



## *Soviet empire, Childhood, and Education*

---

*Imperio soviético, infancia y educación*

**Iveta Silova\* & Garine Palandjian\*\***

DOI: 10.5944/reec.31.2018.21592

**Recibido: 12 de marzo de 2018**

**Aceptado: 9 de mayo de 2018**

---

\*IVETA SILOVA is professor and director of the Centre for the Advanced Studies in Global Education at Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. She holds a Ph.D. in comparative education and political sociology from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University. Her research focuses on the study of globalisation and post-socialist education transformations, including intersections between post-colonialism and post-socialism after the Cold War. Since 2008, Iveta has served as a co-editor (with Noah W. Sobe) of *European Education: Issues and Studies* (a quarterly, peer-reviewed journal published by Taylor & Francis). **Datos de contacto:** E-mail: [Iveta.Silova@asu.edu](mailto:Iveta.Silova@asu.edu)

\*\*GARINE PALANDJIAN is a Ph.D. student in Educational Policy and Evaluation at Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University (ASU). Her current research focuses on Soviet and post-Soviet education transformations in Armenia, including childhood, gender, and national identities. Prior to ASU, she worked at the American University of Armenia (2013-2017) where she set up the Centre for Student Success and student support services. Garine received an IREX Individual Advanced Research Opportunity fellowship to conduct fieldwork as part of her research on peace education in Armenia (2012). She has Master's degree in Comparative and International Education from Lehigh University. **Datos de contacto:** E-mail: [gpalandjian@asu.edu](mailto:gpalandjian@asu.edu)

## **Abstract**

Children constituted a key element of the Soviet empire-building project, reconfiguring childhoods and refashioning the colonial space itself. Children of different ethnicities across the territories of the Soviet republics were to be united by the Russian language and a sense of Soviet patriotism, reflected in such political slogans as “friendship of all people,” “interethnic equalisation,” and “internationalism.” Education curriculum and activities were utilised to facilitate social and cultural “merging” of all ethnic groups on the basis of the Soviet Russian language and culture. At the same time, the Soviet empire advanced the idea of “unity in diversity,” allowing national minorities the right to self-determination and some political autonomy within a socialist context. Drawing on post-colonial theory and critical geography studies, this article looks at how early literacy textbooks were used to shape Soviet childhood by regulating children’s minds, bodies, habits, as well as “locating” them in the empire’s space and time. The article provides a brief historical context of the Soviet empire-building project, followed by a cross-national analysis of early literacy textbooks published in Russia, Armenia, Latvia, and Ukraine. Our goal is to highlight the continuities, contradictions, and ruptures in the vision of the Soviet childhood - and the Soviet future more broadly - as it travelled from the empire’s centre (Moscow) to its geographically diverse peripheries (Armenia, Latvia, and Ukraine).

*Key Words:* soviet education; Soviet empire; childhood; comparative education

## **Resumen**

Los niños constituyeron un elemento clave del proyecto de construcción del imperio soviético, la reconfiguración de la infancia y la remodelación del espacio colonial en sí. Los niños de diferentes etnias en los territorios de las repúblicas soviéticas debían estar unidos por el idioma ruso y por un sentimiento de patriotismo soviético, manifiesto en lemas políticos como la «amistad de todos», la «igualdad interétnica» y el «internacionalismo». El currículum educativo y las actividades se utilizaron para facilitar la «fusión» social y cultural de todos los grupos étnicos sobre la base del idioma y la cultura rusa soviética. Al mismo tiempo, el imperio soviético promulgó la idea de la «unidad en la diversidad», permitiendo a las minorías nacionales el derecho a la autodeterminación y cierta autonomía política dentro de un contexto socialista. Basándose en la teoría postcolonial y los estudios de geografía crítica, este artículo analiza cómo se usaron los libros de texto de alfabetización temprana para moldear la infancia soviética mediante la regularización de las mentes, los cuerpos y los hábitos de los niños, así como «ubicándolos» en el espacio y el tiempo del imperio. El artículo proporciona un breve contexto histórico del proyecto de construcción del imperio soviético, seguido de un análisis internacional de los libros de texto de alfabetización temprana publicados en Rusia, Armenia, Letonia y Ucrania. Nuestro objetivo es resaltar las continuidades, contradicciones y rupturas en la visión de la infancia soviética —y el futuro soviético de manera más amplia—, viajando desde el centro del Imperio (Moscú) a sus periferias geográficamente diversas (Armenia, Letonia y Ucrania).

*Palabras clave:* educación soviética; Imperio soviético; infancia; educación comparada

## 1. Introduction

Children were at the forefront of the Soviet empire-building project. From the ‘civilizing missions’ in Central Asia in the early 1920s to the forceful annexation of the Baltic republics in the late 1930s, the expansion of the Soviet empire mirrored the logic of other European colonial powers, which commonly justified their colonial pursuits in the name of children - “to ensure a better future for them, to save their souls, [or] to teach their parents how to live their lives” (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p. 3). In this context, child development was equated with national development - both in economic and political terms - placing children “on the ladder of evolutionary progress towards modernization” (Millei, Silova, & Piattoeva, 2018, p. 232; see also Pomfret, 2016; Burman, 2008). Colonial territories were viewed as ‘childlike’ and in need of assistance and control, while children functioned as both “an index” of civilization and modernity and “the key arena in which to instil such civilization” (Burman, 1998, p. 77). The association between children and empire-building was thus firmly established as a key element of modernity (and coloniality), reconfiguring childhoods and refashioning the colonial space itself.

While putting childhood at the heart of their colonial pursuits, the Soviet authorities employed somewhat different rhetoric and strategies of empire-building compared to the European colonial powers. One difference was in the approach of conceptualizing childhood. Unlike the Western notions of children as vulnerable, dependent, and weak (see Burman, 2008), the Soviet empire-building strategy relied on the visions of children as “independent, rational and powerful agents of the revolution,” explicitly rejecting Western modernity’s views of childhood (Kirschenbaum, 2001, p. 5). In fact, Kirschenbaum (2001) argues that the Soviet authorities tended to conflate the distinction between “flesh and blood” children and the “cultural construction” of ideas about childhood, presenting the images of children as “mirrors of reality rather than myths and metaphors” (p. 2). In the Soviet social imagination and education policy-making, children thus appeared as both the “ultimate model citizens of the Soviet state” and the “models for adults,” embodying a new social order and actively participating in building the Soviet future (Kelly, 2008, p. 110). While not necessarily liberating children from the adult supervision or state control, the Soviet approach to childhood nevertheless had important implications for education policies, school curriculum, and political socialisation practices, affecting children’s schooling and everyday lives.

Another difference between the Soviet and European empires stemmed from the relationships established between the colonial centre and its peripheries. Following the October Revolution in 1917 and the subsequent demise of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union explicitly declared itself “anti-imperialist” compared to the Western colonial powers (Roberts, 2014). Between the early 1920s and late 1930s,<sup>1</sup> the USSR consolidated its peripheral territories into a federalist system, which was organised (at least in theory) along ethnopolitical units and encompassed fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics, spanning the territory from Central Asia and the Caucasus to the Baltic states. By bringing together people of different cultures, languages, and histories, the Soviet government envisioned that each Soviet republic and its titular (non-Russian) nationalities would have the right

<sup>1</sup> In chronological order, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) incorporated the following republic: Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine in 1922, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in 1924; Tajikistan in 1929; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan in 1936; the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) in 1939; and Moldova in 1940.

to national self-determination and some political autonomy within “a proper socialist context and in such a way that did not challenge Soviet rule” (see Roberts, 2014, p. 15).<sup>2</sup> In the area of education, this strategy entailed the right for titular (non-Russian) nationalities to maintain their cultural heritage and receive education in the native languages, while simultaneously learning Russian as the language of interethnic communication. Children of different ethnicities across the territories of the Soviet republics were to be united by Russian language and a sense of Soviet patriotism, manifesting in such political slogans as ‘friendship of all people,’ ‘interethnic equalisation,’ and ‘internationalism.’ As Zaslavsky (1997) aptly noted, “for decades Soviet propaganda with its ubiquitous anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist overtones lived off these early attempts to support ethnic minorities” (p. 85).

Despite its strong anti-imperialist rhetoric, the Soviet Union nevertheless functioned as an empire, with Moscow as the central location of governance and policy-making (Zaslavsky, 1997; Martin, 2001; Roberts, 2014). Its imperialistic features became more visible in practice when the socialist principle of “unity in diversity,” which guided early nationality policies of the 1920s and 1930s, eventually evolved into privileging the Russian language and Russian speakers in different Soviet republics. In particular, the Soviet nationality policy deliberately shifted towards overt Russification shortly after the World War II, aiming at social and cultural “merging” of all ethnic groups on the basis of the Soviet Russian language and culture. It resulted in the steady decline in the use of national languages, decrease in enrolments in schools with native language education, and the overall linguistic and cultural assimilation of national minorities (Silver 1974; Karklins, 1986). Throughout the history of the USSR, the Soviet empire-building project was thus characterised by a strong tension between ethnocultural identity promotion, on the one hand, and assimilation into the Soviet Russian nationhood, on the other hand, leading to many complex and contradictory outcomes (Gorenburg, 2006; Pavlenko, 2013). In fact, some scholars argue that this unresolved tension enabled the various ethnic groups to maintain their ethnocultural awareness and develop a stronger sense of national consciousness, eventually contributing to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Brubaker, 1996; Barkey & von Hagen, 1997).

This article examines the role of education in the Soviet-empire building project, focusing specifically on the ways the Soviet government used children and the discourses about childhood to simultaneously shape both Soviet and ethnocultural identities. For the purposes of this paper, we define childhood broadly to encompass children’s experiences in formal schooling from elementary through high school education,<sup>3</sup> although most of the empirical data is drawn from early literacy textbooks used in elementary schools. More specifically, we explore how textbooks were used to shape Soviet childhood by regulating children’s minds, bodies, habits, as well as “locating” them in the empire’s

---

2 In the education sphere, this meant that most education policy decisions were made in Moscow and then diffused through the national Ministries of Education. In each Soviet republic, Ministries of Education were therefore responsible for the implementation of centrally articulated policies, while at the same time maintaining some autonomy to shape their national curriculum within the standardised boundaries.

3 The Soviet educational system was organised into three levels. Elementary schools (*nachalnoye obrazovanie*) encompassed 4 and later 3 classes, secondary schools encompassed 7 and later 8 classes and were called “incomplete secondary education” (*nepolnoye sredneye obrazavaniye*). This level was compulsory for all children until 1981. Since 1981, “complete secondary education” level (*polnoye sredneye obrazavaniye*) became compulsory. This level encompassed 10 and, in some republics (e.g., titular schools in the Baltic republics), 11 years. Children began elementary education at the age of eight.

space and time. By focusing on early literacy textbooks, the present article examines how the vision of the Soviet childhood, which was centrally articulated in Moscow, became translated - both literally and figuratively - onto the pages of early literacy textbooks published in the Soviet republics of Armenia, Latvia, and Ukraine. In what follows, we provide a brief historical context of the Soviet empire-building project, outline our theoretical and methodological approach that draws on post-colonial studies and critical discourse analysis, and then present a cross-national analysis of early literacy textbooks published in Russia, Armenia, Latvia, and Ukraine. Our goal is to highlight the continuities, contradictions, and ruptures in the vision of the Soviet childhood - and the Soviet future more broadly - as it travelled from the empire's centre (Moscow) to its geographically diverse peripheries (Armenia, Latvia, and Ukraine).<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Building the Soviet empire: Historical Background

The rise and fall of the Soviet empire is generally discussed in relation to the “national question,” that is the Soviet nationality regime, which attempted to “institutionalize the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as fundamental constituents of the state and its citizenry” (Brubaker, 1996, p. 23). The formation of the USSR was premised on the vision of granting national self-determination to different ethnolinguistic groups, which were oppressed under the former Russian empire, supporting the development of national languages and cultures while at the same time developing a broader sense of belonging to the Soviet empire. In 1923, the Russian Communist Party launched the policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenisation or nativisation), aimed to promote a harmony between national and linguistic identity through establishing ethnoterritorial autonomies to promote national cultures, languages, and cadres. This policy demarcated peoples by their (perceived) discrete ethnic and linguistic characteristics, and through ideological and real administrative and institutional processes alike, “sequestered these peoples into their own physical spaces—territories drawn on maps, ostensibly representing homogeneous ethnorepublics” (Silova, Mead, & Palandjian, 2012, p. 105).<sup>5</sup> As Smith, Law, Wilson, Bohr, and Allworth (1998) explain, the institutionalisation of ethnorepublics made nationality divisions “an integral part and reference point of native and public life and an organisational basis for reinforcing a new sense of local national identities” (p. 6).

Deriving from the stem *koren-* (“root,” meaning “rooting”) and commonly used in the phase *korennoi narod* (indigenous people), the word *korenizatsiia* reflected decolonizing rhetoric of the Bolshevik government and its support for a multinational state. *Korenizatsiia* promoted the distinctive national identities among different groups through “the formation of national territories staffed by national elites using their own national languages,” as well as through “the promotion of symbolic markers of national identity: national folklore, museums, dress, food, costumes, opera, poets, progressive

4 Given the space limitations, this paper will only focus on the Soviet Union and will discuss neither the Soviet influence on other eastern bloc countries in Eastern/Central Europe or Asia nor the Cold War dynamics and its influence on Soviet education.

5 Interestingly, the Soviet practice of fixing ethnolinguistic groups, whether they really represented a singular group or not, to particular physical and institutional/administrative divisions created nations where there were not as was the case with the Central Asian states (Brubaker, 1996; Suny, 1995; see also Silova *et al.*, 2012).

historical events, and classic literary works” (Martin, 2001, p. 74). In this context, native languages were seen as “a means of social discipline, as a social unifier of nations, and as a necessary and most important condition of successful economic and cultural development” (Davydov as quoted in Slezkine, 1994, p. 430). The use of native languages also helped the Soviet government to quickly spread the “word of socialism,” demonstrate its anti-imperialist vision in practice, and therefore gain trust in the “oppressed proletarians” across its culturally and linguistically diverse territory (Slezkine, 1994). In short, *korenizatsiia* made Soviet power “seem indigenous rather than an external Russian imperial imposition” (Martin, 2001, p. 74).

Implemented as a part of the Soviet indigenisation (*korenizatsiia*) policy in the 1920s and 1930s, the support of indigenous languages was accompanied by a rapid spread of mass education across the territory belonging to the Soviet Union. By the middle of the 1930s, native language schools were operating in all regions of the Soviet Union, and in 1934 textbooks were being printed in 104 languages (Sovetkin, 1958, p. 11; see also Silova, 2006). As a result of the Soviet “cultural revolution,” the number of children attending schools rapidly increased, especially in the republics of Central Asia where formal schooling was not available. During the first five years of Soviet rule, the number of children enrolled in schools increased 15 fold in Turkmen SSR, 18 fold in Kyrgyz SSR, 39 fold in Uzbek SSR, 57 fold in Kazakh SSR, and 225 fold in Tajik SSR (Bogdanov, 1954, p. 10). By the early 1950s, school enrolment reached 57 million people compared to only 8.1 million in pre-revolutionary Russia (Bogdanov, 1954, p. 3). At the same time, this comprehensive system of ethnic stratification served as an effective mechanism for the Soviet government to maintain social stability and control in a very complex multiethnic society (Brubaker, 1994; Zaslavsky, 1997; Silova, 2006). As Brubaker (1994) explained, it legitimised national diversity “in form,” but drained it in its content. The ultimate goal was to replace the national content with socialist ideology as a unifying basis for all of the national diversity.

By the 1950s, the Soviet indigenisation (*korenizatsiia*) policy shifted towards the Russification policy, which aimed at “social and cultural unification” of all ethnic groups on the basis of the Soviet Russian culture” (Khazanov, 1993, p. 183). Implemented under the Soviet slogan of “merging the nations,” the Russification policy resulted in a drastic decrease in the number of national units and the promotion of Russians as a nationality in their own right (Slezkine, 1994). In the education sphere, the Russification policy led to a rapid decline of the number of non-Russian languages of instruction in schools, reaching 45 languages in the 1970s and 35 languages in the 1980s - just over half the number of the languages offered by Soviet schools in the early 1930s (Anderson & Silver, 1984). Meanwhile, a continuous influx of Russian settlers into the territories of Soviet republics necessitated the establishment of Russian language schools, which existed in parallel to the schools for titular nationalities, providing autonomy and certain privileges for Russian-speaking populations living outside of Russia, on the one hand, and establishing power structures to control titular nationalities, on the other.

The impact of Russification policies differed across the Soviet republics. In particular, the percentage of students studying in native languages fell to 52 % in Latvia and 47 % in Ukraine by 1989, while the percentage of students studying in the Russian language increased to approximately 50 % in each republic respectively (see Table 1). By contrast, Russification policies in Armenia were less rigid, with the percentage of students studying in the Armenian language declining to 80 % by 1989 and the percentage of students studying in Russian increasing to 15 % only (see Table 1).

Such an uneven implementation of Russification policies across the Soviet republics could be explained by a variety of reasons, including the inadequacies of the Soviet bureaucratic machine, “the scarcity of competent officials, the dearth of qualified teachers, and insufficient funding, in particular for schooling,” as well as other political and geographical factors that compelled the Soviet government to enforce the Russification policies with various degrees of intensity (Dowler, 2001 and Weeks, 2006 as cited in Pavlenko, 2013, p. 656).

**Table 1**  
*Student distribution by language of instruction in secondary schools (1950s-1980s)*

Republics/ Successor states	1955-1956	1980-1981	1988-1989	1990-1991
<b>Armenia</b>				
Titular language	91.0 %	79.8 %	80.5 %	86.9 %
Russian	9.0 %	11.8 %	15.1 %	
Minority language		8.4 %	4.4 %	
<b>Latvia</b>				
Titular language	67.0 %	55.9 %	52.4 %	
Russian	33.0 %	44.1 %	47.6 %	
Minority language				
<b>Ukraine</b>				
Titular language	72.8 %	54.6 %	47.5 %	47.9 %
Russian	26.3 %	44.5 %	51.8 %	
Minority language	0.9 %	0.9 %	0.7 %	

Source. Adapted from Pavlenko (2013), p. 660-661.

Although the official interpretation of the Russification policy did not completely abandon the Leninist principle of unity through diversity, it was characterised by a shifting emphasis on cultivating a common Soviet identity, which would encompass - and eventually assimilate - children of different nationalities under the slogans of “friendship of all people,” “interethnic equalisation,” and “internationalism” (Silova, 2006, p. 32). The development of a common Soviet identity primarily occurred through political socialisation of children, beginning as early as preschool activities and continuing throughout secondary school and higher education. It ranged from official curricula and school uniforms to the participation in political organisations. For example, Soviet children were encouraged to engage in various political organisations that ensured their socialist upbringing and a sense of belonging to a single organisation. At the elementary school level (grades 1-3), children across all Soviet republics were sworn into *oktiyabryata* or ‘little Octobrists’; at the primary school level (grades 4-8), they became *pioneri* or ‘Young Pioneers’; and at the high school level (grades 9-10), they could finally become *komsomoltsy* or Komsomol members. Children participated in these organisations in mass numbers. For example, Moos (1967) notes that about 23 million university students and professionals served in the “Komsomol” rank, about 23 million school children served as “Young Pioneers” and 15 million children were “Young Octobrists” in 1967 alone (p. 80-81).

The main purpose of these children and youth organisations was “to develop social consciousness, loyalty to the Soviet regime, and the virtues of initiative, activism, discipline, and cooperation” (Matossian, 1968, p. 76). By becoming a part of these youth organisations, children received symbolic accessories such as the pin (for little Octobrists and Komsomol members) or the red scarf (for Pioneers) and they were expected to model behaviours of a good student and future role model citizen (Silova, 2006; Kirschenbaum, 2001, Matossian, 1968). Rewards and recognition for participation in these organisations were incentivised by the promise of greater likelihood of higher education admission, better career opportunities, as well as everyday rewards. As DeWitt (1955) describes, “After all, few pupils can resist the temptations of wearing the red scarf of a Pioneer if it means 2 weeks of summer camp free, admission to clubs where all sorts of gadgets can be observed and made, and admission to puppet shows and movies at half price” (p. 42). Over time, such large-scale participation of children and youth in these political organisations and activities was expected to homogenise children’s behaviours, actions, and appearances, ultimately resulting in the formation of an ideal Soviet citizen.

In addition to political socialisation of children, the Soviet government also attempted to socialise children into a common identity through temporal and spatial means. Temporally, the Soviet curriculum blurred the link between “child” and “adult,” as well as “play” and “work,” by introducing labour or labour-like activities into the curriculum to encourage children’s “play” that mimicked the world of adult’s work (Kirschenbaum, 2002, pp. 122-123). Workshops and plots of land were attached to many schools and children often went on excursions to observe the operation of nearby factories, power plants, and mines (Matossian, 1968). While emphasising the social significance of both mental and physical labour, the Soviet curriculum thus positioned children as active participants in the building of the Soviet futures. Over the same period, children’s lives (especially while attending school) were perfectly timed through the “‘seriation’ of successive activities” in each moment of time (Foucault, 1977, p. 160). This “discipline of the minute” was clearly reflected in the Soviet schooling practices that required all schools of a particular type (ranging from elementary schools to universities) and of a particular grade level “to teach the same lessons from the same books with the same methods at the same time” (Hamot, 1996 quoted in Silova, 2006, p. 40). The school timetable looked practically identical across the Soviet republics, further synchronising children’s schooling experiences. Such an orchestrated administration of school time - encompassing both education and afterschool activities - turned Soviet schools into “the ultimate learning machines for supervising, controlling, and hierarchizing of a Soviet child” (Silova, 2006, p. 41).

Finally, Soviet children were also socialised in terms of space and place. The Soviet empire-building project prioritised the construction of common (often physically identical) children’s places—camps, playgrounds, schools, libraries, and kindergartens—aiming to create a sense of common identity through the everyday occupation of these particular places (de la Fe, 2013; Crowley & Reid, 2002). Representing the modernisation efforts of the Soviet state and linking childhood directly to the socialist concepts of “progress,” “enlightenment,” and “inclusion,” these common spaces helped establish an imagined community of Soviet children “no matter where in the empire a child resided” (de la Fe, 2013, p. 35). Importantly, de la Fe (2013) notes that the Soviet discourses of national self-determination and childhood spaces allowed “children in non-Russian regions to understand their place within their respective territorial boundaries which



was both culturally distinctive and socially common with Soviet spaces, evoking feelings of belonging” to both their national territory and the larger multinational space of USSR (p. 40). Combined, children’s everyday physical spaces (such as school buildings) and broader geographical landscapes (both natural and cultural landscapes) served as constituent facets of the old and powerful myth of the Soviet *homeland*. Bonding socio-cultural identities to specific (national) spaces, the myth of the Soviet homeland thus socialised children sociospatially as a part of the Soviet nation-building project (Silova *et al.*, 2012).

Taken together, these three-prong socialisation strategies – encompassing political, temporal and spatial socialisation – placed children at the centre of the Soviet empire-building project, reconfiguring Soviet childhood and refashioning the Soviet empire itself. Yet, as the present article will illustrate, these different socialisation strategies were never static or uniform. Although articulated centrally in Moscow, these strategies were translated by education policymakers into different education patterns across the Soviet republics and they were certainly experienced by individuals in multiple and unpredictable ways (see Silova, Piattoeva, & Millei, 2018).

### 3. Exploring Childhood Socialisation Strategies Through Textbook Analysis

To explore the social construction of Soviet childhood and nation(hood) – two distinct but closely interrelated processes in the Soviet empire-building project – this article draws on the analysis of early literacy textbooks as an example of the *official* interpretation of the Soviet nationality policies in school texts. As Newman and Paasi (1998) explain, educational narratives found in school texts (including textbooks, atlases, poems, and posters) provide an official “reading” of social norms, values, and symbols attached to them, forming a political space that extends state policies (and politics) into the seemingly apolitical aspects of children’s everyday lives (Kallio & Häkli, 2011; see also Silova, Mead, Mun, & Palandjian, 2014). While recognizing that children may read and interpret these textbooks in different ways, it is nevertheless important to understand how the Soviet government attempted to translate its vision of the Soviet future for a direct consumption by school children. Even more interesting is the exploration of the ways in which this vision became translated - both literally and figuratively - onto the pages of early literacy textbooks published in different languages on the territories of the Soviet republics.

While the examination of the nation and national identity in school textbooks has generally tended to focus on the history or social studies textbooks (see, e.g., Janmaat, 2005; Schissler & Soysal, 2005; Michaels & Stevick, 2009), where children’s political socialisation is more explicit, this study expands the focus to early literacy textbooks. Building on our previous research on post-socialist childhoods, we further develop the concept of “*literacies of childhood*” – “a set of discursive constructions that define what it means to be a child, creating normative boundaries of how children conceive the realm of possible actions for themselves and others” (Mead & Silova, 2013, p. 199). *Literacies of childhood* are not necessarily about the traditional notions of literacy described as the ability to read, write, and communicate. They are, first and foremost, about learning the mundane and everyday ways through which children are expected to govern themselves and each other.

For the purposes of these paper, these literacies encompass three distinct ways of childhood socialisation, including political, temporal, and spatial socialisation. First, political socialisation of childhood focuses on texts and images that directly discuss Soviet political norms, values, and behaviours in relation to children and children's lives, simultaneously socialising them into numerous societal institutions and roles. Second, temporal socialisation examines how the construction of the child (and empire) is premised upon particular epistemologies of time and its progression, paying particular attention to how children's lives intertwine with adult worlds on the pages of the Soviet early literacy textbooks (Mead & Silova, 2013). Third, sociospatial socialisation examines how textbooks shape representations of children's space by infusing the national space – whether understood as the country's borders, its geographic landscapes, or articulations of homeland – with certain cultural, social, and national meanings (Mead & Silova, 2013; see also Newman & Paasi, 1998).<sup>6</sup>

## 4. Literacies of Soviet Childhood: Visions of Empire in the National Peripheries

In the following analysis we trace how discursive constructions of childhood and empire were articulated centrally in Moscow and then translated into the textbooks published in Armenia, Latvia, and Ukraine. We analyse each of the three types of literacies of Soviet childhood, including political, temporal, and spatial socialisation of children.

### 4.1. Political Socialisation

As children begin learning the alphabet, they also learn to be political subjects. School children across the Soviet Union – from the Baltics to the Caucasus – were politically socialised as early as they began learning to read and write. Soviet early literacy textbooks carried various messages about what it meant to be a Soviet child, including political norms, values, and behaviours children were supposed to embody. These textbooks also socialised children in various societal institutions and roles, aiming to construct an ideal Soviet citizen. Perhaps one of the most visible signs of political socialisation reflected in early literacy textbooks was through children's participation in school-based political organisations such as Little Octobrists, Pioneers, and Komsomol members. Proudly wearing their red star pins with the image of Lenin as a child (a pin worn by all children admitted into the ranks), Little Octobrists appear in images that portray them studying at school, helping elders, participating in parades, or standing in front of Lenin's portraits or statues. The texts accompanying these pictures remind children about the honour and responsibility of becoming Little Octobrists. For example, a 1990 Russian textbook includes an image of an induction ceremony into the organisation of Little Octobrists and says: "On the day of Great October [Revolution] we became Little Octobrists. But before that we were *only* students" (p. 89, emphasis added). Joining the ranks of the children's political organisation is equated with becoming a fully capable (political) member of the society. A 1986 Ukrainian textbook further instructs children about their responsibilities as Little Octobrists to "protect the Soviet homeland" as Lenin directed them. It further says: "Learn to live like Lenin, and to love the great peoples like Lenin" (p. 103). In all textbooks, children appear to receive the honour of becoming Little Octobrists with joy and excitement, eagerly sharing the news with their friends and families.

6 See Appendix for more information on data sources and our textbook sample for each country.

Although the young readers of early literacy textbooks were only eligible to join the ranks of Little Octobrists (based on their age), they learned about the next steps of moving up the ladder of children's participation in political life. For example, textbooks contained many images of Pioneers, the next level of youth organisation for children in grades 4-8, which was distinguished by wearing a red scarf. The appearance of the induction ceremony into the Pioneer organisation meant to prepare children to strive for membership to the next level so they too could receive the honour and recognition symbolised through the red scarf. The honour of wearing the red scarf came with the responsibility and expectation that a Pioneer must study well and always exhibit exemplary behaviour. As Pioneers, children were expected to continue carrying Lenin's vision forward. For example, a 1975 Latvian textbook shows an image of Young Pioneers putting flowers in front of Lenin's statue in the centre of Riga and feeling proud that "Lenin is always alive in their hearts," teaching them to always strive for knowledge so that they can become "real Leninists" (p. 94). In a 1984 Armenian textbook, a story describes Samvel arriving home and telling his grandmother with great excitement that he had become a Pioneer. In response, his grandmother suggests that he must work harder from this point forward, to always be a disciplined and hardworking student (p. 81). The story suggests that it is not enough to earn this recognition and that children must continue to study hard and do good deeds for their communities.

References to Lenin as a role model appear throughout all Soviet textbooks. Pictures of Lenin as a child accompany many texts, reminding young readers that they must be hardworking and studious – just like Lenin. Textbooks remind children that they are expected to follow Lenin's famous command – "Learn, learn, learn!" – while respecting every task they do both at school or at home. For example, the 1984 Armenian textbook tells a story of Lenin as a great teacher who taught children to love their homeland and be respectful. Entitled "Who is [he] looking at?", the story is about a framed picture of Lenin,<sup>7</sup> which is hanging on the classroom wall. In this story, and many other similar stories in textbooks published across the Soviet republics, children are constantly reminded that they are expected to be diligent, disciplined, and erudite learners and that they are always watched:

On the classroom wall there is a picture of Lenin *babi* (Lenin grandfather). Everyday with nice glances he looks at the students as if saying, 'Study well, you will become people for your fatherland.'  
 One day the children got into a big argument, "Lenin grandfather is looking at us," said Arpik and Soorik seated at the left side.  
 "No, he is looking at us," said Shoghik and Yervant seated at the right side.  
 "Vay, maybe you can't see, but he is directly looking at us," insisted those seated in the middle row. Comrade Tsoghik entered the room. Knowing that the fight was about to start he said, "You are fighting for no reason, children. Lenin grandfather is looking at all of us." (p. 83)

What is striking is that the texts and images of Little Octobrists and Pioneers across the different Soviet republics appear the same, with children frequently standing against

<sup>7</sup> As seen in the image, the portrait of Lenin is "decorated" with devil ears' by a child to whom the *aybenaran* belonged. It is an important reminder of children's everyday reactions and resistances to official political socialisation efforts. Although not a part of this study, it is critical to examine how children experienced political socialisation during their socialist childhoods. See more on this in Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei (2018).

identical backdrops of red flags or portraits of Lenin or Marx, as well as wearing identical school uniforms, red star pins, and red scarves. The uniformed look was coupled with the expected standard of uniformed behaviour: at school, children were depicted to be attentive and engaged in class instruction; they were taught to study well and have good handwriting skills; and they were expected to always look clean and tidy. Once dressed in school uniform, children were also expected to act and respond in homogenous ways, which were cultivated both at school and home. When children arrived home from school, for example, they were expected to help their parents with housework or their siblings with school work. Overall, children's participation in political youth organisations appeared to instil not only particular values and norms of behaviour, but also a sense of belonging to a larger community that united children across the different Soviet republics through common experiences and expectations.

In addition to these messages, children also encountered other role models and learned values associated with their national homelands. For example, textbooks published in Russia feature texts about the famous Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin and occasionally include excerpts from Russian fairy-tales, which teach children about the importance of caring for each other, working hard, and being humble. All of the textbooks include excerpts from Russian fairy-tales and the Ukrainian textbooks also transfer Russian texts on Pushkin. However, Armenian, Latvian, and Ukrainian textbooks also include texts and images capturing their national poets and heroes, as well as national folklore – embedding national sentiments and thus simultaneously initiating children into national patriotic awareness – which are presented alongside texts transmitting Soviet ideology. These nationally-oriented texts and images produce disruptions, opening spaces for developing particular national identities alongside the common Soviet identity among children.

*Set of Images 1. Political socialisation through children and youth organisation*



Накануне праздника Великого Октября мы стали октябрятами. А раньше мы были просто учениками.

Russia, 1990, p. 89



Russia, 1990, p. 42



Armenia, 1984, p. 46



Ukraine, 1986, p. 103



Latvia, 1984, p. 94



Armenia, 1984, pp. 82-83

#### 4.2. Temporal socialisation

Most early literacy textbooks published in the USSR open with strikingly similar pages, announcing the beginning of the children’s learning journey (Mead & Silova, 2013). The first page of almost every book features either an image of a young schoolboy Lenin or a portrait of adult Lenin, confidently staring ahead and reminding children about the importance of learning. For example, a Ukrainian textbook (1990) features an image of a young Lenin, holding his very own literacy primer, and the accompanying text saying: “Bukvar - the beginning of all beginnings” (pp. 2-3). While children are clearly expected to identify with Lenin as a young learner, the textbook also conveys an important message about the “beginnings” – “not only of the beginning of a child’s schooling or literacy, but also indicating a much more profound process, concerning the whole life of the child” (Mead & Silova, 2013, p. 205). So what kind of “beginning” do these early literacy textbooks envision for the Soviet child?

First and foremost, the textbooks introduce a Soviet construction of a *linear* progression of time, which is derived from a larger cultural thesis ordering Marxist-Leninist thought, that is, the modernity narrative of progress reflecting a steady march to a more educated, politically rational, socially peaceful, and technologically advanced world (Mead & Silova, 2013). In early literacy textbooks, this linear progression of time is clearly visible in children’s advancement from “illiteracy” to “literacy,” from “childhood” to “adulthood” - always moving forward and towards a strictly predetermined destination (Mead & Silova, 2013). While the first pages of the books signal the beginning of literacy and the child’s holistic development toward a Soviet subjectivity, the last pages of the textbooks announce the definite completion of this particular “literacy” mission, reaffirming children’s independence and their expected contributions to building a Soviet future. For example, 1980 Russian textbook includes a poem titled “Chitalochka” (Little reader), which suggests that with gaining literacy, the readers also gained the freedom from the world of childhood dependency on adults: “How well you can read! No need to bother mama, no need to go to grandma: “Read, please, read!” ... No need to call out, no need to wait, it’s possible to simply take and read!” (p.

126). The child is thus “liberated – literate – with access to knowledge that can forever be accrued” (Mead & Silova, 2013, p. 212).

The textbooks further explain that literacy opens the whole world to children. For example, a 1990 Russian textbook tells children that they will “find the courage in their favourite books to see all of the USSR and all of the world from the heights [of literacy]” (p. 125). The same textbook also instructs children that literacy (and education more generally) will help them become “hard-working citizens of [their] great homeland – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics” (p. 1). The child’s progression from “illiteracy” to “literacy” thus encompasses also political and social literacy, placing children at the centre of Soviet campaigns of modernisation, urbanisation, and labour mobilisation. The 1973 Armenian *aybenaran*, for example, illustrates how children acquire literacy by helping each other climb on top of the letter blocks, envisioning – as they reach the top – their futures as astronauts, artists, or writers who would contribute to the development of their country (see image set 2). Textbooks also emphasize that children must love (all) books, because they can guide children through the world. As the 1984 Armenian *aybenaran* says, “for you it [the book] transforms a lighted path, it is your guide” (p. 92).

In fact, early literacy textbooks consistently equate learning to read with becoming productive citizens of the USSR, blurring the line between the “play” and “work,” between “child” and “adult.” Kirschenbaum (2001) notes that such purposeful blurring of childhood and adulthood reflects Soviet government’s efforts to “put children’s interests first” in the name of the Soviet future, insisting that the life of the child should revolve around “work rather than play” (p. 120). One of the ways to achieve this was by redefining what was essentially labour or labour-like activities as something inherently “interesting” to kids. In this context, Soviet children’s “play” could mimic the world of adult’s work (as with children’s “building blocks”) or *be* labour, on a micro-scale, from performing various chores around school and home to gathering berries to sewing doll’s clothing (Kirschenbaum, 2001, pp. 122-123; see also Mead & Silova, 2013). These labour-like or actual labour activities are clearly represented in textbooks, portraying children actively involved in cleaning their classrooms and school yards, helping adults to harvest potatoes, or directing traffic through pretend play. In their earlier study on literacy primers in Latvia and Ukraine, Mead and Silova (2013) similarly note the images of children engaged in such “socially useful labour” as harvesting potatoes, raking hay fields, planting trees, picking mushrooms, fixing bicycles, mending clothes, and cleaning schoolyards (p. 213). In these images, children appear – both literally and figuratively – as “miniature adults, moving towards ‘correct’ understandings and habits” as they participate in the construction of the Soviet future (Kirschenbaum, 2001, p. 117). As Mead and Silova (2013) note, children are placed in “a temporal framework of dynamic forward progression” – by learning to read, they gain independence; through “play,” they prepare for the activities and subjectivities of their adult lives; and through observing or participating in real labour, they bear witness to the Soviet Union’s rapid progress (p. 214).

Yet, the linear progression of time – so central to the Soviet empire-building project – is sometimes unexpectedly disrupted through subtle references to pre-modern cyclical time. For example, all textbooks capture the changes of the nature’s seasons throughout the year. While early portions of the books often feature imagery of the fall harvest, the middle of the books include texts of snowy landscapes and winter holidays, followed by the images of spring with birds returning and rain bringing blossoms. The books usually end with the images of children stepping outside of schools into the summer landscapes,

playing in the fields, taking walks in forests, climbing mountains, or enjoying summer vacation by the seaside. Interestingly, in many Armenian, Latvian, and Ukrainian textbooks (but not so much in Russian ones), nature becomes animated, with the smiling sun greeting children as they step outside the school buildings. These flashbacks of seemingly pre-modern time, revealing nature-centred spiritualities and cyclical time, appear in Soviet textbooks in subtle ways, surprisingly co-existing with the modern conceptions of linear time (see Silova, forthcoming).

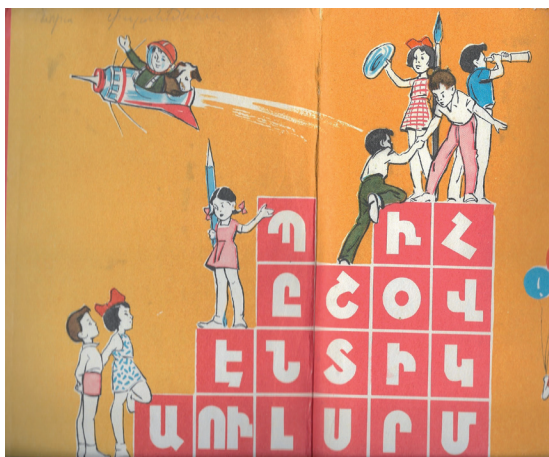
*Set of Images 2. Temporal socialisation*



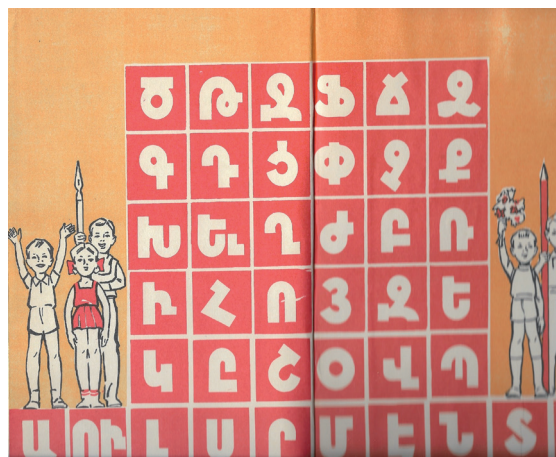
Ukraine, 1990, pp. 10-11



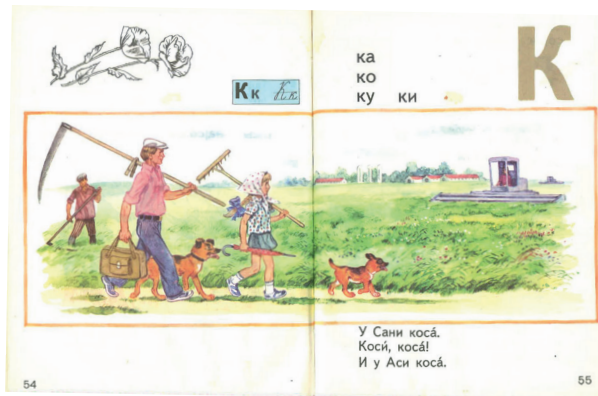
Ukraine, 1986, p. 50



Armenia, 1973, inside cover (front)



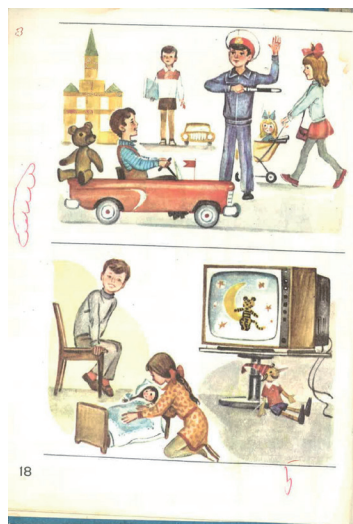
Armenia, 1973, inside cover (back)



Russia, 1987, pp. 54-55



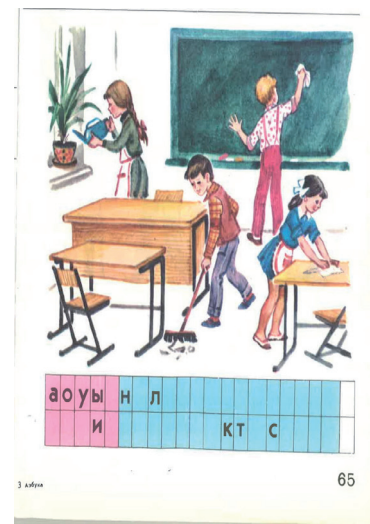
Armenia, 1984, pp. 10-11



Russia, 1987, p. 16



Latvia, 1984, p. 20



Russia, 1987, p. 65

### 4.3. Sociospatial socialisation

Sociospatial socialisation of children constituted one of the central domains of the Soviet empire-building project, aiming to link national and cultural identities to specific geographies of Soviet republics, while at the same time developing a sense of belonging to the entire USSR. In this context, educational narratives and images of space inhabited by children reveal shifting possibilities of nationality and nationhood, constructing powerful myths of their homeland(s). Perhaps one of the most frequently used images – appearing in some variations across different editions of the textbooks published in Moscow – effectively captures the Soviet vision of “unity in diversity” by portraying children of different nationalities (usually wearing traditional national costumes) standing in front of the USSR map or waving red flags as they marvel the vast territory of their new homeland that stretches from the borders of Europe to Asia (see set of Images 3). The texts accompanying these images describe the USSR as a homeland – “singular creation of the peoples’ [plural] will” (1990, pp. 127) or “as the union of unbreakable Soviet Republics” (1986, p. 190) – thus negating the more particularistic national(ist) meaning of the word. Many textbooks include excerpts from the Soviet anthem to further reinforce the idea of



“unity in diversity” expressed through colourful images:

"Unbreakable union of free republics united forever by Great Rus' [Velikaya Rus'].  
Long live the singular creation of the peoples' [narodov] will,  
the mighty Soviet Union!  
Be glorious, our free Fatherland [Otechestvo],  
the reliable stronghold of friendly [druzhby] peoples!  
The party of Lenin -- the power of our people leading us to the triumph  
[torzhestvy] of communism!" (1986, Moscow, pp. 190-191)

More interesting, however, is the reference to a *Great Rus*, which carries pre-Soviet Russian imperial connotations. In a 1986 book produced by Moscow's main educational publisher *Prosveshcheniye* (pp. 190-191), and in 1986 and 1990 textbooks published in Kyiv (pp. 104-105; pp. 126-127), three highly similar versions of the same text appear, suggesting a direct transfer of ideas from Moscow to Kyiv. While the text appears to be quite aligned with traditional Soviet discourses celebrating the Soviet Union as a polity for and of the “friendly/united peoples” [druzhby narodov], a reference to a *Great Rus* competes with the idealised narrative of the Soviet Union as a confederation of equal peoples. The deliberate use of the noun “Rus” [Русь] rather than “Russia” [Россия] is highly evocative. The descriptor of a medieval Eastern Slavic proto-people and polity (the Kievan Rus) that would eventually evolve into the “Great Russia” empire, Rus' is a term that has deeply imperial pre-Soviet connotations, referencing the glorious origin points of the later Russian empire and its historiographical construction that likewise incorporated Belarusian and Ukrainian national identities as the “White Russians” and “Little Russians” in particular. In a similar vein, both Ukrainian textbooks (1986, 1990) include texts and colourful pictures of Moscow's Red Square with a title “Moscow – the main city of our homeland” (p. 54), emphasising the centrality of Russian language and culture in the Soviet nation-building project. Inclusion of such references in the literacy primers of Russia and Ukraine undoubtedly cuts against the (idyllic) grain of Soviet internationalism, suggesting the particular endurance of pre-Soviet Russian national(ist) discourses and the maintenance of its particular privileged position in the supposed non-hierarchy of Soviet peoples.

Meanwhile, the pictures and texts discussed above clearly capture the inherent tension in Soviet discourse on nations – one paradoxically reifying the common Soviet nationhood and simultaneously fuelling national identities constructs in the hopes of subsuming them. Inevitably, this tension points to the ability of language to be repurposed and imbued with new or different cultural or political meanings. This is exactly what we see on the pages of textbooks published in Ukraine, Latvia, and Armenia. While Ukrainian textbooks often directly “translate” ideas of Soviet nationhood from Russian to Ukrainian texts, Latvian and Armenian textbooks take more liberty in modifying the message. In particular, Latvian textbooks still contain images of multinational peoples (e.g., kids wearing traditional costumes and dancing together), yet the map of the USSR disappears. Children's association with the USSR is further blurred in the accompanying text, which definitively describes Latvia as their *only* homeland:

"The land where a person is born is called homeland. No matter where one lives, he remembers his homeland just as he remembers his mother. There is only one mother and motherland [homeland]. We have been born in Latvia. It is a part of Soviet Union. The brotherhood of all Soviet children calls the Soviet Union its Homeland." (Latvia, 1984, p. 100)

The text clearly states that Latvian children have only one homeland – a place where they were born (Latvia) – even though it is officially a part of the Soviet Union. Other texts about homeland lose their association with the Soviet Union altogether. For example, a textbook published in 1984 includes a text about homeland, which is accompanied by a picture of the Latvian map only, with a glaring omission of the USSR in either visual or textual representations. Instead, the text highlights the beauty of the Latvian landscapes, including its “beautiful hills,” “white birches,” “blue lakes,” “vast meadows,” and “the Baltic sea washing the shores of the Latvian land (p. 91). A similar rhetorical device is also used in Ukrainian and Armenian textbooks, which offer detailed descriptions of their *national* landscapes, deliberately avoiding any mention of the USSR. For example, the 1990 Ukrainian textbook includes a poem by Taras Shevchenko, “a great Ukrainian poet” who describes a beautiful [Ukrainian] nature, including its “blue steppes,” “gentle breezes,” and “green willows” (p. 119). Another poem from the 1986 Ukrainian textbook describes a journey of a young crane – a symbol of Ukraine – migrating back north for the summer. After its journey over “hundred lands,” the crane is asked, “What is the best land of all?” The crane answers: “Nothing is better than the native land!” Without directly referencing Ukraine, the poem is remarkable for its powerful association of Ukraine as homeland, drawing on the symbolic imagery of a young crane’s longing for *his* Ukraine, *his* “land.”

Armenian textbooks are perhaps even more radical in disassociating their descriptions of homeland from the USSR. References to the USSR are very rare and usually mentioned only in passing as, for example, a child planning a trip to Moscow and delivering a friend’s letter to her father. Instead, a 1984 textbook describes Yerevan, the capital of Armenia as “one of the world’s oldest cities with beautiful buildings, cool forests, and cold water fountains” (p. 64). Although the picture accompanying the text features a Soviet red flag flying over the government building in the Republic Square, the red flag is the only association with the USSR. The children in the same story talk about Leninakan, the second largest city in Armenia named after Lenin, which they describe as “an ancient city” (p. 64), pointing to Armenian national roots and ethnic claim to their national space that long precedes Armenia’s incorporation into the USSR. Similar to Latvian and Ukrainian texts, Armenian early literacy textbooks include many texts and images linking “homeland” with the notion of ancestry – a line going back through generations – describing how Armenians have been “born in or to” a homeland that has existed seemingly forever. Typically, the natural beauty and bounty of the Armenian homeland is portrayed through the images of grapes, wine, or Mount Ararat. For example, all the Armenian *aybenarans* included in this study incorporate numerous images of grapevines, either in detailed narratives about the importance of wine or simply used as ornaments on the textbook pages. It is through the interaction with natural landscapes – for example, grapes and wine of Armenia, wheat fields and willows of Ukraine, or blue lakes and forests of Latvia – that the children in different Soviet republics are invited to find a symbolic connection to their ancestors, despite the efforts of the Soviet government to forge a common Soviet identity.

Set of Images 3. Sociospatial socialisation



Russia, 1990, p. 3; caption reads: “Our homeland - USSR”



Russia, 1990, p. 127; the text is the Soviet anthem



Russia, 1986, p. 190-191; the text is the Soviet anthem



Ukraine, 1983, pp. 104-105; caption reads: “To live is to serve our homeland. There is no more beautiful homeland than ours.”



Latvia, 1984, p. 100, p. 91

## 5. Conclusion

Historically, empires were built upon colonial institutional foundations and cultural practices, which were used to maintain and reinforce the status quo. Compared to Western models of colonisation, the Soviet empire-building project was distinct in its rhetorical emphasis on “anti-imperialist” goals, which were reflected in the Soviet policies of granting national minorities the right to national self-determination and some political autonomy within a context of building a common Soviet identity. At the same time, however, the Soviet government drew inspiration from Western colonial projects, using ethnography and statistics (e.g. census records) to draw the USSR’s internal borders and (re)order its multiple nationalities into distinct ethnonational territories, which would ideally correspond to national languages and cultures (de la Fe, 2013). Across the

Soviet Union (although in various degrees), the empire-building project thus reflected a tension between ethnocultural identity promotion, on the one hand, and assimilation into the Soviet nationhood, on the other hand, resulting in many complex and contradictory outcomes in the Soviet peripheries. For some republics in Central Asia, for example, Soviet nationality policies facilitated the process of national identity consolidation through modern schools and education in native languages, substantially increasing literacy levels among the population, while building the common Soviet identity. For others, like Latvia and Ukraine, Soviet nationality policies were more closely associated with Russification policies, leading to the decline in the use of national languages, decrease in enrolments in schools with native language education, and the overall linguistic and cultural assimilation of national minorities. Yet still others (like Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the Caucasus) experienced a less rigid impact of Russification, perhaps due to the particular relationship with and distance from the Soviet empire's centre.

Caught in the middle of the Soviet empire-building project were children. Similar to other (Western) empire-building projects, the Soviet Union placed children at the centre of its ambitious nation-building project, linking the fate of the USSR, "if not practically then metaphorically, to the state of its children" (Kirschenbaum, 2001, p. 43). In this context, the childhood socialisation through schooling became central to imagining – and building – both the Soviet childhood and the Soviet future. Aiming to reflect the socialist principle of "unity in diversity," childhood socialisation processes were three-prong, encompassing political, temporal, and sociospatial socialisation of children through school curriculum and everyday practices. While political socialisation of childhood focused on infusing Soviet political norms, values, and behaviours into children's everyday lives, temporal and sociospatial socialisation "located" children in a particular time and space of the Soviet modernisation project. In terms of temporal childhood socialisation, the Soviet curriculum emphasised a strictly linear progression of time, blurring the lines between childhood and adulthood and positioning children as active participants in the building of the Soviet future. In terms of spatial socialisation, the Soviet empire-building project prioritised the construction – both physically and metaphorically – of common children's places, ranging from everyday spaces (e.g., playgrounds, schools, libraries, and kindergartens) to symbolic spaces of their multinational Soviet homeland.

It is at the diffusion stage of these different childhood socialisation processes – that is, their movement from the Soviet empire's centre to its peripheries – where unexpected contradictions and ruptures in the official Soviet discourses became clearly visible. In addition to transmitting the Soviet political norms and values through school curriculum and children's participation in youth organisations, textbooks also taught children about their national poets and heroes, national history, as well as national folklore. In this way, socialisation into the Soviet patriotic awareness often proceeded alongside the development of children's *national* (Armenian, Latvian, and Ukrainian) identities. Similarly, while Soviet textbooks explicitly socialised children into a linear temporal framework, defining their roles in building the Soviet future, the same textbooks also made subtle references to pre-modern cyclical time that simultaneously distanced students from the Soviet empire-building project. Finally, sociospatial socialisation of children through textbooks further revealed the tension in the Soviet discourse on nations, simultaneously reifying the common Soviet nationhood and fuelling national identity constructs. For example, while Russian textbooks explicitly referred to the vast territory of USSR as a *homeland*, Armenian, Latvian, and Ukrainian texts seemed to lose – in various degrees

– association with the Soviet Union, instead emphasising the importance and particularity of their *national* landscapes and therefore defining homeland in national, rather than supranational terms.

Taken together, these three-prong childhood socialisation strategies – political, temporal, and spatial – revealed an uneven terrain on which the foundations of the Soviet empire had been built. Centrally articulated in Moscow, the Soviet nationality policies were translated into different education patterns and childhood socialisation practices across the Soviet republics, revealing multiple tensions and contradictions within the official discourses. While Ukrainian textbooks seemed to “translate” the messages from Moscow into early literacy textbooks in more direct ways, Armenian and Latvian textbooks attempted to overtly disassociate from the Soviet Russian narrative, placing a stronger emphasis on ethnonational identity construction among children. Importantly, the Russian textbooks focused almost exclusively on forging the Soviet identity, ultimately resulting in a much weaker focus on Russian identity. As a result, Russian textbooks appeared imperial in content, with the childhood socialisation strategies geared more towards the Soviet imperial identity construction rather than a Russian or a multi-national one (see also Piattoeva, 2010).

Despite its all-encompassing nature, the Soviet empire-building project had left sufficient space for the national cultures and languages to survive in different Soviet republics. Remarkably, this cultural diversity was preserved not only in oral traditions, but also through mainstream schooling (including official school textbooks), further reinforcing the multiplicity of pre-Soviet identities and ultimately failing to unite the Soviet peoples in all of their diversity. In this respect, as Roberts (2014) rightfully noted, “the Soviet empire fell victim to its own success” (p. 298). As much as early literacy textbooks were designed to transmit and maintain the empire’s vision for the “bright Soviet future,” these same textbooks also worked to destabilise it. It is this fluidity of the Soviet childhood socialisation processes that opened spaces for unexpected contradictions and ruptures to emerge, reconfiguring childhoods and refashioning the future of the Soviet empire itself.

## 6. Appendix

The empirical data in this study is comprised of 15 early literacy textbooks, which were published in Russia (as the Soviet empire’s centre) and its three peripheries of Armenia, Latvia, and Ukraine. All textbooks were approved by the Ministries of Education in respective republics and published between the periods of 1940-1990. The textbooks published in Russia were used not only in the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, but also in schools for Russian-language speakers across the Soviet Union. Thus, children attending Russian language schools in different Soviet republics used the same textbooks, while children attending schools for titular nationalities learned from textbooks written and published in their own republics. The sample of textbooks from the four republics covers an expansive and diverse space, reflecting not only unique geographical position and national symbolism of each republic, but also different degree of engagement with the Soviet nationality policies (e.g., Latvian and Ukraine being affected the most by the Russification policies). Studying the social and cultural construction of Soviet childhood and empire in early literacy textbooks of these countries thus offers a rich comparison, revealing interesting continuities, contrasts, and similarities. Textbook analysis drew on a purposefully broad, interpretive framework, which allowed us to pursue a detailed

qualitative analysis of the messages, ideas, and images through critical discourse analysis, making inferences into what the books communicate to their readers and how readers may interpret and experience the texts.

**Table 2**

*Soviet textbook sample (Armenia, Latvia, Russia, and Ukraine)*

No.	Date	Authors	Title	Publisher
<b>Armenian textbooks</b>				
1	1973	A. Der Krikoryan	Aybenaran [alphabet book]	Yerevan: Polykraf-kombinat
2	1984	A. Der Krikoryan	Aybenaran [alphabet book]	Yerevan: Koynavor Dbakroutyan Dbaran
3	1988	A. Der Krikoryan	Arevik Aybenaran [Arevik alphabet book]	Yerevan: Koynavor Dbakroutyan Dbaran
<b>Latvian textbooks</b>				
4	1950	Ozolins, Ed.	Ābece: Latviesu valoda krievu skolam [ABC for Russian schools]	Riga: Latvijas Valsts Izdevniecība
5	1955	Lubaniete, Z., Berzaja, I., Vuskalne, L.	Ābece 1. klasei [ABC for the 1st grade]	Riga: Latvijas Valsts Izdevniecība
6	1965	Lubaniete, Z., Berzaja, I., Ramsa, A., Vuskalne, L.	Ābece 1. klasei [ABC for the 1st grade]	Riga: Latvijas Valsts Izdevniecība
7	1980	Karule, A., Kauce, A.	Ābece [ABC]	Riga: Latvijas PSR Izglitības Ministrija
8	1984	O. Nesterovs, J. Osmanis	Ābece 1. klasei [ABC for the 1st grade]	Riga: Zvaigzne
9	1987	Teivans, E.	Ābece: Macibu gramata	Riga: Zvaigzne
<b>Russian textbooks</b>				
10	1980	L. Hazarov	Спутник букварь [Sputnik bukvar]	Moscow: Prosveshcheniye
11	1982	V.G. Goretskiy, V.A. Kiriushkin, A.F. Shanko	Букварь [Bukvar]	Moscow: Prosveshcheniye
12	1986, 1987	V.G. Goretskiy, V.A. Kiriushkin, A.F. Shanko	Азбука [Azbuk]	Moscow: Prosveshcheniye
13	1990	V.G. Goretskiy, V.A. Kiriushkin, A.F. Shanko	Азбука [ABC]	Moscow: Prosveshcheniye

(See next page →)

No.	Date	Authors	Title	Publisher
<b>Ukrainian textbooks</b>				
14	1986 (Soviet Ukrainian)	N.S. Vashulenko, A.H. Matveyeva, L.K. Nazorova, N.F. Skripchenko	Букварь [Bukvar]	Kyiv: Radyanska Shkola
15	1990 (Soviet Ukrainian)	N.S. Vashulenko, A.H. Matveyeva, L.K. Nazorova, N.F. Skripchenko	Букварь [Bukvar]	Kyiv: Radyanska Shkola (Kyiv)

## 7. References

- Anderson, B. A. & Silver, B. D. (1984). Equality, efficiency, and politics in Soviet bilingual education policy: 1934–1980. *American Political Science Review*, 78, 1019–1039.
- Applebaum, R. (2015). The friendship project: Socialist internationalism in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s. *Slavic Review*, 74(3), 484–507.
- Barkey, K. & Von Hagen, M. (1997). Conclusion. In K. Barkey & M. Von Hagen (Eds.), *After empire multiethnic societies and nation-building: the Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (pp.181-191). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Bogdanov, I.M. (1954). *Statistika shkolngo obrazovaniia (Statistics of school education)*. Moscow, Russia: State Statistical Publishing.
- Brubaker, R. (1994). Nationhood and the national question in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Eurasia: An institutionalist account. *Theory and Society*, 23(1), 47-78.
- Brubaker, R. (1996). *Nationalism reframed nationhood and the national question in the new Europe*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.
- Burman, E. (1994). *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Burman, E. (2008). *Developments: Child, image, nation*. London, UK: Brunner-Routledge.
- Crowley, D. & Reid, S. E. (2002). *Socialist spaces of everyday life in the Eastern bloc*. New York: Berg Press.
- DeWitt, N. (1955). *Soviet professional manpower: Its education, training, and supply*. Washington, D.C.: National Science Foundation.
- Fe, L. de la (2013). *Empire's children: Soviet childhood in the age of revolution* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1922&context=etd>

- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gorenburg, D. (2006). Soviet nationalities policy and assimilation. In D. Arel & B. A. Ruble (Eds.), *Rebounding identities: The politics of identity in Russia and Ukraine* (pp. 273-303). Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson centre Press.
- Janmaat, J.G. (2005). Ethnic and civic conceptions of the nation in Ukraine's history textbooks. *European Education*, 37(3), 20-37.
- Kallio, K.P. & Häkli, J. (2011). Are there politics in childhood? *Space and Polity*, 15(1), 21-34.
- Karklins, R. (1986). *Ethnic relations in the USSR: the perspective from below*. Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- Kelly, C. (2008). Defending children's rights, "In defense of peace": Children and Soviet cultural diplomacy. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 9(4), 711-746.
- Khazanov, A. (1993). Ethnicity, nationalism, and interethnic relations in the former Soviet Union. The National Council for Soviet and East European Research. Retrieved from <https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/1993-807-05-Khazanov.pdf>
- Kirschenbaum, L. (2001). *Small comrades: revolutionizing childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Matossian, M. K. (1968). *Impact of Soviet policies in Armenia*. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill.
- Martin, T.D. (2001). *Affirmative action Empire: Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1938*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Mead, M.A. & Silova, I. (2013) Literacies of (post)socialist childhood: Alternative readings of socialist upbringings and neoliberal regimes, *Globalization, Societies, Education*, 11(2), 194-222.
- Michaels, D.L. & Stevick, E.D. (2009). Europeanization in the 'other' Europe: Writing the nation into 'Europe' education in Slovakia and Estonia. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 41(2), 225-245.
- Millei, Z., Silova, I., & Piattoeva, N. (2018). Towards decolonizing childhood and knowledge production. In I. Silova, N. Piattoeva, & Z. Millei (Eds.), *Childhood and schooling in (post)socialist societies: Memories of everyday life*. (pp. 231-256). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moos, E. (1967). *Soviet education achievement and goals*. New York, NY: National Council of American-Soviet Friendship.
- Newman, D. & Paasi, A. (1998) Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: boundary narratives in political geography, *Progress in Human Geography*, 22(2), 186-207.



- Pavlenko, A. (2013). Language management in the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Countries. In R. Bayley, R. Cameron, & C. Lucas (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics*. (pp. 651-679). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Piattoeva, N. (2010). Citizenship education policies and the state Russia and Finland a comparative perspective. (Doctoral Dissertation) University of Tampere, Finland.
- Pomfret, D. M. (2016). *Youth and empire: trans-colonial childhoods in British and French Asia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Roberts, J. A. (2014). The anti-imperialist empire: Soviet nationality policies under Brezhnev. (Doctoral Dissertation). West Virginia University, West Virginia.
- Schissler, H. & Soysal, Y.N. (2005) *The nation, Europe, and the world: textbooks and curricula in transition*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Silver, B. (1974). Social mobilization and the Russification of Soviet nationalities. *The American Political Science Review*, 68(1), 45-66.
- Silova, I. (forthcoming). Towards a wonderland of comparative education. *Comparative Education*.
- Silova, I. (2006). *From sites of occupation to symbols of multiculturalism. Reconceptualizing minority education in post-Soviet Latvia*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Silova, I., Mead, M., Mun, O. & Palandjian, G. (2014). Pedagogies of space: (Re)imagining nation and childhood in post-Soviet states. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 4(3), 195-209.
- Slezkine, Y. (1994). The USSR as communal apartment, or how a socialist state promoted ethnic particularism. *Slavic Review*, 53(2), 414-452.
- Sovetkin, F. F. (1958). *National schools in Russian Federation of the 40 years*. Moscow: Academy of Science.
- Suny, R. G. (1993). *The revenge of the past: nationalism, revolution, and the collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Suny, R. G. (1997). The Russian Empire. In K. Barkey & M. Von Hagen, (Eds.), *After empire: Multiethnic societies and nation-building*. (pp. 142-154) Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Zaslavsky, V. (1997). The Soviet Union. In K. Barkey & M. Von Hagen, (Eds.), *After empire: Multiethnic societies and nation-building*. (pp. 73-98) Boulder, CO: Westview Press.