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Socialist Realist Science: Constructing Knowledge about Rural
Life in the Soviet Union, 1943-1958

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Maya Haber

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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1943-1958

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

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Agriculture was one of the most vexing problems confronting the Soviet state at the end of the war. In 1943, as the Red Army began liberating Nazi occupied territories, and the state had to collectivize the local population anew, social scientists were called upon to study and address the economic and social problems plaguing the collective farm system. After a decade of dormancy, soviet economists, ethnographers, and statisticians regained their legitimacy by reconstructing their disciplines as distinctly socialist and endeavoring to provide the state with much-needed information in order to better govern its kolkhoz population. Critical issues of the kolkhoz economy, social structure and cultural practices had been neglected for nearly two decades. The postwar soviet state lacked knowledge about the impact of its pricing, taxation and procurement policies on the kolkhoz household.

Producing this knowledge was not an easy task. A socialist social science had to square the progressive narrative of socialist realism with a realist depiction of social reality. While the latter was necessary to help the state govern, the former rendered the science socialist. The development of a *socialist* social science allowed soviet scholars to become highly influential

participants in state building. Serving as administrative and policy advisers to the soviet state, social scientists conducted scientific observation, experimentation, cost-benefit analysis, and statistical surveys which shaped social and economic reform in the post-Stalin period. The postwar years saw the soviet state's first attempt to extend its biopolitical practices into the village through categorization, measurement, and rationalization.

Utilizing unexamined archival and published sources the work charts this reconstruction through an exploration of three themes. First, it explores social scientists' professional identity and ethos to show that they constructed a science that combined a critical analysis of social problems with political activism. Second, it interrogates the influence of socialist realist aesthetics on scholarly vision to determine how social scientists negotiated rural reality with the idealized vision of socialist modernization. Lastly, it examines the concepts, taxonomic and ordering systems, and their modes of representation in the emergence of a socialist epistemology of scientific engagement.

The dissertation of Maya Haber is approved.

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Theodore M. Porter

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To Zoya and Sean

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Introduction

Agriculture was one of the most vexing problems continually confronting the Soviet state throughout its history, but especially at the end of WWII. In 1943, as the Red Army began liberating Nazi occupied territories and the state began collectivizing the local population anew, the collective farm system in the rest of the country was on the brink of collapse. Collective farm members circulated rumors about the abolition of the kolkhoz, discharged soldiers refused to return to their home villages, and agricultural production was incredibly low. Postwar food shortages, rural unrest and the famine of 1947-8 rendered state action unavoidable. During “the reconstruction period” of 1946-1953, the state harshly restored control over the countryside by reaffirming the power of procurement organs, forcing the redistribution of private plots, dictating sowing plans and exiling labor shirkers. In 1950, in another bid to improve its control mechanism, the state amalgamated the collective farms, reducing them by sixty percent from 252,146 to 99,400.¹

At the same time, the state called upon social scientists to study and address the economic and social problems plaguing the collective farm system. Soviet social sciences had been severely repressed in the 1930s as the state liquidated academic disciplines,

¹Auri C. Berg, "Reform in the Time of Stalin: Nikita Khrushchev and the Fate of the Russian Peasantry" (University of Toronto, 2012); Jean Lévesque, "Exile and Discipline: The June 1948 Campaign Against Collective Farm Shirkers," *Carl Beck Papers* (2006); Jean Lévesque, "The Post-World War II Stalinist Order in the Soviet Countryside: Labour Discipline and Collective Farm Life, 1945-1953" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2003); Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 296-305; Olga M. Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo: ot Stalina k Krushchevu, seredina 40-kh--nachalo 60-kh godov* (Moskva: Nauka, 1992); Veniamin F. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 godov: Priskhozhdenie i prosledstviia* (Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii, 1996); Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War : Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, The New Russian history (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998); M.A. Beznin and T.M. Dimoni, "Sotsial'nyi protest kolkhoznogo krest'ianstva 1940-1960gg.," *Otechestvennaia Istoriiia*, no. 3 (1999).

closed journals and publications and imprisoned and executed scholars. Disciplines such as sociology vanished altogether, while others reoriented their research and methodologies to less dangerous subjects.² In 1943, when the winds of war changed and the front began moving westward, the soviet state was faced with a devastated heartland: hundreds of towns and villages had been flattened, draft animals had been slaughtered or expropriated and factories, dams and bridges had to be rebuilt.³

Beyond the physical destruction, the social and economic fabric of occupied territories lay in tatters. Needing assistance, the state changed its attitude toward the social sciences, enlisting into the Red Army social scientists from a variety of disciplines to map newly liberated territories and help reconstruction efforts. The Soviet Military Administration in Germany, for example, recruited economists and ethnographers to construct knowledge that would make postwar Germany governable. Thus, the war and the task of governing unknown populations gave social sciences an opportunity to reestablish the legitimacy they had lost in the 1930s.⁴ However, while the military provided scientific institutes with clear tasks during the war, social scientific disciplines entered a state of crisis in peacetime. Scholars had to reconfigure their disciplines and

² Terence Cox, *Rural Sociology in the Soviet Union: Its History and Basic Concepts* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979); David Joravsky, "The Stalinist Mentality and the Higher Learning," *Slavic Review* 42, no. 4 (1983); Yuri Slezkine, "The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928-38," *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (1991); Susan Gross Solomon, *The Soviet Agrarian Debate: A Controversy in Social Science, 1923-1929* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977); Elizabeth Ann Weinberg, *Sociology in the Soviet Union and Beyond : Social Enquiry and Social Change* (Aldershot, Hants., England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

³ Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.*, 284-286.

⁴ V.V. Oreshkin, "Deiatel'nost' Instituta Ekonomiki AN SSSR v peiod Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny," in *Institut Ekonomiki & Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk - Institut Ekonomiki, 1995); Elaine Mackinnon, "Writing History for Stalin: Isaak Izrailevich Mints and the Istoriia grazhdanskoi voyny," *Kritika* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2005); A.M. Reshetov, "Institut etnografii AN SSSR, 1933-1943gg.," *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, no. 5 (2003); M. G. Rabinovich and S. A. Tokarev, "Institut etnografii v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny i pervye poslevoennnye gody," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, no. 4 (1975).

methodologies to avoid past mistakes and better serve the needs of the postwar soviet state. After over a decade of dormancy induced by internal conflict and an ideological onslaught on the intelligentsia, social scientists sought to reconstruct their disciplines as distinctly socialist.

Shortly after the end of the war, economists, statisticians and ethnographers turned their attention to the crux of social problems: the collective farm system. For some disciplines this turn came directly from party instructions, while for others it resulted from internal discussions about the best approach to assist in reconstruction. Both groups, however, defined the essence of a socialist science to be the production of practical knowledge promoting the communist future and perceived problems plaguing the collective farm system as crucial obstacles.

The dissertation explores the efforts of social sciences to provide the state with much-needed information in order to better govern its kolkhoz population. Critical issues of the kolkhoz economy, social structure and cultural practices had been neglected for nearly two decades. The postwar soviet state lacked knowledge about the impact of its pricing, taxation and procurement policies on the kolkhoz household. Since collectivization in the 1930s, soviet economists had not calculated the cost of kolkhoz production, ethnographers had not examined changing family relations and statisticians had not studied household budgets. Rather than utilize knowledge to organize and direct social practices, the soviet state had resorted to coercion and brute force to impose its will on the rural population. At the 1947 February Plenum of the Central Committee, high-ranking politicians started demanding useable scientific knowledge about collective farms, saying that agricultural administrators could not govern without it.

As in Europe and the United States, social sciences had emerged in Russia as a governing tool aimed to reform the economy and society. Social sciences thrived in the

late Imperial period: zemstvo statisticians used innovative sampling methods and ethnographers mapped populations to serve the needs of the empire.⁵ During the 1920s, social scientists, now named “bourgeois specialists,” maintained a “symbiotic” relationship with the soviet state. While state officials utilized their expertise to assist in state building, specialists aspired to harness the state’s power to reform society and considered it a partner in enlightening and disciplining the people.⁶ Yet the honeymoon between social scientists and the soviet state was short-lived, ending with Stalin’s Cultural Revolution in the late 1920s. At that time, the soviet state amalgamated science with Marxism to form a “unified scientific method” based on dialectical materialism, sacrificing social sciences in the process.⁷ Marxist ethnographers, statisticians, sociologists and economists formulated utopian theories predicting the “withering away” (*otmirat'*) of their disciplines under socialism. Statisticians imagined a perfect future without room for the study of variability because society would be fully controlled by the

⁵ David William Darrow, "The Politics of Numbers: Statistics and the Search for a Theory of Peasant Economy in Russia, 1861-1917" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1996); Martine Mespoulet, "From Typical Areas to Random Sampling: Sampling Methods in Russia from 1875 to 1930," *Science in Context* 15, no. 3 (2002); Nathaniel Knight, "Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society," in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, ed. Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel, *Indiana-Michigan series in Russian and East European studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Vytautas Petronis, "Mapping Lithuanians: The Development of Russian Imperial Ethnic Cartography, 1840s–1870s," *Imago Mundi* 63, no. 1 (2011).

⁶ Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Harley Balzer, "Conclusion," in *Russia's Missing Middle Class: the Professions in Russian History*, ed. Harley Balzer (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 302; Michael David-Fox and György Péteri, "On the Origins and Demise of the Soviet Academic Regime," in *Academia Upheaval: Origins, Transfers and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe*, ed. Michael David-Fox and György Péteri (Westport, CT: Bergen and Garvey, 2000), 17-20.

⁷ Loren R. Graham, *The Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Communist Party, 1927-1932* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967); Alexander Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge: the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1917-1970)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

planned economy, ethnographers fantasized about the erasure of ethnic particularities under socialism and political economists defined their discipline as the study of commodity production and proclaimed that socialism eliminated commodity circulation.

Histories of soviet social sciences are scarce. With few exceptions, historians tell a story of the demise of social sciences after Stalin's rise to power.⁸ Several historical accounts continue until the beginning of the war and very few cover the period between 1943 and 1958.⁹ Most histories of soviet social science, like those of the educated elites in general, are concerned primarily with the relationship between scholars and the state. They investigate the extent to which scientists succeeded in maintaining their autonomy from the state, thus preserving their professional neutrality. The mainstream literature insists that the production of knowledge required strict impartiality or else it became mere propaganda.¹⁰ Therefore, in writing the history of soviet social sciences, historians often try to rescue soviet scholars' objectivity from the grip of party influence.¹¹

⁸ Weinberg, *Sociology in the Soviet Union and Beyond : Social Enquiry and Social Change*; Slezkine, "The Fall of Soviet Ethnography."; Emily D Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of Kraevedenie* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), chapter six; Cox, *Rural Sociology in the Soviet Union: Its History and Basic Concepts*. An exception to this rule is Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁹ Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Kyung Deok Roh, "Stalin's Think Tank: The Varga Institute and the Making of the Stalinist Idea of World Economy and Politics, 1927-1953" (University of Chicago, 2010); Sergei Alymov, *P.I. Kushner i razvitie sovetskoi etnografii v 1920-1950-e gody* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, Institut Etnologii i Antropologii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, 2006); A. V. Petrikov and G. I. Shmelev, *Teoreticheskoe nasledie agrarnikov-ekonomistov 50-80-kh godov i sovremennaià reforma v sel'skom khoziaistve: liudi, idei, fakty* (Moskva: Academia, 2000).

¹⁰ An exception to this rule is Ethan Pollock's book: Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*.

¹¹ Alen Blum and Martina Mespule, *Biurokraticheskaia anarkhiia: statistika i vlast' pri Staline* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), original in French Alain Blum, Martine Mespoulet, *L'anarchie bureaucratique Statistique et pouvoir sous Staline* (Paris: La Découverte, L'espace de l'histoire, 2003); Martine Mespoulet, "Survival Strategies in the Soviet Bureaucracy: The Case of the Statistics Administration," in *Russian Bureaucracy and the State: Officialdom from Alexander III to Vladimir Putin*, ed. Don K. Rowney and Husjey Eugene (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

However, recent historiography suggests that the division between the sciences and the Party-state were not so stark. Work on the natural sciences, for example, shows that throughout the 1930s soviet science was gradually fused with party and state institutions. Scientists adopted party rituals, rhetoric and cultural norms and the boundary between politics and scientific investigation became blurry.¹² Nonetheless even in the postwar years, some natural scientists attempted to “de-ideologize” science and insisted on the value-neutral character of scientific knowledge.¹³ In fact examining Stalin’s interventions in the scientific debates, Ethan Pollock shows that Stalin himself argued that certain natural sciences were independent of ideology. Thus in 1948 Stalin crossed out Lysenko’s assertion that ‘any science is class-oriented,’ and wrote in the margins “HA-HA-HA!!! And what about Mathematics? And what about Darwinism?”¹⁴

Yet, if the boundaries between politics and natural sciences remained debatable, in the social sciences such distinctions were entirely absent. The protagonists of my study argued that social knowledge was inherently political and produced according to a political agenda. Moreover, inasmuch as a socialist society was fundamentally different

2009); Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia: the Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1956-1974* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). See also Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom : Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999).

¹² Nikolai Kremmentsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Alexei B. Kojevnikov, "Games of Stalinist Democracy, Ideological discussions in Soviet Sciences, 1947-1952," in *Stalinism: New Directions (Rewriting Histories)*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000); Aleksei B. Kojevnikov, "Dialogues about Knowledge and Power in Totalitarian Political Culture," *Historical Studies in the Physical and Biological Sciences* 30, no. 1 (1999).

¹³ Slava Gerovitch, "Mathematical Machines' of the Cold War: Soviet Computing, American Cybernetics and Ideological Disputes in the Early 1950s," *Social Studies of Science* 31, no. 2 (2001).

¹⁴ Ethan Pollock, "Stalin as the Coryphaeus of Science: Ideology and Knowledge in the Post-War Years," in *Stalin: A New History*, ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 285.

from a capitalist society, they maintained that the two called for different scientific tools. When the postwar ideological campaigns against 'cosmopolitanism' and 'kowtowing before the West' hit the social sciences, no one argued that social science should be 'objective' and universal across political borders. The questions economists, statisticians and ethnographers raised during the campaign were how to better serve socialist construction and the soviet state.

Furthermore, postwar social scientists were not alien specialists co-opted into the party and taught its language and rituals; rather, they were part and parcel of the soviet regime: many participated in the Revolution, received their education in party schools and occupied state and party positions before becoming academics.¹⁵ Neither were they wedded to specific academic disciplines. Examining their biographies I found trained agronomists working as economists and former sociologists writing ethnographic and economic studies. The only consistent qualification they all shared was a strong party affiliation and a commitment to advance communism.

In fact, rather than thinking of soviet social scientists as traditional academics, I find it fruitful to consider them social engineers. Soviet social scientists were not impartial observers of social reality but, like their tsarist forefathers and early twentieth century European social scientists, active participants in the transformation of society. They consciously and purposefully manipulated their research objects to produce the future they desired. They emphasized their authority and political seniority at village party meetings to ensure locals would make correct decisions. They secured resources to build clubs, dams and power stations in the villages they were studying. Their objective

¹⁵ Kyung Deok Roh and Konstantin Ivanov make a similar argument. Roh, "Stalin's Think Tank"; Konstantin Ivanov, "Science after Stalin: Forging a New Image of Soviet Science," *Science in Context* 15 no. 02 (2002).

was not limited to academic publication. Often critical of the state and its policies, they used their professional authority and party connections to voice criticism from within: they wrote letters to party and state organs, gave lectures in the localities, and negotiated the allocation of funds and personnel to their communities of research. This activism, in other words, went beyond traditional scientific investigation, extending to the production of socialism. In this sense, my dissertation fits better within a growing literature on scientific knowledge as a part of soviet governmentality. However, while these historical accounts focus primarily on the knowledge produced (i.e. the construction of nationalities), my work investigates the scholars, their methodologies and the process of knowledge production.¹⁶

Although many European social scientists shared an ambition to transform society through their work, the soviet experience is nonetheless unique. I show that a unique prism guided soviet social scientists in their mission of social engineering: socialist realism. Historians of soviet culture use the term “socialist realism” to describe the soviet impulse to transform society. Socialist realism was not just propaganda, but as Evgeny Dobrenko maintains, “an institution for the production of socialism.” Artists, political leaders, journalists and bureaucrats produced images of socialism in order to transform the present into a future socialist utopia. Socialist realism distilled reality into socialism.¹⁷ Neither simply a genre nor a style, socialist realism was a discourse and a way of representing reality. Historians find that socialist realism defied traditional

¹⁶ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); *ibid.*; Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Paula A. Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Evgeny A. Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xii.

boundaries: it was simultaneously an aesthetic and a political phenomenon. It functioned both as art and propaganda and was enveloped not only in belles-lettres but also everything from journalism to bureaucratic records.¹⁸ Soviet social scientists had much in common with socialist realist artists – to paraphrase Marx—both groups aspired not merely to interpret the world, but to change it. Soviet scholars conceived of themselves as artists molding society into a utopian form.¹⁹ As Boris Groys wrote, “All utopias of the modern world have their source in art. [...] The work of art long served as the model of what the world would be like whole, harmonious, tragic, elevated, free, elegant.”²⁰ Socialist realism shaped not only the political unconscious of social scientists, but also their imagination.

The most distinctive feature of socialist realism was a representation of the future as present: socialist realist artists and novelist depicted utopia as history. They described “reality in its revolutionary development:” an idealized reality captured in a realist mode.²¹ As Sheila Fitzpatrick put it, “In the socialist-realist view of the world, a dry, half-dug ditch signified a future canal full of loaded barges, a ruined church was a potential

¹⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste," in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! : Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Matthew E. Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, xiv.

¹⁹ There are similarities between my argument and that of the late Gennady Batygin, see Batygin. S. Gennady and E. M. Swiderski, "Social Scientists in Times of Crisis: The Structural Transformations within the Disciplinary Organization and Thematic Repertoire of the Social Sciences," *Studies in East European Thought* 56, no. 1 (2004).

²⁰ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (London ; New York: Verso, 2011).

²¹ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 37-38; Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 39-40.

kolkhoz clubhouse, and the inscription of a project in the Five-Year Plan was a magical act of creation that might almost obviate the need for more concrete exertions.”²²

At the same time, socialist realism induced a crisis of representation in the social sciences. By definition, social science analyzes contemporary social reality; however, complying with socialist realist representation obfuscated social conflicts, inequalities and depravation. “Socialist realism de-realized life so profoundly that it can be compared to profound anesthesia,” Dobrenko writes, “The supra-life aesthetic forms were designed to shift the activities of social man from the reality of life into the plane of socialism.”²³ Social scientists who described a utopian future in present tense brought calamity to their disciplines, for their declarations about the end of ethnic diversity, commodity production and economic variability delegitimized their own disciplines. They also failed to provide the state with the information it required to govern and manage contemporary society, which was far from problem-free. As Stalin reminded economists in 1941:

We have yet to get socialism in the flesh and blood and we still need to put socialism right, still need to distribute according to labor as is necessary [...] We have dirt in the factories and want to go directly to communism. And who will let you in? They are buried in rubbish but desire communism. Two years ago in one major factory they were raising hens and geese. What good is this? Dirty people are not permitted into communism. We need to stop being pigs!²⁴

²² Fitzpatrick, "Becoming Cultured," 217.

²³ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 37.

²⁴ Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, 172-173.

Until the postwar period, social scientists depicted all collective farms as equally prosperous, collective farmers as devoid of individual interests and working for the good of the collective and collective farm life as constantly getting happier. As social scientific disciplines began regrouping in the postwar period, they faced severe party and state criticism questioning their utility to the state. Party and state officials argued that the sciences were “divorced from practice” because they had failed to capture problems and conflicts and assist in overcoming them. The story of this dissertation is about social scientists’ attempts to overcome this crisis of representation and produce knowledge about society which would contribute to the construction of socialism while maintaining their revolutionary affiliation to socialist realism.

The tension between representing reality “as it was” and “as it ought to be” was not a unique problem of social sciences, but was internal to socialist realism. Theorists of socialist realism insisted on the mimetic function of art, which allowed it to be named “realism,” but at the same time emphatically distanced socialist realism from “naturalism,” that is “the reflection of immediately perceived reality.”²⁵ Leonid Heller illustrates the tension using an instructive text Mikhail Kalinin wrote for artists:

For example, on one page we find M.I. Kalinin saying, “We must love our motherland along with all the new that is taking root now in the Soviet Union, and display it, the motherland, in all its beauty ... in a bright, artistically attractive way,” while on the following page he says, “Socialist realism should depict reality,

²⁵ Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, 50.

the living reality, unadorned”; and then again, “But it should also use its works to advance the development of human thought.”²⁶

My dissertation captures this very tension in the work of social scientists and examines how they navigated the need to produce concrete “realist” knowledge of society with the revolutionary demand to capture the beautiful and the new.

Despite this tension, the distinction between art and social science remained clear. The similarities neither made fiction science nor turned science into fiction.²⁷ My work shows that even at the apex of socialist realist science, in the mid 1940s, statisticians, economists and ethnographers continued describing “immediately perceived reality.” Reading their texts closely I find vibrating silences, which captured what they could not describe. By the early to mid-1950s social scientists developed a methodology that allowed them to capture both the utopian and the realist. They used socialist realism as a prism refracting the selection, categorization, and narration of research objects. Socialist realism dictated that social scientists study villages that exemplified the rational unfolding of socialism. The villages they described, however, were far from perfect, often lacking roads, clubs and adequate housing. Nevertheless, they demonstrated unfulfilled socialist potential: some were located along rivers where a hydroelectric station could be built; others were inhabited by extraordinary people who exemplified heroic builders of the future. Social scientists’ mission was to facilitate the realization of these potentials by identifying social problems and calling on the relevant institutions to resolve them. Socialist realism provided them with the means to criticize

²⁶ Leonid Heller, “A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (1995), 697.

²⁷ Here my analysis differs from Yuri Slezkine’s see: Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, particularly chapter 9.

state and party organs for failing to assist in realizing the hidden socialist potential of collective farms.

Nonetheless, my dissertation shows that socialist realism remained an obstacle to soviet governmentality. As long as social scientists could not analyze data and coherently describe social ills, they could not assist the state improve longevity, productivity and morals. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev depicted the effects of socialist realism on state's ability to govern the countryside but limited it to Stalin's ignorance:

Anyone even a little interested in the national situation saw the difficult situation in agriculture, but Stalin never even noticed. Did we tell Stalin about this? Yes, we told him, but he did not support us. Why? Because Stalin never traveled anywhere, he did not meet urban or collective farm workers. He did not know the real situation at the periphery. He knew the country and agriculture only from films. But these films embellished the existing situation in agriculture. Many films depicted collective farm life with tables bent from the weight of turkeys and geese. Evidently, Stalin thought that it was actually so.... The last time he visited a village was in January, 1928, when he visited Siberia in connection with grain deliveries. How then could he have known the situation in the provinces?²⁸

²⁸ Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, *Istoricheskii ocherk: Nikita Khrushchev, Doklad na zakrytom zasedanii XX S"ezda KPSS* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1986), 95.

Of course Khrushchev wrote the Secret Speech to exonerate Stalin's lieutenants from responsibility for agricultural failure. Moreover, historians show that Stalin was informed of the state of soviet agriculture throughout the 1930s.²⁹

My work shows that socialist realist science informed agrarian policies throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Scholars producing socialist realist knowledge identified a subject who worked effortlessly for future communism and soviet glory. Like the Stakhanovite heroes of the 1930s, this socialist realist subject required no material rewards or incentives. In this sense, the rural subject was different than the urban one. While already in the 1930s industrial policies accounted for the material interests of workers,³⁰ agrarian economic policies still focused on increasing collective farms labor productivity by raising enthusiasm, promoting competition, and propagating consciousness. Yet by the late 1940s it was clear that this policy had proven unsuccessful. Its failure became apparent when the state once again was forced to turn to domination, violence and coercion to achieve a growth of agricultural output. The work of social scientists suggested that a conceptualization of an alternative subject would better suit the state's mission to transform rural society. That subject, ironically, was akin to a liberal subject, a highly rational individual acting in his own self-interest, as a potential base for the conceptualization of reform. My dissertation shows that we should understand Khrushchev's reforms as an attempt to turn away from the socialist realist subject and adopt a liberal subject.

²⁹ R. W. Davies, "Stalin as Economic Policy-Maker: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1936," in *Stalin: A New History*, ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³⁰ Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: the Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1986); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

The struggle between realism and socialist realism did not end when Khrushchev began the process of Thaw and de-Stalinization. Neither did it end with the unequivocal victory of the liberal subject over his socialist realist brother. As historians of art have shown, socialist realism was not defeated, it merely changed its colors.³¹ Indeed, my dissertation ends with a close analysis of Khrushchev's most radical agrarian reform, the liquidation of the Machine-Tractor Stations. There I show that though economists conceptualized the MTS reform to fit the nature of the liberal subject, the state implemented it with a socialist realist subject in mind. Interestingly, it was Nikita Khrushchev, the man who prided himself on knowing the village, who steered the reform away from respecting the rational actions and motivations of collective farmers back to the utopian fantasy of socialist realism.

The dissertation opens with a chapter on the professional identity of social scientists, examining the biographies of several prominent scholars to show that many of them acquired scientific training in political settings and considered their scientific practice political and their politics scientific. Chapter one demonstrates that social scientists perceived themselves as party members and social engineers and viewed their academic production as tool in the transformation of society. Chapter two sheds light on the crisis in ethnography and statistics, which was revealed in the campaign against cosmopolitanism (*Zhdanovschina*). During the campaign, scholars of both disciplines were confronted with the realization that they had failed to serve the state and advance the cause of socialism. The chapter illuminates the process in which ethnographers and

³¹ See for example Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, chapter 3.

statisticians attempted to formulate a socialist realist scientific methodology. Chapter three examines this emerging methodology in the practice of ethnographic study. It focuses on an ethnographic expedition's search for a "typical" collective farm and analyzes how ethnographers used socialist realism as a way to identify the seeds of the future in the present without inhibiting them from detecting social ills. The fourth chapter analyzes the failure of socialist realist statistics to provide knowledge suitable for governance. It narrates the struggle of statisticians to develop taxonomies of collective farms without abandoning socialist realism. Ultimately the chapter shows that statisticians had to abandon the socialist realist subject if they were to prove useful to the state. The final chapter captures the birth of the liberal subject in the work of economists and shows how the formulation of this subject informed Khrushchev's agrarian reforms.

Chapter One

For Party and Science: the Professional Identity of Social Scientists

Soviet social scientists considered themselves social engineers dedicated to creating a communist society. Their attitude to social knowledge, therefore, was instrumental. They studied the progressive elements of soviet society to facilitate its transformation. In this sense, their identities were grounded both in the tradition of nineteenth social science in Europe and the US and in the ethos of the Russian intelligentsia.¹

The Russian educated elite prided itself on its social mindedness, commitment to practical improvement and civic consciousness. As Elizabeth Hachten shows, pre-revolutionary Russian natural scientists rejected the idea that knowledge should be produced for its own sake. Rather, they preferred applied science which was useful for betterment of society.² Though Nikolai Kremmentsov differs from Hachten on the significance of social and ideological motivations behind pre-revolutionary science, he clearly demonstrates that after the revolution the regime's interests in practical applied science converged with of scientific impetus and promoted a science which primarily sought to answer practical concerns. By the end of the 1920s, Kremmentsov writes, "Russian scientists no longer claimed that their work transcended ideological, political, and practical concern."³

¹ Dorothy Ross, "Changing Contours of the Social Science Disciplines," in *The Cambridge History of Science, volume seven: The Modern Social Sciences*, ed. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 217-224.

² Elizabeth A. Hachten, "In Service to Science and Society: Scientists and the Public in Late-Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Osiris, 2nd Series* 17, Science and Civil Society (2002).

³ Nikolai Kremmentsov, "Big Revolution, Little Revolution: Science and Politics in Bolshevik Russia," *Social Research* 73, no. 4, Politics and Science: An Historical View (2006).

Yet unlike natural scientists, postwar soviet social scientists not compelled to embrace an alien communist worldview. Rather, they were committed communists, who considered their politics scientific and their science political.⁴ Many leading postwar scholars participated in the revolution and the civil war, implemented war communism, the New Economic Policy and collectivization. Their professional trajectories weaved service in state and party institutions alongside research positions. But whether they were running a museum or a Machine Tractor Station, their commitment was to change social reality and advance communism. As communists they developed an interventionist methodology. They did not perceive themselves as mere tools in the hands of the state, producing objective knowledge designed to inform the state and allow it to manipulate society. Rather, they themselves actively participated in the transformation. While conducting field research, they participated in local party meeting to ensure that their research subjects would make correct decisions. They prioritized writing letters to party and state officials who had the power to correct social wrongs over publishing their conclusions in professional journals.

The chapter analyzes the professional identity of soviet social scientists in the postwar period. It begins by examining the biographies of a number of representative scholars to shed light on their commitment to the service of the party and state. The second section analyzes their activist scientific methodology. The final section uses the 1957 hearing at the Institute of Economics of the economist Vladimir Venzher for criticizing soviet agrarian policies during an official visit to Bulgaria, to shed light on his identity as a scientist-revolutionary and social-engineer.

⁴ In this they differed from social scientists in the 1920s whose origins and affiliations were diverse. See Martine Mespoulet, "Survival Strategies in the Soviet Bureaucracy: The Case of the Statistics Administration," in *Russian Bureaucracy and the State: Officialdom from Alexander III to Vladimir Putin*, ed. Don K. Rowney and Husje Eugene (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

1. Social Scientific Biographies

Pavel Kushner: an Exemplary Biography

On 29 November 1949, the Institute of Ethnography's Party cell discussed the article "Bolshevik style of Party work," which described the desired character and leadership qualities of party and state workers.⁵ During the discussion, older cell members attacked the Institute's graduate students (*aspiranty*) for their narrow mindedness. A certain Iusov attacked graduate students for "just aspiring to finish their dissertations." Pavel Kushner (1889-1968) joined in: "Our graduate students are afraid to pose big questions. Their reports are compilations of hundreds of citations without conclusions." "[Students] are afraid to dare (*derzat'*)," he added, "and without [daring], serious scientific work is unthinkable." Kushner's call to dare echoed an ethos of intelligentsia, which was based on the idea that only a fresh critical gaze would allow scientists to transform social reality.⁶

Kushner's castigation stemmed from a memory of a purer revolutionary past, in which scientific workers played an essential role. Contrasting the intellectual timidity of the younger generation with the audacity of his own, Kushner referenced his experience as an instructor at the famous Sverdlov Communist University in the 1920s. There, he said, "people who came from local party work arduously mastered science, knew how to dare and always possessed broad perspective."⁷ His implication was clear: Communist university students of 1920s came from less fortunate backgrounds. They may not have had the proper professional training, but because they were seasoned party activists, and they produced scientific work of a superior quality.

⁵ L. Slepov, "O bol'shevistskom stile v partiinoi rabote," *Bol'shevik*, no. 18 (1949), 27-41. The article was based on the ninth chapter of Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism, Style in Work*.

⁶ Karl Loewenstein, "Obshchestvennost' as Key to Understanding Soviet Writers of the 1950s: Moskovskii Literator, October 1956--March 1957," *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no. 3 (2009).

⁷ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op.1, d. 2, l. 162-162ob.

In fact, Kushner could have spoken of his own academic background. He too became a scholar with little formal education, armed instead with a great deal of activist experience. In 1905, Kushner, then 16 years old, joined a Social Democratic circle in Grodno. Less than two years later, he was expelled from Grodno's gymnasium for organizing a students' strike, and within a year his revolutionary activities got him drummed out of yet another gymnasium, this time in Riga. Kushner clearly considered his activity in party circles as crucial to his intellectual development since he listed them under "education" in his autobiographies. This "education" only expanded with the revolution and civil war. In 1917, he was in Moscow at the center of events. In February, he was elected to Moscow's Provisional Revolutionary Committee while serving on the executive committee of Soviet of Workers' Deputies. In October 1917, as a member of Moscow's Military-Revolutionary Committee, Kushner negotiated the surrender of the anti-Bolshevik Junkers defending the Kremlin. In the civil war, he commanded the first group of Red Army lecturers and was later sent to head the political administration of the Turkmenistan front, which was one of the bloodiest theaters of war.⁸

Kushner's revolutionary resume substituted for his lack of formal education. His higher education consisted of evening lectures at the Shaniavskii People's University, a private university which required no formal qualifications, during World War I.⁹ Yet, despite his informal and intermittent education, his revolutionary credentials qualified him to begin teaching at the Sverdlov Communist University, the Party's "flagship institution," in 1921.¹⁰

⁸ Sergei Aymov, *P.I. Kushner i razvitie sovetskoi etnografii v 1920-1950-e gody* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, Institut Etnologii i Antropologii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, 2006), 19-20.

⁹ On Shaniavskii People's university see Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929*, Studies of the Harriman Institute (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 39-40.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

There, Kushner, who would acquire a graduate degree only in 1945 and a doctorate in 1947, headed the Department of the Development of Social Systems.¹¹

Even in a teaching position, Kushner did not forsake his identity as an activist. For it was activism, Kushner argued, that gave him the prerogative to produce academic work and judge others' scientific scholarship. Kushner saw his right to evaluate academic work as derived not from formal education, but from his experience in transforming social reality as an activist. In 1949, for example, to the charge that he was not "competent to judge" ethnographers because he had not done fieldwork in a long time, Kushner furiously responded:

With great agitation I give you my impressions. Yes, I haven't done fieldwork for 20-25 years. But it so happens that I lived and worked for four months in one of the most backwater collective farms in the Urals. And I think I have some insight and expertise (*navyki*) that give me the right to criticize how a collective farm is studied.¹²

Kushner's career, a mixture of employment at state administrative departments and scientific institutions, suggests that he was first and foremost an activist who served the party and soviet state wherever they needed him. After a decade of research and teaching, he became the Soviet trade representative to Lithuania and Norway and served as the head of the Eastern subdivision of the People's Commissariat. Kushner returned to academic work only in late 1936. Even then, his initial appointments were to administrative positions: member of the Budget Committee for the Supervision of Scientific Institutions, the Deputy Director of the Museum of the Peoples of the USSR, and editor-in-chief of historical publications at the State Political Publishing House.¹³ It was only in March 1943, when the Soviet victory in World War II seemed

¹¹ Alymov, P.I. Kushner i razvitie sovetskoi etnografii, 16-20.

¹² ARAN f.142, op. 1, d. 212, l. 36.

¹³ Alymov, P.I. Kushner i razvitie sovetskoi etnografii, 37-38.

sure, that Kushner found himself back at the center of scientific production as the head of the Ethnographic Statistics and Cartography Department of the Institute of Ethnography. Here Kushner was serving the military agenda of the Soviet state rather than pure academic pursuits.¹⁴

“Commissars in Dusty Helmets” and the Memory of Terror

The vast majority of postwar scholars were either of Kushner’s generation or older. The older generation had been trained in pre-revolutionary Tsarist academic institutions; the younger studied in Soviet institutions in the 1920s. Even in the more technical institutions, such as the Erisman Scientific-Research Institute of Hygiene, only 15.5 percent of scientific workers in 1946 were under forty years old, 33.8 percent were between forty and fifty years old, 35.2 percent were between fifty and sixty years old and 15.5 percent were over sixty. Of the Institute’s 136 scientific workers, only one was a graduate student.¹⁵

When Tatiana Zaslavskaia joined the department of Agrarian Economics at the Institute of Economics as a graduate student in August 1950, it was composed predominantly of people in their fifties and sixties. “The staff of the institute,” she remembers, “did not grow during the war or in the first postwar years.” She recalled that only four or five young workers joined the institute in 1948 and the “truly young landing troops” (*molodezhnye desanty*) filled the Institute’s staff only in 1950-51.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 39-43. The subdivision’s work was secretive and one can only infer what its responsibilities were.

¹⁵ TsAOPIM f. 281, op. 1, d. 5, l. 43. The Institute had a total of 383 workers but those included administrative personnel, laboratory technicians and other service personnel.

¹⁶ Tatiana I. Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 3: *Moia zhizn': Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 2007), 368. Official reports of the agrarian subdivision strengthen Zaslavskaia’s assertion. See ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 173, l. 3-4.

Zaslavskaia describes the older generation colorfully as “commissars in dusty helmets.” “My god, how much they saw, knew and lived through. They understood so much better than I the social fabric in which we were living,” she remembers thinking, adding:

Most of these people greeted the October Revolution when they were still young men and women. Many fought in the Red Army, joined the Communist Party in the early 1920s and worked on its behalf in the village – they guided the politics of War Communism, NEP, and collectivization, organized state farms and Machine Tractor Stations, and occupied high positions in the Party. Some graduated from the Timiriazev Agricultural academy, others from the Institute of Red Professors.¹⁷

After the war, most active social scientists were middle-aged men and women who had been marked by the turmoil of war, revolution and Stalinist terror. Many inexplicably survived the latter against all odds.¹⁸ The background of the renowned statistician Maria Smit-Falkner (1878-1968) made her fit for arrest in 1937. A University of London graduate and revolutionary veteran since 1897, Smit-Falkner sided with the Mensheviks in the 1903 Russian Social Democratic Labor Party split. She joined the Bolsheviks only in 1918, and her change of heart was tainted with possible opportunism. Nevertheless, she taught at Moscow State University, the Moscow Institute of National Economy and served as a collegium member in the Central Statistical Administration in the 1920s. From 1930-1938 she worked at the Institute of Economic Research under the State’s Planning Agency (Gosplan). In 1938, at the height of the

¹⁷ Ibid., 373.

¹⁸ On the sovietization of the Academy of Science and the tragic consequences for scientists see Loren R. Graham, *The Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Communist Party, 1927-1932* (Princeton, N.J.,: Princeton University Press, 1967); Alexander Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge: the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1917-1970)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

terror, she became a senior researcher at the Institute of Economics and a year later was appointed an associate member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.¹⁹

Kushner too had every reason to worry when the Great Purges began in 1937. Not only was he an Old Bolshevik who voted for Trotsky in 1923, he was also a member of the Red Professors' Institute, which was a known center of Trotskyites.²⁰ Moreover, his career was closely connected to Arkady Rozengol'ts, the People's Commissar of Foreign Trade, who was arrested in 1937 and sentenced to death in the Third Moscow Show Trial. Rozengol'ts appointed Kushner as the trade representative to Lithuania and Norway and recommended him as the deputy chair of the Committee for the Supervision of Scientific Institutions.²¹ Kushner was known for unorthodox Marxist opinions. He rejected the theory of primitive communism, arguing that observations of contemporary "primitive" people negated the possibility of a past classless society.²² He was also severely criticized in 1926 in the Central Committee's journal *Bol'shevik* for failing to find social classes in his research of Kirgizia. There, he curtly argued: "I thoroughly searched for class struggle and social classes, but did not find them."²³ Given this resume, Kushner was a prime candidate for arrest.

Like Kushner, who taught sociology in the 1920s, many social scientists survived the liquidation of their academic fields. Sergei Tolstov had been highly active in the field of *kraevedenie*, or local studies, throughout the 1920s. He was one of the founders of the Marxist-

¹⁹ V.P. Kornev, *Vidnye deiateli otechestvennoi statistiki: 1686-1990: biograficheskii slovar'* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1993), 146-147.

²⁰ Michael S. Fox, "Political Culture, Purges, and Proletarianization at the Institute of Red Professors, 1921-1929," *Russian Review* 52, no. 1 (1993).

²¹ Alymov, P.I. Kushner i razvitie sovetskoi etnografii, 26, 37.

²² Ibid., 72-87.

²³ Ibid., 95-96.

Regional Studies Society and an active member in the Central Regional-Studies Bureau. When the local studies societies were closed in 1933 and most of their members arrested, he survived unscathed.²⁴ In 1942, he was appointed the director of the Institute of Ethnography.²⁵

Particularly interesting for the present study are those scholars who found themselves in the postwar period using methodologies of discredited disciplines in safer sciences. Grigorii Kotov (1901-1980), for example, was a trained statistician and conducted sociological research of villages until the mid-1930s. Kotov survived the liquidation of sociology and the arrest of many of its practitioners. In the postwar years, he worked as an agrarian economist. "Grigorii Grigor'evich never spoke to me about sociology, but the methods he used were sociological," wrote Zaslavskaja of her dissertation adviser. "During expeditions, G.G. Kotov went to homes and to collective farm offices and spoke with people."²⁶ Elsewhere she recalls her astonishment at Kotov's qualitative methods of data collection: "We were never taught such a method for collecting social economic data in university." When she questioned Kotov's about his methods, he explained that "Often the figures [you find in official accounts] have nothing in common with reality."²⁷

²⁴ Emily D Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of Kraevedenie* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

²⁵ Tolstov had yet another significant black mark against him. He was a son of a Cossack officer and the nephew of Vladimir Tolstov, the commander of the White Cossack Urals Corps during the Civil War. Iu. A. Rapoport and Iu. I. Semenov, "Sergei Pavlovich Tolstov: Vydaishchikhsia etnograf, arkheolog, organizator nauki," in *Vydaiuhchiesia otechestvennye etnologi i antropologi XX veka*, ed. D. D. Tumarkin and V.A. Tishkov (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), 185-186. On the fate of ethnographers see Nathaniel Knight, "'Salvage Biography' and Useable Pasts: Russian Ethnographers Confront the Legacy of Terror," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 2 (2000); D. D. Tumarkin, ed. *Repressirovannye etnografy* (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia firma "Vostochnaia literatura" RAN, 2002); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 139-143.

²⁶ Tatiana I. Zaslavskaja, "Nam ochen' khotelos' sozdat' nastoiashchuiu nauku," in *Rossiiskaia sotsilogiia shestidesiatykh godov* (Sankt-Peterburg: Russkii Khristianskogo Gumanitarnogo Instituta, 1999), 135-136.

²⁷ Zaslavskaja, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 380.

It is impossible to know how these scholars avoided imprisonment or execution like so many of their colleagues. Zaslavsaia writes that the soviet agrarian scientists she met in the early 1950s had simply “survived by chance and many of them couldn't understand themselves why they were spared when everyone around them was arrested.”²⁸ Sergei Alymov, Kushner's biographer, received contradictory answers from different people. Nataliia Shlygina, Kushner's colleague at the Institute of Ethnography, told Alymov that the scholar “somewhat naively believed that he was spared because he was honest.” Kushner's son, on the other hand, remembered that his father had been arrested in 1937 but “was saved by a stroke of luck: he was one of the few who were arrested but released at the moment of Ezhov's removal and the arrival of Beriia to the leadership of the NKVD.”²⁹ Yet this scenario is somewhat unlikely. Alymov found no supporting evidence suggesting that Kushner was ever arrested, and although Rozengol'ts was arrested in October 1937, Ezhov's demise came only in November of 1938. Moreover, had Kushner been arrested and released there would have still been negative consequences from the arrest, yet he remained unscathed and continued as the deputy director of the Museum of the Peoples of the USSR until 1941 without incident.

Whether Kushner was arrested or not, like so many of his surviving colleagues, he was deeply affected by the Terror. Very few of his Old Bolshevik comrades survived. As a sociologist, his discipline was liquidated, and many of his colleagues were imprisoned or shot. Kushner probably knew that his connection to Rozengol'ts put him in grave danger. Perhaps this is why he burnt his archive in 1936, later telling his young colleague Viktor Kozlov that “this act saved many Old Bolsheviks from ruin.” Even after the war, the possibility of arrest weighed on him, which is evidenced by Kushner demanding that his son burn his letters after reading them.

²⁸ Ibid., 370-374.

²⁹ Alymov, P.I. Kushner i razvitie sovetskoi etnografii, 38.

Kozlov remembered Kushner as a secretive man: “I was under the impression that Stalin’s terror was hanging over him. He was afraid that people could find fault in what he was saying.”³⁰

Concerns about political scrutiny are a repeated topic in depictions of the postwar social scientists. Ethan Pollock discusses the stagnation in the field of political economy in the postwar years, and of economists’ inability to reach a consensus and produce a textbook in political economy. He argues that “all agreed that fear of making a mistake hindered scholarly exchange and dissuaded people from publishing their work.”³¹ Much like the graduate students at the Institute of Ethnography, economists preferred using “compilations of hundreds of citations” and waited for Stalin to pass judgment. As Pollock correctly notes, the campaign against “cosmopolitanism,” which will be discussed in the next chapter, made matters worse.³²

In addition to affecting personal consciousness of the Great Terror survivors, the events of the 1930s contributed to form the identity of young postwar scholars. As far as students were concerned, surviving terror against all odds added an aura of mystique and heroism to the work of their mentors. These young scholars speculated about the circumstances that allowed for the survival of their teachers. Zaslavaskaia, for example, retells a survival story of her mentor Vladimir Venzher that sounds somewhat fantastic:

Venzher's family, for example, appeared three times on the arrest list of the party district committee, where he was registered. But the secretary of the district committee, who was his friend, risked his own life and erased [Venzher] from the list every time. Later he himself told Venzher about this.³³

³⁰ Ibid., 50-52.

³¹ Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 193.

³² Ibid., 176-179.

³³ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 370-374.

The possibility that a district committee secretary would endanger his own life and then run to tell the potential victim sounds somewhat odd, to say the least. Yet whether the story was true or not matters less than the fact that it was circulating at the Institute of Economics and that Zaslavskaia's generation speculated about the circumstances that allowed for the survival of their teachers.

Indeed, the old cadres of the Institute did not have to confide in Zaslavskaia's cohort for the young researchers to learn about the terror. Knowledge of the terror was inherent to graduate students' work at the Institute. Graduate students spent a day a week at the Institute's library purging books. Zaslavskaia utilizes her own graduate diary to shed light on her perception of the task: "Today is Wednesday – my library day, and this means that I sit all day at the Institute's library and skim books to detect references to dated literature." To be sure, she found the job "irksome and uninteresting" but ironically she learned a great deal from it. "Purging" libraries became a form of "secret education" and introduced Zaslavskaia and her cohort to names, ideas and works that otherwise they most likely would never have known.³⁴

The tragic life of the agrarian economist Mikhail Kubanin and the stories told about him shed light on the way terror functioned in the memory and imagination of young scholars who had never met him. Kubanin is often mentioned in the memoirs of postwar agrarian economists as a symbol of scientific heroism and martyrdom.³⁵ According to Zaslavskaia, Kubanin was a Central Committee member and a senior editor the journal *Bol'shevik*, who headed the Institute of Agrarian Problems until 1941. Kubanin, she writes, completed "a serious scientific work" comparing the productivity of agricultural labor in the Soviet Union and the United States,

³⁴ Ibid., 370.

³⁵ See for example: N. K. Figurovskaia, "Problemy reformirovaniia agrarnogo stroia (k 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia V.G. Venzhera)," in *Teoreticheskoe nasledie agrarnikov-ekonomistov 50-80-kh godov i sovremennaia reforma v sel'skom khoziaistve, liudi, Idei, fakti*, ed. A.V. Petrikov and G. I Shmelev (Moscow: Academia, 2000), 10.

which showed that in the second half of the 1930s, soviet collective farmers were 4-5 times less productive than American farmers and published it in two parts in *Bol'shevik*.

Stalin saw a latent criticism of the collectivization of agriculture in the article, and appraised it as “ideological subversion.” Kubanin was declared an enemy of the people, arrested and shot, his family was literally thrown to the street, and the institute, which proved to have been a source of sedition, was closed. The employees who were closely related to Kubanin were repressed. Others were fired. And those who managed to survive later formed the Agrarian Sector of the Institute of Economics, where my path in science began.³⁶

Zaslavskaia got some of her facts wrong. To begin with, Kubanin's initials were not M.M. but rather M.I. (Mikhail Il'ich). He did not publish the article in *Bol'shevik*, but in *Problemy Ekonomiki*. Nor was he a member of the Central Committee. And naturally we do not know whether Stalin ever saw the article, let alone appraised it himself. Moreover, in the absence of access to the archives of the secret police, we have no source indicating that Kubanin's article was the cause of his demise. However, there is some truth in Zaslavskaia's narrative: Kubanin indeed published an article comparing labor productivity of soviet collective farms and American farmers. The article was discussed at length at an Institute meeting and a critique of the article appeared in the March 1941 edition of *Bol'shevik*.³⁷

More importantly, Kubanin's tale became particularly relevant to Zaslavskaia's life and identity when as a researcher at the Institute of Economics, Zaslavskaia and her friend Margarita Sidorovna were asked to repeat Kubanin's study and extend it to 1957. This was part

³⁶ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 448, 368.

³⁷ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 42; M.I. Kubanin, "Uroben' proizvoditel'nosti truda v sel'skom khoziaistve SSSR i SShA," *Problemy Ekonomiki*, no. 1 (1941); "O klevetnicheskoi vylazke M. Kubanina," *Bol'shevik*, no. 6 (1941).

of a larger research agenda the Central Committee entrusted to the Institute of Economics after Khrushchev's 1957 declaration that the Soviet Union would "catch up and overtake America."³⁸ Zaslavskaia recalls that:

Senior colleagues were never tired of explaining how dangerous our proposed research topic was and how prudently we should approach it. But it was after the Twentieth Party Congress, the Thaw had set in, and we believed that it was a new era. We wanted to speak and write as truthfully as possible in order to contribute to the democratization of the country.³⁹

Comparing labor productivity in the US and the Soviet Union was a difficult task: not only did it require a proficiency in English which the young economists lacked, but except for Kubanin, soviet economists had not studied agricultural labor productivity since the 1920s. After thoroughly researching the subject, Zaslavskaia and Sidorovna wrote a paper reaffirming Kubanin's findings: soviet agricultural labor productivity was 4-5 times lower than that of the United States and maintained that lag consistently between 1936 and 1957. Zaslavskaia describes the morning the Institute of Economics was supposed to convene an intradepartmental conference to discuss their paper. Zaslavskaia and Sidorovna arrived at the Institute at nine a.m. to find the director Kirill Plotnikov "in a state of panic." The night before, the head of the science department of the Central Committee had called him demanding explanations for the report. As the conference attendees began arriving, KGB agents collected the copies of the report and put them in a safe. "They took not only our own copies from Margarita and me but also all draft materials."⁴⁰ In accordance with the ethos of the Russian

³⁸ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 448-449.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 448.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 449-452.

intelligentsia, Zaslavskaia stresses the rigid scientific method of the work, the truth in the findings and her bravery standing her ground in confrontation with the Institute's director. She makes a point to mention that more than half of the eighty scholars who had received and read her report refused to surrender their copy to the KGB officers. "Many authoritative scholars refused to return interesting material on such an important question." Among those who kept the copy, Zaslavskaia names only one, the renowned economist and statistician Stanislav Strumilin.⁴¹

Thus, beyond the fear and caution the memory of terror instilled into scholarly production, it produced a sense of pride in young scholars. Zaslavskaia and her colleagues found their mentors brave and following the ethos of the intelligentsia described them overcoming obstacles in the search for true social knowledge. By extension young scholars ascribed heroism to themselves for pursuing the same work.

The significance of party membership

One of the most visible changes in social scientific disciplines after the war was the pressure on scholars to join the party. Until then, many scholars, even avowed Marxists, were not party members. After the war, however, scientific production on the political margins was no longer acceptable. An important contributing factor to this change was the postwar campaign against Cosmopolitanism, which is discussed in chapter two. Yet, the numbers clearly indicate that the shift began earlier and reflected the general composition of party membership. As T. H.

⁴¹ Ibid., 452. The irony, of course, is that Strumilin is well known to have said that "it is better to stand for high rates than to sit in prison for low ones." Johanna Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 39.

Rigby notes the party grew rapidly during war. Out of the six million full and candidate party members in January 1946, only a third had been in the party before the German invasion.⁴²

Thus, the increase in party membership in scientific institutes was significant. At the Institute of Ethnography, for example, there were only ten communists in 1943 and within five years their numbers grew to thirty-six.⁴³ Even scholars like the sanitation specialist Abram Iavnel', who was born in 1884, began publishing in 1909 and remained politically unaffiliated throughout the prewar years, joined the party in 1943.⁴⁴ Yet while Iavnel's less political scholarly discipline could explain his late interest in party membership, Sergei Tolstov's lack of party affiliation is more surprising. Tolstov had joined the Komsomol in 1922, at the age of fifteen. As a Komsomol member and a museum worker he was active in exposing the "anti-Marxists, fellow travelers and bourgeois elements" in 1928-9. Even after leaving the Komsomol in 1934, he continued participating in purges, and in 1937 joined three other archeologists in publishing an article exposing Trotskyites and enemies of the people.⁴⁵ Yet, Tolstov became a candidate member of the Communist Party only in 1942, when he was appointed director of the Institute of Ethnography, and was finally accepted as a full member only in 1944.⁴⁶

While party membership was growing in most academic disciplines, one field of social science had always been the purview of party members: Economics. Tatiana Zaslavskaiia

⁴² T. H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the U.S.S.R., 1917-1967* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 275-276. For more on changing party composition during and after the war see Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War : the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴³ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d.167, l. 9-10.

⁴⁴ TsAOPIM f. 281, op. 1, d. 2, l. 19.

⁴⁵ Rapoport and Semenov, "Sergei Pavlovich Tolstov."; Sergei Alymov, "Na puti k "drevnei istorii narodov SSSR": maloizvestnye stranitsy nauchnoi biografii S.P. Tolstova," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, no. 5 (2007); Yuri Slezkine, "The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928-38," *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (1991).

⁴⁶ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op.1 d.1, l. 28.

explains that because all economic data was classified, it was impossible to become an economist without first acquiring party or Komsomol membership. In fact, as a student at Moscow State University, Zaslavskaia was forced to become a Komsomol member after she switched her major from physics to economics.⁴⁷ Party membership and experience in party work was so significant for economists that a 1949 report of the Central Committee's department of propaganda on the agrarian subdivision of Institute of Economics suggests that years of activist experience substituted for formal higher education. The report states that the subdivision was composed of eighteen scientific workers, seven senior and eleven junior. Six of the seven senior scientific workers had joined the Party between 1917 and 1920. "But it must be noted," it continued, "that while in relation to the party (*v partiinom otnoshenii*) the senior scientific workers are sufficiently solid (*dostatochno solidny*), [they are not sufficiently solid] for the fulfillment of independent scientific work. There isn't a single professor or doctor of economic science among them."⁴⁸ As a result, the cadres were not sufficiently qualified to carry out research "on a high theoretical level and answer questions of current interest (*aktual'nyi*)."⁴⁹ Moreover, the report reveals that the majority of the scientific workers lacked degrees in economics except for one junior worker. While the report does not indicate what the qualifications the other junior scholars had, it does state that two of the senior scholars were agricultural studies graduates. Furthermore, though most of the workers had years of scientific experience, only three had worked at the Institute of Economics before the war.⁵⁰ Thus, interestingly, while social sciences in Europe and the US had divided into clearly distinct

⁴⁷ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 371, 307-379.

⁴⁸ ARAN f. 1877, op.1, d. 354, l. 1.

⁴⁹ ARAN f. 1877, op.1, d. 354, l. 11.

⁵⁰ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 354, l. 1-17.

discipline early in the twentieth century,⁵¹ in the Soviet Union economic education was still admitted in a variety of forms and the most prestigious research positions could accept scholars trained in other disciplines.

The scientific workers of the Institute of Economics had one thing in common: they were all Party or Komsomol members.⁵² As party members, the decision to transfer them from one position to another was in the hands of the Central Committee.⁵³ A 1954 letter from the director of the Institute of Economics, Vasilii D'iachenko, to the Central Committee suggests the complexity of acquiring academic specialists. D'iachenko complained that the Institute was under a lot of pressure to produce agrarian economic analysis but it lacked specialists. It had located appropriate people, but the Institutes employing them refused to release them.⁵⁴

In fact, social scientists of all disciplines moved from positions in state and party service to scientific research and back. In this sense, Kushner's appointments as the soviet trade representative in Lithuania and Norway were far from unusual. The Central Committee's 1949 report of the agrarian subdivision mentions that the last head of the subdivision, Ivan Laptev, went on to work in the editorial board of *Pravda*.⁵⁵ Similarly, the economist Grigorii Kotov (1901-1980) had been working for the Soviet Military Administration of Germany from 1945 to

⁵¹ Ross, "Changing Contours of the Social Science Disciplines."

⁵² The sociologist Martine Mespoulet, who studied the biographies of soviet statisticians, argues from the late 1920s "Distance vis-à-vis political power was no longer considered an indispensable guarantee of independence and of scientific rigor. On the contrary, this distance was suspect." Much like economists, she found that for statisticians "a career in the Party replaced apprenticeship in practice on the terrain, and the possession of a membership card substituted for the criteria of qualification." Translated in Michael D. Gordin, "Statistique et revolution en Russie: Un compromis impossible (1880-1930), and: L'anarchie bureaucratique: Statistique et pouvoir sous Staline (review)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 4 (2004), 806.

⁵³ Werner G. Hahn, *Postwar Soviet Politics: the Fall of Zhdanov and the Defeat of Moderation, 1946-53* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

⁵⁴ RGANI f. 5, op. 17, d. 466, l. 34-5.

⁵⁵ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 354, l. 1.

1949, when he was appointed to the agrarian subdivision of the Institute of Economics. Indeed his administrative and scientific experience overlapped when he wrote his doctorate in the early 1950s on soviet agricultural reforms in Germany.⁵⁶

I argue that in the postwar period, scientists' ethos of social mindedness and commitment to social improvement required a membership in the Communist Party. It was not merely, as Zaslavskaia argues a sign of loyalty that granted one security clearance. Rather, for social scientists, party membership was part and parcel of a social ethic that centered on the importance of "purposive activity for the public good."⁵⁷ Soviet social science demanded a conscious commitment for social improvement, but party membership transformed that commitment into practice. Social scientists were meant to be social engineers, and party membership gave them legitimacy and authority as well as the practical resources to transform social reality.

The significance of party membership is best seen when members of scientific collectives failed to fulfill their duties as scientists and Communist Party members. Thus, for example, in August 1943, the party cell of the Erisman Institute convened to evaluate the Party work of comrade Tomson, a scientist and party member since 1918. According to the protocol, the Ministry of Healthcare had sent Tomson to Kalinin, Smolensk and Rostov provinces to collect sanitary data immediately after their liberation. His party cell, however, received complaints from the provincial administrations that Tomson never arrived. In response, Tomson admitted that he "was delayed in Moscow for two days and then there was no possibility of getting to the region." Nevertheless, he asserted that though he failed to reach the provinces, he did not shirk

⁵⁶ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 375-376, 378, 415; D. N. Filippovych, "Kratkie biografii rukovoduashchego sistava svag, Sovetkaia voennaia administratsiia v Germanii, 1945-1949," Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, http://statearchive.ru/assets/files/Svag_sprav/o8-ro4.pdf.

⁵⁷ Hachten, "In Service to Science and Society," 187.

his Party duty, and he “eventually collected the information at the center.” If he was guilty of anything, he said, it was “lacking organizational experience.” But the Institute’s cell rejected this excuse with outrage. “A communist and scientific worker with a task from the Ministry of Health during a time of war– this is serious,” Ettinger charged, “[Tomson] systematically breeches party ethics.” The charge was clear: Tomson’s dual role as a party member and a scientist meant his responsibility was twice as significant. Malakhova pointed to his Party record to question his self-ascribed guilt: “Tomson has been a party member since 1918 –he could not lack organizational experience!?” For Malakhova, Tomson’s years in the party necessitated organizational experience. The party required practical experience in social engineering. Unfortunately, Tomson’s fate is unknown. The cell’s verdict was never recorded.⁵⁸

2. “The ethnographer is not merely a soviet man, but a soviet agent”

The armchair scholar and the activist

Following the tradition of the Russian intelligentsia, soviet social scientists considered “moral and political activism” as “a sacred duty of science and ‘armchair scholar’ (*kabinetnyi uchenyi*) a term of abuse.”⁵⁹ In 1957, Nikita Khrushchev described the “armchair scholar” as one who held a “scholastic-bookish” approach. “Those who hold these views are afraid of anything new. They cry out, dash aside in dismay and lose the ability to soberly analyze the situation.”⁶⁰ The armchair scholar was detached from people’s lived experience, and preoccupied with theoretical questions, which had no bearing on reality. The philosopher Petr Fedoseev explained:

⁵⁸ TsAOPIM f. 281, op.1, d. 2, l. 8-8ob.

⁵⁹ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 149.

⁶⁰ Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, “Za tesnuiu svyaz’ literatury i iskusstva s zhizn’iu naroda,” *Pravda*, August 28 1957, 3.

[These academics] want to bring real life to a halt because they can't find corresponding citations in the classics of Marxism-Leninism. The creative development of theory cannot be separated from life. And those who see life through the eyes of books are far from Marxism and even farther from innovative Marxism. Some economists discussing wages and other issues still look back to Marx's *Capital*. This is clearly the root of the alienation of theory from practice.⁶¹

This attitude toward scientific theory, which stressed the importance of purposive activity and devalued all theory that was not applicable, stems from the social ethic of the Russian intelligentsia. Its influence on the choice of scientific themes and methods will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. The current discussion is limited to the effects of the reverence for the practical and purposive on social scientists' identity and understanding of their role in society.

Tatiana Zaslavskaia's memoir offers a glimpse into agrarian scholars' sense of shame for lacking a true connection to collective farmers and their labor.⁶² Though her father was raised in a peasant family and she had relatives living in a village in the 1950s, Zaslavskaia refers to her young self as an "urban girl." The first time she spent an extended period of time in a village was as a student at Moscow State University. University education also stressed the significance of practical work. "The third year [at the university] included not only lecture courses and seminars, but also 'production practice.'" As "*agrarniki*" (agriculturalists) Zaslavskaia and her friends were sent to "practice" at a village on the bank of the Moscow River, just across from Stalin's dacha. "We were not given any specific assignments and we could not make them up ourselves. Besides, we were afraid to approach collective farmers because we did not know their

⁶¹ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 38, l. 74.

⁶² In this sense, the similarities between soviet social scientists and Russian nineteenth century populists are striking. See Richard Wortman, *The Crisis of Russian Populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

language and way of thinking.”⁶³ Armed with theoretical knowledge and Komsomol credentials, one might have expected soviet students of agrarian economics to declare their presence in the village and lecture collective farmers about better ways to conduct their lives and improve their labor. But Zaslavskaia and her friends were rather timid in the presence of collective farmers and were embarrassed because they were not proficient in the village vernacular.

Zaslavskaia’s shame for lecturing collective farmers on issues that had little relevance to their daily life is best captured her reminiscence of a talk she delivered to collective farmers on new forms of payment for labor. Her superiors sent her assuming that her education and komsomol activism qualified her to give “an important and interesting lecture” to farm members. However, she quickly realized that her years of study were completely divorced from collective farm realities:

To be sure, Zaslavskaia’s inability to effectively communicate with collective farmers took a toll on the quality of her academic work. Knowing this, she venerated Grigorii Kotov, her thesis advisor, precisely because he had a rapport with peasants. Kotov, who was born and raised in a village in Saratov province and had years of party activism under his belt, “felt completely at home in any collective farm. He easily found a common language with the old and the young, women and men, collective farm brigade leaders and secretaries of district party committees.”⁶⁴ On numerous occasions, Zaslavskaia was surprised at the information Kotov managed to obtain using “village speech” (*derevenskii govorok*). He taught her that mastering the village vernacular was essential since “you never know what accountants write in their reports” and as a result “[their]

⁶³ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 333-334.

⁶⁴ Laurie Manchester describes a remarkably similar attitude of members of the intelligentsia toward sons of priests (*popovich*). Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

numbers have nothing in common with reality.”⁶⁵ Thus, as long as Zaslavskaia lacked proficiency in “village speech,” her research neither reflected in reality nor were its results applicable. She could not help the villagers because of the cultural wall between them.

On publishing and other avenues

Historians often cite the paucity of scholarly publications as proof of the insignificance of social science in the Soviet Union. Yet, though social scientists often complained about difficulties publishing, the significance of publication for western and soviet scholars cannot be compared. Publishing was not the main outlet for social scientific academic production; rather, their commitment to serve society often caused them to prefer conveying their findings directly to officials, who could correct wrongs and bring about real change. The economist Avgusta Teriaeva, for example, reported in 1949 that the Institute of Economics sent its annual research findings directly to People's Commissar for Agriculture, Andrei Andreev, and Politburo member Georgii Malenkov, claiming that the results of her team's research influenced policy.⁶⁶ Also in 1949, when the ethnographer Iakov Vinnikov found “harmful remnants” in the Turkmen family, especially in regard to gender inequality, during in his research in Turkmenistan, he reported it to his party organization. “The ethnographer cannot ignore such phenomena,” he wrote. “It is necessary to uncover their roots and make informed suggestions for their rapid eradication.” He informed his colleagues that the researchers had spoken to the district secretary, the secretary of the Central Committee of Turkmenistan, and the deputy chair of the council of ministers of Turkmenistan about these findings. But he doubted these oral conversations would suffice. “[Ethnographic] expeditions should make party and soviet organizations aware of such

⁶⁵ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 375-376, 380-382.

⁶⁶ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 245, l. 3.

information in writing and with the appropriate conclusions and proposals.”⁶⁷ In fact, the alternative outlets of academic scholarship were so significant that scholars felt they should be included in the corpus of their academic work. In his appraisal of Aleksandr Nikonov’s scholarship, Aleksandr Petrikov writes that his published works “do not encompass his creativity” and that a fair amount of Nikonov’s work included equally important “letters and memorandums to policy-making bodies.”⁶⁸

State and party archives are filled with letters from scholars and university lecturers who submitted their academic work to relevant policy makers asking for change.⁶⁹ At times, the letters even contain odd theoretical musings and attempts to expose the mistakes of the highest political authorities. Thus, for example, in October 1955, the Presidium of the Central Committee received a letter from a certain “CPSU member P.A. Timikhin,” a lecturer at the Moscow Institute of Land Utilization. Timikhin wrote to inform the Presidium that he had uncovered “mistaken political positions” among certain soviet economists and members of the Central Committee. The mistakes pertained in particular to “the development of the socialist economy, industrial and agricultural planning, and utilizing the achievements of science and technology, among other issues.” In the final lines of the letter, Timikhin explained that “as a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and a scientific worker,” he could not remain on the sidelines of these issues. Interestingly, following Timikhin’s letter, the archive contains a report of the head of the Central Committee’s Science and Higher Education

⁶⁷ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 2, l. 191.

⁶⁸ A. V. Petrikov, “Nauchnoe nasledie akademika A.A. Nikonova i problemny rynochykh preobrazovaniy v issledovaniyakh agrarnogo instituta,” in *Teoreticheskoe nasledie agrarnikov-ekonomistov 50-80-x godov i sovremennaiia reforma v sel'skom khoziaistve : liudi, idei, fakty*, ed. A. V. Petrikov and G. I. Shmelev (Moscow: Academia, 2000), 222.

⁶⁹ For example, a report of Abram Iavnel’ of the Erisman Scientific-Research Institute of Hygiene on the sanitary conditions of three villages, which was sent to the Ministry of Healthcare. See GARF f. A482, op. 48, d. 759 and RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 529.

Department outlining Timikhin's argument, exposing his mistakes and summarizing the response of Timikhin's party cell secretary. The cell secretary explained that Timikhin's mistakes resulted from "confusion," noted that he had been previously reprimanded for similar errors, and promised to privately rebuke him again.⁷⁰ The Central Committee's treatment of Timikhin's letter suggests the body took these missives seriously, while the authors sincerely believed that writing the Presidium could indeed rectify wrongs.

Nevertheless, publishing academic work in the Soviet Union was not a simple task and social scientists often complained about their limited opportunities. Letters like Timikhin's often served as alternative channels to distribute research and opinions unfit for academic journals. Timikhin admitted as much when he noted that the editors *Kommunist* and *Voprosy Ekonomiki* declined to publish his work. Still, most social sciences lacked disciplinary journals in the immediate postwar years. Until 1949, when *Vestnik Statistiki* was established, soviet statisticians complained about the difficulties in getting their work published. "The only journal where our statisticians can publish is *Planovoe Khoziastvo*," said Isaak Sosenskii at a conference in August 1948. "As it turns out, the last article published there on [statistics] before Tsirlin and Boiarskii's article in issue six of 1947 was in 1938."⁷¹

The situation was similar for ethnographers. Even after acquiring a disciplinary journal in 1946, ethnographers remained discontented. In 1955, five ethnographers expressed their dissatisfaction in a letter to the Central Committee. "Even works which are accepted fully as publishable, approved and sanctioned by the scientific council of the Institute, and scientifically valuable and of current interest, lie for years on end in the Academy of Sciences publishing

⁷⁰ RGANI f. 5, op. 35, d.10, l. 21-50.

⁷¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 194, l. 2.

house, which cannot cope with the demand.”⁷² A year later Sergei Tolstov, the director of the Institute, wrote the secretary of the Central Committee, Dmitrii Shepilov, confirming the complaint. “The situation is especially bad with atlases,” he reported, noting that although the Institute had been producing ethnographic atlases, “since the October Revolution no such atlas has been published.”⁷³ Zaslavsakaia explains that part of the lag was because the publication of every book had to be discussed at the Central Committee’s department of sciences. “Therefore the Institute of Economics, which numbered almost a hundred researchers, published no more than four-five books a year.”⁷⁴

Active methodology

The ethos of social responsibility meshed with party activism to create a new form of “active methodology.” Soviet social scientists transformed villages while studying them. Social scientists who were party members had the authority to lecture the local population about economics, party politics or the role of increasing agricultural productivity in the victory of socialism. Indeed, in January 1947 the party cell of the Institute of Ethnography decided that “all communists” conducting expeditions would “carry out political-educational work with the population they research” and report their efforts to the party assembly.⁷⁵ Interestingly, two months later, in March 1947, the party cell expanded this activist ethos to include all workers of the institution regardless of party affiliation. The decision required “all the Institute’s workers,” to give “instructional lectures on the immediate tasks of agriculture according to the Central Committee VKP(b) or the Ministry of Agriculture.” To facilitate this work, one cell member was

⁷² RGANI f. 5, op. 17, d. 518, l. 33.

⁷³ RGANI f. 5, op. 35, d. 38, l. 10.

⁷⁴ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 371.

⁷⁵ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 1, l. 108.

tasked with preparing a list of approved lecture topics while another was delegated to writing lecture primers on the biographies of Lenin and Stalin.

While lectures were a dominant form of activism, party cells did not consider them sufficiently purposive work, especially in implementing decisions of the Central Committee. Instead, many scientific institutions established patronage (*shefstvo*) over local villages to assist their district party organization in implementing union-wide decisions. Soviet *shefstvo*, a staple form of activism for scientific institutions in the postwar years, originated at the end of the civil war as a relationship of patronage between a soviet institution (the patron) and a military unit. When the Red Army was in desperate financial and moral straits during the civil war, soviet institutions provided both material and moral support.⁷⁶ Similarly, a scientific institution accepting *shefstvo* over a village would send its members to examine that village's living conditions and discuss how the scientists could help improve them.

In 1951, for example, the party organizations of the Erisman Institute of Hygiene together with the Second Refrigeration Factory established *shefstvo* over the "Vernyi Put" collective farm in Dmitrov district, Moscow province. Both party organizations sent representatives to the farm and then held a joint party meeting to discuss its conditions. "Vernyi Put" was a failing collective farm: its harvest was poor, its income half of what had been projected, its members were paid little per workday, and it had poor labor discipline. Moreover, the farm was in debt for an electrification system that had not been completed. Two hygiene specialists from the Erisman Institute spent two months in the village and concluded that deficiencies laid in a weak party organization. "Its decisions are not implemented and it has no control over production," the specialists reported. The Erisman Institute dispatched party

⁷⁶ David R. Stone, "Shefstvo: Lev Trotsky and the Military Origins of Revolutionary Patronage," *Revolutionary Russian* 19, no. 1 (2006).

members to assist in strengthening the local organization and mobilized a contingent of people to help during the harvest. However, the Erisman specialists rejected the farm's request for money to repay the debt. "*Shefstvo* is meant to provide organizational, not material, assistance," they argued.⁷⁷

More often, though, the *shefstvo* of scientific institutes reflected scientists' professional knowledge. As Elizabeth Hachten notes in the late Imperial period, scientists used the ethos of social responsibility "to present their professional activities as civic activism aimed at ameliorating the problems of Russia and its people rather than just serving narrow professional interests or the state."⁷⁸ For example, in March 1947 party organizations of scientific institutes discussed the Central Committee's resolutions "on improving agriculture" in their respective localities. The Institute of Ethnography responded by accepting *shefstvo* over several villages in the district to develop rural teachers' interest in regional studies.⁷⁹ The cell meeting of the Erisman Institute, on the other hand, decided to focus its patronage on villages' sanitation and medical conditions. Discussing the implementation of the Central Committee's decision, a certain Kovaleva told her fellow party members that while working in one village "as a communist" harvesting grain, she discovered the village's poor sewage system. "The water services are in bad [shape] there. There are no bathhouses," she reported, suggesting that the Institute accept the challenge and improve water supply. Another member suggested sending brigades to improve schools' sanitation. Eventually the cell decided to apply its particular specialization to three of the region's villages. It would write sanitation plans, help build a district sanitary laboratory and teach local sanitary and medical personnel about preventative

⁷⁷ TsAOPIM f. 281, op. 1, d. 11, l. 100-102

⁷⁸ Hachten, "In Service to Science and Society," 172.

⁷⁹ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 1, 131-133.

and anti-epidemic work in villages and finally establish a local sanitary-hygienic library.⁸⁰ Its employees also collected used books and donated them to the collective farms' libraries, gave lectures on infant disease and sanitary issues, and took responsibility for furthering the qualification of local doctors in the region.⁸¹

Yet the Institute's patronage eventually turned into a research agenda. The Institute's planning department studied the villages and suggested appropriate reconstruction projects. Thus, civic activism merged into scientific research and then into a political campaign: the cell severely criticized the district administration for the absence of a district village and collective farm planning department. Then it presented its research agenda as a measure to assist the district leadership. Interestingly, the result was a dialogue between the Erisman Institute and district administration. Less than year after the Institute submitted its findings, the district administration replied with its own criticism of the Institute's patronage work: "They think that we can do [with water supply] what Mosenergo did with electrification," reported Miterev to the Party cell meeting.⁸²

The relationship between party cell organizations of scientific institutes and local administrations was complex. On the one hand, the district administration counted on institutions like the Erisman Institute to improve villages. On the other hand, the institutes' direct involvement with the local population often exposed the inadequacies of the district's bureaucracy. In February 1957, for example, the Institute of Philosophy and the Institute of Economics sent an agitation brigade to the collective farms in the Novo-Petrovskii district to lecture the villagers about the domestic and international state of affairs and produce an

⁸⁰ TsAOPIM f. 281, op. 1, d. 6, l. 7-9.

⁸¹ TsAOPIM f. 281, op. 1, d. 6, l. 100-1.

⁸² TsAOPIM f. 281, op. 1, d. 7, l. 70.

amateur concert. As Party members, they explained party policy directly to collective farmers and suggested improvements to their economic and living conditions. Institutes did not simply represent a one-way conduit between the party and collective farmers. They also conveyed the conditions of villages back to the party, and if necessary, circumvented the district by reporting directly to the provincial administration. As party members, they represented another set of eyes and ears of the party-state. As one report stated:

At the Stalin kolkhoz, collective farmers voiced many complaints about the chairman and bookkeeper's vulgar muzzling of criticism. The collective farm suffers from a lot of organizational confusion: the livestock is wintered in a poorly roofed shed, and it's cold where the calves are housed. The kolkhoz experiences failures unrelated to livestock, (according to the collective farmers) three tons of feed oats were secretly sold.⁸³

Reporting their findings to their party cell was an essential part of their responsibility.

In March 1949, Kushner summarized the responsibility of an ethnographer during a fieldwork expedition:

The ethnographer is not merely a soviet man, but a soviet agent (*deiatel'*) and an active builder of soviet society and therefore he should act, - and not only collect material from here, but also give that material to the localities, and give lectures. I heard stories how the population of the village came out and thanked participants of the Zakarpatiia province expedition for the painting job, and jobs not directly connected to ethnographic work, like our girls' work at daycare centers and kindergartens, or the work with the activists. This is absolutely necessary if the ethnographer is to have authority in the locality. And we have to strengthen this work in every way. Therefore, when setting to go on an expedition it is necessary not only to plan the expedition work itself but also to

⁸³ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 39, l. 68-70.

prepare some lectures and individual conversations for the local population so that the active participation of a soviet ethnographer in the kolkhoz life would indeed be widespread.⁸⁴

Kushner conception of the duties of ethnographers was akin to what a 1957 report of the Black-Earth Branch of the All-Union Scientific Research Institute of Agrarian Economics termed “active methodology.” The report detailed the “propaganda and agitation work among collective farmers” on the benefits of cost accounting, it elaborated on economists’ efforts to design production and financial plans, form labor brigades to devise production targets, organize a system of recordkeeping, and monitor their implementation.⁸⁵

“How we, ethnographers, perceive ourselves” : Activist Methodology at Work

In June 1959, the Historical Materialist Department of the Institute of Philosophy gathered ethnographers to discuss “concrete sociological research methodology.” Mikhail Igitkhanian, who chaired the discussion, invited the visiting scholars to share their experience researching the collective farm peasantry and the working class. Introducing herself as the secretary of the party cell, Liudmila Terent’eva (1910-1982) explained to the audience, “How we, ethnographers, perceive ourselves.” Interestingly, the ethnographer focused her treatise on of her fieldwork in the Altai in the 1930s:

When I finished [my studies at] the Leningrad Institute, I went to the Altai. But I didn’t work at a museum as an ethnographer. I carried out soviet work. I worked for the Komsomol. [...] This was in the 1930s when the Altai was going through collectivization. This was when there were still bloody sacrifices in the Altai, when shamanism still flourished. I fought against these. But at the same time I recorded how these bloody

⁸⁴ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 212, l. 58-9.

⁸⁵ RGAE f. 260, op. 2, d. 62, l. 82-3.

sacrifices were carried out. I worked there in consolidating soviet power, soviet laws.

This was a period when girls in the Altai were forced to marry young. As the chair of the soviet's executive committee, I denounced such matrimonies, tried to persuade young people, constructed bathhouses, kindergartens etc.⁸⁶

Terent'eva saw no distinction between her work as an ethnographer and her activities as a Komsomol member. The latter was a direct continuation of the former. As a komsomol-ethnographer, her job was to record backward social practices as she was working to liquidate them. Unlike her contemporaries in the West, Terent'eva did not see herself as an objective observer detached from her research subjects. Working and living among the people was integral to her methodological practice. Still, living among her subjects she was not attempting to accustom them to her presence and thereby increase her access to their lives. Rather, Terent'eva felt responsible for ensuring that her research subjects made their political, cultural and economic decisions according to the Party line. "I attend all public meetings of the collective farm," she told her audience:

Since I am a communist, I also go to party meetings and there I criticize very harshly. I consider myself half a member of the Moscow Party Organization of the Academy of Sciences and half a member of [the collective farm's] party organization. They refer to me like this: "And here comes our Moskvichka. We have a meeting today"--and they send me invitations and notifications.⁸⁷

Terent'eva narrated her ethnographic work as heroic. She detailed how it brought her to dangerous places such as Latvian villages in 1949, "where there was still banditry" and "when nationalism was still strong." She described the fears accompanying her work, "In some places

⁸⁶ ARAN f. 1922, op. 1, d. 986, l. 183-4.

⁸⁷ ARAN f. 1922, op. 1, d. 986, l. 190.

[in Latvia] the local population feared us” she said, “we were afraid bandits would catch us.” To emphasize her sacrifices, she reiterated: “Only our enthusiasm saved us from death at the hands of bandits.”⁸⁸ But such heroism was not limited to newly liberated territories. For Terent’eva, ethnographic work was always heroic because it brought ethnographers face to face with the intransigent remnants of the past:

We [ethnographers] sometimes encounter serious everyday difficulties, especially when our work brings us among nomads who still don’t care much about cleanliness. It so happens that we also eat insects etc. In short, we encounter many bad aspects of everyday life. But [in the end] our enthusiasm overcomes all.⁸⁹

3. Vladimir Venzher: Working the Boundaries of the Admissible

On March 30 1957, a telegraph of the soviet ambassador to Bulgaria provoked a discussion of “the mistakes of Comrade Venzher” in the Directorate of the Institute of Economics. In the telegraph, the ambassador described Vladimir Venzher’s public criticisms of soviet agrarian policy during lectures and private consultations with agrarian economists in Sophia, Bulgaria. In the words of Ivan Laptev, the Institute’s director who assumed the meeting’s prosecutorial role, Venzher historicized current soviet economic policies instead of explaining them as “objectively necessary for the construction of communism.”⁹⁰ For example, when explaining obligatory procurements, a cornerstone of soviet agrarian policy, Venzher described how during industrialization and collectivization “when our country was isolated, it was forced to adopt what Stalin then called ‘a sort of tax in kind’ to accumulate more capital.

⁸⁸ ARAN f. 1922, op. 1, d. 986, l.187.

⁸⁹ ARAN f. 1922, op. 1, d. 986, l.186.

⁹⁰ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 7.

Thus, implicitly, Venzher argued that obligatory procurements were a remnant of the “class approach” toward rural exploitative classes, rather than a rational “form of state planning.”⁹¹

Laptev charged Venzher’s characterization as “an iniquitous indictment against the Party’s alleged ‘military-feudal’ exploitation of the peasantry.” He then utilized a statement Venzher had made to the Central Committee’s Department of Science and the Institute’s directorate to argue that Venzher’s formulations made “certain analogies that could create a perverse notion of payment in kind.” According to Laptev, Venzher had maintained that because subsistence farming predominated under feudalism, seigniorial dues in kind (*natural'nyi obrok*) were the predominant form of agrarian taxation. With capitalism, some farmers produced for market, thereby causing taxation to be partially in kind and partially monetary. Venzher believed that it was only under socialism that commodity relations encompassed all production and therefore all taxation should be monetary. The implication, according to Laptev, was that Venzher viewed collective farms’ in-kind payments to Machine Tractor Stations as a feudal relationship and “not a socialist category.”⁹² In addition, Laptev used Venzher’s criticisms of obligatory deliveries to charge him with viewing these as “remnants of the Middle Ages that amount to natural quitrent” rather than as “socialist principles.”⁹³ In all, Venzher was not only unorthodox but offensive to party policy and disrespectful of its history.

Laptev clearly meant he had it in for Venzher. Though critical of the soviet state governance of its rural population, Venzher probably did not intend to imply that it was exploiting them in a feudal manner. But Venzher’s conduct in Bulgaria had far reaching implications and could have tarnished the reputation of the Institute of Economics as a whole.

⁹¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 5.

⁹² ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 6-7.

⁹³ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 3-4.

Moreover, as the director of the Institute, Laptev was personally responsible for sending Venzher to Bulgaria. Indeed, Laptev admitted that the Institute had “committed a mistake” in sending Venzher. Nevertheless, he maintained, this admittance before the Central Committee “does not make it easier for us” because Venzher did not only disgrace himself but potentially the entire institute and “our soviet economic thought, which is the standard bearer of Marxism” in the eyes of the socialist states of Eastern Europe.⁹⁴

The incident in Bulgaria was not the first time Venzher’s propensity to air his opinions caused controversy. In fact, he had the reputation of a troublemaker. As Laptev put it, Venzher had a tendency for “ad-libbing and expressing personal opinions that clashed with the Party and with the experience of constructing socialism in the USSR.”⁹⁵ Venzher’s fame, after all, originated from Stalin’s public letter “To comrades A.V. Sanina and V.G.Venzher” published as part of *The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* in September 1952. In the text, Stalin repudiated Sanina and Venzher’s idea to sell state machinery to collective farms. After Stalin’s rebuke, Venzher had been repeatedly reprimanded for voicing and publishing unconventional opinions. In each instance, the Central Committee called those responsible to account for Venzher’s actions and their inability to control him. In April 1954, for example, M. Rumiantsev and M. Goriukhov of the Central Committee Department of Science chastised the editors of *Voprosy Ekonomiki* for publishing an article of Venzher’s that “counter[ed] the Party’s resolutions on the question of establishing permanent MTS working cadres with his own opinions.”⁹⁶ Venzher’s infamy made the Institute’s “mistake” in sending such a troublemaker to Bulgaria even more damning.

⁹⁴ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 14.

⁹⁵ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 13.

⁹⁶ RGANI f. 5, op. 17 d. 466, l. 32-3.

This section examines Venzher's surprising "mistake" in relation to his biography and identity. It maintains that Venzher's "ad-libbing" was an essential part of his identity as a communist and a scientist. And yet, if Venzher's "ad-libbing" was common knowledge, why was he repeatedly allowed into situations that would land him in more trouble? The second part of the section utilizes Venzher's 1957 hearing to understand the limits of admissible scholarly behavior. The hearing allows us a glimpse into postwar social scientists' self-perception as soviet scholars and their understanding of their mission and responsibilities. At the end, I argue, Venzher the scholar had to be a communist first. His scholarship was bound to serve socialist transformation. The problem was not what he said in Bulgaria but where he had said it. His scholarly work of two decades was simply not beneficial for the contemporary Bulgarian historical stage.

A commissar in a dusty helmet: Vladimir Venzher's biography

Venzher's biography, like that of many social scientists in the postwar period, is reflective of a man who considered his politics scientific and his science political. Like others, Venzher's biography combined science with state and party service. He joined the revolutionary movement as a teenager, fighting as an anarchist on streets of Moscow in 1917, and on the Eastern and Western fronts in the Civil War. But unlike Kushner, when the war ended, he turned to state and party service, and only after acquiring practical experience did he begin an academic career. In the two decades between the end of the Civil War and 1939, when he joined the Institute of Economics, he administered party schools, trade unions, served as a secretary of provincial party committees, headed the political department of the MTS, and eventually directed a grain manufacturing state farm. He served in the Crimea, the Urals, Uzbekistan and Kirgizia. His education was no less political: sixteen years after leaving the Physics-Mathematical department of Moscow State University to fight for the revolutionary cause, he graduated from the Institute

of Red Professors in 1933.⁹⁷ When he was appointed to study of agrarian economics at the Institute of Economics in 1939, a position he would hold until his death in 1990, he brought to science his practical experience as a party leader and an agrarian administrator.⁹⁸

Venzher's students primarily saw him as a political figure. Tatiana Zaslavskaia explains that "Science for him was first and foremost a means to change social life, strengthen socialist rudiments, and raise economic efficiency, state fastness and the welfare of people."⁹⁹ She recalls that after she had finished her dissertation, she asked Venzher for advice on turning the dissertation into a publishable manuscript. The problem was that her dissertation revealed that collective farmers were more efficient when working on their private plots than working the collective land. Her conclusions recommended establishing market relations between the state and collective farms. It would have been impossible for Zaslavskaia to publish her dissertation in 1956. The state was seeking advice about ways to improve agricultural production, but it showed little desire to air its dirty laundry in print. Venzher, she recalls, encouraged her to dare. He demanded no self-censorship during research and initial analysis. "Separate between the problem of research and that of publication," he said. Only after writing up her scientific conclusions, he suggested that she conceive of ways to give the manuscript a publishable form. Even then he recommended to "work on the boundary of the admissible. And to the extent that the boundary is unknown, don't be afraid to cross it. If you make a mistake –rectify it (*popraviat*)."⁹⁹ Venzher had one other piece of advice: "If you fail to achieve your goal in one way

⁹⁷ N.K. Figurovskaiia, "Vladimir Grigor'evich Venzher (1899-1990)," in *Agrarnyi stroi v Rossii: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee* (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburg Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Ekonomiki i Finansov, 1999), 8.

⁹⁸ For a detailed biographic data on Venzher until 1939 see:
<http://www.centrasia.ru/person2.php?&st=1087040874>

⁹⁹ Tatiana I. Zaslavskaia, "Moi VenSany," in *Agrarnyi stroi v Rossii: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee* (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburg Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Ekonomiki i Finansov, 1999), 30.

(for example, publish a book) look for another way (teach students, supervise graduate students, give public lectures, and write recommendations to governing bodies).”¹⁰⁰ This was indeed the path Venzher took in his own life.

Yet Venzher’s concentration on letter writing, lecturing and reporting to policy makers was somewhat different. More than others he felt that he was denied the right to publish. The cause of Venzher’s misfortune was Stalin’s public repudiation of Sanina and Venzher’s idea to sell machinery to collective farms. As a result Aleksandra Sanina, Venzher’s wife, lost her teaching position at the Economics Department at Moscow State University and with it the right to search for another. The atmosphere “was notably more liberal” at the Institute of Economics, reports Zaslavskaia in her memoirs. The party organization interrogated Venzher, demanded that he admit his mistakes, and reprimanded him. “But no one suggested dismissing him from his job or depriving him of his scientific status.”¹⁰¹

Zaslavskaia assumes that the Party punished Venzher by forbidding him to publish. “For many years,” she writes, “he was not allowed to publish. His name was on the blacklist and any attempt to railroad (*protashchit*) his work to print was ruthlessly stopped by the censorship...” Though not entirely true, Zaslavskaia’s perception reflects Venzher’s own feeling of persecution.¹⁰² In 1957, at the meeting of the directorate of the Institute of Economics, Venzher railed against those criticizing him: “Since 1952, I have been viewed almost everywhere as the person who had researched the MTS and suddenly and unexpectedly suggested liquidating it. But I did not make such a proposal and the glory I received was undeserved.”¹⁰³ He continued

¹⁰⁰ Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 438.

¹⁰¹ Zaslavskaia, “Moi VenSany,” 27.

¹⁰² Venzher’s articles appeared in print as early as March 1954. See Vladimir G. Venzher, “O razvitii i ukreplenii ekonomicheskikh sviazei MTS i kolkhozov,” *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 3 (1954), 40-55.

¹⁰³ ARAN f. 1877, op.1, d. 1154, l. 17.

boasting his martyrdom: “It was quite difficult for me to study the MTS, but despite that I [continued] studying the MTS all this time and wrote work that has been published. The critique [of it] ostensibly wasn’t half bad.”¹⁰⁴

Moreover, Zaslavskia assumes that Venzher’s participatory scholarship stemmed from his persecution. During the years he could not publish, she writes, “He did not surrender: he continued researching, wrote books (which were later published), sent analytical papers to the Central Committee (which at times received empty replies), publicly lectured, and supervised scientific cadres. He served as a model for us, young [scholars], who sometimes went limp in the face of smaller disappointments.”¹⁰⁵

But Venzher’s form of participatory economic scholarship did not begin after Stalin’s denunciation. In fact, Stalin’s letter was a public response to six letters Sanina and Venzher had sent him. Though they had not been invited to participate in the discussion of political economics, they chose to “offer their two cents” (*vesti i svoiu leptu*), and bring their position to Stalin’s attention.¹⁰⁶ Venzher “could not stay on the sidelines” during a debate on the future of political economy, writes Nadezhda Figurovskaia.¹⁰⁷ While those who had been invited to join the discussion may have had academic pedigree, Sanina and Venzher held that their position should be heard inasmuch as they were party members and economists who had practical agricultural experience. Venzher and Sanina’s life experience, their service to the soviet state

¹⁰⁴ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Zaslavskia, “Moi VenSany,” 35.

¹⁰⁶ Vladimir G. Venzher and Aleksandra V. Sanina, “Pis'ma v TsK,” *ibid.* (1999), 36-83. On the political economy discussion see: Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, 168-211.

¹⁰⁷ Figurovskaia, “Vladimir Grigor'evich Venzher,” 9.

and Communist Party and their ethos as scientists and activists demanded that they contribute “their two cents.”¹⁰⁸

“This does not fit my impression of him as a communist”: Vladimir Venzher and Boundaries of the Admissible

Venzher’s outspoken criticism of soviet agrarian policy was no surprise to those who knew him. It was a logical continuation of lifelong activities. Venzher saw himself as a soviet agent and builder of socialism. In this sense, little changed when Venzher closed the twenty-year chapter of party activism and began his academic chapter. Speaking of his prewar role in building socialism, he told Nadezhda Figurovskaia: “We literally put the peasant-collective farmers on their feet, saved them from hunger, and set aright the cooperative farms. There were some things we successfully achieved.”¹⁰⁹ His mission was no different as a scholar. If he believed the Bulgarians would do better without Machine-Tractor stations or obligatory deliveries, he offered them his “two-cents.”

Venzher’s colleagues at the Institute of Economics were well aware of his positions. When Lev Gatovskii, the editor of *Voprosy Ekonomiki*, took the podium at Venzher’s hearing, he summarized Venzher’s opinion on the three main economic issues under debate. According to Venzher, he said, “We should liquidate the MTS now, at the present [historical] stage. It is

¹⁰⁸ Little has been written about Sanina’s biography. Zaslavskaia devotes much space to Sanina’s beauty (“Beauty with a capital B”), her popularity among students and their personal relationship, but when it comes to Sanina’s life story, she says little. Zaslavskaia remembers, Sanina responded “concisely and unwillingly” about her background. However, her credentials as an activist were quite storied. From a very young age, she participated in the construction of the Soviet state, worked for women’s rights in Central Asia, (where, incidentally, she met Venzher and married him) graduated from the Institute of Red Professors, defended her dissertation, worked for the Central Committee, and right before the war, began lecturing at Moscow State University. Tatiana I. Zaslavskaia, “Moi VenSany,” *ibid.* (1999), 23.

¹⁰⁹ N.K. Figurovskaia, “Vladimir Grigor'evich Venzher (1899-1990),” *ibid.* (1999), 8.

important to understand that without the MTS the machinery would be better utilized.”¹¹⁰ In fact, several of Venzher’s reform recommendations had been under experimentation. Since 1955 the Soviet Union was experimenting with changing the relationship between the MTS and collective farms. By 1957, when Venzher spoke in Sophia, the Russian Republic alone had nearly four-thousand complex brigades, which united under one leadership machinery operators and fieldworkers. At the same time, as early as February 1956, collective farm chairmen received permission to purchase farm machinery from the state’s Agricultural Supply Administration. Other experiments were seeking different forms of cooperative accounting and taxation.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, Venzher had crossed the line of the admissible because he practiced his “ad-libbing” in Sophia. His opinions were tolerated as long as they were voiced in internal scientific discussions of the Institute of Economics. They were even acceptable at a Central Committee forum. But Venzher expressed his personal opinions in Sophia though he had been sent there to represent the Soviet Academy of Sciences. There, said Gatovskii, “They value our experience in constructing socialism very highly, and consider us as great authorities in developing Marxist-Leninist science.” Indeed, thirty to forty people had attended Venzher’s lecture in Sophia. “The number [of attendees] is not the point,” Gatovskii reiterated, “The point is that this was an authoritative consultation of the Institute of Economics, which was attended by members of the Bulgarian scientific council as well as prominent practical-economists, including the minister of finance.” While Venzher and his colleagues were given remarkable latitude to speak and experiment in semi-private settings, speaking openly in Bulgaria went too far.

¹¹⁰ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 44.

¹¹¹ Robert F. Miller, *One Hundred Thousand Tractors; the MTS and the Development of Controls in Soviet Agriculture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 317-321; Galina K. Ol'shevskiaia, "Reorganizatsiia MTS i kolkhozy v 1958-1961gg.," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 114(1986), 12-13.

Venzher's timing was not optimum either: it was only a few months after the Hungarian uprising and when Bulgaria was still considering its path to collectivization. Gatovskii reminded the audience of the "revisionist elements," in the People's Democracies, which "trump what is called the 'Yugoslav path,'" i.e. Tito's 1953 decision to disband of the peasants' working co-operatives. "For Bulgarian cooperatives," he continued, "[the question of the Machine-Tractor Stations] is vital because they need to establish themselves on the basis of the MTS."¹¹² Or as Denis Kondrashev put it:

I am not a specialist, but I heard that in Bulgaria there isn't enough bread, there is a class struggle, and the enemies of the kolkhoz are looking for a reason to ruin collective farms. Under these conditions it was necessary to choose words in order to explicate the position of the Institute of Economics. That and more, could comrade Venzher's recommendations somehow give Bulgaria more bread? Of course not. It is impossible to get bread under these conditions. And without bread no state could survive.¹¹³

Interestingly, Venzher did not take the criticism seriously. He apologized formally for speaking his mind in Bulgaria. "I want to say, first of all, that of course, in the gravity of events, I am conscious of my guilt to the Institute's collective and to the Bulgarian comrades. I did not fulfill the honorable task before me." But he evaded criticism, saying that though he should have spoken about the great achievements of the soviet collective farm, rather than about his own work, he maintained that he was merely responding to specific questions he was asked.¹¹⁴ He refused to acknowledge that he had made any mistakes in evaluating soviet agrarian economics.

¹¹² ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 42; Melissa K. Bokovoy, *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav countryside, 1941-1953* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998).

¹¹³ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 51.

¹¹⁴ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 16-7.

Some of the accusations, he argued, were mere misunderstandings, while other quotations were taken out of context.

The forum was not enamored with Venzher's responses. Their dissatisfaction is evident when Venzher responded to quotations of a manuscript he had submitted to *Voprosy Ekonomiki*. "I agree, my formulation was unsuccessful and not entirely clear," he said. "One could think the author had in mind, maybe, the liquidation of the MTS. But this is still an unpublished article, and had the article gone through the usual process, this paragraph would have been removed, because it is unclear." Lev Gatovskii interrupted, reminding Venzher to be truthful: "But the editorial board says they debated this paragraph with you at length."¹¹⁵

When it was clear that he would relentlessly argue that the ambassador's words were hearsay, F. Samokhvalov compared an article draft that Venzher's had submitted to *Voprosy Ekonomiki* with the report of the soviet ambassador and found that the two were almost identical "word for word." "Listening to comrade Venzher's detailed explanation," he said, "I am under the impression that he is not sufficiently frank with the directorate."¹¹⁶ Samokhvalov also sensed that Venzher's apology for speaking in Bulgaria was not entirely sincere: "Do you understand that a discussion *there* (in Bulgaria) is not the same as a discussion *here*?" he asked directly. Venzher's response proved that Samokhvalov was correct: "I spoke about this in a meeting with economists, who have brains and conduct debates. Now it is completely clear to me that I shouldn't have said it."¹¹⁷

The discussion shifted when Samokhvalov turned to speak of Venzher's revolutionary persona. Rather than discussing Venzher actions in third person, Samokhvalov turned to

¹¹⁵ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 24.

¹¹⁶ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 46-48.

¹¹⁷ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 40.

Venzher and said “This is even stranger for me because I was under the impression that you could already tell the truth as it is. There is no truth here. Maybe you internally admitted the [gravity] of [your] political mistake, but you turn out to be immature politically and do not have sufficient courage to tell it straight and without false rumor about the mistake which has been admitted.” He continued with a personal disappointment with Venzher:

Apparently I don’t know Venzher, even though I have been working with him for six-seven years... I would have never conceded the idea that Venzher would hold himself like this as a soviet representative in Bulgaria. This does not fit my impression of him as a communist... I cannot explain this: a man who has been in the party since 1919, who came from a great school and acquired great party experience that all of a sudden [he would have] such a lapse [in judgment].¹¹⁸

And the young M.V. Usievich added the icing on the cake: “It is difficult for me to speak about comrade Venzher, who had joined the party many years before I was born, and whom we trusted very much, that he could behave with such incompetence.”¹¹⁹

Tarnishing his reputation as a communist and questioning his political maturity, Samokhvalov forced Venzher to take the criticism seriously. At the end of the discussion Venzher followed the Bolshevik ritual of self-criticism with more sincerity. “The comrades were correct to give me a lashing,” he said. He then confessed and accepted responsibility for his mistakes without offering an excuse. “I don’t want to rebut. . . I can’t answer myself, why [my visit to Bulgaria] turned out so badly.” Accepting full responsibility, Venzher exonerated the Institute of Economics and his fellow scholars. He apologized for disgracing the science of economics. “I understand that the mistakes I made could, of course, snowball if analyzed

¹¹⁸ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 46-48.

¹¹⁹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 52.

appropriately. It's painful for me. I have worked in this science for eighteen years and now I caused it great damage and brought much grief. I have no justifications.”¹²⁰

Yet at the same time Venzher admitted his mistakes, he simultaneously utilized the confession ritual to reassert his identity as a communist. “Of course, it is not easy [for me] to confess,” he said, “especially considering my experience, and it is not easy to hear about the immaturity of a man who is already 60 years old and has been in the party for 38 years.” The gravity of his mistakes did not make him a lesser communist. On the contrary, in confessing and endorsing the ritual of self-criticism Venzher further asserted his Bolshevik persona. His confession reads like a competition over who was more critical of Venzher—Venzher or his accusers. “For a long time I’ve criticized myself harsher than you’ve criticized me here,” he told the directorate. “What happened is a huge personal failure.”

In the end, in Venzher self-assessment of his actions in Bulgaria, it was not Venzher the scientist that failed, but Venzher the communist. While his recommendations to the Bulgarians were applicable to soviet agriculture in the late 1950s, he admitted that they had “no practical meaning now [in Bulgaria].” His mistake was formalism, and therefore had no place in a science that was activist.¹²¹

Conclusion

Soviet social scientists perceived themselves as social engineers aiming to transform society rather than merely represent it. To this effect, they consciously and purposefully manipulated their research objects to produce the communist future. In the village they emphasized their authority and political seniority to ensure locals would make correct economic and political decisions. Outside the village they used their party connections to secure resources

¹²⁰ ARAN f. 1877, op. -1, d. -1154, l. 53-54.

¹²¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1154, l. 53-54.

and correct social wrongs. However, though their work often focused on one or two villages, their perspective was different from other party activists. As scientists, they believed they had the power to identify laws and generalize findings and claimed the specific villages they studied were somehow representative. This of course was Venzher's mistake in Bulgaria. After a decade of studying the relationship between MTS and collective farms, he considered his findings universally true. The assertion that their knowledge was authoritative occasionally brought scholars into conflict with the party.

As we shall see in chapter two, as committed party members and communists they were torn between following the party-line and representing social reality. Village life was not as picturesque as party leaders portrayed it. Had scholars chosen to identify inequality, inefficiency and poverty, they would have contradicted the party-line. Yet, had they opted to ignore social ills, they would have failed in their mission to transform society. The task before social scientists, therefore, was to invent a language which captured the socialist utopia while representing backwardness and filth.

Chapter Two

The Search for a Disciplinary Identity

In August 1946 the Central Committee of the Communist Party condemned the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* for publishing the “ideologically harmful works” of the satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko and the poet Anna Akhmatova. Zoshchenko and Akhmatova were accused of “kowtowing before western modern bourgeois culture.” The decree sparked the anti-cosmopolitan ideological campaign, or *Zhdanovshchina*, which swept through all corners of soviet cultural and intellectual life. Rooted in the Cold War, the campaign aimed to purge the soviet intelligentsia of “foreign,” “un-soviet” elements. It demanded an emphasis on the “historical uniqueness of the Russian people” and “a crusade against servility to Western culture.”¹ Historians consider the campaign anti-cosmopolitanism a mark of “high Stalinism” and “the triumph of ideology.” It was the resurrection of oppressive measures aimed at subjugating the intelligentsia to the control of the party and state. The triumph of Trofim Lysenko and the defeat of soviet genetics were most emblematic of the campaign in the sciences. Lysenko discarded Western knowledge and argued for an ideologically pure Russian-socialist science rooted in the work of Russian plant breeder Ivan Michurin.²

This chapter examines the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the social sciences. It shows that though it resembled the *Zhdanovschina* in the natural sciences, the social scientific campaign was nonetheless unique. Soviet social sciences had been in a state of crisis since the 1930s when attempts to formulate Marxist disciplines brought many sciences to a standstill. In several disciplines Marxist practitioners adopted utopian visions which predicted the “withering

¹ Alexander Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge: the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1917-1970)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 211.

² David Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); Nils Roll-Hansen, *The Lysenko Effect: the Politics of Science* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2005).

away” of the subject matter of the social sciences under socialism. Thus, political economists defined their discipline as the study of commodity production and argued that it had no place researching socialism.³ Ethnographers defined their discipline as the study of traditional national cultures, which they said, would vanish under socialism. And statisticians defined their work as the science of uncontrolled and haphazard phenomena, which would cease to exist in a planned economy. Unlike sociology and pedology the disciplines of statistics, ethnography and political science survived the 1930s and their practitioners continued producing academic work. Nonetheless the postwar years and the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign illuminated the fact that they remained in a lingering state of crisis. Social scientists used campaign’s rhetoric to reconfigure their disciplines and adapt to the postwar conditions.

The chapter focuses on anti-cosmopolitanism campaign in ethnography and statistics to examine how different disciplines tackled the campaign and attempted to reconstruct themselves as “truly soviet sciences.” It shows that social scientists perceived a distinctly soviet science as one which balanced socialist utopianism with a measure of realism. While realism was necessary in order to provide the state with much needed social knowledge, utopianism embodied by the party-line turned the science soviet.

1. Ethnographers adjust

Historians argue that until the spring of 1947, when the Central Committee organized a discussion of Georgii Aleksandrov’s textbook, *A History of Western European Philosophy*, the campaign against cosmopolitanism had little impact on the scientific community.⁴ Ethnography, however, first showed signs of the campaign already in 1946, when the ethnographic leadership began reconfiguring the discipline in accordance with the Central Committee’s decree

³ E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country, 1924-1926*, vol. 1 (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1970), 525-526.

⁴ Nikolai Kremetsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 130.

condemning the literary journals *Zveda* and *Leningrad*.⁵ The decree stated that “Soviet writers must concern themselves largely with current themes, and their writings must inculcate loyalty to party and state [...] Above all, Soviet belles-lettres must show the best aspirations of Soviet man, must be positive and optimistic.”⁶ In response, soviet ethnographers turned away from the innocuous study of pre-class societies and directed their attention toward the study of contemporaneity, particularly issues relevant to “socialist construction.” By 1947 the Institute’s directorate ordered all expeditions to study contemporary soviet everyday life and a year later called for increased focus on “the culture and everyday life of collective farms.”⁷ “It is necessary to understand that the study of the collective farm is of paramount political significance,” reminded Tatiana Zhdanko, the Institute’s Party cell secretary, “The collective farm is Stalin’s great discovery (*genial’no otkryta forma*) to insure the transformation of the small peasantry of various nationalities on the path to socialism.” The collective farm acquired a particular significance in the postwar years, she added, because it served as a model for young Socialist Republics and People’s Democracies constructing their own forms of collective agriculture.

While the Central Committee called upon philosophers, biologists, physicists, linguistics and political economists to account for “kowtowing before the west,” ethnographers were never directly pinpointed and only the linguistics discussion had clear relevance to their work. Nonetheless like all party cells in scientific institutes, ethnographers sensed where the wind was blowing. In November 1947, the Institute of Ethnography discussed the Central Committee’s

⁵ Sergei Alymov, “Kosmopolitizm, marrizm i prochie “grekhi”: otechestvennye etnografy i arkheplogi na rubezhe 1940-1950-kh godov,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 3 (2009), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2009/97/al2.html>.

⁶ Quoted in Kees Boterbloem, *The Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov, 1896-1948* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 281.

⁷ TsAOPIM f.7349, op.1, d. 1, l. 107-8

“closed letter” on the affair of Nina Kliueva and Grigorii Roskin (KR affair).⁸ Kliueva and Roskin were put on trial in 1947 for sharing the results of their biotherapeutic cancer research with American scientists.⁹ At the discussion Ivan Potekhin (1903-1964), the deputy director of the Institute of Ethnography, said that the KR affair had “direct pertinence” to ethnographers because, despite the fact that there were indications “that not everything is successful (*blagopoluchno*) on the scientific front,” there was a “sense of complacency” (*blagodushie*) among ethnographers.¹⁰ Yet the Central Committee’s letter was ambiguous about the affair’s pertinence to the broader scientific community, leaving ethnographers, like other scientists, to adapt the implications of the demise of two cancer researchers to their own disciplines.

The reaction of most ethnographers echoed Nikolai Kremmentsov contention that the campaign against cosmopolitanism intensified the significance of Marxism, patriotism, *partiinnost’* and practicality, which had embodied the meaning of Stalinist science since the 1930s.¹¹ Thus, there were two prevailing answers to the question of the KR affair’s relevance to ethnographers. Sergei Tolstov, the Institute’s director, offered the initial and most natural explanation: the *Zhdanovshchina* was about patriotism. He emphasized Kliueva and Roskin’s collaboration with Americans and warned of “similar things” in ethnography. He particularly pointed to Petr Bogatyrev and Dmitrii Zelenin, who had published in foreign languages.¹² This

⁸ The letter had been was to local party committees for discussion. The date of this discussion is somewhat peculiar for Nikolai Kremmentsov writes that the letter, which was sent in mid-July, contained the warning, “this letter must be destroyed within a month from the date of receipt.” Kremmentsov, *Stalinist Science*, 138.

⁹ Nikolai Kremmentsov, *The Cure: A Story of Cancer and Politics from the Annals of the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹⁰ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 1, l 150.

¹¹ Kremmentsov, *Stalinist Science*, 46-48, 216-220.

¹² TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 1, 152. There is a great irony in accusing Zelenin of cosmopolitanism. Laurie Manchester uses Zelenin as an example of the way the *popovichi* ethos was carried into the soviet period. She quotes one of Zelenin’s students who wrote that “he himself came from the *narod*, like a tree comes from the ground.” Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia*,

explanation supports Ethan Pollock's contention that the term cosmopolitan was antonymic to a patriot and scientists who had previously lived abroad, maintained connections with foreign colleagues, and published in foreign journals were "particularly vulnerable to the epithet."¹³ Indeed, Bogatyrev's years of residence in Prague and associations with the Russian émigré community made him a natural suspect of cosmopolitanism. Moreover, Bogatyrev openly endorsed a structural-functional method of folklore study, which was similar to English functionalism and the American "psychological school."¹⁴ As for Zelenin, Tolstov charged that his approach to the study of Eastern Slavic cultures appeared unpatriotic because it was "saturated with the notion that the Russian people had created nothing throughout its history." Tolstov highlighted items in Zelenin's academic work that corresponded with the Central Committee's enumeration of Russian inventions "misappropriated" by foreigners."¹⁵ "The Russian hut (*izba*), the Russian plow (*sokha*), the Russian woolen skirt (*paneva*), hats – all came from the West," he itemized from Zelenin's work. "Everything came from the Germans, from Scandinavians, from the Romans, [even] the Spanish Arabs." The problem, Tolstov explained, was that Zelenin's work suggested a unidirectional influence in which everything originated from the west and "nothing went in the other direction." This was denying, in the

and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 201-210.

¹³ Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 81. Similarly soviet scholars who borrowed Western knowledge or studied capitalist economies and societies were often accused of "kowtowing before the west." This was the case of the renowned Comintern economic expert Evgenii Varga. In his 1946 book, *Changes in the Economy of Capitalism resulting from the Second World War*, he argued that the war had transformed capitalist states' involvement in the economy and predicted that the change would delay the collapse of capitalism. Varga was criticized for cosmopolitanism and "bourgeois objectivism," resulting in his institute's merger with the Institute of Economics. ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 331, l. 6-15 and André Mommen, *Stalin's Economist: the Economic Contributions of Jeno Varga* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 167-191; Kyung Deok Roh, "Stalin's Think Tank: The Varga Institute and the Making of the Stalinist Idea of World Economy and Politics, 1927-1953" (University of Chicago, 2010).

¹⁴ Alymov, "Kosmopolitizm, marrizm i prochie "grekhi"."; I.I. Potekhin, "Zadachi bor'by s kosmopolitizmom v etnografii," *Sovetskaia Etnografiia* 2(1949).

¹⁵ Krementsov, *Stalinist Science*, 138-139.

words of Alexander Vucinich, the “historical uniqueness of the Russian people.”¹⁶ Thus, Zelenin denied Russian cultural priority much like Kliueva and Roskin disavowed soviet scientific priority.¹⁷

In the same forum, Potekhin and Pavel Kushner offered a second reading of the Central Committee's cue. They translated *Zhdanovshchina* into the language of *partiinnost'*, that is, the “subservience to Party objectives and the subordination of the scientific community to Party guidance.”¹⁸ Potekhin held up as an example Vera Belitser's (1903-1983) article on the expedition to the Komi Republic, which she published in *Kratkie Soobshchenie*. “The article is written in such a way,” he said, “that it is possible to conclude that there are kulaks, middle peasants and landless peasants [i.e. classes] in our villages, and landless peasants perform seasonal work in factories in the Urals.”¹⁹ Belitser's analysis of Komi's villages contradicted the concept of *partiinnost'* because it suggested that there were exploited and exploitative elements in the socialist republic even though collectivization had successfully liquidated classes in the Komi twenty years prior.²⁰ Potekhin urged ethnographers and their editors to prevent the publication of scholarship deviating from the party line.

Similarly, Kushner called for “strengthen[ing] the Party leadership” with relation to the Institute's multi-volume collection *Peoples of the World*, particularly in the “volume devoted to

¹⁶ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 286, l. 27 and Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge*, 211.

¹⁷ Sergei Alymov argues that at the core of Tolstov's attack on Zelenin was personal and originated in 1929: “During the Marxization of ethnography,” when Tolstov condemned Zelenin's non-Marxist approach to ethnography. Alymov, “Kosmopolitizm, marrizm i prochie “grekhi”.” Potekhin, “Zadachi bor'by s kosmopolitizmom v etnografii.” On Zelenin's biography and Tolstov's attack in the 1930s see A.M. Reshetov, “Dmitrii Konstantinovich Zelenin: klassik russkoi etnografii,” in *Vydaioushchiesia otechestvennye etnologi i antropologi XX veka*, ed. D. D. Tumarkin, Valerii Aleksandrovich Tishkov, and Institut etnologii i antropologii imeni N.N. Miklukho-Maklaëia. (Moskva: “Nauka”, 2004), 137-183.

¹⁸ Krementsov, *Stalinist Science*, 216.

¹⁹ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 1, l. 150.

²⁰ On collectivization in the Komi republic see Yuri Slezkine, “From Savages to Citizens: The Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Far North, 1928-1938,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (1992).

the Slavs” which “is especially bad.” Kushner cited Vladimir Bogdanov’s (1868-1949) article on the Great Russians’ traditional cuisine for failing to “illuminate [it] from a Marxist position.”²¹ A year later, in November 1948, Kushner hit Bogdanov again, this time for his leadership over the Slavic sector of the Institute. Kushner argued, “They say that a sector’s work depends to a large extent on its party members.” However, he added that although Bogdanov was “a great scholar,” he was “very far from Marxism” and therefore should not be allowed in leadership positions.²²

The crisis in Ethnography

Almost a year later, in October 1948, ethnographers began ascribing a different meaning to the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign. Rather than merely using the campaign to target individuals and expel them as un-soviet elements, the campaign became a tool to transform the discipline. Less than three months after Lysenko’s victory at the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences, the scientific council of the Institute of Ethnography discussed the implications of the Academy’s biological session on soviet ethnography. Leonid Potapov (1905-2000) the Institute’s deputy director spelled out the discussion in biology’s main lesson for ethnographers, explaining, “It boils down to how we deal with the dangers on the scientific front.” The dangers, he said, were formalism, uncritical engagement with bourgeois science, and most importantly, “how useful we are to our Soviet state.” To be clear, he identified this issue as the same question put before the biological session. Biologists were forced to ask themselves: “How are we useful to our soviet state [and] our soviet people? Do not forget that our soviet science serves the people. We are the people’s servants (*slugi*).” The failure to serve the state, Potapov and Tolstov emphasized, was a heritage postwar ethnography had to combat. “Until a few years ago, that is, until the war, and indeed under soviet rule, [our Institute] never played a leading role in the country. Not formally and not practically.” Other disciplines went through this “transformation”

²¹ TsAOPIM f. 7349. Op. 1, d. 1, l. 149.

²² TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 2, l. 84.

much earlier. Ethnography, however, was “only now becoming a truly soviet ethnographic science.” Tolstov in turn explained that the failure was because of the “erroneous policies of the previous administration of the Institute, which abandoned ethnographic work and failed to find the application of the [ethnographic] specialty.” As a result, he added, “not only did we have to train new cadres [and] bring them up on the job while fulfilling the critical tasks related to the objectives of the war, but [at the same time we had to] create and deploy a new scientific-research tradition.”²³

Tolstov was referring to the crisis of the ethnographic discipline after Stalin’s revolution. Indeed, historians still debate the effects of this period on the field ethnography. As Yuri Slezkine shows, until 1929 the discipline of ethnology had been mostly shielded from ideological debates: “In contrast to what was happening in many other fields, there were Marxist ethnographers but no serious attempt to construct a Marxist ethnography.”²⁴ In 1928-9, during the campaign against the Academy of Sciences, young Marxist ethnographers, linguists, archeologists and other experts questioned the possibility of establishing a Marxist ethnography.²⁵ Slezkine narrates this crisis as the “fall of soviet ethnography,” arguing that at the end of the discussion the discipline was reduced to the study of “preclass society and its survivals” and ethnographic fieldwork was declared “imperialistic by nature.”²⁶ Francine Hirsch and Tat’iana Solovei, on the other hand, show that ethnography did not “fall,” but was rather “sovietized.” Soviet ethnographers continued “mediating border disputes, served as experts for collectivization efforts in non-Russian regions, and organized and participated in dozens of

²³ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 167, l. 8-9 and 55-6.

²⁴ Yuri Slezkine, “The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928-38,” *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (1991), 478.

²⁵ On the Sovietization of the Academy of Sciences, see Loren R. Graham, *The Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Communist Party, 1927-1932* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967); Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge*.

²⁶ Slezkine, “The Fall of Soviet Ethnography,” 481.

expeditions.”²⁷ My work follows Hirsch and Solovei to suggest that unlike sociology, ethnography was not liquidated as a science. Scholars continued identifying themselves as ethnographers and served the state in a variety of advisory capacities before and during World War II.

Nevertheless, though ethnographers continued serving the state throughout the 1930s, postwar soviet ethnographers expressed a deep sense of crisis and argued that their discipline had not been fully sovietized until the late 1940s. As Tolstov wrote to the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee in 1950:

Until the Great Patriotic War, the Institute [. . .] was in a state of complete decline and disintegration. For years the collective had been preoccupied with a fruitless scholastic debate over “what is ethnography.” Expeditions completely ceased. The journal “*Sovetskaia Etnografiia*” lost its scientific credibility, forfeited its subscribers, and stopped publication. Cadres of ethnographers were thinned out and the training of new cadres was in total decline.²⁸

Archival records reveal that as postwar ethnographers attempted to exit the mire of disciplinary quibbles, they still had to struggle against the theory that their discipline should “wither away (*otmirat'*)” under socialism.²⁹ This theory which was widespread since the 1930s suggested that socialism would erase ethnic differences and traditions and in turn would make

²⁷ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 139-143; T.D. Solovei, *Ot “burzhuaiznoi” etnologii k “sovetskoi” etnografii: Istoriia otechestvennoi etnologii pervoi treti XX veka* (Moscow: Koordinatsionno-metodicheskii tsentr prikladnoi etnografii Instituta etnologii i antropologii, 1998).

²⁸ Sergei Alymov, *P.I. Kushner i razvitie sovetskoi etnografii v 1920-1950-e gody* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, Institut Etnologii i Antropologii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, 2006), 40.

²⁹ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 280, l. 32.

ethnographic study irrelevant.³⁰ As Potapov put it in 1949, the notion that ethnographers would have “nothing left to do” because “old culture and old everyday life (*byt*) would wither away very quickly under socialism . . . is still among us today.” The renewed focus on collective farms served as Potapov as proof that ethnography was not withering away. Studies of collective farms, Potapov forcefully argued, “demonstrate how widely and deeply the national cultural construction developed in our great soviet period.” The people, who objected to this fact, he added, ignored the fact “that our soviet construction develops in defined national forms, that there is no soviet internationalism, no characterless nation; [the nation] always has a national face.” Interestingly, Potapov accused those holding the theory of cosmopolitanism, for assuming that Russian national characteristics would wither away under socialism was anti-patriotic.³¹

Thus, ethnographers struggle to re-emerge as a “truly soviet science” brought them to the study of contemporaneity already in 1946.³² Their focus on collective farm served simultaneously to assist the state in facing its most taxing social problem and to prove to their own colleagues that the subject matter of ethnography had not “withered away.” For ethnographers the collective farm peasantry represented authentic Russian culture to be studied and cherished on the one hand and a social problem to be resolved on the other.

2. “Two worlds-two ideologies”

In July 1948, Trofim Lysenko informed a conference audience at the Lenin All-Union Agricultural Academy that the field of biology was divided into “two opposing and antagonistic”

³⁰ For more on the theory in the context of the 1930s see T.D. Solovei, ""Korennoi perelom" v otechestvennoi etnografii, diskussii o predmete Etnologicheskoi nauki: kanets 1920kh-nachalo 1930-kh godov," *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, no. 3 (2001).

³¹ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 212, l. 28-9.

³² ARAN f. 142, op.1, d.280, l. 49-50.

trends that reflected “two worlds-two ideologies.”³³ Lysenko’s assertion represents a turning point in the natural sciences because it forced scientists to use a Cold War language of mutually exclusive worlds that produced incompatible sciences. However, for social scientists this mode of thinking was not new. Postwar soviet scholars took a social-constructivist position toward social scientific production. They argued that science was a product of socioeconomic and political forces and therefore they found power hiding behind every social fact. This perception drove their analysis of bourgeois social sciences: as an outgrowth of the capitalist economic base, bourgeois science was designed to serve the ideological superstructure of capitalist societies.³⁴ “Bourgeois economic-statistics has developed and is developing on the basis of vulgar bourgeois political economy,” explained Vasilii Nemchinov in a 1948 memo. For Nemchinov and others, the methods of bourgeois statisticians veiled “capitalist exploitation and paint[ed] a falsified picture of capitalist economy.”³⁵

Soviet scholars sought to develop a scientific methodology that would serve the state and socialist society. “The Soviet planned economy placed fundamentally new challenges before statistical-economic theory and practice and required the development of new statistical methods of collecting, processing and studying the national economy,” read a 1948 draft memo of the Institute of Economics.³⁶ The problem was that the campaign against cosmopolitanism

³³ Originally Lysenko depicted the opposition as reflected a class distinction. Editing Lysenko's text Stalin deleted references to the class character of science, see Slava Gerovitch, "Mathematical Machines' of the Cold War: Soviet Computing, American Cybernetics and Ideological Disputes in the Early 1950s," *Social Studies of Science* 31, no. 2 (2001); Kirill Rossiianov, "Editing Nature: Joseph Stalin and the 'New' Soviet Biology," *Isis* 84, no. 4 (1993); Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*.

³⁴ This view coincided with Marxist understanding of the function of science in society. As Lenin said to Popov, the chair of the Central Statistical Administration, statistics, as any other scientific discipline, possesses problems and solves them in the interests of specific classes. Cited by Samuel Kotz and Eugene Seneta, "Lenin as a Statistician: A Non-Soviet View," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 153, no. 1 (1990), 90.

³⁵ ARAN f.1877, op. 1, d. 222, l. 2 .

³⁶ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 1.

exposed both statistics and ethnography to their failure to serve both the state and society. As Nemchinov noted, however, “science always springs out of living, productive or practical demands, and in so far as these living practical demands of the planned economy are sufficiently pronounced, they have not yet received scientific analysis.”³⁷ The *Zhdanovshchina* with its demand for service intensified an epistemological crisis already simmering in both disciplines.

Soviet social scientists defined their scholarship as the binary opposite of its bourgeois counterpart. Ironically, however, a distinct soviet social science required engagement with bourgeois literature in order to identify bourgeois elements. As a result, the initial call to purge foreign influences, halt publishing in foreign languages, and cease reviewing foreign scholarship in soviet journals was soon dropped.³⁸ In 1948, for example, statisticians argued that the only way to begin purging bourgeois concepts from soviet statistics was to critically engage bourgeois scientific literature. “Criticizing bourgeois statistics is imperative for the successful development of Soviet Marxist-Leninist statistics,” Nemchinov explained, “It is essential for overcoming the influence of bourgeois statistical work and methodology on some Soviet statisticians and for exposing and coping with bourgeois statistical data falsification about capitalism.”³⁹ Moreover, the demand to engage bourgeois scholarship continued after the anti-cosmopolitan campaign officially ended. When the Central Committee reviewed *Sovetskaia Etnografia* in 1953, it condemned the journal for publishing too few articles “exposing contemporary bourgeois

³⁷ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 31.

³⁸ For example, in November 1947 at a meeting of the party cell of the Institute of Ethnography, I.F. Simonenko spoke of a *Literaturnaia Gazeta* article that accused soviet technical journals of publishing only foreign bibliographies. This was a sign, he argued, that *Sovetskaia Etnografiia* should ignore foreign literature and focus only on scholarship produced in the Union Republics and new People's Democracies. See TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 1, l. 152-3. Also, in 1949, the Politburo urged authors of a planned-second edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* “to criticize modern bourgeois trends in science and technology from Party's position.” Quoted in Gerovitch, “Mathematical Machines' of the Cold War: Soviet Computing, American Cybernetics and Ideological Disputes in the Early 1950s,” 257.

³⁹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 13

ethnography” and “absolutely no articles on the struggle of progressive against reactionary ethnography in foreign countries.”⁴⁰

To uncover the means that allowed bourgeois science to “veil capitalist exploitation” and “paint a falsified picture” of social reality, soviet social scientists pointed to the power of photography. Statisticians argued that their bourgeois counterparts duped their audience with a snapshot of reality. For soviet scholars, this “induction without analysis” rendered bourgeois science “purely descriptive” and lacking “abstraction.” “Contemporary American economic-statisticians are empiricists,” stated Nemchinov’s 1948 draft memo. They “widely employ formal-mathematical methods” that merely “compile facts, study partial processes and keep to the surface of economic phenomena.” Thus, for example, bourgeois unemployment statistics counted only those actively seeking work, ignoring people working part time and women who had been forced back into the home after the war. This act of “stripping the interests of classes and their struggle,” they argued, served as “the most powerful weapon of concealing capitalist contradictions.” Put simply, it “embellished capitalism.”⁴¹ For many soviet statisticians, the most powerful bourgeois methodology of deception was mathematics because it provided “the appearance of an objective inquiry” while “conceal[ing] social conflicts.” Thus, for example, bourgeois demography portrayed vital statistics on birth and death as random phenomena by examining them “from a biological point of view” that divorced them from their “social-productive relations.” Ultimately, this “biologization” of social processes glossed over contradictions inherent to capitalism.⁴²

Soviet ethnographers also focused on the “photographic” or “purely descriptive” methods of bourgeois ethnography. According to Tolstov, when bourgeois ethnographers described

⁴⁰ RGANI f. 5, op. 17, d. 426, l. 26

⁴¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 14-17.

⁴² ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 222, l. 11.

reality, they presented “a crooked picture” composed of static and unrelated, atomized parts.⁴³ This resulted in an understanding of society that robbed it of its dynamism and condemned it to an eternal present. This “naked description,” Tatiana Zhdanko said in 1950, “is a genuine but disinterested recording of all subsequent ethnographic elements—the dwelling, clothes, nourishment, beliefs and rituals—without scrutiny, [without asking] what is progressive, [and] what is being overcome. [This] is a ‘photographic’ recording of all phenomena in the life of the people. It produces, of course, an objectivist, distorted picture of contemporary life [which is] unscientific and unobjective.”⁴⁴

Indeed, scholars accused of cosmopolitanism were often charged with using a photographic methodology. Thus, Andrei Popov was a cosmopolitan because he aspired “to get away with a clean description” and even advocated that “ethnography is photography,” which his accusers took as a belief in a true apolitical picture of reality. “You are a theoretician,” Popov allegedly told Leonid Potapov, “and I am not a theoretician and will not collect theories.”⁴⁵ The dangerous implication of photographic ethnography, however, was not merely “a crooked picture,” but also one that could serve reactionary political forces. “To whom is it [your work] useful?” Tolstov asked Popov. To which Popov replied, “It’s all the same to me!!” Uncomfortable with the implications of the response, Tolstov retorted, “Maybe future shamans will recreate their devilish services on the basis of the anthropological collection at the Institute of Ethnography!!!”⁴⁶

⁴³ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 286, l. 10-12. ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 167. These assertions echo classical Marxist theoreticians’ view science under capitalism, see for example Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness; Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971). On the campaign against cosmopolitanism in the ethnographic field see: Alymov, “Kosmopolitizm, marrizm i prochie “grekhi”.”

⁴⁴ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 280, l. 47.

⁴⁵ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 167, l. 61-2.

⁴⁶ ARAN f.142, op. 1, d. 169. l. 91.

The struggle with bourgeois positivism

Soviet ethnographers' alternative to bourgeois photographic methodology was to incorporate judgment into their scholarship. In a discussion on the annual expedition work of the Institute of Ethnography in March 1949, Kushner criticized ethnographers for becoming so captivated by their informants' stories that they failed to use proper scrutiny and common sense in their evaluation. Instead, ethnographers inserted their respondents' narratives "into the fabric of the report as [if they were] approved material." For Kushner, accurate generalizations about the study of collective farm life were impossible without "personal observations." He cited Tatiana Zhdanko's "incorrect position" as a telling example. Zhdanko had reported a story, the full content of which we are not privy to, about rich landowners who received prizes for winning horse races "regardless of whether the horses even went to the races or not." The story itself raised Kushner's suspicion. Without hesitation, he assumed the narrative was the reminiscence of an old man, whose words, Kushner contented, should not be accepted "without subjecting them to criticism." In response, someone, probably Zhdanko, called from the audience: "He was not an old man. He was the district committee secretary!" Kushner was not moved as he believed that the respondent's personal qualities had no bearing on his worldview. "Even more so," he responded, "it doesn't depend on his identity (*tem bole, eto ot litsa ne zavisit*)." Kushner then went on to explain his doubts about Zhdanko's story. "I've travelled to the Taiga," he said, grounding his claim in his own experience, "Rich people get most of the prizes. Why? Because it is important for them to show that they are the guardians of tribal traditions."⁴⁷ Kushner's judgment of Zhdanko's informant was rooted in the postwar understanding of past remnants in people's consciousness. When the first post-revolutionary generation of soviet people matured, the materialist notion that relics of bourgeois and feudal societies would gradually vanish was abandoned. Instead, soviet philosophers, ethnographers and party ideologues recognized that

⁴⁷ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 212, l. 54-5

biological age and social position of informants were unreliable gauges of the credibility of their testimony. Scholars' party training had taught them that even a young communist could possess an old man's worldview.⁴⁸ In the context of the *Zhdanovshchina*, ethnographers deemed Zhdanko's recording of the district committee secretary's story "photographic" and therefore an expression of cosmopolitanism.

Sergei Alymov offers a unique opportunity to analyze Kushner's "personal observation" and "source criticism" through the ethnographers' field notes for *The Village of Viriatino*. In them, Alymov found discrepancies between the ethnographers' notes from the expedition and the book's published narration of events. Thus, for example, Alymov compares Sof'ia Rozhdestvennaia's notes during a conversation with S.S. Kalmykov, the first chairman of the farm, with the book to argue that Kushner and his fellow authors "retold" (quotation marks in the original) Kalmykov's reminiscences after subjecting them to "unambiguous judgment." Kalmykov, Alymov writes, told Rozhdestvennaia that during collectivization, the village men refused to join the kolkhoz:

The men were reluctant to go to the meeting [discussing the organization of the kolkhoz] and sent the women (*bab*) [saying], 'We don't want the kolkhoz and we won't go.' The women, in turn, listened to the future chairman's portrayal of the village's collective future and all bellowed: 'We are unwilling.'

The monograph, in contrast, substituted "men" (*muzhchiny*) with "kulaks" to transform the meaning of Kalmykov's words. The monograph reads: "Afraid to speak openly, the kulaks conducted their campaign against the kolkhoz through their wives, sisters and mothers."⁴⁹The

⁴⁸ On the postwar discussion of relics in people's consciousness and behavior see Sergei Alymov, "Pavel Ivanovich Kushner: mezhdru nauko i ideologii," in *Vydaishchiesia otechestvennye etnologi i antropologi XX veka*, ed. D. D. Tumarkin and Valerii Aleksandrovich Tishkov (Moskva: Nauka, 2004).

⁴⁹ Sergei Alymov, "Nesluchainoe selo: sovetskie etnografy i kolkhozniki na puti "ot starogo k novomu" i obratno," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, no. 101 (2010).

monograph's translation of Kalmykov's statement reveals Kushner's source criticism.

Kalmykov's narrative was epistemologically unacceptable to soviet ethnographers because he failed to distinguish between classes in the village and his account implied that the peasants acted against their self-interest, i.e. that landless and poor peasants failed to see the collective farm as their ally. Kushner corrected his statement to fit the party line. His aim was not to capture the voice of the collective farm chairman but rather to adjust it to soviet episteme.

Similarly, during the *Zhdanovshchina* statisticians reprimanded their peers for "lack of judgment." Konstantin Ostrovitianov (1892-1969) and Nemchinov used the work of the statistician G.L. Lempert as an example of cosmopolitanism. Lempert's demographic study of Latvia between 1938 and 1946 showed that the rise in mortality was the continuation of a trend that began in 1938 and not the result of Nazi occupation. "The book is full of libelous statements," said Nemchinov, referring to its political implication that neither the Baltic nation's fascist occupation nor its Red Army liberation had altered its rising mortality rates. Ostrovitianov and Nemchinov accused Lempert of regressive politics because his "narrow empiricism" dissolved the glue political economy provided science to connect atomized frames into a total picture.⁵⁰ Political economy was the discipline that made social science political. As Timofei Kozlov explained, "Those who do not follow a correct theory cannot evaluate facts and data correctly and analyze reality."⁵¹ Much like Zhdanko, Lempert failed to expose his data (derived from the Nazis sources no less) to proper criticism.

Konstantin Ostrovitianov clearly captured the impossibility of social scientific empiricism in a 1954 article on soviet statistics. Ostrovitianov rhetorically asked: "What does the grouping of stars according to luminosity and, let us say, Lenin's grouping of the peasantry

⁵⁰ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 222, l. 11-12 and ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 196, l. 13-14.

⁵¹ Timofei Kozlov, "Statistika - mogushchestvennoe orudie sotsial'nogo poznaniia," *Vestnik statistiki*, no. 4 (1950), 9.

according to their [socio-economic] class characteristics have in common?" "Nothing," he replied, "other than certain technical statistical devices used in the study of these totally different kinds of phenomena." Lenin's grouping of peasants was scientific because it was grounded in "the postulates of historical materialism and political economy." Those who mistakenly regarded statistics as a universal science, Ostrovitianov explained, constructed a statistical science that was "over and above the [socio-economic] classes, coldly indifferent to good and evil, and without any preference at all as between [socio-economic] classes and social structures."⁵² Thus, the social science of soviet society could not remain dispassionate and had to incorporate moral and political judgment into its results.

3. The crisis in statistics

In late January 1948 Nikolai Voznesenskii, a Politburo member and the chairman of the State Planning Commission (*Gosplan*), received a letter from a certain "practical statistician" named Nikolaev. In the letter, Nikolaev used the language of anti-cosmopolitanism to attack statisticians working at academic institutions for failing to answer "the needs of the practice." Utilizing scientific lingua to assure Voznesenskii that he was well versed in the literature, Nikolaev continued, "Experience shows that prolonged and conscientious study of theoretical statistics does not enrich the techniques of practical work."⁵³ Nikolaev, who most likely worked at the Central Statistical Administration, emphasized the primacy of "practical" over "theoretical" statistical work.

We practical people know the works of Nemchinov, Boiarskii, Iastremskii, Kreinin etc.
But these comrades, evidently, need a friendly and thorough talking to... They,
theoretical-statisticians, do not listen to our practical voice. They don't understand, or

⁵² Konstantin V. Ostrovitianov, "K itogam diskussii po statistike," *Vestnik Akademii Nauk SSSR* 24, no. 8 (1954), 6-7.

⁵³ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d.222, l. 23.

don't want to understand that practice should be the springboard of theory and theory should answer the demands of practice.⁵⁴

Nikolaev put forth a serious accusation. In a political system that demanded that science serve the state, accusing academic statisticians of deafness to the needs of statistical workers meant academic statistics was tantamount to bourgeois scholasticism. As Ethan Pollock explains, "Since the late 1920s the Party had been insisting that Soviet science serve the state. In simplest terms this meant that theoretical work was acceptable only as a step toward applying those ideas to some practical problems. Science for science's sake was not good enough; all science had to play a role in socialist construction."⁵⁵ Indeed, there was nothing new about the utilitarian requirement of science in the postwar era. In fact, a similar accusation voiced in 1926 resulted in sweeping reforms of the Central Statistical Administration.⁵⁶

Yet Nikolaev's letter was suffused in the language of the campaign against cosmopolitanism. He explained the failures of "theoretical" statisticians was rooted in their kowtowing to bourgeois statistics rather than studying the "Russian statistical experience" of Tsarist-era zemstvo statisticians. Six months before Lysenko gave his "two worlds – two ideologies" speech at the Lenin All-Union Agricultural Academy, Nikolaev similarly stipulated two opposing and antagonistic trends in statistics: mathematical bourgeois statistics versus the "revolutionary practice" of Lenin and Stalin. "Theoretical" statisticians, Nikolaev charged, "study the mathematical methods of foreign statisticians," and thus did not follow Lenin and Stalin, who analyzed social phenomena without employing "esoteric" (*zaumnyi*) mathematical formulas. Nikolaev even implied that theoretical statisticians purposefully neglected their duties

⁵⁴ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 222, l. 24-5.

⁵⁵ Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, 59.

⁵⁶ Vsevolod Holubnychy, "Organization of Statistical Observation in the U.S.S.R.," *The American Statistician* 12, no. 3 (1958), 15; Alen Blium and Martina Mespule, *Biurokraticheskaiia anarkhiia: statistika i vlast' pri Staline* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006).

to the soviet state by relying on complex mathematical formulas. "Everyone knows that practical statistical work requires only elementary knowledge of mathematics," Nikolaev argued, "People who practice statistics for a long time forget mathematics because it is unnecessary for their daily practical work."⁵⁷

Indeed, if we ignore his divisive language, Nikolaev was describing the effects of Stalin's revolution on the field of statistical economics. When the Stalinist state embraced teleological planning, it attacked the "arithmetical-statistical deviation" in statistics and tagged mathematical economics as "the most reactionary brand of bourgeois economics." Thus, much like Nikolaev described, state statistical practice relinquished its theoretical aspirations and acquired instead the characteristics of the "controller." State or "practical" statisticians conducted audits of enterprises by identifying negligence in the economical use of materials, sabotage, corruption and the lack of labor discipline. Their education mostly consisted of applied statistics and, as Nikolaev noted, many of them forgot what little mathematics they had learned.⁵⁸ In contrast, for reasons discussed later in this chapter, academic statisticians continued practicing a mathematical form entirely divorced from state statistical practice. Thus, while Nikolaev's letter reflected the tension between academic and applied scholars that was prevalent during the campaign against cosmopolitanism, it also pointed to the historically-rooted gap between "practice" and "theory."⁵⁹

Nikolaev's letter initiated the campaign against cosmopolitanism in statistics. Voznesenskii forwarded the letter to the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences,

⁵⁷ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1d. 222, l. 23-24.

⁵⁸ Pekka Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge Soviet paperbacks (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 28-29; Johanna Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 37.

⁵⁹ Peter Kneen, "Physics, Genetics and the Zhdanovshchina," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 7 (1998).

which housed many of the “theoretical statisticians,” and demanded a response. On 10 March 1948 the Institute’s director Konstantin Ostrovitianov convened twenty leading economists and statisticians to discuss a draft memo on “the defects in theoretical statistics and measures to eliminate them.” He informed the participants that Gosplan had identified a gap between theoretical statistics and Soviet statistical practice and asked the Institute of Economics and the Central Statistical Administration (*TsSU*) to explain the disparity and suggest ways to eradicate it. Ostrovitianov gave Vasilii Nemchinov ten days to assemble the responses of theoretical statisticians and economists and draft the Institute’s final opinion to Gosplan.⁶⁰

Academic statisticians at the Institute of Economics agreed with the thrust of Nikolaev’s letter: theoretical statistics was entirely divorced from what was practiced in state bureaus. The result was twofold. On the one hand, as Nemchinov explained, “Always and everywhere science springs out of living, productive or practical demands,” and academic production deteriorated without a connection to state statistical practice.⁶¹ On the other hand, both academic and state statisticians readily admitted the inadequacies of state statistical practice. The Soviet state, stressed Konstantin Ostrovitianov, “collects a great quantity of data . . . Yet a very small quantity is being utilized in practice because of weak theoretical formulation of sampling and data processing.”⁶² Innokentii Pisarev (1894-1966), the deputy director of the Central Statistical Administration, concurred that “many, or better said very many” statisticians showed “complete

⁶⁰ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 26

⁶¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 31

⁶² ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 222, l. 15 A year later, in August 1949, the Council of Ministers reestablished the Central Statistical Administration as an independent organ from Gosplan, citing the “poverty of analysis” (*bednost’ analiza*) as the cause for a vast reorganization of state statistical institutions. The Council’s diagnosis was terse: “State statistics did not meet the requirements of the administration and planning.” The Institute of Economics echoed this with the charge that “a considerable portion of collected statistical material” was not being “properly processed or analyzed,” and was therefore useless to the government. See A.I. Ezhov, “Gosudarstvennaia statistika, ee razvitie i organizatsiia,” in *Istoriia sovetskoi gosudarstvennoi statistiki* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe statisticheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1960), 64-65; “Ot Redaktsii,” *vestnik Statistiki*, no. 1 (1949), 241-247.

paralysis and ineptitude” when it came to analyzing statistical materials. “Statistics is not merely a science, in a sense it is also an art [that] demands a specialized handicraft,” Pisarev preached. Nemchinov viewed the problem as structural because the TsSU’s “theoretical carelessness” was “not coincidental.” Adding to Pisarev’s diagnosis, Nemchinov said that “wide circles of scientific economic workers” often admitted “complete statistical illiteracy.” Moreover, the administration’s directors also “reduce[d] statistical computation to simple recording and arithmetic.” As a result many economists expressed “disdain for statistics and are not competent to work with factual materials.”⁶³

Statisticians readily recognized that the paucity of useful information was a direct consequence of the breach between statistical theory and the practical work. Nemchinov argued that the “clutter of statistical rubbish” and “number games” that the Central Statistical Administration had been producing was the result of “abandonment of any scientific-research work.” To this effect, he referenced Lenin’s dictum that central and provincial statistical bureaus employ at least ten percent of their staff in “the comprehensive study of academic issues.” Instead, “ten out of ten [statistical workers] are busy with operational work (*operativnoi*)” which infected statistics with “narrow practicism,” (*uzkii praktitsizm*). To bridge the gap between theory and practice, Nemchinov called on the TsSU to rise above narrow practicism and devote more resources to experiments and theory.⁶⁴

Despite Nemchinov’s enjoinders, even academicians were skeptical that all would be well if only the TsSU paid more attention to theory. After all, statistical practice had abandoned theory so long ago that it was unclear whether academic statisticians were even relevant. In fact, two months after the statistical discussion began, in May 1948, Ostrovitianov was still uncertain,

⁶³ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 11-12.

⁶⁴ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 10.

asking, “How should [state] statisticians use our methods?”⁶⁵ He feared that Voznesenskii would force academic statisticians to prove their worth by ordering them to “take one hundred industrial enterprises, survey them, take a tally, and then survey a few hundred collective farms and give us your material.” Ostrovitianov was unsure how theoretical statisticians would go about conducting the surveys and, when the surveys were completed, what they would do with the data. That is to say, how would they produce information better than the “data the TsSU acquired in official ways?”⁶⁶

Theoretical statisticians’ inability to access the TsSU’s methodology and data for nearly two decades was yet another factor in the theory-practice gap.⁶⁷ Without this material, theoretical statisticians could not formulate surveys or structure the data. As Nemchinov put it during a 1948 discussion, the TsSU was run by “a small circle of administrators (*apparatnye rabotniki*) [who treated TsSU work] as their patrimony (*dostoianie*).”⁶⁸ TsSU secrecy persisted in spite of its detriment to theoretical statistics. Eight years later, Nemchinov still complained about the “completely abnormal situation” induced by the inaccessibility of “the state reports for scientific generalization and economic analysis.” As a result, the training of new statisticians was “completely divorced from our practical experience.” But the impact of secrecy extended beyond this, and threatened to undermine Soviet economics as a whole. “Our economic science cannot successfully develop without numbers and facts,” Nemchinov explained to Khrushchev in 1956, “Workers of the economic science cannot correctly organize scientific information for directive organs.”⁶⁹ Anastas Mikoyan reaffirmed Nemchinov’s complaints later that year at the Twentieth

⁶⁵ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 196, l. 99

⁶⁶ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 196, l. 101

⁶⁷ For a similar complaint in the discussion of the political economic textbook, see Pollock, Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars, 194.

⁶⁸ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 9-10

⁶⁹ RGANI f. 5, op. 35, d. 24, l. 1-4

Party Congress. “No scientific economic work is possible without painstaking analysis of all the statistical data [...] without systematizing and generalizing them.” Mikoyan continued reiterating Nemchinov: the problem lay in TsSU’s patrimonialism. “Unfortunately, Comrade Starovskii [head of the TsSU] has these statistical data locked up in the Central Statistical Administration. Economists are still deprived of the opportunity of analyzing them, and are compelled to recite and to reiterate old formulas, old data. This is one reason why we do not see any creative work from our economists.”⁷⁰

The Central Statistical Administration’s culture of secrecy was not without its ironies. The CIA, for example, possessed more information on the Soviet economy than its own economists. In her memoir, Zaslavskaia recalled the impact of “the conditions under which research was conducted” at the Institute of Economics. Every year the Institute ordered annual reports on several hundred collective farms from the TsSU. The reports, which she later discovered only revealed the amount of cultivated land and procurement data, “were kept secret from us.” “Even gross figures on collection and crop yields were secret,” she writes. “And should I even mention the secrecy of kolkhoz income, payment for labor, and the productivity of private plots?”⁷¹ To be sure, Zaslavskaia continues:

Our pseudo-secrecy interfered with our work more than it did with the Americans’. They knew more about our economy than we did. In the mid-1950s, the CIA carried out extensive research of our economy and published it in dozens of volumes. Our secret service agents acquired this work, translated it to Russian and deposited it in the secret

⁷⁰ Cited from Pravda 18 February 1956 in Harry Schwartz, “The Renaissance of Soviet Statistics,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 40, no. 2 (1958), 122. Starovskii promptly published a self criticism in which he called the culture of secrecy “errors committed during the period of the cult of personality.” See Michael Kaser, “The Publication of Soviet Statistics,” in *Soviet Economic Statistics*, ed. Vladimir Treml and John Hardt (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1972), 51.

⁷¹ Tatiana I. Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 3: *Moia zhizn': Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 2007), 374.

department of our institute. When I [finally] read the volumes, I was struck how close the American calculations were to the real classified numbers. In particular, they identified the average wage per workday in the USSR, which was off by only a few kopeks. Moreover, the Americans made no secret of how they calculated this number. They simply collected the data from [local] newspapers in agricultural districts, where the average wage was not secret.⁷²

“Why is this happening at this moment?”

Acknowledging the failure of statisticians to productively serve the state turned the March 1948 discussion into a forum of collective soul searching. The participants, many of whom had practiced statistics before the revolution, were proud of the achievements of Imperial Russian statistics and committed to the great promise of its soviet successor. They shared Lenin’s conviction that “Socialism is first of all accounting” and that the science was an essential tool for socialist construction.⁷³ Thus, the current state of statistics disturbed many of them. Indicative of this anxiety was Nemchinov rhetorical question, “Why is this happening at this moment?”⁷⁴ It echoed the devastated vibe in the room.

Isaak Sosenskii responded to Nemchinov in a personal tone. Nemchinov’s outline of the current state of Soviet statistics “brought back long since repressed feelings.” “I began my path in statistics under the guidance of Mariia Natanovna,” Sosenskii said, referring to the renowned statistician Mariia Smit-Fal’kner, “and when I left statistics, I never really left it behind. A person who was part of tsarist statistics can never truly leave it.”⁷⁵ Sosenskii’s pride in tsarist

⁷² Ibid., 372.

⁷³ Soviet statisticians were paraphrasing Lenin’s repeated statement, which originated in December 1917 in Vladimir Il’ich Lenin, “How to Organize Competition?,” in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), vol. 26, 404-415.

⁷⁴ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 32

⁷⁵ Though I did not find a record suggesting what had made Sosenskii leave both statistics and his workplace in the late 1940s, we know that many statisticians abandoned the profession in the early

statistical practice only stressed his shame for the current situation. “What did we have in 1927-8?” he asked and began rattling off a list of institutions: a sector of scientific methodology in the Communist Academy, two statistical societies, the Institute of Experimental Statistics in the Central Statistical Administration, and two professional journals. “What do we have now?” he continued, “I don’t know.” Sosenskii noted with a measure of irony, “In the House of Science there are eleven departments with a [division for statistics] alongside that of athletic and motion pictures. Clearly, this statistical division is at best a substitute.” To emphasize his point, he compared Soviet statistical institutions with those of England, France and the United States, which all had statistical societies and journals. “Why in our country, where socialism is [first and foremost] accounting, does no one care that there isn’t a single society or a journal?” Sosenskii’s disappointment hit a nerve, as someone in the audience interjected that “Lenin’s heritage” should have compelled the Soviet Union to give more credence to statistics.⁷⁶

Yet Sosenskii did not explain the decline of statistics since the late 1920s. Why did a science that Lenin considered integral to socialism fall to such a nadir? Postwar academic statisticians often blamed the decline on a group of statisticians who “monopolized” statistics and dictated an “anti-scientific theory.” This “pernicious theory,” which prevailed in the 1930s, predicted the extinction of statistics under socialism. Advocates of the “withering away of statistics” viewed it as “a science of uncontrolled and haphazard phenomena” employing the

1930s to continue their work at other scientific institutions, where they often pursued statistics under another name. Kotz gives several examples, among them Slutsky, one of the forefathers of econometrics, who became an astronomer, and several others who became meteorologists. Samuel Kotz, “Statistics in the U.S.S.R.,” *Survey: A Journal of Soviet and East European Studies* 57(1965), 135. On Maria Smit-Fal’kner’s biography see chapter 1, and V.P. Kornev, *Vidnye deiateli otechestvennoi statistiki: 1686-1990: biograficheskii slovar’* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1993), 146-147.

⁷⁶ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 194, l. 1-2. Nemchinov argued that the absence of a professional journal held implications for statistical science in general, stating, “Our scientific-research cadres work in isolation from each other.” Elsewhere he elaborated: “To this day we do not have [a statistical journal], even though in the past we had one. [I am speaking] particularly of the journal of the Society of Marxist Statisticians, *Problemy Statistiki*.” In the absence of a journal, “young cadres don’t grow, because there is nowhere to read about statistics.” See ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 22, 32

Law of Large Numbers and the theory of probability to determine potential future trajectories and tame chance. The “pernicious theory” assumed that there would be no random phenomena in a fully planned economy, and simple accounting would substitute for statistics.⁷⁷ “Statistics is not needed where there is no volatility,” Valerian Osinskii, the deputy chair of Gosplan, argued in 1932.⁷⁸ Indeed, following this theory, the Central Statistical Administration was abolished in 1930 to be replaced a year later by a Central Administration of Economic Accounting, which was subordinated to the Gosplan (*Tsentral'noe Upravlenie Narodno-Khoziaistvennogo Ucheta pri Gosplane SSSR*). This new body operated under the assumption that in a planned economy, the total coverage of statistical data rendered superfluous mathematical and statistical sampling, estimation and variance analysis. As Vsevolod Holubnychy puts it, statisticians believed that “in an organized society and planned economy it was only necessary to add up the totals and to put them into tables and diagrams.”⁷⁹ The result, Ostrovitianov explained to the presidium of the Academy of Sciences in 1954, was that state statistics abstained from complex statistical analysis, avoided predictions and employed only “elementary methods.” At the same time, theoretical statistics was “confined to abstract methodological themes unrelated to the practical realities of building a socialist society.”⁸⁰ The widening gap between theoretical and practical statistics brought the science to a standstill. As long as state statistics eschewed the input of

⁷⁷ Echoes of the theory that “we have a planned economy and therefore there is nothing accidental for us to study” were still heard in the early postwar years. ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 53.

⁷⁸ B. G. Ploshko and I. I. Eliseeva, *Istoriia statistiki* (Moscow: Financy i statistika, 1990), 222-223.

⁷⁹ Holubnychy, “Organization of Statistical Observation in the U.S.S.R.,” 35-37. See also Blum and Mespule, *Biurokraticheskaia anarkhiia: statistika i vlast' pri Staline*, 160-164; Ploshko and Eliseeva, *Istoriia statistiki*, 222-223; F.D. Livshits, “Zakon bol'shikh (srednikh) chisel v obshchestvennykh iavleniiakh,” *Uchenye zapiski po statistike* 1(1955), 166.

⁸⁰ Ostrovitianov, “K itogam diskussii po statistike,” 4. For other reference to the theory see: RGANI f. 5, op. 17, d. 423, l. 23 - A letter of Innokentii Pisarev to Khrushchev, December 19, 1953 on the need to reform statistical science and ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 4-5.

theoretical statisticians and theoretical statisticians were ignorant of what the state required, the science of statistics was incapable of advancing forward.

Nemchinov, however, offered the most provocative answer to his own question, “Why is this happening at this moment?” “It is impossible,” he said, “to succeed in scientific work without organizing creative cadres and listening [to their voice.] But this voice died off in 1937.”⁸¹ Nemchinov, who had begun his career as a zemstvo statistician in 1915 and was a prominent member of the Agrarian Marxist School, located the source of the problem with the arrest and execution of many statisticians during the Great Terror. Like many of the scientists covered in the first chapter, Nemchinov’s brave reference to 1937 corresponds with his social ethos.⁸²

4. “Becoming a True Soviet Science”

Thus, ethnographers and statisticians entered the postwar period in a similar position. Both sciences were in a state of crisis for failing to serve socialist construction. Yet the cause for the failure was very different. While ethnography had withdrawn from engaging with the socialist present and applied its methodology to less relevant and less dangerous subjects, statistics had transformed itself into an utterly utopian science incapable of contributing to the state’s knowledge of the present. As chapter four reveals, already at the February Plenum of the Central Committee in 1947, soviet leadership criticized statisticians for not providing the necessary knowledge to govern. Interestingly, Stalin made a similar accusation to the authors of the political economy textbook in 1941. The authors’ draft assumed socialism had been achieved and perfected, an idea that Stalin rebuffed. According to Ethan Pollock, Stalin charged them for

⁸¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d.192, l. 32.

⁸² Later in 1948 Nemchinov forcefully disrupted the All-Union Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences’ session that indorsed Trofim Lysenko. Nemchinov defended the “chromosome theory of heredity” as “one of the greatest discoveries in biology.” See L.P. Balakina, “Etos nauki: Akademik V.S. Nemchinov Zashchishchaet genetiku,” *Vestnik Iuzhno-Ural'skogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Seriiia Sotsial'no-gumanitarnye nauki*, 14, no. 8 (2010); Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, 64-66.

failing to provide verisimilitude. “The textbook,” Stalin told the authors at a meeting, “fails to show that people do not work because Marxists are in power or because the economy is planned, but because they have an interest in working.” To be sure, Stalin told the economists that “we have yet to get socialism in the flesh and blood, and we still need to put socialism right.”⁸³ The following section examines how ethnography and statistics dealt with this epistemological crisis. Their respective answers lay in socialist realism. Following Evgeny Dobrenko, I argue that socialist realism functioned as a methodological template for scientific observation and its incorporation into ethnography and statistics transformed them into “institution[s] for the production of socialism.”⁸⁴

Ethnographers debate socialism

As mentioned above, already in 1946 the Institute of Ethnography responded to the campaign against cosmopolitanism by focusing future ethnographic work on socialist contemporaneity.⁸⁵ Yet, though it was clear that researching contemporaneity would allow ethnographers to better answer the state’s needs, there was a heated debate about what comprised the socialist present. As the deputy director of the Institute Potekhin said at a party meeting in 1947, “We do not even have a clue how to portray the soviet period.”⁸⁶ The study of contemporaneity demanded a fresh perspective on daily life. In chapter three, I will discuss the ethnographic socialist realist methodology in detail, particularly as it applied to choosing a research object. For now, I want to elaborate on the extent to which socialist realist methodology originated in the criticism of bourgeois methodology and gave birth to “a truly soviet ethnographic science.”

⁸³ Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, 172-173.

⁸⁴ Evgeny A. Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xii.

⁸⁵ See also Alymov, “Kosmopolitizm, marrizm i prochie “grekhi”.”

⁸⁶ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 1, l. 141-2.

By January 1949, the leadership of the Institute of Ethnography had managed to formulate an approach to the study of soviet contemporaneity. As the Institute's director Tolstov plainly explained, studying contemporaneity meant "spotting the new and leading" (*uvidet' novoe, vedushchee*).⁸⁷ As chapter three will explore, ethnographers, like other soviet social scientists, saw the present as consisting of remnants of the past and seeds of the future. In and of itself, the present was nothing but a brief moment on the continuous timeline from the past into the future. While bourgeois ethnographers documented the static reality of the present, soviet ethnographers studied the grand dialectical development across time. In line with this, Tolstov's speech identified the new ethnographic methodology as a search for the seeds of a communist future in the present.

The problem, however, was that ethnographers had been trained to observe everyday life and identify the continuity of past traditions in the present. Discovering future elements in the present reality required retraining. As the folklorist Chicherov apologetically recognized, "Our generation was taught the tradition of bourgeois and liberal-bourgeois sciences in the universities during the [19]20s and we uncritically preserve many features of this tradition to this day."⁸⁸ Ethnographers working on socialist contemporaneity could not describe the present as a compilation of persisting ancient traditions. Tatiana Zhdanko explained that the influence of "old ethnographic schools" brought a "significant number of ethnographers" to be "fixated on surviving institutions and curiosities."

[These institutions] have been preserved to a greater or lesser extent in lives and beliefs of the peoples they studied. The great historical development of these people, their movement in huge steps from the old backwardness, poverty and lack of culture to the

⁸⁷ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 2, l. 126.

⁸⁸ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 167, l. 88.

new socialist cultural life [...] has remained out of sight, out of interest and outside of the practical research of ethnographers.⁸⁹

Zhdanko thus tagged soviet ethnographies of contemporary life as “objectivist ethnographic descriptions” because they “primarily and above all illuminate the past of these people and the diverse remnants of early forms of social development preserved in their life.”⁹⁰ This “created a deliberately distorted picture of contemporary life and does not shed light on the true specificity of the national *byt* of works and collective farmers.”⁹¹

Thus, studying contemporaneity required a socialist methodology that focused on the progressive, but past training was so ingrained in soviet ethnographers that some simply wrote about the present in past tense. In a sense, grammar itself precluded the means to speak about a present-future. “Take for example Comrade Panek, an experienced ethnographer,” lamented Kushner at a meeting of the Institute’s scientific council in 1948, “Whatever she sees she describes in past tense.”⁹²

To be sure, focusing on the progressive did not mean ignoring remnants of the past. After all, analyzing and reporting shortcomings made soviet social scientists useful to state construction. As Kushner explained in 1949, the “soviet scholar has to seriously analyze all defects and help to promptly overcome them.” He reminded his fellow ethnographers that

⁸⁹ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 280, l. 31-2.

⁹⁰ On the distinction between objectivity and objectivism in the study of history see: Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia : the Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1956-1974* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 61. “Objectivity is not objectivism. A truthful, objective depiction of events is a party depiction of events.” Alexei B. Kojevnikov, “Games of Stalinist Democracy, Ideological discussions in Soviet Sciences, 1947-1952,” in *Stalinism: New Directions (Rewriting Histories)*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 147.

⁹¹ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 280, l. 31-3, Similarly, Kushner lamented that ethnographers often continued seeking “the magic, religious meaning of everyday objects, of the details of clothes.” TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 1, l. 106

⁹² ARAN f.142, op.1, d. 167, l.75

“Comrade Stalin” had said that “scholars should be 100 percent truthful.”⁹³ The issue, however, was one of interpretation. When soviet ethnographers saw phenomena that reminded them of the past, they had to carefully consider which of those cultural manifestations were “contemporary and which represent remnants of the past.” A 1951 program for the ethnographic study of collective farmers in the central Volga region called this methodology “critical observation.”⁹⁴ Already in 1948 Kushner offered an example of collective farm harvest celebrations:

It is a celebration of the harvest --- this is contemporaneity. It is very good that the collective farm population celebrates the completion of the harvest. Is there anything magical in this celebration? Of course not. The contemporary holiday has a completely different content. If we struggle against various magical ceremonies, then we should not fight this holiday. On the contrary, we fully support a collective farm celebration of large harvests. Some ethnographers do not notice the new essence of this celebration and begin seeking its mythical or magical origin. They go no further. This is what they engage in. Then this ethnographer feels uncomfortable saying that magical forms are preserved in the present, so he writes it all in past tense. ⁹⁵

Grounding ethnographic methodology in socialist realism required teaching ethnographers to ask a different set of questions. As Potapov put it in 1949, “It is important not only to find the new, because strictly speaking there is nothing to fumble about, it lies openly, it is important to approach the new in a more correct and rational manner.” This required an interdisciplinary approach: “In order to give a correct comprehensive account of culture and

⁹³ TsAOPIM f. 7349, op. 1, d. 2, l. 191

⁹⁴ N. I. Vorob'ev, "Programma dlia sbora materialov po izucheniiu sovremennogo byta kol'khoznoi derevni i istorii ego formirovaniia u narodnostei Srednego Povolzh'ia," *Sovetskaia Etnografiia*, no. 4 (1951), 180-183.

⁹⁵ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 167, l. 74

everyday life of a people in its historical development,” Potapov said, “we use a variety of sources – archaeological, folklore, linguistic, anthropological, historical and others.”⁹⁶ Interestingly, ethnographers tended to revert to their “bourgeois training” when focusing solely on cultural phenomena. But when they considered culture in an economic and historical perspective, they produced ethnographic socialist realism. As Kushner explained, “The collective farm should be studied in conjunction with its particular environment,” defining the “environment” as “soviet power,” “the assistance of the socialist city” and industry. Ethnographers, he argued, should study the collective farm as the product of these three progressive powers, which joined forces to “liquidate the gap between city and village.”⁹⁷

Statisticians debate realism

In March 1949 at a scientific council meeting at the Institute of Economics devoted to the struggle against cosmopolitanism, the economist Ivan Kantyshev accused Nemchinov of embracing “decadent bourgeois economic” theories. In order to prove his accusation Kantyshev deconstructed Nemchinov’s article in *Izvestiia Otdeleniia Ekonomiki i prava Akademii Nauk SSSR* in 1947. There, according to Kantyshev, Nemchinov propagated a solution to “the problem of the three maxima.” Seeking to “maximize the satisfaction of the population's needs,” Nemchinov called for a reconfiguration of the distribution of agricultural crops and livestock.⁹⁸ Since the eighteenth century, Russian geographers studied the relations between natural conditions and economic activities to delineate the Russian empire into economic regions according to climate conditions, the quality of the land, and the labor force. After collectivization, soviet economists and agricultural specialists argued that a rational delineation of the Soviet Union into specialized agricultural regions would allow for better use of labor and

⁹⁶ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 212, l. 30.

⁹⁷ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 212, l. 40.

⁹⁸ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 331, l. 77-8.

natural conditions, while improving economic organization.⁹⁹ The state pursued this specializing approach to planning until the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934, when the emphasis shifted toward agricultural diversification. There Stalin declared that “every region will have to develop its own agricultural base so as to have its own supply of vegetables, potatoes, butter and milk and, to some extent, grain and meat, if it does not want to get into difficulties.”¹⁰⁰ Nemchinov’s 1947 article, therefore, was a suggestion to return to specialized planning which considered natural conditions in order to maximize the utilization of the land and labor.

Kantyshev naturally accused Nemchinov of contradicting Stalin’s words at the Seventeenth Party Congress. But the core of his accusation was that Nemchinov’s article “smelled of proprietary theories of marginal utility, declining productivity costs, and falling soil fertility: [in short] decadent bourgeois economics.” Kantyshev pointed out that in accounting for natural conditions, Nemchinov in effect questioned the role of planning in soviet society and assumed external constraints on the plan. “Nemchinov began [his article] with the leading role of the state, then at the end he switched fully to a position [accounting for] a spontaneous agricultural base and structural forces.”¹⁰¹ Kantyshev’s criticism echoed the discourse of the late 1920s, when Marxist statisticians rejected probability and the Law of Large Numbers, arguing that they would not apply to a planned economy. It was then that soviet planners reconfigured their methodology to capture the “will of the collective” and “state power” as the main “factor in the economy.”¹⁰² Thus, Nemchinov was accused of focusing on a reality that was external to the

⁹⁹ Douglas W. A. Jackson, "The Problem of Soviet Agricultural Regionalization," *Slavic Review* 20, no. 4 (1961), 659.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 667. Jackson suggests that the 1934 turn to diversification in agriculture was the result of the lack of both fertilizer and an appropriate crop rotation system, without which “intensification could only provoke disaster.”

¹⁰¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 331, l. 78, 80.

¹⁰² E. H. Carr and R. W. Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926-1929*, vol. 1, part 2 (New York: Macmillian Company, 1969), 791-792.

plan and analyzing it to understand its constraining effects on the plan. Pursuing this methodology, Nemchinov followed generic planners of the 1920s who assumed the state would incorporate an external reality into the plan. The adoption of the first five-year plan symbolized the victory of teleological over genetic planners. Teleological planners, like Kantyshev, rejected the ontology of structural forces and argued instead that the plan eliminated all external constraints.¹⁰³

The crux of the discussions in statistics was the ontological question concerning which statistical methodology best depicted socialist society. Did chance still operate under socialism? Were there constraints to the plan? How could mathematics enumerate human will and state power? Vasilii Nemchinov readily acknowledged that “statistical science emerged from the need to study bourgeois society. Most of the provisions of statistical science were tailor-made to fit spontaneous random processes which are built into the bourgeois economy.”¹⁰⁴ Soviet statisticians agreed that planning contradicted chance by dictating the course of events. However, as I explore in chapter four, it was already apparent at the February Plenum of 1947 that statistical science was failing to serve the soviet state because without probability it could neither predict nor analyze reality. The campaign against cosmopolitanism forced statisticians once again to attempt to separate the wheat from the chaff, accepting some bourgeois methods and rejecting others.

Most of the discussion revolved around whether and to what extent statisticians should re-incorporate mathematical methodology and probability into their practice. The problem, as Pavel Maslov demonstrated, was that in the absence of statistical tools, the science became nothing more than a simple numerical description. As an example, Maslov pointed to a “highly

¹⁰³ Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social, Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 55-61.

¹⁰⁴ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 213, l. 42.

typical report” examining passenger traffic by counting transportation tickets. Cynically, Maslov stated, “Based on passengers’ tickets we should have a complete picture and a plan for passenger traffic in 1960.” Instead, he said, we get “tickets, passengers’ tickets, and nothing more.”¹⁰⁵ Maslov depicted the report as indicative of reducing statistics to pure accounting. Rather than stipulate the number of future passengers and assist state planning, this statistician focused on depicting a frozen and irrelevant past. At the same time, Maslov claimed mathematical applications often made statistical study “withdraw from living reality and social problems to the field of pure mathematics and abstract schemes.” To this, he offered Aron Boiarskii’s article on illiteracy rates in 1928. Maslov dwelled at length on the different formulas and integrals Boiarskii had utilized and then summarized its overall quality. “Here is a big article,” he said, but “there are no conclusions. I ask, is this work with its integral equations needed in order to define literacy rates in the USSR in 1928? Of course, this work is meaningless for this purpose. This is an example of scholasticism.”¹⁰⁶

Soviet theoreticians questioned math’s relevance to soviet social statistics. Thus, as Slava Gerovitch writes, the philosopher Leonid Maistov “condemned the attempt to apply probability theory to sociology as a dangerous effort to substitute probabilistic laws for the ‘real regularities’ of social development.”¹⁰⁷ The participating statisticians agreed that the theory of probability had “great application” in the natural sciences. Maria Smit-Fal’kner reminded the audience that Laplace had applied the theory of probability to the artillery of the French Revolutionary army and it “played a large role” in their victories. She added that she had “also heard that in the development of the problem of atomic energy, they also used the theory of probability.” Yet she

¹⁰⁵ ARAN f. 1877, op.1, d. 195, l. 27.

¹⁰⁶ ARAN f. 1877, op.1, d. 195, l. 19-21.

¹⁰⁷ Slava Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 36.

denied its relevance to society, arguing, “the attempt to apply this method to social life, to build on it general laws of social life, is a stretch and a convenient tool for all kinds of extrapolation of the past into the present and future.”¹⁰⁸ The discussion’s participants claimed there was a fundamental difference between nature and society, and that while probability predicted natural phenomena well, it failed to capture soviet social reality.¹⁰⁹ Thus, Evgenii Varga, perhaps the most renowned socialist economist of his time, asserted “a principled difference between the role of mathematics in physics and chemistry and the role of mathematics in the economic science.” In the physical sciences, mathematic formulas captured reality: chemists and physicists translated their experiments into mathematical language and manipulated the formulas to add to their understanding. “It doesn’t work that way in economics,” Varga contended. Bourgeois economists used mathematical formulas but they did not shed a deeper understanding of social relations.¹¹⁰

Mathematical and probabilistic methods failed to capture the socialist realist spirit. Indeed, most academic statisticians had abandoned the utopian view that the planned economy had eliminated random phenomena. Instead, they argued that probability distorted the reality because it turned statistical research away from soviet power and Party policy and toward haphazard phenomena. Moreover, utilizing probabilistic methods, economists and statisticians extrapolated from the past phenomena into the future, thereby erasing human will and revolutionary ardor. “Was it a ‘random event’ there were Stakhanovite records in 1935?” Maslov rhetorically asked, adding, “When we speak of social relations we cannot speak of chaotic

¹⁰⁸ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 55-6.

¹⁰⁹ Lysenko made a remarkably similar argument in 1940, according to which mathematical formulas had no bearing on biological science. See Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak* 59-60.

¹¹⁰ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 66. On Eugen (Jeno) Varga’s life (1879-1964) and significance See: Thomas F. Remington, “Varga and the Foundation of Soviet Planning,” *Soviet Studies*, 34, no. 4 (1982); Mommen, *Stalin's economist*.

processes like in biology, physics or astronomy.”¹¹¹ Indeed, party policy and the planned economy made extrapolation of past into the future impossible. The disciplined determination of one Aleksei Stakhanov inspired many to perform unimaginable feats that certainly could not have been predicted if scholars had limited their analysis to the past.¹¹² Mikhail Ryklin calls this phenomenon a “struggle against agents of reason.”¹¹³

Statisticians attempted to balance the futuristic and the applied elements of their science. As the deputy director of the Central Statistical Administration Pisarev put it, on the one hand, “relegating mathematics to the forest and to a bowl of mathematical formulas serves as a means of escape from life and life’s demands.” On the other, he cautioned, “not all mathematics should be seen as a seed or an expression of formalism.”¹¹⁴ Just as dangerous, he warned, was “The nihilist theory that reduces statistics to simple accounting. We remember the fate of the 1937 census. This census was abortive because the Central Statistical Administration of that time demoralized statistical cadres and violated the basic foundation of statistical science and theory [by predicting] the withering away of statistics under socialism.”¹¹⁵ Soviet statistics could not be reduced to simple accounting nor could it completely rely on mathematical methodology. The debate was so heated that the director of the Institute of Economics Ostrovitianov wrote: “the fact that it took such a long time for the debated questions in statistics

¹¹¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 82. The same argument was made in the 1930s. see Blum and Mespule, *Biurokraticheskaia anarkhiia: statistika i vlast' pri Staline*, 160-164.

¹¹² There were many similarities between the issues at stake in social statistics and in the economic discussion. See Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, 188-189.

¹¹³ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 176.

¹¹⁴ On the meaning of “formalism” see Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak* 33-42.

¹¹⁵ ARAN f. 1877, op.1, d. 195, l. 15. On the 1937 census see: Catherine Merridale, “The 1937 Census and the Limits of Stalinist Rule,” *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 1 (1996).

to be resolved led to a deepening and sharpening of the controversy, to the formation of cliques among statistical workers.”¹¹⁶

In March 1954, the Academy of Sciences, the Central Statistical Administration and the Ministry of Higher Education held a final conference to resolve the controversy. Seven hundred and sixty people attended: many were practicing statisticians and statistical scholars, but also in attendance were economists, mathematicians, doctors and engineers.¹¹⁷ Soviet statistics had been in limbo for too long. Statisticians and economists forcefully attested that statistics could not serve the soviet state without mathematical and probabilistic methods. Boiarskii of the Economic-Statistical Institute charged, “Some comrades would be better off understanding the objectivity of probability instead of bullying [others] as if it was bourgeois.” He explained that “if statistics is only about how much output is necessary in order to re-sow the seeds - then probability is unnecessary.” But statistics, he said, could increase productivity by selecting a certain type of higher yielding seed. He specifically directed his attack at utopian statisticians who advocated searching for “a type [of seeds] that will have no losses,” an idea he considered “demagogical.” In effect, Boiarskii argued that statisticians, economists and agronomists alike should focus on improving present reality and not fantasize about an ideal future pretending it was real.¹¹⁸

Others argued that planned economy could not eliminate social variability. A certain Iastremskii ascertained that the planning of a mass phenomenon transforms a “planned target, which still exists only as a possibility” into a reality. “In the transition from possibility to actuality,” he said, “the factual levels” of production were not identical to the plan, but rather

¹¹⁶ Ostrovitianov, “K itogam diskussii po statistike,” 9.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁸ “O roli zakona bol'shikh chisel v statistike: Iz vystuplenii na Nauchnom soveshchanii po voprosam statistiki, Mart 1954g.,” *Uchenye Zapiski po Statistike* 1(1955), 155-156.

reflected “a range of options that deviate from the average quantities and obeyed the law of averages and the Law of Large Numbers.” He implied that if statisticians wanted to limit their role to crunching plan numbers and avoid studying the implementation of the plan in reality, they could indeed ignore probability.¹¹⁹

Eventually the mathematician Andrei Kolmogorov negotiated a compromise incorporating socialist realism.¹²⁰ The conference participants accepted the Law of Large Numbers as an objective law capturing social reality and condemned the idealism of those who argued that it was a “purely mathematical law.” Like all objective laws, the Law of Large Numbers could not be eliminated in a planned economy. However, the conference participants agreed that most economic processes in the Soviet Union fell under another law, “the Economic Law of Socialism,” and thus while some social phenomena required probabilistic methods, others fell beyond the realm of the arbitrary.¹²¹

Conclusion

The social sciences had been in a continuous state of crisis for two decades since the early 1930s. The utopian vision of the present/future foresaw the “withering away” of the social sciences and society that used socialist realism to depict itself did not need social engineers to improve it. If plans controlled all aspects of economic life, and socialism erased inequality and poverty, statisticians and ethnographers were left standing on the balcony applauding. In the postwar period, however, the state began demanding social knowledge and ethnographers and statisticians sought to satisfy its needs. But social scientists faced a conundrum. In the environment of the Zhdanovshchina, describing social reality “as it was” would have made social

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 154.

¹²⁰ Samuel Kotz, “Statistical Terminology-Russian vs. English -in the Light of the Development of Statistics in the U.S.S.R.,” *The American Statistician* 19, no. 3 (1965), 19. On Kolmogorov see Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak* 56-61.

¹²¹ Livshits, “Zakon bol'shikh (srednikh) chisel v obshchestvennykh iavleniiakh,” 191-192.

scientists targets for cosmopolitanism. Had social scientists represented social reality “as it should be” they would have been charged as “divorced from practice.” Social ills and the demand to resolve them gave social scientists legitimacy to work in the socialist society, but illuminating them made scholars’ commitment to communism questionable. Social scientists, therefore, had to find a way to balance utopia and realism. But how could social scientists describe village reality in a way that would simultaneously capture its utopian form and allow for its transformation? Chapter three examines ethnographers’ search for a “typical village” and sheds light on how they captured the future in making.

Chapter Three

Ethnography in motion: capturing the socialist realist village

In 1949, Sergei Tolstov, the head of the Institute of Ethnography, spoke at a discussion about ethnographic fieldwork and expressed a common view that ethnographers should take example from socialist realist novelists. “Recently,” he announced, “great literature has been published about the construction of a new culture.” By this, he was specifically referring to two novels: Tikhon Semushkin’s *Alitet goes to the Mountains* and Georgii Gulia’s *Spring in Saken*.¹ These novels, set in Abkhazia and Chukota respectively, describe how, in Tolstov’s words, even in the most remote corners of the Soviet Union the “Soviet people overcame all obstacles in a constant movement forward, overcoming centuries of remnants, centuries of ultra-patriarchy and echoes of the influence of former exploiting classes, religious ideology etc....” Tolstov then concluded that “we must recognize that, in this respect, we, ethnographers, shamelessly lag behind literary writers.”²

This quest for a scientific narrative capturing socialist transformation was in line with the trends of the time. As discussed in chapter two, in the postwar period, when Soviet ethnography was beginning to re-form as a science, ethnographers sought a path to distinguish their scholarship from that of their bourgeois counterparts. They identified “bourgeois methodology” as “photographic” and “purely descriptive.” According to Sergei Tolstov when bourgeois ethnographers described reality, they presented “a crooked picture” composed of static and unrelated, atomized parts. This resulted in an understanding of society that robbed it

¹ Tikhon Zakharovich Semushkin, *Alitet ukhodit v gory* (1947); Georgii Dmitrievich Gulia, *Vesna v Sakene* (1948).

² ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 212, pp. 80-81

of its dynamism and condemned to an eternal present.³ During the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign, or Zhdanovshchina, ethnographers criticized their colleagues for “old methods of objectivist ethnographic study.” Tatiana Zhdanko explained in 1950 that these “naked descriptions” were the result of a failure to ask “what is progressive, [and] what is being overcome. [This] is a ‘photographic’ recording of all phenomena in the life of the people. It produces, of course, an objectivist, distorted picture of contemporary life [which is] unscientific and unobjective.” “In this respect,” she said, “ethnographers are lagging behind writers. But ethnographers, no less than writers and artists, must study the source of creativity and of all that happens. They must cultivate an understanding of the new -- and discern the main elements of people’s lives, living conditions, and culture which would otherwise hamper their growth moving forward.”⁴ Pavel Kushner argued that in order to develop a methodology which truly captured the new and progressive, ethnographers needed a system of value that remained “external to the current conditions, a fixed direction in the research of the kolkhoz. We have Comrade Stalin’s eminent statement from his speech at the Seventeenth Party Congress, in which he pointed out that the contradictions between city and village are gradually disappearing and the abyss that in the past divided the city and the village is being bridged.”⁵

This admixture of scientific investigation and socialist realist production shaped much disciplinary work during this period. Socialist realism was not a blindfold, inhibiting social scientists from engaging with social reality. Rather it functioned as a research methodology, part of the larger “machine for distilling Soviet reality into socialism.”⁶ In the case of village

³ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 286, l. 10-12.

⁴ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 280, l. 47-48

⁵ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 212, l. 39-40

⁶ Evgeny A. Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 6.

ethnography, socialist realism aided this distillation process in three ways. First, it provided social scientists with a “typical” structure for identifying, categorizing, and ordering the objects of their research. Second, it allowed scientists to distinguish between aspects of collective farm life that were remnants of the past and those that possessed future potential. Lastly, it provided a normative discursive location from which they could powerfully criticize the shortcomings of local administrators.

The chapter focuses on a particular ethnographic expedition from 1951, discussing the qualities that ethnographers looked for when choosing which villages to study, and explaining why they rejected the majority of villages recommended to them. The next section examines the history of knowledge produced about a “typical” village, illuminating its allegiance to the socialist realist narrative. The final section returns to the expedition of 1951-2, this time examining the ways that Pavel Kushner presented his team as a group of socialist realist heroes, engineering society and struggling against obstinate bureaucrats who impeded the transformation of village life.

1. Seeking an (arche-)typical village

In 1951, the Miklukho-Maklaia Institute of Ethnography decided to embark on a three year research project on village economy, everyday life, and culture. The institute needed to select a village that could embody socialist transformation. After consulting with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Council of Kolkhoz Affairs, the ethnographers decided to focus this search on Voronezh province. In Voronezh, the ethnographers turned to provincial administrators who recommended ten villages in different districts of the province. The ethnographic team, headed by Pavel Kushner and staffed by four other ethnographers and one photographer, began scouting these villages in the autumn of 1951. Although they determined most of the villages to be unfit for ethnographic study, they eventually settled on two: the neighboring villages of Staraia Toida and Staraia Chigla. The team conducted research in these two villages until the

winter of 1952. Although they intended to return and continue the study, they never did. They were, as it turned out, rather disappointed with the entire province of Voronezh. In the end, they chose another village entirely: the kolkhoz known as “Lenin’s Path” in the village of Viriatino, in Tambov province.⁷ The study of Viriatino was published in 1958 and quickly became an archetypical narrative of village transformation under the Soviet system. It even caught the attention of Western scholars and was ultimately translated into English in 1970.⁸

What were the criteria ethnographers used to determine which villages were suitable for study in Voronezh province?⁹ Although they claimed to be seeking what they referred to as a “typical” (*tipichnyi*) village, Kushner’s report provided little explanation of what that meant. Instead, it focused on describing the villages that they had rejected. For contemporary readers, however, the term “typical” would not have required any explicit definition. “Typical” had already become a ubiquitous term in the context of the postwar literary debates.¹⁰ Malenkov explained to artists and writers at the Nineteenth Party Congress that “the power and significance of realist art is that it can detect and uncover the lofty spiritual qualities (*vysokie dukhovnye kachestva*) and the typical positive features of a person.” Malenkov defined the Marxist-Leninist understanding of typical as neither “the most frequently encountered” nor “the statistical average” but rather that which “expresses the essence of a given social force in its

⁷ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 14-38

⁸ Pavel Ivanovich Kushner, *Selo Viriatino v proshlom i nastoiashchem, opyt etnograficheskogo izucheniia russkoi kolkhoznai derevni*, Trudy instituta etnografii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia novaia seriia, t. 41 (Moskva: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1958); Pavel Ivanovich Kushner, *The Village of Viriatino; An Ethnographic Study of a Russian Village from before the Revolution to the Present*, trans. Sula Benet (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1970).

⁹ All sciences must select “working objects” which represent the sector under investigation. The chapter does not question the necessity to select a collective farm as a working object, but rather the scientists’ definition of what constituted such an object. For a fascinating discussion of the selection of working objects in natural sciences, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2010), 19-22.

¹⁰ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 66-74.

fullest” and is uncovered by its “conscious exaggeration (*soznatel'noe preuvlechenie*).¹¹ The “typical,” therefore, was actually understood as a kind of archetype, which transcended empirical reality while simultaneously imbuing it with symbolic meaning. Ethnographers may have been inspired to search for such an archetype by *Sovetskaia Etnografiia*, which urged practitioners to follow Stalin’s “brilliant” (*genial'nyi*) work, *The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, when analyzing villages.¹² Stalin’s work provided ethnographers with a blueprint to identify the underlying laws (i.e. the “typical”) of economic and cultural development. By using the term “typical” in his definition of suitable research objects, therefore, Kushner was implicitly presenting his research project as the study of these pure reflections of the socialist realist archetype.¹³

Without explicitly defining an archetypal village, Kushner alluded to three noteworthy aspects: the state of its economy, its cultural growth, and its national characteristics. This village was, first of all, expected to have had a long agricultural tradition, culminating in a vibrant and diversified economy based primarily on grain production, and secondarily on cattle breeding.¹⁴ The socialist realist village, in other words, should have a story of economic development that began with wooden ploughs and ended with giant tractors and combines, picturesquely working vast fields. Grain was a staple of the general population’s diet, so its abundance signified an achievement of the Soviet agricultural economy. Animal husbandry also signified prosperity and

¹¹ G. Malenkov, *Otchetnyi doklad XIX s"ezdu partii o rabote tsentral'nogo komiteta VKP(b)* (Moscow 1952), 6.

¹² "XIX s"ezd kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza i voprosy etnografii," *Sovetskaia Etnografiia*, no. 4 (1952), 7.

¹³ Sergei Alymov understands the ethnographic search for a “typical” research object merely as a post-revolutionary inclination to study the new rather than the old and traditional. Sergei Alymov, "Nesluchainoe selo: sovetskie etnografy i kolkhozniki na puti "ot starogo k novomu" i obratno," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, no. 101 (2010).

¹⁴ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.15

progress for a “typical” village, particularly after the war, when the Soviet Union vowed to increase its dairy and meat production to match that of the United States.¹⁵ The ethnographers never stated that they were seeking a wealthy collective farm, but this would also have been an inevitable quality. In order to follow Malenkov’s instructions, after all, they had to uncover the most positive features of a village, and then exaggerate them. One of the farms they scouted was the Dzerzhinskii kolkhoz of Losevskii district. Because its income exceeded a million rubles a year, the farm was known as a “kolkhoz millionaire,” making it a perfect case subject for studying the underlying laws of economic development. Kushner’s team, however, ultimately rejected it because the farm’s success derived primarily from its fruit orchard. The farm’s “grain sector was not sufficiently developed,” which excluded it from categorization as a “typical” collective farm.¹⁶

The second noteworthy aspect of the socialist archetype would have been a correlation between economic development and some cultural growth. An economically successful kolkhoz was supposed to be culturally advanced.¹⁷ These farms were expected to invest a portion of their income in entertainment and to supply the population with services. The Voroshilov kolkhoz of Levo-Rossodhanskii district, for example, had formerly been a “kolkhoz millionaire,” and was, therefore, “considered one of the flagship [farms].” Kushner, however, rejected this as well, because “the collective farm was extremely lagging in its attitude to culture.”¹⁸ Kushner did not need to explain what kind of culture was lagging for this, too, was implied by the archetype. The Soviet kolkhoz was supposed to have invested its resources in the most advanced forms of

¹⁵ Jenny Leigh Smith, "The Soviet Farm Complex : Industrial Agriculture in a Socialist Context, 1945-1965" (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006).

¹⁶ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.16

¹⁷ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.16.

¹⁸ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.16

proletarian culture. The club, for example, was expected to have not only a meeting space, but an auditorium with a full lighting system, equipped for the requisite troupes of amateur performers—often including an orchestra, a dance group, or a singing ensemble. In addition to the club, the collective farms were expected to provide certain public services, including a library, a post office, schools, nurseries, and perhaps even a cinema. It was viewed as a particularly clear sign of cultural investment when individual houses were wired with broadcasting receivers. Proletarian culture, however, was not exclusively a matter of material objects and institutions. Certain codes of conduct, such as politeness, conscientious work, mutual aid, and personal hygiene also functioned as symbols of the transformation that made old peasants into rural Soviet subjects.¹⁹

The third noteworthy aspect of an archetypical village was that it had to be ethnically Russian and “preserve the best national traditions in its material and spiritual culture.”²⁰ The “typical” village, after all, should have a “typical” nationality, and in the post-war years Russia was certainly the economic and cultural leader of all the Soviet nations.²¹ Village ethnography was expected to show the “beneficial influence of “Great-Russian” culture on the country’s other

¹⁹ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “The Shaping of Soviet Workers’ Leisure: Workers’ Clubs and Palaces of Culture in the 1930s,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 56 (1999); *ibid.*; *ibid.*; Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 197; Judith Pallot, “Rural Settlement Planning in the USSR,” *Soviet Studies* 31, no. 2 (1979). To make sure that the village of their choice would have a sufficiently strong proletarian influence, the ethnographers chose to study Voronezh province. Voronezh had the advantage of bordering the Donbass area. This flourishing Ukrainian coal basin had attracted peasant-workers seeking additional income even before the revolution. The influence of proletariat culture on the local peasantry was considered long lasting and strong.

²⁰ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.16

²¹ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How Socialist State promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994); David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 183-196.

nations.”²² To study the peasantry of the Soviet Union meant to examine the country’s rural population as a cultural whole regardless of its national particularities. The shared influence of Russian culture was expected to provide this. It did not, however, always work as expected. Among the ten recommended villages the ethnographers scouted was the village of Livenka, a wealthy Russian village. Although the village preserved many national traditions, they were not the right ones. As the report describes: “To this day [Livenka] is a center of pilgrimage for women, who go and worship at the ‘holy’ well. As a result local everyday life preserves many routines (in material lifestyle there is a strong preservation of domestic industry, and spiritually, the population is religious).”²³ In his diary, on September 7 1951, Kushner added:

Though there is no church, they celebrate saints’ days. Up to a thousand people gather, they sing and dance in a ring until the bitter end (partying in [traditional] costumes.

Binge drinking and fighting. [...] Backward young women – few komsomols, two party members (out of 43). They are religious. Every hut has icons. [Though] we sleep in a hut without [icons]! ²⁴

A “typical” Soviet village, of course, could not also be a religious center of Orthodox pilgrimage and worship.

Although Kushner may not have thought that the socialist realist archetype required any detailed definition, it is clear from the sheer number of villages surveyed and rejected by his

²² RGANI f. 5, op. 17, d. 426, p. 11. In published ethnographic literature there are plenty of examples stressing the assistance of the Great Russian nation to other nationalities. See Z.A. Nikolskaia, “Etnograficheskoe opisanie Darginskogo kolkhoz “Krasnyi Partizan”,” *Sovetskaia Etnografiia* 2(1950), 93. For secondary literature, see: Lowell Tillelt, *The Great Friendship; Soviet Historians on the non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill,: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 86. and Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia : the Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1956-1974* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

²³ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.16

²⁴ Sergei Alymov, *P.I. Kushner i razvitie sovetskoi etnografii v 1920-1950-e gody* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, Institut Etnologii i Antropologii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, 2006), 181.

team that a gap existed between the understandings of “typical” held by the ethnographers and by the provincial administration. The nature of this gap was probably temporal. The administration sent ethnographers to what it considered to be the best villages in the province: those experiencing current economic success. As they saw it, any collective farm that paid its dues, was left with a surplus, and invested this surplus in further production or distributed it among the population, was worthy of study. Ethnographers, however, were simply not interested in the present of the village. They were seeking a village that demonstrated the seeds of the future. Following Malenkov, they were attempting to “detect and uncover lofty spiritual qualities and the typical positive features” of an existing village and “consciously exaggerate” them in the production of a socialist realist text; a text that could narrate the transformation of the past into the present and of the present into the future.

2. A narrative of one “typical” village

Ethnographers were not alone in their search for a socialist realist research subject. The “typical” village was sought throughout the social sciences. The Il’ich kolkhoz of Dobrinskii district, for example, served as a research object for scholars of various disciplines beginning in the 1930s. From 1945 to 1953, economists from the Voronezh Institute of Economics wrote a five-year plan for this kolkhoz and the Voronezh Agricultural Institute developed a vast construction project for it in cooperation with the Erisman Central Sanitation Institute.²⁵ Even the Academy of Architecture knew of this village, and recommended it to Kushner’s team as they embarked upon their research. Unlike the scientists of these other disciplines, however, Kushner

²⁵ A.D. Danilov, “Pochvennaia geobotanicheskaia kharakteristika i assortiment dlia ozeleniia kolkhoza im. Il’icha Dobrinskogo raiona Voronezhskoi oblasti,” Interview; F.A. Noskov and N.I. Sobolev, *Piatiletanii plan ordena Lenina kolkhoza im. Il’icha* (Voronezh: Voronezhskoe obl. Izd., 1947); V. Petrova, *V ordenonoznom kolkhoze* (Voronezh: Voronezhskoe obl. Izdatel'stvo, 1940); N.P. Sobolev, *Piatiletanii plan kolkhoza, opyt sostavleniia piatiletnikh planov v kolkhozakh: ordena Lenina imenii Il’icha, Dobrinskogo raiona i imeni Chapatva, Kalacheevskogo raiona, Voronezhskoi oblasti* (Moskva: Ministerstvo kul'tury SSSR - Glavizdat, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo sel'skokhoziaistvennoi literatury, 1953).

ultimately rejected the village, declaring that “such a kolkhoz, of course, is completely unsuitable for [ethnographic] study as typical.”²⁶

The Il’ich kolkhoz was certainly far from the ideal as depicted in the rosy pastorals of socialist realist art. It lacked a sewage system, it had no roads, its economy was based on seasonal laborers, and its administration was plagued with corruption. What made Il’ich attractive to some scientists, however, was not its present condition but rather the narrative of its past establishment and its future potential. In a sense, the village was attractive precisely because it seemed to embody what Katerina Clark calls the “master plot” of a socialist realist novel. The village, like Clark’s positive hero, could be seen as merely passing through the stages of revolutionary spontaneity on the journey to a higher degree of consciousness. This spontaneity—class-consciousness and the rejection of poverty—provoked the peasant community to establish a commune. It was the job of the party and state to gradually assist in the development of consciousness, self-control, and discipline.²⁷

Studies of the Il’ich kolkhoz followed this socialist realist narrative to the letter. Their narratives present it as follows: After the revolution, the farmlands of a local landowner were seized by peasants from the nearby village. In 1919, twenty-one landless peasant households (*batraki*) settled on the land and established a commune. The early years were quite difficult, because the land had been neglected since the revolution and suffered from a severe lack of livestock, machinery, and inventory. The commune was further compromised by class enemies, who attempted to sabotage its development. In the end, however, the peasant households prevailed, tripling their number by 1923.²⁸

²⁶ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 16-18

²⁷ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 15-24.

²⁸ RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 529, pp. 4-5

This story featured three tropes of the socialist realist narrative. The first was the establishment of the commune by *batraki*. In Soviet ideology, landless peasants were considered to be the most conscious element of the rural population, the proletariats of the peasantry, forced to sell their labor instead of working their own land, and simultaneously exploited by both landowners and kulaks. The gathering of *batraki*, therefore, leaving their village behind, losing their chains, and establishing an independent commune, was often presented as a kind of a rural mini-revolution. The second trope was the choice to establish a commune instead of another village or even a kolkhoz (collective farm). In a kolkhoz, members could access private plots and own draft animals; a commune, by contrast, was a more fully communist form of production, devoid of any private property. By choosing to live in a commune, the landless peasants of Il'ich proved that they possessed the right class instincts, taking the most conscious route of rural social transformation almost ten years before collectivization. The third trope was the commune's dependence upon courage and struggle. According to the narrative, the peasants fought not only against nature (the neglected land and the dearth of livestock) but also against class enemies. These peasants, who, showing their class consciousness, fought against alien classes and overcame natural elements, "proved" themselves worthy of state assistance.²⁹

The greatest transformations of the village began during the First Five Year Plan (1928-1932), when the Soviet state did indeed reach out to the commune, assisting it with crop planning, and supplying machinery. While the majority of villages in the country continued to shrink as peasants migrated to urban centers, Il'ich kept growing.³⁰ The number of households

²⁹ Anna Krylova, "Beyond the Spontaneity-Consciousness Paradigm: "Class Instinct" as a Promising Category of Historical Analysis," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 1 (2003).

³⁰ David Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941*, Studies of the Harriman Institute (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

in the commune grew almost fourfold.³¹ These new residents came from an unusual mix of backgrounds. Some were Russian peasants, but others were migrants from Ukraine, Poland, and Belorussia. Some even moved to the commune from urban origins.³² For the scientists who studied the village, its attractiveness to people of various nationalities and classes would have been self-evident. In none of their accounts did they find it necessary to defend its appeal.

The First Five Year Plan brought state planning—or as Katerina Clark puts it, “consciousness,”—to the commune. The size of land under cultivation more than doubled (from 284 hectares in 1929 to 655 hectares in 1932), mostly tilled by the new local Machine-Tractor station (MTS). Successful harvests allowed the commune to invest in animal husbandry and former grain fields were soon allocated to produce fodder crops. In Kushner’s report on the village, however, this economic development did not successfully fulfill his narrative criteria. In fact, his team argued that animal husbandry had developed disproportionately to arable land cultivation and that “because of this, cattle breeding appeared to lack enough food supply.” Kushner warned that the kolkhoz would suffer because it was increasingly neglecting its crop cultivation in favor of the more profitable economies of cattle. And indeed, according to N.P. Sobolev in 1947, 88.7 percent of the farm’s income came from revenues from animal husbandry.³³

Not unlike the socialist realist master plot, the commune of Il’ich was populated by extraordinary individuals. Many of the farm workers were decorated for their “selfless labor” (*samootverzhennyi trud*) with the highest honors of the Soviet Union; two received the Order of

³¹ Sobolev, *Piatiletanii Plan kolkhoza*. According to this report, the number of households grew from 21 in 1919, to 63 in 1923 and continued growing thereafter. In 1946 there were 138 households in the village and at the time of the research, in 1948, there were 182 households.

³² RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 529, p.3

³³ Sobolev, *Piatiletanii Plan kolkhoza*, 30-33.

Lenin, K.V. Pochel'nikov was granted a Medal of Honor for outstanding labor, seven individuals earned the Red Banner for Labor for their contributions to the high grain harvest, and several others received medals for Labor Valor. Pictures of these honored workers decorated the pages of the abundant scientific literature about the village.³⁴

The rest of the population also provided a highly disciplined and productive labor force. According to the socialist realist “cult of labor,” after all, a collective farmers’ initiative to work did not flow from a rational desire to improve individual life, but rather from an almost religious devotion to higher romantic goals. As A. Iu. Iavnel’ of the Erisman Sanitation Institute reported: “They piously (*sviato*) execute the directives of Comrade Stalin, that only one thing is needed now in order to become prosperous collective farmers—to work honestly on the kolkhoz, to correctly use tractors and machinery, to correctly utilize draught animals, to correctly cultivate the land, and to take care of kolkhoz property.” Farmers’ piety was apparently revealed not through the products of labor but through the manner in which labor was performed: honestly, correctly, and meticulously. Moreover, Iavnel’ added, the Il’ich collective farmers evaluated success in terms of the Soviet values of culturedness and conscientious labor. “In our surveys of the kolkhoz,” he wrote, “people often answered: ‘How do we live? We live well. We live well culturally because we work a lot and in good faith on the kolkhoz.’”³⁵

Such socialist realist tropes facilitated the transformation of Il’ich into a work of art to be displayed to the world. After receiving the Order of Lenin, the kolkhoz and its successes were exhibited in the Soviet pavilion at the New York World’s Fair in 1939, and in the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition from 1939 to 1941.³⁶ In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Il’ich functioned

³⁴ *ibid.*, 34.

³⁵ RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 737, p. 52 and RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 529, p.6

³⁶ Sobolev, *Piatiletanii Plan kolkhoza*, 33-34.

as an exemplary kolkhoz, to which officials could bring foreign delegations, and demonstrate the advantages of collective farm production. The main tourist attraction was the group of eight two-story cottages, constructed by the Institute of Architecture of the Academy of Sciences USSR in 1935.³⁷ This transportation of foreign delegations to the Il'ich kolkhoz was not an easy task. The farm was located in the northeast part of Dobrinskii district on the border of Tambov province. Foreigners who had landed in Moscow had to travel over four-hundred kilometers to Dobrinka, the district center, and then make their way through fifteen kilometers of unpaved country road, which, even in 1948, were still impassable, lacking "transit character."³⁸

Though the Il'ich farm clearly embodied a socialist realist narrative, scientists did not believe it was perfect. If anything, they chose to work in Il'ich precisely because of its distinct shortcomings, for these were the problems they could help alleviate. As discussed in chapter one, social scientists perceived themselves social engineers and their mission as the transformation of social reality. In the postwar years, there were two particular aspects of Il'ich that required improvement. First of all, the village suffered from severe housing problems. Although the Institute of Architecture had built cottages in 1935, the eight cottages still lacked plumbing, sewage, and lavatories. Their heating systems did not actually function because the necessary materials were not available. More importantly, however, the majority of houses on the kolkhoz were still the wooden barracks that had been built in the first commune years. According to the ethnographic team, the kolkhoz economy was largely based on the hired seasonal laborers who "lived in horrific conditions." In response, the farm planned to use the two postwar Five Year Plans (1946-1950 and 1951-1955) to boost housing construction.³⁹

³⁷ RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 529, pp. 3-4

³⁸ RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 529, p. 17

³⁹ Sobolev, *Piatiletanii Plan kolkhoza*, 218-220.

The second urgent problem was the insufficient development of the village's public institutions. In the 1946-1950 Five Year Plan, architects and hygienists planned to build a new building for the kolkhoz administration and an 800 square meter club with a library, gym, and a 300-seat auditorium. They also outlined plans for a primary school and two kindergartens, a building for communal services—including a hairdresser, post-office, and dining room—and a clinic with a pharmacy and a maternity hospital. They even hoped to build a bathhouse and a bakery.⁴⁰ When the ethnographers arrived in the village in 1951, however, the impressive potential of these cultural institutions had not yet been fulfilled. There were no children in the school, the club was deserted, the radio was silent, the orchestra lay in a storeroom, and the beautiful daycare center remained unfenced from the road, with fetid bathrooms.⁴¹ Worst of all, by 1951 the farm was ripe with corruption. As the ethnographic report explained, “shortly before our arrival the chairman, the steward, some members of the administration and accounting committee had been arrested for embezzling socialist property.”⁴²

These shortcomings did not deter scientists from their research. If anything, the prospect of transforming a village at the precise locations where it was flawed demonstrated their revolutionary zeal. For this reason, socialist realist methodology actually encouraged them to describe present flaws in great detail. The existence of such flaws, in a sense, justified their involvement in the village. It may have been because of this involvement, however, that Kushner's ethnographic team would later reject Il'ich. The village may not have satisfied the

⁴⁰ RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 529, pp. 12-14

⁴¹ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 17-8

⁴² ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 18

team's definition of "typical" because it appeared too contrived. Its strange heterogeneity of people and culture cast doubt on the organic nature of its master plot.⁴³ As Kushner explained,

Gathered [to the former commune] from different parts of the USSR, peasants and former urban people did not have a common tradition, and therefore culture developed in some cosmopolitan forms (Jazz, western dances, the development of rogue folklore [*razvitie blatnogo fol'klora*] etc.). Only the language of the majority of the population makes this [collective farm] Russian— there are no other clearly apparent national features in the everyday life [*byt*] of the population. And therefore there is no genuine common cohesion among them.⁴⁴

For both the ethnographers and the other scientists, however, the developmental shortcomings of Il'ich were not the problem. The present conditions of a village were viewed as less important than its past and its future potential. The present, they believed, was nothing but a brief moment on the continuous timeline from the past into the future. What scientists wanted to research and document was not the static reality of the present, but rather the grand dialectical development across time. For those scientists who did choose to study the Il'ich kolkhoz, it represented both a glorious, ideologically correct, past and a promising, ideologically designed, future in becoming. In the search for a realized socialist realist master plot, scientists looked not for the perfect kolkhoz, but for one that germinated the seeds of a communist garden.

3. The scientist writes himself as a socialist realist hero

After detailing the ethnographic search, and its rejection of the ten villages in Voronezh province, Kushner's report reaches its peak, describing their discovery of two villages in

⁴³ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 10-11.

⁴⁴ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 17. Soviet ethnographers chose to study multi-ethnic collective farms when their research agenda was the consolidation of nations. See for example ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 282, pp. 14-19

Annenskii district and the ensuing year-long study. In the report, Kushner interweaves the ethnographic study of the two villages with a drama about the confrontation between the cultured scientists and the local bureaucrats. In line with postwar socialist realist conventions, Kushner presented the scientists as heroes, setting out to write an ethnographic study and hoping to assist in improving rural living conditions. Their antagonists in this quest were the party, local and kolkhoz bureaucrats, who failed to properly understand the party objectives and deeply neglected the village's welfare. The end of this drama, however, diverged from the socialist realist ideal. After nearly a year of struggle, the bureaucratic antagonists forced the ethnographers to withdraw. The team abandoned the two villages and moved to the village of Viriatino in Tambov province.⁴⁵

The bulk of this story takes place in the two adjoined and remarkably similar villages of Staraia Toida and Staraia Chigla. Only nine kilometers apart, they farmed on the same type of soil, and invested in the same types of agricultural production. Each village contained two collective farms, only one of which, in both cases, had any great prospects. In terms of certain structural figures, the two villages were also identical. Both had an incredibly large population of 3000-4000 people and two defining streets, 3-4 kilometers long.⁴⁶ Even their cultural compositions were alike: ethnically Russian. Yet despite these convergences, Kushner stressed, the two villages remained completely independent from one another. They did not share the same administration, they did not intermarry, and they did not cooperate. Quite the opposite, in fact; the two villages were remarkably competitive: "The leadership of the villages and the

⁴⁵ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 195-199.

⁴⁶ For a sense of how unusual was the size of these villages see: Auri C. Berg, "Reform in the Time of Stalin: Nikita Khrushchev and the Fate of the Russian Peasantry" (University of Toronto, 2012).

collective farms jealously refer to the successes of their neighbor. If a kolkhoz chairman learns that his neighbor got a metal roof, he will immediately try to also obtain one.”⁴⁷

And indeed, in many ways, the villages were sufficiently distinct. The main attraction of Staraia Chigla, for example, was the hydroelectric station planned for the Bitiug River, a symbol of grand economic potential. For Staraia Toida, on the other hand, the appeal was largely cultural: it had a school and a club, which was the “center of great cultural-enlightenment work,” as well as a hospital and pharmacy, which, according to Kushner, were “the pride of the entire district.” Staraia Toida, as a result, developed a diverse and highly active village intelligentsia, consisting of not only schoolteachers, administrators and agricultural specialists, but also medical personnel engaged in improving the population’s hygiene. Staraia Chigla, by contrast, was seen as culturally backwards. Two churches pierced its skyline, and although they had been closed for worship, their mere presence would have been “untypical” in the socialist realist archetype. Its only school was located in the “old and ill-suited” houses of several former traders and kulaks, and its club, which was said to resemble a barn sooner than a center of culture, was never booked for cultural events, lectures, or amateur performances, let alone cleaned.⁴⁸

Kushner emphasized the economic and cultural potential of these two villages, while simultaneously pointing to their present deficiencies. “In their external appearance,” he said, “the villages changed little in comparison to the pre-revolutionary period.”⁴⁹ As the ethnographers discovered, the majority of houses had been built either before the First World War or during the New Economic Policy. Almost nothing had been built after collectivization. Worse yet, most of the roofs in both villages remained thatched, despite the preference for slate

⁴⁷ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 18-21

⁴⁸ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 21-22.

⁴⁹ When the stenograph was edited, Kushner’s potentially explosive statement was qualified with “in regards to housing.” ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.19

or iron.⁵⁰ By focusing on these shortcomings, Kushner carved a space for the ethnographers to act in the village and transform it. Like the social scientists described earlier, Kushner perceived his scientific responsibility as not only to describe the present conditions, but also to actively take part in their transformation. In this, social scientists were social engineers who like the socialist realist artists, perceived themselves as instruments of societal uplift.⁵¹ Like artists, scientists rejected the “photographic” methodology, which limited itself to objectively describing the present.⁵² At a 1949 ethnographic conference Kushner addressed this explicitly: “The ethnographer,” he said, “is not merely a Soviet person, he is a Soviet agent and an active builder of Soviet society.” Kushner demanded that ethnographers participate in the political life of their chosen villages of study, giving lectures, working in kindergartens, and training activists. “This is absolutely essential,” he said, “if the ethnographer is to have authority among the locals.”⁵³

The immediate antagonists to Kushner’s objectives were the chairmen of the collective farm. In his report, he accused them of lacking foresight, misunderstanding party and state policy, and plain boorishness. “In terms of cultural growth,” Kushner explained, “the leading cadres of collective farms and village councils should outstrip the cultural level of the rest of the population. But this is not the case in the given villages. The current kolkhoz chairmen are ‘practical workers,’ (*praktiki*) i.e. they lack agricultural education. They don’t even have enough general education. Therefore the leadership is administrative rather than having the correct

⁵⁰ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 19

⁵¹ Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 38-80.

⁵² ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 167, pp. 61-2

⁵³ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 212, pp. 58-9

analysis and foresight.”⁵⁴ Kushner accused the collective farm leadership of devolving into a rigid bureaucracy that lacked a correct understanding of what the future held.

Kushner was also quick to note that one reason for this lack of clarity may have been that many chairmen were alcoholics. In the summer of 1951, he described, the chairman of “Great October,” who was generally a good leader, gathered some relatives and friends to relax on the bank of the river Bitiug. “They drank, started singing songs and [eventually] sank into [the tune] ‘From Beyond the Island’ (*Iz za Ostrova na Strezhen*) and when they reached the verse where Stepan Razin throws the Persian princess into the Volga, they pushed their wives into the Bitiug. The river was deep and the women almost drowned.” “From Beyond the Island” was a popular folk song that tells the story of the Cossack rebel Stepan Razin (1630-1671), who returned to Russia with a beautiful Persian Princess. When rumors circulated that his love for the princess had weakened him, Razin threw her into the Volga, proving his manhood to his mutinous followers. Ironically, the kolkhoz chairman’s reenactment did not garner the respect bestowed upon Razin. Instead, he lost his authority in the eyes of collective farmers.⁵⁵

If boorishness was one way to lose authority and respect among collective farmers, indifference to the population’s welfare was another. The chairmen’s decision to forbid collective farm households from owning a cow is one clear example of this bureaucratic disinterest. A domestic cow, they believed, interfered with the collective farmers’ participation in kolkhoz production. When asked to explain his decision, one chairman reasoned that in the future “the kolkhoz will be able to provide its members not only with grain but also with milk products.” This explanation did not satisfy Kushner, however, who noted that “currently the dairy farm cannot accomplish this target because it does not have an abundance of products and barely

⁵⁴ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 29

⁵⁵ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.29

fulfills its task of supplying dairy to the state.”⁵⁶ Kushner perceived the kolkhoz chairmen as plagued with “idealism” that made them completely indifferent to “both human nature and the laws of production.”⁵⁷ For contrast, he presented the director of the Machine-Tractor Station [MTS] as a voice of greater realism: “One of the reasons for the migration of collective farmers from the village to the city is that the collective farmer often has to sell his domestic cow. In the summer, collective farms do not allow collective farmers’ cattle to pasture, and in winter, because collective farmers lack fodder, they sell their cow. If the muzhik sells his cow, he has no reason to live – he has no milk or meat. He will leave the kolkhoz if he does not receive [milk and meat].”⁵⁸ Kushner tagged the chairmen’s idealization of kolkhoz economics as “a reiteration of certain left deviations [from the party line] which occurred in the first years of collectivization.” Not only did kolkhoz chairmen fail to motivate collective farmers to work, they misunderstood Soviet economic policy. The Soviet tax policy, Kushner explained, ultimately considered private cows necessary for the development of the country’s food resources. Moreover, he argued, the villagers’ diet was based on the milk and butter supplied by privately owned cows. Without it, their caloric intake and the quality of their food suffered significantly. It is important to note, however, that Kushner’s critique of the chairmen did not step outside the conventions of socialist realist discourse. Kushner was merely confronting a socialist realist vision that contradicted his own. The chairman, he explained, focused more on the ideals of the communist future, while Kushner was more attentive to its realistic demands.

According to Kushner, the collective farmers themselves shared this same realistic agency and, in the absence of the chairmen’s leadership, rallied together and saved the day:

⁵⁶ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.25

⁵⁷ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 4.

⁵⁸ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 25

The number of cows in both villages did not correspond to the number of kolkhoz households. Nevertheless, the majority of collective farmers, even those who do not have a cow, consume milk products. How do they manage – through the market or by way of buying from their neighbors? No. The kolkhoz village chooses a different path. A new form of collectivized ownership sprang up. Two households shared one cow, and each household got [the cow] every other day. [They share] equal rights of usage and for its offspring.⁵⁹

In this dramatic conflict over cows, collective farmers defeated the bureaucratism of their chairmen by further collectivizing among themselves. Kushner portrayed them simultaneously as rational individuals acting in accordance with their own interests and as conscious members of a socialist society who understood that their interests was embodied in the collective. Together, they proved to be more conscious in their understandings of ownership than their leaders, and, for that reason, ultimately displaced kolkhoz chairmen as the ideological vanguard.

Just as they had embodied kolkhoz economic agency, the collective farmers were, according to Kushner, ideal representatives of Soviet postwar culturedness.⁶⁰ Although the collective farmers of the early 1950s still lived in ancestral wooden log huts, their thatch roofs, he was careful to stress, “do not indicate the shabbiness of the household.” “They,” he explained within the socialist realist vernacular, “are merely the result of a temporary shortage of roofing materials.” Under these damp, but temporary, matted grass roofs, he explained, “a completely different peasant way of life prevails.” The interior of the ancestral hut had undergone “radical changes;” farmers replaced their traditional peasant furniture with free-standing beds, stools, and chairs made of metal and wood. Tablecloths and window curtains supplanted the usual bare

⁵⁹ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 24-5

⁶⁰ Vera Sandomirsky Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, Enl. and updated ed., Studies of the Harriman Institute (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

decor, and plants and flowers adorned the windowsills. Many collective farmers had acquired dressers, cupboards, sewing machines, and some even had bicycles and radio-receivers.⁶¹

The clearest example of the chairmen's bureaucratic formalism and its discrepancy with the progressive population, however, was their divergent position on youth's desire for education. Because they lacked education themselves, the chairmen may have felt threatened by the prospect of the collective farm youth supplanting them. Kushner quoted one chairman who responded to young peoples' desire to study by saying: "Eventually, there would be an overproduction of intelligentsia, and under communism, when everyone will receive the opportunity to acquire higher education, even engineers in this kolkhoz will work in the fields (*dazhe na volakh*)."⁶² Once again, Kushner critically noted, kolkhoz chairmen impeded the unfurling communist future by over-formalizing it.

Such neglect for youth culture and wellbeing, however, caused the villages to lose their natural youth leadership. In the socialist realist aesthetic, tractor and combine drivers were understood to be the most conscious figures in the village. Young drivers, in this sense, should have represented the best parts of the future, with their technical expertise with machinery placing them on par with urban youth.⁶³

To the astonishment of the ethnographers, however, while the cultural level of the general population in the villages was rising, the influence of tractor and combine drivers was only diminishing. As a result of schooling and exposure to Soviet radio, cinema, and press, the

⁶¹ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 22-23

⁶² ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 29

⁶³ V. N. Tomilin, *Nasha krepnost', mashinno-traktornyĭ stantsii chernozemnogo tsentra rossii v poslevoennyĭ period: 1946-1958gg* (Moscow: AIRO-XXI, 2009).

average kolkhoz youth was instead aspiring to higher education and industry employment.⁶⁴

Tractor and combine drivers, on the other hand:

Do not stand out in their cultural attitudes from average young family members.

Sometimes they are even below [them] in literacy and culturedness. This demands further research. We can assume that it is the result of the abnormal labor conditions of the MTS tractor brigade. The workers of these brigades live in caravans away from any human collective seven to eight months a year. [They] do not go home for months, and do not eat properly. The caravans are generally crowded. There is no cultural entertainment. They never read books or even newspapers. Their only outside contact is via the telephone or radio. Village youth, even when working in the field [during harvest], do not lose contact with the village, their family or with society. [The village youngster] is often more literate than any given tractor driver because of the expansion of primary schooling. When he [the tractor driver] comes back to his family and village in winter, he feels how much he has fallen behind the pace of cultural life, and therefore he is less active in the family, especially when this concerns the reconstruction of everyday life. He feels like a guest in his own family.⁶⁵

Kushner seemed to understand the danger of this situation. He certainly knew that tractor drivers were highly valued in socialist realist ideals. This may be why he qualified his team's observations by stating that "the influence of tractor and combine drivers, which was significant and undoubtedly progressive before the war, has been diminishing."⁶⁶ Kushner hoped to see this change, envisioning a socialist realist path in which MTS workers would reemerge as a

⁶⁴ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 29

⁶⁵ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 28

⁶⁶ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 27-8

progressive force in the village. “In some collective farms, youth working in tractor brigades constructed well equipped and spacious MTS field camps with bedrooms, dining rooms, showers and reading rooms. Unfortunately such cases are still rare, and we encountered none in our research.”⁶⁷ Kushner’s admission that he had never actually seen this ideal realized is highly significant. In the socialist realist aesthetic, the ideal future was always presented as if it were present. Whether or not Kushner and his fellow researchers had ever actually seen the ideal present-future would always be irrelevant.

In the winter of 1952, Kushner’s team temporarily ended their research in the two villages, intending to return in the future. Kushner stated two official reasons for suspending the study. The first was an unexpected lack of funding, but this seems suspect given that the ethnographic team immediately moved to study the village of Viriatino. The second official reason was the merger of the two collective farms in Staraia Chigla. This amalgamation was expected to cause a complete reorganization of the village’s economic life.⁶⁸ As a reason for abandoning study this, too, is suspect, for it would have improved the quality of labor, machinery, and party leadership, thus facilitating any ethnographic efforts to depict a village undergoing socialist transformation.

According to Kushner, however, “These were not the only reasons to suspend the study.” His list of secondary reasons sounds eminently more plausible. It included the severe production failures of 1952, caused by the “incompetent economic leadership” of the collective

⁶⁷ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 28-29

⁶⁸ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p.32

farms and the deteriorating material conditions of the farm.⁶⁹ “The breeding of dandelions (*kok-sagyz*) was unsuccessful, 300 hectares of irrigated land was waterlogged and the construction of the hydroelectric station was delayed.”⁷⁰ With its failing economy and poor living conditions, the collective farm no longer satisfied the requirements of the “typical.” Soviet ethnographers simply could not study a failing farm. “Fortunately,” Kushner pointedly noted at the end of his report, “such [problematic] conditions do not exist everywhere. Our country has many other collective farms with Russian populations that successfully meet their goals. The village advances and the population’s material and spiritual (*dokhovnyi*) everyday life is reorganized. Despite the help of local organizations, we weren’t able to find such villages in Voronezh province, so we had to look for them in neighboring provinces.”⁷¹

Kushner’s reference to the “help of the local organizations” might well have been sarcastic. Part of his rationale for leaving Staraia Toida and Staraia Chigla, after all, was his utter disappointment with the provincial and district administrations. As he clearly noted, “The Voronezh provincial administration promised to give our ethnographers whatever aid it could to improve the collective farms’ cultural life. These promises were not fulfilled.” Specifically, Kushner mentioned that they had promised to build a club in Staraia Chigla and to send a party and a cultural organizer.⁷² Not only did the administration neglect to help the ethnographic team achieve its goals, it failed to prevent collective farm leaders from disregarding state policy. “The basic cause of all the misfortunes in the village,” Kushner emphasized, “is the failure to prepare leaders and cultural personnel. The Soviet village needs the constant and great

⁶⁹ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp. 32-33.

⁷⁰ The Soviet Union used Russian dandelions since the 1930s as a source of natural rubber. See G. Krotkov, “A Review of Literature on *Taraxacum Kok-Saghyz Rod*,” *Botanical Review* 11, no. 8 (1945).

⁷¹ ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, pp.33-4

⁷²ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 33

assistance of the socialist city: this is where the leading role of the working classes and socialist cultural centers should manifest itself.”⁷³

Criticizing officialdom, however, was part and parcel of Party democracy.⁷⁴ It was a process that kept officials accountable to the party masses and served as a tool against bureaucratization. As both a party member and an Old Bolshevik, speaking at a closed forum, Kushner was, in a certain sense, playing by the rules. He criticized the state for not supplying sufficient building materials and the local Party organizations for failing to provide proper ideological and cultural leadership to the villages. Kushner’s criticism, however, ultimately cut further than the particular local organizations. When speaking about family budgets, for example, he came close to condemning the basic structure of the entire collective farm system. “Collective farmers’ material conditions are not equal and to a large extent depend on the ratio of workers to eaters in the family.” Kushner’s audience would certainly have heard Chayanov’s pre-collectivization paradigm of labor-consumer balance resonating in this analysis.⁷⁵ Kushner could have toted the official line, attributing social inequality to the discrepancy in the number of workdays each family invested in the collective farm, but he chose not to. Instead, his vague reference to Chayanov’s neo-populist analysis suggested that collectivization may not have resolved the traditional demographic cycle in which the ratio of producers to consumers determined the prosperity of a family. Kushner would have understood the intensity of this critique, which may be why he annotated it with a softening qualification that “even in families

⁷³ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 33

⁷⁴ Alexei B. Kojevnikov, "Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work: Science and the Games of Intraparty Democracy circa 1948," *Russian Review* 57, no. 1 (1998).

⁷⁵ Teodor Shanin argues that Chayanov had been fully “brushed under the carpet” until 1987. Kushner, however, like many of his colleagues was a contemporary of Chayanov. It would be surprising therefore if he was not familiar with Chayanov’s paradigm and simply arrived at the same conclusions himself. Teodor Shanin, "Chayanov's Treble Death and Tenuous Resurrection: An Essay about Understanding, about Roots of Plausibility and about Rural Russia," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009).

with a large number of children and a small number of working adults, the food intake is never below what is necessary for the normal function of the organism.”⁷⁶

In some ways, socialist realist discourse made Kushner’s critique more poignant. Statements that “Our country has many other collective farms [...] that successfully meet their goals” or that farms built “MTS field camps with bedrooms, dining rooms, showers and reading rooms,” were certainly informed by a priori socialist realist representations of village conditions circulated by Soviet media. But this same socialist realist methodology did not force scientists to obscure or ignore their critical observations. When Kushner looked at an MTS caravan, he was encouraged to see both a future field camp complex and an overcrowded, filthy, and culturally barren present space. Research reports were expected to simply exaggerate the elements of village life that best represented the saplings of socialism. In this process—the discursive transformation of existing village conditions into a socialist realist product—Kushner achieved a measure of critical space. Or in other words, by skillfully managing the discursive waste of this distillation—the realities that could not be abstracted within socialist realist tropes, narratives, and categories, Kushner was able to push the boundaries of socialist realist discourse itself.

Conclusion

Social engineering informed by socialist realism, which simultaneously required scientists to choose research objects representing the future and actively improving the object while describing it, was not rejected with the emergence of sociology.⁷⁷ On the contrary, in a

⁷⁶ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Scholars argue that the reestablishment of sociology after Stalin’s death signaled the emergence of “true social science.” Elizabeth Ann Weinberg, *Sociology in the Soviet Union and Beyond : Social Enquiry and Social Change* (Aldershot, Hants., England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); Ilya Zemtsov, *Soviet Sociology: A study of Lost Illusions in Russia under Soviet Control of Society* (Fairfax, Va.: Hero Books, 1985); Terence Cox, *Rural Sociology in the Soviet Union: Its History and Basic Concepts* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979); Dmitrii N. Shalin, “The Development of Soviet Sociology, 1956-1976,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 4(1978).

discussion of sociological methodology in 1959, F. I. Onotskii stressed the importance of choosing a correct research object and criticized the authors of *The Village of Viriatino* for selecting a village that was too average. “We all know perfectly well that we have leading, average and lagging villages,” he said. And echoing Malenkov, he added “but we can find an average village among leading ones. I think that to take an average village as typical should not be done. Concrete sociological research of an average village will only provide an incomplete picture.”⁷⁸ Needless to say, there was little average about the village of Viriatino. In fact, a 1956 Tambov province budget study utilized the Lenin’s Path collective farm, also known as the Village of Viriatino, as an exemplary collective farm. While 45.5 percent of collective farms were paying less than two rubles per workday and only 4.5 percent were paying more than ten rubles a workday, Lenin’s Path was paying twelve rubles and seventeen kopeks.⁷⁹

Soviet social science was conditioned by a socialist realist discourse that extended beyond literature and the arts to encompass Soviet society as a whole. As a result, Soviet social science, unlike science in the west, was not limited to the study of the past and the present. Quite the opposite really, the present was seen as nothing but a transient moment in time, and the transformation of the past into the present was important only inasmuch as it predetermined the unfolding of the future. Indeed, Soviet ethnographers distinguished themselves from bourgeois ethnography by attributing the later with a “denial of all development and progression.” Soviet science, they insisted, was historical and dialectical in nature. It rejected the idea of a static and fragmented present, capable of being observed with bourgeois scientific objectivity. Instead, Soviet science insisted, an object of study was constantly progressing forward. As Tolstov underscored in 1949, “this emphasis on the internal

⁷⁸ ARAN f. 1922, op. 1, d. 986, pp. 226-7

⁷⁹ GARF f. A374, op. 30, d. 10311, l. 185

process of the progressive development of culture is what differentiates Soviet from bourgeois ethnographies.”⁸⁰ Soviet social scientists, however, did more than just focus on the future; they consciously and purposefully manipulated their research object to produce the future they desired. Before settling in Staraia Toida and Staraia Chigla, for example, Kushner’s ethnographic team demanded that Voronezh’s provincial and district administrations build a club and send qualified personnel to the villages. Many western social scientists of the 1950s aimed for unbiased social interaction and developed methodologies to minimize the observer effect. For them, the manipulation of the research object would have been a violation of the sanctity of the scientific method, undermining the validity and reliability of scientific findings. Soviet scientists, in contrast, perceived their mission differently. Their aim was not objective description. Instead, they perceived themselves as activists, with a mission to transform their objects of research. In a sense, Soviet social scientists were following Marx’s prescription that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Yet ethnographers’ path to create a socialist realist discipline with a scientific claim was significantly easier than scholars of other disciplines. Unlike statisticians and political economists, ethnographers did not have to depict society at large. They could choose one village and ignore elements which did not fit their progressive vision. The next chapter examines statisticians’ struggle to produce social categories which would shed light on reality and allow for its transformation without breaking away from socialist realism.

⁸⁰ ARAN f. 142, op. 1, d. 286, pp. 12-13

Chapter Four

Measuring socialism: the development of collective farm taxonomies

At the 1947 February Plenum of the Central Committee, Andrei Andreev, the deputy chair of the Council of Ministers, maintained that statistical practice obstructed the improvement of agricultural production. Statisticians, he said, measured “all agricultural things in averages . . . Our agricultural plan is created to stipulate the average harvest for the district and the province, the average readings for animal husbandry, the average output of a tractor.” This planning form, he argued, failed to capture the discrepancies between farms and prevented administrators’ ability to learn from success or assist unsuccessful enterprises. The Soviet planning organs did not adjust the plan for collective farms that surpassed the average. “It is unquestionable,” Andreev ascertained, that “a differentiating approach” would allow for “responsive organizational work” and eliminate weak farms.”¹

Local administrators too noted the bankruptcy of statistical averages. As Ivan Boitsov, the secretary of the Stavropol krai party Committee later elaborated, these averages caused local administrators “not to know the actual state of affairs” and prevented them from being “sufficiently involved in the economy.” Instead, local officials, said Boitsov, were managing agriculture “guided by generalities” (*rukovodia “voobshche*). Worse yet, knowing only the averages of collective farms under their guidance, district party and state officials were “often unconscious of new phenomena” that needed support and blind to “serious defects and even failures.”²

¹ Andrei A. Andreev, *O merakh pod"ema sel'skogo khoziaistva v poslevoennyi period, доклад na plenum TsK VKP(b)* (Moscow: Ogiz, 1947), 58-59.

² I. Boitsov, "Uluchshit' rukovodstvo sel'skimi raikomami," *Pravda* 1947, April 28, 2. Boitsov was a candidate member of the Central Committee since 1939 and became a member in 1952. Boitsov would later serve as the deputy chairman of the Party Control Commission.

Indeed, Soviet postwar statistics offered no differentiating methodology to planners and administrators. Provincial planners calculated a collective farm's compulsory delivery quota as a proportion of the province's quota according to a cadastre of land. Collective farms with more land were given a higher quota regardless of the quality of land, weather conditions and the success or failure of past years.³ As a 1948 report of the Institute of Economics USSR stated, "We cannot accept the fact that in the last twenty years there was almost no differentiation of our great country according to zones of agricultural production." The report pointed to the fact that Soviet statisticians classified collective farms according to administrative divisions rather than "concrete conditions" such as topography, soil, weather and "variability of crops."⁴

The significance of taxonomies cannot be overemphasized. Michel Foucault demonstrates that taxonomies are the building blocks of human thought systems. Classifications unite individual things into more complex objects and allow us to order our reality and make sense of our surroundings. Without them, it is unclear whether human thought is possible.⁵ In the absence of systems of classification, the soviet state could not make sense of the data it was collecting. Alain Desrosières explains that "taxonomy is associated with both the construction and the stabilization of a social order; with the production of a common language allowing individual acts to be coordinated; and last, with a specific and transmissible knowledge employing this language in descriptive and explanatory systems (especially statistics) capable of orienting and triggering action."⁶

³ Nancy Nimitz, "Soviet Agricultural Prices and Costs," in *Comparison of the United States and Soviet Economies*, ed. US Congress Joint Economic Committee (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 249.

⁴ ARAN f. 1877, op.1, d. 222, l. 15-16

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

⁶ Alain Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers: a History of Statistical Reasoning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 247-248.

Innokentii Pisarev (1894-1966), the deputy director of the Central Statistical Administration, argued in September 1947 that by relinquishing the classification of collective farms, soviet statisticians and political economists abandoned their sciences' claim to explanatory power and with it their ability to coordinate state action. "Statistics without grouping," Pisarev said, "is simply castrated statistics." He explained that "rich and invaluable materials" had been flowing into the Central Statistical Administration and its local agencies, but

The level of effective utilization of [this] material depends on quality of its analysis: how skillfully, expressively and clearly tables are constructed. The level of effective utilization of statistical materials depends on their correct economic analysis. [...] The key to radically improve the utilization of the rich materials that we receive is the broad-scale introduction of grouping and the development of an economic analysis, which will not be based on lumping overall figures [together] but on grouped and differentiated data.⁷

Pisarev distinguished between data and information. The soviet statistical bureaus had collected enormous amounts of raw data, but without classifying it they could not analyze or produce information utilizing it.

This chapter examines the development of collective farm taxonomies in political economy to illuminate the debate over the appropriate method of measuring socialism. It demonstrates that after collectivization, socialist realism entered political economic theory and brought it to a halt. The first section discusses the gradual disappearance of taxonomies in the late 1920s to argue that the cause was a socialist realist expectation of sameness that prohibited soviet economists from classifying collective farms. It shows how data the state collected did not allow for calculated action. Part two looks at statisticians' struggle to introduce a measure of realism into socialist realist political economy and develop taxonomy of collective farms. It

⁷ RGAE f. 1562, op. 327, d. 247, l. 20-22

examines how these taxonomies critiqued soviet agrarian policies and informed later reforms. Part three examines the measuring unit of labor, the “workday,” to demonstrate the inherent tension between utopia and measurements. It shows that the workday was a socialist realist unit designed to distill socialism.

1. Measuring without Classifications

If taxonomy is so essential to the production of statistical knowledge, why did soviet state statistics eliminate it from collective farms? As far as I can discern, there is no smoking gun that initiated the elimination of collective farm taxonomies. Postwar statisticians neither explained why, nor did they point a finger at any one order. The only explanation for this strange occurrence is historical.

The imperial Russian government taxed peasant communes according to the size of their landholding.⁸ In the mid-1860s zemstvo statisticians began contesting this cadastre paradigm, arguing that fair taxation should be based on budget and inventory studies and not on a homogeneous utilization of land allotment.⁹ Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, zemstvo, neo-populist and Marxist statisticians sought to identify the appropriate combination of factors that determined the welfare of a household. The discussion continued well into the first decade of soviet rule. In the early 1920s, the Central Statistical Administration, which employed primarily former zemstvo statisticians, applied a complex taxonomy of peasant households that divided them into seventeen groups according to the type of production, the usage of hired labor, and the type of craftsmanship. Only in the second half of the 1920s did the state recognize that the Central Statistical Administration’s grouping did not coincide with Marxist social analysis. Party propagandists could not translate the seventeen groups into

⁸ Yanni Kotsonis, ““Face-to-Face”: The State, the Individual, and the Citizen in Russian Taxation, 1863-1917,” *Slavic Review* 63, no. 2 (2004).

⁹ David W. Darrow, “The Politics of Numbers: Zemstvo Land Assessment and the Conceptualization of Russia’s Rural Economy,” *Russian Review* 59, no. 1 (2000).

classes representing the moral dichotomy of exploiters and exploited. With reorganization of the Central Statistical Administration in 1926, Marxist statisticians instituted a new four-class categorization of the peasantry (landless, poor, middle peasants and kulaks).¹⁰ The new taxonomy was grounded in a Marxist structural classification: a peasant's class was defined by his relationship to means of production.¹¹

Collectivization brought all peasant classifications to a halt. It eliminated the possibility of a structural Marxist taxonomy of households because all means of production were collectivized and hired labor was eliminated. Finally, on December 27, 1929, Stalin announced the liquidation of the "kulak as a class" and thereby officially ended the debate about peasant household taxonomy.¹² Rural inhabitants were now classified either as workers (on a state farms), or collective farmers (members of a cooperative). In the absence of class taxonomy, soviet political economy stopped classifying collective farms and their inhabitants. Thus ironically, the soviet state completed the circular historical process and resumed the Tsarist pre-reform distribution of obligations according to a cadastre survey. The only difference was that instead of calculating it by commune (*obshchina*), the soviet state prescribed obligations on the commune's direct descendent: the collective farm.

After collectivization, statistics of collective farms became a socialist realist enterprise. Without a politically acceptable means to identify rural economic differentiation, statisticians

¹⁰ Alen Blum and Martina Mespule offer a fascinating description of the process of elimination of statistical categories on the road to a classless society. Alen Blum and Martina Mespule, *Biurokraticheskaia anarkhiia: statistika i vlast' pri Staline* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 189-203. Translated from Alain Blum and Martine Mespoulet, *L'anarchie bureaucratique. Statistique et pouvoir sous Staline* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003).

¹¹ For a detailed nuanced discussion of the 1920s scholarly debates see Susan Gross Solomon, *The Soviet Agrarian Debate: A Controversy in Social Science, 1923-1929* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977).

¹² Terry Cox, *Peasants, Class, and Capitalism: the Rural Research of L.N. Kritsman and his School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 216-218; Blum and Mespule, *Biurokraticheskaia anarkhiia: statistika i vlast' pri Staline*, 189-203.

turned to averaged data which “lumped overall figures” together and masked differences. Thus, using averages, collective farm surveys represented an idealized future of full equality. These surveys correspond to Evgeny Dobrenko’s understanding of socialist realism: they de-realized the present and substituted it for an idealized future represented as reality.¹³

For example, a 1942 budget study of collective farms in Sverdlovsk province reported that the average pay per workday grew in 1942 compared to 1941. Like many other statistical reports, this study utilized payment per workday as indicative of collective farm prosperity and the economic conditions of their members. The workday payment, discussed later, was a share of the collective farm’s profit. Since collective farms were cooperatives, farmers were not guaranteed a wage. Labor payments came from the kolkhoz labor compensation fund and was dependent on the farm’s surplus after delivering the obligatory procurement to the state, paying the Machine-Tractor Station, allocating produce for seed, reserving cash in a capital fund ('indivisible', *nedelimyi*) and covering necessary production expenses and administrative costs.¹⁴ Any cash or in-kind surplus was distributed among collective farmers according to their earned “workdays.” Thus, prosperous farms with surpluses paid out substantial sums per workday while those without surpluses paid nothing.¹⁵ The surplus of most farms was rather meager. The demographer Olga Verbitskaia found that in 1950, between 72 and 92 percent of collective farms in Volograd, Kursk, Orel, Kalinin, Gorky, Smolensk and several other provinces paid less than one kilogram of grain per workday and 4-8 percent paid nothing to their members.¹⁶ Reporting

¹³ Evgeny A. Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ The 1935 statute of the agricultural *artel* defined that the every kolkhoz had to reserve no less than 12 and no more than 20 percent of its annual money income in a capital fund. Galina K. Ol'shevskaia, "Reorganizatsiia MTS i kolkhozy v 1958-1961gg.," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 114(1986), 28.

¹⁵ RGAE f. 1562, op. 331, d. 86, l. 4 For more see Alec Nove, "The Incomes of Soviet Peasants," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 38, no. 91 (1960).

¹⁶ Olga M. Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo: ot Stalina k Krushchevu, seredina 40-kh--nachalo 60-kh godov* (Moskva: Nauka, 1992), 43. Similarly Aleksandr Nikonov quotes a 1951 inspector of the Council of Kolkhoz Affairs who wrote Malenkov that forty percent of collective farms were paying less than 300

that the average pay per workday grew in 1942 compared to 1941, the 1942 Sverdlovsk province budget study indicated that the province's collective farms were gradually becoming more prosperous.

But the devil is in the details. In spite the positive reaffirmation that life was constantly getting better (even during the war), it was difficult to ascertain whether payment per workday in Sverdlovsk's farms indeed increased between 1941 and 1942. Payment per workday was, for the most part, payment in-kind, and the report did not convert in-kind payments into rubles.¹⁷ Instead, it stated that while the average amount of grain payments per workday shrank by almost 30 percent, from 1.16 kilogram per workday to 0.81kg, the amount of vegetables grew by 475 percent from 4 grams to 19 grams of vegetables. Most importantly, collective farmers received more money per workday in 1942, when the average pay grew from 0.70 rubles to 0.85 rubles per workday. Judging from the aggregated data, there were no differences between collective farms of different ethnic composition, geographical location or dominant agricultural production. The report "lumped together," to use Pisarev's words, the Russian majority of Sverdlovsk province with its Tatar and Ukrainian minorities and ignored the geographical diversity of the central and northern parts of the Ural Mountains and the western edge of the Siberian Plain.¹⁸

grams of bread per workday and twenty-six collective farms were paying nothing in Velikoluk province. Aleksandr A. Nikonov, *Sprial' mnogovekovoï dramy: Agrarnaia nauka i politika Rossii (XVIII-XX vv.)* (Moscow: Entsiklopediia rossiskikh dereven', 1995), 298.

¹⁷ Frank Durgin calculated that in 1952 75% of collective farms' workday payment throughout the Soviet Union was in kind. The numbers began dropping only after Stalin's death as a result of Khrushchev's reforms. Frank A. Durgin, "Monetization and Policy in Soviet Agriculture since 1952," *Soviet Studies* 15, no. 4 (1964).

¹⁸ In contrast see Martha Lampland, "Classifying Laborers: Instinct, Property, and the Psychology of Productivity in Hungary (1920-1956)," in *Standards and Their Stories*, ed. Martha Lampland and Susan Leigh Star (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 123-142. On the economy and geography of the region see Gijs Kessler, "The 1932-1933 Crisis and Its Aftermath beyond the Epicenters of Famine: The Urals Region," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 25, no. 3/4 (2001).

Yet the report's authors were not satisfied with the complete "de-realization of the present." They wanted to attract the readers' attention to the silence produced by the aggregated averages without breaking it. The result was twofold. On the one hand, the authors indicated the disparities between districts by naming the three districts with the highest pay. "On average [in these districts, payment] of grain per workday was between 1 and 1.8 kilograms," they stated. Thus, without a taxonomy of collective farms, they classified data administratively, (i.e. by district), to indicate that the province had not reached the desired ideal future of similitude. On the other hand, the report included an additional table depicting grain payment per workday in six collective farms. Without using sophisticated statistical tools, the authors chose six individual cases that projected differences between farm payments. All six collective farms paid considerably more grain in 1942 than the average payment for the province as a whole. Moreover, four of the six exemplary farms increased their grain payment in 1942, while the average farm, as we have seen, decreased grain payment by almost thirty percent. Thus, reading between the lines, a reader could understand that if six collective farms were doing better than average, there were others that were considerably worse off. Offering data from *Otpor* kolkhoz of Alapaevsk district, which paid in 1942 1.89 kilograms of grain per workday, more than twice as much as the average, the reader could discern that there was another kolkhoz that paid nothing or nearly nothing.¹⁹ However, since the six farms were all better than average, the report did not break away from socialist realism as a form of representation.

Nonetheless, without categorization, the 1942 Sverdlovsk survey lacked any real explanatory power.²⁰ Had the report grouped collective farms by size, the reader could have

¹⁹ Kh. Kessler and G.E. Kornilov, eds., *Kolkhoznaia zhizn' na urale 1935-1953*, Dokumenty sovetskoi istorii (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 539-543.

²⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that the soviet leadership gradually replaced class analysis with an ascription of *soslovie*. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *The Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 4 (1993), 764. Gijs Kessler, "The Passport System and State Control over Population Flows in the Soviet Union, 1932-1940," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 42, no. 2/4

presumed that larger collective farms were more profitable. Had it grouped them by ethnicity, it could have suggested that one ethnic group was more arduous than another. The report could have classified collective farms by the percentage of land mechanically tilled, their main line of production, the geographical proximity to a city, or even the political affiliation of the chairman. But the report offered nothing of the sort. As Pisarev would lament in 1947, it was data and not information.

Governing without classifications

Andreev's concern with statistics and the lack of information it provided agricultural administrators originated in the slow pace of agricultural reconstruction and the first indications of the 1946-7 famine.²¹ In devising taxonomy of collective farms, soviet statisticians sought to identify and address the bottlenecks and inefficiencies of agricultural production to increase output. As Jean Lévesque demonstrated, there was a consensus among postwar policy makers that the main cause of poor output was low labor productivity, a problem that soviet statesmen assumed could be resolved with proper administrative measures.²² Yet statisticians faced a grave discursive problem when they assembled to formulate the taxonomy of collective farms in 1947. To put it simply, they could not conceive of a classification system that would explain the low labor productivity in collective farms.

As we have seen, soviet political economy was based on structural differentiation categorizing people according to their relations to the means of production. In this sense, those

(2001). On the development of the *soslovie* system, see Gregory L. Freeze, "The *Soslovie* (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (1986).

²¹ For more on the state of soviet agricultural production, see the introduction. Veniamin F. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 godov: Priskhozhdienie i prosledstviia* (Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii, 1996), 12-37; I. E. Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N.S. Khrushcheva i sel'skoe khoziastvo* (Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii, 2001), 17-59; Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*; Sidney I. Ploss, *Conflict and Decision-Making in Soviet Russia; a Case Study of Agricultural Policy, 1953-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 25-40.

²² Jean Lévesque, "The Post-World War II Stalinist Order in the Soviet Countryside: Labour Discipline and Collective Farm Life, 1945-1953" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2003).

employed by the state were all workers. As members of a cooperative, collective farmers were a distinct social class because they collectively owned the means of production and utilized state land. Statisticians repeatedly argued that collective farms could not be divided into separate social types because their relationship to the means of production rendered them all “identical” socialist enterprises “by their nature.”²³ Statisticians were highly aware that there was no discursive space for differentiating between collective farms. Quoting a *Pravda* editorial, Aleksandr Silin stated, “We do not have conditions for weak collective farms. The only lagging cooperatives are those headed by untrained and weak chairmen who lack initiative. There cannot be bad collective farms, only bad directors who are unable to overcome a weakness in the collective farm and bring it to the path of mighty upturn.”²⁴ By extension, collective farmers were all “identical” because they worked for identical institutions. If there were differences in income or living standards between them, these differences were merely indicative of the quality of a cooperative chairman’s leadership skills.²⁵

Instead of grouping collective farms in a way that would explain differentiation, soviet political economists individualized the problem. Cynthia Kaplan shows that the administrative practice of governing collective farms followed *Pravda*’s assertion that “there could not be bad collective farms, only bad directors.” Between 1947 and 1949, one-third to one-half of all collective farm chairmen were replaced annually.²⁶ In fact, Andreev’s speech at the 1947

²³ A. Libkind, "O metodakh statisticheskikh gruppirovok kolkhozov," *Vestnik Statistiki*, no. 3 (1950), 33.

²⁴ A. Silin, "O statisticheskikh gruppirovkakh kolkhozov," *ibid.*, no. 6, 15. The quotation is from *Pravda*, July 27, 1950.

²⁵ This homogeneous presentation of the countryside is particularly interesting when compared to the classification of workers. Workers were subdivided into skilled and unskilled or semi-skilled, and distinct from the intelligentsia, which was subdivided into technical-engineering personnel (*ITR*), teachers, medical workers and servicemen. For example: GARF f. 374, op. 30, d. 2116, l. 267-285. A 1952 RSFSR report on the budget of workers, servicemen and collective farmers

²⁶ The rate dropped to 25 percent after amalgamation. Cynthia Sue Kaplan, *The Party and Agricultural Crisis Management in the USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 79.

February Plenum called for a reconsideration of this individualized approach. “How can we justify the practice of mass replacement of collective farm chairmen and MTS directors?” he asked referencing three provinces in which nearly half of the chairmen had been replaced in 1945 and 1946. The practice of replacing leading personnel, Andreev contended, was a sign “of the weakness of provincial leadership, and such poor leadership practices must end.”²⁷

Yet the individualization of economic problems and solutions were rooted deeply within soviet culture. Following Evgeny Dobrenko, I argue that there was an inherent tension between soviet socialist realist discourse and economic rationality.²⁸ While the former offered collective farmers primarily ethical incentives to work, the latter operated under the assumption that people required a motivation based in economic self-interest. Dobrenko shows that the soviet cult of labor, enthusiasm, and heroism replaced economic rationality, depicting socialist realism and the Stakhanovite movement as “devoid of economic motives.”²⁹ Indeed, had soviet political economists categorized collective farms, examined their members, and analyzed what made them prosper or flounder, they would have surely found the realism of economic incentive. Had they classified collective farms by the main production line, for example, they would have discovered that the higher procurement price the state paid, the more collective farms received per workday, and the more productive they were. But soviet political economists could not conceive of collective farm taxonomy because their knowledge was rooted in a socialist realist discourse, which rejected material motivation.

²⁷ Andreev, O merakh pod"ema sel'skogo khoziaistva v poslevoennyi period, доклад na plenum TsK VKP(b), 59.

²⁸ Dobrenko takes this argument further than me and argues that “What in fact is lacking in the political economy of socialism, and what makes it magical, if not to say the most fantastic of all Soviet social disciplines, is its idealism (that is, complete indifference to both human nature and the law of production) and its absence of logic in all these elevated constructs, which arises from an absence of motivation. In other words, it has no realism (since realism is motivation).” Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

Thus, since the 1930s, soviet agrarian economic policy equated increased labor productivity with rising enthusiasm, promoting competition, and propagating consciousness.³⁰ Collective farms and farmers pledged to increase their labor productivity and challenge each other in “socialist competitions.” This was the embodiment of the rural Stakhanovite movement that Mary Buckley depicts so well.³¹ In the postwar period too, political economists still considered socialist competition to be the most effective way of increasing agricultural output. In 1944, the economist Konstantin Ostrovitianov, for example, wrote that socialist competition was “the most important factor in the development of productive forces at the stage of socialism.”³² Yet, as Dobrenko argues, the Stakhanovite movement needed “constant justification, permanent invention of motives,” because it lacked economic motivation.³³

Similarly, when state officials realized that collective farmers had been shirking collective work, rather than examine their motivation, or lack thereof, they took measures to “increase the peasants’ political consciousness and consequently their labor productivity,” by granting them the power to exile shirkers to labor camps. During the campaign against shirkers and parasites, collective farms deported over thirty thousand members between June 1948 and March 1953. Jean Lévesque writes that while collective farmers refused to perform unpaid labor, which they

³⁰ On scientific management in the Soviet Union as an alternative to the Stakhanovite movement see Mark R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Arthur G. Bedeian and Carl R. Phillips, “Scientific Management and Stakhanovism in the Soviet Union: A Historical Perspective,” *International Journal of Social Economics* 17 no. 10 (1990); Kendall E. Bailes, “Alexei Gastev and the Soviet Controversy over Taylorism, 1918-24,” *Soviet Studies* 29, no. 3 (1977); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “Soviet Norm Determination in Theory and Practice, 1917-1941,” *Soviet Studies* 36, no. 1 (1984); Zenovia A. Sochor, “Soviet Taylorism Revisited,” *ibid.* 33, no. 2 (1981); William J. Chase, *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 214-224.

³¹ Mary Buckley, *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants: Heroines and Heroes of Stalin's Fields* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006).

³² Konstantin V. Ostrovitianov, *Bol'shevik*, no. 23-24 (1944).

³³ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 177.

considered corvée, the soviet state chose to label some as “lazy bums” and used their demonization to teach others labor ethics.³⁴

The 1948 campaign was a mirror image of the rural Stakhanovite movement. While the latter propagated the valor of individual labor to increase productivity, the former tagged individual shirkers as the cause for low agricultural productivity. Both campaigns ignored economic incentive and focused on the villages’ heroes and villains.

2. “Data averages satisfy no one” – The emergence of classification

Andreev’s speech at the 1947 February Plenum symbolized a turn in the conceptualization of collective farm productivity problems. It triggered a debate among statisticians and economists about potential collective farm taxonomy that lasted nearly ten years. The problem, as the economist David Chernomordik (1888-1969) put it in 1948, was that while the taxonomy of collective farms was the “chief problem on the economic front,” economists and statisticians “still hold scientific positions based in classical Marxism.” As we have seen, the soviet understanding of classical Marxism limited all economic classification to relations to the means of production and since all collective farmers had the same relationship to the means of production, they simply belonged in one homogenous group. Chernomordik, who had graduated from Moscow University in 1911 and from the Institute of Red Professors in 1922, argued that it was this insistence on Marxist orthodoxy that caused soviet economists to fail: “We have not yet developed a system of scientific categories of political economy.” To be sure, Chernomordik did not argue that classical Marxism was obsolete; rather it had “enormous influence on the creation of statistics as a science.”³⁵ And yet at the same time, his voice was

³⁴ Jean Lévesque, "Exile and Discipline: The June 1948 Campaign Against Collective Farm Shirkers," *Carl Beck Papers* (2006).

³⁵ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 192, l. 45

loud and clear: soviet political economy had to creatively deviate from classical Marxism to develop an applicable taxonomy of collective farms.

There was one classification Andreev explicitly named in his 1947 Plenum speech: differentiating between “lagging,” “average” and “leading” farms. This basic taxonomy, he argued, would allow provincial and district administrators to learn from “leading” experience and assist “lagging” farms.³⁶ Andreev did not offer a definition of “leading” or “lagging,” and the earliest definition I have encountered was in a 1955 “program for the study of leading farms.” The program defined leading collective farms as those producing fifty percent more per hectare than the average collective farm in the district. Similarly, lagging collective farms produced fifty percent less per hectare than the average.³⁷ While this classification allowed district administrators to see the entire spectrum of collective farm productivity, it still did not break away from the socialist realist model. The classification was based in the traditional soviet success indicator, gross output, it lacked explanatory power and did not even attempt to answer what made one collective farm “leading” while another in the same district was “lagging.”³⁸ Instead, statisticians who used the classification painted a socialist realist picture of life on a leading collective farm.

For example, a 1952 budget study of the Russian Republic’s Statistical Administration shows how life on a leading farm was more joyous than on an average farm. The study used the workday category to demonstrate that like Stakhanovites, collective farmers in leading farms “work more on the kolkhoz.” Thanks to their investment and hard work, collective farmers from leading farms received a higher wage and more in-kind compensation. The study measured the

³⁶ Andreev, O merakh pod"ema sel'skogo khoziaistva v poslevoennyi period, doklad na plenum TsK VKP(b), 58.

³⁷ RGAE f. 1562, op. 331, d. 128, l. 1.7-9

³⁸ Pekka Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge Soviet paperbacks (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 50-51.

quality of life of collective farmers in consumption of food, clothing and shoes and showed that their life was much better than those on average farms. They purchased 28 percent more shoes and consumed 31 percent more meat and 42 percent more sugar and confectionary products. The ultimate proof that collective farmers in leading farms were better off was that their families were larger: 4.37 versus 4.26. Moreover, fewer family members worked in cities or were absent from the household – 92.4 percent of family members were present versus 87.3 percent in “non-leading” collective farms.³⁹ When migration to cities constantly threatened the collective farms’ integrity and split families, larger families and lower migration rates were indexes of happiness.⁴⁰ The life of the collective farmer in a leading farm was no doubt better. But what distinguished this farm from the neighboring farm? The socialist realist narrative would suggest that political consciousness, strong leadership and hard work were the wheels of economic success. Yet socialist realism was not sufficient to assist administrators in transforming a lagging farm into a leading one.

According to Auri Berg, in 1949, soviet officials began raising concerns about another classification they believed had bearing on agricultural productivity. Nikita Khrushchev, then First Party secretary in Ukraine, argued in the spring of 1949 that small collective farms lay beyond the soviet state’s control. Not only were they poorer than larger ones, but they were run by “inexperienced local villagers,” and suffered from “many infractions against the collective farm charter” and “weak labor and government discipline.”⁴¹ As a result of the amalgamation campaign, which first began in Ukraine and spread throughout the Soviet Union, the number of

³⁹ GARF f. A374, op. 30, d. 2116, l. 297-298

⁴⁰ Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 80-97.

⁴¹ Auri C. Berg, "Reform in the Time of Stalin: Nikita Khrushchev and the Fate of the Russian Peasantry" (University of Toronto, 2012), 90.

collective farms shrank from 251,734 in 1949 to 94,655 in 1952.⁴² If the aim was the statistical increase of party control over collective farms, the campaign was highly successful. Though the absolute number of party members among kolkhoz chairmen rose only slightly, the percentage of those who were members of the communist party grew from 28.3% in 1947 to 79.4% in 1952.⁴³ Scholars had little to do with the amalgamation campaign; however statisticians used it as an example of a productive classification that assisted state rule.⁴⁴

The formation of recommendations for collective farm taxonomy caused a silent discomfort among statisticians and economists. The 1949 Central Statistical Administration's recommendation on grouping collective farms reads, "Even though all collective farms are of a singular social-economic type (socialist enterprise), they are not homogeneous." After nearly two years of debates, the Central Statistical Administration stipulated four basic classifications to differentiate collective farms: production (grain, cotton, animal husbandry etc.), fulfillment of plan and obligatory quota, percentage of mechanically tilled land, and economic success (whether the farm was "leading," or "lagging"). Though these were still experimental classifications, the scientific council of the Central Statistical Administration emphasized that economic analysis should determine differentiation and that "preliminary experimentations are of the utmost importance." This last phrase reminded readers of Lenin's insistence that "the very same material can give diametrically opposed conclusions under different grouping."⁴⁵ After all, Lenin's groundbreaking analysis of peasant class stratification was based primarily on data

⁴² The numbers in the Russian Republic were even more dramatic, the number of collective farms decrease from 161,733 in 1949 to 54,666 in 1952.

⁴³ Berg, "Reform in the Time of Stalin", 188.

⁴⁴ Libkind, "O metodakh statisticheskikh gruppirovok kolkhozov," 35.

⁴⁵ RGAE f. 1562, op. 331, d. 15, l. 3

collected by zemstvo statisticians. He simply analyzed the material differently and classified peasants according to economic rather than legal categories.⁴⁶

“We have not studied income accounting in 25 years”

The debate over collective farm classification further intensified after the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued the decree “On improving budget statistics of workers, white collar workers and collective farmers” in November 1951. The decree signaled Soviet statesmen’s continued demand for information about collective farms and their population. Statisticians still held the raw data and had to construct classifications to turn it into information. The Central Statistical Administration appointed Nemchinov to head a commission to develop a “method for estimating collective farmers’ income.” The commission worked for nearly two years before presenting its recommendations at a statistical discussion in August 1953. Part of the difficulty in classifying farm households was their variety of income sources. Collective farmers received payments from the farm, from products sold from their private plots, remittances sent by family working in cities and in some cases from the state.⁴⁷ Another problem was that collective farmers received much of their pay in kind and statisticians had to translate potatoes, grain and the right to use the collective farm pasture into a ruble sum. Finally, the commission argued for the importance of including in the calculations free benefits the state was offering collective farmers. Medical care, education, state expense on administrative cadres and other social amenities had to be distributed among collective farmers’ household budgets.⁴⁸ Yet most importantly, the commission had no precedent to draw on. Indeed, after his commission’s proposal was severely

⁴⁶ Samuel Kotz and Eugene Seneta, "Lenin as a Statistician: A Non-Soviet View," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 153, no. 1 (1990), 77-78; Esther Kingston-Mann, "Marxism and Russian Rural Development: Problems of Evidence, Experience, and Culture," *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 4 (1981).

⁴⁷ Collective farmers were not entitled to old-age pensions or disability benefits. However, since budget studies calculated the household’s income as a whole, a kolkhoz household could include a worker who chose to return to his native village in his old age or a postman who received his wage from the state.

⁴⁸ RGAE f. 1562, op. 331, d. 86, l. 1-7

criticized, Nemchinov apologized: “We have not studied income accounting in 25 years.” He added that commission was well versed in the Russian tradition of budget studies, but “there is no comparison with prerevolutionary income.”⁴⁹

Much of the criticism of Nemchinov’s proposal revolved around its classification methods. The 1951 decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR called for conducting budget studies “according to the branch of production the household was engaged in” (grain, animal husbandry and industrial crops), but the discussion’s participants found this classification dissatisfactory.⁵⁰ The proposal “does not meet the requirements,” said Konstantin Vinogradov. “Data averages satisfy no one. We need to develop additional groupings,” N.P. Fedotova added. A. N. Pavlov suggested that there would be “great economic interest” in introducing grouping by economic regions alongside main production and sub-grouping the households according to their aggregated income.⁵¹

The proposed classifications had enormous implications on the state’s perception of its relationship with collective farms. Regional classifications, for example, could shed light on imbalances in the pricing for Machine-Tractor Stations (MTS) services. The MTS received a share of the crop from collective farms as payment in kind for planting and harvesting services. The rates the MTS charged depended on soil fertility and topography and were calculated in relation to the productive capacity of the land.⁵² Thus, for example, if statisticians found

⁴⁹ RGAE f. 1562, op. 331, d. 86, l. 19

⁵⁰ RGAE f. 1562, op. 331, d. 141, l.3. I have not found an explanation for the decision to ignore collective farms that specialize in fishery, only evidence that such decision was made. See RGAE f. 1562, op. 331, d. 82, l. 67ob

⁵¹ RGAE f. 1562, op. 331, d. 86, l. 17-18

⁵² This differential method was exchanged with the abolition of the MTS in 1958 for zonal price differentiation. Morris Bornstein, “The Soviet Debate on Agricultural Price and Procurement Reforms,” *Soviet Studies* 21, no. 1 (1969), 6.

stratification between the welfare of collective farm households located in Siberia and Black Earth Region, this could potentially indicate that the MTS pricing system was set incorrectly.

Similarly, when the Central Statistical Administration began classifying collective farm household budgets according to the farm's production, they found significant disparities between the incomes of households in cattle breeding, grain producing and industrial crop collective farms. A 1953 budget study of households in Sverdlovsk province found that in the second quarter of 1953, a household in livestock collective farms had an average annual income of 1218.16 rubles compared to 1035.5 rubles in a grain-producing farm. The study suggested that the reason behind the apparent difference was that livestock collective farms were often located closer to cities, which allowed members to migrate for work in industry. Proximity to an urban center also meant that the collective farm market was more profitable and the household could substantially increase its income from selling produce from its private plot.

Ultimately, however, disparities in household income between cattle-breeding and grain-producing farms pointed to the inequality in the state procurement price policy. In addition to higher income from migration and private plots, the wages the household received from the collective farm were considerably higher. A household on a livestock farm received 130 rubles on average compared to 81.80 rubles for a household in a grain-producing farm.⁵³ As the political economist Aleksei Malafeev shows in his history of soviet price policy between 1929 and 1952, state procurement prices for grain and potatoes changed very little, while meat and milk prices increased significantly. In fact, the procurement price for potatoes was so low that it did not even cover the cost of delivery to the city. Thus, collective farms cultivating potatoes were in fact subsidizing the urban market. At the same time, the state increased retail prices tenfold between 1929 and 1953, while milk procurement prices increase fourfold and grain prices increased only

⁵³ Kessler and Kornilov, eds., *Kolkhoznaia zhizn' na urale 1935-1953*, 773, 778-779.

by 19 percent. Thus, collective farm household incomes had been eroding since collectivization in relation to inflation and were unequal even in their erosion.⁵⁴

In fact, while Moscow's statisticians had not calculated these differences until 1952, agrarian economists were highly aware of the effects of different procurement prices. Tatiana Zaslavskaia recalls "one of the best collective farms" she encountered on a 1950 field trip to Krasnodarsk krai. The house she and the other researchers resided in had "large bright rooms, hardwood floors, curtains, electricity, good furniture, [and] mirrors." The kolkhoz, she writes, had a good chairman, but he was no better than other chairmen. According to Zaslavaskaia, the difference was that the collective farm produced tobacco. The state's procurement prices for raw materials like tobacco, cotton, flax and sugar beets adjusted with inflation, fully covered production costs and even allowed for a profit. Zaslavskaia remembers that the chairman of this farm was one of the secretaries of krai's party committee and adeptly exploited his political connections "Therefore this kolkhoz received much larger tobacco planting plans. The collective farms of Briukhovetskii district received income only from the production of tobacco, which went to the army. All other products were grown at a loss."⁵⁵

Interestingly, in an economic system where prices were set by the state rather than through the market, the differentiation of collective farm income by production assisted the state in adjusting prices. Indeed, after Stalin's death, his successors' first agricultural reform was to increase procurement prices and adjust them to revise previous price inequality. Wheat prices increased in September 1953 by 145 percent, the price of eggs increased by 26 percent and the

⁵⁴ Aleksei N. Malafeev, *Istoriia tsenoobrazovaniia v SSSR, 1917-1963 gg.* (Moscow: Mysl', 1964), 266-267. For a detailed analysis of procurement prices in relation to inflation and cost of production, see: Nimitz, "Soviet Agricultural Prices and Costs."; Bornstein, "The Soviet Debate on Agricultural Price and Procurement Reforms."

⁵⁵ Tatiana I. Zaslavskaia, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 3: *Moia zhizn': Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 2007), 379-381.

price of cotton only by five percent.⁵⁶ In his memoirs, Khrushchev called procurement prices under Stalin “a system of extortion,” and argued that raising procurement prices was a necessary step “to spur greater production and productivity through economic incentives.”⁵⁷

3. The workday: Classifying Individuals

The workday (*trudoden'*) was created in 1930 as the principle for calculating collective farmers' pay. The workday had little to do with a natural “human day” counted by hours; rather the workday was an example of a socialist realist measurement. It was designed to simultaneously represent socialism and to produce it. On the one hand, the workday was an idealized unit designed to measure all human activities and give due recognition to all forms of labor without disturbing workers' equality. On the other hand, soviet economists called it “a powerful tool of social control,” a means to incentivize collective farm members and an instrument of social engineering designed to transform petit-bourgeois peasants into rural proletariats. Soviet officials argued that the workday was designed “remake [peasant] psychology in the spirit of socialism” and increase their interests in collective production.⁵⁸

A History

After collectivization, the Ministry of Agriculture and the *Kolkhoztsentr* (The Collective Farm Center) conceived of the workday as a means to ensure that all collective farm members participated in public production. They instructed collective farms to avoid distributing income to members who did not work. Soon, however, the “egalitarian” (*uravnilovka*) principle which equated all human labor regardless of an individual's qualifications was replaced by the

⁵⁶ Durgin, “Monetization and Policy in Soviet Agriculture since 1952,” 377.

⁵⁷ Quoted from Stephen K. Wegren, “Dilemmas of Agrarian Reform in the Soviet Union,” *ibid.* 44, no. 1 (1992), 4.

⁵⁸ N. Nazartsev, *Kolkhoznyi trudoden'* (Gosudarestvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1951), 23, 58.

“socialist principle” from each according to his ability, to each according to his work.⁵⁹ In 1933, the People's Commissariat of Agriculture reformulated the workday as an idealized unit measuring all human activity. It devised seven categories of qualifications, the lowest of which received half a workday and the highest two workdays for every human day of labor. Yet the collective farm workday did not measure the qualification of the worker; rather, it claimed to measure the quality and quantity of the work. Skilled labor was of higher quality and therefore deserved a higher rate. As the economist Mikhail Kraev explained in a 1949 article in *Voprosy Ekonomiki*, “The labour-day measures labour; and the same collective farmer is employed in jobs of different grades.” He argued that collective farms that mistakenly constructed the workday “in imitation of the factory grades” were destroying “the collective farm standard for valuing labour, and the means of distributing income according to quantity and quality of labour.”⁶⁰ The 1933 workday was similar to Marx’s notion of abstract labor.⁶¹ The collective farmer, like Marx’s worker “in communist society,” did not have “one exclusive sphere of activity,” but could “do one thing today and another tomorrow, [...] hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner [...] without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.”⁶² The collective farm workday was a utopian measurement: in an idealized society where all workers were equally trained, the workday maintained the equality of workers without sacrificing their incentive to improve the quality of their labor. As a 1951 pamphlet for collective farm administrators maintained, “In a socialist

⁵⁹ Martha Lampland offers a fascinating analysis of this principle as it applies to Hungarian agricultural workers. See Lampland, “Classifying Laborers.”

⁶⁰ Mikhail A. Kraev, “The Collective Farm Labour-Day (Continued),” *Soviet Studies* 1, no. 3 (1950), 267.

⁶¹ For a fascinating analysis of Marx’s theory of abstract labor, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capital,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000).

⁶² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. Christopher John Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 53.

society there is equality of the workers. Equality under socialism is 'not egalitarianism' (*uravnilovka*) of personal consumption and living conditions, but the abolition of classes."⁶³

But even utopian measurements adjust with time. In 1935, as a result of the rural shock-workers movement, collective farm accountants calculating workdays adjusted them to account for labor productivity and paid kolkhoz "rate-busters" for overfulfilling production plans. Indeed, the 1935 collective farm statute recommended setting aside ten percent of the workdays to compensate for "above average productivity."⁶⁴ In a 1950 article in *Novyi Mir*, Zakhar Kiiashko, a collective farm chairman from Krasnodarsk krai, described the 1935 kolkhoz statute as a response to the call of collective farm chairmen. He recalled that collective farm chairmen realized almost immediately after collectivization that "one could come to work for 10 minutes, conspicuously (*pomaiachit'*) make his appearance and leave [while] another could work conscientiously. . ." A person's qualification could not substitute for his labor discipline, he said. "We were wandering in dark forest [in this respect], our labor accounting method at the time was simply 'by the stick.'"⁶⁵

After the war, when it became apparent that the workday was not assisting in increasing agricultural production, the Ministry of Agriculture redefined it once again to better incentivize collective farmers to work. A draft resolution Malenkov sent to Stalin in 1948 illuminated the severe discrepancy between the number of workdays paid and the harvest results achieved. The former grew annually, while the latter showed no significant change.⁶⁶ Malenkov's draft resolution advised implementing the recommendation of the 1935 kolkhoz statute to account for productivity rates in workday enumeration, but in a new way. In April 1948, while maintaining

⁶³ Nazartsev, *Kolkhoznyi trudoden'*, 29.

⁶⁴ Kraev, "The Collective Farm Labour-Day (Continued)," 261-262.

⁶⁵ Zakhar Kiiashko, "Na Kubanskoi zemle (zapiski predsdatelia kolkhoza)," *Novyi Mir*, no. 3 (1950), 137.

⁶⁶ Lévesque, "The Post-World War II Stalinist Order in the Soviet Countryside", 92.

the euphemism “workday,” the Council of Ministers of the USSR published instructions that transformed the workday into a piece-rate. It consisted of recommendations for exemplary output norms covering 350 of the most common agricultural jobs and 1130 auxiliary and construction occupations. The recommendation divided fieldwork labors into nine categories according to their complexity, labor intensity and importance to the national economy. The most common agricultural field labors, such as sewing bags and harvesting sticks for making baskets, were at the bottom of the pay hierarchy. Work associated with clearing virgin lands, such as pioneering single-furrow ploughs, sat on top. The recommendation also increased the prescribed differentiation of pay, where the first category of labor received half a workday per daily norm and the ninth category received two and a half workdays.⁶⁷ Making rope for haybands, for example, was classified at the lowest category and half a workday was equivalent to making 1,200-1,400 ropes. In contrast, mechanically reaping grain in the steppe was atop the scale, whereby 4.5-6 hectares of reaped grain equaled two and a half workdays.⁶⁸

Thus, the state eradicated the homogeneous measurement for collective farm labor and replaced it with a system similar to that which had managed soviet industrial workers since 1924.⁶⁹ The new workday was “a powerful tool of social control.”⁷⁰ It provided the collective farm surveillance over its labor force and gave workers the ability to self-reflect on their true

⁶⁷ Il'ia B. Shchukin, "Rastsenki v trudodniakh osnovnykh polevykh rabot v kolkhozakh," <http://istoriya-pskova.ru/rascenki-v-trudodnyax-osnovnyx-polevyx-rabot-v-kolxozax/>.

⁶⁸ V. Ovchinnikova, "Kolkhozhnyi trudoden' za 20 let," *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 8 (1951), 68-73; Nazartsev, *Kolkhozhnyi trudoden'*, 62-63.

⁶⁹ On Soviet industrial piece-rate see Bailes, "Alexei Gastev and the Soviet Controversy over Taylorism, 1918-24."; Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power*; Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: the Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), 21-23; Sochor, "Soviet Taylorism Revisited."

⁷⁰ Nazartsev, *Kolkhozhnyi trudoden'*, 23, 58. Evgeny Dobrenko makes a similar argument about the function of labor in the soviet system in general. See Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 178-181.

contribution to the collective. In this sense, the workday was a highly modern tool of social engineering.

At the same time, the postwar workday defied every definition of modern. After all, it was a local measurement: since collective farms differed in geographical terrain and crops, each devised its own labor output quotas.⁷¹ While the state showed growing interest in controlling and managing the kolkhoz labor force, its recommendations were merely guidelines. In reality, every collective farm had to classify the types of labor and devise a method of measuring them in piece-rate. Though in 1948 the Ministry of Agriculture asked local state organizations to assist collective farms in determining quotas and offered “exemplary norms,” this had little to no effect on the practice of enumerating “workdays.”⁷² In reality, as we shall see, the workday reflected the power dynamic within the village.

Nonetheless, Zakhar Kiiashko, the collective farm chairman from Krasnodarsk krai, followed the instructions and explained the scientific manner in which his collective farm established output quotas:

We started as follows: we took a sheet of paper, listed the name of [different types of] jobs and collectively began to discuss them. [Take] plowing, for example. When a man works alone - how much could [he] plow in one day? The answer was easy. Everyone knows that two people with a two-horse plow can plough half a hectare per day. Meaning, the norm is set: twenty-five decares (*sotok*) of plowing will equal a day of

⁷¹ Interestingly, Donald Filtzer describes a similar situation in factories where “the conditions of production varied enormously from one factory to another, depending on the age of the equipment, the rate of breakdown, and the accessibility of raw materials, fuel and spare parts.” Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 233.

⁷² Lévesque, “The Post-World War II Stalinist Order in the Soviet Countryside”, 97-98.

work.⁷³ In the same way, sometimes with great difficulty, sometimes with less, we calculated the norms for harrowing, sowing, weeding, wood carrying, carrying manure, care for the horses, etc.⁷⁴

Kiiashko continued to explain that when the “collective experience was insufficient” to calculate the norm, they called on the “main norm-setter,” (*glavnyi normirovschhik*) the collective farm accountant, Feodor Leonov and he went to the field “at dawn and there he conducted a kind of time-study and developed his own [norm] system.”⁷⁵

Yet while Kiiashko made the norm-setting process sound simple, in reality it was a rather complicated process. The sheer number of norm classifications was overwhelming to many collective farm accountants. Kiiashko’s farm processed almost a hundred different types of labor. Nazartsev’s pamphlet for collective farm administrators gave as examples the Molotov kolkhoz of Shipunovsk district in the Altai krai, which standardized over 600 types of labor and the Maiak revoliutsii kolkhoz of Kirganinsk district in Krasnodarsk krai which had 2400 types of work.⁷⁶ If we consider the education level of the average collective farm accountant, the task of standardizing labor quotas becomes even more harrowing. A sample study of the Collective Farm Council found that nearly twenty percent of kolkhoz accountants had not completed the fourth grade and 67.5 percent had “no special training.”⁷⁷ Indeed, Feodor Leonov, Kiiashko’s norm-setter, was no ordinary accountant. “Word of our norm-setting reached far,” wrote Kiiashko, “collective farm chairmen started coming to us to learn from our experience and

⁷³ The text uses both hectare and decare interchangeably. A hectare equals 10,000 square meters and a decare equals 1,000 square meters. Thus if two people plow half a hectare per day, each of them plows twenty-five decares per day.

⁷⁴ Kiiashko, “Na Kubanskoi zemle,” 139.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Nazartsev, *Kolkhoznyi trudoden'*, 26.

⁷⁷ Berg, “Reform in the Time of Stalin”, 105.

Leonov was even invited to Moscow to an all-union conference of norm-setting of collective farm labor. He gave a report there and some of our set norms were included in the all-union handbook.”⁷⁸

The workday became even more peculiar in May 1939 when the Central Committee and *Sovnarkom* ignored its local nature and introduced a compulsory minimum of workdays for all collective farmers. During the war the state raised the obligatory minimum to 150 workdays in cotton-producing farms, 100 in the farms of some central provinces and a few regions in the Urals and Far East and 120 for most of the soviet agricultural heartland. In June 1948, merely two months after transforming the workday into a piece-rate output quota, the soviet state utilized the new measurement to discipline collective farm members, granting collective farms the power to deport members falling below the minimum obligatory workday quota.⁷⁹ Thus, this local measurement received universal powers and impacted the lives of collective farmers.

Significance

The purpose of the workday was to discipline labor and incentivize collective farmers by setting a standard that collective farmers were to aspire to. This was no coincidence. When the workday was first established there was a debate about the type of work that would be set as the standard measuring unit. An early suggestion was to equate a workday with the easiest and least skilled labor, “jobs which can be done by juveniles.” Under this formulation, all other labor would be calculated as multiplications of the easiest job. The alternative, equating a workday with the most heavy and complicated labor, would have turned all other labor into fractions of a “workday.” Eventually the Commissariat for Agriculture decided that the “commonest jobs should be used as a basis, jobs of average difficulty, not requiring special qualifications and done

⁷⁸ Kiiashko, "Na Kubanskoi zemle," 139. Kiiashko was referring to a forty-page handbook of output quotas (norms) which was sent with the 1948 resolution to all collective farm chairmen.

⁷⁹ Lévesque, "Exile and Discipline."

by adult collective farmers. The completion of the daily norm of output in such jobs is reckoned as one labour-day, i.e. as the unit of measurement for the evaluation of all other types of jobs.”⁸⁰

Yet this standard had to be progressive. In a society that was constantly moving toward a utopian future, it was impossible to imagine that if a typical man could plow twenty decares per day in 1935, he could not plow twenty-five ten years later. Just as the typical collective farm, which I examine in chapter three, was constantly moving toward the future, so was the standard output of a “workday.” Kraev explained that “As the communal economy of the collective farms developed and as technical equipment increased and cadres of specialists were trained, particularly in the years of the Stalin post-war five-year plan, it again became necessary to revise and improve the system of labour remuneration in collective farms.”⁸¹ Indeed, the April 1948 resolution set higher quotas per workday than the previous norms, aimed to reduce the overall expenditure of workdays and incentivize collective farmers to work harder.⁸²

The effects of the resolution are unclear. The demographer Olga Verbitskaia shows that on average the number of workdays per collective farmer changed little between 1946 and 1949. For the entire Russian Republic it decreased from 251 to 249 workdays a year. It is of course impossible to tell whether collective farmers worked harder after the 1948 quota increase and therefore accumulated nearly the same number of workdays or whether the resolution had little effect. Economists began examining the relationship between workdays and “human-days” (*chelovekodni*) only in the late 1950s. Verbitskaia finds that for an average of 373 workdays in 1957, collective farmers in the Russian Republic were laboring between 210-250 human-days.⁸³

⁸⁰ Mikhail A. Kraev, “The Collective Farm Labour Day (To Be Concluded),” *Soviet Studies* 1, no. 2 (1949), 168.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁸² Donald Filtzer finds the same increase in quotas alongside a decrease in piece-rate payment. He argues that the regime was squeezing industrial workers to work harder. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism*, 232-234.

⁸³ Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 50, 52-53.

Discursively the workday replaced money. Statisticians calculated that collective farmers in the Russian north in 1949 earned 327 workdays a year and demonstrated that collective farmers who accumulated more workdays lived better. However, though the workday could be seen as a remnant of utopian non-monetary accounting, which had been abandoned with the adoption of the New Economic Policy in 1921, there were practical reasons behind its embrace.⁸⁴ As Kraev explained, while state farms and factories had “a definite annual fund, fixed by the government, for labour remuneration,” collective farms were not tied to the state’s budget. Insofar as they were cooperatives, labor compensation was a share of the farm’s surplus and could be calculated only at the end of the year after delivering the obligatory procurement to the state, paying the Machine-Tractor Station, allocating produce for seed, reserving cash to a capital fund and covering necessary production expenses and administrative costs.⁸⁵

Nonetheless, alongside practical reasons, a genuine distrust of peasant psychology produced an attempt to minimize the amount of money in the hands of collective farm members. In fact, when the economists Vladimir Venzher and Aleksandra Sanina wrote Stalin in 1952 suggesting moving collective farm labor compensation to monetary wages, Stalin rejected their suggestion and argued that it would increase commodity circulation, thereby constituting a step back from communism. Collective farmers, according to Stalin, were to remain outside soviet monetary economy.⁸⁶ Scholars often articulated similar sentiments. In a 1957 discussion

⁸⁴ On non-monetary accounting during War Communism see Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform in the Soviet Union*, 9; Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organization of War Communism, 1918-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁸⁵ Kraev, "The Collective Farm Labour Day (To Be Concluded)," 167. For more see Nove, "The Incomes of Soviet Peasants."

⁸⁶ Vladimir G. Venzher and Aleksandra V. Sanina, "Pis'ma v TsK," in *Agrarnyi stroi v Rossii: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee* (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburg Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Ekonomiki i Finansov, 1999), 66-68; Tamara E. Kuznetsova and Lev V. Nikoiforov, "Ob avtore," in *Kak bylo, kak moglo byt', kak stalo, kak dolzhno stat'*, ed. Vladimir G. Venzher (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 3-11; Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 209.

about the persistence of religion in collective farms, for example, philosophers argued that commodity circulation in the collective farm market contributed to the religious piety of collective farm women (*kolkhoznitsa*). “When the *kolkhoznitsa* prays and after praying she sells milk for five kopeks more, she believes that the prayer helped her.”⁸⁷ Scholars and politicians alike suspected collective farmers of preserving their ancestral petit-bourgeois mentality and therefore repeatedly argued that they should be kept outside the commodity market.

The workday therefore represented ambivalence toward collective farmers. On the one hand, it was an instrument of social engineering meant to discipline and transform the collective farmer into a rural proletariat by incentivizing him to work harder. On the other hand, collective farmers were expected to accumulate workdays in order to affirm their morality in what Dobrenko calls “socialist realist labor.” Like the collective farmer’s labor, socialist realist labor was unpaid, or at least it was not attached to monetary value. As Dobrenko explains it:

Having produced a total de-realization of the economy, it not only based itself on consistent moralization of economic life (as it was more subject of ethics and literature than of political economy) but also ideally (with “the triumph of communist labor”) created a situation in which ethics was no longer regarded as simply a source, but also as a result of a particular relationship to labor. Ethics itself becomes the discursive formulation of economics; economics begins to be described in categories of ethics.⁸⁸

Labor was an ethical category and the workday was designed to produce an emotional affect. Indeed, in the second part of chapter three, I explore several groups of scholars who studied the Il’ich collective farm of Dobrinskii district, Voronezh province. I show that Il’ich was an exemplary farm for a variety of reasons, including the fact that its members expressed their attitude to labor in socialist realist terms. “In our surveys of the *kolkhoz*,” Abram Iavnel’ of the

⁸⁷ ARAN f. 1922, op. 1, d. 905, l. 36

⁸⁸ Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*, 177.

Erisman Sanitation Institute wrote, “people often answered: ‘How do we live? We live well. Culturally, we live well because we work often and faithfully on the kolkhoz.’” He reported that the Il’ich collective farmers “piously (*sviato*) execute the directives of Comrade Stalin, that only one thing is needed now in order to become prosperous collective farmers—to work honestly on the kolkhoz, to correctly use tractors and machinery, utilize draught animals, cultivate the land and take care of kolkhoz property.”⁸⁹

Eventually, the workday did not meet the needs of a less utopian social reality. As we have seen, soviet officials repeatedly redefined the workday to increase surveillance and control over the workforce but did not contemplate its monetary value. Moreover, linguistically the workday was confusing. Kiiashko recalled that when the norm-setters finished their work, “the norm system was clear to everyone, but accounting in workdays confused some.” He remembered this conversation with a female collective farmer:

- You think that every day (*den'*) we should hoe fifteen acres, said one *kolkhoznitsa*.
And I, for example, hoe twenty or twenty-five. How would this be calculated?
- As one and a half workdays (*polтора trudodnia*).
- Are you kidding? I can earn a day and a half in one day (*v odnom dni, pivtora dniia*)?

The woman was puzzled and took offense that [we] would make fun of her.⁹⁰

Yet as an economic measurement, the workday failed to produce the desired results. It prevented economists from comparing and analyzing statistical data about labor. Though economists used it as indicative of labor productivity, it was a highly misleading measurement.⁹¹ Since the workday was not a universal category, it was immensely difficult to utilize it to measure labor beyond a specific locality. In fact, using the workday as a measurement precluded

⁸⁹ RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 737, l. 52 and RGANTD f. 140, op. 3, d. 529, l. 6

⁹⁰ Kiiashko, "Na Kubanskoi zemle," 139.

⁹¹ Lévesque, "The Post-World War II Stalinist Order in the Soviet Countryside", 50.

soviet economists from measuring labor productivity. Indeed, in December 1955, the Scientific-Methodological Council of the Central Statistical Administration discussed developing methodological quantifications of productivity of labor in agriculture. Nemchinov compared soviet and capitalist labor statistics, noting, “In this sense our statistics is lagging behind capitalist statistics: one American journal showed the rise in labor productivity in agriculture over the last 10 years. Comrade Benediktov came back from England and said that they pay more attention there to the productivity of labor.” The Council concluded, “The basic index of agricultural labor productivity, like in other branches of production, is gross production divided by the annual [work of] one average worker.” Nemchinov called for “a standard for translating workdays into human-days (*chelovekodni*)” And the economist Stanislav Strumilin interrupted, “[But workdays] are variegated (*pestrye*) even within the same kolkhoz.”⁹² Similarly, it was nearly impossible to calculate the cost of collective farm labor because the value of a workday was different in every collective farm and varied from year to year. As Nancy Nimitz explains, “Consequently, central planning decisions involving regional specialization, the direction of agricultural investment, choices between alternative technologies, the structure of procurement prices and so on, were made without benefit of cost criteria.”⁹³

Reforming the workday

Aaron Hale-Dorrell demonstrates that in 1953, Khrushchev devised policies to address the twin problems of “low labor discipline” and lack of incentive, (known in soviet jargon as “violations of the principle of material interest”).⁹⁴ Tackling lack of incentive to work, Khrushchev’s initial reforms raised procurement prices, which in turn increased collective

⁹² RGAE f. 1562, op. 33, d. 127, l. 22.

⁹³ Collective farms began calculating cost of production only in 1958. Nimitz, "Soviet Agricultural Prices and Costs," 241.

⁹⁴ Aaron Hale-Dorrell, "A Problem of “Material Interest”: Collective Farm Labor and Incentives in Post-Stalin Agricultural Reforms" (paper presented at the Annual meeting of ASEES, New Orleans November 15-18 2012).

farms' revenue and with it the value of a "workday." As a result, an average collective farmer's monthly wage increased from 143 rubles in 1954 to 182 rubles in 1957 and 237 rubles in 1958.⁹⁵

Simultaneously, beginning in 1955, *Gosplan* promoted a policy in which collective farms would distribute pay in monthly advances rather than as a single lump sum at the end of the year. Hale-Dorrell quotes a Gosplan report arguing that, "the most important incentive [. . .] for raising collective farmers' material interest in increasing output of agricultural products is the implementation of [. . .] monthly advance payments on labor-days from the income of the collective farm."⁹⁶ Of course, the problem was double faceted, as economists of the All Union Institute of Agrarian Economics (*VNIESKh*) discovered in 1956. First, only prosperous collective farms with significant reserves could afford to advance payment for labor before receiving payment from the state. In 1956, for example, the Institute's Black Earth Branch devised an experiment on milkmaid productivity in the Kirov collective farm in Peremyshl'sk district of Kaluga province. The experiment required guaranteed piece-rate cash payments. The economists calculated a payment per quintal of milk and imposed a goal of increasing the labor productivity of milkmaids by ten percent. While they assured a sufficient fund to pay the milkmaids before beginning the experiment, their calculations paid off more than expected. The payment per quintal of milk resulted in a thirty-five percent increase in the farm's milk production for 1956, and the economists had to seek additional funds to pay the over-achieving milkmaids.⁹⁷ Naturally, the economists found the necessary funds, but discovered that as long as

⁹⁵ Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 45.

⁹⁶ Hale-Dorrell, "A Problem of "Material Interest": Collective Farm Labor and Incentives in Post-Stalin Agricultural Reforms."

⁹⁷ RGAE f. 260, op. 2, d. 25, l

the collective farm was an independent economic entity, it was nearly impossible to formulate timely incentives.⁹⁸

Secondly, though Khrushchev's agrarian reforms indeed increased collective farmers' labor compensation, as long as the workday maintained its local character, it remained outside the Kremlin's panopticon. Indeed, when economists and statisticians of *VNIESKh*'s Black Earth Branch began analyzing labor productivity and cost in 1956, they found that "there is a great gap in the compensation for labor among collective farmers." The scholars compared the annual number of workdays accumulated by the best workers in various fields and found that while the best field crop workers made on average between 256 and 411 workdays annually, shepherds earned 850-1400 workdays. Shepherds therefore accumulated three to five times as much as field workers. Farm managers earned even more, about 2000 workdays a year.⁹⁹

Worse yet, the researchers found that the disparity in earnings was totally divorced from "the quantity or quality of labor." At times, collective farmers who worked harder received less compensation for their labor. For example, in the Voroshilov kolkhoz of Buturlinovsk region, female collective farmers who thinned out and inspected sugar beets earned 1.84 workdays per 7.2 hours of work, while pig tenders tasked with fattening the herd received "twice as much," 3.73 workdays per 7.3 hours of work. "We have the same data for Borets kolkhoz of Sampur region: the daily wage of collective farmers employed in harvesting grain, hay and silo is 1.47 workdays for a seven-hours of work, milkmaids [get] 2.07 workdays for an average of nine months working for 5.5 hours a day, shepherds [receive] 2.66 workdays etc." The researchers

⁹⁸ The solution to this problem was found only in 1966 when the state allowed farms to borrow from banks to pay their members. Alec Nove, "Soviet Agriculture under Brezhnev," *Slavic Review* 29, no. 3 (1970), 398.

⁹⁹ RGAE f. 260, op. 2, d. 62, l. 150-1

concluded that this was an "intolerable difference (*nedopustimyi razryv*) in labor compensation" between those working the fields and those tending animals.¹⁰⁰

The income gap did not escape the Ministry of Agriculture. In a 1956 discussion at the Institute of Economics, the economist Makar Terent'ev reminded his fellow discussants, "You know that we still have today dramatically different wage levels." He compared the pay per workday in Belorussia with that of Georgia and found a ration of 1:3.

The explanation of this huge difference is not the high labor productivity in Georgia and the low labor productivity in Belorussia. Rather, the explanation is that the [procurement] prices of agricultural products produced by Belorussian collective farms do not cover the costs. For potatoes produced in Belorussia, say, where there are exceptionally favorable conditions for [raising potatoes], the state prices cover roughly 50 percent of the cost of production."¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Socialist realist political economy produced a homogeneous depiction of soviet society. Economists and statisticians reduced all differences to individual ethics. This picturesque portrayal rendered village reality ungovernable. In order to produce beneficial knowledge statisticians and political economists had to break from socialist realism. In the process of differentiating between collective farms, economists and statisticians discovered the collective interests of cooperatives. They learned that there was a correlation between labor productivity and the state's procurement prices. For example, in tobacco producing collective farms labor productivity was considerably higher than in grain producing farms. When they began experimenting with workday payments, they learned material incentives improved productivity beyond expectations. The collective farmer that emerged from these studies was a coherent and

¹⁰⁰ RGAE f. 260, op. 2, d. 62, l. 150-1

¹⁰¹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1075, l. 34

rational economic actor capable of knowing himself and acting in his own self-interest. The following chapter further elaborates on the emergence of this liberal subject from the clouds of the war and the pens of social scientists.

Chapter Five

Agrarian Reforms between Socialist Realism and the Law of the Market

The chapter examines the contribution of economists to the agrarian reforms instituted after Stalin's death, analyzing the reforms as a struggle between socialist realism and the law of the market. These reforms, which were implemented between 1953 and 1958, were social scientists' contribution to the cultural shift in the Soviet attitude toward the peasant. At their core of this offering was a representation of the collective farmer as a liberal subject: a highly rational individual capable of knowing himself and acting in his own self-interest. The reforms were inspired by social scientists' consideration of the collective farmer's interests and suggestions to create incentives that would prompt him to increase agricultural production.

The chapter focuses primarily on the reorganization of the Machine-Tractor Stations (MTS) as a representative example of the post-Stalin reforms. The first section analyzes a discussion at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences, which depicts the cultural shift in the perception of the collective farm peasantry. The second section examines how economists produced the collective farmer as a liberal subject and called to consider his interests and motivation. The final section looks at the MTS reform as one manifestation of the struggle to accept the liberal subject and reject socialist realism; however, at the final instance the victory of socialist realism undermined the effectiveness of reform.

1. "Our scientific workers do not sufficiently know life" – the rediscovery of the peasantry

On 13 March 1958, the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences invited collective farm chairmen, directors of Machine-Tractor Stations and district administrators to discuss the Central Committee's proposal to reorganize the MTS. The meeting carried great

significance for the representatives of the Academy of Sciences.¹ The philosopher Tsolak Stepanian (1911-1994) announced, “If I am not mistaken this is the first time that we, philosophers, sit together with representatives of our socialist agriculture, people who directly provide for our material wealth, to discuss one of the core questions of socialist construction.”² To assure that philosophers understood the local context of the MTS reform, the Institute had dispatched a group of employees to the Novo-Petrovskii district of Moscow province to speak and listen to collective farmers, MTS workers and agricultural administrators and to share their observations with their fellow philosophers.³ The meeting was one of many forming a “nationwide discussion” (*vsenarodnoe obsuzhdenie*) about the Central Committee’s call to reform the Machine-Tractor Stations.

Nearly two weeks prior, on 1 March 1958, *Pravda* devoted three pages to Khrushchev’s theses “On further development of the collective farm system and the reorganization of machine-tractor stations.”⁴ The MTS were state agencies that supplied collective farms with agricultural machinery and trained personnel while simultaneously offering political and agrarian guidance.⁵ Khrushchev told a dialectical tale of progress to explain that although the MTS had been necessary in earlier periods, they had become a fetter to the development of collective farms. The MTS, he explained, were established after collectivization, when collective farms were too small and poor to purchase and employ their own machinery. But gradually,

¹ So much so that it was captured by the journal of the Academy of Sciences. N.I. Linkui and A.P. Ermilov, “Obsuzhdenie voprosov reorganizatsii MTS (Na sobraniiakh sotrudnikov Instituta Ekonomiki i Instituta filosofii,” *Vestnik Akademii Nauk SSSR*, no. 5 (1958), 126-130.

² TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 93

³ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 93

⁴ Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, “O dal’neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh stantsii: Tezisy doklada tovarisha N.S. Khrushcheva na sessii Verkhogo Soveta SSSR,” *Pravda*, March 1, 1958, 1-3.

⁵ For more on the history of the MTS and its operation Robert F. Miller, *One Hundred Thousand Tractors; the MTS and the Development of Controls in Soviet Agriculture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

particularly after the amalgamation campaign of 1950, collective farms strengthened, prospered and their members politically matured. Therefore, by 1958, they needed neither the MTS political supervision nor its assistance in buying, repairing and operating agricultural machinery. Khrushchev's dialectical tale introduced an analysis of emerging conflict between the MTS and the collective farm. The MTS, Khrushchev said, created a duality of power in the countryside to the point that it was unclear who was in charge of the collective farm economy.⁶ He used the Russian proverb "with seven nannies, the child loses an eye," to capture the severity of the problem.⁷ "There are two landlords on one [piece of] land," he said, "the collective farm and the MTS. And where there are two landlords, there can't be good order."⁸ To solve this problem of dual power, Khrushchev suggested selling MTS machinery to collective farms. Technical questions like how poor farms could afford to pay for machinery, how long collective farms would have to pay in full and how they would repair and stock spare parts, were left for a "nationwide discussion." The historian Galina Ol'shevskaja writes that fifty million people participated in a month-long public discussion over the fate of the MTS. Provincial and district administrations, collective farms and scientific institutes organized conferences and invited party and economic activists, MTS directors and personnel, and collective farm chairmen and brigade leaders in addition to economists and agrarian specialists. Throughout March 1958, scientists and agrarian administrators published editorials, letters and opinion pieces in party and local newspapers, professional agrarian journals and other national and local media.⁹

⁶ A similar charge caused the dissolution of the Political Departments (*Politotdel*) of MTS and state farms in 1934. Mark B. Tauger, "Soviet Peasant and Collectivization, 1930-1939: Resistance and Adaptation," in *Rural Adaptation in Russia*, ed. Stephen K. Wegren (London: Routledge, 2005); Il'ia E. Zelenin, "Politotdely MTS (1933-1934 gg.)," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 76(1965); Robert F. Miller, "The Politotdel: A Lesson from the Past," *Slavic Review* 25, no. 3 (1966).

⁷ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2003), 376.

⁸ V. N. Tomilin, *Nasha krepnost', mashinno-traktornyĭ stantsii chernozemnogo tsentra rossii v poslevoennyĭ period: 1946-1958gg* (Moscow: AIRO-XXI, 2009), 138.

⁹ For an English summary of the discussion see J. Miller, "The Reorganization of the MTS," *Soviet Studies* 10, no. 1 (1958), 87-91.

Finally, on March 31, the Supreme Council of the USSR published the law, “On Further Development of the Collective Farm System and the Reorganization of Machine Tractor Stations.”¹⁰

In calling for “nationwide discussion” of Khrushchev’s theses the Central Committee set the tone for the meeting at the Institute of Philosophy: it prioritized the practical experience of agricultural workers and administrators over the theoretical knowledge of scholars.¹¹ The philosophers dutifully expressed reverence to their *praktiki* guests. A.T. Fedorova, for example, exclaimed that she was at a disadvantage “speaking to such well-known guests who had spoken so colorfully.”¹² Her colleague, Viktor Chertkov, thanked the *praktiki* for illuminating important questions of historical materialism and dialectics, adding, “we, soviet philosophers draw a great deal upon folk wisdom (*narodnaia mudrost'*).”¹³ The director of the Institute of Philosophy, Petr Fedoseev, attenuated the adulations and reminded the audience of social scientists’ relevance and contribution to decision making. “Before the Central Committee Plenum,” he said, “Comrade Khrushchev organized a serious consultation with agrarian-economists, but there were also other social scientists present.” Khrushchev’s reliance on social scientists suggested that their knowledge was also necessary for formulating reforms and analyzing social reality.¹⁴

The tone of the discussion reflected the postwar cultural shift embodied by the emergence of village prose. Village prose writers, who began publishing as early as 1952 but

¹⁰ Galina K. Ol'shevskaia, "Reorganizatsiia MTS i kolkhozy v 1958-1961gg.," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 114(1986), 17-18.

¹¹ For an interesting analysis of another nationwide discussion and its function in soviet politics, see J. Arch Getty, "State and Society Under Stalin: Constitutions and Elections in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991), 23-28; Wendy Goldman, "Stalinist Terror and Democracy: The 1937 Union Campaign," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 5 (2005). Getty and Goldman both argue that the “all-union discussion” of the 1936 constitution was a manifestation of soviet democracy. Getty explains that beyond the regime’s genuine interests in public opinion, the discussion functioned simultaneously as a mobilization campaign and as a means to criticize local officials.

¹² TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 124.

¹³ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 75.

¹⁴ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 29-30

flourished late in the decade, recaptured the Russian peasant in the tradition of Tolstoy and Turgenev as a hard-working dignified person.¹⁵ Unlike socialist realist kolkhoz novels, which had dominated until then, village prose writers distanced themselves from the narrative of the successful gigantic kolkhoz and focused on capturing the internal dynamics of the village. They were often nostalgic for a pre-revolutionary past and held that traditional peasant values stood for the Russian nation.¹⁶

For the purposes of this chapter, there are two important characteristics of the village prose. First, village prose writers represented the collective farm peasant as a rational actor whose lived experience was significant for policy formation. Second, they used peasants' lived experience to criticize the state's agrarian policy. Geoffrey Hosking analyzes a similar theme in village prose in which a townsman, or someone returning after studies, goes to the village with the desire to understand or help the peasants only to discover that his urban knowledge is irrelevant to village reality. One telling example is the urban protagonist in Vladimir Voinovich's novella *My zdes' zhivem* (We Live Here), who comes to a village and tells the peasants he meets, "I would like to work with you a while. I need experience of life. Will you have me?" Much like the discussants at the Institute of Philosophy, Voinovich's young protagonist recognizes the superior value of village life. Indeed, one of the novella's peasants responds to the urbanite's naive and clumsy honesty with, "You came here looking for life experience, but we live here. You understand?"¹⁷

The visiting *praktiki* at the Institute of Philosophy responded to scholars' inquiries much like the villagers react to Voinovich's urban protagonist. V.K. Pavlov, the chairman of Nikolskii

¹⁵ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 243; Kathleen F. Parthé, *Russian village prose: the radiant past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 37.

¹⁶ Parthé, *Russian village prose*, 4-12.

¹⁷ Geoffrey A. Hosking, "The Russian Peasant Rediscovered: "Village Prose" of the 1960s," *Slavic Review* 32, no. 4 (1973).

collective farm of Novo-Petrovskii district in Moscow province said to his hosts, “I think you did right to invite us, [because] we can tell you about the conflict.”

I think I will not be mistaken if I say that many of you don't completely understand why for so many years you thought the MTS was a decisive force in the development of the kolkhoz and now they say that it is an obstacle. You read the [Central Committee's] theses and the decision of the plenum and now, comrades, on the basis of these theses, you speak of conflicts. But what are these conflicts? And this, it seems to me, many of you don't understand.¹⁸

The discussion at the Institute of Philosophy turned into an epistemological controversy revolving around the appropriate source of beneficial knowledge. The *praktiki* insisted that useful knowledge was always rooted in practical experience. N.A. Fokina, the party district secretary of Novo-Petrovskii district, accused the philosophers of “not sufficiently knowing life, especially the life of our collective farms. They visit rarely and rarely speak with the people.” As a result, she said, scientific knowledge only stemmed from party decisions. “When the discussion of the Central Committee's documents began, [scientific] comrades started digging for scientific problems.” Fokina suggested that if scientists wanted to play a role in the country's economy, “they should work the other way around: scholars should find problems in life, [resolve them] and bring their proposals to the Central Committee of the party.” To be sure, she continued, understanding the problems plaguing everyday village life was not difficult. “Our people always greet [scholars] magnanimously and suggest problems needing to be worked out. And comrades from your institution came to us and said: Maybe you could tell us what problems we can work on together? I think that if comrades frequently went to see how the people work, they would find those problems themselves.”¹⁹

¹⁸ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 101

¹⁹ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 86.

There was nothing unexpected about Fokina's accusation. She demanded that scientists follow their *obshchestvennost'* ethic and accused them of being "armchair scholars."²⁰ Many philosophers agreed. The editor of *Voprosy filosofii*, Mikhail Kammari (1898-1965), admitted that philosophers had not "managed to deeply generate a theoretical position on the critical problems posed by life..."²¹ Stepanian asked philosophers to closely examine the Party's practice. There was a conflict between the collective farm and the MTS "and now the Party resolved it. And how did [it] resolve it? It did not use armchair work (*kabinetnaia rabota*), but studied the facts of reality, the facts of life itself." Philosophers, he added, should learn how to develop theoretical questions from the Party.²² Ethan Pollock contends that Stalin similarly accused economists for "stringing together quotations," instead of "working with their heads." Stalin chastised economists in 1941, stating, "In the USSR you have a laboratory that has existed for more than twenty years, and you think that Marx should know more than you about socialism."²³

But there was more to the epistemological controversy than the expected ethical code of *obshchestvennost'*. *Praktiki* expressed discomfort listening to philosophers speak of village reality. They repeatedly argued that social scientists who had not visited the countryside for years had finally encountered working men and were now freely giving examples "from reality." After the Institute's director Fedoseev mentioned that he had heard of MTS tractor drivers using tractors as personal transportation vehicles, several *praktiki* responded agitatedly. Fokina, for example, retorted: "Fedoseev said that tractor drivers go home on the tractor. This is not an anecdote. These things happened. The tractor driver drove the tractor to his sweetheart (*k miloi*)

²⁰ See chapter one.

²¹ Linkui and Ermilov, "Obsuzhdenie voprosov reorganizatsii MTS," 121.

²² TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 94-5.

²³ Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 173.

for a date or to his auntie for pancakes.”²⁴ Pavlov, referring to the same utterance, ridiculed philosophers’ surprise when they encountered stories of daily experience. “One fact was mentioned,” he said, “that the tractor driver drives the tractor to social visits (*v gosti*), and there was excitement in the hall.”²⁵

The most striking distinction between the philosophers and the *praktiki* was their argumentative structure. The participating philosophers spoke of harmonious interactions between social elements that reflected the transformation of the past into the future. The Institute’s director, Fedoseev portrayed the sale of machinery to collective farms as a progressive step that would bring the kolkhoz’s manual labor closer to the status of intellectual labor.²⁶ Philosophers sought to understand the implications of the MTS reform on strengthening the alliance between the working class and the peasantry, and how cooperative ownership would transition into public ownership under communism.²⁷ The irony did not escape Tsolak Stepanian, who reminded his fellow philosophers that according to “the law of dialectics, uncovering a conflict is an instrument of cognition.” And yet, he said, “We were afraid of uncovering this conflict. [...] This fear impedes theoretical work.”²⁸

Practical workers, on the other hand, spoke of struggles, conflicts and personal interests. “We felt these conflicts,” Fokina said. “Had one of you visited our assembly where agricultural questions were decided, you would have seen that there was simply a war (*prosto byla voina*) between the chairmen of collective farms and the MTS.”²⁹ L.V. Korneev, the chairman of the Iskra kolkhoz, tried to keep to the constructive issues facing the farm’s future. “I am not going to

²⁴ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 88.

²⁵ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 101.

²⁶ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 46.

²⁷ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 32, 42.

²⁸ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 94-95.

²⁹ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 85-6.

criticize and reprimand the MTS,” he said. “We had a partnership with the MTS. We took on obligations and it took on obligations.” But Korneev could not resist: “True,” he said, “the MTS never fulfilled its obligations.”³⁰

The philosophers were uneasy with Khrushchev’s assertion that dual power in the countryside produced conflict. They spoke of the MTS as an extension of way in which a member of the proletariat would care for his younger peasant brother. It supplied the village with technology and guidance and assisted collective farmers in becoming rural proletariats. Fedoseev asked rhetorically, “Why are we speaking *now* of two proprietors (*khoziana*) tending to one piece of land?” He clarified the question adding, “This is not the MTS’ first year. They were established during collectivization and yet we have not dealt with this question before.”³¹ Though Fedoseev did not answer, he most likely intended to reiterate Khrushchev’s dialectical narrative whereby as the younger brother strengthened and matured, he began to desire independence, resenting his older brother’s dominance. Following Khrushchev, philosophers saw conflicts as the result of progress and prosperity and not an expression of inherent structural interests.

The attending *praktiki*, on the other hand, refused to accept Khrushchev’s dialectical narrative. V.K. Pavlov took Fedoseev’s rhetoric as personally offensive. He apologized for speaking bluntly (*grubo*). “You think this question popped up all of a sudden, that everything was fine and suddenly it happened!” Speaking on behalf of his fellow kolkhoz chairmen, Pavlov declared: “We have seen these [conflicts.] [...] I have been working out these conflicts for twenty-five years, and I will tell you more, it was all very expected (*zakonomerno*).” He argued that the conflict between the MTS and the collective farm was structural and inherent to their roles and interests. Pavlov used philosophical lingua to strengthen his point. Soviet social

³⁰ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 111.

³¹ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 33.

scientists used the term *zakonomerno* to capture law-like social phenomena that followed known and anticipated patterns. Pavlov took the Central Committee's call for discussion as a professional offense against his fellow agrarian *praktiki*. The conflicts, he stated, had been "brewing for a long time. The party is carrying out [the decision] now, but this question has been waiting long. As our district committee secretary said, we have spoken about this for a long time. We spoke about it even in the Kremlin." What was new, he argued, was that it was noticed. As long as kolkhoz chairmen and agricultural personnel described the situation and demanded a resolution, the Party ignored the problem. But "three years ago," Pavlov continued, "the Party sent the 30,000ers to collective farms and the conflicts appeared." Pavlov was referring to 1955 campaign to recruit thirty thousand new collective farm chairmen from the ranks of urban educated party members.³² "We have been handling machinery for dozens of years and we immediately saw that it was incorrectly used," Pavlov continued, "[We] literally raised this question a year after [collectivization]. But the Party stipulated this: the working class will come, look and reveal the conflicts. They have done this before."³³

Pavlov's words reverberated throughout the discussion: philosophers and *praktiki* agreed that the only legitimate source of knowledge was practical experience. Yet Pavlov's accusation went beyond decrying impractical scientific knowledge and moved to criticizing decades of Party policy. If the formation of correct policies required listening to the voice of practice and learning from experience, the Party had failed collective farms for nearly thirty years. Pavlov suggested that class bias and an inherent disregard for peasants was the veil that covered the Party's eyes from seeing conflicts and listening to agricultural administrators.

³² For more on the campaign see Robert C. Stuart, *The Collective Farm in Soviet Agriculture* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1972), 170-171.

³³ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 104-5 Interestingly, Robert Miller argues that 30,000ers caused the conflict with the MTS. "The new kolkhoz chairman often came from positions that were at least equal in the Soviet status hierarchy to that of an MTS director. Such persons were unlikely to submit without protest to the arbitrary commands of the MTS director. The potential for friction between the MTS and the kolkhozes was certainly increased by their presence." Miller, *One Hundred Thousand Tractors*, 313-314.

Indeed, the soviet postwar discourse about the peasant shifted between two poles and informed reform. On the one hand, postwar nationalism sparked a renewed embrace of the Russian peasant as the soul of the nation and a rational hardworking economic actor. This representation of the peasant echoed a long Russian tradition stretching back to the eighteenth century and best manifested in the nineteenth century populist movement. On the other hand, soviet discourse derived from classical Marxist antagonism toward the peasantry and depicted the peasant as a self-seeking petit-bourgeois social element. Pavlov, who asserted his proletarian culture by introducing himself as a locomotive engineer, resented the suspicious disregard for his opinion that stemmed from his position as a collective farm chairman.³⁴

2. The law of value and the discourse of constraints

In November 1957, the Ukrainian journalist Ivan Vinnichenko published an article in *Oktiabr'* entitled "Time Does not Wait," which served as a prelude to the discussion on the MTS reform.³⁵ The article was primarily based on Vinnichenko's conversations with district party secretaries, collective farm chairmen, and MTS directors. Vinnichenko's respondents spoke of the economic inefficiency and lack of accountability caused by the structural conflict between collective farms and Machine-Tractor Stations. In an effort to turn the text from circumstantial grievances into a serious call for reform, Vinnichenko described a random meeting with economists Vladimir Venzher and Aleksandra Sanina, who provided a valid theoretical framework for reform:

It was in the winter of 1955 in one sanatorium in Moscow's suburbs. Across the table from me was a nice elderly couple. We started talking. And what do sick people talk about at a sanatorium? Well of course, they talk about their afflictions. And suddenly it

³⁴ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 104-5

³⁵ Sidney Ploss writes that Vinnichenko was Khrushchev's friend. Sidney I. Ploss, *Conflict and Decision-Making in Soviet Russia; a Case Study of Agricultural Policy, 1953-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 117-119.

became clear that my neighbors were the economists Sanina and Venzher. The cardiovascular problems were forgotten and we started talking about economic problems.³⁶

In 1952, Venzher and Sanina famously called on Stalin to allow collective farms to purchase machinery. Stalin responded publicly to their missive in an appendix to *The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*. As a result of their challenge to Stalin, Sanina lost her teaching position at the Political Economic Department of Moscow State University and the Party organization of the Institute of Economics reprimanded Venzher.³⁷

Venzher advanced a radical argument in the conversations with Vinnichenko. Against the prevailing notion, he maintained that collective farmers were not adversaries of science and progress. "Take any collective farmer or any collective farm chairmen," Venzher told Vinnichenko, "he will gladly accept [any reform] that is advantageous for production." The difference between collective farmers and scientists, Venzher argued, was that collective farmers eschewed dogmatism. In contrast, scientists tended to "pray to authority" (*moltit'sia na avtoritety*) and accordingly espoused one scientific formulation over another. For the collective farmer, "all science is on equal standing and he employs it as he sees fit, as [it applies to] his concrete conditions and daily practice. When it comes to these complex theoretical problems, they [collective farmers] are only interested in the bottom line (*poslol'ku-poskol'ku!*)."³⁸ When Vinnichenko suggested that Venzher's training as an economist colored his perception of collective farmers' motivation, Venzher interrupted him and exclaimed: "Every kolkhoznik is an economist!"³⁸

³⁶ Ivan Vinnichenko, "Vremiia ne zhdet (Zametki zhurnalista)," *Oktiabr'*, no. 11 (1957), 208.

³⁷ Tatiana I. Zaslavskaia, "Moi VenSany," in *Agrarnyi stroi v Rossii: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee* (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburg Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Ekonomiki i Finansov, 1999), 27.

³⁸ Vinnichenko, "Vremiia ne zhdet," 210.

Venzher's insistence on the collective farmer as a rational economic actor fit into the emerging cultural trend of village prose. But Venzher's example went further than simply idealizing the rationality of peasants. With it, he contrasted rational collective farm peasants against the state's economic irrationality. "You clearly travel extensively," Venzher told Vinnichenko. "Have you noticed that in many railway stations under the eaves and even in open air there are piles of mineral fertilizers? These fertilizers lay there for months. Collective farmers don't want to take them. And I ask, why?" For decades, the state had been sending scientific propagandists to convince collective farmers of the benefits of fertilizing soil, yet collective farmers appeared to resist science.³⁹ "Are they so ignorant that they don't understand the usefulness of mineral fertilizer?" Venzher asked rhetorically. "Don't worry. They understand [fertilizers'] benefits well. The thing is that using mineral fertilizers, oddly enough, is not always economical." Venzher calculated the cost of a ton of superphosphate and its potential benefits to crop yields in order to show Vinnichenko that it was not cost effective for a collective farm to purchase fertilizer. The problem, Venzher stressed, was not one of tradition but of economic rationality. "Judge for yourself: Is the collective farm chairman who ignores science and refuses fertilizers really so tradition-bound (*konservativnyi*)?"⁴⁰ Venzher's fertilizer example illuminated a severe theoretical inadequacy plaguing soviet economic science. Vinnichenko tried to argue that Venzher's example proved nothing. He contended it was merely coincidental and suggested a mistaken "price-policy" that should be corrected. Venzher disagreed. The problem lay at the heart of one of the foundations of economic theory: "Better put, [it's about] the law of

³⁹ James T. Andrews, *Science for the Masses: the Bolshevik State, Public Science, and the Popular Imagination in Soviet Russia, 1917-1934*, 1st ed. (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2003). V.S. Eroshov, "Sanitarnoe prosveshchenie v SSSR," in *Sanitarnoe prosveshchenie v SSSR*, ed. V.S. Eroshov (Moscow: Tsentral'nyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut sanitarnogo prosveshcheniia, 1959). L.S. Bogolepova, "Nauchnaia rabota v oblasti sanitarnogo prosveshcheniia i ee prakticheskie rezul'taty," in *Sanitarnoe prosveshchenie v SSSR*, ed. V.S. Eroshov (Moscow: Tsentral'nyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut sanitarnogo prosveshcheniia, 1959), 48-60.

⁴⁰ Vinnichenko, "Vremiia ne zhdet," 210.

value. This is an objective economic law based on the principle of equivalence in [any] exchange.”⁴¹

The debate over the applicability of the “law of value” to a socialist economy had persisted since the revolution. According to Marx, the concept of value was wedded to commodity production under capitalism.⁴² During the 1920s, prominent party economists like Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhensky argued that since “direct exchange in kind would soon replace commodity exchange relations, [...] ‘the law of value’ – market-based prices and exchange – would no longer regulate the economy.”⁴³ Indeed, this assertion persisted until 1941 when Stalin maintained that the “law of value” would still apply in the Soviet Union as long as it engaged in commodity production. Economists attempted to decipher the meaning behind Stalin’s argument, but they were unclear about the extent to which the Soviet Union engaged in commodity production, whether the law of value had somehow been transformed, or whether it was an eternal law that would continue to apply under communism.⁴⁴ A decade later, in *The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, Stalin explained that while publicly-owned enterprises did not produce commodities, collective farm products were commodities because they were exchanged for money. The trouble, Stalin asserted, was not “that production in our country is influenced by the law of value. The trouble is that with few exceptions our economic executives and planners are unfamiliar with the workings of the law of value, do not study them, and are unable to take account of them.” Stalin illustrated this with an example in which the Central Committee decided to adjust the prices of cotton and grain to make cotton production

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Don Lavoie, *Rivalry and Central Planning: the Socialist Calculation Debate Reconsidered* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 33.

⁴³ Johanna Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 35.

⁴⁴ Pollock, Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars, 172-173, 177, 188-189.

more profitable. The Central Committee received a proposal that set the price of a ton of cotton as equal to the price of a ton of grain. But more interestingly, Stalin explained:

The price of a ton of grain was taken as equivalent to that of a ton of baked bread. In reply to the remarks of members of the Central Committee that the price of a ton of bread must be higher than that of a ton of grain because of the additional expense of milling and baking, and that cotton was generally much dearer than grain, as was also borne out by their prices in the world market, the authors of the proposal could find nothing coherent to say.⁴⁵

Thus, Venzher's argument about the application of the "law of value" to the soviet economy and his criticism of the price of fertilizer were uncontroversial. Nonetheless, his usage of the "law of value" was highly contentious. The "law of value" was central to Marx's political economy, but Venzher employed as if it were a neoclassical economic law. As a classical economist, Marx viewed the value of commodities as determined by the objective costs of their production (the labor theory of value).⁴⁶ Following Marx, Stalin argued that the price of bread should consist of the price of grain plus the additional processing expenses. Venzher's conceptualization, however, suggested that value was "*subjective or perceived*, that the individual agent – individual or a firm – judges the utility or usefulness of certain goods or services."⁴⁷ Like neoclassical economists, Venzher studied consumer behavior at the margins and argued that the value of fertilizer should be deduced from the perceived benefit the collective farm could gain from the consumption of a ton of superphosphate.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Joseph Stalin, *Ekonomicheskie problemy sotsializma v SSSR* (Gospolitizdat, 1952), 50.

⁴⁶ Tom Bottomore, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Laurence Harris, V.G. Kiernan, and Ralph Miliband, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Reference, 1995), 564-568.

⁴⁷ My definition of neoclassical economics relies heavily on Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism*, 6-7.

⁴⁸ Indeed, Johanna Bockman argues that certain soviet economists continued practicing neoclassical economics throughout the Stalinist period. However, as Pekka Sutela and others have shown, these economists were marginalized and highly criticized until the 1960s. Ibid., 39-41; Pekka Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge Soviet paperbacks (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 29-41.

Venzher's presentation of the collective farmer poses a great irony. For forty years, soviet economists and politicians had been arguing about the applicability of the "law of value" to a socialist society, while all along Venzher's model collective farmer intuitively used the "law of value" to estimate the marginal benefit from a unit of fertilizer. Moreover, the farmer did not dogmatically stick to Marx's classical understanding of value, but rather "employs it as he sees fit, as [it applies to] his concrete conditions and his daily practice. When it comes to these complex theoretical problems, they [collective farmers] are interested only in the bottom line."⁴⁹ Venzher's collective farmer was a liberal subject of neoclassical economics: a highly rational individual acting in his own self-interest. This subject was immune to soviet advocacy of the higher interests of socialist society and disinterested in the communist future. As a liberal subject, the collective farmer analyzed his economic setting, understood that his interests lay with the interests of his cooperative and utilized his inalienable liberties to make decisions accordingly. However, Venzher did not criticize collective farmers for backward petit-bourgeois attitudes, but considered their actions in keeping with economic reality.

Yet while Venzher presented "every collective farmer [as] an economist!", he argued that the soviet state had severely neglected its economic responsibilities. "Until very recently," Venzher told Vinnichenko, "we considered perfecting farming methods and cropping patterns to be the main conditions for agricultural progress, and [paid] almost no attention to the organization of production and its economy. Think [about it]! For many years we did not even have a method for calculating the cost of collective farm production."⁵⁰ Thus, the irrational actor in Venzher's formulation was the soviet state and its economists because they insisted on ignoring reality and assumed that people would forgo their self-interests under socialism.

⁴⁹ Vinnichenko, "Vremiia ne zhdet," 210.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 211.

Venzher's criticism captured mainstream soviet economic theory. Since the late 1920s, soviet economists and planners argued that the economic laws governing society no longer constrained soviet economic growth. In 1929, the Gosplan economist G.A. Feldman maintained that the rate of industrialization and, by extension, planning, "must be limited only by what all the working people of the USSR are physically able to achieve when strained to the margin of their physical and psychological capabilities." Teleological planners treated workers like cogs in a machine, which could be strained until they broke. Workers' individual will and interests were irrelevant. Planners instead spoke of the collective of producers and argued that the job of the planner was not to forecast tendencies but to use "targets" and "directives" in order to mould the "collective will of producers."⁵¹ As Stephen Collier explains, "the principle of teleological planning was not exactly the domination of society. Rather, it was that society, as such, was irrelevant to the consideration of total planning." The soviet five-year plan treated humans as resources in the vast production machine. The plan began "from the needs of the industry," but "in order to plan for the development of industry, one needed to plan inputs to production, not only material inputs but also human labor."⁵² Planners deemed irrelevant social circumstances as potential constraints on the plan.

Soviet five-year plans reflected socialist realism. Teleological planners imagined themselves as invisible hands guiding a collective in which man and machine were harmoniously integrated to achieve a higher progressive end. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the soviet state, as Venzher argued, paid "almost no attention to the organization of production and its economy" and chose to focus its attention instead on agricultural

⁵¹ E. H. Carr and R. W. Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926-1929*, vol. 1, part 2 (New York: Macmillian Company, 1969), 791-794.

⁵² Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social, Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 63-64.

techniques.⁵³ The plan assumed humans would exert themselves “to the margins their physical and psychological capabilities;” the soil, however, still had to be convinced.

3. The Agrarian Reforms and the Law of the Market

The agrarian reforms instituted months after Stalin’s death demonstrate the leadership’s acceptance of the “law of the market.” Already in March 1953, the Ministry of Finance drafted a report on collective farm tax policy, which showed “an inequity stemming from an economically unfounded increase of taxes on peasants” and suggested “the need to take into account the material interests of the peasant.”⁵⁴ Indeed, when Malenkov and Khrushchev began publicly discussing the reforms, they ascribed low agricultural output to “violations of the principle of the peasantry’s material interest.”⁵⁵ The epiphany that collective farmers’ labor was not benevolent forced statesmen to formulate agrarian reforms to increase the profitability of collective farms and households. Among other measures, they reduced and restructured household taxation and repeatedly increased agricultural procurement prices, thus increasing the payment per “workday.”

However, lack of information about collective farm life limited the leadership’s ability to conceptualize constraints. To assure adequate profitability, for example, economists had to add a profit markup above the average cost of production; however until the late 1950s, they could not recommend an accurate price for agricultural products because they had not calculated the cost of collective farm production.⁵⁶ Prior to the late 1950s, the last attempt to calculate the cost

⁵³ Vinnichenko, “Vremiia ne zhdet,” 211.

⁵⁴ Elena Zubkova, “The Rivalry with Malenkov,” in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (New Haven: Yale University Press 2000), 77.

⁵⁵ Aleksandr A. Nikonov, *Sprial' mnogovekovoi dramy: Agrarnaia nauka i politika Rossii (XVIII-XX vv.)* (Moscow: Entsiklopediia rossiskikh dereven', 1995), 299-300. See also Aaron Hale-Dorrell, “A Problem of “Material Interest”: Collective Farm Labor and Incentives in Post-Stalin Agricultural Reforms” (paper presented at the Annual meeting of ASEES, New Orleans November 15-18 2012).

⁵⁶ Procurement prices were raised in 1953, 1956, 1958, 1962, 1963 and 1965. Morris Bornstein writes that in the early 1960s there was a consensus that the profitability “necessary for the successful operation

of agricultural production occurred in 1929 when the Central Statistical Administration conducted a budget survey of twenty-six thousand peasant households.⁵⁷ In July 1956, the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences and the Moscow State Economics Institute held a three-day joint conference with the Ministry of Agriculture of the USSR and the Republics' Ministries of Agriculture to resolve this problem. Makar Terent'ev from the Ministry of Agriculture implored the participants to assist the state in setting appropriate prices. "Comrades, recently we can say that even in the last two years, things are not as they should be. We, who are working on questions of agrarian economics, have been and still are in dire need of elaborating conceptual problems and clarifying them in order to implement these concepts." Academic economists, he said, needed to take an active role in developing agrarian reform. "I might be betraying a secret, but the researchers need to know about these things, [they should] be sharper and feel responsible for their proposals. After all, when we set the new prices for grain in 1955, we adopted your technique, comrade Venzher, which accounts for actual income per workday in collective farms." Yet, Terent'ev stated, they discovered that Venzher's method was not "economically sound."⁵⁸ The problem was that Venzher had argued that it was impossible to configure correct prices without calculating the cost of production. But at the Ministry, specialists felt that there was no time to wait:

Venzher says that now we are working on calculating the cost of production, and then we'll turn to price formation and assessing prices. But life is not patient. The State Economic Commission (*gosekonomissia*) and the Ministry of Agriculture workers need to also think about theoretical problems, in order to "stay out of trouble" here (*ne nabludit'*). So, Comrade Venzher, if you resolve this issue later, in many years, maybe

and development of Soviet agriculture" was forty-five to sixty percent above cost. Morris Bornstein, "The Soviet Debate on Agricultural Price and Procurement Reforms," *Soviet Studies* 21, no. 1 (1969), 3.

⁵⁷ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1075, ll. 17-19

⁵⁸ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1075, l. 27-28

[your solution] will still be needed, but today it is more necessary than it has ever been, because we have to correct errors.⁵⁹

Later in the report Terent'ev offered the price of potatoes as an example of such a mistake. "The state price," he said, "covers roughly speaking fifty percent of the collective farms' cost." This resulted in severely low payment per workday in potato-growing collective farms.⁶⁰ Thus, though economists had not calculated the cost of potato production, the Ministry had clear indications that its price policy was inadequate.

Indeed, this was the case with all the reforms: policy makers received letters and reports suggesting problems in agrarian policies. Such was certainly the case with the MTS reform. As V.K. Pavlov told the attending philosophers, agrarian administrators "had spoken about [the need to reform the MTS] for a long time. Even in the Kremlin we spoke about it."⁶¹ Auri Berg cites a 1951 report from the province of Kuibyshev in which one M. Kolokol'tsev, a collective farmer, purportedly said: "I don't think we should be talking about merging with other farms, but about splitting our farm into three. The bigger the collective, the worse off we are. If only we had more workers and fewer tractors and combines, we collective farmers would live better. If only because we give all our grain to the government in exchange for the [MTS' work]."⁶² Similarly, in July 1956, Ivan Benediktov, the Minister of Agriculture, convened a meeting of deputies of the Supreme Council, who were themselves collective farm chairmen, and asked for their suggestions on current agricultural matters. "Benediktov was allegedly much taken aback

⁵⁹ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1075, l. 27

⁶⁰ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1075, l. 34

⁶¹ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 104-5

⁶² Auri C. Berg, "Reform in the Time of Stalin: Nikita Khrushchev and the Fate of the Russian Peasantry" (University of Toronto, 2012), 108.

when at the very beginning of the discussion the assembled chairmen had shouted in a chorus: “We have had enough of the MTS!”⁶³

Since the late 1940s, Venzher published suggestions for alternative ways of distributing and operating tractors and combines in collective farms. Indeed, Venzher had the ideal background to conceptualize and explain the sentiments of collective farmers. As discussed in chapter one, Venzher was known for his ability to combine practical experience with scientific work. When he joined the Institute of Economics in 1939 and began researching the MTS, his work drew on two decades of practical experience running agrarian enterprises.⁶⁴ It is no surprise therefore that Venzher’s academic production echoed the issues frustrating collective farm administrators. At the same time, his revolutionary credentials were so impressive that his student Tatiana Zaslavskaia tells that in 1958, “shortly before the decision to sell MTS machinery to collective farms,” Khrushchev invited a group of scholars, including Venzher, “for a last consultation.” Venzher had close relations with Khrushchev when the two worked together for a party district committee in the early 1920s. Khrushchev greeted Venzher with the informal ‘ty;’ however, when “Venzher responded also with *ty*, i.e. peer to peer, [it] confused the leader and made him angry.”⁶⁵ Indeed, personal relationships in the highest echelons of soviet leadership and revolutionary credentials allowed Venzher to conduct extensive fieldwork and experimentation in collective farms and Machine-Tractor Stations in Krasnodar krai even before Stalin’s death.⁶⁶

⁶³ Miller, *One Hundred Thousand Tractors*, 314.

⁶⁴ N.K. Figurovskaia, "Vladimir Grigor'evich Venzher (1899-1990)," in *Agrarnyi stroi v Rossii: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee* (St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburg Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Ekonomiki i Finansov, 1999), 8.

⁶⁵ Tatiana I. Zaslavskaia, "Stranitsy tvorcheskoi biografii," in *Teoreticheskoe nasledie agrarnikov-ekonomistov 50-80-x godov i sovremennaiia reforma v sel'skom khoziiaistve : liudi, idei, fakty*, ed. A. V. Petrikov and G. I. Shmelev (Moskva: Academia, 2000), 58.

⁶⁶ Miller, *One Hundred Thousand Tractors*, 385, footnote 356.

Thus, for example, at the 1956 discussion on the cost of kolkhoz production, Venzher used three years of data from Kuban to prove that the growth in payment to the MTS did not correspond to rising gross yields. While gross yields in 1954 were smaller than in 1953, the number of workdays of tractor brigades grew by eleven percent and with them the collective farms' payments for the MTS. He explained that the increase in the "volume of tractor work" had "failed to show results." "The question," said Venzher, was "why were there no returns [on the investment]?"⁶⁷ Venzher did not provide an answer at that forum, but the question reflected the concerns of collective farm chairmen. Galina Ol'shevskaiia finds that throughout 1956 and 1957, collective farm chairmen and MTS directors spoke at meetings of the Ministry of Agriculture and raised the very same issues. They pointed to an inherent contradiction in the material interests of the collective farm and the MTS. While collective farmers profited from high harvest yields, MTS drivers sought to increase the speed in which they plowed a hectare.⁶⁸ As Pavlov explained at the Institute of Philosophy:

And here is how you get a conflict: the tractor driver is paid by hectare, the cost of which is determined by a defined norm plus fuel and luboil. Meaning: all work [is calculated] by hectare. The work begins in the fall: plowing, harrowing, [and] sowing. In order to give good results, it is necessary to take [it] deeper and treat [the soil] and not stroll on the land. But if [one] takes it deeper and works it better, there will be excess expenditure on fuel and the norm will not be fulfilled. Meaning, this is how he fulfills his hectare and has many hectares. Furthermore, if he sows well, then there will be a good harvest. And then again there is a conflict: to bring in a good harvest is more difficult on the combine

⁶⁷ ARAN f. 1877, op. 1, d. 1075, l. 20-21

⁶⁸ Ol'shevskaiia, "Reorganizatsiia MTS i kolkhozy v 1958-1961gg.," 11-12.

and he will not receive his hectares. So what happens is that he plows badly, and it turns out good for him because there are many hectares.⁶⁹

The problem, as Pavlov put it, was not that the tractor driver lacked socialist ethos or morale, but that his economic incentive lay elsewhere. Pavlov's self-interested tractor driver had much in common with Venzher's collective farm chairman who refused to purchase fertilizer. Both were modern coherent subjects, capable of knowing themselves and identifying their interests through the faculty of reason. Though frustrated with the driver's action, Pavlov did not condemn him but rather argued that he was playing in an irrational field. The state expected the driver to work selflessly against his own interests.

Indeed, Khrushchev formulated the MTS reform to comply with this liberal subject. Not only was he arguing that the kolkhoz as a proprietor would best utilize its own machinery, but he assumed that factories would produce better equipment if they had to sell it directly to the kolkhoz. According to Khrushchev, until the MTS reform factories strove to fulfill their production quotas and "some factory directors are not interested in whether [the agricultural machines] are economically beneficial to the collective farm and the state." Furthermore, "many factories manufacture imperfect machines, which poorly serve agriculture and sometimes lie unused for years and then are taken away for scrap." The interests of the factory directors and workers did not coincide with the interests of collective farms, and the market was the only mechanism capable of creating the equilibrium between supply and demand. The centralized plan, which was designed to match the agricultural needs of the farm with appropriate industrial production, was not fulfilling its mission. Like Venzher, Khrushchev represented collective farms as rational consumers; therefore, placing the ownership and control of machinery in their hands would increase economic efficiency. "Under the new conditions," he said, "such factories

⁶⁹ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 102-3

[which produce imperfect machines] may find themselves in difficulties: collective farms will not buy their products, and the factories will inevitably improve the production of agricultural machinery.”⁷⁰ Thus, Khrushchev conceived of collective farms as consumers in a free market with the power to revolutionize lagging and inefficient production.⁷¹

The participants of the discussion at Institute of Philosophy echoed Khrushchev’s conceptualization of market relations. I. M. Bakai, an MTS director, offered a concrete example from the daily life of his station. “Here is an example for you: on Vasil’evskii MTS there is machinery worth four million rubles, and in 1957 we worked only with machinery worth three million, one million did not participate in production at all... Why?” he asked, increasing the suspense. “They sent us potato harvesters [and we] tried these machines, but in light of their defects we refused to use them.” Bakai argued that the waste of resources and inefficiency bothered no one because the factory and the MTS were state enterprises. “[The potato harvesters] stood idle while the factory was working and the workers received money, squandered metal and thought that they were doing a good deed. But essentially the expenses were high and there were no benefits. Under the new system when the proprietor (*khoziain*)

⁷⁰ Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, “O dal’neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh stantsii: doklad i zakliuchitel’noe slovo na pervoi sessii Verkhovogo Soveta SSSR. piatnogo sozyva 27 i 31 marta 1958g.,” in *O dal’neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh stantsii: doklad i zakliuchitel’noe slovo na pervoi sessii Verkhovogo Soveta SSSR. piatnogo sozyva 27 i 31 marta 1958g. i Zakon o dal’neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh stantsii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1958), 53; Khrushchev, “O dal’neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh stantsii: Tezisy doklada tovarisha N.S. Khrushcheva na sessii Verkhogo Soveta SSSR,” 3; Miller, “The Reorganization of the MTS.”

⁷¹ In recent years, the literature on soviet consumerism has been growing, see David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: the Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 118-145; Steven E. Harris, “Moving to the Separate Apartment: Building, Distributing, Furnishing, and Living in Urban Housing in Soviet Russia, 1950s-1960s” (U. Chicago, 2003); Vera Sandomirsky Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, Enl. and updated ed., Studies of the Harriman Institute (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste,” in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Julie Hessler, “Cultured Trade: the Stalinist Turn towards Consumerism,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000); Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

himself would order the machinery, the director of the factory would not have such an easy life as he has been living until now. If he produces a machine he would be interested in its promotion.”⁷²

Indeed, studies showed that MTS inefficiency and waste raised the cost of kolkhoz production. Like in the case of other reforms, administrators' dissatisfaction prompted studies to reaffirm their suspicion: production costs on collective farms were often twice as high as that of state farms.⁷³ In fact, when collective farms began experimenting with changing the relationship between the MTS and collective farms in 1955, economists discovered the effect of the MTS on high costs.⁷⁴ In his article in *Oktiabr'* Vinnichenko used the example of the 'Avangard' collective farm of Chkalovskii district, Gorkii province, which had operated its own tractor brigade with seven of “its own tractors:”

At the same time the kolkhoz is also served by an MTS tractor brigade. A researcher of the All-Union Institute of Agrarian Economics studied the work of these two brigades for a long time. Rigorous objective analysis led him to an unexpected conclusion: despite the fact that two of the collective farm's tractors are in fact old scrap (*lom*), the productivity of the machines in this brigade is thirty-eight percent higher, and the cost of labor lower by forty-two percent than in the MTS brigade.⁷⁵

⁷² TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l.69

⁷³ Tomilin, *Nasha krepost'*, 132; Ploss, *Conflict and Decision-Making in Soviet Russia*, 121.

⁷⁴ The most well known among these was the experiment with complex brigades, in which a collective farm field brigade was united with an MTS brigade under one brigadier. By 1957 there were nearly four thousand such brigades in the RSFSR alone. At the same time, as early as February 1956, collective farm chairmen received permission to purchase farm machinery from the state's Agricultural Supply Administration. Miller, *One Hundred Thousand Tractors*, 317-321; Ol'shevskaia, "Reorganizatsiia MTS i kolkhozy v 1958-1961gg.," 12-13.

⁷⁵ Vinnichenko, "Vremiia ne zhdet," 218.

Economists in 1959 expected that “according to the most modest and tentative approximation” the kolkhoz production costs “might drop by thirty to forty percent in the next few years.”⁷⁶

Finally on March 31, the Supreme Council of the USSR published a law, “On the Further Development of the Collective Farm System and the Reorganization of Machine Tractor Stations.”⁷⁷ The law instructed soviet republics and provinces to follow market principles by insisting on collective farms’ right to purchase their machinery. “Tractors, combines and other agricultural machinery [...] will be sold to collective farms expressing a desire to purchase this equipment.”⁷⁸ Khrushchev’s language was even stronger. He commanded that all purchases would be “strictly voluntary” (*dobrovol’noe nachalo*). He did not shed his doubt of peasant irrationality completely, however, and advised “Workers of Repair and Technical-Stations,” (RTS) which replaced the MTS, to “assist collective farms in correctly matching their needs with machines and to make sure that the acquired equipment would be quickly adopted.” He assumed that with the guidance of educated urbanites, the soviet new technological market could work efficiently.⁷⁹ The law promised loans to collective farms incapable of paying for the equipment. Indeed, while Vinnichenko and Khrushchev mostly spoke of strong and wealthy collective farms that were sufficiently developed to operate their own machinery, much of the public discussion focused on “weak” farms unable to enjoy the privilege of cutting MTS costs

⁷⁶ Shamaï Iakovlevich Turetskii, *Ocherki planovogo tsenoobrazovaniia v SSSR* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1959), 235.

⁷⁷ Miller, "The Reorganization of the MTS," 93.

⁷⁸ "Zakon o dal'neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh Stantsii.," in *O Dal'neishem Razvitii Kolkhoznogo Stroia i Reorganizatsii Mashinno-Traktornykh Stantsii: Doklad i Zakliuchitel'noe Slovo Na Pervoi Sessii Verkhovogo Soveta Sssr. Piatnogo Sozyva 27 - 31 Marta 1958g. i Zakon O dal'neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh stantsii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1958), 77.

⁷⁹ Khrushchev, "O dal'neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh stantsii: doklad i zakliuchitel'noe slovo na pervoi sessii Verkhovogo Soveta SSSR. piatnogo sozyva 27 i 31 marta 1958g.," 52.

and increasing production. The law, therefore, established district committees consisting of provincial and MTS administrators alongside representatives of financial organs and relevant kolkhoz chairmen to collectively calculate the percentage of equipments' wear and tear, its price and the length of the collective farm's loan.⁸⁰ The committees evaluated the economic condition of each collective farm and decided the criteria for loans. It also had the authority to extend loans for three years and with special permission for up to five years without interest. Moreover, the law promised that collective farms uninterested in purchasing machinery could continue to use the services of the MTS. The purchase was to be entirely voluntary and those that refused would not be punished. As the law cautioned, "the reorganization of Machine-Tractor Stations should be carried out gradually, accounting for the development of the economies of particular collective farms and the peculiarities of different areas and districts of the Soviet Union..."⁸¹

Bakai reported the experience of his district committee handling the "strictly voluntary" principles of the law. Cautiously, the committee decided that three of the six collective farms were wealthy enough to purchase machinery. The other three could not expend their income and continue receiving MTS services until their economies improved. Yet the committee faced resistance from collective farm 40-let Oktiabria, which despite its poor condition wanted to purchase machinery:

[The kolkhoz's] indicators are lower than the average for the MTS. For example, it has an income of 690 rubles per hectare of plowed land, where the average for the MTS is more than a thousand rubles. We decided that it will not receive machinery in 1958. But when the decision was conveyed to the members and the [kolkhoz's] mechanic, they went to the administration and asked to purchase the machinery. It should be said that the mechanic of 40-let Oktiabria is the best mechanic of our MTS. [...] If this kolkhoz will

⁸⁰ Ol'shevskaiia, "Reorganizatsiia MTS i kolkhozy v 1958-1961gg.," 23.

⁸¹ "Zakon o dal'neishem razvitii kolkhoznogo stroia i reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh Stantsii.," 78.

direct its economy correctly and with the mechanics that it has, who can fully use the machinery, better use it than it was in the MTS, - - then in four maybe five years it will be transformed.⁸²

Caution was thrown to the wind in the face of the free will of kolkhoz members. Yet was the committee's decision respecting collective farmers as rational actors, who knew that purchasing machinery was the best path to prosperity, or was it inspired by socialist realism? Bakai's description is devoid of any hint of material forces restricting the farms prosperity. Instead, it suggested that an educated mechanic was a socialist realist hero who could singlehandedly transform the collective's economy with good leadership. Putting their faith in the talented and enthusiastic mechanic, the committee members allowed the farm to take on loans it could not afford to pay off.

Thus although it was formulated to consider human motivation and the market, the law's implementation followed Socialist Realism. As the historian, Galina Ol'shevskaiia writes, the law "materialized into life without delay." By 21 May, less than two months after its adoption, 58.4 percent of soviet collective farms had acquired equipment. The numbers were even more striking in Ukraine, where 92.6 percent of collective farms bought machinery, Moldavia showed the astonishing record of 98.9 percent and Turkmenistan shortly behind with 87.6 percent.⁸³ There were reasons for the swift success of the southern regions, where collective farms were generally larger and wealthier, yet Ol'shevskaiia records the pressure on farms to purchase equipment faster and pay sooner. In the months following the resolution, local administrators strove to achieve high success rates in convincing farms to purchase machinery. When pressure alone did not suffice, they also initiated an amalgamation campaign of collective farms too small to purchase machines and transformed many others into state farms.

⁸² TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 71-72

⁸³ Ol'shevskaiia, "Reorganizatsiia MTS i kolkhozy v 1958-1961gg.," 24.

Articles filled the press chiding collective farms unwilling to participate in the great reorganization of agriculture and those wishing to spread their loan over too many years. The representation of the rational collective farmer gave way to a return of the self-seeking petit-bourgeois peasant. The director of the Institute of Philosophy Fedoseev echoed these sentiments and spoke of “a tendency among collective farm chairmen to stretch the purchase of equipment over many years, figuring that [they] could pay less money or extending [the payment], [pretending] that it’s not in exchange for money.” He mentioned a particular “highly respected” kolkhoz chairman who had been criticized severely at the Central Committee’s plenum. “[This chairman’s] kolkhoz has an income of many millions, and this chairman expected to buy equipment for three hundred thousand rubles and pay over ten years and maybe even longer. This collective farm could have paid for the equipment, if not immediately, then in a year, or a year and a half or two years maximum. [But] he thought he could pay leisurely for ten years.” To be sure, he added, echoing the language depicting kulaks during collectivization, “this kind of sentiment is justly regarded as a belching private proprietary self-seeking disposition (*otryzhka chastno-sobstvennicheskikh, rvacheskikh nastoenii*).”⁸⁴ The petit-bourgeois peasant was the other head of the Janus faced liberal rational subject. Like the liberal subject he was primarily seeking his own economic interests and ignoring the collective good.

Socialist realism would not surrender to the law of the market and accept each and every kolkhoz’s right to act in its own self-interest. Moreover, acknowledging the law of the market restricted the state’s power to act in its best interests. Indeed, in October 1958, the Council of Ministers reconsidered the conditions of collective farm loans, arguing that the high yield of the 1958 harvest allowed farms to increase loan payments. In December, the Central Committee

⁸⁴ TsAOPIM f. 2501, op. 1, d. 40, l. 52-54. For the language used during collectivization to capture the kulak see Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

noted the inexpediency of keeping the MTS further and recommended that collective farms still using MTS services buy the equipment.⁸⁵

After Khrushchev's demise, the March 1965 Plenum of the Central Committee concluded that "the reorganization of the MTS... [was] a progressive measure, but it was carried out in a way that undermined the economies of many collective farms. After the liquidation of the MTS, collective farms of non-black-earth regions, which had endured relatively small in-kind payments [to the MTS], were put in exceptionally difficult economic conditions."⁸⁶

Khrushchev asserted himself as an advocate of realism. In the Secret Speech, he rebuked Stalin's policies as socialist realist:

Because Stalin never travelled anywhere, he did not meet urban or collective farm workers. He did not know the real situation at the periphery. He knew the countryside and agriculture only from films. But these films embellished the situation in agriculture. Many films depicted kolkhoz life with tables collapsing under the weight of turkeys and geese. Obviously Stalin thought that this was how things actually were.⁸⁷

Though he strove to defeat socialist realism and adopt policies that would consider people's interests and motivations, in the final test, Khrushchev could not break away from the socialist realist discourse.

⁸⁵ S. A. Tsepov, "Istoriografiia voprosa deiatel'nosti KPSS po reorganizatsii mashinno-traktornykh stantsii v 1958," in *Problemy Istoriografii opyta KPSS v tekhnicheskome perevoruzhenii sel'skogo khoziaistva* (Vladimir: Ministretvo Prosveshcheniia RSFSR and Vladimirovskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii Institut imeni P.I. Lebedeva-Polianskogo, 1987), 57.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Richard Taylor, "Singing on the Steppe for Stalin: Ivan Pyr'ev and the kolkhoz musical in Soviet cinema," *Slavic Review* 58, no. 1 (1999), 143.

Conclusion

Between the early 1930s and the mid-1950s, soviet politicians and agrarian scientists posited a utopian concept of the collective farmer who exerted himself “to the margin of [his] physical and psychological capabilities” for future communism.¹ This subject was as much a product of fiction writers as it was the basis of soviet governmental rationality. Since their working hypothesis was that ethical concerns were the primary motivators of this utopian actor, policy makers attempted to improve labor productivity by tapping into his consciousness to increase enthusiasm. They sent party agitators to lecture collective farmers about the biographies of Lenin and Stalin as well as domestic and international affairs. Agrarian policies set collective farms’ procurement plans to progressively grow on the premise that the plan itself incentivized farmers even when the farms continually failed to fulfill their quotas. Planners persistently argued that the job of the planner was not to forecast tendencies, but to use “targets,” and “directives” in order to mold the “collective will of producers.” Teleological planners treated collective farmers like cogs in a machine that could be pushed until they broke. Collective farmers’ individual will and interests were irrelevant. Socialist realist science argued that in a socialist society, all groups lived harmoniously and individual interests could not clash with societal concerns.

The “workday” (chapter four) serves as an example of this socialist realist governmental rationality. As a unit of measurement and a means to incentivize collective farmers, it treated all farm members as homogenous regardless of their education, skill set, or ambition. The drafters of the workday assumed that any member of the cooperative could perform any necessary task.² Thus rather than measure quality of the worker, workdays were intended to quantify the quality

¹ E. H. Carr and R. W. Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926-1929*, vol. 1, part 2 (New York: Macmillian Company, 1969), 791-794.

² There were obvious exceptions. For example, not every collective farmer could work as the kolkhoz accountant.

of the labor. The same collective farmer could take the leisurely job of making rope for haybands or he could opt for the more arduous work of herding the farm's cattle. He would be modestly compensated for choosing the former, while the latter allowed him to accumulate a greater number of workdays. The workday incentivized collective farmers to choose more difficult jobs and to exert themselves while performing them, and policy makers assumed that collective farmers would compete over who accumulated the most workdays. However, the workday offered primarily ethical rewards rather than material benefits. Collective farmers who had labored to the limit of their capabilities could boast that they had acquired a certain number of workdays, and even pin pendants signifying labor valor on their chests. The pride in their achievements might even make them the envy of their neighbors. But this accolade did not necessarily mean they could purchase more sugar for their families.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, after two decades of experimentation with a utopian form of governmentality, the state of collective farms suggested that the method had not been a glimmering success. Collective farmers did not fulfill the workday minimums, they illegally hired out their labor for seasonal work outside the kolkhoz and invested their enthusiasm into their private plots. Moreover, collective farm youth refused to join the cooperative when they turned sixteen.³ As a result, collective farms were in a chronic state of labor shortage throughout the postwar years and private plot production accounted for 70-74 percent of potatoes, 49-51 percent of vegetables, 67-79 percent of milk and 84-89 percent of eggs produced in the Russian Republic between 1945 and 1953.⁴ As shares of the cooperative profits, workdays were

³ Jean Lévesque, "'Into the Grey Zone': Sham Peasants and the Limits of the Kolkhoz Order in the Post-War Russian Village, 1945-1953," in *Late Stalinist Russia: Society Between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. Juliane Fürst (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁴ Olga M. Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo: ot Stalina k Krushchevu, seredina 40-kh--nachalo 60-kh godov* (Moskva: Nauka, 1992), 75. See also M. A. Beznin, *Krest'ianskii dvor v Rossiiskom nechernozem'e 1950-1965gg.* (Moscow, Vologda: Institut istorii SSSR AN SSSR, 1991), 104-142.

theoretically effective, because they incentivize members to increase the profits of the collective farm, but in practice they were inadequate and did not raise labor productivity.⁵

Though the state accumulated data indicating that labor productivity was low and incentives were ineffective, it failed to understand the underlying cause. As long as economists and statisticians posited a utopian collective farmer devoid of individual motives and interests there was no reason to calculate his income or study his budget. Tatiana Zaslavskaja (chapter two) reveals the irony behind economists' analytical failure when she recalls that the CIA used data from local newspapers in agricultural districts to estimate the average wage per workday, which soviet economists had not calculated.⁶ Without the knowledge necessary for predicting the population's behavior, the state resorted to the mirage of hegemony: naked domination and coercion. It excised, repressed and stigmatized individuals but could not successfully intervene, discipline and incentivize collective farmers' behavior.

This absence of social scientific knowledge is particularly intriguing because the emergence of state planning in Europe during World War I increased the demands for social knowledge.⁷ However, while liberal states assumed that in order to plan they had to evaluate social conditions, soviet planning was fundamentally different because it ignored all external constraints, including society. Stephen Collier cites one proponent of soviet teleological planning as saying:

⁵ Interestingly, soviet economists were not the only ones to confuse utopian theory with concrete actuality. In 1980, Dwight Israelsen, an economist at Utah's Brigham Young University, published an article arguing that worker incentives in collective farms were higher than in communes and "likely higher than in comparable capitalist organizations." In response, Alec Nove wrote a damning article explaining the reality of labor incentives on the collective farm and why their practice was different from Israelsen's theoretical calculations. Dwight Israelsen, "Collectives, Communes, and Incentives," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 4, no. 2 (1980); Alec Nove, *Studies in Economic and Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 290-301.

⁶ Tatiana I. Zaslavskaja, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 3: *Moia zhizn': Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 2007), 372.

⁷ Peter Wagner, "Social Science and Social Planning during the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 7: *The Modern Social Sciences*, ed. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

We deliberately depict a model of industry to ourselves as we want it, so it may be brought into existence. ... We free ourselves to a considerable extent in the given circumstances from the clutches of what is given by history; we break the old bounds and gain a considerably greater creative freedom.⁸

Soviet planners ignored society because they considered it an obstacle to “creative freedom.” Collier explains that “teleological planning was not exactly the domination of society. Rather it was that society, as such, was irrelevant to the conditions of total planning.”⁹ Consequently, soviet planners imagined themselves operating a country-wide machine where the population functioned as levers to manipulate. Socialist realism served as the planned economy’s superstructure by providing the missing humanistic image and giving life to the utopian subject. This figment of soviet imagination, “the new soviet person,” is the object of study of many recent histories of Soviet Russia, whereby historians analyze the mechanisms the state employed in order to produce this new type of individual.¹⁰ But as Evgeny Dobrenko argues, these studies often “accept the leadership’s rhetoric at face value,” reproducing the utopian subject and mistaking him for an existing soviet subject.¹¹

My interests lie not in the aesthetics of the new soviet person, but in the marriage of governmental rationality and socialist realism in the social sciences. Though historians have shown that a utopian dream of centralized authoritarian control mobilized collectivization,¹² I

⁸ Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social, Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 62.

⁹ Ibid., 62-64.

¹⁰ For example: David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: the Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008); Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

¹¹ Evgeny A. Dobrenko, "Socialism as Will and Representation, or What Legacy Are We Rejecting?," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 4 (2004).

¹² Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Social Experiment in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 226; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State : How*

contend that socialist realist utopias undermined this desire for control and relegated the collective farm population outside the sphere of soviet power. While collectivization increased the quality of bureaucratic and police knowledge about collective farms, teleological planning and socialist realism reduced the production of scientific knowledge, and with it real state power over the rural population.

This phenomenon can be seen in other spheres of soviet state knowledge. David Shearer, for example, shows that since 1932 the passport and residence registration system served as the state's "most detailed and comprehensive" technology of knowledge. It allowed the state to control population movements and to categorize, identify and monitor its citizens.¹³ And yet collective farmers were not issued passports until 1974.¹⁴ Shearer challenges the widespread historiographical claim that refusing peasants passports was a "second serfdom," a measure to tie collective farmers to the land. Instead he writes that the passport and registration system was designed to control the movement of all citizens and its main function was to provide the state with much needed knowledge. Yet if the passport system was primarily a technology of knowledge, is it not surprising that the soviet state chose to leave the majority of its population outside its knowledge-power?

Thus, while we can speak of urban biopolitics already in the 1920s,¹⁵ the collective farm population remained to a large extent outside soviet body politic until the late 1950s. Until this

Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed, Yale agrarian studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); James Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian Province: A Study of Collectivization and Dekulakization in Siberia* (New York: St. Martin's Press in association with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, 1996).

¹³ David Shearer, "Elements Near and Alien: Passportization, Policing, and Identity in the Stalinist State, 1932–1952," *The Journal of Modern History* 76, no. 4 (2004), 837–838.

¹⁴ Victor Zaslavsky notes that even in 1974, collective farmers were not granted an unconditional right to a passport and that the statute enabled local authorities to issue passports to collective farmers who "depart for other places for a long term." Victor Zaslavsky, "Socioeconomic Inequality and Changes in Soviet Ideology," *Theory and Society* 9, no. 2 (1980).

¹⁵ David Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Paula A. Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003).

time, the soviet state lacked elementary knowledge about collective farms. Since economists stopped calculating the cost of kolkhoz production in 1929, the state did not know whether its procurement prices covered expenses and allowed farms to compensate members for their labor. Though the state collected data about collective farmers' nutrition, it had no means to improve it since the collective farmers' primary source of food was their own private plots. After the war, while the state invested in reconstructing towns, collective farmers had to gather their own resources to rebuild their homes. Indeed, in areas liberated from German occupation, collective farmers still lived in dugouts as late as 1949 and the families most likely to remain homeless were those who had lost a son or a father to the war effort.¹⁶ In the postwar years, when ethnographers and sanitation specialists wrote of improvements in the personal hygiene and public health of the collective farm population, they attributed these to the gradual diffusion of urban culture into rural life and not to schooling or medical propaganda.

The first glimpses of attempts at biopolitical intervention in rural life occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In the 1930s, party leaders spoke of the socialist realist image of large urban-like collective farm settlements. However, historians examining village planning before the war found few professional attempts to conceptualize this new way of life and even fewer villages in which such construction was carried out.¹⁷ The Il'ich kolkhoz of Dobrinskii district (chapter three) was one such location. Yet Il'ich still lacked plumbing, sewage and lavatories more than fifteen years after the Academy of Architecture had built its eight cottages. In the early 1950s, these cottages were no more than tourist attractions, hardly counting as a re-conceptualization of rural space. The war produced the circumstances for a turning point.

¹⁶ State Archive of Kaluga Province, Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Kaluzheskoi oblasti (GAKO) f. 883, op. 16, d. 576, and RGASPI f. 17, op. 138, d. 44

¹⁷ Judith Pallot, "Living in the Soviet Countryside," in *Russian Housing in the Modern Age, Design and Social History*, ed. William Craft Brumfield and Blair A. Ruble (Washington, D.C.; Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Neil Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside : Policy Innovation and Institutional Decay* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire New York: Palgrave Macmillan in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2003).

Historians note that after the war the Soviet Union developed a form of a “welfare state.”¹⁸ Collective farmers, of course, did not enjoy many welfare benefits: they were not entitled to pensions, paid leaves or disability insurance, for example, and much of their medical care was paid for by the cooperative. While the state’s mass housing projects rebuilt cities, the war’s demolition of villages provided architects and sanitation specialists with an opportunity to rethink village life and design models for entirely new villages. This opportunity gave birth to the best known postwar biopolitical initiative: Nikita Khrushchev’s suggestion to build agrotowns furnished with plumbing, electricity, medical clinics and childcare services designed to transform peasants’ traditional way of life. But in March 1951, Stalin excoriated the initiative, calling Khrushchev’s biopolitical approach “consumerist” and arguing that the state should prioritize raising production and not investing in lifestyle utopias.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the war’s social and economic costs, the slow postwar recovery, mass migration into cities and collective farmers’ hostility toward the kolkhoz, brought soviet social scientists to study the social fabric and call for new economic and social reforms.

Yet if the state was to successfully design biopolitical policies, it needed a new conceptualization of the collective farm subject. As long as it understood the collective farmer to be a cog in the great state-machine that could be shaped and molded by plans and targets, reform was inconceivable because the state could not conceptualize a problem. Biopolitical intervention required a new subject who stood external to the state, and possessed his own interests, customs and desires, which were not necessarily harmonious with state’s plans. The state had to act on *this* subject and shape him. The great irony is that though social scientists

¹⁸ Alec Nove, "Is the Soviet Union a Welfare State," in *Readings in Russian Civilization, Volume III*, ed. Thomas Riha (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1964), 290; Christopher Burton, "Medical Welfare during Late Stalinism: A Study of Doctors and the Soviet Health System, 1945-53" (University of Chicago, 2000); Mark B Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb, IL: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2010).

¹⁹ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2003), 228-230; Auri C. Berg, "Reform in the Time of Stalin: Nikita Khrushchev and the Fate of the Russian Peasantry" (University of Toronto, 2012), 166-181.

were committed to the party agenda (chapter one), they nonetheless discovered a liberal subject. This new subject was a coherent and rational economic actor, capable of knowing himself and acting in his own self-interest. Thus, for example, ethnographers seeking to explain the migration of collective farmers to cities (chapter three), constructed the residents of Staraia Toida and Staraia Chigla as such liberal subjects. Many of them desired to migrate because the collective farm chairmen denied them of a private cow and “If the muzhik sells his cow, he has no reason to live – he has no milk or meat.”²⁰ These peasants’ understanding of their families’ nutritional needs brought them to collectivize their cows to ensure that they had the dairy nutrients they required. Their rationality did not contradict their collective consciousness or undermined their ability to act as a group.

To be sure, postwar social scientists’ rational subject was not new to the Russian countryside. He had existed until the late 1920s in the works of economists, ethnographers, sociologists, and statisticians. Chayanov explained his economic action in the rationality of subsistence farming. Russian readers found him in the fiction of Tolstoy and Turgenev, to name but a few. Yet this rational peasant vanished from the discursive surface until the war and was replaced by a utopian subject.

This liberal subject was not an actually existing person, but an object of scientific knowledge and a subject of governance. Scholars assumed a coherent and rational actor because only such a subject would enable biopolitical intervention and reform. As Vladimir Venzher explained to the journalist Ivan Vinnichenko (chapter five), as long as the state assumed that collective farmers were selfless individuals working for future communism, the only possible explanation for their refusal to purchase fertilizer was ignorance. For nearly forty years, the state had dispatched agronomists and agitators to convince farmers of the benefits of fertilizers. It imposed the Machine-Tractor Stations’ specialists to advise farms on the best agricultural

²⁰ARAN f. 142, o. 1, d. 509, p. 25

practices. And yet in 1957 piles of fertilizers still lay unused in train stations. The assumption that the collective farmer was a rational subject allowed scholars to achieve the desired results. It enabled economists from the Black Earth Branch of the All Union Institute of Agrarian Economics (*VNIESKh*) to experiment with piece-rate cash payment for milkmaids. By assuming that milkmaids were rational individuals working for material benefits, they designed incentives that would increase milk production. The results exceeded all expectations.

Social scientists constructed the liberal subject as a solution to the challenge of representation which they had faced since late 1940s. During the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign (chapter two), social scientists had to configure how they could represent “reality in its revolutionary development” while providing the state with much-needed knowledge about less idyllic aspects of social life. As long as they represented futuristic and utopian soviet subjects, their work was considered “divorced from practice;” however, if they were to depict reality in its true grim colors, their work would have been discarded as “bourgeois photography.” Grounding their work in the rational self-knowing subject allowed scholars to experiment with the soviet present and at the same time shape and inform the practices of collective farm members. For example, understanding that the collective farmer would work harder if he was materially and not merely ethically compensated could assist the state in resolving real economic problems. This liberal subject was the product of applied social sciences.

The significance of the soviet liberal subject and the scientists who produced him cannot be overstated. Scholars like Tatiana Zaslavskaya, who helped formulate liberal subjects in the 1950s, became one of the intellectual architects of Perestroika.²¹ Indeed, her call for reform was rooted in a liberal subject. In 1983, Zaslavskaya was a sociologist at the Institute of Economics and Industrial Engineering in Novosibirsk when she wrote a seminar paper on the state of soviet agriculture. Leaked to the Russian service of *Voice of America*, the paper, dubbed the

²¹ Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

“Novosibirsk report” or the “Zaslavskaia memorandum,” is widely considered to be a herald of Mikhail Gorbachev’s Perestroika. In it, Zaslavskaia argued that “production today can only be successfully managed if we can learn to regulate the behavior of the workers.” She went on to define that behavior as “emanating from workers’ own interests, their goal is the satisfaction of their material, social and spiritual needs.”²² However, though Zaslavskaia continued producing liberal economic subject conscious of his own interests, her rejection of his utopian counterpart caused political outrage involving the KGB. In the Novosibirsk Report, Zaslavskaia argued against “theories developed in political economy textbooks” according to which socialist society was unique in that “it ceased to reflect the struggle of interests of character.”²³ Thus, until the 1980s, the social utopia which claimed individual interests were harmonious and subordinated to society-wide concerns under socialism still prevailed. Social scientists like Zaslavskaia were still struggling against the socialist realist worldview.

²² Tatiana I. Zaslavskaia, *A Voice of Reform* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 164.

²³ *Ibid.*, 169-170.

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	Fond 454 The Editorial Review board of the Academy of Sciences (<i>RISO</i>)
	Fond 1877 The Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences
	Fond 1922 The Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences
GAKO	<i>Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Kaluzheskoi oblasti</i> / State Archive of Kaluga Province
	Fond 883 Kaluga province executive committee
GARF	<i>Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii</i> / State Archive of the Russian Federation
	Fond A259 Council of Ministers RSFSR
	Fond A374 The Central Statistical Administration RSFSR
	Fond A482 The Ministry of Healthcare RSFSR
RGAE	<i>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki</i> / Russian state archive of the Economy
	Fond 260 All-Union Institute of Agrarian Economics
	Fond 1562 Central Statistical Administration of the USSR Council of Ministers
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