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Facts or Fakes in Historiography: The Manipulation of Historical Events.

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Introduction

In today's world, where information is constantly shared and debated by using all possible ways to do so, it is becoming harder and harder to tell what is true and what is false. Especially nowadays with newer inventions of technology, this topic is getting more importance into time. The stories we hear about the past shape how we understand who we are, where we come from, and how we see the world around us. However, history is not always told the way it happened. It can be twisted, altered, or even completely rewritten to match certain agendas. This manipulation of history raises important questions about how we, as societies, remember our past and what impact it has on our present but also our future. The question, which is going to guide this article will be: "*How does the manipulation of historical events impact collective memory, and what dangers does 'fake history' pose to the perception of historical facts?*".

This article explores how and why history is manipulated, and what consequences this has for our collective memory. From governments using history as a tool to control narratives, to the spread of misinformation in the digital age, the article analyzes the methods with which history can be distorted. We also explore the role of education, media, and propaganda in shaping how we remember past events.

Throughout this article, we will see how the manipulation of history is able to change the way people see themselves and their societies. It can create divisions, justify wrongdoings, or even erase the suffering of certain groups. Using the help of examining examples from different periods and countries, we will understand how history can be changed and shaped to serve certain interests or agendas, and why it is so important to question the version of history we are getting presented with.

As you read, take a moment to think about how much responsibility we must take to protect the truth about our past but also our present. When history is changed or manipulated, it can create confusion, divide people, and even excuse harmful actions. Imagine how it feels for a group to have their contributions erased by history or their struggles ignored, whereas in the meantime Dothers might use false versions of history to gain power or avoid facing the truth about their actions.

It is important to question the stories we are told about the past. Not everything we read in books or see in the media might be the full truth. Sometimes, history is shaped to fit certain agendas, leaving out the uncomfortable parts or twisting the facts. By staying curious, questioning what we are told about, and doing our own research about history, we can uncover the deeper truths and see the bigger context.

When we understand what really happened in history, we give ourselves the chance to grow. We can honor the experiences of those who came before us, learn from their mistakes and struggles, and make better choices for our present and future. That is why protecting truthful history matters – it helps us to build a fairer, and more understanding world for everyone now and in the future.

1. Definitions and explanations

In the following, there will be definitions and explanations which are crucial, laying the foundation for understanding this seminar work.

1.1 What is the definition of facts and fakes in historiography?

Facts refer to **verifiable events, data or details** about the past which are supported by reliable sources and evidence like official documents (government records, laws, official report...), first-hand perspectives from individuals (e.g. held in diaries or personal letters), publications of that time (newspaper and journals), visual documentation (photos or videos), physical objects (tools, clothing, weapons, record papers, or art from that period of time). These methods of verifying the past help to reconstruct and understand historical events.

Fakes refer to false or manipulated accounts of history, often used for misleading or serving a certain agenda. Mostly, these fakes made of falsified documents, distorted narratives, or the omission of key facts lead to a distorted or completely wrong view of historical reality.

1.2 Importance of objective history for collective memory and society

Objective history is essential for collective memory and society as it helps ensure that people understand the past accurately, which is crucial for building a fair, correct, and informed future. This leads to preserving the truth, because it prevents the spread of false narratives that can mislead generations. Accurate history makes sure that societies remember the events which happened in the past, as truly as they happened. Preserving the truth leads to learning lessons. Understanding historical events makes societies learn from the past and do better in the future, i.e., avoid voting for a certain party in elections.

1.3 How and why are historical events manipulated?

Leaving out certain facts or perspectives; twisting or recontextualizing events to fit a specific agenda; creating fake documents, altering records, or fabricating evidence to cover up the lie; using media, education, and cultural outputs to promote a distorted version of history or destroying records, artifacts, or cultural heritage to erase inconvenient truths could all be possible ways to manipulate history. But why even manipulate it in the first place?

Some possible explanations are i.e.: rewriting the history to make someone look good or justify their rules, to make the past seem heroic or flawless, to hide bad things done by rich or powerful people, to make people stop questioning or rebelling, or to make enemies look worse and justify revenge.

2. History as a tool of power

To understand how history can be used to influence people it is a good beginning to look at already happened cases. The easy but also big changes happened thousands of years ago. In the following, there will be a deeper dive into multiple periods of time explaining how already back then history got reshaped to fit certain agendas.

2.1 Ancient era (3000 BC – AD 500)

Ramses II, often called Ramses the Great, was once one of Egypt's most powerful and ambitious Pharaohs. Ruling during the 19th Dynasty, which was later known as the Ramesside period, he was famous for his grand building projects and efforts to ensure his name would never be forgotten. One way he achieved this was through a practice called 'Usurpation'. This involved taking monuments from earlier rulers/pharaohs, erasing their names, and replacing them with his own. This led to not only claiming credit for structures he did not even build, but also tied his reign to Egypt's glorious past, wanting his power to be presented more than it was.[1][2]

Ramses II's usurpation was widespread. He targeted monuments from some of Egypt's most celebrated rulers, such as Amenhotep II and Thutmose III. For example, at the Luxor Temple, statues were originally built to honor Amenhotep III. However, Ramses II's artisans changed the meaning of those statues. They altered the name to make it the honor of Ramses II. Not only did they change the inscription, but they also reworked the statues face to match Ramses II's. This was not only about ego – it was a smart move to make people believe that Ramses had always been at the center of Egypt's greatness. [3][4]

This procedure had a deeper purpose than glorifying his personality. Politically, it helped him seem like the true successor to Egypt's greatest rulers. By linking himself to their achievements, he made his rule look strong and convinced people that Egypt would stay successful under his leadership. This was important in a society that believed in maat – the idea of keeping balance, order, and harmony, which the Pharaoh maintained. Besides political aspects, this also had cultural impacts in ancient Egypt. Ramses understood the importance of monuments. Temples and statues were not only decorative, they symbolized the Pharaoh's connection to gods and his role as the protector of the nation. By putting his name and image on earlier

[1] (Wilkinson, 2010, p. 245)
[2] (Assmann, 1992, p. 88)
[3] (Brand, 2010, p. 45-60)
[4] (Lephron, 2013, p. 102)

monuments meant for other rulers, he ensured that future generations would re-member him as a god-like figure who brought stability and greatness to Egypt.[5]

This practice creates challenges for modern historians and archeologists. Figuring out which Pharaoh originally built a monument can be tricky when Ramses' name and shape have been applied over everything. Still, these alterations offer valuable insights into how ancient leaders already used propaganda to shape their legacies and control how history remembered them. In the end, Ramses II's usurpation wasn't just about stealing credit – it was a calculated strategy to cement his place into history. By taking over the monuments of his predecessors, he made sure that his name would be tied to Egypt's greatest achievements, even though they weren't his own. This practice shows just how far ancient rulers were willing to go to shape their stories according to their imaginations to receive benefits in the future and se-cure their legacies.[6] [7]

2.2 Medieval era (around 746 AD – 1400/1500)

The medieval era provides some of the clearest examples of how history was shaped or manipulated by powerful people to achieve their goals. Whether to strengthen their rules, justify controversial actions, or gain public support, rulers and institu-tions understood the importance of controlling how events were remembered. Two of the most famous cases of historical manipulation during this period are the "Do-nation of Constantine" and the events surrounding the Fourth Crusade. Both exam-ples demonstrate how reshaping history could have impacts on politics, religion, and public perception.

The "Donation of Constantine" was a document that claimed Emperor Constantine, a major figure in Roman history, had given control to the Western Roman Empire to the Pope. This supposed transfer of authority made the Pope not just a spiritual leader but also a political ruler over large regions. For centuries, the Catholic Church used this document to justify its power and to argue that its power came straight from Constantinople himself, him being one of the most respected Roman

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[5] (Brand, 2010, p.45-60)
[6] (Baines, 2007, p.203)
[7] (Redford, 1986, p.112)

Emperors. The "Donation" allowed the Church to influence kings and rulers across Europe, making it a key element in medieval politics. However, during the Renaissance, a scholar named Lorenzo Valla deeply studied the language and content of the document. He discovered that the document was a fabrication, not an authentic one – written not during Constantine's time but several centuries later. The style of Latin did not match the period it was supposedly written in and many of the claims in that document were historically impossible. Despite this finding, the "Donation of Constantine" had already shaped history. For hundreds of years, it had given the Church immense power and had played a crucial role in shaping the politics in medieval Europe. This example shows how a single false document, if believed, can change the course of history and affect millions of lives. [8]

Another striking example of historical manipulation is the Fourth Crusade, which took place in 1204. The Crusades were originally promoted as holy missions to reclaim Jerusalem and other sacred lands from Muslim control. However, the Fourth Crusade took a very different path. Instead of marching to Jerusalem, the crusaders attacked Constantinople, a Christian city and the capital of the Byzantine Empire. This unexpected attack shocked many people at that time, as it involved Christians fighting against other Christians. Constantinople was a wealthy and strategically important city. Therefore, many historians believe that the crusaders' real motivation for this unexpected attack was more economic and political rather than religious. The leaders of the crusade, however, needed to justify their actions to maintain the support of the Christian population in Europe. They framed the attack as part of God's larger plan, claiming it was necessary for the success of their holy mission. By doing so, they hid their true motives and avoided widespread criticism. [9] [10]

3. Case study I: Nazi Germany

The nazi regime did not only control public opinion in the present but actively rewrote the past to support its ideology and long-term goals. Historical events got

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[8] (Valla, et al., 2007, p.23)
[9] (Phillips, 2004, p.45)
[10] (Runciman, 1954, p.120)

twisted, falsified, or selectively erased to align with the narrative the regime wished to promote. This manipulation already took place before the Nazis took power, but got more crucial after 1933, becoming a key part of education, public memory, and national identity. [11]

A central element in this rewriting was the "stab-in-the-back" myth (*German: "Durchstoßlegende"*), which falsely claimed that the Germany did not lose World War I on the battlefield but instead got betrayed by internal enemies – particularly being Jews, Marxists, and the democratic leaders of the Weimar Republic. Although historians have confirmed that this myth cannot be true, the Nazis treated is as it was a historical fact, integrating it into school and public discourse. This distortion laid the foundation for justifying antisemitism and furthermore for the destruction of democratic structures. [12]

Another action of the Nazis was painting the Weimar Republic – Germany's first democracy – as a complete failure. In textbooks and exhibitions, Nazis described it as a time of weakness, shame, and chaos. All its positive contributions to democratic freedoms, cultural achievements, or progress in arts and sciences were ignored or downplayed. Nazis wanted people to believe that Hitler's rise to power was not a break or exception is history, moreover it being a necessary solution to a broken system. [13]

Another way the Nazis also rewrote history was by portraying Jews and political opponents as long-standing enemies of the German people. They were written in the past as causes of decline or disorder, even in places where they had no real role. This made it easier for the regime to justify persecution and make their actions seems like a kind of "defense" against their so called but made-up "threat".

The Nazis also created myths about a Glorian Aryan past. They claimed that German people descended from noble ancient tribes and therefore always had been defined

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[11] (Bessel, 1993, p.134)
[12] (Benz, 2015, p.22)
[13] (Benz, 2015)

to be ruling. There were even organizations like the Ahnenerbe, which twisted archeological finding and historical records to prove that point.

In the end, Nazis used history as a tool of manipulation, shaping beliefs, fueling hate, and justifying terrible actions. They changed the past to profit from it in the present and future. Understanding how they did this helps us see just how dangerous it can be when history is no longer about truth but about power. In the following, there will be a deeper dive into those mentioned ways of Nazis using history to gain power.

3.1 The stab-in-the-back myth and rewriting WWI history

After the end of World War I in 1918, Germany was left shocked and humiliated by its defeat. Germans had believed that they would win the war, moreover because of the state-controlled military propaganda that hid military setbacks from the public. When the armistice was signed, and the harsh conditions of the Treaty of Versailles were revealed, Germans searched for an explanation, moreover someone to blame. Out of this frustration the *stab-in-the-back* myth took hold. This story claimed that Germany didn't lose the war on the battlefield, but they were betrayed by inner enemies within Germany – especially Jews, socialist, Marxist and leaders of the democratic Weimar Republic. [14]

The myth was first promoted by high-ranked military officials like *Erich Ludendorff*, who was looking for a way to avoid blame for Germany's defeat.[15] In 1919, Ludendorff and Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg testified before government commission and claimed the army had been "undefeated in the field" but had been betrayed by "civilian saboteurs" and a weaking of morale at home.[16] This lie completely ignored the real reasons for Germany's defeat, such as the exhaustion of German troops, food and resources shortages, successful Allies offensives, and the impact of United States entering the war 1917.[17]

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[14] (Evans, 2003)
[15] (Bessel, 1993)
[16] (Memorial Museum United States Holocaust, n/a)
[17] (Watson, 2014)

The *stab-in-the-back* myth quickly spread through nationalist and right-wing political circles. These groups used the narrative to discredit the Weimar Republic, which had signed the peace treaty, and to create hate against Jews and political leftists. The Weimar leaders were called "November criminals", accused of stabbing the heroic German Army into the back by signing and agreeing the armistice and therefore also agreeing to the Treaty of Versailles.[18]

When Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party rose to power in the 1930s, they used the *stab-in-the-back* myth as a central pillar of their ideology. In his book 'Mein Kampf', Hitler argues that the Jewish population and Marxists politicians had ruined Germany from within.[19] Nazi propaganda repeated this message endlessly – in newspapers, schools, speeches, and films – until it became a widely spread and accepted historical fact by many Germans. This myth helped Nazis justify their dictatorship, their dismantling of democratic institutions, and their persecution of Jews and minorities.

Modern historians have completely rejected the *stab-in-the-back* myth as a dangerous fabrication. Studies by scholars such as Richard Evans, Ian Kershaw and Jeffrey Herf show that it was created and spread intentionally to serve the political purposes of the Nazi Party. [20]

3.2 The criticism of the Weimar Republic and democratic values

After seizing power in 1933, the Nazi regime undertook a comprehensive campaign to reshape German society's understanding of its recent past. Central to this effort was the deliberate vilification of the Weimar Republic, Germany's first democracy experiment, which the Nazis portrayed as a period of national humiliation, moral decay, and political chaos. This process changed German's mindset about democracy to be negative and legitimize the Nazi dictatorship.

The Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, established in March 1933 under Joseph Goebbels, played a crucial role in controlling and manipulating

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[18] (Bitesize, n/a)
[19] (Hitler, 1925)
[20] (Herf, 2006)

cultural and intellectual life in Germany. The ministry exercised authority over all forms of media, including newspapers, film, literature, music, and education, ensuring that Nazi ideology permeated every aspect of public discourse. Through this centralized control, the regime systematically distorted a narrative that depicted the Weimar Republic as a failed state, incapable of providing stability or national pride or national pride. [21]

In the realm of education, the Nazis implemented sweeping reform to align the curriculum with their ideological goals. History textbooks were rewritten to emphasize themes of national struggle and to portray the Weimar era as a time of betrayal and weakness. The 1938 "Guidelines of Teaching History" instructed educators to present history as a means of fostering national consciousness and loyalty to the Führer, effectively erasing the democratic achievements of the Weimar period from collective memory. [22]

Teachers were required to join the National Socialist Teachers League and undergo training to ensure adherence to Nazi principles. Subjects such as "Race Studies" and "Eugenics" were introduced, promoting notions of Aryan superiority and antisemitism. The curriculum was designed to instill obedience, militarism, and reverence for Hitler, while critical thinking and democratic values were systematically suppressed.[23]

Higher education institutions like universities were affected by Nazi ideas. Professors who were Jewish or did not support the Nazis were fired. Freedom in research and teaching was taken away. Instead, scholars were expected to support Nazi beliefs in their work. Subjects like history and politics were changed to fit Nazi views. These changes helped spread negative views of the Weimar Republic and made the Nazi regime seem more rightful and stronger. Through these actions, the Nazi regime effectively rewrote history of the Weimar Republic, casting it as a cautionary tale of democratic failure. By controlling education and cultural expression, they

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[21] (Welch, 1993, p.112)
[22] (Wegner, 2002, p.89)
[23] (Pine, 2010, p.59)

fostered a collective memory that rejected democratic principles and embraced authoritarianism as the path to national revival.[24]

3.3 Constructing a mythical Aryan past through pseudo–history

The Nazi regime endeavored to fabricate a glorified Aryan past to legitimize its racial ideology and political ambitions. Central to this effort was the propagation of pseudo-historical narratives that portrayed the Aryan race as the originator of all significant human achievements. These narratives were disseminated through various channels, including education, propaganda, and scholarly institutions.[25]

One key figure in spreading these ideas was Alfred Rosenberg. In his book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, he claimed that the Aryan race had created the world's greatest cultures and had to stay "pure" by staying away from other races. Even though his ideas had no real scientific proof, the Nazis still used his book to support their beliefs, and it became one of the most promoted words in Nazi Germany, convincing Germans to support the actions the Nazi regime undertook. [26] [27]

To make these ideas of Rosenberg's book sound legit, the Nazis established the Ahnenerbe, an organization dedicated to researching the supposed Aryan heritage. Under the guise of scientific inquiry, the Ahnenerbe conducted expeditions and studies aimed at uncovering evidence of ancient Aryan superiority. However, their methods were often unscientific, and their findings were manipulated to fit the preconceived narrative of Aryan dominance. [28]

These pseudo-historical narratives were integrated into the educational system, where textbooks and curricula were revised to reflect the glorified Aryan past. Students were taught that Aryans were the original creators of culture and that their lineage needed to be protected. This type of teaching served to instill a sense of racial pride and superiority among German youth, aligning them with the regime's ideological goals. The construction of a mythical Aryan past through pseudo-history was a

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[24] (Burleigh, 2000, p.210)
[25] (Goodrick-Clarke, 1985, p.89)
[26] (Rosenberg, 1930, p.112)
[27] (Stern, 1961, p.78)
[28] (Rosenberg, 1930)

deliberate strategy by the Nazi regime to foster a unifying national identity rooted in racial superiority. By manipulating history and promoting unfounded theories, the Nazis sought to justify their policies and motivate public support for their agendas.[29]

3.4 Educational reform and the rewriting of textbooks

After the Nazi party rose to power in 1933, it swiftly transformed the German educational system to serve its ideological objectives. The regime aimed to cultivate a generation that embodied National Socialist values, emphasizing racial purity, unwavering loyalty to Adolf Hitler, and readiness for military service.[30]

Crucial for this transformation was the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture, which centralized control over educational content and administration. Teachers were required to join the National Socialist Teachers League, and those who denied or seem to be politically unreliable or of non-Aryan descent were dismissed. By 1936, approximately 97% of teachers had joined this league, spreading dissemination of Nazi ideology in classrooms.[31]

Textbooks underwent significant revisions to reflect Nazi principles. Subjects such as history, biology, and geography were rewritten to emphasize Aryan superiority, antisemitism, and the importance of *Lebensraum* (living space).

History textbooks were completely rewritten to portray Germany's past through nationalist and racial perspectives. Events were reinterpreted to highlight the heroism of German peoples and the supposed threads posed by Jews and other minorities. For instance, the causes of World War I were attributed to a conspiracy of enemies aiming to undermine Germany, thereby fostering a sense of victimhood and justification for future aggression.[32] [33]

The concept of *Lebensraum* was introduced in geography and history lessons to legitimize territorial expansion. Students were taught that it was Germany's historical

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[29] (Stern, 1961)
[30] (Pine, 2010)
[31] (Giles, 1985)
[32] (Wippermann, 1979, p. 56)
[33] (Füssl, 1994, p. 78)

right to acquire lands in Eastern Europe, a narrative that served to prepare the youth for future military campaigns.

Biology and racial science were integrated into the curriculum to instill beliefs about Aryan superiority and the dangers of racial mixing. Textbooks contained content that categorized humans into hierarchical races, with Aryans at the top and Jews depicted as subhuman. [34]

Furthermore, those educational reforms were not only meant to change the current perspectives from not only the youth and elder people, it also was about changing historical events to fit the Nazi regime's agenda of fulfilling their ideas with support of the German population, which got influenced through for instance educational reforms. This made them believe, that the Nazi regime was doing the right thing and moreover needed support.

3.5 Long-term effects on german memory culture

The Nazi regime's deliberate rewriting of history, particularly through educational reforms and textbooks revisions, left a profound and lasting impact on Germany's collective memory. By achieving a distorted narrative that emphasized Aryan supremacy and justified territorial expansion, the Nazis aimed to reshape the German populace's understanding of their national identify and history. [35]

In the "immediate" aftermath of World War II, efforts were made to dismantle the educational system which got built up by the Nazi's and re-educate the German public. However, the now deep-seated narratives established during the Nazi era proved resilient. For instance, the "myth of the clean Wehrmacht" – the belief that the regular German army was largely uninvolved in Nazi war crimes – persisted for decades, complicating efforts to fully acknowledge and address the military's role in the regime's atrocities.[36]

In recent years, Germany has made significant contributions to confront its Nazi past through education, memorialization, and the public discourse. Institutions like

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[34] (Weindling, 1989, p.112)
[35] (Frei, 1996)
[36] (Maier, 1988)

the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum have played roles in shaping international perspectives on the Holocaust, promoting Germany to reflect on its own approaches to remembrance.[37]

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. In some rural areas, mainly in East Germany, there is resistance to fully acknowledging the extent of Nazi crimes, and debates continue over how to appropriately commemorate victims and perpetrators. This ongoing tension underscores the complexity of collective memory in Germany and the enduring influence of historical narratives established during the Nazi era.

In conclusion, the Nazi regime's manipulation of history has had lasting effects on German memory culture. While significant progress has been made in confronting and correcting these distortions, the process remains ongoing, requiring continual reflection, education and dialogue to ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the past.

4. Case study II: Stalinist Soviet Union

Much like the Nazi Regime, Stalin's Soviet Union did not only attempt to influence the present through active propaganda – it went further. Its efforts were defined to reshape how the past was remembered. Under Stalin's leadership, history became a tool of political power, and historical truth was subject to erasure, distortion, or invention depending on the needs of the state. The rewriting of past events, especially the revolutionary years and early Soviet period, allowed Stalin and the Communist Party to strengthen their legitimacy and eliminate ideological opposition.

This manipulation took many forms. Through strict censorship and centralized control over archives and publishing, the regime would control what was written, read, and remembered about Soviet history. Rivals such as Leon Trotsky, once a central figure in the October Revolution and the Civil War, were systematically removed from historical records, schoolbooks, and even photographs. Their contribution got

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[37] (Assmann, 2013, p.67)

downplayed or portrayed as betrayal, reshaping the revolutionary narrative to center Stalin.

At the same time, Stalin's public image was carefully built through a "cult of personality", in which he was portrayed as Lenin's rightful and natural heir. Official biographies, speeches, and artwork elevated him to near-mythical status, building a historical legacy that positioned him as the father of Soviet progress. Schools and universities taught a state-appropriate version of history that reflected his narrative. Students weren't even able to ask questions about history because history was altered in a way that it wasn't questionable anymore. Historians were expected to produce scholarships that aligned with Party ideology, and deviation was punished. History, like other fields of knowledge, became an extension of loyalty.

The long-term impact of this manipulation was profound. Generations of Soviet citizens were raised with a distorted understanding of their own past. Even decades after Stalin's death, the effects of this historical rewriting could be felt, both in how the Soviet Union understood itself and in how post-Soviet societies have struggled to come to terms with the legacy of falsified memory. This case study explores how deeply state control over history can shape national identity, not just during a dictatorship, but long after it ends.

4.1 Censorship and control of historical records

One of the clearest signs of Stalinist historical revisionism was the manipulation of photographs. Images that once served as factual records were edited to erase individuals who had fallen out of political favor. This included high-profile figures like Trotsky and Yezhov, as well as ordinary officials. The goal was to rewrite key historical events, such as the Revolution or early party congresses, to present Stalin's leadership as unchallenged and continuous.

David King's *The Commissar Vanishes* documents how these photographs were altered over time. Former allies were removed from group photos that were then widely republished in textbooks and museums. These changes were not only about hiding people – they trained the public to forget them. The visual edits supported rewritten historical narratives, casting doubt on the reliability of any objective

history. Examples of Yezhov and Trotsky being erased illustrate how effective this manipulation could be. Underneath, there are two examples of Yezhov and Trotsky being airbrushed away, making them look like they were never a part of the picture.[38]

Figure 2: Removal of Nikolai Yezhov standing next to Joseph Stalin (Source: The New Yorker)

Figure 1: Removal of Leon Trotsky and Lev Borisovich Kamenev standing next to Vladimir Lenin

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[38] (King, 1997)

4.2 Erasing rivals: Trotsky and the reshaping of revolutionary history

Leon Trotsky, once a central figure in the Bolshevik Revolution and the early Soviet state, became the primary target of Stalin's efforts to rewrite history. Trotsky's instrumental roles as the founder of the Red Army and a key strategist during the Civil War were systematically downplayed or omitted in official accounts. This deliberate erasure served to elevate Stalin's status, diminishing Trotsky's contributions.[39] [40]

Stalin's campaign against Trotsky extended beyond political rivalry; it involved a comprehensive revision of historical records. In The Stalin School of Falsification, Trotsky himself documents how the Stalinist regime manipulated historical documents, speeches, and party records to distort the past. He highlights instances where his own writings and speeches were altered or removed from archives to align with the new official narrative.

The rewriting of history was further institutionalized through state-controlled educational materials and scholarly works. Textbooks and official histories were revised to portray Stalin as Lenin's sole legitimate successor, often attributing Trotsky's achievements to Stalin or omitting them entirely. This systematic distortion of history not only marginalized Trotsky but also reshaped the collective memory of the Soviet populace.

The long-term effects of this historical revisionism were profound. By controlling the narrative of the past, Stalin not only eliminated political opposition but also solidified his ideological dominance. The erasure of Trotsky from Soviet history exemplifies how authoritarian regimes can manipulate historical records to legitimize their rule and suppress dissenting voices.

4.3 Cult of personality and the myth of Stalin as Lenin's heir

Joseph Stalin's consolidation of power was significantly bolstered by the cultivation of a pervasive cult of personality, meticulously crafted to present him as the legitimate successor to Vladimir Lenin. This constructed image served to legitimize his authority and suppress dissent within the Soviet Union.

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[39] (Service, 2009, p.345)
[40] (Detuscher, 1963, p. 89)

Central to this narrative was the portrayal of Stalin as Lenin's closest confidant and ideological heir. Official biographies and historical accounts were revised to emphasize a seamless transition of leadership, often exaggerating or fabricating Stalin's role in the Bolshevik Revolution and the early Soviet state. For instance, the Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), published under Stalin's direction, became a key instrument in disseminating this revised history, effectively marginalizing other prominent revolutionaries like Trotsky and Bukharin.[41]

The visual arts played a crucial role in reinforcing Stalin's constructed image. Portraits, posters, and statues proliferated, depicting him alongside Lenin or in solitary grandeur, symbolizing wisdom and strength. These representations were not merely artistic expressions but deliberate tools of propaganda, designed to embed the leader's image into the public consciousness. Jan Plamper's The Stalin Cult: *A Study in the Alchemy of Power* provides an in-depth analysis of how these visual mediums were employed to foster a quasi-religious reverence for Stalin.[42]

Educational institutions were instrumental in perpetuating the cult of personality. Curricula were tailored to glorify Stalin's achievements, while critical perspectives were systematically excluded. This indoctrination ensured that successive generations internalized the state-sanctioned narrative, further entrenching Stalin's mythologized status.[43]

The construction of Stalin's cult of personality and his portrayal as Lenin's rightful heir were not merely exercises in self-aggrandizement but strategic moves to solidify his grip on power. By controlling historical discourse and cultural expression, Stalin effectively reshaped Soviet collective memory, leaving a legacy that would influence the nation's identity for decades.

4.4 State control of education and historical scholarship

Under Joseph Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union transformed its educational system into a powerful instrument for ideological indoctrination and state control.

[41] (Service, 2009, p.245-247)
[42] (Bonnell, 1997, p.134 f.)
[43] (Holmes, 1999, p. 78)

Education was not merely a means of imparting knowledge but a strategic tool to mold the "New Soviet Man" and reinforce the legitimacy of the Communist Party.

The curriculum was centrally controlled, with a strong emphasis on Marxist-Leninist ideology. Subjects such as history, literature, and social sciences were revised to align with party doctrines. For instance, history textbooks were rewritten to glorify Stalin's role in the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent events, often at the expense of other key figures like Trotsky. This revisionism served to legitimize Stalin's authority and suppress alternative narratives. [44]

Educational institutions were also instrumental in promoting the cult of personality surrounding Stalin. Schools featured "Lenin Corners," which displayed images and writings of Lenin and Stalin, reinforcing their revered status. Students participated in activities that celebrated Soviet achievements and leaders, fostering a sense of loyalty and unity.[45]

Higher education and scholarly research were subjected to stringent state oversight. Academic freedom was curtailed, with scholars required to conform to party lines. Research institutions and universities were directed to produce work that supported state ideologies, effectively turning academia into a propaganda tool.

The state's control over education and historical scholarship had profound implications for Soviet society. By monopolizing the narrative, the regime was able to suppress dissent, manipulate public perception, and maintain its grip on power. This manipulation of knowledge not only distorted historical understanding but also stifled intellectual growth and critical thinking.

5. The consequences of historical falsification: a comparative conclusion

This seminar paper examined how authoritarian regimes like Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union manipulated history to maintain power and shape public perception. Both regimes turned history into a political tool, rewriting events, erasing

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[44] (Holmes, 1991, p.112)
[45] (Holmes, 1991)

inconvenient figures, and promoting myths that served their ideological goals. The past became a flexible narrative used to justify oppression, legitimize authority, and control collective memory.

These manipulations had lasting effects on national identity and public understanding. In Germany, confronting falsified history required decades of reckoning. In Russia, many falsified narratives still influence education and politics today. When citizens grow up with a distorted past, critical thinking and democratic values suffer.

The danger of 'fake history' lies in its ability to undermine trust in facts and enable harmful ideologies. By turning history into propaganda, regimes foster conspiracy thinking, justify violence, and shape emotionally charged but inaccurate memories. Even after their fall, these regimes left behind altered narratives that still affect how societies remember and learn from the past.

In answering the core question "**How does the manipulation of historical events impact collective memory, and what dangers does 'fake history' pose?**" the conclusion is clear: manipulated history fragments collective memory, weakens democratic discourse, and erodes the basis for accountability. Historical truth becomes negotiable, and with it, the ability of a society to learn, reflect, and progress.

In today's digital age, historical falsification remains a relevant threat. That's why the work of historians, educators, and critical thinkers is essential. Defending fact-based historiography helps ensure that societies remain open, reflective, and resistant to authoritarian manipulation. A culture that remembers honestly is a culture prepared for the future.

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List of figures

Declaration of Originality

I, Thuvijan Maheswaran, hereby declare that I have written this seminar paper independently and have not used any sources or resources other than those stated.
All passages taken verbatim or in essence from external sources have been properly identified.

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Signature: