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How did a Communist political system, the Polish one, deal with primary school textbooks? How did it try to influence teaching and learning through Marxist political messages? How did it deliberately distort the content of *all school textbooks* in order to make impact on the minds and thinking of the future generations? Joanna Wojdon's *Textbooks as Propaganda. Poland under Communist Rule, 1944-1989* gives us a thorough and detailed explanation which goes well beyond Poland's historical experience. Even if her starting point is that "schools were supposed to install communist ideology and positive attitude toward the Soviet Union" (page 140), in fact, I am convinced that the lessons we can learn from this book stretch much beyond the post-Communist countries.

Certainly, we have already known many things. In fact, there is no need to prove that communist regimes wanted schools to indoctrinate young people already from the very first grades. And Joanna Wojdon's book gives us a substantial amount of proof that neither the Polish nor other Eastern European communist regimes did not even try to hide their intentions. On the contrary, they openly declared their ideological goals. She rightly touches upon a general rule as an overall context for communist textbooks: "The term 'doing a textbook' was coined to characterize the flow of many lessons", i.e. to follow the book step by step, and she gets to an extremely important conclusion that "textbooks, not curricula, were what teachers and pupils actually 'did'" (page 1).

It has also long been known that Eastern European communist school systems used to have a significant amount of teaching content in textbooks inserted purely for political reasons. Anybody with just the slightest experience from those pre-1989 years could remember the achievements of the Soviet natural sciences and especially space research, the presentation of workers' achievements of those times – and not only in history textbooks! And this is one of the features what rates Joanna Wojdon's book on the top of our bookshelves, i.e. "She explores the ways in which propaganda was incorporated into *each school subject*, including mathematics, science, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, history, Polish language instructions, foreign language instructions, art education, music, civic education, defense training, physical education, and practical technical training." (page i)

Joanna Wojdon has rightly chosen primary textbooks as the source and subject of her research since she reconstructs the universal message of the communist regime aimed at 'the youngest citizens' who as the youngest readers are vulnerable and "therefore more susceptible to the propaganda messages" (page 2). The author who is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Wrocław, Poland, and who follows in the steps of her earlier book "*The World of Reading Primers: The Image of Reality in the Reading Instructions Textbooks of the Soviet Bloc*" (2015), nicely explores the most significant ideological strategy of the times, the all present and omnipotent *workers perspective* which used to be the fundamentum of the mass-oriented communist indoctrination. As a result of this one-sided worldview, where the imaginative 'worker' was the alpha and the omega of all arguments, caused that for instance "the history of the Roman Empire was reduced to the reason for its collapse, the characteristics of its social classes and the rebellions of its slaves" (page 111).

Since Joanna Wojdon has researched almost all Polish textbooks of the selected time period (from 1944 to 1989), we can be curious if there was a special ideological stress on history textbooks? There certainly was. I regard as extremely fascinating how the author explores the great variety of distortions and biases in the books surveyed. Completely distorted topics such as “the imperialist First World War” (page 111) and the fact that WW I was dealt with from the universal perspective of the constant struggle of the working class rather than from Polish national(ist) view, perfectly fits into a general pattern typical for most Eastern European communist textbooks. It is no surprise that in these textbooks, many times written from Soviet point of view (page 118), little attention was paid to Polish national(istic) ideology (page 114). More precisely, the nationalist layer in the textbooks was intentionally selective. One just should look at the fact that while on the one hand Polish textbook omitted any trends of Russification, on the other hand they massively stress Germanization. But the most interesting discovery by Joanna Wojdon is the constant appearance of picture of the enemy in communist Poland. It was “the Christian church as general, and Jesuits in particular, as exploiters of the workers’ society” and as stubborn representatives of “retrograde conservatism” (page 115).

To measure the quality of propaganda is not an easy task to do, and to research the specific means and methods of propaganda in school textbooks is a huge scientific challenge. Many propaganda tricks are hidden in the language. Selective language (and branding) for national affiliation of some historical personalities was typical. It concerned for instance Charles Darwin as a “famous English biologist”, Dmitri Mendeleev as a “great Russian chemist”, and Wilhelm C. Roentgen who was left without a nationality (page 117).

Even more difficult is to spot and identify *latent language structures*, i.e. deliberately omissions, or as I call them, the “structures of silence”. Let us be no naive, language tricks happened on purpose, deliberately and in a systematic way (page 140). In Polish textbooks researched by Joanna Wojdon there are many well known omissions, such as the system of Gulags or the Katyn massacre, eastern borders of Poland, as well as dozens of other ‘sensitive’ issues. As the author puts it: “The textbooks narratives [...] did leave out certain historical facts, figures, processes and phenomena” (page 108). The same tendency of deliberate omissions is true for the imagological apparatus. As a result one would rarely see church buildings as illustrations in many Eastern European textbooks. And I think that all these “structures of silence” contribute to the general amnesia and harmful silence about social and historical problems.

Probably the greatest challenge for any researcher to identify the ideological burden in history textbook is of a semiotic character, as the author puts it, “propaganda motives, topics and techniques intertwined in the text” (page 119). In other words, spotting covert messages, and especially those which are hidden not in the text but in the didactical apparatus (questions, tasks, photo captions, etc.) of the textbooks, that make both descriptive text and didactical apparatus almost cognitively indigestible. In this field Joanna Wojdon rightly states that in methodological terms, Polish communist “textbooks made clear judgements on everything from the past, and left children with no doubts or ambiguity” (page 109). It may sound weird but it is my own experience that Marxist ideological burden was palpable in the text, nevertheless it is very, very difficult to prove them scientifically. And yet, it was a pre-calculated effect which contradicted the true nature of history as a science because for the professional history “either – or” situations, disquieting questions and constant doubts are *fundamental*. What is it for a school textbook which entirely switches off critical thinking or multiperspectivity over the peoples and their deeds in the past, and compels a one-sided

worldview? No contradictory opinions were allowed (page 143) in order to change societal opinion en masse, and in order to attempt to change cognitive structures from where divergent thinking is excluded (page 143).

Since the time period selected by Joanna Wojdon is the era of the Cold War, it is worth asking how did these textbooks react upon the superpower rivalry? To what extent did Polish communist textbooks present anti-Western orientation or indoctrination? What about anti-Americanism? As the author states, "The world as presented in geography textbooks was thus bipolar, black and white. It was an arena of battle between capitalism and socialism" (page 78), and no doubt that ridiculous comparisons between the USA and the USSR were present: "What monstrous amounts of pollution New York, Chicago and Los Angeles must produce each year!" versus "On the wide and clean streets of Moscow there is much traffic at all hours of the day" (page 76). And this leads us to a contemporary question regarding current East-West cultural tensions. Was the Communist ideology in the textbooks intentionally anti-Western? If it was, has it contributed to the tensions that can be observed between current Western and Eastern Europe?

Joanna Wojdon's book is a very valuable contribution to the general and international textbook research, reaching well beyond the Polish experience. In fact, she gives us a certain list of typology of specific means of ideological indoctrination: Marxism, socialism, enemies of the system, presentist interpretations, politization, etc. (These are Joanna Wojdon's expressions from pages 109-110.) I would be curious to know if these are common Eastern European patterns? There are surely delicate similarities that keenly offer themselves for international comparative textbook research. There is evidently much to offer for Eastern European readers, especially for those who are engaged in comparative analysis of history textbooks. Giving just one example: On the level of phraseology, for instance, in Poland abbreviation "Before Christ" and "Anno Domini" were replaced with "before our era" and "of our era". The same kind of de-Christianized terminology in communist Czechoslovakia used 'before' and 'after our time'. Joanna Wojdon's typology is surely a useful 'toolbox' for coming-soon textbook researchers. Clearly the author is well aware of many parallels with school textbooks from the GDR (pages 72, 143), and less of those textbooks research involving Tatyana Tsyrlina-Spady, Alan Stoskopf, Milan Olejník, Karina Korostelina, Ibolya Nagy Szamborovszky and others, who have produced very valuable books and papers on the textbook propaganda in the Soviet Union and its political orbit.

Joanna Wojdon's book ends with a short and poignant Conclusion (pages 140-148) in which she raises one of the most neglected sections of the textbook research, i.e. "*the question of the effectiveness of the textbook propaganda is the most problematic*" (page 145). For many pupils textbooks are 'boring'; formal schooling is no omnipotent; and education has never been limited to schools only. What more, we know that quite many contemporary teachers did refuse to follow senseless 'ideological rules' (page 147), and this kind of disobedience had had a rather strong impact on many pupils – as it is shown in some rare interview based research materials. If one considers the deep and general social apathy in the Soviet bloc countries in the 1970s and 1980s (page 145) (definitively in Czechoslovakia and Hungary), the failure of the overwhelming indoctrination at schools seems to be quite clear.

There might be no doubt that the communist school textbook system, with its no-choice and competition-free textbook regime, all around Eastern Europe, was an integral part of a carefully designed social engineering system. Similar propaganda content and similar patterns “can be observed in other countries of the Soviet Bloc” (page 143) which leads us to a very contemporary problem: How should we consider those European countries where the state is the major (sometimes exclusive) sponsor of the school textbooks; where there is a limited (if not entirely closed) textbook market; and where teachers’ choice is limited to one and single available textbook? And I think Joanna Wojdon exactly knows this. For at places she winks at us when she writes that “school history is notorious for being used as a tool of indoctrination, not only in Poland and *not only under Communism*” (page 108).

At least one extremely illuminating message of Joanna Wojdon’s book is clear: Democratic school systems have to maintain the possibility of schools (in fact, teachers) to choose their textbooks because this is the only real and significant professional force in and around schools that can compensate any ideological push that occur from time to time.