

**ARTICLE**

# Famous and Forgotten: Soviet Sociology and the Nature of Intellectual Achievement under Totalitarianism

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[msokolov@eu.spb.ru](mailto:msokolov@eu.spb.ru)**Abstract**

For decades Soviet and later post-Soviet sociology was dominated by a cohort of scholars born between 1927–1930 (Grushin, Kon, Levada, Ossipov, Yadov, Zaslavskaya). The origins of their prominence and the character of their recognition offers a puzzle as it seemingly defies conventional ideas about where academic renown comes from. Academic prominence is usually associated with either intellectual leadership or skillful manipulation of the academic power structures. Neither of these stories describes the peculiar pattern of recognition of the giants of Soviet sociology whose fame persisted after they retired from administrative responsibilities and in spite of their ideas from the Soviet era being almost forgotten. The hypothesis developed in this paper holds that this peculiar form of fame emerges from the unique position sociology held in Soviet society. The paper introduces a distinction between natural and intentional secrecy and argues that while most of Western sociology specialized in natural secrecy, Soviet sociology had to deal with intentional secrecy resulting from conscious attempts to conceal the dismal realities of state socialism. The pervasiveness of secrecy during the Soviet era resulted from the central legitimizing myth of Soviet society describing it as built following a scientifically devised plan. This legitimation allowed Soviet sociology to emerge and develop with an unparalleled speed, but, at the same time, it explains why sociology was seen as having considerable subversive potential and faced periodic repressions. This political environment accounts for Soviet sociology's unique intellectual style as well as for the fact that its central figures remained in the disciplinary memory as heroic role models, rather than as authors of exemplary texts.

**Keywords**

Soviet sociology, history of sociology, sociology of social sciences, sociology of secrecy, legitimacy

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The history of Soviet sociology unearths several puzzles that cannot be solved easily with reference to commonsense views on how the sciences, including the social sciences, work. Among others, this history challenges our views on the origins of success and fame in the academic world. Social studies of science equate the success of an intellectual movement with the degree of acceptance its knowledge claims achieve in the academic world (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Collins and Pinch 1998). Critical of scientists in all other senses, sociologists of scientific knowledge such as Bruno

Latour are incredibly idealistic in their belief that it is only by putting forward groundbreaking ideas that a group of scholars (or in the specific case of Latour's theorizing, a network uniting academic actors with non-human actants) can come to dominate the intellectual scene. This prominence will hold as long as these ideas continue to be accepted. Other sociologists in the academic world, particularly those studying social sciences (Bourdieu 1988; Clark 1977; Wiley 1979), tried to allow for sources of academic power other than the ability to mobilize intellectual support. Thus, in Pierre Bourdieu's pessimistic vision of the field of social sciences in France, academic power residing in the control over others' professional trajectories dominates over purely intellectual influence.

The careers of the more prominent figures of Soviet sociology do not, however, fit easily into either of these two stereotypes—intellectual leader or institutional manipulator. While many of them served in important administrative posts, they remained revered (or even worshipped) figures even after they ceased to have any control over others' academic careers. At the same time, their works from the Soviet era—during which they won their lasting recognition—are scarcely remembered. This article will proceed in the following way. First, I will provide evidence substantiating the claim that the recognition won by the Soviet sociologists is of a very intriguing nature to those studying academia. Then I will formulate the major research hypothesis matching types of sociological work to the types of secrecy a researcher has to deal with. Then follows a very short historical overview of the development of sociology in the USSR.<sup>1</sup> Then I will show how the Soviet sociologists' having to deal with Soviet secrecy explains the nature of the major problems they had to solve, the achievements they valued, the dominant styles of their work, and the peculiar character of their fame. I will conclude by discussing some implications of these arguments for our understanding of “recognition” in the social sciences.

### **THE PUZZLE: A STRANGE WAY OF BEING FAMOUS**

In the 1960s, a group of scholars established themselves as the leaders of Soviet sociology and retained their centrality within the discipline until the first decade of the new millennium. This most prominent members of these group were Boris Grushin (1929–2007), Igor Kon (1928–2011), Yuri Levada (1930–2006), Gennady Ossipov (b.1929), Ovsej Shkaratan (b.1931), Vladimir Yadov (1929–2015), Tatiana Zaslavskaya (1927–2013), and Andrei Zdravomyslov (1928–2009). In the new millennium, their lifelong achievements were celebrated by accolades of various honors, including medals of disciplinary associations, invitations to give plenary talks, and memorial editions. A few leaders of Soviet sociology wrote autobiographies (Kon 2008; Zaslavskaya 2007), complemented by various biographical and historical materials (interviews, collections of historical documents) prepared by their former pupils, relatives, and colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

There still exists something short of resembling a “personality cult” around them. To give only one illustration, to commemorate Yadov's eightieth birthday, the Moscow-based Institute of Sociology at the Academy of Sciences published a book of memoirs by his colleagues named “c” (Gorshkov 2009). Its chapters had revealing titles such as “Sociology starts with the letter “Y” (B. Doktorov), “Yadov: great, unique and inimitable” (V. Bakirov), “Yadov: The family jewel of Russian sociology”

<sup>1</sup> One can find more detailed histories in Zemtsov (1985); Shlapentokh (1987); Weinberg (2004); Firsov (2012); Zdravomyslova and Titarenko (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Doktorov 2005; Doktorov 2012; Moskvichev 1997; Levada T.V. 2011; Ossipov and Moskvichev 2008; Firsov 2012; Radaev and Starcev 2008

(A. Bulynina, S. Sedyakhina). While there was probably a degree of self-irony in naming the pieces in such a fashion, this was obviously not intended to be read as sarcasm. To complement the picture of this apotheosis, they remain among the most cited authors in Russian sociology.<sup>3</sup>

This apparently points in the direction of “intellectual leaders,” an interpretation that suggests that Yadov, as well as other Soviet sociologists, were men and women who established influential schools of thought early in their careers. The existence of these schools could explain the fame they continue to enjoy. This text will argue, however, that this explanation is not completely satisfactory. We will see that, surprisingly, the intellectual achievements of Soviet sociology were nearly forgotten during the very period in which its founding fathers received their highest honors. No abstract intellectual constructions associated with their names that could be considered “a theory” currently enjoys any wide currency in Russia. The works of these Soviet scholars that they defined as their most important intellectual contributions, and which were published at the period they rose to prominence, are scarcely cited, and a few of such texts were never reprinted, despite the fact that many of them are completely unavailable. At the period when the leaders of Soviet sociology were at the heights of acclaim and power, their intellectual legacies from the Soviet past fell into oblivion. Few people remembered and cited their work published before 1991. As an illustration of this, Table 1 gives an indication of the amount of citations for the published work of the six key figures of Soviet sociology in the Russian Scientific Citation Index (RSCI).<sup>4</sup> The RSCI covers Russian periodicals from 2004. The figures give some idea of which work of the giants of Soviet sociology is most visible now.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> As of September, 2017, Yadov with 11,495 citations is the most cited of 5,490 authors that the Russian Index for Scientific Citing (RISC—see below) classifies as sociologists. Zaslavskaya is No.8 with 8,763 citations, Zdravomyslov No.10 (6,501). Igor Kon, who is counted as a psychologist, rather than a sociologist, got 21,213 citations and became the most cited of above 7,000 authors in this category.

<sup>4</sup> The six who received above 3,000 citations in the RSCI were chosen for analysis.

<sup>5</sup> The data were taken from the RSCI webpages on 1 September, 2017. RISC does not produce compact disc editions, and as the database it being constantly updated, the figures are not exactly reproducible. Nevertheless, the results proved stable after several recalculations.

Name	Total citations	Year text receiving median citation published	Three most cited texts with years published and number of citations in parenthesis <sup>6</sup>
Yadov	12118	1995	Social and Social-Psychological Mechanisms of Social Identity Formation, 1995 (356) Social Identification in a Crisis Society, 1994 (320) <i>Strategies of Sociological Research: Description, Explanation, Understanding of Social Reality</i> , 2007 (316)
Zaslavskaya	7254	1999	<i>Contemporary Russian Society: A Mechanism of Social Transformation</i> , 2004 (759) Social Structure of Contemporary Russian Society, 1997 (206) How All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Study was Born, 1998 (191)
Kon	23144	1988	<i>Sociology of Personality</i> , 1967 (1260) <i>Discovery of the Self</i> , 1978 (892) <i>Child and Society</i> , 2003 (479)
Zdravomyslov	6813	1995	<i>Needs, Interests, Values</i> , 1986 (1068) <i>The Sociology of Conflict</i> , 1995 (388) <i>Man and his Work</i> , 2003 [1967] (with V.Yadov) (246)
Shkaratan	3913	1998	<i>Social Stratification</i> , 1995-1996 <sup>7</sup> , with V.Radaev, (876) <i>The Sociology of Inequality. Theory and Reality</i> , 2012 (133) <i>Social Stratification in Russia and Eastern Europe</i> , 2006 (with V. Ilyin) (100)
Levada	3469	2000	<i>From Opinions to Understanding. Sociological Essays, 1993-2000</i> , 2000 (489) <i>Looking for a Man. Sociological Essays, 2000 to 2005</i> , 2006 (154) <i>The Problem of Elite in Contemporary Russia</i> , 2007 (with L.Gudkov and B.Dubin) (131)
<b>Control group</b>			
Gurevich	8669	1989	<i>Categories of Medieval Culture, 1972-1984</i> <sup>8</sup> (2167) <i>Medieval World: The Culture of the Silent Majority</i> , 1990 (507) <i>Historical Synthesis and the Annales School</i> , 1993 (466)
Ivanov	6783	1983	<i>A Study of Slavic Antiquities. Lexical and Phraseological Issues of Text Reconstruction</i> (with V.Toporov), 1974 ( 543) <i>Indo-European Languages and Indo-Europeans</i> , 1984 (with T.Gamkrelidze), (496) <i>Slavic Languages Semiotic Systems</i> , 1965 (with V.Toporov) (493)

**Table 1. Bibliometric characters of citation of work by leading Soviet sociologists in the Russian Index for Scientific Citing, in comparison with scholars from other disciplines**

<sup>6</sup> Titles provided are English translations of Russian-language originals.

<sup>7</sup> Net citations for two identical editions

<sup>8</sup> Net citation for two editions.

The first impression is one of the high immediacy of their work: the texts of the Soviet sociologists receiving most citations are relatively recent ones published after the start of Perestroika in the mid-1980s. The major exception is Igor Kon who was a key figure in importing whole fields of Western social sciences, such as (sociological) social psychology and sexology. His earlier texts introducing these fields to the Soviet reader remain widely read and cited, while the popularity of his later books was probably undermined by his interest in gay and lesbian studies, which had a lesser appeal to the majority of morally conservative Russian academics. With the exception of Kon, we find only two Soviet books on the list, both listing Zdravomyslov among their authors: his 1986 treatise on *Needs, Interests, and Values* from the Perestroika years and the second edition of his and Yadov's *Man and His Work*, which appeared in 2003. The newer edition, however, had a totally new section offering a reinterpretation of the older results, contained a previously unpublished account of a comparative study of labor values of Soviet and US workers and a replication of the original study after Perestroika, as well as sections with the author's recollections of the emergence of their masterpiece. With this exception, the texts of the stars of Soviet sociology that are currently most acclaimed appeared after the USSR was gone. As a measure of the immediacy of their reception, a calculation was made for each of the six representative figures the year in which their text receiving the median citation was published (e.g., roughly half of the citations go to earlier and half to later texts). Yadov's and Zdravomyslov's median citations fall at their publications of 1995, Shkaratan's falls in 1998, Zaslavskaya's 1999, and Levada's in 2000 (Levada died in 2006, so half of the papers cite works produced in the last six years of his life). Only Kon's falls when the USSR was still alive; 1988.

This is a highly unusual citation pattern for leaders of an intellectual movement in twentieth-century sociology. While recent research has partly disproved the earlier conviction that science is "a young man's game," it nevertheless seems that in the majority of disciplines, including economics, the most influential pieces are still produced by relatively young people in their late thirties or forties (Diamond 1980; Wray 2003; Jones et al. 2014). It seems that this pattern also holds for sociology. A reader could test this proposition by composing a list of books that have most influenced him or her and then find out the authors' age when the book was written. For this purpose, I used the list of the "Books of the Century" named by members of International Sociological Association as those "which were most influential in their work as sociologists" in 1994.<sup>9</sup> I took seventy-eight books named by five or more people from the 455 surveyed and calculated the age of the author at publication (for those published posthumously, the age of death was taken, although in most cases it obviously lead to an overestimation of age parameters). The mean age of an influential book author was forty-six years; median was even less at forty-five, and the modal value was only thirty-nine. Only three books qualified as published when their author was over sixty, two of them were published posthumously (Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* and Marx's *Capital*). In contrast, Yadov's median publication citations falls when he was sixty-eight years old, thirty-eight years after his publishing career began. For Levada, the median citation was to a paper published when he was seventy years old, forty-two years after the first piece authored by him was published. Zaslavskaya was seventy-two years old, forty-one years had passed since her first piece was published. This discrepancy can be partly explained by the fact that, in sociology, citation measures are not perfectly correlated with subjectively estimated influence (Najmann and

<sup>9</sup> Results reported at <http://www.isa-sociology.org/books/>, retrieved 09 September 2017

Hewitt 2004). Even taking this into account, however, Soviet sociologists look like as a rather odd group of classics.<sup>10</sup>

Following the “institutional manipulator” interpretation, one might suppose that this pattern of the Soviet sociologists’ recognition is a reflection of their exceptional political skill in manipulating power structures rather than intellectual leadership. Perhaps those dependent on them cited their work to avoid the wrath of the academic bigshots. This hypothesis turns out to be even more wanting, however. The majority of them did occupy important administrative posts at various points in their lives, such as heads of the Academy of Sciences institutes; in fact, many of them were renowned organizational builders who actively participated in creation of these institutes (Ossipov, Firsov, Zaslavskaya). However, some occupied administrative positions for only very short times early in their lives (Igor Kon), and most suffered from long periods of political disfavor during which they lacked the keys to institutional power. What is more, their acclaim lasts long after their retirement from influential administrative posts, and after most of them, sadly, passed away. This influence obviously cannot be fully explained with reference to their control over others’ careers.

Four familiar explanations can be offered to explain the oblivion of the works of leaders of Soviet sociology without resorting to the institutional manipulator hypothesis. First, the tendency to cite recent literature could be attributed to the citing of later editions rather than the originals. However, qualitative analysis demonstrates that when earlier editions were identical to the original one, the latter received the lion’s share of citations. Furthermore, most of the books routinely cited in interviews as the highest quality work of Soviet social sciences were not reprinted for many years after 1991, with some of them available only as rare mimeographed editions (such as Levada’s 1969 *Lectures on Sociology* until 2011), or not published at all, such as the second volume of Grushin’s Taganrog studies. It was only recently that some of Levada’s, Grushin’s, and Zaslavskaya’s texts were reprinted as parts of commemorative editions that also included their autobiographies and recollections related to them (Grushin 2001; Zaslavskaja 2007; Levada Ju.A. 2011); none of them were printed by a major commercial publisher and most editions were made available electronically immediately after their release, thus demonstrating that the publishers did not hope for any market success. The only example of a later edition gathering considerable citations were the increasingly extended editions of Yadov’s textbook on methods, giving peaks at 1987, 1995, 1998, 2001, and 2003.<sup>11</sup>

The second explanation of the unusual tendency to credit leading Soviet sociologists for relatively recent findings is that they, in all likelihood, had to keep their most important thoughts to themselves until Soviet censorship vanished. Their best books could be published only after the fall of Communism, which explains the unusual citation pattern. This claim is hard to disprove bibliometrically, but if it is subjected to a more qualitative analysis, this explanation appears questionable at best. First, if this was the case we would expect the most influential books to be published right after the fall of Communism and to use Soviet empirical material. However, among sociologists, only Levada published a totally new and highly influential book in late eighties or early nineties: *The Simple Soviet Man*, which largely comprised his reflections on the “Soviet personality.” However, even this book was nearly exclusively based on results of surveys from the

<sup>10</sup> As the RISC stores information on citations to books and edited volumes, not only on journal articles, this pattern could not be explained by the greater retrievability of more immediate journal citations Clemens et al. (1995).

<sup>11</sup> The 2003 edition was three times as long as that of 1987.

Perestroika years. His later, and currently better-cited books such as *From Opinions to Understanding. Sociological Essays of 1993–2000* (2000) and *Looking for Man. Sociological Essays from 2000 to 2005* (2006), mostly consisted of interpretations of ongoing survey studies.<sup>12</sup>

Comparison with other Soviet social-scientific disciplines may be revealing here. I added to the table two figures who shared much with the first-generation Soviet sociologists: historian Aron Gurevich (1924–2006) and linguist and semiotician Vyacheslav Ivanov (b.1929). Gurevich and Ivanov were of approximately the same age as our heroes, they lived and continued their publication career well into the twentieth century, and they also developed a kind of scholarship that was bluntly non-Marxist and ideologically suspicious (Gurevich was a prominent student of Medieval mentality in the *Annales* school tradition; Ivanov, in addition to developing formal semiotics, was connected to political dissident circles). In spite of this, they managed to publish their still most cited books in the Soviet era. Gurevich, as one might expect, exploded with publications in the early 1990s, taking one manuscript after another from his desk. Later periods saw a considerable decline in their publication activity and an even greater decrease in the number of citations to that publications.

The third explanation refers to the arrival of new theoretical approaches, methodological standards, and rhetorical conventions that could have made writings of the classics of Soviet sociology look obsolete. But while such processes are arguably occurring, their spread in Russia was too slow to explain the fall of Soviet sociological literatures from grace by the 2000s. Indeed, analysis shows that there were no considerable changes in the methodological rigor and statistical argumentation among the authors of the top Russian-language sociological journal since the Soviet era (Sokolov and Kincharova 2015). Even in disciplines in which such shifts arguably did occur, the fall of Soviet-era literature into disregard did not necessarily follow. Comparison of sociology with other disciplines, such as psychology, is instructive here. The classics of Soviet psychology (such as books by Boris Ananyev, Alexey Leontiev, and Alexander Luria) are still widely cited, in spite of psychology being in many senses more globalized than sociology.

The fourth and perhaps the most convincing explanation points to the changes in society itself. The work Soviet sociologists were doing, and possibly the work they have continued to do after the fall of the USSR, was empirical, not theoretical, in nature. An extension of this explanation—and one used by revisionist historians of Soviet sociology trying to draw a less celebratory picture of it (Bikbov and Gavrilenko 2002; Filippov 2013)—was that, in addition to being empirical, it was fundamentally applied in character, aimed at solving the problems faced by the regime. With radical change occurring in society, their findings lost much of their relevance. However, the same people who emerged as the leaders in the Soviet period also proved capable of leading the discipline in the new era. This explanation is probably simultaneously true and insufficient. Soviet

<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, sociologists feeling that the totalitarian regime obstructed publication of their most important findings could have published their reflections in the West and withstood the political consequences. In fact, while quite a few Soviet social thinkers followed this path, none belonging to the core of the sociological movement did. Possibly the closest to being a sociologist was Alexander Zinoviev, who had to emigrate after his “sociological novel” *The Yawning Heights* was published in the West. Zinoviev was a member of the same intellectual circle as Levada, although he was officially employed as a philosopher, never as a sociologist. Other borderline cases are younger members of Novosibirsk school led by Zaslavskaya and Ryvkina, such as Simon Kordonskii, Olga Bessonova, or Svetlana Kirdina, who obviously did employ their Soviet experience in developing what is possibly the most interesting variety of Soviet indigenous sociology. Their publication careers, however, began after the fall of the USSR, and Kordonskii, the most widely renowned of them, is marginal to sociology.

sociology was (mostly) empirical. It was also (mostly) applied, or at least it universally used the rhetorical forms of applied research, and the topics of this research are arguably obsolete now (e.g., workforce turnover at Soviet plants—a subject of numerous studies during the Soviet era—is hardly a topic of wide interest anymore).

Nevertheless, the claim that leaders of Soviet sociology never invented a “theory,” understood as a set of relatively context-free propositions, would be untrue, although they were obviously less attracted to theorizing than their US or European counterparts. The “disposition conception” of Yadov and his group—a social-psychological model of attitude structure reminding one of Henri Murrey, Gordon Allport, and Milton Rokeach (Yadov et al. 1979), and Grushin’s theory of mass consciousness (Grushin et al. 1980)—a Soviet version of mass society thesis, were theorizing attempts. Moreover, even to the degree to which the answer pointing to the empirical nature of the research in the Soviet sociology holds, it gives rise to new questions. Why did Soviet sociologists abstain from theoretical generalizations? This theoretical muteness cannot be attributed to pressure from official Marxism as such. In history, psychology, or literary studies, in spite of pressure from official Marxism, Soviet scholars produced a few viable theoretical outputs, from Lev Gumilev’s “ethnogenesis” theory to Yuri Lotman’s Tartu breed of semiotics. While some of them would possibly qualify today as a form of conservative mythology rather than scholarship (ethnogenesis), they were definitely attempts at grand theorizing, even when misguided. Their relations with official Marxism varied: some suffered certain degrees of discomfort (Gumilev), although by the end of Soviet rule the influence of Marxist philosophers was limited, and purely non-Marxist ideas were freely developed in academia (in addition to structuralism and cybernetics, which flourished in the seventies and eighties, one can mention economic game theory, studies of Medieval mentalities by Gurevich, or personality testing based on C.G. Jung by Ausra Augustinavičiūtė). Rather than the regime’s repressiveness, it seems that the shortage of theorizing resulted from the lack of its appreciation, both inside the sociological movement as well as among its audience. The same lack of appreciation is evident now: neither the disposition conception, nor any other theoretical construction by the leaders of Soviet sociology has received much attention in recent years. Yadov attempted to revive interest in his work on dispositions in the mid-2000s, but without much success. His and his colleagues’ theorizing attempts are forgotten nearly as fully as their applied, but, paradoxically, that does not subtract too much from their fame.

Finally, evidence of repressions contradicts the belief held by the revisionist historians of Soviet sociology that Soviet sociology associated itself with regime causes and voluntarily limited itself to the role of handmaiden of the Communist Party. This does not explain either its troubled history, or its present reputation. By late-Soviet standards, the Soviet sociologists encountered an unusual level of ideological repressiveness. Chroniclers of Soviet sociology, recruited from its ranks, tell its history as one of repeated political repression and pogroms (Firsov 2012; Doktorov 2013). As one of the founding fathers of Soviet sociology has put it, “None of the foreign sociologies has such a history. This is a drama, a tragedy” (Ossipov 2013). While one may criticize this vision as exaggerated, in the light of what happened to sociology in China and some other countries (Tse Tang and Yeo Chi 1978), in all likelihood sociology did experience a pressure unheard of in other social-scientific disciplines at that time. Indeed, some of these disciplines were treated as ideological outcasts (e.g., political science or theology) and were never institutionalized to any significant degree. Those there were institutionalized, such as psychology, however, managed to work out a *modus vivendi* with the Communist regime by the 1960s and successfully avoided troublesome situations. While it is difficult to propose a measure of political repressiveness toward a given discipline, it seems that none has experienced anything like the pogrom at the Institute of



the Academy of Sciences in the early 1970s following the “Levada affair.” During that episode, the majority of department heads—who were officially responsible for guiding whole branches of sociology in the Soviet academic hierarchy (see Appendix 1)—were fired and many had to pick up jobs at institutes unrelated to sociology, which usually meant that they would radically change their field of study to correspond to the profile of their own employer.<sup>13</sup> An instructive point of comparison is purely ideological disciplines, such as the political economy of socialism or scientific communism, major authorities in which are now firmly forgotten. Were the Soviet sociologists just collaborators of the regime, the same would happen to them as well. In the next section I will develop a hypothesis that simultaneously explains Soviet sociology’s peculiar status in Soviet academia, the reasons for its oblivion and its lasting glory.

### **SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE TYPES OF SECRECY: A RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

All scholarship deals with secrets. The secrets disclosed by research could be divided, however, into two broad classes: *natural* and *intentional*. Intentional secrets emerge from conscious attempts to avoid the spread of certain information (Simmel 1906; Goffman 1969; Gibson 2014). Natural secrets are not protected through human conscious efforts. They can be divided into secrets of *distance* and secrets of *perspective*. The former arise from difficulty in observing an object, while the latter emerge from difficulty in synthesizing observations and putting forward a hypothesis placing the available observations into a meaningful pattern. In Western, as well as many non-Western societies, empirical sociological research mostly praises itself for disclosing secrets of distance. Thus, in quantitative research, statistics allow a researcher to grasp regularities in social life invisible for those who are immediately involved in it, while qualitative research allows him or her to get in contact with social groups that those middle-class publics who mostly consume sociological findings have little contact with. Sociological theory that dominates present-day textbooks presents itself as disclosing secrets of perspective. Theoreticians such as Georg Simmel or Erving Goffman are credited for shedding new light on what was considered trivial and obvious.

Neither one of these types of natural secrets were the principal aim of Soviet sociologists. This paper posits that Soviet sociology specialized in disclosing intentional, not natural, secrets about society because the latter were much more widespread and salient in the Soviet Union, than they were in the USSR’s Western competitors. Both Soviet sociology’s research styles and peculiar organization of disciplinary memory could be accounted for by this fact. Probably all human societies are familiar with both natural and intentional secrecy. However, a few observers have commented on the all-encompassing pervasiveness of secrecy in societies of state socialism (Harrison, 2013). Indeed, the USSR was unique in the rage of information classified in it (it included not only all statistics, basic demographic statistics notwithstanding, and detailed maps of the country, but even the most innocuous of books, such as a cafeteria’s chief cookbook that was

<sup>13</sup> Among other episodes of this kind, after a blunder occurred, Yadov and Firsov were fired from the Institute for Social and Economic problems (*ISEP*) and had to find asylum at the more tolerant Institute for History, Science and Technology, which was a stronghold of *naukovedy*—scientific studies (Yadov), and the Institute for Anthropology and Ethnography (Firsov). Both were demoted from their positions as department heads to senior researchers. Yadov had to put aside his study of industrial relations and do a study in the sociology of science; Firsov’s obligation at his new place of work was preparation of publication of the archive of Prince Tenishev, one of the social surveyors of the nineteenth century—something very far from his own field of mass communications (Firsov 2012).

marked “for restricted use” [*dlia sluzhebnogo pol'zovanija*]; the Soviet people were not meant to know in too much detail what the public catering system had to offer).

An explanation one could offer for this fact is that secrecy was the other side of the Soviet central legitimization myth, according to which socialist societies developed along a scientifically devised, all-embracing plan of movement toward communism. In the official Soviet vision, societies unaware of the laws of history discovered by Marx and Engels, or not ready to embrace them, existed in the kingdom of historical necessity. They were governed by forces outside the scope of their control and, consequently, suffered from regular crises. Soviet society, in contrast, existed in the realm of historical freedom because it was based on a recognition of these laws, allowing Lenin and his comrades to work out a blueprint according to which the first socialist state developed.

This legitimization myth had several empirical implications, a falsification of any of which would put the whole myth in doubt. It followed from the myth that:

- (1) The development of Soviet society follows a pre-scheduled path;
- (2) The implementation of this plan assures the superiority of socialist society over its capitalist rivals;
- (3) The Soviet people more or less unanimously support the movement into the direction chosen by the Party;
- (4) A few rather specific predictions would come true, such as the gradual disappearance of the divide between manual and intellectual labor and, thus, working class and intelligentsia, in both living standards and lifestyle.

The legitimacy of the Communist Party’s rule depended on how well Soviet society approximated these predictions. Multiple grand discrepancies would inevitably raise doubts in either theory, practice, or both, and would ultimately undermine the Party’s right to rule. Unluckily for the Soviet elites, many of these predictions were quite precise and could thus be quickly (and easily) disproved, as occurred with the ill-fated 1937 census resulting in the infamous “Statisticians’ Affair.”<sup>14</sup> To make things even more complicated for the Party, the fact that one of the central predictions was that Soviet society would be governed according to an all-embracing plan inevitably produced a sort of a vicious circle: the necessity to legitimize any new action through reference to a plan lead to proliferation of progressively more precise and, thus, more collapsible predictions covering every aspect of the USSR’s development.

Overall, due to its definition as a fully rationalized state, the Soviet Union was unique as a state in the sheer scope of responsibility for its social problems that its rulers had to accept. The rulers of a totalitarian regime are by definition responsible for everything happening with its citizens. This “everything” ranged from the persistence of religious beliefs to lack of shoes of a particular size in a particular village store. The same legitimizing myth of all-encompassing responsibility that gave the regime license to intrude into every corner of citizens’ lives made it extremely vulnerable to criticism when it failed to fulfill its promises. Moving to the subject of our study, this meant that an

<sup>14</sup> The results of the 1937 census contradicted the projected outcomes of the Second Five-Year Plan; the population had increased much less than expected, more than half of adults confessed as religious, and one third remained illiterate. These results were never published and statisticians responsible for the census were accused of sabotage with the most gruesome consequences.

analysis of any aspect of social life had repercussions as an evaluation of the legitimacy of the Soviet regime as a whole.

An ever-increasing amount of effort by the Soviet regime was dedicated to coping with such failures. A variety of explanations or excuses were available for the ruling elites. Some problems could be attributed to natural or historical causes, such as the cultural legacy of the Tsarist period, and such legacies were regularly referred to, even late in the Soviet period. This defense, however, was a relatively weak one as it raised doubts about the Party's predictive abilities. Another, and more efficient, defense was reinterpreting the plan and the expectations to which it gave rise, and the constant work of many ideological commentators was reconciling reality with Lenin's visions through redefining what Lenin and other classics had intended to say. Still another way of coping was localizing the blame, preferably at a lower level of hierarchy, and defining it as a personal failure. The localization of those responsible was determined by the scope of the problem. Problems at the level of a particular organization were, in all likelihood, the result of shortcomings at the level of the directorate and, if the organization was large enough, the Party and/or *Komsomol* (Communist youth organization) cell. Problems at the regional level were the responsibility of the municipality and *rajkom* (local Party committee), *gorkom* (city Party committee), or *obkom* (regional committee – see Attachment at the end of this text), depending on how large the affected territory had been. Finally, nationwide problems were the responsibility of the Council of Ministers and the Politburo. Unless the problem was experienced nationwide, the legitimacy of the regime as a whole could be safeguarded by making some personnel changes.

The fourth and final defense mechanism was suppressing the evidence of a social problem. Such evidence could not be allowed to become public, or even to appear. This explains the all-embracing secrecy that was one of the most pronounced traits of the Soviet regime. Together, the last two defenses give us the tendency to limit the scope of any activities that could generate discrediting information and to prevent such information from becoming publicly available. And here come the sociologists who, by the very nature of their trade, were divulgers of secrets.

## **A VERY BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF SOVIET SOCIOLOGY**

Statistical, positivist, and Marxian movements reached Russia soon after they emerged in Western Europe (Golosenko and Kozlovsky 1995). The further development of sociology in what later became the USSR was also largely synchronous with that of other countries. After WWI, the initial blooming of sociology was followed by a widespread decline (Shils 1970; Turner and Turner 1990). In Russia, however, this downturn ran far deeper than in most other countries as the even the word "sociology" disappeared from the official lexicon. Lenin used it inconsistently, both as a specific name for Comtean positivism (an anathema for a Marxist), and as a generic name of any social theorizing (he occasionally referred to Marx as the father of scientific sociology – a citation widely used by Soviet sociologists later). Unluckily for the term, Bukharin employed it as a generic name publishing "A textbook in Marxist sociology". After his downfall, the word also fell into disgrace and was reserved as derogatory term to describe "bourgeois teachings" (*burzhuaznyje uchenija*). Eventually, a group of professional critics of such teachings emerged at the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in the late 1940s, but its personnel never referred to themselves as sociologists (Batygin 1991). Historical-materialist philosophy was officially the only theory applicable to historical process.

Social surveys continued in the 20s and, to a lesser degree, the early 30s (Batygin 1998), but following the consolidation of Stalin's rule they virtually ceased. The turning point was, arguably, the "Statisticians' Affair" of 1937-1938. Although some of those involved in the surveys of the 1920s survived the repressions, all traces of their activities disappeared, and a new generation of empirical researchers started their work without any knowledge of their early Soviet predecessors. A revival of sociology began after Stalin's death and, in many senses, was a prototypical example of the homogenizing pressure of the "world-society" (Scott and Meyer 1994; Meyer and Schofer 2005). Its history began when the Academy of Sciences – a network of institutes in which most basic research was located (see Appendix for details on how the Soviet Union was organized) – received invitations from organizers of the World sociological congresses. The invitation for the Liege congress of 1953 was ignored, but the next one, for the Amsterdam congress of 1956, found a warmer welcome. In correspondence with their Party curators, academics argued that absence of a Soviet delegation at such an event could be regarded as a sign of Soviet intellectual weakness; they made a special point of insisting that leaving participants from Third-world countries exposed to advocates of capitalism from the US and Western Europe was dangerous (Moskvichev 1997). The academics had found the right arguments needed to persuade the Party officials. A delegation consisting of twelve philosophers attended the 1956 Congress, and Soviet representatives were present at them from that point on. Moreover, the USSR expended a great amount of effort to send the largest delegation as this was perceived to be a matter of national prestige. For many Soviet sociologists, this offered the only real chance to see the outside world.

However, Soviet participation in such events had far-reaching consequences. First, according to the provisions of the International Sociological Association that gave a country the option of sending a delegation, a national sociological association had to be set up. This was the principal reason for organizing the Soviet Sociological Association in 1958 under the leadership of Yuri Frantsev, one of the central members of academic establishment of his time. He was the editor-in-chief of the main Party newspaper "Pravda," the rector of the Academy of the Social Sciences attached to the Party's Central committee, and one of the founding father of the *MGIMO* (the Moscow Institute for International Relations)– the elite Moscow diplomatic academy. It is safe to say that from that moment on, sociology officially existed in the USSR.

The creation of the Association was not enough by itself, however. Soviet philosophers appeared somewhat amateurish at sociological meetings and their ability to resist alleged assaults of the advocates of capitalism were feeble. More suitable candidates were needed for such a challenge and Frantsev soon transferred the Association to one of his students from *MGIMO*, Gennady Ossipov (1959), who, from then on, became one of the central figures of the Russian sociological establishment for more than 60 years. Ossipov, and other students of Frantsev from the diplomatic school (Semyonov, Zamoshkin), formed one of the first groups in the USSR that read Western sociologists extensively and with a more positive attitude than their predecessors, who functioned as professional denouncers of capitalist heresies. Other groups emerged at approximately the same time at faculties of philosophy at Leningrad University (Yadov, Zdravomyslov, later Firsov), and Sverdlovsk University (Rutkevich, Kogan).

These early comers and the future leaders of the sociological movement formed a remarkably homogenous group. They belonged to the generation of 1926-1930 and were thus peers of Bourdieu, Habermas, Foucault, Luhmann, Tilly, and Howard Becker. Most of them were children

of intelligentsia — professors of humanities, teachers, doctors, or prominent Party officials.<sup>15</sup> Many were active in *Komsomol*, the Communist Youth Union, which was not surprising given that the philosophy faculties were widely regarded as a source of cadres for the Party apparatus. In their later reflections, they would define themselves as Communist true believers at the outset, incorporating the vision of socialist society as a rational project (see interviews in Batygin 1999). After Stalin's death, however, there was a general feeling that the Soviet project had suffered a great distortion under the rule of a tyrant, and was in need of a radical renovation. These renovation attempts shaped the last period of enormous social creativity in the Soviet history, known as “the Thaw” (1955-1968). For many, including the young philosophers, that meant revitalizing the technocratic imagery of social engineering with the latest achievements of science. In this they were supported by powerful Party philosophers, like Frantsev, who were also looking for a new creed. The first Soviet sociologists can be regarded as the younger generation in their academic patronage networks and worked under the following arrangement: the bosses would provide them with political and administrative cover, while their dependents would produce innovative work for which the bosses could take credit. Such bosses included Lovchuk (patron of the Sverdlovsk group), Rozhin (patron of the Leningrad group), Rumyantsev, Fedoseev and Konstantinov in Moscow, and later the political economist Prudensky in Novosibirsk. The motives of the bosses who fostered sociology still remained subject to conflicting interpretations; the subsequent narratives on them fall typically into two groups according to the connections of the narrator to a particular figure. For example, the former clients of Frantsev describe him as a dedicated reformer and a secret critic of Communism<sup>16</sup>, while others believed that he was an unprincipled opportunist interested in distancing himself from excesses of Stalinism.

Whatever the motives, sociology promised to bring new life to the legitimizing myths of Soviet society as a totally rational organization. That made it attractive and not only for the academic bosses. Making a career in the Party required demonstrating initiative that would be noticed by one's superiors. For a provincial Party official that meant starting a campaign creatively invoking one of the grand themes of the Soviet ideology, ideally making its way into federal press or television. Risks were involved, however; the initiative could be considered un-socialist or something could go wrong in the process. Nevertheless, there was always the chance to get ahead, and for many there was no other way.<sup>17</sup> Given that American empirical sociology promised to make social engineering “truly scientific,” a phrase that was central to Soviet legitimizing myth, it was inevitable that sociology should spread and expand in the USSR. Sociology became a source of several Union-wide campaigns such as “scientific organization of labor” or “social planning”.

Social planning was probably the single most important political achievement of Soviet sociologists. From its early days, almost all legal economic activities in the USSR were engineered according to an all-encompassing plan developed by *Gosplan*. A group of sociologists based in

<sup>15</sup> Few of the first-generation Soviet sociologists were exceptions to this rule. Among such exceptions were Mikhail Rutkevich from Sverdlovsk (born in 1917 and a WWII veteran) and Vasili Elmeev from Leningrad (born in 1929, but, in contrast to the rest, in a distant Mordovian village). Characteristically, both were politically much more orthodox than the rest of the movement. In Communist times, they served as nemeses to some of the more liberal and reformist figures; in post-soviet times, they became outcasts excluded from the pantheon of Soviet sociology.

<sup>16</sup> One of those close to the MGIMO group described him as an “originally a promising Egyptologist” who “in his own words, sold his soul to Bolsheviks”. This was probably too strong a thing for a leading Party philosopher to say (Grushin 1999: 147).

<sup>17</sup> This is nicely described in what is probably the best sociological account of the spread of Soviet sociology, a paper of two Soviet émigrés who worked at Yadov's group for a considerable time (Beliaev and Butorin 1982)

Leningrad advocated the inclusion of a set of social parameters into these blueprints, so that they regulated not only production and consumption, but also the rise of educational levels or stability of marriages. Such plans existed at national level as well as at the level of particular enterprises, which were responsible for social development for their personnel. A request to develop “plans of social development” was included in the new Constitution adopted in 1977.

When, in the 1970s, the Soviet Sociological Association published a directory of its members (Ossipov 1970), it listed 1426 individuals and 231 organizations, which made it the second largest national association at the time (after the American Sociological Association). This list of organizations gives an idea of the niches Soviet sociologists occupied. 91, or 39%, of them were university departments (*kafedry*) and the laboratories attached to institutions of higher learning. It is worth noting that none of these departments had the word “sociology” in their name. 40 (17%) of the organizations were laboratories of the scientific organization of labor or social planning at industrial enterprises, 38 (16%) were institutes or divisions of institutes at the Academies of Sciences (Soviet and republican academies), 31 (13%) were centers of applied research attached to the profile ministries, 15 (6%), were centers attached to the Party and *Komsomol* divisions and the remaining 16 (7%) were attached to various organizations such as mass media, trade unions and artistic societies (see Appendix 1 for a very brief introduction to the Soviet governance).

Soon after rebirth of their discipline in the late 1950s and early 60s, Soviet sociologists reached the heights of public acclaim. Newspapers with the widest circulation sought to publish the latest results of their surveys, and their lectures translating the wisdom of their Western colleagues gathered crowds. Igor Kon recalled that his course on “the sociology of personality” (largely consisting of American interactionist social psychology) in Leningrad University was attended by over 1000 people. The Big university hall proved to be unable to accommodate this amount safely, and Kon had to sign a paper embracing full responsibility for any possible consequences (Kon 1999). One wonders if Talcott Parsons, or any other American sociologist, ever gathered such an audience.

This development did not come problem free. First, as one might expect, it encountered opposition from some Marxist-Leninist philosophers, who regarded the rise of sociology as an encroachment on their territory. During the 1950s and 60s the spread of sociology met sporadic resistance from those criticizing, for example, any statistical analysis of survey data as an expression of “bourgeois positivism.” This kind of opposition was silenced, however, by the 1970s. A symbolic turning point was seen in 1971 with the publication of an article in the official flagship journal of Party ideology *The Communist*, which was authored by leading Soviet philosopher Grigorii Glezerman, the Party curator of academic philosophy Nikolai Pilipenko, and philosopher and sociologist of science Vladislav Kelle (Glezerman et al. 1971). This article, characteristically titled “Historical materialism – theory and method for scientific research and for revolutionary action” formulated the division of spheres of influence between the disciplines. Historical materialism was proclaimed the only true theory of historical development. Sociology was responsible for “concrete” empirical research instrumental in order to help solve the social problems of the Soviet society but ultimately demonstrating the correctness of the grand theory. Sociology thus became a sub-discipline of historical materialism, to use Abbott’s (1986) phrase.<sup>18</sup> After that, no objections were raised against

<sup>18</sup> As representatives of a sub-discipline, sociologists suffered from many minor humiliations; they were denied the right to call their journal “Sociological issues” (*Voprosy sotsiologii*), which was customary for a fully-fledged discipline, and had to call it “Sociological research” (*Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*).

the empirical research, but macro-sociological theorizing, especially as far as comparison of socialist and capitalist societies was involved, fell mostly beyond the purview of Soviet sociologists.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Glezerman participated in the campaign against Yuri Levada who carried out bold comparisons between socialist and capitalist societies in his lectures at the Moscow University. Levada was dismissed from the university, and subsequently the Academy's Institute for Applied (*Konkretnykh*) Sociological Research, where Levada headed a department, became a victim of a political pogrom. An anonymous letter accused the institute of a loss of political vigilance, as was demonstrated by Levada's lectures, a fall in publication productivity<sup>20</sup>, and a "one-sided ethnic composition" (which can be translated from the idiom of the day as an employment of a significant number of Jews<sup>21</sup>). This letter later reached the desk of the main Party ideologist Suslov (Batygin 1999: 445-475). As a result of Party investigation, the hardliner Rutkevich replaced the former philosopher-patron of sociologists Rumyantsev, and a few leading figures, including Levada, had to leave the institute. This was the best-known, but in no way the only, case of a "purge." Similar campaigns followed what was called "*prokoly*" (political blunders), which occurred in Tartu, Leningrad and Novosibirsk in late 1970s and early 80s (Firsov 2012; Zdravomyslova and Titarenko 2017).

Apart from individual repression, sociologists experienced certain restrictions of a less direct nature. Graduate schools (*aspirantura*) and PhD-level degrees (candidate of sciences) in "applied sociology" existed, but were extremely few. Undergraduate education in sociology was unavailable until the beginning of Perestroika. What probably depressed Soviet sociologists most was a ban on launching a research center that could carry out nationwide surveys. Their studies were confined to singular enterprises, or to the audience of a newspaper, or, less frequently, to communities like a village or middle-range town (for example Grushin's study of reception of mass communication in Taganrog) but were never at the level of a larger territorial or administrative unit. Finally, only during Tchernenko's brief administration in 1984 were principal decisions made to launch undergraduate education at Moscow and Leningrad universities and to create an All-Russian research center for public opinion studies (*WCIOM*), neither appeared until the beginning of Perestroika.

Perestroika totally altered the landscape for Soviet sociology. This general political liberalization allowed those who had been repressed and dismissed from their posts to return in triumph their previous positions and to head institutes and the governing bodies of the Association. Their former nemeses took their place as outcasts. Sociology faculties flourished in universities, especially after 1991 as a result of the conversion of former historical materialism chairs. Yadov headed the Moscow Institute for Sociology, the descendant of the Institute for Applied Sociological Research and a national survey center was created with Zaskavskaya as the first director, soon replaced by

<sup>19</sup> There were some exceptions to this rule. One of them was comparative studies of science, which were carried out in a relatively free fashion even when the comparisons turned out to be unfavorable to the Soviet side. Interestingly, however, such studies were symbolically isolated from the rest of sociology as a specific discipline named "Science studies" or "*Naukovedenie*." *Naukovedy* had a few licenses sociologists were denied, which allowed them, for example, to publish Foucault's "The Order of Things" in 1977 as a treatise in history of science. However, the subject of their studies was nearly exclusively natural sciences, which were, at that time, officially viewed as being above class conflicts and apolitical.

<sup>20</sup> Arguably, Russia pioneered the use of various research performance metrics the usage of which in Russian universities could be traced to early 19th century. The Soviet Academy of Sciences paid tribute to this obsession.

<sup>21</sup> Late-Soviet Anti-Semitism fueled by the Six-days war was on the rise at this moment.

Levada. Zaslavskaya also headed the Soviet Sociological Association. Their authority won in the previous period secured them leadership in the new times.

### **THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE TROUBLES OF SOVIET SOCIOLOGY**

As one can easily see from even from this brief reconstruction, the entire development of Soviet sociology occurred in the shadow of the major legitimizing narrative of Soviet society. This narrative and the necessity to maintain the belief in it explains its emergence, the repressions it suffered from, and the recognition its leaders received. We have already seen how the legitimacy themes surfaced in the story of the Soviet sociological revival. Soviet sociology as a whole emerged from the necessity to demonstrate that the Soviet Union was eager to implement the newest techniques of governance rationalization as well as that it was a leading player in the global intellectual scene. It also emerged from the immanent necessity to expand the scope of spheres to which the planning procedures applied.

Following the path chosen by Lenin required much ongoing planning activity, such as the development of subsequent five-year economic plans. In Soviet Marxism, the economic base determined the development of the social and cultural superstructure, which meant that economic plans were considered the most important types of blueprints in the engineering of Communist society. Nevertheless, the ideology of a fully rationalized state also required expanding planning into new spheres. To explain some of its failures, the Soviet leadership had to recognize that cultural and social rudiments of capitalist society, if not dealt with in a rational manner, may impede the development of socialist economics and defer the coming of communism to the indefinite future. That meant that cultural and social spheres had to be rationally managed as well. Ideally, the plan should have covered everything, from the output of potassium to the transformation of family values. Soviet sociology's mission was to assist in what, to use Coleman's phrase (1983), was the rational reconstruction of Soviet society.

In the first stages of development at least, support of the sociological movement in the upper echelons of political elites were met with initiatives from below. At a lower level of the administrative hierarchy, a broad spread of applied sociological research was facilitated by the necessity to demonstrate that each individual organization was scientifically managed. As such demonstrations also contributed to confirming the legitimacy of the whole Soviet project, they were highly valued; providing them was the road to a career in the Party (Beliaev and Butorin, 1982). The need to demonstrate the intellectual superiority of Soviet society over the outside world, as well as attempts to resolve its internal tensions, explain why the institutionalization of Soviet sociology was so rapid and successful.

The legitimacy needs of the Soviet regime explain, however, not only sociology's successes, but also its hardships. Any advance in the institutionalization of sociology led sociologists into potential problems. Most obviously, sociological studies could raise doubts about the presuppositions Soviet politics relied on. For understandable reasons, research that directly tested propositions of official ideology were under particularly intensive control. Nevertheless, some studies followed in this vein. Yadov's and Zdravomyslov's masterpiece, *Man and His Work* (1970), was directly aimed at testing the proposition that, as Soviet society moves toward communism, post-material incentives (such as having an interesting job) replace material ones (meaning salary). Yadov surveyed employees at a large plant in Leningrad and discovered that engineers were much less likely to be materialistic than manual workers. That could be interpreted as a proof of the maxims of official ideology. It was believed that highly qualified labor will replace unqualified labor in the course of the new scientific



revolution, and, if the character of labor is responsible for degree of materialism, new generations of workers are likely to become more post-materialist than earlier ones. Yadov and his colleagues, however, walked on thin ice as they showed that, first, important cultural divisions existed between classes, and, second, working class members were further than the intelligentsia from the Communist ideals.

The episode ended well for Yadov and his colleagues, although not everybody was so lucky. An instructive example was the “Golofast affair” of 1983–85 in Leningrad (Bozhkov and Protasenko 2005). Valerij Golofast, a Leningrad sociologist and a younger colleague of Yadov, had prepared a book on the sociology of family that made relatively free comparisons between Soviet and US studies. Given the fact that these studies demonstrated similar dynamics (such as a decrease in the number of births per family couple), Golofast concluded there were processes common to all industrial societies. That blatantly contradicted the official position of Marxist ideologists, who insisted that the USSR and its capitalist rivals should not be put under a common more general category and that their paths diverged. The reviewers at *Nauka*, the Academy of Sciences publisher who were responsible for ideological quality control, duly pointed out Golofast’s mistakes. The criticisms were relatively mild, merely requiring the revision of several paragraphs, but Golofast ignored them, concealed the whole episode from colleagues at his institute, and attempted to get the manuscript printed without alterations. When the truth surfaced, he was subjected to a detailed investigation and his expulsion from the Party was discussed. Ultimately, the punishment turned out to be not so severe—Golofast received an official reprimand (*vygovor*), which meant that he was unlikely to be promoted or allowed to go to conferences abroad. His book was excluded from the publisher’s schedule.

Independently of how well sociologists’ findings or theorizing fitted in with the Party line, an important element was what intellectual sources sociologists relied upon in developing their reasoning. An overly intensive and uncritical reliance on “capitalist” sources in social sciences (except psychology, which by the 1970s attained the status of a natural science) was suspicious and possibly signaled that an individual did not recognize the superiority of Soviet science with its Marxist-Leninist foundations. Citing Parsons without ritually condemning the capitalist bias in his reasoning was a risky thing, and Levada suffered partly because he was not cautious enough.

The risk of coming into conflict with the guardians of Soviet ideology was the greatest in the case of researchers working at the Academy of Sciences who were responsible for basic research and for translating Western literature into Russian (knowledge of foreign languages and access to foreign books were severely limited). The next source of political troubles for Soviet sociology was equally important for all belonging to it, not only to those working at the elite research institutions. As an inevitable consequence of sociology’s legitimization through its usefulness in bringing about the Communist society, sociologists were primarily experts on problems. As such, they were interested in the proliferation of problems to specialize on, were keen to ensure that these problems would remain active in the public consciousness, and were inclined to find potential threats in whatever subject they studied. The success of sociology was intertwined with shedding light on the dismal realities of Soviet socialism and this made sociologists an inevitable danger to the legitimacy of those who were responsible for the realities they studied.

For those at the bottom of the Soviet administrative hierarchy, sociology’s potential as an opportunity was to be balanced with its dangers. Initiating a campaign that promised scientifically based improvement could lead to one being noticed at the top. However, the research could also reveal problems that would then be attributed to its initiator. Active heads of local *Komsomol* at a

plant could launch a series of surveys of young workers to find out how political propaganda among them could be improved. In itself, such an initiative was highly regarded. But, if the surveys revealed that workers were completely indifferent to propaganda, and no improvement occurred after new measures were implemented, that would put the activists in significant danger (Rusalina 2008); the lack of political consciousness could be attributed to their own failings as political agitators. This was generally the safest way for their superiors to interpret the findings. Sociological research was thus a threat for those responsible for the setting studied. The latter, knowing that they had no chance to refuse their superiors the information on their performance after it appeared, often chose to prevent this information from emerging at all. The infamous Soviet secrecy often consisted not of classifying information which was publicly available in other countries, but of gathering none. Thus, after the damaging 1937 census, a new census was carried out in 1939 that demonstrated results closer to what the Politburo wanted to announce. Following this, however, no further censuses were carried out for 20 years, until 1959.

Carrying out sociological research in a given setting required collaboration at different levels; collaboration between the subjects researched, between those in authority in the research setting and those above them in the authority chain as well as those above the researchers. Research could be blocked by a refusal to cooperate at any of these levels. The higher levels of a bureaucracy could overrule the decisions of lower levels when they suspected them of trying to avoid their control. In practice, however, they were often convinced to do otherwise by the lower levels, disguising their own secrets as being secrets of the regime in general. If such arguments failed, the research could still be blocked, through either a tacit lack of cooperation or a counterattack.

An episode that occurred in Leningrad at approximately the same time as the Golofast affair is instructive. Boris Firsov, a friend and colleague of Yadov, was charged with the task of developing an “information system” at Leningrad *obkom*. Among other things, this system applied content-analysis procedures to accumulate information on complaints. The task gave Firsov an office at *obkom* and a direct telephone connection to the higher Party officials (*vertushka*), a symbol of highest Party trust in an individual. At some point, however, a secretary of Yuri Andropov, the head of Politburo, requested data from Firsov on complaints from Leningrad inhabitants about the state of the public health system. Having provided the data, Firsov’s group was removed from the “information system” project the following day and the project closed. The fact that Georgii Romanov, the powerful head of the Leningrad *obkom*, had punished sociologists for making potentially damaging information on the state of healthcare system in his territory available to the Secretary General was, however, never mentioned. Instead, Firsov’s carelessness in dealing with sensitive information in a totally different case was given as a pretext of his fall from grace (Firsov 2012). The institute’s director, unhappy about Firsov’s direct contacts at *obkom*, used the blunder to force Firsov to leave for another institute.

The craft of sociological research in such a setting is indistinguishable from the art of political intrigue. One had to build coalitions consisting of agents belonging to different hierarchical levels who needed to be convinced that the benefits of a given piece of research (its value in bringing in real improvements or increasing international prestige, the chance to gain recognitions from one’s superiors) outweighed its risks. The list of specific settings researched by Soviet sociologists reflects the opportunities that existed to build such coalitions. The chances were best at the bottom of political hierarchy; the higher the level, the less political support they found.

Overall, the policy adopted by the Communist Party toward sociological research could be formulated in the following way. Sociologists were allowed to do their research at particular local

cases, as anything happening at a level of a particular plant could be dismissed as a “singular shortcoming” (*edinichnyj nedostatok*), probably together with the plant’s director or head of local Party organization, so not discrediting the Soviet project in general. But the wider the scope of the research, the more general were its implications, as it meant that a higher level of the political hierarchy would be deemed responsible. The higher the level, the less incentives there were to initiate a research campaign. While a local *obkom* secretary for propaganda could see it as a chance for promotion, a Politburo member had no upward promotion aims. This explains why the institutionalization of sociology stalled at the local level, and why establishing a national survey center proved to be such a formidable task.

The stagnation of sociology in the 1970s and early 1980s, which a few observers noticed (Shlapentokh 1987), was probably the result of its reaching the limits of expansion. On one hand, the list of problems the Soviet regime was ready to recognize as existing had been exhausted and new groups within the discipline found no subjects to study. On the other hand, sociology was unable to institutionalize at the level that would allow it to be regarded as a fully fledged discipline by the powers that be, the public, or sociologists themselves. As the mission of Soviet sociology was to assist the Soviet state in developing plans and evaluating performance, its structure was correlated with the structure of the state. Each research center was attached to a decision-making unit of a certain level in the administrative hierarchy, with the research center’s status and profile corresponding to that of the respective unit. The scope of settings the center analyzed also coincided with the scope of authority of the unit to which it was attached. Thus, the institutes within the Academy of Sciences, connected to the Union ministries and to regional Party branches (*obkomy*), stood at the top of this hierarchy. They could study at the level of whole regions or industries. Even they, however, could not research such subjects as the class structure of Soviet society or public opinion of the Soviet people at national level. Without such divisions, the institutionalization of sociology was deemed incomplete. Sociologists striving to boost the importance of their discipline inevitably endeavor to enlarge the territorial scope of their research to the national level. That meant, however, conducting research for which the results could not be interpreted as characterizing “singular shortcomings.”

Unable to expand upward, Soviet sociology also faced increasing resistance at the lower levels. As sociological work became more familiar, the attitudes held toward it by Soviet administrators became increasingly less enthusiastic. For latecomers, who did not initiate campaigns to introduce innovative methods of scientific governance but merely joined them following orders from above, there were no possible gains, only risks. Sociological studies were not stopped, but at most enterprises they were reduced to a certain number of safe, and often purely decorative, forms.

While the obstacles and risks in developing sociology in the USSR were enormous, so was the perceived importance of research. Precisely the same vulnerability that made the regime respond so violently to alleged sociological misdoings was the reason why sociologists could see themselves as a part of subversive social action of great importance. In the USSR there could be no study of industrial relations at a plant that would not, at the same time, be a study of the performance of particular officials in the bureaucratic hierarchy, of Soviet policies in the industrial sphere, and, ultimately, which would not be a test of the intellectual foundations of the Soviet regime’s credibility, something sociological censors were always eager to remind sociologists of. But while this status was a source of much trouble for Soviet sociologists, it also gave them the feeling of possessing enormous influence that was unheard of in other contexts.

This understanding of the significance of their research created a unique intellectual style, not fully intelligible for scholars living in another system of relevances (an example of such gross misunderstanding is Greenfeld, 1988). As elements of Western sociology travelled East, they were put to rhetorical usages not intended by their originators. One example will suffice here. A trait of Soviet sociology that may surprise an international observer is the central role public opinion studies played within it. Rather than an industry at the periphery of the profession, public opinion polls were (and, to a certain degree, still are) widely regarded as perhaps the most important sociological practice. The stars of Soviet sociology strove more vigorously to become the heads of national public opinion research centers (Grushin, Levada, Zaslavskaya) than to receive professorships at Russia's most prestigious universities or to be elected a member of the Academy of Sciences. "The sociology of public opinion" is still a necessary course in sociologists' undergraduate curriculum and George Gallup may be mentioned in the same breath as idols of sociology such as Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld. There are still no established terms in the Russian language to distinguish Gallup's polls from academic sociology.

The relevance of public opinion studies to the Russian sociological context was, in all probability, due to the fact that they disclosed one of the most sacred secrets of Soviet society. An essential part of the Soviet regime's self-description was its self-declared democratic nature, which was buttressed by the claim it enjoyed the unanimous support of all Soviet people (with the exception of a pitiful band of renegades, dissidents, and class enemies). Together with scientific authority, this democratic support was one of the regime's two major sources of legitimization. Public opinion studies, however, revealed this picture of unanimous support to be illusionary. At times they even showed that the majority disagreed with the course chosen by the Party. In a society deprived of any real elections that, nonetheless, witnessed constant references to the "popular will" as the ultimate source of authority, public opinion polls emerged to play the role as a substitute for plebiscites. As such, they tore apart the most politically important veil of secrecy.<sup>22</sup> For those who saw this as the major aim of sociological enterprise, pollsters naturally gained the stature of sociological giants.

This understanding of the role of sociologists was shared by international observers familiar with Soviet society. One of the final Soviet-era scandals broke out in Novosibirsk in 1983 after the text of a memo, which was intended for a closed seminar, was leaked. The memo, which recognized the existence of latent class conflict within the USSR and called for the wider introduction of quasi-market mechanisms to the planned economy, emerged in the West, where it was published and widely discussed. Its author, Tatyana Zaslavskaya, found herself famous overnight. What made the conference paper important was not that it contained any ideas or evidence that was totally unfamiliar to Sovietologists. The remarkable thing about it was rather, from the perspective of the Western press, that its existence proved that such views could be expressed by a member of the

<sup>22</sup> Ironically, this was their original intention in the eyes of people like George Gallup who saw polls more as a political instrument than a research technique. One of the preeminent historians of Soviet sociology, Boris Doktorov also wrote voluminous biographies of the founding fathers of the US pollster industry [Doktorov, 2005]. In a private communication with the author, Doktorov expressed the belief that the US pollsters stand much closer to Soviet sociologists than their academic counterparts. This arguably explains the pattern of progress in research techniques in Russian sociology that was much stronger in gathering quantitative data (e.g., in constructing scales), than in statistical analysis. Most articles in the Soviet era never offered more than frequency distributions. If the argument here is correct, they all had reasons to do so as it was the distributions that had the greatest unveiling value. A small band of those who cultivated advanced methods of analysis were highly appreciated and widely admired—as they provided evidence of the discipline's scientific status—but were rarely emulated

Soviet academic establishment who was officially entitled to define realities of Soviet societies. For outside observers, as well as from the perspective of social sociologists themselves, the very fact of its emergence and relatively free circulation along administrative channels signaled important political changes.

The importance of sociology was also recognized among the Soviet educated public, which we have so far omitted from this discussion. Soviet people were surrounded by information screens but they were constantly anxious to know what lay behind them. One of the central slogans of “Solidarność,” the Polish trade union that became a central force in overthrowing Communist rule, was “To tell the truth about the real situation in the country.” This also expressed the feelings of many Soviet citizens. The initial burst of enthusiasm over Soviet sociologists, which made their leaders little short of media stars, was followed by a period of indifference during which sociologists were left studying local problems. This was, in turn, followed by a new wave of acclaim during the Perestroika years when national research became possible and the list of forbidden topics rapidly shrank. After decades of struggle, Soviet sociologists ultimately prevailed. Soviet sociology ended in a burst of enthusiasm, not in a whimper of subservience.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This returns us to the original question of this paper: Why has the fame of Soviet sociologists persisted, while the specific fruit of their intellectual labors has almost been forgotten? The answer to this question consists of two parts, the first part pointing to the ambiguity of intellectual achievement, the second to the traits of Soviet society that favored certain forms of achievement over others. First, there is a growing literature that questions the accuracy of the conventional opposition between “moral” and “purely intellectual” qualities of a researcher and the belief that great discoveries are predominantly a product of the latter (Shapin 1995; Lamont 2009). All involved in research know that any groundbreaking study is no less as a demonstration of stamina and courage, as it is of imagination and breadth of vision. Some settings, however, tax character qualities particularly harshly, and they are particularly likely to produce figures whose standing as heroes fully eclipses their contribution as providers of facts or ideas. An example here are polar explorers: few people remember what (if any) were Scott’s unfortunate expedition discoveries, but this does not detract much from Scott’s fame.

The settings in which investigators have to deal with strong intentional secrecy are similar to polar expeditions in the sense that they are another area in which moral qualities become a dominant element of academic achievement. The discoveries of sociologists struggling with intentional secrecy are akin to the revelations of investigative journalists: as with journalism, the major obstacle in disclosing intentional secrets are usually organizational or political, rather than intellectual. Facts are difficult to construct because of the need to overcome the active resistance of those who would like to suppress their construction. To deal with such secrets one needs courage, patience, diplomatic skills, sometimes even cunning, and other qualities usually qualified as moral. The success of the founding fathers of the Soviet sociology lay in their possession of these qualities and this, more than anything else, was what they were and are still admired for.

The second part of the explanation points to the specific characters of Soviet society, which was unique in the extensiveness of secrecy present in it, and which thus particularly favored moral components of academic achievement over the cognitive. I argued above that this preoccupation

with suppressing information open to all in most other countries was a by-product of its self-definition as a single rational project. The pervasiveness of secrecy engineered to sustain this self-definition created numerous obstacles Soviet sociologists had to overcome. It also gave their work importance unheard of in other contexts. The central legitimizing myth of Soviet society as scientifically planned gave certified scientists' voices enormous weight as they could not be ignored without jeopardizing the whole of this myth. Ironically, they were regularly reminded of this fact precisely by those Party scions who impeded their studies. The reason why they were so repressed was precisely because what they said was considered so important. This sets the USSR apart from many other twentieth- and twenty-first-century authoritarian regimes. While all non-democratic governments are likely to produce some kinds of enforced secrecy, for most, the scope of such secrecy is limited to highly specific issues, such as the levels of a dictator's popularity. Moreover, most do not feel that disregarding advice by academics delegitimizes them. The subsequent, post-Soviet, regime refused to take the blame, even for corruption and currency devaluation, and happily ignored sociologists who tried to draw attention to Russia's mounting problems. Even in the Soviet era, sociologists could probably avoid repression by carefully choosing their research topics, but this came at the cost of rendering their work less important in their own eyes than it could otherwise be. Escaping repression meant shirking the serious challenge of revealing really far-reaching truths able to influence the legitimacy of the Soviet regime and possibly change the country's course overnight. The research taxing moral qualities most heavily was also the one perceived by sociologists and their publics as far more important, than safer topics.

The problem with studies overcoming intentional secrecy is that they, as with work by investigative journalists, are more likely to produce stand-alone scandalous reports, attracting the widest attention in a short time-span, than lasting intellectual legacies. Settings rich in intentional secrecy produce role models with greater ease than canonical texts, and moral examples for young beginners with greater ease than theoretical generalizations. For those who associate true success and deserved fame in the social sciences with authoring texts and ideas outliving their authors, it would seem that Soviet sociologists were victims of the "resource curse" that has played a prominent role in Russian history in general. They were seduced by the ease with which they could obtain an audience and a sense of self-importance, and neglected to undertake work that would leave more solid landmarks behind. Their efforts at breaking the veil of secrecy were unlikely to outlive the political regime creating this veil. After an enormous change in the dominant forms of political legitimation, the very nature of the Soviet sociologists' achievements became unintelligible.

This paper emerged from a talk given at a panel of the World Sociological Congress in Yokohama in 2014 named "Failed Sociologists and Dead Ends in the History of Sociology."<sup>23</sup> Soviet sociology can quite obviously be considered a dead end. Its heroes outlived the memory of their research and there are few people today who would claim to develop their theoretical legacies or who make use of their empirical findings.<sup>24</sup> If, however, we measure success by a feeling of importance that the researchers themselves and their immediate audiences share, then Soviet sociology probably represents one of the peaks of sociological history.

<sup>23</sup> My gratitude is to Christian Fleck, to whom the exciting idea of this session belongs.

<sup>24</sup> Yuri Levada is an exception as he had at least two highly visible younger colleagues who claimed developing his ideas on the Soviet personality, Boris Dubin (1946-2014) and Lev Gudkov (b.1946).



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## APPENDIX 1: HOW THE SOVIET UNION WAS ORGANIZED

Organizationally, the USSR can be regarded as an extremely complex matrix structure consisting of a multiplicity of independent functional hierarchies.<sup>25</sup> These hierarchies, however, were largely arranged according to the same set of principles, and intertwined at each successive level. The following is, of necessity, a very simplified picture that mentions only the agents appearing in our story.

The basic dualism in this structure was between hierarchies belonging to the state apparatus on the one hand, and to the Party and *Komsomol*, the Communist youth league – on the other hand. Nearly all organizations providing employment, including industrial enterprises, universities, and research institutes were integrated into the state apparatus. The Party and *Komsomol* primary cells were created as organizations-employers. As such, Party members from among university professors had to attend meetings of the Party primary cell and to pay dues at the universities where they worked. The higher levels of the Party organization, however, were organized following territorial, rather than institutional, principles. All primary cells were subordinates to the district (*rajon*) Party committee (*rajkom*), and the latter to the regional (*oblast'*) committee (*obkom*) (sometimes an intermediate level of city committee (*gorkom*) existed). A strict hierarchy among the territorial units of the same class was present, with Moscow *obkom* being unquestionably the first in Russia, and Leningrad *obkom* the second for example. *Komsomol* was structured in the same fashion, and subordinated to the Party at all levels. The role of the Party was described in the Constitution as that of the “leading and directing force of society” (*rukovodiaschaya I napravliajuschays sila obschestva*). While any organization was immediately responsible to a respective ministry, it also reported to the local Party committee and could take orders from it. In a way, this system reproduced in institutional form the old Western dualism of mind and soul, with Party playing the role of the soul, and ministries of the mind. The local Party bosses (*secretari obkoma*) took the credit for any success at in their territory; they were also blamed for any major failures. The boss had subordinates responsible for functional sectors. Thus, in greater academic centers like Leningrad, one of them was responsible for science. This subordinate reported to the regional party boss as well as to the party boss responsible for science across the whole country (this was the head of the respective department of the Party Central committee in Moscow).

Research activities in this system were distributed between several functionally separated hierarchies. Basic research was located at the system of the Academy of Sciences that had the rights and privileges of a separate ministry. The Academy was organized according to strictly bureaucratic principles. It consisted of institutes that were responsible for a given field of research. The institutes were divided into divisions (*otdely*) and departments (*sektora*) each responsible for progressively lesser fields. A young employee started as an assistant, then proceeded to a junior researcher, then to senior researcher, and then to a department head (*zavsektora*). It was assumed that all those below department heads would work under their close supervision.

Institutions of higher education belonged to the system of the Ministry of Education or some other ministry (e.g. humanities institutes belonged to the province of Ministry of Culture). They were created as administrative centers of territorial units of a certain scale and importance. Their own status was derived from the status of these territorial units. At the very bottom of this pecking order there were provincial teacher's training institutes existing in every town. At the top were

<sup>25</sup> Still the best description of this structure is probably (Hough and Fainsod 1979).



three types of higher education institutions. The first of them was institutes immediately connected to the ministries, such as the *MGIMO* that was connected to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The second type was institutes connected to the Party central organs, such as the Academy for Social Sciences that was Party's graduate school. Finally, there were major universities that represented the capital cities and received students from them, including children of the elites in Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, or Novosibirsk. In addition to these two branches of the academic system there was the applied research system that was affiliated with the ministries (upper strata) or particular enterprises (lower strata).