

IDEOLOGY AND EDUCATION IN POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Olga Shparaga

European College of Liberal Arts in Belarus

Mikhail Minakov

Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars and Basel University

ORCID: 0000-0002-0619-7321

The institutions, values and practices of the educational systems of post-Soviet societies have been molded by the process of “decommunization,” by which they have opened themselves to globalization (and thus to Westernization), and to the emergence of nation-state projects in the early 1990s.

Decommunization was an ambivalent process. On the one hand, the forms and contents of education were deprived of the ideological monopoly of Soviet Marxism, which made these elements much more pluralistic and open to change. On the other hand, over time these elements were exposed to new ideological influences, in which the influence and presence of nationalism, clericalism and demodernization worldview increased significantly (Silova 2009: 301ff; Stan 2009: 73ff).

Along with decommunization, the post-Soviet nations lived through “decolonization”, an ideological process that included the decoding of the “Soviet order” as non-normal, making “national” (often in ethnic, ethnolinguistic and/or class terms) a new norm (Pavlenko 2008a, 2008b: 61; Kogan et al. 2012: 79; Konstantinovskiy 2012). Among the concepts reopened for debate and reordering were the issues of social justice, equality of citizens and that of collective solidarity.

The transformation of post-Soviet societies into an integral part of political and educational globality has had a significant impact on how the new national educational systems have been organized. The language of science, the dictionaries of managers, the nomenclature of degrees, the qualifications and competencies of workers and bureaucrats, the significance and activities of universities and secondary schools—all this was determined in relation to the Western educational canon (Golovaha & Panina 2001; Elliott & Tudge 2007; Silova 2011; Myhajlychenko 2012).

Westernization was more concerned with the formal side of education. In this case, the content was more responsive to the needs of the new states, the economies, and the ruling elites, as well as the new social order behind them. First, educational systems sought to create new citizens of new states (Mincu 2009; Kutsyuruba 2011; Yenin 2018). These citizens were to internalize new national and political identities, the skills of

specific post-Soviet capitalism regarding consumption, and consider normal socio-economic inequality (Patino & Caldwell 2002; Janmaat & Vickers 2007; Eglitis 2011; Ryabchuk & Onyshchenko 2012; Катровский 2013; But'ko 2013; Kyriuhin 2018). As importantly, novel dichotomies between “Us” and “Them” arose and became “natural”.

These and other processes have created new, fairly similar post-Soviet educational systems and cultures. These new systems and cultures, as well as their respective political creativity and ideological production, are interesting phenomena for scholarly study. And it is precisely to this study that this new issue of the Ideology and Politics Journal (IPJ) is dedicated.

This IPJ issue consists of twelve research papers written in different academic styles and within diverse disciplinary frameworks. Many of the authors have focused on the ties between ideology and education in separate countries like Belarus and Ukraine. The rest of the essays are exercises in comparative perspective.

Special attention is paid to history as the dominant discipline in educational systems. There is one Belarusian and three Ukrainian cases studies in this issue. These articles demonstrate how the imaginary “Other,” the representation of “religion’s choice,”¹ the interpretation of the origins of national statehood and of the Cold War in school textbooks create incentives to and obstacles for critical thinking in national communities.

Another crosscutting theme in the issue is the state of the higher education in post-Soviet societies. Here the decisive differences that pre-determine the state of higher education are largely dependent on the political regimes. However, in conjunction with the neoliberal beliefs, on the one hand, and the unprocessed Soviet legacy, on the other, the political regimes in Belarus and Ukraine have fostered a specific combination of traditional academic liberalism with a “value paternalism” in higher education (cf. article by Alexander Golikov). This combination makes the participants of university administration detached—or even alienated—from making decisions regarding the goals and organization of higher educational institutions. Also this combination has led to the incongruity of the system of higher education and the labor market, as well as to an imbalance between education as a fundamental human right and education as a commercial service. In this case, the authors pay attention to the problems of access to education and to the culture of critical thinking and public rationality in universities. These scholars discuss the ways to solve these problems where (a) the classical Humboldt university model—focusing on the formation of national elites—has exhausted itself, while (b) the neoliberal strategies have subordinated the university and its graduates to the logic of the market.

Finally, the third important theme of this issue is the placement of (mainly Ukrainian) scientific and educational practices, as well as their ideological priorities in a wider international context (with the special attention to European and American contexts). This provides our authors with the possibility to demonstrate the major trends of educational and ideological practices in Ukraine, and to assess their strengths and weaknesses.

¹ I.e. the legendary choice of the Orthodox faith by great prince Volodymyr.

To these ends, one of the studies focuses on the manner of integration of Donbas war veterans into educational programs. This study unites analysis with a criticism of militarism, and it demonstrates that militaristic culture is incompatible with education as an open and horizontal process. Such studies manifest the importance of a critical approach to militaristic cultures of post-Soviet societies. These cultures are based on paternalism and various kinds of power hierarchies that continue to play an important role and seriously hinder the democratization of not only education, but also of the entire society.

Altogether, this IPJ issue provides our readers with an opportunity to look into the long and diverse history of higher education, as well as the connection between education and the social, economic, political and cultural processes in post-Soviet societies. It also offers an opportunity to ask about the role of nationalism in the era of the conservative, illiberal turn and to uncover the power techniques that prevent education from adding to democratization—of itself and of its societies. The proffered research papers constitute an important step in the understanding of the connection between ideology and society, using the examples from post-Soviet societies.

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