among those who would be marginalized' (Filippov 2007a, p. 483). What exactly was meant by that was unclear.

Filippov, following Putin, considered school history as a weapon on the ideological battlefield, and the young generation was supposed to be the main target for the attack from the West. In an interview, he said: 'I think Russia can be proud of its history […] So far, Russia has been a target of ideological attacks, including those from the outside […] The aim of these attacks was, first, to demonstrate that Russia, throughout its history, has always been peripheral to the world. And second, Russia, as an inheritor of a totalitarian regime, must feel guilty and apologise for all real and imaginary crimes forever. Overall, they wanted us to feel guilty and to instill in us an inferiority complex' (Filippov 2007b).

Mass opposition protests in Russia in 2011–2013 marked a significant turning point for revising the whole approach to school history. These were the largest protest demonstrations in Russia for 23 years, and Putin could hardly ignore the age range of the participants: most of them were people aged 18–28; the proportion of those aged 23–24 was especially high (Zacharov 2012). Putin declared that the leaders of protests served the interests of foreign states that were buying the young people off. It seemed to him that the young generation was getting out of his control and was already poisoned by the West and used by the West for 'rocking' Russia.

In 2013, the reform of school history was started soon after suppressing the protests and repressing their participants. It aimed to create a single history concept (or a 'single history textbook', as Putin called it) for schools – the only history narrative as dictated by the government. Many respectable Russian historians tried to oppose the state intervention in composing history textbooks. 'Where is the exact list of contradictions or anti-scientific approaches that allegedly exist in current schoolbooks?' responded the well-known Russian academician, Valery Tishkov.[3] Instead of the respected Russian Academy of Sciences, the so-called Russian Historical Society controlled the creation of the new single history textbook. The chair of this society was Sergey Naryshrin, a former director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, who was hardly an expert on historical scholarship. The website of the Russian Military-Historical Society stated that in new textbooks, 'a positive view on our history has been represented and the toughness of our people in front of external threats, as well as the ability to sacrifice themselves in the name of motherland and readiness to help those who were a subject of aggression, have been highlighted'.

The result of this reform was three series of history textbooks that have been approved and distributed in Russian schools. With minor changes, these series have been used up to the present (2023). New textbooks indeed reflected the state-approved narrative of Russian history as an eternal triumph. The most terrible and sensitive events have been mentioned only briefly and drily (ie, only one page was dedicated to the Great Purge of 1936–1937, and the opposition protests in 2012–2013 were referred to as a 'demonstration of raised political activity of the society' with no mention of repression followed) or not mentioned at all. The latter 'blank spots' in history include the reasons for the Soviet army's initial devastating failures after the German invasion of 1941 and the fact that a joint German–Soviet military parade took place in Brest-Litovsk in 1939. Such episodes could cast a shadow over the USSR's image.

An essential feature of the narrative was the tendency to glorify the state's role in history. In Pokrovsky's account and that of post-Stalin Soviet textbooks, classes (the proletariat, etc.) were the primary 'engines of progress'. Soviet propaganda constantly repeated that the real power in the state belonged to the people. In a new Russian narrative, the old Karamzin concept of strong monarch power as a guarantor of the nation's stability was revived. The problems of the 1990s were boiled down to the weakness of a president's power. Putin's success in all spheres was caused by the consolidation and strengthening of the president's authority.

Speaking about the Russian role in the international arena, historians have recently emphasised the aggressive policy of NATO and the U.S. against Russia and their wish to humiliate Russia. The European Union has been described as a weak structure that follows American orders, and NATO expansion appeared as a constant threat, along with the assurance of Russia's ability to effectively oppose it. In the conclusion of an earlier textbook published in 2014, it was even said that 'Russia will be able to solve its historical problems and reach its goals only in cooperation with the Eastern and Western countries, but also by relying on its resources' (Gorinov *et al* 2016, p. 109).

Since 2021, Putin's obsession with the idea of conspiracy in the Russian nation and its young generations in particular who have been influenced by Western (read 'anti-Russian') ideology and values has become ever more evident. Putin and state propagandists increasingly quote the so-called Dulles Plan, in accordance with which the U.S. allegedly had an insidious strategy to destroy the USSR by instilling Western values in the Soviet people through alcoholism, drug addiction, and moral degradation. Putin seemed to believe that this plan existed and is still in force. In 2021, during a press conference, he noted, 'I want to remind you of what our opponents have been saying for centuries: Russia cannot be defeated; it can be destroyed only from within. This was done successfully at the end of World War I and in the 90s when the USSR was broken up' (Putin 2021a).

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[3] https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=344482752337752&id=100003280900276.

Several months before this press conference, Putin signed a recent version of the President's decree on the 'Strategy of National Security'. The text of this decree states that 'we should fight not only against extremists who are undermining the constitutional order but also against those who popularize Western culture and ethics'. As stated in the document, 'information and psychological diversion' and 'westernisation of culture' were being carried out in the country (Putin 2021b). This strengthened the threat of Russia losing its cultural sovereignty. Moreover, Russia's enemies (both external and internal) were blamed for the falsification of Russian and world history, misrepresentation of historical truth, destruction of historical memory, and thereby, for weakening a 'vanguard' nation (read: 'the Russians'). Thus, the westernisation of the country was officially identified as an existential threat to Russia, and those involved in its popularisation were equated with extremists. Among the ways of opposing this threat, a military-patriotic education was put forward.

The fear of this existential threat of Russia undergoing westernisation and thus being controlled by the so-called collective West was one of Putin's motives for launching the war in Ukraine. And as Stalin before, Putin conveyed his fears, suspicions, and anxiety to Russian society. He realised that almost every family in Russia has relatives or friends in Ukraine, and nearly every family includes those who fought against Russia or immigrated from it to Ukraine. Thus, Putin's government initiated a massive propaganda attack on schools to establish the sole 'right' view on what was happening between Russia and Ukraine and prevent shame or guilt.

The earlier state narrative about the glorious past and bright future was changed for the Soviet concept of a 'besieged fortress', where even the existence of Russia was under question. In March 2022, a new patriotic lesson called 'Conversations About Important Things' was added to the school's curriculum. Teachers received special instructions on how to conduct these lessons. For the first lesson, the list of 22 'complicated questions'[4] that pupils might have asked and the 'right' answers have been attached. This list can be regarded as a list of fears produced and conveyed by the state. I have divided them into three groups.

The first group addressed anxiety about the shame/guilt for launching the war. It included seven questions, such as: 'Why have we invaded Ukraine?', 'Is it true that a real war is occurring in Ukraine?', 'Why couldn't this conflict be peacefully resolved?', and 'Is it true that the Russian troops are surrounding and occupying the Ukrainian cities?'

The second group of questions concerned the existential threats to Russia in the present and future. This group of questions is the largest (11 of 22), demonstrating the colossal anxiety for the future. It includes the following questions: 'Is the conflict with Ukraine a threat to us? Is it possible that the war could spread into our country?', 'Could this situation in Ukraine lead to World War III?', 'Is it possible that the conflict could escalate into a civil war in Ukraine?'

The third group of questions relates to the preoccupation with the young people's participation in antiwar protests or being influenced by antiwar views of friends/family/media. I put five questions in this group, including: 'What can we do in this situation?', 'How shall we react to calls in social media and messengers to join opposition actions?',

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[4] Documents from the author's personal archive.

'What should we do if we are suggested to post a Z-symbol in support of our military forces?', 'What shall we do if one of the parents supports the operation in Ukraine and the other one is against it?' and 'How should we communicate with those (friends, relatives, schoolmates) who do not support the special military operation in Ukraine?'

The new patriotic lessons were supposed to supplement the main history course, which was revised to reflect a new state narrative. Teachers were instructed to focus on heroic examples of self-sacrifice in honour of Motherland. The materials drawn for the lesson[5] entitled 'Heroes of our time' included a fragment of a movie telling an imaginary story of Muhammad from Dagestan, who served for the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. One day unknown extremists attacked Muhammad's friends and family who went for a picnic, insisted he leave his service, and threatened him with death. When he refused these demands, the extremists immediately shot him. This terrifying story was supposed to inspire the kids to think about true patriots and heroes. Other examples of people's heroism followed it, demonstrated in different periods. All the heroes were from Russia (but belonged to various ethnicities), and most died.

Escalation of the atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety deeply affected pupils. After such a patriotic lesson, a young boy said, with some bitter humour: 'Should I dig my grave right now or may I do it later?'[6] The new series of history textbooks created to convey a new state narrative about Russia living in a ring of enemies and calling for sacrifice is on the way. The Ministry of Education promised schools that they would receive the textbooks by the beginning of the new school year of 2023. This new textbook on the modern history of Russia is already published. It includes a chapter justifying the war in Ukraine and describing a military threat to Russia: 'The establishment of military bases and training camps for the Ukrainian army by the USA and Great Britain encouraged the Ukrainian authorities (Zelensky was elected president of Ukraine in 2019) to prepare a violent takeover in Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), Luhansk People's Republic (LPR)[7] and Russian Crimea. According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, U.S. laboratories have been organised on the territory of Ukraine to develop biological weapons. Kyiv called for possessing a nuclear weapon and possibly using it against Russia. A young generation of Ukrainians is supposedly being educated on the basis of neo-Nazi ideas and traditions to hate Russia. In Ukrainian schoolbooks, Russia was represented as the main enemy of Ukraine, its oppressor and enslaver' (Danilov *et al* 2023, p. 124).

Vladimir Medinsky's words which I quoted at the beginning of the paper demonstrate an ominous point of view which is inherent in the current Russian narrative, and this is not surprising. Having learned lessons from the past, Russian society is living on with the ghosts from the past and following previous narratives, none of which is to be dismissed entirely. The current narrative template, therefore, is a confusing combination of previous narratives (except the inclusive one): the Empire narrative with its expansionism and etatism, the early Soviet dream of the Russians being a pioneer and guiding light to the other nations, and a 'besieged fortress' constantly waiting of attack. With all these narratives still in use, with 'besieged fortress' being prevalent, it suggests that there is no stable past. Living in this history does not cause optimism and a feeling of stability and security. Instead, it involves a traumatic, anxious everyday experience of living with ghosts. The atmosphere of living this life is brilliantly shown in the movie 'To Live!' (2012) ('Жить!') directed by Vasily Sigarev. The film's heroine could not come to terms with the tragic death of her daughters, and instead of working out this trauma, she dug their bodies from the graves, brought them home, and lived with them, pretending they were alive.

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[5] Materials from the author's personal archive.

[6] https://meduza.io/feature/2022/09/02/etot-novyy-urok-polnyy-bred-mama-razreshila-progulivat.

[7] Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) are internationally unrecognized republics in east Ukraine, occupied by Russia since 2014.

This weird story reflects today's Russian approach to history: instead of bringing up past traumas, discussing them, learning lessons, and creating a new reality and new prospect of the future, people are still experiencing living in the midst of exhumated ghosts who are supposed to navigate them into the future.

Conclusions

I have outlined the role of temporal thought in changing school history in Russia. As I illustrated, the state conducts its own time travel, and driven by the emotions caused by the image of the future, it rewrites the past and affects the present.

When the current Russian authorities initiated the publication of new history books in the middle of the ongoing war in Ukraine, many were perplexed as to why the government rushed to do it. As I have suggested, however, this is unsurprising, given the twists and turns of the state's approach to school history in Russia and the motives for their changes. Russian authorities have used the narrative templates from the past (ie, Russian Empire template, early Soviet one, and 'besieged fortress' narrative) and infused them with strong emotions (anxiety, fear, suspicion, anger, ressentiment, etc.) to construct a 'usable' image of the past, which is critical for the future. What is this future image supposed to look like, according to the government approved school narrative?

Exploring the school history and the most recent textbooks (together with the materials for new patriotic lessons), I demonstrated that ghosts from the past (people fallen in world wars, their feats, and the narratives used to relate them) are an essential force for explaining the present and mobilising particular emotions among people. In the new schoolbooks, the 'new heroes' who sacrificed themselves in the Russia-Ukraine war are represented as the heirs of those fallen in previous 'glorious' wars of Russia (World War I, World War II, 'peaceful missions' in Afghanistan, Syria, etc.). The message that the state is sending is clear: we are forced to be involved in the war, this war is the protective war for saving the existence of Russia as a sovereign state and for protecting the world against the aggressive neocolonial power of the West, and everyone should sacrifice (the usual way of life, comfort and if necessary – their life). The state, in return, provides the memory, which was the main reason to rush the school history reform: to prove that sacrifices will be memorialised, not forgotten.

This promise to remember is an extremely effective instrument in Russia. On the Russian monuments commemorating those fallen in WWII, it is always written: 'No one and nothing will ever be forgotten'. The state is trying to convince those who are supposed to do the killing and dying today that they would join the generations of fallen heroes of the past. It is hardly surprising, then, that the government rushed to publish new schoolbooks for high school students who might soon be on their way to Ukraine. Portraits of 'new heroes' are now on cities' billboards, hanging on school walls, and many are already on the pages of schoolbooks. Based on the mixture of the previous narrative templates, in which self-sacrificing and future memory played an essential role, the young generation is being taught to defend the Motherland from the existential threat with their own lives following the promise of being remembered in the future.

In contrast to research that finds that people often hold on to a positive sense of their personal past and future but exhibit negative national future thinking, in Russia now, people's personal future is strongly tied to the national one. People may still try to hold on to an optimistic view of the future of themselves as individuals, but it is likely that if Russia does not work through the past traumas, they will live in the midst of haunted images from the past that will not provide a productive guide to life.

The historian Peter Novick noted that collective memory tends to deny the ‘pastness’ of events and ‘insist on their continuing presence’ (Novick 1999, p. 4). This applies to Russia’s case today where the past remains the past in the present – or even the past in the future. Past fears, traumas, and nightmares continue to be transmitted from generation to generation, making it more difficult for people to imagine possibilities for different futures. Hopefully, one day the discussions of the past, which started in the 1990s, will be back to collective discourse and schoolbooks and will lead to the transformation of Russian society, taking responsibility and recovering.

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