Russian National Identity and History Today: Research on the Presentation of National Identity in Russian Children's Books on History

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Abstract: This study describes the concepts of Russian national identity and Russian history that are presented in current Russian children's books on history. The analysis allowed for the formulation of the semantic profiles of "Russia", "Russian Empire", "Soviet Union", "Great Patriotic War" and "Russian people". These concepts include key aspects of Russian national identity and history.
A comparison with Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks has demonstrated that current concepts are directly related to those of the Soviet and post-Soviet period. Russian history is told as linear and harmonious, practically inevitable in its course. It ranges from the *Kievan Rus* to the *Russian Empire* and the *Soviet Union* to *today's Russia*. Russia, the Russian nation with the tsar at its center, embodies a beautiful world. The children's books narrate in simple and clear form the myth of the distinctiveness of the Russian nation and its historical path.

Keywords: Russia, national identity, culture of remembrance, history policy and education

1. Introduction

This study describes the concepts of *Russian national identity* and *Russian history* that are presented in current Russian children's books on history. It is based on a content analysis of all sentences and statements relating to "Russia", "Russian Empire", "Soviet Union", "Great Patriotic War" and "Russian people" which I extracted from the children's books. Thus, central components of Russian national self-image and Russian history were collected and assembled into an overall picture.

In addition to the *content* and *structure* of the Russian national self-image, I investigate the possible *causes* that may have led to its present form, and I also name its central *functions* in Russian culture. One of these causes is certainly the historical context of memory itself (i.e., the Russian worldview). I assume that the current national self-image and the national image of history emerged from the historically preceding images of self and history and thus represent the current endpoint on an ongoing continuum.

In order to shed light on the historical tradition in which the current image of self and history is placed, I consider the semantic profiles of "Russia", "Soviet Union", "Russian people", "Great Patriotic War" that were present in Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks from the 1980s and 1990s (Notarp, 2001). As a result, continuities and discontinuities have become apparent in the construction of the national self-image and the image of history. Both are to be seen as permanent adaptations to social, political, and cultural conditions and demands.

In the final part of the study, I explore the functions that the national image of self and history serve for Russian society and its relevant political actors, functions that are also of crucial importance to its current form.

2. Critical Historical Research Versus Collective Memory

In Germany, the public and academic rapprochement with Eastern European cultures has become a joint exploration of *their* past. Lars Karl and Igor J. Polianski (2009, p. 7) elaborate on this in their introduction to the conference volume, *History, Politics and the Culture of Remembrance in the New Russia*.

First, the authors argue for a distinction to be made between *historical science* and its methodologically-based knowledge, on the one hand, and *collective memory*, on the other. While the former seeks verifiable statements about the past, the latter is culturally specific and has a certain cultural imprint.

Secondly, the authors disavow a lack of reflection on one's own position of observation, description, and appraisal, which is accompanied in the German case with a morally supported *imperative of memory,* requiring a confession of historical guilt from other cultures as well. In line with Martin Sabrow (2008, p. 20), Karl and Polianski call for maintaining the distinction between historical-analytic knowledge, on one hand, and historical-moral avowal, on the other.

Similarly, Jutta Scherrer hints at the "cultural, political, ideological, and national conditions" (Karl Polianski, 2009, p. 13) under which Western historians consider Russia's search for its own self-image or identity. In her opinion, a historian should try to understand without condemning, although also without apologizing (Scherrer, 2009, p. 23).

Aleida Assmann (2013) differentiates between history and historical science, on the one hand, and the commemorative culture of a society and memory research, on the other. The main task of historical science is to come as close as possible to the "historical truth," while the research of memory describes and explains the contents and forms the collective memory of a community take.

According to Assmann, memory research basically assumes that people live together in groups, societies, and cultures "to which they feel they belong and on the basis of which they define themselves" (2013, p. 20). Thus, individual identity is to a large extent defined by the group, its collective self-image, or collective identity. Collective memory, as Maurice Halbwachs puts it, provides a framework for the individual's memory and contains the collective patterns of the interpretation of events while determining their emotional alignment (Assmann, 2013, p. 18; see also Schenk, 2006, p. 52).

The Russian national self-image and the image of Russian history are seen as part of the collective memory and thus are a part of the Russian worldview (Notarp, 2018, 2019). A *nation´s take on their history* equates to that area of their worldview which is oriented towards the past. It shapes the identity of both the individual and the group. Both individuals and groups/societies construct their view of the past in a way that is useful for them, and they create symbolic constructs with which they align themselves in the present and according to which they organize their existence.

3. Children's Books as Research Material

Children's books on Russian history are unlikely to contain a critical historiography; rather, they focus on the presentation and dissemination of a coherent image of national history and identity. This national self-image certainly claims to be true and fact-based; however, its primary function is to shape the worldview and the national identity of young readers. In addition, I expect that the Russian self-image and the image of history mediated in children's books have a simple and prototypical form. Therefore, the chosen text base seems predisposed to achieve the study's goals.

In any case, it is not my intention to normatively evaluate the children's books themselves. Neither is it my aim to determine whether the books are pedagogically meaningful, morally justifiable, or historically accurate enough (from a Western point of view) to teach children the history of their country. Rather, my goal is to collect from the books the material covering Russia and the Russian nation in an unbiased and neutral way.

This study is based on two children's books on Russian history; a tutorial for students studying Russian as a foreign language; and, additionally, a history textbook for 10th graders in secondary school. One of the children's books addresses preschool children (Golubev et al., 2015), the other one primary school children (Aleškov, 2015). Both tell Russian history in a correspondingly simple manner while employing the style used in fairytales. The tutorial for Russian as a foreign language (Akišina et al., 2015) comprises texts about Russian history and culture; it is targeted at pupils learning Russian who are at the second and third language level (ibid., p. 2) and is also written in a relatively simple narrative style. The only textbook on history is one used for pupils in 10th grade at secondary schools (Volobuev et al., 2016). All of the books which were examined indicate that they comply with the provisions of Act No. 436 of the Russian Federation on the protection of children from information that harms their health and development. Thus, they are among the books recommended or permitted "in accordance with the legislation on use in the educational process" (Article 11 of this Law).[1]

The empirical text base is relatively small and therefore is not comprehensive. The selection of the books examined here is due to their availability also in non-Russian territory. There are certainly children's books on Russian history available on the Russian book market, which convey a slightly different view on Russian history than the books examined in this study. However, the political and social range in which Russian history can be told today is relatively limited (Scheliah, 2014, p. 2). In my view, it is unlikely that a different selection of books would have led to a completely different outcome – or in other words, to a significantly different national self-image and image of Russian history. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that the statements made on the basis of the material chosen for this study do not claim to be universally valid.

Furthermore, I believe that the national self-image and the image of Russian history reconstructed from the abovementioned books, corresponds to the official, state-propagated self-image and image of history. Otherwise, these books would not reference compliance to

[1] http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=LAW&n=181927&rnd=0.5121557663514754&div=LAW#0

Russian law. Additionally, the images of self and history reconstructed in this study should be similar to those that are generally valid in Russian culture.

The study is based on a content analysis with a category system containing the categories:

- Normative statements: what is considered normal, good, correct
- Auto-stereotype: statements and sentences that capture the Russian self-image
- Hetero-stereotypes: statements and sentences that describe the differentiation from others
- Statements about Russia and the Russian people that cannot be assigned to any of the categories, but are still relevant for the reconstruction of the national self-image
- Narratives about the origin of one's own nation, myths about the struggle of the people for the fatherland, about the victims of the people for their fatherland
- Narratives of central events in history that are still relevant to the national self-image

The statements and sentences determined by the content analysis were assigned to the subject areas: "Russia", "Russian Empire", "Soviet Union", "Great Patriotic War", "Russian people", "Russian national history". Thus, central components of Russian national self-image and Russian history were collected and assembled into an overall picture.

4. The National Self-image and the Image of Russian History

From the beginning, the books examined paint a consistent and continuous picture of Russian history and the Russian people. It all starts with ancient Rus, *Drevnjaja Rus*, with the story of the ancient Slavs who were the ancestors of Russian and other Slavic peoples and who lived as simple peasants in settlements.

> The Slavs were a proud and warlike people, skillful, resourceful, and cunning warriors. ... By nature well-tempered, they were cruel during battle. The Slavs knew neither guile nor malice – they had a simple and sincere mind and were friendly to their prisoners (Akišina et al., 2015, p. 11). (All translations from Russian are my own, U.N.)

4.1. Russia/Russian Empire

According to the books examined, the concept of "Russia/Russian Empire" consists of four central elements: the Orthodox faith, the state, the tsar, and the fatherland.

4.1.1. Orthodox Faith and the State

The adoption of Christianity is the basis of and precondition for the formation of an independent state. Orthodox faith is the unifying force that brings together the Slavic people and allows for the foundation of a Russian state. In turn, the foundation of an independent state is a prerequisite

for the development of social life, a unified policy, economy, and culture.

> The most important event in Russian history in the 10thcentury was the adoption of Christianity in 988. Pagan polytheism made the unification of the state difficult and complicated Russia's dialogue with developed countries (Golubev, 2015, p. 12).
>
> The foundation of an independent state is the most important event in the life of every nation and is a very difficult and lengthy process. But it is the only way to create politics, economics, culture, and other important aspects of people's lives (Golubev, 2015, p. 6).

4.1.2. Tsar and Fatherland

Tsarism is a central part of the "Russia" construct since both are discursively linked. The Russian tsar and the Russian fatherland are a discursive unit, which complement and modify each other. The 18th century, for example, is described as the most luminous in Russian history. At that time, tsars, like Peter the Great, united the country and turned it into an empire, a world power.

> In the history of Russia there have been many glorious periods, although the 18th century is considered to be the most brilliant. Great rulers, the creation of a unified administrative system, the development of the economy, and great military victories allowed Russia to become a strong world power (Golubev, 2015, p. 42).
>
> A great transformer of Russia was Tsar Peter I. Under his rule, the Russian Empire became a powerful state with which the whole world had to reckon (Aleškov, 2015, p. 30).

Russia's history is a success story also thanks to the tsars. Through military victories, economic development, and the unification of the administrative system, they turned the country and its people into a large, powerful nation.

> By the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian Empire united more than a hundred ethnic groups as well as representatives from all of the world's religions ...
>
> Thanks to the railways, the enormous country was joined into a single unit: the Far East was connected to the western provinces and the northern regions to the southern regions (Golubev, 2015, p. 66).

The image of a strong, victorious, and independent world power is embodied in these passages above. Russia – the fatherland – is inseparable from its ruler – the tsar. The history of the country is the history of the Russian people and their tsars. The terms "Russia" (*Rossija*) and "Russian" (*russkij/rossijskij*) refer to the multi-ethnic great Russian state and its corresponding territory. (With regard to the terms "russkij" and "rossijskij" as well as the concept of a "multiethnic nation," see Rowley, 2000, p. 32 and Pavleeva, 2011).

4.2. Soviet Union

The narrative of the examined books portrays the Soviet Union as immediately following the Russian Empire. From the Russian Empire emerged a new, no less powerful state – the USSR.

> The beginning of the 20th century brought with it turbulent events which resulted in the formation of a new, equally powerful state on the territory of the Russian Empire – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Golubev, 2015, p. 68).

> The construct "USSR" refers to the union of many nations; the semantic components "Soviet" and "socialist" underscore that many different ethnic groups live peacefully in one state. All people in the Soviet Union are equal, free, and live justly.

> During the Civil War, several independent republics were formed on the territory of the former Russian Empire: Soviet Russia, Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Belarus, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Republic, which included Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In 1922, the republics merged into a new state – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The word "socialist" meant that all people in the USSR were equal, free, and lived justly (Aleškov, 2015, p. 58).

Furthermore, the Soviet Union is portrayed in the books as a peaceful state; although, at the same time, it is seen as a state which was required to defend itself against its enemies. It is also portrayed as having been the world leader in terms of the economy and technology and as a place of groundbreaking inventions and developments. Furthermore, the Soviet Union is depicted as a humane and socially-just country where people lived well and justly. The foundation of the concept is based on *equality*, *freedom*, *social justice*, *peace*, and *economic success*.

> Soviet science flourished and important scientific discoveries were made (Aleškov, 2015, p. 59).

Thus, as the books espouse, the greatness and fame of the Russian Empire of the 18th and 19th centuries continued into the 20th century in the form of the Soviet Union. The positive self-image of the Russian nation was further developed and strengthened by the numerous economic and technical achievements of the Soviet nation.

4.3. The Russian Federation

The Russian Federation (i.e., Russia) immediately follows the Soviet Union. All of the positive qualities of the Russian and Soviet empires are thus transferred to the new Russia – the only change is the name of the country.

The concept of today's "Russia" consists of the following semantic components: the largest and most beautiful country on earth; home to more than 100 different ethnic groups who live together peacefully and equally; large forests and rivers, rich in mineral resources; and Russian

as the national language.

> Over 100 nations live in our country. The official language on Russian territory is Russian. Furthermore, all people have the right to preserve their native language (Golubev, 2015, p. 92).
>
> In 1991, the country received the name of the Russian Federation. ... Russia is the largest country in the world. It is located on two continents – Europe and Asia. … The capital of our country is Moscow, one of the largest cities in the world (Aleškov, 2015, p. 76).

4.4. The Russian People

First of all, the semantic profile of the "Russian people" is characterized by a clear demarcation between the Russian people, on the one hand, and rulers, tsars, and the nobility on the other. At the top of the social hierarchy are the tsars, the nobility, the rich and powerful, while at the bottom are the peasants, serfs, and later the workers, the poor and powerless, the discredited. The Russian people, however, are true to their rulers by serving and being obedient to them.

> Mikhail Romanov demanded an oath of allegiance from the people and he received it. The king became an autocrat ... and thus no one had the right to blame him for his failures. The Russian people pledged to serve the tsar faithfully and obediently (Aleškov, 2015, p. 29).

The discursive division of society into one with rich, powerful rulers and poor, powerless people who lack rights applies to all periods of Russian history and continued up until the late 1980s. It is an order that is apparently considered natural and granted by God, and thus most likely is a structural constant within the Russian worldview.

Uprising and struggle of the common people against the powerful has occurred during various phases of Russian history. The people rebel against the ruling class and fight for freedom and justice always when they are exploited and suppressed by violence and when they are deprived of their rights and livelihood. Concise examples are the Decembrist Uprising or the October Revolution.

> ... they [the Decembrists, U.N.], as leaders of their time, were against serfdom in Russia. They believed that the tsar's dictatorship would not allow for democracy, which was already spreading in Europe at the time, to take root. The Decembrists wanted the tsar to resign and to establish a democratic government (Akišina, 2015, pp. 101-102).

Since the 1990s, private property has become a part of the country's economic foundation, and relatively quickly a Russian middle class was formed. According to the books examined, the historical division of society into "top and bottom", the division into classes with and without power, no longer applies to modern Russian society. Nonetheless, I believe that this bipolar structure has been preserved in Russian collective memory to this day and will change

only slowly, despite the improvement of economic and social conditions.

> Instead of state and cooperative ownership, private property has become the economic foundation of society. ... A large part of the social strata started out as being self-employed (e.g., in trades, retail, service). Gradually, a middle class began to form in Russia. ... Within ten years, the majority of people managed to adapt to the new socio-economic conditions (Volobuev, 2016, p. 316).

Another important component in the semantic profile of the Russian people is their role as the victim. The Russian people have always been at the mercy of the ruler's power and arbitrariness. Under both the tsars and Soviet leaders, the people suffered injustice and reprisals. For example, one account about Catherine II reports:

> Under Catherine II, ordinary people did not have an easy life. The construction of cities, the conquest of new lands, and the equipment for the army was all paid for by the money received from peasants. The empress gave the nobles total control over the serfs. They could sell them, use them as a wager in a game, beat them, and even kill them (Aleškov, 2015, p. 39).

In the texts examined, the exploitation and oppression of the people is justified by the rationale that it was for the benefit of the country – it was a prerequisite for its economic and social development. The Russian Empire could emerge, develop, and sustain itself only through the suffering and sacrifice of the people and thus was able to become what it is today – the largest and most beautiful country in the world. A particularly extreme example of this suffering is Stalinist terror, which is no longer concealed in today's history books.

> ... At the time of Stalin's personality cult, an era began that was later said to have the markings of a totalitarian regime. (...)
> The repressions of 1937-1938 were called *Ežovščina*, named after the People's Commissar of the Interior, N. I. Ežov, who directly organized the repressions (...)
>
> People accused of betrayal and sabotage were prosecuted in accelerated trials without the participation of witnesses, prosecutors, or lawyers. The indictment was adjudicated within one day, applications for a pardon were denied and judgments were enforced immediately after the verdict was pronounced.
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> From March 1935, a law regarding the punishment of family members of traitors came into force. There were too few places in the prisons, so the network of concentration camps was expanded (Golubev, 2015, pp. 78-79).

4.5. History as War History

According to the texts examined, Russian history is above all a history of war and conquest. The vast majority of the pictures and depictions in the children's books are represented by soldiers and combatants, warfare, battles on horseback and on foot or war items such as ships,

cannons, airplanes, tanks, and the like.

Russian history is the story of permanent struggle against other people who aim to threaten and destroy the country and the Russian people. Russian history is also that of a victorious people who conquer new territories and secure access to resources of all kinds. Thus, war and struggle are seen as something natural that shifts throughout history, something that demands great suffering and sacrifices from the Russian people, but which always leads to fame and honor.

Of particular importance in the Russian history of war and struggle is the Great Patriotic War in which the Russian/Soviet people defeated fascist Germany. Russian historiography distinguishes between World War II, which began on September 1, 1939, and the Great Patriotic War, which began on June 22, 1941, when German troops invaded the Soviet Union. From that point on, the Soviet Union took an active part in the war against fascist Germany, which ended in 1945 with the victory of the Soviet Red Army.

The significance of this victory for Russia's current national self-understanding is, first of all, evident in the amount of space dedicated to it in the children's books. Whereas other historical subjects, such as the beginnings of the Kievan Rus or the founding of the Russian state or the reforms of Peter I, are covered on average in one double page, the portrayal of the Great Patriotic War is three to seven double-pages long.

The message conveyed in the section on the Great Patriotic War is that "we – the Russian (Soviet) people are good and peaceful". Throughout history, however, the Russian people have been threatened and attacked by external enemies. Thus, they have been required to defend themselves and their homeland against evil. Russian (Soviet) soldiers are courageous and brave; they fight and suffer in order to protect the Russian people, their children, and their homeland. The Russian (Soviet) people stand together and fight for their homeland, for the glory and honor of the Russian nation. The Russian nation is a victorious (invincible) nation that has won the fight against evil (i.e., fascism).

> The troops of fascist Nazi Germany crossed the borders of our country on 22 June 1941 and attacked the Soviet state without a declaration of war. ... The peaceful life of the people was over; the Great Patriotic War had begun. All people rose up, sparing no effort for the protection of the fatherland, for its own sake and for the protection of the future of its descendants. The years 1941-1945 were incredibly difficult for the Soviet people, but they overcame this terrible trial honorably (Aleškov, 2015, pp. 60-61).
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> The Soviet troops liberated Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and crossed the Soviet border to rid European countries of fascist conquerors. ... The Great Patriotic War ended with the victory of the USSR (ibid. pp. 72-73).

The analysis reveals a second structural constant: the demarcation "we – the Russian (Soviet) people, the good guys" versus "them – the others, the enemies, the bad guys". There is a distinction between positively valued Russian (e.g., territory, ethnic groups, language, culture, and religion) and non-Russian (e.g., fascist Germany, the West, the territory of Western Europe). In addition to the hierarchical structure "top – bottom", it is apparent that the Russian worldview is determined by the demarcation with the outside: "us vs. them".

Alongside the glorification of the Great Patriotic War, we can find the memory of Stalin as the Soviet leader who led the Red Army and the Soviet people in the fight against fascist Germany. Stalin is thus not only the one who – in the tradition of many of his predecessors – oppressed and terrorized the people, but he is also the paternal, practically divine leader who led his people through the toughest of trials.

> The solemn parade on Red Square on 7 November 1941 calmed the country for good. Supreme Commander Stalin led the parade. On that day there was heavy snowfall, so the fascists were not able to bombard the parade. Directly from Red Square, the soldiers moved to the front. A few days after the parade, the fascists made the last attempt to conquer Moscow, but were pushed back. In early December, the Red Army launched a counterattack and eventually drove the Germans out of the Soviet capital (Aleškov, 2015, pp. 62-63).

In this story, heavy snowfall, almost like a divine power, protects the Red Square parade from the fascists' bombs. Supreme Commander Stalin symbolically stands between this divine power (above) and the soldiers (below) in Red Square; he is the commander-in-chief, who, almost like a good father to his children, protects the soldiers and the Russian people. He is the person they obey and is the one who eventually leads them to victory.

Thus, the two discursive basic structures of this worldview are also reflected in Stalin's persona. His persona embodies the prototype of a Russian ruler or a Soviet leader in all essential respects: absolute power; faithful devotion on the part of the people; repression and exploitation/terrorization of the population; demands sacrifice and suffering on the part of the people for the benefit of the fatherland; leads the Russian nation to victory over external enemies; strengthens the imperial power of Russia and the glory and honor of the fatherland.

5. The Burden of Tradition

As mentioned above, one cause of the present image of self and history is presumably a result of the Russian worldview itself. The current image is the end point on a continuous development; it developed on the basis of historically preceding images of self and history.

In this sense, it is the *burden of cultural tradition* (Fleischer, 2001, pp. 286-288) that limits the continuation of discourses on certain narrow paths. Similar to a river bed that channels the river's course, cultural tradition promotes a nearly identical reproduction and transmission of a nation's self-image and its image of history and counteracts any modification. Therefore, the national image of self and history reconstructed in this study is most likely largely consistent with the collective memory of the Russian population (i.e., the Russian worldview).

Historical scholarly literature mentions three central ways of thinking in the Russian tradition of remembrance, which widely determine the form of the current self-image and the image of history: a *Soviet*, a *democratic*, and a *national-patriotic* thinking tradition (Kurilo, 2009, pp. 141-162). Both the democratic and the national-patriotic tradition (ibid., pp. 146-156) are less prominent than the dominant Soviet tradition, whereas both provide alternative memories and views on national history and both compete for shares in the overall societal

discourse by attempting to assert their view on history. I have interpreted the results of my analysis on the basis of these three lines of thinking.

5.1. Soviet Traditions of Remembrance

The Russian image of self and history reconstructed in this study is most likely in line with the image stemming from the collective memory of a large majority of the Russian population. Parents and grandparents read stories in contemporary children's books to their offspring which they have heard in similar form in their childhood. Socialization during Soviet or post-Soviet times also means socialization in the *Soviet thinking tradition*, which thus underlies the assessment of what is in today's children's books.

Even though the collapse of the Soviet Union and the social transformations in the late 1980s did not lead to a dissolution of Soviet memory patterns in Russian society, *Perestroika and Glasnost* paved the way for alternative memory traditions. At that time there was an opportunity to establish alternative perspectives on national history, especially as the social collapse had discredited much of the Soviet Union. One problem, however, was that historians had also been socialized in the Soviet way of thinking and thus found it difficult to break free and tell Russian history in a different way (see the impressive report by Galina Zvereva, 2009, p. 99).

5.2. Democratic Traditions of Remembrance

The Russian democratic thinking tradition is committed to democratic principles, such as respect for human rights, freedom, equality, and dignity of the individual. Furthermore, it is characterized by its perspective on the victims of war and violence. Russian history is told from the point of view of the victims of WWII, Stalinist terror, or the Soviet system (Kurilo, 2009, p. 146). However, the discourse of democratic remembrance gets relatively little attention in Russian society since the sacrificial discourse is difficult to reconcile with the popular heroic victorious myth connected to WWII. When it comes to competing for attention in the discourse of societal memory, the discourse of democratic remembrance is disadvantaged further by its ideological proximity to the democratic West, which falls into the negative discursive space.

Public representatives of this tradition of thought are the political democratic opposition and civil society organizations such as *Memorial* or the *Lewada Center*. The stigmatization of many of them as "foreign agents" by the government has led to an association with terms such as "spy", "enemy" and "traitor" (Siegert, 2016, p. 17). This certainly contributes to further discrediting of the democratic tradition of remembrance for large parts of the population.

The Russian journalist Juri Saprykin, however, points to a "new culture of memory from below". In his article "The social change after 20 years of Putin" Saprykin (2020) reports on the young generation in Russia, who was born in the 1990s and is developing a new national identity regardless of the state. Reshaping of national identity takes place in popular YouTube series, on Instagram, in the works of street artists and hip-hop musicians. National identity expresses itself as local patriotism. National identity is a sense of belonging to a place and to the people who live there. It is a feeling of community, the union of colleagues, neighbors,

like-minded people, who together can make a difference in and for their living environment. This new sense of national identity also includes "a new kind of memory culture in which not only war heroes deserve collective memory and honor, but also the victims of a criminal regime (...)."

Saprykin reports on a generation "ready to accept and reflect on their history and identity", about young Russians who are ready to "take responsibility for their lives without waiting for the state to solve their problems".

5.3. National Patriotic and Russian Orthodox Traditions of Remembrance

National patriotic and Orthodox traditions of remembrance date back to Tsarist Russia of the 19thcentury. The well-known representatives of national ideas and supporters of a Russian nation-state are Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin (1766-1826) and Nikolai Ivanovich Kostomarov (1817-1885) (Schenk, 2006, p. 58-61; on the characteristics of national discourse in the 19th century, ibid., p. 61ff).

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox tradition of thought are Slavophiles, such as Aleksej Chomjakov (1804-1860) and Ivan Kireevskij (1806-1856): "By utilizing the confrontation of Russian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, they introduced a contrast between Russia and the West and devised an utopian Old Russian world as a model of a religiously-renewed state. Konstantin Leont'ev (1831-1891) criticized the societies of Western Europe for their liberalism, their ideal of equality, and their belief in progress. Pan-slavist Nikolai Danilevsky (1822-1885) constructed his own model of Slavic civilization which, in contrast to the European model of civilization, is characterized by the rejection of individualism and rationalism" (Götz, 2015, p. 110, translated by me, U.N.).

Today's national-patriotic, Russian Orthodox traditions of thought (Kurilo, 2009, p. 150ff) are supported by the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church and are promoted and disseminated by national-patriotic organizations such as the Izborsk Club. The primary goals are the promotion of a unified Russian nation, unity of the Russian homeland, and a preservation of given power structures. National-patriotic concepts for the conservative renewal of Russia, such as the so-called "Russian doctrine", are characterized by anti-Western, anti-democratic, and anti-liberal values and attitudes (Götz, 2015, p. 128; Zvereva, 2009, p. 94). Individual human rights, parliamentary democracy, and the separation of powers are rejected. A collective-based community is preferred over a society shaped and organized by individuals (Götz, 2015, p. 131). Preference is given to a traditionalist-orthodox way of life and a hierarchical social order with a strong leader. An awareness of Russia's external and internal enemies should be increased among the population and national consciousness must be strengthened (Götz, 2015, p. 131).

6. Traditions of Remembrance in the National Image of Self and History

In the following passage, I present the core concepts of the Russian national self-image and the image of history of the 1980s and 1990s, which I have reconstructed from Soviet and post-Soviet history books which were used in public schools at the time (Notarp, 2001, pp. 135-

250). As a result, continuities and discontinuities have become visible in the development of the national self-image and history.

In the history books of the 1980s and 1990s, both concepts, "Russia" and "Soviet Union" , are semantized by the terms: *house, family, children of a large country, homeland, fatherland, best country, largest country in the world*. Both concepts also include the components, *powerful nation* and *military power*, as well as the terms *big, strong, rich, glorious*. Furthermore, *equality* exists amongst the different ethnic groups living on the territory of Russia or the Soviet Union (Notarp, 2001, pp. 157-159).

The comparison with the current semantic profile of "Russia" demonstrates that it is an ongoing continuation of historically preceding profiles. The current concept of "Russia" combines all of the positive qualities of both the "Russian Empire" and the "Soviet Union". All three concepts take on similar functions in their respective discourses as they specify what the homeland and the fatherland is. They differ neither in their function nor in their semantic components.

Similarly, the concept of the "Soviet Union" that has been reconstructed in this study is a discursive development of the concepts from the 1980s and 1990s (Notarp, 2001, p. 158, pp. 163-165). Unlike the post-Soviet discourse of the 90s, the "Soviet Union" today is no longer seen negatively and therefore rejected, but is seen rather as an integral part of Russian history. The positive socialist components that characterized the "Soviet Union" in the Soviet discourse of the 1980s are present again in the current concept, albeit in a tempered form. The terms *Soviet* and *socialist* again have a positive connotation: *many different ethnic groups live peacefully together in one state, all people in the USSR are equal and free and live justly* (see Aleškov, 2015, p. 58).

The semantic profile of the "Russian people" reconstructed in this study also matches almost perfectly its historical predecessors (Notarp, 2001, pp. 168-175). All semantic components of the current profile are already represented in the discourses of the 1980s and 1990s: the Russian people are loyal to their tsar and to the church; they are hard-working, courageous, and freedom-loving, ready to make great sacrifices in the fight for the fatherland; people are exploited and oppressed by the powerful and they fight for freedom and justice. The discursive division of society into "top and bottom" – rich, powerful rulers, on the one hand, and a poor, powerless population, on the other – also exists in the discourses of the 1980s and 1990s. I assume that this is a hierarchical structural constant of the Russian worldview, which has its basis in a corresponding social structure that has shaped it for centuries.

In the Soviet history books of the 1980s, the name "Stalin" does not appear – the topic is completely avoided and is apparently taboo. However, in the post-Soviet textbooks of the 1990s, Stalin's crimes against the Soviet people are mentioned and condemned. The Communist Party is seen negatively and Soviet citizens are criticized for being educated in a collective way to be highly disciplined and subservient (Notarp, 2001, p. 164ff).

The image of Stalin conveyed in the books examined in this study is consistent with the description of Stalinist terror in the discourse of the 1990s, while criticism of the Soviet people and socialist ideology is no longer visible today. As I said earlier, the Soviet Union is an integral part of national history and tends to be viewed positively in contemporary books.

The image of the "Great Patriotic War" transmitted in today's children's books is largely in

line with the image found in the history books of the 1980s and 1990s (Notarp, 2001, pp. 231-237). The threat of and fight against an external enemy, the fight for the fatherland, for glory and honor of the Russian nation, can be found in all three discourses. The second structural constant, the demarcation "we – the Russian (Soviet) people, the good" versus "them – the others, the enemies, the bad guys" is already present in the discourses of the 1980s and 1990s. The boundary between the positive connotation of *Russian* and the hostile *non-Russian Western* is a constant in the Russian collective memory with its historical roots reaching well into the past (cf. the national-patriotic, Russian-Orthodox memory tradition) (Schenk, 2006, p. 65ff; Urban, 2006, p. 251ff; Tschižewskij & Groh, 1959). In this perspective, the present war in Eastern Ukraine appears as the latest front between the *Russian we* and the *non-Russian hostile West* (Russland Analysen, 2015, p. 14f).

Therefore, the difference in the current discourse taken from the Soviet and post-Soviet discourses is the partial rehabilitation of Stalin as Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army and leader in the fight against fascism. As I said earlier, the name "Stalin" was still taboo in Soviet textbooks of the 1980s, while in post-Soviet textbooks of the 1990s, Stalin is seen as an initiator of fear and terrorism and, therefore, is viewed absolutely negatively and thus is rejected.

In the discourse of the 2010s, Stalin is seen as one of the many rulers in Russian history; he represents the prototype of a Russian or Soviet leader and has thus lost his terrifying qualities. By rehabilitating Stalin as a leader in the fight against fascism, Stalinist terror receives a relativistic counterweight. The passing of time does the rest: As the eyewitnesses die off and the active state memory focuses mainly on the glorious end of the war, the atrocities fade and lose their impressiveness. Moreover, the memory of victory and glory in World War II certainly resonates more today than the memory of a time of weakness and powerlessness as a victim.

Nina Frieß (2017) comes to a similar conclusion in her analysis of a recent survey on the perception of Stalinist repression amongst the Russian population (see *All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (WCIOM))*. According to Frieß, the answers to the survey can partly be understood as relativizing the repressions. "After all, 43 percent of respondents today consider Stalinist repression as necessary measures (...) to help Stalin maintain order in Soviet society" (Frieß, 2017).

All in all, the semantic profiles of the individual constructs in the discourses of the 1980s and 1990s clearly reveal the traditions of thought in which today's national self-image and history find themselves. It turns out that the meanings behind the central constructs of the Russian self-image – "Russia" and "Russian people" – have hardly changed. The self-image is that of a heroic, strong, proud, and invincible and unified nation in the most beautiful and largest country in the world.

In terms of content and structure, the current national image of history is directly linked to that of the Soviet and post-Soviet period. It ranges from the Kievan Rus to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union to today's Russia (Zvereva, 2009, p. 105f). Russian history is a linear and harmonious one, almost inevitable in its course. In any case, "Russia" and the "Russian nation" are the ones that are glorious, successful, victorious, and so on. The message conveyed in current books on history is clear: Every child can be proud to have been born in this country, in this nation.

Overall, the *Soviet* and the *national-patriotic* traditions of memory are represented much

more in the examined books than is the *democratic* tradition. The *Soviet* and *national-patriotic* thinking traditions determine the discursive orientation of the central concepts of "Russia", "Russian people", and "Russian history". The discursive structure of the "top – bottom", worldview, the demarcation of "we, the Russian (Soviet) people, the good" versus "them, the enemies, the West", the glorification of the Great Patriotic War, and the rehabilitation of Stalin as a great leader are to be seen as an expression of the Soviet and national-patriotic memory tradition.

One reason for their discursive presence in the current books is certainly that this thinking tradition linked to being a national imperial power makes more sense to the rulers in the Kremlin than the democratic memory tradition (Dulebova, 2015). The spread and consolidation of national-patriotic thinking is part of the state policy under President Putin, which is also supported by the Russian Orthodox Church. Thus, in 2013, on the initiative of the government, a unified textbook concept was adopted which defines how Russian history should be told (Scheliha, 2014).

Again and again, President Putin has emphasized the need for a clear historical narrative, rationalizing that Russia needs it. An unambiguous narrative of history is characterized by fundamental conventionality and simplicity in the style of a *grandmother's story* which embodies a "recognizability of the central axes in Russian history" and an "interpretation of the past from the point of view of common sense" (Zvereva, 2009, p. 97).

It is precisely this beautiful world that centers on Russia, the Russian nation, and its tsar – this myth of the distinctiveness of the Russian nation and its path – that we have found in clear and simple form in the children's books.

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