Imagining a good citizen: The roles of a historical hero in Slovak pedagogical tradition

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Abstract: Based on a diachronic case study of history textbooks used in Slovak primary and secondary schools since 1918, this article discusses the roles biographies of historical heroes can play in school education. The case study analyses history textbook narratives about the medieval ruler Svätopluk published during three different political regimes, tracing their heritage up to present-day history textbooks. The text argues that the presentation of Svätopluk's qualities, talents and achievements has been used not only in depicting him as a representative of the community, and as a desired prototype of a good citizen, but also in the formation of negative stereotypes about the representatives of the *Other*. This excluded significant segments of pupils of certain national minorities from the mainstream narrative and labeled them as enemies. An examination of the images of Svätopluk in history textbooks confirmed that these were politically motivated and influenced by current ideologies. However, it also showed that 19th century Romanticist ideals, resulting in apologetic and nation defending narratives, remained an integral part of history textbooks throughout the 20th century, prevailing over the narratives offered by official contemporary historiography.

Keywords: textbook narratives, social stereotypes, concept of a hero, the *Other*

The medieval ruler Svätopluk, an intriguing and sometimes controversial subject in Slovak historical research, has become a substantial part of school history curricula in Slovak schools since the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918. A dramatic dispute over Svätopluk in Slovak soci-

ety erupted in 2010, after his monument – a bronze equestrian statue – was unveiled in the courtyard of Bratislava Castle by the highest representatives of the state, less than a week before the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Two committees were appointed to judge the relevance and political correctness of the statue. Political utilization and media coverage of the event provoked a lively and controversial debate in Slovak society and among historians, and even attracted attention from abroad. The most discussed topics included the dispute over the designation of Svätopluk as the king of Slovaks, and the interpretation of the meaning of the double cross, which, according to some experts, was strikingly reminiscent of the symbolism used during World War II – the emblem of Hlinka Guard and Hlinka Youth, thus being interpreted as insensitive towards many segments of the Slovak society (Uličný, 2011; Marsina 2011; Steinhübel, 2013; Homza, 2013; Bartl, 2014; Kalhous, 2017). Opposing reactions to the statue of Svätopluk have given rise to reflections dealing with the political instrumentalization of the past in general; the place of the Great Moravian tradition in Slovak historiography and interpretations of the significance of Svätopluk in Slovak history (Michela, 2015; Lysý, 2015).

Following these debates, in which different stakeholders participated, I conducted a study of the narratives on Svätopluk presented in history textbooks used in primary and secondary schools during the interwar period (1918-1938), World War II (1939-1945) and the rule of the Communist Party (1948-1989) in order to detect how the texts presented to students contributed to the formation of stereotypes about the self and the *Other*. Then, I studied contemporary textbooks with the aim of detecting if and how they reflect the heritage of previous narrative traditions. This work stems from a hypothesis that narratives about historical heroes have the task of presenting them as ideal representatives of the nation and as desired prototypes of the individuals (Eriksonas, 2004; Balázs & Royer, 2019). Concurrently, I contextualized the work under the assumption that such representations of national heroes can also contribute to the creation of negative representations of the *Other* and that these representations were projected into the past based on current socio-political context and needs, which prevailed at the time of the creation of a specific history textbook (Kratochvíl, 2011). History textbook narratives were also studied in the context of mainstream contemporary historiography with the attempt to see to what extent they followed ongoing historical research.

The substantial role education plays in the formation and changing of stereotypic content has long been recognized (Grever & van der Vlies, 2017),

researched and presented through a number of case studies (Alberty 1991; Beneš, 1999; Gracová, 1999; Vajda, 2009; Otčenášová, 2010; Findor, 2012; Labischová, 2013 as some examples illustrating Slovak and Czech contexts; and Cajani, Lässig & Repoussi, 2019 as examples of some most recent contemporary global and comparative perspectives). This article aims to complement the existing solid scholarly results by putting research on ethnic stereotypes produced by narratives in history textbooks into a historical perspective, comparing textbooks published within the last century under different political regimes, and discussing them within a historiographical framework. The highly interdisciplinary character of the topic on the relation of historical narratives and ethnic stereotypes in school education in a historical perspective usually means that researchers interested in the topic opt to the use of content analysis. This approach has been widely recognized as a leading method and has seldom been questioned in the academic tradition of historical research, yet presented a challenge for the research topic in question. While employing content analysis can disclose much about certain patterns and can document trends over time, it fails to reveal the underlying motives for the observed patterns. Therefore, the research of almost one hundred history textbooks (see Appendix) that is summarized in this article was based on applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) and theories on stereotypes developed in the field of the social sciences. CDA, as an interpretative perspective, is based on the assumption that power relations are discursive in nature and that discourse and its textual manifestations are influenced by relations of domination (Van Dijk, 1993). This perspective turned out to be particularly relevant for the selected sources. Narratives were constructed in textbooks to represent particular agendas of the state (Crawford, 2000) and using CDA helped expose how power struggles and the interests of the dominant groups had been represented in history textbooks. Three dimensions of analysis were incorporated in order to meet the objectives of the study: 1. Describing verbal texts in textbooks and coding all references to the Other while applying systemic functional linguistics; 2. Interpreting the descriptive data from the verbal analysis according to the context of their production. Two types of contexts were taken into consideration – a) the situational context that depended on the political regimes in which textbooks were published, and b) the intertextual context, combining the findings from different textbooks produced within one political regime as well as collating the findings from textbooks produced in different regimes; 3. Explaining the motivation and nature of state-produced stereotypes using the theoretical framework of social science theories on stereotypes. Merging key concerns of linguistic research and critical engagement with the social and political context in which the textbooks have been produced and

understanding these processes within the framework of social theories of stereotypes allowed for explaining motivations behind the creation of particular narratives. Categorization, which is widespread in history education, triggers the process of creating stereotypes and prejudices. Stereotypes presented in history textbooks, which are understood as a set of beliefs shared by members of a specific social group (in this case a nation), are treated as a result of politically motivated efforts to present one's own group (i.e. one's own nation) as exceptional (Biggler & Liben, 2006). This phenomenon can be explained by the theory of social identity, which interprets the origin of conflicts between social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Realistic conflict theory offers an analysis of rivalry between social groups, and on this basis, we can perceive national stereotypes occurring in history textbooks as a result of the competition between nations (Sherif, 1967; Levine & Campbell, 1972; Runciman, 1966; Brown, 1988). The process of creating negative stereotypes about other groups can also be explained by the concept of "scapegoating", according to which such stereotypes are the result of economic or social instability. To put it simply, if we attribute the reasons for our own unfavorable situation (current or past) to other social groups, our own social identity may not suffer (Duckitt, 1994). Since this article aims to analyze the image of a selected hero from national history in Czechoslovak and Slovak history textbooks, it is necessary to briefly define the concept of the nation. The article is based on the post-primordialist and anti-essentialist perceptions of the nation, which emphasize its character as a social construct (Anderson, 1983) and as an entity created and maintained by social and political elites (Gellner, 1983).

Different and contradictory images of Svätopluk have been produced in literary and historical sources from the times of his life until today in the past thousand years. Some sources describe him as a brave king, a founder of the nation and its first state, a unifier of all Slavs, or a saint man, while in some others he is represented as a traitor, an uneducated oppressor of Methodius' students and a prototype of a wrongful collaborator with the enemies. Stories about Svätopluk appeared in medieval chronicles: in Czech ones he was represented as a founder, in Frankish ones as a traitor, and in Hungarian ones as a simpleton giving up his land to smarter Hungarians. Since the times of the Baroque period, he has been a frequent topic among the Slovak authors, such as Samuel Timon and Ján Baltazár Magin. He became an organic part of the Slovak master narrative in the 18th and 19th centuries, when he was described as a Slovak national symbol, but also more universally as a pan-Slavic unifier in works of Pavol Jozef Šafárik and Ján Kollár. Juraj Papánek pictured him as a founder of the medieval state and

even as a predecessor of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. 19th century Slovak historiography, represented by Ľudovít Štúr and his circle, influenced by nation-building movements and Romanticist ideals, contributed significantly to the development of the cult of Svätopluk, instrumentalizing him within the contemporary political context in a sort of a black and white and highly idealized pro-Slavic and anti-German and anti-Hungarian narrative (Otčenáš, 2003; Homza, 2014). After 1918, when the Czechoslovak Republic was established, Svätopluk became less prominent in the national historiography, leaving more space for medieval ruler Rastislav and Hussites who better served the need to create the image of joint Czech and Slovak past. During WWII, Slovak historiography mainly focused on narratives describing the positive and confident relationship of Svätopluk towards the Frankish Empire, which was a natural outcome of the contemporary international relations and domestic political situation in Slovakia. After WWII, his image was codified as that of a reactionary collaborator with the Germans who were described as oppressors. The shift in his image appeared only at the end 1980s/beginning of 1990s when he was again installed into the nation-founding position. After the end of the Socialist regime in 1989 and the creation of the Slovak Republic in 1993, Svätopluk became again an important topic of Slovak historiography, often instrumentalized in patriotic and strongly nationally oriented discourses (Hudek, 2010; Otčenášová, 2010).

During Interwar Period

Czechoslovakia was established after the World War I, following the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The new state consisted of several regions with different historical, political and economic developments and it became the homeland of different nationalities – Czechs and Slovaks in the position of the state-forming nation, others in the position of national minorities. There was an inevitable socio-political need to justify the existence of the newly formed entity. To achieve this, an official concept of the Czechoslovak state-building nation was promoted, which was supposed to strengthen the image of a unified, hegemonic and solid nation-state. This position was enshrined in the Constitution of 1920, enacting the idea of a state-forming Czechoslovak nation, with two branches - Czech and Slovak. This was necessary mainly in order to counterbalance a numerously distinctive national minorities of Germans and Hungarians. This agenda also found its way into the state education. Many teachers were removed from schools in Slovakia after 1918, as they were suspected of persisting pro-Hungarian orientation, and the missing personnel was solved by transferring teachers from the Czech part of the state. The main ideological principles in the

school teaching of history in Slovakia were to show a clear distance from the Hungarian historical master narrative and to promote the concept of Czechoslovak history (Otčenášová, 2010; Matula, 2013). These ideas were also reflected in contemporary history textbooks and narratives about national heroes. Regarding history textbooks, it is necessary to mention that there were three types of history textbooks used in schools in Slovakia in the interwar period: textbooks written in Czech language and intended primarily to be used in Czech schools (and Ministry of education recommended to use them in Slovak schools only when other types were not available); history textbooks written by Czech authors, translated into Slovak language, with some passages added by Slovak authors (so-called *Slovakized* textbooks); and, finally textbooks written by Slovak authors. The textbooks were written mainly by professional historians, but also by history teachers who were encouraged to do so by the Ministry of education. The plurality of the textbooks that occurred in Slovak schools in the interwar period has never been repeated since then.

Searching back for the common roots of Czechs and Slovaks, the medieval principality of Great Moravia seemed like a handy solution and it was depicted as the first joint state of Czechs and Slovaks in history in all of the analyzed textbooks: “All the Czechoslovak Slavs were united in the Great Moravian Empire” (Reitler & Touc, 1933, p. 19). Such an interpretation was needed for legitimizing the existence of newly established Czechoslovakia in 1918 as a continuation/rebirth of the medieval tradition. At the same time, the textbook narratives promoted the idea of the sovereignty and cultural supremacy of Czechs and Slovaks over the outside world and clearly defined the competitive relationship with their neighbors: “This Empire was the first Slavic Christian Empire, independent from Germans... We Czechoslovaks, after Yugoslavs, were the first Slavs to embrace Christianity and we laid the foundations of the Slavic Church and Slavonic literature” (Hlavinka, 1922, pp. 19-20).

Narratives about the Moravian ruler Svätopluk presented him as a virile and brilliant politician who turned the land of our ancestors into a significant state power in Europe, which was culturally superior to the surrounding world. Even more importantly, Svätopluk was depicted as the creator of the first unified joint state of Czechs and Slovaks, which was anachronically projected back to the 10th century: “In the Great Moravian Empire, Czechoslovaks were united into a single nation and state, for which they had been destined long before” (Reitler & Touc, 1933, p. 19).

The narratives about the life and deeds of Svätopluk incorporated the message that it was necessary and strategically important for Czechs and Slovaks to join forces and collaborate: “Svätopluk defended the country against the new attacks of Germans with the help of Czech prince Bořivoj. Thus, we can see how powerful our unity was and that it could completely shatter the evil efforts of our enemies” (Hlavinka, 1922, pp. 19-20).

Symbolically, the requirement for the cooperation between Czechs and Slovaks was also reflected in the legend of three Svätopluk's branches, which found its way into several history textbooks. “Svätopluk, seeing a great danger in Germans and Hungarians, reminded his three sons to cherish their unity and fraternal love. To teach them a lesson, he handed to each of them a bundle of branches to break. When they could not do it, he untied them and gave each of his sons one branch to break, which they easily did. Then he told them this: if you remain united, your enemies will never defeat you, but if you are disobedient and divide the Empire, you will destroy yourself” (Hlavinka, 1922, p. 20). This legend was used as an example from history emphasizing the urgency of unity between Czechs and Slovaks in their new joint state established in 1918 and, at the same time, it was a response to the contemporary autonomist movement in Slovakia calling for a more independent position of Slovaks within Czechoslovakia.

The idea of the superiority of one's own nation over neighboring nations has become an integral part of the interpretation of national history since the 19th century. This superiority was, in textbooks, often depicted in a cultural (civilizing) and moral sense: “The Germans are characterized by high-handedness ... The Germans sought to control the Slavs, the Slavs defended their freedom” (Dejmek, Kratochvíl & Šimko, 1927, p. 36). Heroic characters from the national past were to embody the character of the nation as a whole - unique in terms of moral values, progressive thinking, messianism, and ethical and intellectual superiority over the outside world. However, presenting the uniqueness of one's own nation went hand-in-hand with excluding of the *Other* and the efforts to present their neighbors negatively. The tense international relations that Czechoslovakia had with Hungary and Germany in the interwar period, as well as the internal social context in the country characterized by the need to cope with the distinctive and numerous national minorities whose members were suspected of inclination and loyalty to neighboring states, had an impact on creating historical narratives about Germans and Hungarians. Interwar history textbooks contained narratives about neighbors depicting them as vandals trying to dominate the territory historically belonging to the Czechs and Slovaks, and as the cause of the

subsequent decline in any significant attempts at state formation by our ancestors: “The Germans had been attacking the Empire of Svätopluk for a long time, but he always defeated them. Therefore, they called for the help of the Hungarians, a wild Mongolian nation. Only after the death of Svätopluk, they could defeat the Empire of Great Moravia and thus divide the Slavs. From that time on, Slovakia was constantly under the Hungarian power until 1918” (Reitler & Touc, 1933, pp. 24-25). The motive of civilizational difference and emphasizing the barbaric character of the enemy was applied when creating the image of the Hungarians: “It was a wild nomadic nation ... they slept under tents in summer, in reeds and dirt huts in winter, and lived from cattle breeding, hunting and robbery” (Pekař, 1921, pp. 12-14). To sum up, the neighbors were described as phony, aggressive, immoral, and less civilized foreigners, and thus these narratives symbolically presented a break with the German and Hungarian heritage. All types of the textbooks – i.e. either written by Czech authors, Slovak ones or Slovakized, as well as those for primary and secondary schools contained similar narratives and no differences in politics of representing Svätopluk and *Other* were articulated.

During World War II

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia at the end of 1930s, the establishment of the Slovak Republic and the outburst of World War II inevitably influenced the nature of school history education. Czech teachers were massively dismissed from Slovak schools; textbooks translated from Czech language were removed for good and replaced by the new ones written by Slovak authors. Textbooks publishing was supported by the Association of Slovak Professors, focusing on producing textbooks in Slovak language, as well as by church organizations such as *Tranoscius* in Liptovský Mikuláš or *Spolok sv. Vojtecha* in Trnava. Propaganda disseminated by political elites reflected such interpretation of the past that was supposed to portray the independent Slovak statehood as the optimal culmination of historical development, highlighting the values of the new regime – especially Slovak nationalism and Catholicism. Historian František Hrušovský, who graduated from the Jagiellonian University, and was a member of the Slovak Parliament during WWII, wrote several history textbooks, and also greatly contributed to the consistent promotion of these concepts in history textbooks. A direct historical continuity between Great Moravia and the new state unit was emphasized, the Slovak Republic was declared to be the successor of the 9th century state, and contemporary president Tiso was often portrayed as Svätopluk’s successor (for example in the works of Štefan Polakovič and Konštantín Čulen).

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia also required a change in the concept of national history. In the new political context, it became essential to clear the narratives about Slovak history from the image of the common Czech and Slovak past. Thus, in history textbooks published during World War II, Great Moravia was no longer interpreted as the common state of Czechs and Slovaks, but as a genuinely Slovak state: "Founded by Mojmir around 830, enlarged by Rastislav and consolidated by King Svätopluk ... the Great Moravian Empire united all the Slovaks who defended their homeland against their enemies. Thus, Great Moravia became the first Slovak state" (Hrušovský, 1940, pp. 9-10). The idea of an alliance of Czechs and Slovaks under Svätopluk was not needed anymore, and thus he was no longer presented as a unifier, but as a conqueror: "Svätopluk lead wars against Slavic neighbors to expand the boundaries of his kingdom. He conquered the Transdanubian Pannonia, defeated the powerful pagan ruler of the Polish Vislan tribe, seized the Czech Lands and extended his power to the territory of Lusatian Serbs" (Hrušovský, 1939, pp. 26-27). The narratives on Great Moravia also reflected the animosity towards the Czechs promoted by the ruling elites during WWII: "Slavic tribes, which had been conquered by king Svätopluk, were waiting for the opportunity to break free ... By 895 the Czechs broke away from Great Moravia, just to be subjugated to the German king" (Hrušovský, 1939, pp. 29-30).

Narratives in history textbooks published in Slovakia during this period presented Christian culture as one of the greatest achievements of the Slovak ancestors, making them a part of important historical communities: "In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word. - These were the first words written in Slavic! Then Constantine translated some worship books. These books were the beginnings of literature of Slavic nations. The Glagolitic script and the translations of the sacred books are so perfect that even today's scholars admire the wisdom of the Slavic Apostles. In addition to rich gifts, Emperor Michal sent a letter to Rastislav saying that God himself had revealed the Slavic script to Constantine to add the Slavs to the great nations that glorify God in their language" (Hrušovský, 1939, p. 42). At the same time, Christianity was presented as one of the strategic political power attributes that granted the successful expansionist policy of Svätopluk and thus aided in the boom of Great Moravia: "The Slovak nation, which had already at the beginning of its history accepted Christianity, spread the Christian faith to all the neighbors. From our country, Christianity spread to the Czech Lands, Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria and thence east to Russians. Pagan Hungarians also adopted the Christian faith from Slovaks" (Hrušovský, 1940, pp. 12-13). Consequent-

ly, Svätopluk was described as an ardent supporter of Christianity: "Great Moravian Christianity spread to all the conquered countries and the Czech ruler Bořivoj received baptism from the hands of Archbishop Methodius in the court of King Svätopluk... Svätopluk's power grew so that his country became a powerful Slavic state on the Germanic-Slavic border. Svätopluk was a Christian ruler, together with Rastislav he invited the Slavic apostles, and he was receiving the letters from the popes, while he himself asked the Pope to protect his country" (Hrušovský, 1939, p. 50).

Narratives about the life of Svätopluk were also used to promote the contemporary image of neighbors who were regarded as enemies. The disintegration of Czechoslovakia, fresh border changes in favor of Hungary after the Vienna Arbitration in 1938 and the dominance of the German Empire influenced the ways in which history textbooks represented the *Other*. The political relationship that existed between Great Moravia and the Kingdom of the Franks was presented as an analogy of the contemporary 1940s international political relations between Germany and the Slovak Republic. While the interwar textbooks emphasized the conflict with German power, and Germans were perceived as aggressive, offensive and unfair, in the case of WWII textbooks, the image of the German neighbor is already much different under the influence of the changes in the international political situation: "Great Moravia was created under the pressure of danger from the West. Just as Prince Pribina understood the position of his country in the neighborhood of the powerful Germans and maintained friendly relations with them, Mojmir also sought to live in harmony with the German neighbors. Because the fight with the Germans had no prospects of success, only such a policy of the Great Moravian rulers was reasonable" (Hrušovský, 1939, p. 38). Svätopluk himself was portrayed as an extraordinarily capable and independent sovereign who was able - thanks to his military availability and strategic political decisions - to establish an equal relationship with his powerful neighbors: "...he recognized the sovereignty of the German Empire and restored peace with the German neighbors" (Hrušovský, 1939, p. 48).

Although the WWII Slovak Republic, together with Hungary, formally belonged to the German sphere of power, and both countries stood in one international political bloc, the Vienna Arbitration and the subsequent territorial losses in favor of Hungary marked the bilateral relations between the two countries with a bitter taste. Therefore, the representations of the Hungarians in the history textbooks published during World War II did not differ much from those present in the interwar history textbooks. The Hun-

garians were once again described as primitive savages, at a lower level of civilizational development than our ancestors: “Brute and uneducated Hungarians ... became the allies of Germans against king Svätopluk, but he successfully resisted all attacks and defended his country” (Hrušovský, 1939, p. 51). Similarly: “Hungarians, like all nomads, avoided hard work, indulged in fun, ate raw meat, drank sour horse milk, shaved their heads” (Hrušovský, 1939, p. 32).

WWII textbooks represented the clash between Great Moravian Slavs and Hungarians from the point of view of the so-called hospitality theory promoted since the 18th century - supporting the idea that in the 10th century, indigenous Slavic populations accepted and welcomed the newly arriving Hungarian tribes and helped them settle in their new joint homeland. The presented narratives were supposed to enhance the image of the superiority of culturally more advanced Slavic Christian ancestors and their civilization mission in relation to the barbarian immigrants: “Slavs taught Hungarians how to farm the fields, and Hungarians took Christianity and learned the principles of the state administration from Slavs” (Hrušovský, 1939, p. 76).

The period of World War II has been the subject of many discussions in Slovak society and historiography. Especially the question of the character of the Slovak Republic from 1939 as a totalitarian and authoritarian state (often contrasted with the image of a democratic Czechoslovakia of 1918) has been frequently disputed. The examined narratives about Svätopluk have shown that WWII history textbooks did not incorporate a significant change in the representation techniques of national history and in describing the *Other*. Emphasizing the traditions of one's own statehood, its uniqueness and superiority over the surrounding nations was present similarly as in the narratives produced in the interwar period. Svätopluk was portrayed as a warrior, a conqueror, the founder of the Empire of Slovaks, and as a supporter of Christianity. The emergence of the Slovak Republic was presented as a rightful and deserved climax of the history of the Slovak nation, and the narration of national history was adapted accordingly. The Slovak Republic from 1939 was perceived as a successor of the medieval Slovak state, a *Golden Age* in the history of Slovaks, which ended with the fall of Great Moravia. Christianity was presented as a cultural value that had made the Slovak nation exceptional and superior to the *Other* at the time of its adoption, and had contributed to the dignified survival of the nation within its subsequent existence in Hungary.

Under the Rule of the Communist Party

Political changes in Czechoslovakia after 1948, when the Communist Party began to rule in the country, brought the complete reconstruction of school education. A Unified School Act was adopted in 1948 thanks to which education in Czechoslovakia was characterized until the end of the regime in 1989 by a strong degree of centralism. The state became the exclusive founder of primary and secondary schools and all alternative forms of education were eliminated. The basis of the school system became the idea of a unified school and uniform education under the state monopoly. No variations in curricula, indoctrination of ideology and little individuality became the basic factors determining education. This was also reflected in the production of textbooks under the auspices of the State Pedagogical Institute; its involvement intensified after the IX. Congress of the Communist Party in 1949, when it was openly pointed out that there was an acute shortage of textbooks and an urgent need for their ideological improvement. While in 1950s a number of textbooks, (mainly those regarding world history), were translated from Russian language, later on they were written exclusively by local authors. The Ministry of Education always approved one textbook for a given subject in a specific year for a certain type of school. The plurality of textbooks from the previous, especially the interwar period, was gone for good, and alternative forms of curriculum presentation ceased to exist. Historical materialism became the methodological basis for Czechoslovak pedagogy in all subjects taught. In 1960s, the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences undertook to write the economic, political and social history of Slovakia from the perspective of historical materialism, which was supposed to be a basic guide for schools and history teachers.

Each of the analyzed history textbooks of national history was a project of a team, which would usually include - either as authors or reviewers - representatives of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, professionals from the field of didactics from the Research Institute of Pedagogy and sometimes also teachers. In both Czech and Slovak parts of the state, students learned from content-wise identical history textbooks and were presented with the same story of national history, the only difference being the language of the textbook – Czech language being used in the Czech schools and Slovak language in the Slovak ones.

The Marxist approach in the master narrative necessitated the implementation of new values in the construction of a story of the national past. The requirement to include the concept of internationalism, class struggle and

revolution as the driving forces in history turned into emphasizing good relations with other Slavic nations, nationalizing the class paradigm and merging the national and class principles in interpreting the past. At the same time, elements of historical materialism were strongly promoted in historical narratives, and there was an evident shift in the rhetoric in which the broad, unprivileged masses of the population became more central to the historical narrative than ever before.

Promoting internationalism did not mean that nationally-oriented narratives were removed from history textbooks published between 1948 and 1989. However, there was a tendency to view the national history in a wider context of other Slavic nations and their holdings, thus creating an image of a common Slavic glorious past: "During the reign of Svätopluk, the Great Moravian Empire reached the peak of its power. In addition to Kievan Rus and Bulgaria, it was one of the three great Slavic empires of that time" (Husa & Kropilák, 1966, p. 31). Great Moravia was once again described as the first state uniting Czechs and Slovaks. According to the textbooks, after its fall, "Slavs living in Bohemia and Moravia and Slavs living in Slovakia were torn apart for the centuries" (Husa & Kropilák, 1966, p. 31). These narratives represented a return to the idea of legitimizing Czechoslovakia as a common state of Czechs and Slovaks as a natural entity, which, after a thousand years of separation, was rebuilt in the 20th century on the solid medieval foundations: "The life of our ancestors then developed until 1918 in two states, Bohemia and Hungary. Although both our nations lived in two different countries, the Czechs and Slovaks were aware that they were close and belonged together" (Sosík & Vrabec, 1962, p. 26).

Textbooks presented the inhabitants of Great Moravia and their culture as a unique, exceptional and superior, and sought to emphasize their prestige in a wider European context. It was stressed that Great Moravia was the first state of Western Slavs and that, "it was the place of origin of the oldest Slavic literature and scriptures, which were later followed by Southern and Eastern Slavs" (Suttý & Balcar, 1977, p. 127).

For ideological reasons, textbooks issued during the rule of the Communist Party avoided the image of Christianity as a determining influence in the national development, which was the main difference to the textbooks published in previous periods. For example, in some textbooks, the Christianization efforts of Constantine and Method were not mentioned at all. At other times, the spread of Christianity in Great Moravia was interpreted as a political necessity of the time: "Frank priests, under the pretext of spread-

ing Christianity, were actually preparing the ground for seizing of the country. Great Moravian ruler, as a wise and prudent politician, knew that he would only succeed in fighting the East Frank Empire if he found a strong enough ally in Europe. Therefore, he addressed the Byzantine Emperor to send priests to spread Christianity in Slavic language in Great Moravia" (Skladany, Jilek & Zatkaliková, 1980, p. 91). At the same time, textbooks portrayed adopting Christianity as an unnatural process, as a top-down political decision that was not accepted by the general population. "People were not enthusiastic about Christianity; there was a lot of unrest, but the ruler finally pushed through the new religion" (Suttý & Balcar, 1977, p. 122).

The distinction and superiority of the Great Moravian culture was also achieved through emphasizing the excellence of the material culture of Great Moravian Slavs in comparison to the surrounding nations. Slavs were usually characterized as skilled farmers and shepherds living a sophisticated and mature way of life, having good governance over their country: "From their more advanced neighbors, especially Slavs, Hungarians learned how to grow crops and breed the cattle. They learned to build dwellings and make crafts. Gradually, they moved on to a more advanced way of farming and took many Slavic words into their language" (Sosík & Vrabec, 1962, p. 33). This narrative was similar to the stories presented in Czechoslovak interwar textbooks and Slovak textbooks that were used during World War II.

The time of the rule of Svätopluk were considered the most important period in the history of the Great Moravian Empire. He was depicted as the ruler who, "abolished the alliance with the Byzantine Empire, and expelled Slavic priests" (Suttý & Balcar, 1977, p. 123). Narratives presented Svätopluk not only as the unifier of Czechs and Slovaks, but as a ruler integrating a wider group of Slavs in general: "Svätopluk's Empire continued to evolve as the influential West Slavic state and probably included the territories of Moravia, Slovakia, Bohemia, Lusatia, Silesia, Krakow and Pannonia" (Jilek, 1989, p. 118). Emphasized were his attributes as a successful warrior and an independent ruler under whom, "the Great Moravian Empire gained the greatest scope and power. Contemporary foreign chroniclers referred to him as the king." (Sosík & Vrabec, 1962, p. 34).

The decline of Great Moravia was interpreted as resulting from the death of the powerful ruler and as the outcome of German-Hungarian collaboration: "After Svätopluk's death, the king of the Franks resumed attacks against Great Moravia. He teamed up with the new nomads who were infiltrating the country - the Hungarians. Together, they finally destroyed Great Moravia at

the beginning of the 10th century. After 906, there is no more information about it" (Suttý & Balcar, 1977, p. 122). However, a more conciliatory tone is evident in describing the impact of Germans and Hungarians in national history. The most obvious change occurred in the description of Hungarians, when the textbooks began to abandon the images of wild barbarians. In the narratives about the extinction of Great Moravia, the ancient conquering theory and hospitable theory were merged. This led to admitting the military superiority of Hungarians, while the indigenous Slavic population continued to be characterized as politically conquered - yet culturally superior to their new neighbors. "By the end of the 11th century, all Slovak regions became part of the Hungarian state. Although Hungarians had taken much of their knowledge of agriculture from the more advanced Slovaks, they retained their dominant position" (Suttý & Balcar, 1977, p. 142).

Concurrently, a new *us* and *Other* identified on the basis of class affiliation emerged in the textbooks narratives, while eliminating ethnic and national differences: "Slovak and Hungarian subjects rebelled side by side against the introduction of feudal domination in Hungary. Slovak peasants and Hungarian shepherds and their leaders organized anti-feudal pagan uprisings" (Golán, 1962, p. 20). Slovak and Hungarian masses as carriers of progressive fight became the in-group while ruling class – feudal and Christian – became the symbol of oppression, and this was one of the most significant shifts in representing the *Other* that occurred in the textbooks published after 1948; and this narrative remained untouched until the end of the regime.

During the rule of the Communist Party, the interpretation of the history of Great Moravia and the significance of Svätopluk in history textbooks brought together an older historiographic tradition, i.e. repeating selected representations already contained in history textbooks published during the interwar period or during World War II. Great Moravia was depicted as the first common state of Czechs and Slovaks, a true *Golden Age* of the nation. Svätopluk was portrayed as a sovereign ruler, a unifier of the strong joint medieval empire of our ancestors, a successful conqueror and a foresighted political leader. There were also significant new motives included which identified our ancestors within a wider group of Slavic peoples, moving away from interpreting the adoption of Christianity as a major civilizational milestone in national history, and incorporating fewer hostile descriptions of the *Other* - Hungarians and Germans. An important component of historical narratives were the ordinary people, the masses, who were represented as the carriers of progress, and thus became the archetypes of heroes them-

selves. The transfer of heroic competences to ordinary people was also reflected in the reduced space devoted to specific historical personalities in the narratives examined.

Svätopluk was an integral part of the narratives on national history in all of the textbooks in the three periods under study. He was consistently portrayed as the founder and unifier of the first great and significant empire of our ancestors (depending on the current political context, there were variations related to the question of who our ancestors actually were and whether Great Moravia was a common state of Czechs and Slovaks, or merely a purely Slovak venture). Svätopluk was described as a great warrior, conqueror and guarantor of a possible expansion. He was depicted as a great political leader, as a symbol of independence, internal power and unity. However, the narratives on Svätopluk were also used to express contemporary political propaganda and its representation of the *Other*. As such, textbooks often contained hostile narratives regarding neighbors.

The fall of the Communist Party regime in 1989, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993 lead to a number of significant changes in interpreting the national past, which were reflected in school history education. Narratives about Svätopluk were again reformulated to fit within the contemporary political agenda, and different points of view have been presented in school history textbooks in the past thirty years. In 1990s, there was an attempt to spread some ultra-patriotic narratives in school history education and these were describing Svätopluk as a great warrior and defender of the Slovak homeland: “He always repelled the attacks and drove German troops back to their country. Annals of Fulda noted that after the defeat of Germans, Slovak women with clubs shed escaping nobles off their horses.” (Ďurica, 1995). In the meanwhile, more neutral and moderate views have been presented as well, depicting Svätopluk mainly as the consolidator of the medieval state, without hostile references to the *Other* (Dvořák, Mrva & Kratochvíl, 2001; Lukačka, Tonková, Kačírek & Hanová, 2015). One of the ways of grasping into how some students may internalize the story about Svätopluk today can be seen through the annual artistic competition, *Svätoplukovo kráľovstvo oživa*¹ (Revival of the kingdom of Svätopluk). The images students frequently presented in their poems were those of “our good ruler”, “Slavic hope”, “our role model”, but also as the one,

¹ <https://www.ukf.sk/verejnost/aktuality/udalosti/2732-svaetoplukovo-kralovstvo-oziva>

“whose sword cuts the hands and heads of Franks and Hungarians”.² While this is certainly of anecdotal character, far more intensive and complex interdisciplinary research is needed in order to analyze how students through school history education nowadays, understand the images of Svätopluk or historical heroes in general³. The fact that this competition is supported by the state institutions (some schools and universities, Matica slovenská) and that they also may contribute to the negative promotion of the *Other* is an important indicator (or a by-product) of the contemporary politics of school history education.

Conclusion

There are different approaches in present-day scholarship to the use of biographies of prominent historical figures in history education, ranging from viewing them as a relic of 19th and early 20th century historicism (Campbell, 2017) up to the reimagining of them as possible methods for developing students’ critical thinking skills (Halpin, 2010). On the one hand, some scholars see using the concept of a hero in history education as a tool for practicing the deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of historical narratives, fostering historical thinking and training in domain-specific literacy (Schmitz, 2014); and regard stories about heroes from history as a motivational tool that humanizes the past, or as important elements in such teaching of history where a discussion about moral values and role models is implemented (Vitz, 1990). Some go as far as ascribing them a definite potential to contribute to promoting cultural awareness and serve as an inclusion tool for students of various backgrounds (Holm, 2010). Views that are more critical have been expressed as well. Understanding biographies in education as a technique that introduces highly charged and opinionated perspectives into the classroom (Warren, 1992). The analysis of texts about Svätopluk produced for students in Slovak schools over the last hundred years has proven that, indeed, he has served as an ethno-identifying and consolidating element in the society, but only when concerning the in-group (i.e., us). He

² http://www.zssintava.edu.sk/downloads/svatoplukovo_kralovstvo_brozura.pdf

³ The author of the paper is currently collaborating with history teachers in several primary and secondary schools in Slovakia and studying which historical personalities from national and general history students deem as the most important, and why. According to a pilot study conducted by surveying 90 pupils in 9th grade in the elementary school Šrobárova in Prešov, Svätopluk, together with Ľudovít Štúr and Milan Rastislav Štefánik, belong to the three most widely mentioned historical personalities. Students provide different answers on what desired qualities a person should possess in order to enter history textbooks, usually falling in between two categories: *a producer of a general benefit for human kind* and *a great warrior*.

was presented as a founder, reconciler, defender of the nation and champion of national sovereignty. He was depicted as the personification of the whole nation (which was either Czechoslovak or Slovak – according to current political needs), and the characteristics attributed to him were intended to support the formation of positive national auto-stereotypes, i.e. favorable images of ourselves. Despite different socio-political regimes in which the textbooks were produced, there were several recurring concepts, such as the image of independence, self-exceptionalism, certain moral and cultural superiority over the *Other*, a fair fight against the oppression that came from the outside, and the struggle to preserve the nation, which was seen as natural, ancient and unique in its essence. Svätopluk has been used to symbolize social cohesion among the members of the nation. In relation to the out-group (the *Other*), however, Svätopluk was used as a highly divisive symbol. The motive of conflict, frequently present in narratives about national heroes (Berger&Lorenz, 2006), was strongly employed in all of the analyzed textbooks. Stories of Svätopluk constantly went hand-in-hand with the picture of the enemies of the nation, the neighbors – the *Other* – who were always described as immoral and unjust expansionists; as usurpers at a lower stage of civilizational development. One of the most important segments of the narratives on Svätopluk was his role as a conqueror of foreign oppressors. In the interwar period, the analyzed narratives were connected with the creation of a negative image of Germans and Hungarians. During World War II, they were largely used in anti-Czech narratives. During the period of 1948-89, they were utilized in addressing the *Other*, i.e. enemies, while merging a national and a class principle. Such interpretation of the past can sometimes lead to a resurgence of conflicts with the *Other*, and may lead to the exclusion of some groups from the process of commemorating the past. In history textbooks I researched, this approach was particularly noticeable in relation to the Germans, Hungarians and Czechs who became the *Other* in different political regimes in the national master narrative. These narratives were not only about neighbors, but directly had an impact on the formation of relations with citizens of the state – members of certain national minorities.

Although written mostly by historians, history textbooks in the three examined historical periods only loosely followed the developments in contemporary academic scholarship. The analyzed texts showed that the interpretations of life, deeds, and the importance of the selected national hero mainly served as indoctrination for the ideals and values currently promoted by state power, while retaining a large dependency on 19th century narratives; communicating images related to nation building ideals. Indeed, the idea of a hero has been important in creating a cohesive community and formed

a significant link between the community and the individual, but he has also been used in narratives that defined the national community against imagined enemies – in this case even affecting groups of citizens living in the state. In this way, history textbooks have instilled the feelings of wrongdoing, fear of strangers, biases towards neighbors, and contributed to the emergence and development of negative stereotypes and prejudiced opinions about members of other communities, as well as certain groups of citizens of one's own state. Looking at the recent political utilization of Svätopluk in public discourse in the context of narratives and images produced in history textbooks over the last century, it is obvious that current controversies have their roots in decades of anachronistic character of promoting historical heroes through history education. Despite the attempts of contemporary textbooks striving to provide a more neutral narrative, it remains an imperative task for different stakeholders – historians, textbook authors, didacticians, and teachers – to enter into a public discussion about the messages spread through the stories about heroes from national history, and the possible implications that may lead towards creating social stereotypes and the subsequent exclusion of the *Other*.

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Annex

Analyzed history textbooks in chronological order (* designates textbooks for students at primary level of education):

History textbooks published during interwar period

- Gebauerová, M., Jiráček, A., & Reitler, A. (1920). *Dejepis pre školy meštianske. Diel I. Pre druhú triedu škôl meštianskych*. Praha: Komenia.
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- Hlavinka, K. (1926). *Stručné dejiny národa československého pre nižšie triedy stredných škôl*. 3rd edition. Praha: Česká grafická unie.
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- *Dejmek, P., Kratochvíl, R. & Šimko, M. (1927). *Po stopách ľudstva. Dejepis pre 6. – 8. školský rok ľudových škôl slovenských*. Praha: Štatne nakladateľstvo.
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*Hrušovský, F. (1939). *Dunaj. Dejepis pre 6. postupný ročník slovenských ľudových škôl.* Trnava: Spolok sv. Vojtecha.

*Hrušovský, F. (1940). *Dunaj. Dejepis pre 7. ročník slovenských ľudových škôl.* Trnava: Spolok sv. Vojtecha.

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