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The Russian Sociological Tradition from the XIXth Century Until the Present: Key Features and Possible Value for Current Discussions

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Abstract The aim of this article is to highlight key features of the Russian sociological tradition and to demonstrate its relevance for certain ongoing international debates. In the current literature the image of "Russian sociology" remains fragmentary and incomplete. Different stages in the history of Russian sociology are usually considered as mutually antagonistic. We challenge this view by arguing that the Russian sociological tradition can be seen as a continuing trajectory of social thought development, lasting from the XIXth century until present days and unified by a set of underlying historically determined common features: *publicism* (an orientation to non-academic audiences and a desire to promote changes in the real world); *moral and ethical concern* (a clear expression of value orientations; the particular importance of ethical and moral issues); *problem orientation* (a focus on urgent social concerns with "problem" dominating over "method" in sociological research). We demonstrate the importance of these features for a better understanding of the perspectives and contributions of Russian sociologists to current international debates.

Keywords Russian sociology · Russian history · Methodology · Public sociology

Introduction

Questions about sociology's self-identification, its place and role in the contemporary society are more and more actively discussed in the international literature (Savage and Burrows (2007), Gane (2011) and Back (2012)). These discussions might benefit from the contributions of scholars with different national and cultural backgrounds (Bhambra 2013, 2014). The global world with its global problems calls for a global sociological community which means that the sociological mainstream should become more sensitive to the ideas arriving from its peripheries. New sources for novel approaches might

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be found within "local" sociologies originating outside of the Anglo-Saxon world and having unique experiences and traditions.

In the present article we focus on the Russian sociological tradition, aiming to highlight its key features and demonstrate its relevance for certain ongoing international debates.

In the current international literature the image of "Russian sociology" remains fragmentary and incomplete. On the one hand, there is a tendency to perceive it as a very young, incipient phenomenon not capable of a significant contribution to the ongoing international debates (Davis and Erofeev 2011; Voronkov and Zdravomyslova 1996). This approach usually results in claims for rapid one-sided integration of Russian sociology into the international community through direct exportation of mainstream methodological standards, concepts and theories (Radaev 2013). Within this framework Russian sociology is perceived without substantial consideration of its traditions in the soviet and pre-soviet periods.

On the other hand, the literature shows a certain growth of interest in the history of Russian sociology in the XIXth and the first half of the XXth century (Nichols 2012; Krotov 2012). The famous Russian emigrant, Harvard professor and the president of American Sociological Association in the 1960s, Pitirim Sorokin is often in the focus of these discussions (Krotov 2012). For example, in the article by Nichols (2012) the lifelong connections between Russian intellectual traditions and Sorokin's sociological approach are profoundly investigated. Along with Sorokin, his predecessors (Lavrov, Mikhailovsky and others) are also given attention in the literature (Efremenko and Evseeva 2012). However, contemporary researchers generally do not consider Russian sociology as a long-lasting integrative intellectual tradition. On the contrary, different stages in the history of Russian sociology are usually considered as contrasting. For example, soviet sociology is often regarded as antagonistic to both pre-soviet social thought and to contemporary Russian sociology (Krotov 2012; Osipov 2009).

In the present article we challenge this view by arguing that the Russian sociological tradition can be seen as a continuing trajectory of social thought development, lasting from the XIXth century until present days and unified by a set of underlying common features. This tradition, analyzed not only in regard to its limitations in comparison with mainstream western sociology, but also in terms of its valuable originality, has not yet been given necessary comprehension in the literature. We believe that exploring the Russian sociological tradition can contribute to the ongoing discussions in the international professional community.

Russian Sociology and Russian Society: An Enduring Connection

The development of Russian sociology has been inextricably linked with its political, cultural and social contexts. In the first half of the XIXth century major preconditions for the formation of a Russian sociological tradition had been shaped. Public life in Russia at that time was full of ambiguities and contradictions (Walicki 2010), and probably the most important antagonism was between archaic social institutions and progressive cultural canons co-existing in Russian society.

The social structure of Russian society in the middle of the XIXth century was based on a congealed and outworn institutional system. There were two major foundations of

the whole Russian Empire's economic and political functioning: peasants' serfdom and the unlimited autocracy[1] of the Tzar (Emperor).

Serfdom (practically, slavery (Stanziani 2008)) embraced approximately 40 % of the Russian Empire's population. "Serfs" were peasants attached to the land owned by a landlord. According to the official decree of 1835 (Code of Laws of the Russian Empire, 1857), serfs could not possess any property; a landlord had total disposal of serfs' lives (including unlimited freedom to punish physically and to permit, or prohibit marriages). There were practically no restrictions regarding the manner of serfs' treatment: indeed, they were officially prohibited to lodge complaints to the Emperor. The serf trade was flourishing, often breaking families apart by selling children and their parents separately. This dramatic situation inspired one of the most famous novels in Russian literature. *The Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol that describes the adventures of a person buying documents on deceased serfs ("dead souls") from landlords, in order to sell them later as living ones to the new owners.

Serfdom was officially abolished only in the year 1861. However, announcement of the imperial Manifesto dated 19 February 1861 only increased the already existing acuteness of the "peasant question." According to the document peasants became formally "free" but they did not receive land in their full possession and also had to continue working for their landlords. As a result, numerous revolts started all over Russia because people could not believe that this Manifesto was issued by the Tzar himself and suspected that officials had deceived him and announced a fake document (Zayanchkovsky 1954: 161, 166, 181).

At the same time intellectual elites of Russian society were well acquainted with the best achievements of progressive European culture. Since the XVIIIth century, due to efforts of Peter I, Russian aristocrats had been sending their children to the leading western universities. Peter I had even issued special decrees prohibiting appearing at the Emperor's court in traditional Russian dress and wearing an old-style beard (Anisimov 1993:214). The establishment of Moscow University in 1755 and Saint Petersburg University in 1795 further stimulated dissemination of western social and philosophical thought and the formation of a progressive, democratic and reformist-oriented intellectual tradition in Russia (Confino 1972). The role of European civilization in the everyday life of Russian elites can be traced in the novel *Evgeni Onegin* by the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin. A young Russian provincial aristocratic lady, Tatiana, writes a letter to her beloved Onegin in the French language, not in Russian, which Pushkin depicted as typical: "it's the foreign phrase that trips like native idiom from their lips" (Pushkin 2003, chapter 3, poem 17).

Russia's brightest pearls in literature (Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol), painting (Venetsianov, Brullov, Ivanov), music (Glinka, Dargomyzhsky) and architecture (Voronihin, Zaharov, Stasov) appeared in the first half of the XIXth century, confirming

[1] "Autocracy" is a translation of the Russian word "Samoderzhavie" which appeared in the Russian political discourse in the XVIth century. Autocracy is defined by the Oxford Dictionary of English (Stevenson 2010) as "a system of government by one person with absolute power." In the Russian historical context this concept has a broader meaning. According to the famous Russian historian of the XIXth century, V. Klyuchevsky, "Autocracy" is particularly important as, on the one hand, the symbol of political independence of Russia, and, on the other hand, the sacrament of the unlimited power of the Russian rulers (Tzars, Emperors) in the domestic policy (Klyuchevskii 2002).

Russia's intentions to become one of the European leaders in terms of fine arts' development (see for example Stavrou 1983).

This is perhaps the most important feature of the historical context in which the Russian sociological tradition originated: the "golden age" of progressive high culture coexisted with an outworn institutional system.

The Russian Sociological Tradition: Key Features

The historical context had largely determined the three key features of the *Russian sociological tradition*: (1) *Publicism* (an orientation to non-academic audiences and a desire to promote changes in the real world); (2) *Moral and ethical concern* (a clear expression of value orientations, the particular importance of ethical and moral issues in sociological practice); (3) *Problem orientation* (a focus on urgent social concerns with "problem" dominating over "method" in sociological research).

Features close to each of these characteristics have been mentioned in the literature in connection with particular Russian sociologists (Krotov 2012), areas of studies (Efremenko and Evseeva 2012), historical periods (Zdravomyslova 2008) or Russian culture as a whole (Nichols 2012). The novelty of our approach lies in the fact that these three characteristics have not yet been comprehended as integrative attributes of Russian sociological tradition lasting from the second half of the XIXth until the XXIst century. In our view, revealing this tradition might contribute to certain contemporary international debates.

Publicism

The publicism of Russian sociologists is a natural consequence of the historical premises highlighted above. The "Decembrist revolt" (Raeff 1966) of 1825 (an unsuccessful coup d'état inspired by the ideals of French Enlightenment) revealed the formation in Russian society of a powerful intellectual and ethical tradition aiming at bringing about democratic social change. Beginning from the 1830s, critically oriented Russian intellectuals (e.g., Belinsky [Terras 1974], Herzen [Steiner 2007] and others) established various voluntary groups called "circles" where they discussed perspectives for further social and political transformations in Russia. These "circles" contributed to the increasing dissatisfaction of intellectuals with the conservative policy of Emperor Nicholas I. The "heroic maximalism" (Walicki 2010:105) of the Russian intelligentsia gradually turned them into a state-opposed political force and resulted in severe persecutions by the government.[2]

[2] A most notable example was the circle of Mikhail Petrashevsky inspired by progressive European materialistic and socialistic ideas. This circle shaped in the 1840s and united Russian intellectuals seeking freedom for the peasants and democratic political transformations (Dolinin 1987). The famous Russian writer and philosopher Fyodor Dostoevsky (see Mochulsky 1971) in his younger years actively engaged in the Petrashevsky circle. As a result, he was sent into exile in Siberia where he spent 4 years. Remarkably, in the international discourse Dostoevsky is acknowledged, most of all, for his elaborations of religiously conservative existentialist views that, obviously, did not support revolutionary movement (Fergusson 2010; Morillas 2008). However, being a member of Russian intellectual culture, as a young man he naturally joined revolutionary-oriented circles that largely determined the social and political context of the time.

Nichols calls the "popular or "public" genre the "Russian element" describing "the stylistic "how"" of doing sociology in Pitirim Sorokin's approach (Nichols 2012:378). However, when considered in its wide historical context this public orientation of Russian sociologists and social thinkers, in our view, is more about "why" than "how." Social thought and political movements in Russia have traditionally been closely interrelated and mutually supporting and have enriched each other. The founders of Russian sociology Lavrov and Mikhailovsky were possibly the first Russian "public" sociologists (Podvoiski 2009:22).

Pyotr Lavrov (1823–1900) originated from a noble family and had a successful military career (as colonel and professor of mathematics in Saint Petersburg Artillery Academy). However, he engaged in democratically oriented movements in the late 1850s and became a member of the first Russian revolutionary organization "Zemlya i Volya" ("Land and Freedom") which aimed at organizing a peasant revolt (Bell 1959). In 1867 he was sent into exile for disseminating "harmful" ideas (Rusanov 1907). Along with Lavrov many other bright representatives of Russian intellectuals were persecuted, for example, Nikolai Chernyshevsky, the famous Russian philosopher and writer (Kareev 1996).

While living in exile in the Vologodsky region Lavrov wrote his main work, *Historical Letters* in which the foundations of his sociological conception were described. In our view, "Historical letters" may be considered as the earliest evidence of emerging sociology in Russia. The notion "sociology" is used more than 35 times throughout the "Historical letters" suggesting indirect self-identification of the author as sociologist. Most remarkable, in our view, is the following piece of text demonstrating an interesting vision of the origins of sociology and its agenda by Lavrov. "Among the rebels against the capitalist system appeared fighters, relying on all the achievements of the previous periods of thought which set the most acute and radical problems. This shaped the agenda for sociology as an integrative science, as the Supreme science" ("Historical letters", Letter 16). In our opinion, the three key features of the Russian sociological tradition found clear expression in these lines: public orientation (in this case it is the struggle against capitalism), problem orientation (focus on the "most acute and radical problems") and moral concern (distinct ethical consideration of the sociological activity: sociologists are regarded as "rebels" fighting with the capitalistic system).

In 1870 Lavrov escaped to Paris where he renewed his revolutionary activity, got acquainted with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and became a member of the "Second International" in 1889 (Rusanov 1907). Nikolai Mikhailovsky (1842–1904) continued the sociological elaborations and political activity of Pyotr Lavrov. He engaged with a revolutionary movement (the organization "Narodnaya Volya" ["The People's Will"] (Vilenskaya 1979)) for which Mikhailovsky several times was sentenced to exile.

Remarkably, such public activity of Lavrov and Mikhailovsky was a natural supplement to their sociological conceptions. The so-called "subjective method of sociology," proposed by Lavrov in *Historical Letters*, suggested the active individual to be the major driver of social transformations. Instead of searching for predetermination in social development Lavrov and Mikhailovsky pointed to the crucial role of creative human personality (Youzhakov 1995). Lavrov believed that an individual having critical consciousness and faith to change the congealed social forms is "the organ" of progress (Dobrenkov 1998).

That is why from the very beginning of sociology in Russia it was so important for social thinkers to engage personally in social transformations. They often identified themselves not with passive observers but with active participants of social change, "vehicles" of the progress, for which they were frequently severely persecuted by the government. As Walicki notes, Russian intelligentsia welcomed scientific positivism in social thought because it identified the scientific spirit with political progressiveness (2010:104).

Many Russian sociologists in the XIXth century engaged in publicism—mostly through journals, magazines and newspapers published for wide intellectual audiences (*Otechestvennye zapiski (Notes of the Fatherland), Nedelya (Week), Vperyod (Forward)* and many others). This came naturally since Russian academic sociology was only emerging at that time and sociologists had to share intellectual space with writers, journalists, philosophers, economists, historians, etc..[3] In line with the general direction of social and political movements in Russia in the second half of the XIXth century, many Russian sociologists and social thinkers expressed left political views. However, there were notable exceptions. A group of earlier sociologists and social scholars of the XIXth century had conservative political preferences (Nikolai Danilevsky, Nikolai Leontiev and others (see Batygin and Deviatko 1994)). Later (1890s–1900s), such acknowledged thinkers as Sergei Bulgakov, Semion Frank and Nikolai Berdiev opposed the Marxist and socialist ideas and successfully developed traditions of Russian religious idealism (Berline 1947).

In general, Russian sociology in the XIXth century largely engaged with left political ideology (especially with socialism): one part of scholars shared these ideas and the other part criticized them. Hardly any social thinker maintained neutrality in the context of the growing activity of socialist political movements like "Zemlya I Volya" ("Land and Freedom") promising radical social transformations. In our view, this engagement, on the one hand, naturally originated from the cultural, political and social context of the time, and, on the other hand, laid foundations for the Russian sociological tradition as a long lasting intellectual flow in the XXth and, possibly, the XXIst century.

Social and political tension was increasing gradually in Russian society: the revolt of 1905 resulted in new repressions over democratically oriented intellectuals (Harcave 1964). That is when the first political engagement of young Pitirim Sorokin took place. In 1906 the future's most acknowledged Russian sociologist was sent to prison after he became a member of the "socialist-revolutionary" political party and engaged in their activities (Efremenko and Krotov 2012). He managed to escape from the jail and entered Saint Petersburg State University in 1910. Based on this marginal experience Sorokin wrote his first sociological work, *Crime and Punishment: Heroism and Reward* (1913) (Efremenko and Krotov 2012). For Sorokin (as well as for many other Russian sociologists) personal involvement in public and political activity had often served as valuable source of expertise and inspiration in sociological investigations.

The peak of Sorokin's political career was serving as personal secretary to Prime Minister Alexander Kerensky in the Provisional regime of 1917 from February (the

[3] The first academic institution in Russian sociology was established only at the beginning of the XXth century: the "Russian Higher School of Social Sciences" (founded in 1901 in Paris (France) by Maxim Kovalevsky).

overthrow of the last Tsar, Nicholas II) until the Russian October Revolution which he openly criticized. In 1922 after Lenin accused Sorokin of bourgeois views the latter was sent out of his homeland along with many other representatives of democratically oriented intellectuals (Raeff 1990). In his early American period Sorokin often appeared in periodicals, gave public lectures and talked on the radio. Remarkably, Sorokin's famous writings of the following years, *The American Sex Revolution* and *The Crisis of Our Age* were also oriented to the general public and not solely to the academic community (Nichols 2012:394).

With the establishment of the soviet rule Russian intellectuals staying in the country had to face new challenges. Dimke argues that sociological practice in soviet times was a "revolutionary action" (2012:103). After sending out "bourgeois professors" in the beginning of 1920s, a new series of repressions towards social scientists took place in the 1930s (for example, the sociologist Alexander Chayanov[4] and the famous economist Nikolai Kondratiev[5] were put to death [Radaev 2013:5]). During the first decades of soviet rule practicing "sociology" was indeed very dangerous as this discipline did not have the official approval of political censorship (Radaev 2013:5). The first soviet sociologists had to run the risk of being accused of bourgeois views.

However, in the beginning of the 1960s, the first institutions and projects aimed at "social research" were officially established, though still under severe political control (Osipov 2004). The government needed sociological knowledge in order to perform better in its ideological "war" with world capitalism (Sokolov 2011) and also wanted to enhance economic efficiency by promoting the "scientific organization of labor" (Radaev 2013:6). In this context sociologists had to pass between Scylla and Charybdis: to abide by the regulations of political censorship and at the same time to provide knowledge and critical considerations about the state of the art in the country for as wide an audience as possible.

The famous Russian sociologist Vladimir Yadov, the head of the first sociological laboratory established in Saint-Petersburg in 1960s claims that, "The uniqueness of Soviet sociology lies primarily in the fact that, being involved in the reproduction of basic ideological and political values of Soviet society, it became an important factor in its reshaping and, finally, revolutionary transformation" (Yadov and Grathoff 1994:3–5). Indeed, soviet sociologists brought to light many facts which put officially reported successes of the regime into question (Osipov 2004:28). Remarkably, in their memoirs soviet sociologists often compared sociology with journalism (Dimke 2012:104).

[4] Alexander Chayanov (1888–1939) is an internationally acknowledged scholar in the field of peasant studies (Harrison 1979). He analyzed the basic differences between capitalistic rural production and the traditional social organization of the Russian peasantry. Chayanov pointed to the necessity of greater space for the individual initiative and competition in the rural cooperation (Durrenberger 1984). Tragically, his views on the issue of differentiation of Russian peasantry were opposite to those of Stalin. In 1926 Chayanov was accused of protecting the interests of "Kulaks" (owners of rich rural households), in 1930 arrested and in 1937 sentenced to death.

[5] Nikolai Kondratiev (1892–1938) is the author of the theory of "Big Economic Cycles" (Louçã 1999) which links the macroeconomic long-term cyclic development with the social transformations (this theory still gets credit in the international sociology (see, for example, Wallerstein (2000))). In his youth, Kondratiev served as personal secretary to the famous Russian sociologist Maxim Kovalevsky. In the 1920s, he was actively engaged in the policymaking in the field of rural economic and social development. Kondratiev was arrested on a false charge in 1930 and executed in 1938.

Many soviet sociologists honestly tried their best to help the Communist Party bring about positive changes in the life of the people (Firsov 2001). However, critics of the regime also appeared, resulting from disappointment with the official policy. This dissatisfaction found practical manifestation in the famous "lectures on sociology" by Yuri Levada, delivered in the faculty of journalism in Moscow State University in 1968. Osipov, the witness of those events reports: "not all of the theses of the author might have been correct. However, this was a question for professional discussion, scientific ethics. But this discussion was transferred to political and administrative fields. The personnel of the Institute (Institute of Concrete Social Research in the Academy of Science – *P.S.*) were accused of disseminating bourgeois theoretical conceptions and views" (Osipov 2004:28). As a result, in 1969 Levada was stripped of the title of professor.

Post-soviet sociology retained a pronounced public orientation (Gorshkov 2012; Toshchenko 2013; Osipov 2009). Partly this may be due to the fact that the top figures of the Russian sociological hierarchy secured their positions after the collapse of the soviet regime (Davis and Erofeev 2011). According to Jean Toshchenko, the current chief editor of Russian leading sociological journal *Sociologicheskie Issledovaniya* (*Sociological Research*), the necessity of "public sociology" for Russia is explained "not simply by the wish to show ourselves but by the needs of the time: to provide society with scientific analysis and reasonable recommendations" (2013:10).

It must be noted here that the "publicism" of the Russian sociological tradition is, in our view, a somewhat different feature from what the concept of "traditional public sociology" (Burawoy 2005) implies. According to Burawoy, "with traditional public sociology the publics being addressed are generally invisible in that they cannot be seen, thin in that they do not generate much internal interaction, passive in that they do not constitute a movement or organization" (2005:264). In this regard the Russian sociological tradition is much different. Russian sociologists like Lavrov, Sorokin, Levada and others stimulated radical social changes throughout Russian history by actual personal participation in the powerful social movements fighting with authoritarian regimes which often had tragic consequences for themselves. The Russian sociological tradition used to stay much closer to the real social and political action and therefore seems to be the champion of being truly "public."

Moral and Ethical Concern

Russian social thought has traditionally been very sensitive to the ethical concerns of Russian society. The huge gap between the ideals of humanistic European social thought and the awfully poor living conditions of the ordinary population in Russia resulted in a strong feeling of moral duty that stimulated various social initiatives of the intelligentsia. For example, in the second part of the XIXth century educated Russian intellectuals actively engaged in the social movement "Narodnichestvo," or "going to the people" (Belfer 1978). They left their comfortably furnished surroundings and traveled from one rural settlement to another. Their aim was, on the one hand, to disseminate ideas of enlightenment, democracy and humanism and, on the other hand, to restore spiritual complicity with ordinary Russian people and their lives. The intelligentsia felt morally obliged to help improve the living conditions of the peasantry, understanding that the privilege of doing science and fine arts in the civilized cities is

possible only at the price of ordinary people who work very hard and suffer in their backwardness (Belfer 1978). The "Narodnichestvo" movement is, in our view, a perfect example of the inseparable connection between Russian intellectual elites and lower orders of society.

Pyotr Lavrov, the founder of Russian sociology, is a perfect illustration of the integrity comprised of individual morality, research activity and civil engagement typical for the Russian sociological tradition. His elaboration of "The Subjective Method of Sociology" begins with skepticism towards the moral foundations of existing concepts and analytical frameworks in social thought. "All those believing in the absolute infallibility of their moral worldview would like to assure themselves that this worldview exists not only for them but per se…However, let us be fair, the time has come to realize a very simple thing: that the distinctions between important and unimportant, between useful and harmful, between good and bad in their essences are distinctions existing only for a human being as they are not organic for the nature and things themselves" (Lavrov 1965). It is crucially important for Lavrov that an understanding of "progress" always depends upon consciously chosen moral criteria.

Mikhailovsky elaborated on Lavrov's ideas. arguing that historical progress is possible only through moral ideals that individuals try to achieve (Mikhailovsky 1922). Therefore, social processes should be assessed, first of all, by moral judgment. Mikhailovsky believed that social phenomena cannot be approached by any other way but only subjectively. Without introspection, without sympathy, real social processes become "invisible" (Vilenskaya 1979). Such deep consideration of moral issues was a rather novel idea for sociology at that time. Ethical questions were often ignored or regarded as "self-evident" within the dominant western-centric positivist approach in the XIXth century.

Maxim Kovalevsky, the famous Russian sociologist and liberal politician, a personal acquaintance of Karl Marx and a member of the first Russian parliament ("Duma") in 1905, believed that freedom of moral manifestations was the key element of individual autonomy while the growth of human solidarity was the most important criterion of progress. He taught that human egoism and the lack of altruistic behavior were major obstacles to further social development (Timasheff 1966).

By the beginning of the XXth century the major problems in the political, social and economic development of the Russian Empire were not solved. Most importantly, despite the revolt of 1905 the autocracy in Russia secured its positions (Harcave 1964). Socialistic ideas were disseminating rapidly and attracted young Pitirim Sorokin. His ethical views were influenced by both traditional Russian values relating to solidarity and "sobornost" (Efremenko and Evseeva 2012)) and western socialistic ideology. Nichols characterizes his teaching as "integral knowledge" (a combination of scientific knowledge and values) suggesting it to be the "Russian Substantive Element" (2012:388). Indeed, this inextricable connection between morality and knowledge was typical for many Russian thinkers (Walicki 2010). For example, according to Mikhailovsky, there are two different types of "truth" that social science seeks for: "truth-fact" (acquired without subjectivity as in natural sciences) and "truth-justness." The latter is a combination of knowledge about facts and moral consideration of these facts (Mikhailovsky 1909:492).

Nichols notes that it was the stance of "scientist-believer" by Sorokin in his American career that openly defied contemporary norms and practices of science,

and thereby risked condemnation by his peers (2012:388). Indeed, in the 1940s Sorokin witnessed a rapid transformation of the discipline: moving away from its philosophical background towards concrete and "value-free" empirical research (Smith 1994). This shift left Sorokin with his idea of "an integral system of knowledge and values" (Nichols 2012:388) outside of the mainstream. He felt uncomfortable in the American sociological academy but he did not change his moral and ethical worldview.

In the soviet time all elaborations of ethical and moral issues were forcibly limited to the ideological field. Due to this political and institutional context soviet sociologists reproduced traditional "Russian" ethical concerns in the narrow field of political ideology. The aim of soviet sociology was to become the "emotional substitute" for ideology (Olshanski (1994)).

The collapse of the soviet system brought to Russian society the unprecedented freedom of moral manifestations which immediately resulted in serious fragmentation within the sociological community. Zdravomyslova reports the division between sociologists in post-soviet Russia into two groups: "chekists" [6] and "reformators" (2008:409). The "Chekist" group is oriented towards cooperation with the authorities and believes that "the public role of sociology is to define the contours of state policies; to construct a national idea that could mobilize society" (2008:409). Elena Zdravomyslova indicates Osipov (Osipov 2004) and Kuznetsov (Kuznetsov 2005) as members of this group. Indeed, Osipov believes that Russian sociology "will contribute significantly to shaping the strategy of Russian society's development" (Osipov 2009:14). The "reformist" group, on the contrary, argues that "professional sociological consciousness is inherently critically oriented. They believe that this criticism should be democratically reformist" (Zdravomyslova 2008:410). According to Elena Zdravomyslova, the founders of contemporary Russian sociology belong to this community: Yadov, Zaslavskaya, Zdravomyslov, Ryvkina, Levada and others (Zdravomyslova 2008:410).

The disintegration of contemporary Russian sociological community on ideological grounds is noted by Radaev, the acknowledged Russian sociologist and economist, who argues that the decisive role in professional fragmentation in sociology today is played by political partiality (2013:15).

Moral consideration of scientific findings (first justified by Lavrov) remains an inseparable part of sociological practice throughout Russian history reflecting the dramatic ethical concerns of Russian society and never ending ideological debates. Due to changes in political context and transformations in the institutional organization of social science, moral and ethical positions of Russian sociologists were expressed in various ways in different historical periods but remained inextricably linked with sociological investigations per se.

In contemporary international literature discussions about the role and place of ethical issues in sociological practice take an important place, especially in discourse on "public sociology" (Turner 2005; Nichols 2009). In our view, the main question is:

[6] "Chekists" were, originally, the members of the "All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage" (1917–1922). This Extraordinary Commission was established soon after October revolution of 1917 in order to persecute and punish those who opposed the Soviet rule. Since 1918, the Extraordinary Commission had special authorities to put counter-revolutionaries to death without trial. Later the notion "chekist" became a common noun indicating a person fiercely defending the interests of the State and existing political power.

can (and should) sociologists remain "value-free" while witnessing radical changes in social, political and economic fields affecting millions of human lives? Burawoy believes that moral commitment is "one element of sociology as a vocation. Another element is sociology as a science" (2014:279). Our study of Russian sociological tradition suggests that it is extremely difficult to remain value-free in turbulent and dramatic times. Ethical sensitivity becomes especially important for sociological investigation in the age when different moral worldviews are becoming more and more confronted, intersected or interrelated. Also the present research illustrates that moral manifestations of sociologists better serve the development of the discipline when they are not limited to political ideology only but are built upon fundamental ethical concerns.

Problem Orientation

For Russian sociologists it has traditionally been less important to elaborate sophisticated methodological procedures than to acquire meaningful comprehension of a particular social problem. This feature is the third constituting element lying at the core of the Russian sociological tradition. When sociological knowledge becomes morally interpreted and publicly oriented it comes naturally that the problems of methodological accuracy are treated in a special way: from the point of reaching not the "cognitive truth" but rather the "truth-justice" (Walicki:102). Russian sociologists used to perceive their mission as understanding the most urgent social problems and helping to solve them (Batygin (1998), Radaev (2013) and Nichols (2012)). That is why in their empirical studies they tend to apply less demanding methodological standards (in comparison with western sociology) and often rely upon self-made research tools (Radaev 2013).

A strong focus of Russian sociology on urgent social concerns once again illustrates ceaseless connections between social science and history in Russia. In the context of the continuing reproduction of autocratic and outworn social institutions in Russian society such issues as democratic transformations and economic modernization attracted the greatest interest of Russian sociologists. They were not so much focused on analysis of laws and mechanisms determining the development of the social world but instead were actively trying to help this world become better and overcome its most painful diseases.

The difference between dominating methodological orientations in western and Russian sociological practices became most apparent in the XXth century. In the 1930s and 1940s western sociology began actively adopting and copying patterns of the natural sciences (Smith 1994). This led to a growing prevalence of the accuracy of the method over the relevance of the empirical problems (Mills 1959). As a result, the freedom of sociologists to choose subjects, approaches and methods for their studies was limited. It became necessary to abide by the strict methodological norms in which formal quantitative procedures gained dominant positions. For Gane this "methodological inhibition" still dominates in mainstream sociology and determines insensitivity to the important problems of the real world (2011:159).

Soviet sociology did not (and, possibly, could not) adopt this orientation. Due to political context soviet sociologists had very limited opportunities to develop concrete empirical social research. The deliberately constructed image of sociology as part of philosophy had its effect: as Osipov notes, even in the 1960s scholars engaged in large quantitative empirical research were depreciatingly called "collectors of facts" and accused of "positivism" in the soviet academic community (2004:26).

At the same time Russian emigrant sociology also did not become an organic part of the new international mainstream which tried to "measure up" according to the standards of natural sciences and broke with the freedom of scholars to develop "any type of sociology they wished" (Nichols 2012:389). For example, Nichols notes that Pitirim Sorokin's turn to the issues of love, sexual behavior and family relations in the middle of the XXth century was regarded by the US sociologists as an "embarrassment to the discipline that had gained much respect as a science during the World War II era" (Nichols 2012: 399).

The situation remains to a large extent the same in current Russian sociology. According to Vadim Radaev, Russian sociologists give preference to the "problem" over the "method" (Radaev 2013:13). This orientation to urgent social concerns may have negative consequences for the development of a methodological apparatus. As Radaev notes, contemporary Russian sociologists reproduce the tradition of soviet sociology that focuses more on accumulating new data than on progressing in the field of quantitative analysis (Radaev 2013:16). This is suggested to be a serious obstacle to integration into the international mainstream which is very demanding in regards to the methodological accuracy of the research. The qualification of many Russian sociologists in qualitative analysis is often unsatisfactory which makes Nikolai Romanovsky, the deputy editor of the journal *Sociological Research*, speak about the "unacceptability of unprofessionalism" (Romanovski 2012:42).

At the same time, contemporary Russian sociologists express skepticism regarding the capability of current quantitative methods for dealing with difficult sociological questions. Russian methodologist Uliana Tolstova argues that sociologists of the past implemented methods of formal statistical analysis very carefully while contemporary researchers tend to believe that "by clicking the button the sociological problem might be solved" (2013:59).

In our view, it is to a large extent the desire to get meaningful understanding of particular urgent social issues which made the Russian sociological tradition turn away from the direction that the international mainstream took in the middle XXth century. For many Russian sociologists the statistical reliability of the means by which the sociological comprehension of the particular problem is obtained has become of secondary importance compared with the meaningful content of this comprehension. That is why Pitirim Sorokin was so critical concerning the tendencies toward "quantophrenia" and "numerology" (Sorokin 1956) which he witnessed growing in American sociology of the 1950s.

Conclusion

In the present article we aimed to elaborate a comprehension of Russian sociology as a unique long-lasting tradition of social thought unified by several key features:

- *Publicism*. The Russian sociological tradition demonstrates a strong "public" orientation, which often demands serious personal sacrifice. Remarkably, the publicism of Russian sociologists has proved to be capable of continuous significant contributions to real social change. Such consistent, strong and practically efficient public engagement of sociologists remains internationally unprecedented which explains the necessity for integrating of the studies in the history of Russian sociology in the current discourse about public sociology.

- *Moral and ethical concern*. The Russian sociological tradition reveals that moral judgment and ethical consideration may become an inseparable part of scientific investigation and research methodology, which calls for special attention to the ethical grounds of sociological practice. The current sociological mainstream may possibly benefit from such critical reconsideration of existing "self-evident" ethical patterns in the face of contemporary global challenges in the field of ethics and morality.
- *Problem orientation*. The history of Russian sociology illustrates several pitfalls relating to a certain trade-off between "problem" and "method" orientations in sociological practice. On the one hand, a rigid methodological framework may be insensitive to the most acute social concerns but, on the other hand, total focus on "problems" is fraught with underestimation of methodological accuracy. Therefore a balance between two sides of the same coin is needed.

Instead of focusing solely on the concrete historical periods or figures we tried to provide a more integrated understanding of Russian sociology, which is lacking in current international discourse. We do not claim to have examined deeply (or even mentioned) all the diversity of approaches, ideas and research practices ever elaborated within Russian sociology. However, the three characteristics outlined above, in our view, have special importance for a better understanding of the difficulties experienced by Russian sociologists in integrating into contemporary international sociology, and for perspectives on their contribution to current debates.

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