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PART I
NATIONAL SOCIOLOGICAL FIELDS
& THE STUDY OF EMPIRE
THE RUSSIAN DILEMMA
From a modern functionalist point of view, despite its obvious specificity and peculiarities, the Russian Empire “was made” of the same basic elements as other composite polities of its day and faced similar challenges. It is the arrangement of those “elements” and their specific historical and cultural contexts that made the Russian case so special. This explains why Russian intellectuals conceptualizing the structure and dynamics of society so easily operated with theories and models produced by their West European peers and had so much difficulty applying them to the Russian imperial context. To understand the challenges faced by Russian sociologists (both academics and those theorizing society for practical purposes), we suggest the interpretation of Russian historical experience by means of focusing not on political institutions and social structures but on practices and social relations that characterized Russian society.

To make sense of this “Russian dilemma” by way of counterfactual comparison and without delving into nuances of Russian history, imagine that sometime in the late nineteenth century the British islands sunk to the sea bottom, overnight, leaving the British Raj in India without its overseas metropole. All other key elements of administration, social infrastructure, and cultural relations remained intact: the viceroy, the British colonial personnel, and the native Indian staff of colonial institutions; the division between “dominion” and “suzerainty” states; the religious strife among Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians; the cultural distance between the colonizers and colonized, overlapping with the social distance within the
“white” milieu. Everything was the same, except the retired colonial officers had not sailed “home” but had settled amidst their former colleagues and subjects. Native Europeanized intellectuals, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, still experienced frustration with the attitude of the British elite, but there was no metropole society left into which they might aspire in vain to integrate or which insisted on their subaltern status. In short, all the conflicts and social and cultural differences of the “imperial formation” remained in place; the only thing that had disappeared is the structurally imposed clear-cut demarcation between “them” and the subaltern Other. This minor change would have dramatically transformed the lived experience of such an imperial society and complicated the metanarratives of its description. The cultural, social, or racial distance would have become effectively conditioned by circumstances, social context, or locality, as both dominant social groups and subaltern Others would be integral parts of the same society. Colonization, along with attendant Westernization and modernization, would have become a factor of internal politics, losing any external subject or agency. The disappearance of the externally imposed normative social hierarchy would have prompted the proliferation of hybrid (or rather composite) social identities that poorly fit into any single system of social status. Nobility, ethnicity, confession, economic standing, service record, and education would have formed combinations competing with each other, rather than with the universal standards of good old Britain. Still an imperial society, this imagined India would be poorly described in the categories of “economic exploitation,” “colonial domination,” some homogeneous “metropole,” and equally homogeneous “subalterns.” Such an India never existed, but a society in many aspects resembling this picture of an empire without a distinctive metropole and unambiguously alienated colonial subjects can be found in Russian history. The historical Russian Empire can be analyzed within the analytical framework developed by modern social sciences as a phenomenon sui generis exactly because it featured all the key elements of “Western” imperial formations; only they were set in specific historical context that defied any monological schemes of imposing and sustaining difference and distance. Given that Russian social sciences were thoroughly integrated into the European and, later, transatlantic intellectual context largely insensitive to the specificity of Russian internal imperialism, it becomes a challenging task to identify those trends in Russian social thought that reflected on the specificity of the local imperial situation. Yet a scrutiny of the development of Russian social theories and sociological discipline in the Russian Empire is capable of locating different modes of relationship between sociology and empire. More-
over, this scrutiny can contribute to the historical understanding of empire by taking into account the process of making sense of Russian imperial experience of diversity in the field production of modern knowledge.

Besides the “spatial” specificity of the Russian Empire that did not have a clearly localized “core” and “periphery,” the empire was characterized by a “chronological” displacement. Russia was invariably presented as a remnant of a bygone epoch in the family of modern nations. The dominant model of modern social (and sociological) discourse that was formed under the impact of the Enlightenment paradigm in Western Europe had a built-in definition of social norm based on the contrast with “Asiatic,” “barbarous,” and “underrationalized” societies that included Russia along with the Ottoman Empire and other East European and “oriental” polities (Wolff 1994). Otherwise mutually controversial views of legal theorists and moral philosophers (from Hobbes to Rousseau and from Pufendorf to Montesquieu) shared a common convention that a regular polity was formed by people of the same culture (that is, language, religion, and customs). The imagined political union was a result of a natural historical process: be it a public contract based on general consensus or an integrating experience of subjection in the same kingdom for a long time. Russia was almost universally seen as a violation of those norms: its territory was an arbitrary conglomerate of lands acquired through (illegitimate) conquests, and its population was not only excessively socially stratified but, what is worse, included many different peoples alien to each other. This diverse population was not rationally organized or justly governed. Long before France or Germany themselves reached any degree of internal cohesion and cultural integration, Russia was seen as an example of a hopelessly backward polity. This stereotype could not be deconstructed simply by curing the alleged European “Russophobia”: at stake was the very normative definition of Europeanness as the true West and the embodiment of modernity.

Russian intellectuals inherited this authoritative understanding of the normative Europe as part and parcel of their education and socialization into modern European culture, and there were no alternative cultural traditions and norms in educated Russian society, at least since the eighteenth century. It is not surprising, then, that even representatives of the social elite expressed quite critical views of their native country (that occasionally brought them to political or religious dissent): the man of (European) culture should be an opponent of anything primordially “Russian.”

Although Russian educated society had been engaging European social theories at least since the time of Peter I, it may be argued that a truly
theoretical social discourse emerged in Russia only after the 1840s. The enthusiastic reception of Hegelianism by Russian intellectuals (most notably, by the so-called Moscow circle of university students and younger lecturers) played a seminal role in the development of all major intellectual currents of the epoch: the proto-nationalist Slavophilism, the proto-socialist anarchism, and early versions of liberalism. In the philosophy of Hegel, Russian intellectuals found a rare combination of “social structure” and “social dynamics” enveloped in the model of self-propelled historical development of the Absolute Spirit that went through several stages marked by distinctive social regimes. The figure of Mikhail Bakunin is paradigmatic for this early period of Russian Hegelianism: he explored both the ultra-conservative interpretation of Hegelian idealism, and its revolutionary connotations of adjusting the existing social order to the ideal and desirable model (Pirumova 1970; Randolph 2007). By switching between the politically polar interpretations of the same theory, Bakunin demonstrated his primary interest in the sociological model as such, rather than in any of its specific applications. Eventually Bakunin became known as the founding father of Russian anarchism, who envisioned the ideal society as a federation of independent local communities. Although among the first Russian Hegelians there were people with more articulated sociological views and different political ideals than those of Bakunin, his example is telling because of the series of conscious choices he made (Berlin 1978; Walicki 1979). He found it necessary to take an anti-imperial stance in order to fully accommodate the theoretical system of his choice. By applying the principles of a just society (based on the free public contract) and historical progress to Russia, he arrived at the conclusion that this imperial conglomerate should be ruined by a popular uprising. All categories of the oppressed (peasants, ethnic and religion minorities, and criminals) should revolt to get a chance for a free expression of their subjectivity. In this logic, the “true” Russia should be reassembled from ground zero as a free political union of self-determined subjects. Thus this proverbial “typical Russian” and anti-system activist resolved the imperial dilemma quite in line with the dominant episteme of modern European sociological imagination.

The fundamental trope of the Russian Empire’s backwardness grafted onto the discourse of European modernity made the next generation of Russian intellectuals particularly attentive to Marxism. Even those not sharing extreme political views took very seriously the famous motto from Marx’s early Theses on Feuerbach (little known to their European peers): “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to
change it” (thesis 11). The Russian imperial dilemma made this idea central for Russian social thinkers: a proper interpretation of Russian “irregular” society amounted to (or made imperative) its radical transformation.

These imperatives of political philosophy also explain why evolutionism became a key formative factor for Russian social sciences. In the Russian context of dual underdevelopment (Russia versus Europe, backward regions of empire versus territorial and nonterritorial loci of modernity), the idea of a universal evolutionary path promised the eventual catching up with historical leaders in some distant future. A regular taxonomic classification, so typical of early stages of social sciences, almost automatically acquired a developmental vector in the imperial heterogeneous social landscape. This is why the initial optimistic evolutionism successfully survived criticism that caused its subsequent rejection or serious revisions in Europe and the United States. Beginning in the 1870s, Russian populist-inspired ethnography increasingly embraced evolutionism as a way out of particularism and a means of scientific rehabilitation as a science of modernity. Russian physical anthropology embraced evolutionism from the moment of its academic institutionalization in the mid-nineteenth century (Mogilner 2013). The key to evolutionism’s persistence in imperial Russia was its ability to function as a modern and scientifically legitimate imperial ideology: it placed Russia as the unfortunate alter ego of European modernity on the universal civilization ladder, granting a hope of its eventual normalization in the future. What was open to debate was the price to be paid for this normalization.

There are no conventional canons for telling the history of Russian sociology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, not least because this multifaceted discipline did not produce a comprehensive self-descriptive narrative (beyond superficial outlines for college survey courses and encyclopedia entries) prior to the dramatic overhaul of the structure of social sciences after 1917. Sociology was all but outlawed throughout much of the Soviet period as a field of competing explanatory models of society’s functioning and organization. This happened because one specific (Marxist) sociological doctrine became the major source of political legitimacy of the regime, and as such it did not allow any room for criticism and rival interpretations. Even the eventual reemergence of sociology in the Soviet Union and its legacy for post-Soviet sociology remains the most contentious issue in the self-reflection of the contemporary sociological profession (Firsov 2001), and there are differing interpretations as to what extent the legacy of the pre-1917 sociology has
been actually reclaimed by modern-day Russian sociologists (Golosenko and Kozlovskii 2005; Medushesvkii 1993). Today we witness attempts to invent a distinctive and coherent national sociological tradition (Yadov 2008).

As was mentioned above, most Russian sociologists and a good part of social thinkers saw themselves as belonging to the general European intellectual tradition, speaking the analytical language and discussing problems that originated in European and transatlantic contexts, and this fact alone makes futile any attempts to “nationalize” Russian sociology.

As was long ago pointed out, both Russian “nativists” and “Westernizers” belonged to the same modern European cultural tradition, their ideological preferences and prejudices notwithstanding (Walicki 1975). Therefore, there was nothing specifically “Russian” about their social theories and models, except for their political biases and possible better acquaintance with local realities. One fundamental divide between the camps of Russian intellectuals was sustained by the opposition between the universalist legacy of the Enlightenment and particularism of the Romantic tradition. Another important difference was between theorists who became interested in social theory for practical (political) purposes and those who came to sociology out of general (academic) epistemological interest. Typically for the imperial situation, one opposition relativized the difference between the parts of another opposition, and vice versa. Thus, the proverbial strife between the Russian populists and Marxists in the late nineteenth century looks like a petty disagreement on issues of secondary importance when epistemological foundations of social analysis are taken seriously. Indeed, although they had serious political differences, both populists and Marxists operated basically within the same conceptual framework: they debated the prospects of the class society, capitalism, and premodern social forms in Russia but not the validity of those concepts. Similarly, to politicized social thinkers (be it Lenin or Mikhailovsky), the argument between neo-Kantians and phenomenologists was little more than scholastic rhetoric, concealing their fundamental agreement on the legitimacy of the existing social order. Still, the suggested elemental classification of Russian sociologists is helpful for the purposes of their classification and interpretation of their intellectual genealogies and agendas.

THE CASE OF RUSSIAN POPULIST SOCIOLOGY

The specific Russian context with its “imperial dilemma” in one way or another affected those scholars who dealt with abstract and general theoretical problems of sociology and those politicized intellectuals mostly interested
in practical application of their ideas. They could choose from several options in finding a place for Russia on the map of mainstream social development: to redefine “Russianness” by criticizing its Sonderweg interpretations or revealing some “true Russianness” that would not hamper its progress; to deconstruct (or practically dismantle) the empire; to remap the very normative Europeanness, in order to eliminate the structural stigmatization of Russian society; or any combination of the above.

These distinctive discursive strategies became possible not before the fundamental conceptual agreement was reached between different streams of Russian social theory that the terrain of the social was the sui generis foundational base that determined the shape of the state, law, culture, and human agency. It may be seen as yet another Russian peculiarity that this complex “social sphere” was initially envisioned as a social body (society = the people), and only later, by the early twentieth century, did it become conceptualized as a social structure. This explains the preponderance of “populism” in Russian sociology of the nineteenth century—a very diverse conglomerate of concepts and approaches that had just one common trait: the centrality of “the people,” rather than social institutions and practices. Both revolutionary and conservative “populists” were preoccupied with the problem of relations between the individual and the group and the foundations of groupness and collective social action. A series of consecutive individual choices and group actions were conceptualized teleologically as “history.”

On the theoretical level, populist writers and ideologues, such as Petr Lavrov and Nikolai Mikhailovskii, directed their criticism at Social Darwinism, Herbert Spencer’s organicist social theory, and Durkheim’s theory of social facts and disciplinary autonomy of sociology (Vucinich 1976: 15–66). This criticism of both organicist theories and arguments in favor of autonomy of sociological knowledge by Russian authors reflected the overwhelming concern of Russian social thinkers with locating the agency of modernity (and, more broadly, of the historical process) in the peculiar context of underdevelopment. This criticism provided the affirmation of the ideological and moral mission of the Russian intelligentsia as the subject of society’s self-cognition and hence transformation (Wortman 1967). Russian society could become modern by following the vanguard stratum of “the people,” and conversely, the intelligentsia as the advanced social group had to demonstrate its superiority not only intellectually but also morally, by providing a clear ideal of the better social compound. As a result, the “subjective school” of Russian populist sociology blended into a single whole the study of society, moral judgment, and utopian socialism.
Yet apart from the theory of critically thinking intellectuals, populist sociology in its substratum followed the Western vision of holistic and determining nature of social order and construed the Russian peasant commune as the bounded social structure that lay at the foundation of Russian society. This holistic humanist tradition of the Russian intelligentsia was obsessed with the fear of any type of human “fragmentation” and “alienation,” whether a “differentiation” within the capitalist society or a “narrow specialization” of the individual. Regardless of party affiliation, social activism based on this worldview acquired a form of body politics, be it individual terror or an educational “going to the people” campaign: the conscious personality was seen as both the means and the end of social interaction, and no formalized routine (institutional or technological) was tolerated in the process. The idealization of the peasant social order in populist rendition was based not so much on faulty and superficial social analysis but rather on the double premises of the nature of Russian society (i.e., “people”) and Western modernity. If the eventual goal of modernization was socialism, Russia was best fitting into this ideal as a country of elemental peasant communitarianism, rather than, for example, the society of many nationalities, or rich resources, or diverse climatic zones, and so forth. Incidentally, whenever Russian sociologists spoke about “the people,” they implied first of all the broad stratum of a legally and economically unprivileged population. The same rhetoric coming from an intellectual with a double identity (the Russian cultural and ethnic Ukrainian or Jewish) almost immediately altered the communicated meaning from social emancipation into national liberation. This was the case of Mikhail Dragomanov and his polemics with Russian revolutionaries over the question of distinctiveness of populism in the Ukrainian lands where “Only an illogical populist cannot become a Ukrainophile and the other way round. And from which end one is going to start this combination is a matter of personal choice” (Dragomanov 1881: 125; Miller 2000: 220–223; von Hagen 2007). For quite a while, Russian intellectuals did not notice this subversive characteristic of the populist discourse in the situation of imperial diversity. In fact, many of them even did not pay attention to Russia’s imperial diversity, treating Russia as an analog to an idealized France or other European “nation.” The populist focus on the social body of the “people” made them ignore political institutions of the Russian state, which spanned the regionally, confessionally, and ethnically heterogeneous space of the Russian Empire and enveloped variegated groups of population into structures of imperial citizenship (Burbank 2006). This changed in the second half of the nineteenth century,
as the Russian Empire ceased to resemble the ideal type of traditional, land-based, and composite polity (Hosking 1997) in which social and cultural differences were made invisible to the sociological eye by the differentiating regime of imperial policy, if this ideal type can be said to have ever adequately captured the history of the Russian Empire. The policies of the modernizing empire and colonialism and the processes of social mobility and cultural hybridity (Gerasimov 2009; Suny 2006) made even the populist sociologists ponder the question of how to account for the fabric of imperial society and address the question of diversity.

Among the populist sociologists of the late nineteenth century, Gleb Uspenskii and Sergei Iuzhakov registered the presence of imperial diversity more than their populist peers. Both Uspenskii and Iuzhakov followed the developing process of resettlement/colonization, which involved empire’s agricultural population (Breyfogle 2005; Breyfogle, Schrader, and Sunderland 2007; Sunderland 2004). Both authors were noted populist writers and correspondents of central populist periodicals. Uspenskii traveled as a freelance journalist, and Iuzhakov was employed as secretary to the construction company of the Ussuri railroad in the Far East. Uspenskii and Iuzhakov followed the movement of agricultural communities to the steppe regions, South Caucasus, Siberia, and Far East and witnessed the encounter between the resettled peasant communities and the local population (Iuzhakov 1894; Uspenskii 1908). Uspenskii wrote about the impact of capitalism in the form of land speculation and peasant land acquisition in the Urals region (Ufa and Orenburg provinces) that together led to the “vanishing of the Bashkirs,” which had been the titular service estate holder of the lands (Steinwedel 2002). Iuzhakov drew a picture of the heterogeneous social and cultural composition of the city of Vladivostok and the Far Eastern region, which included the Russian military and navy personnel, Russian peasant communities, Chinese borderland bandits (hunghutzu), Chinese and Korean laborers, and Japanese prostitutes, as well as merchants and convicts of different faiths and origins. However, the analysis of both authors remained persistently focused on the state of affairs of the peasant communities. Those communities might have been made of different groups of Eastern Slavic (“Great Russian” and “Little or Southern Russian”) or non-Slavic populations, yet in the eyes of the populist authors they comprised the common social structure and the privileged object of social analysis.

Following the concerns of populist sociology writ large, Uspenskii and Iuzhakov refocused their travelogues from the heterogeneous context of resettlement/colonization toward the discussion of the prospects for development.
of a social order based on the spread of education, technology, and communal solidarity. The substratum of holistic and bounded definition of society made the populist sociologists ignore the processes of interaction and hybridization in the imperial social fabric and, in the case of Iuzhakov, deny Vladivostok’s heterogeneous social milieu the very “name of society.” It is indicative that in his descriptions of individualism, unchecked pursuit of profit, and corruption of Vladivostok, Iuzhakov used the term “Eastern America” (1894: 101). The “vanishing Bashkirs” did indeed vanish from Uspenskii’s account of the injustices of the governmental resettlement policies and the plight of uneducated Russian peasants. Noting the threat to communal solidarity in the form of the waged labor of “alien origin” in the peasant economy of the Far East, Iuzhakov called for the elimination of the “alien” population3 from the territory together with the extermination of the menace of the Far Eastern tigers (stopping slightly short of the call for ethnic cleansing [Iuzhakov 1894: 94–97]).

The case of late nineteenth-century Russian populist sociology reveals a type of relations between sociology and empire that cannot be accommodated in the political dimension of sociological endorsement or critique of empire. This case demonstrates the epistemological aspect of the relationship between paradigms of modern knowledge and empire, in which the nonrecognition of diversity and interconnectedness of the social space of empire was the effect of “learned ignorance” (Stoler 2009: 247) of sociological discourse, in that it was underpinned by the perception of society as a holistic social order. The case of Russian populist sociologists of later generations also calls into doubt the interpretation of Russian non-Marxist socialism as fundamentally different from populist ideologies and movements of Central Europe, which showed predisposition toward nationalizing politics and ethnic nationalism. One can argue that Iuzhakov’s sociological analysis of the Far East as “Eastern America” encapsulated the potential development of the vision of society as a holistic and bounded structure into a program of ordering the space of empire through exclusion and homogenization of territory and population.

EVOLUTIONARY SOCIOLOGY AND COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Apart from the populist tradition that was politicized and centered on the “social body,” there was a different type of sociology in Russia, motivated primarily by the academic interest in social sciences and epistemology. It was constituted by Russian imperial universities and, later on, private
educational institutions together with the rich networks of professional associations and nonformalized intellectual circuits. This context gave rise to a cluster of social sciences, including the late-coming discipline of academic sociology. Before the 1905 revolution, sociology was generally understood in the Comtean key as a science of generalization of different fields of knowledge about society. Therefore, the boundaries of specialization were not rigid, and there were multiple junctures that connected jurisprudence, ethnography, political economy, physiology, psychology, and history to the science of society. These crossing points were underpinned by commonly held paradigms of positive science and evolutionism. Although it is difficult to separate the nascent field of academic sociology from the politically engaged social theory of the period before the 1905 revolution, it is still possible to see that academic sociology was increasingly defined in reference to the analytic methodology of academic sociology in the United States and Europe.

It is instructive to take a closer look at the world map of sociological knowledge as it was pictured by representatives of Russian academic sociology. As a self-appointed advocate of Russian “subjective sociology” and the defender of Comtean understanding of social sciences, Nikolai Kareev of St. Petersburg University viewed the world map of the science of sociology as inhabited by national schools and intellectual traditions and claimed the parity of the Russian populist sociology, which advanced the critique of monism, integrated social psychology into sociological theorizing, and anticipated the neo-Kantian turn in philosophy of social sciences (Kareev 1907: 67–69, 223–225, 253–255; 1996: 43–88, 355). The appearance of sociological literature in a national language was interpreted by Kareev as a sign of belonging to the “civilized nations” (including the newcomers, such as Japan) and the reflection of the advanced position of that nation in terms of social and political development (Kareev 1907: 336, 394). The schools of academic sociology were also reflections of respective “national” political and historical contexts. Thus the late reception of Auguste Comte in Germany was, according to Kareev, due to the historical hegemony of idealist philosophy. The central role of the competition between “races” in the sociology of Ludwig Gumplowicz (see chapter 1) could be explained by the presence of struggle between nationalities in the Habsburg monarchy (Kareev 1907: 394–395). The Russian national tradition of sociology was, according to Kareev, based on the following foundations: the emergence of theoretical sociological thinking in the milieu of progressive political thought and the synthetic character of the Russian sociological tradition, which had the benefit of familiarity with all European sociological traditions and thus was able
to relate them to one another and solve paradoxes and contradictions of sociological theorizing in an overarching synthesis (Kareev 1907: 396). The presence of diversity and empire was patently not part of the Russian context or research agenda of Russian sociological tradition.

Contrary to Kareev, Maksim Kovalevsky saw the world map of sociological knowledge as related not only to national traditions and contexts but also to the structures of empire. Maksim Kovalevsky was a versatile scholar of comparative and public law, economic history, political institutions, and ethnography (Aresen’ev et al. 1917; Boronoev et al. 1996; Kaloev 1979; Medushesvkii 1993: 119–162; Pogodin 2005; Safronov 1960; Vucinich 1976: 153–172). He perceived his main vocation and achievement to be in the field of sociology or in what he defined as “genetic sociology.” His contribution to the development of European sociology and promotion and institutionalization of academic sociology in Russia was acknowledged in the honorary title of the “dean of Russian sociology” and the fact that the first Russian sociological society was named after him. Kovalevsky was a showcase of cosmopolitan scholar-globetrotter, who connected academic circles in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kharkov (his native city in modern-day Ukraine) with Vienna, Berlin, London, Paris, Stockholm, and Chicago. His early academic career as a student of public law and the federalist regime of the Habsburg Empire was changed in the direction of sociology and comparative study of law by his visit to England. In his memoirs, Kovalevsky acknowledged that his main research projects on ancient and comparative law, comparative study of communal land tenure, ethnography of traditional societies in the Caucasus, and history of economic development of Europe prior to capitalism were all conceived of during his stay in England, when he was able to familiarize himself with English and American literature on ethnology and sociology (Kovalevsky 2005: 90–97, 161). Kovalevsky’s conversion to the comparative methodology of social sciences happened under the influence of Henry Sumner Maine and his comparative studies of “traditional societies” (Kovalevsky 1891: 3–5; Mantena 2010). Kovalevsky did not fail to note that Maine combined his scholarship with the administrative position of legal expert in the Indian Office. The universalism of empire in the sense of outreach of imperial rule beyond the home society and comparative evolutionary sociology were interconnected, and the meeting point was the imperial archive as the site of production of knowledge and power (Kovalevsky 1890a: 8; Mantena 2010: 57). With the help of Maine, Kovalevsky gained access to the archives of the Indian administration and was able to launch his first comparative research project on communal land
tenure. This project and other explorations by Kovalevsky of evolution of forms of society in relationship with ancient custom and historic law were routed by ethnographic and administrative documentation of different imperial archives and mapped the synchronous terrain of traditional societies in British India, the Spanish American colonies, French Algeria, and the Russian Caucasus (Kovalevsky 1879; 2005: 160–161).

Comparative methodology as espoused by Kovalevsky was an integral component of evolutionary theory. It could ascertain the universality of historical stages of development of law, forms of social organization, and culture and therefore could provide the foundation for the “unity of history,” that is, the formulation of scientific laws of general evolutionary development from the primitive human aggregates to the modern individualistic society (Kovalevsky 1880; 1890b: 1–7; 1902a). In Kovalevsky’s conception, a scientific law had to be necessarily universal in order to be scientific, and evolution had to be self-generating in order to be evolution. From this vantage point Kovalevsky criticized Gabriel Tarde’s theory of invention and imitation (Tarde 1895), noting that imitation of the superior society by the inferior could exist only as modification and adaptation of cultural influences to the local historical and cultural context (Kovalevsky 1997: 17–18, 37). Kovalevsky clearly saw the political implications of evolutionary sociology. It could scientifically reject the claim of uniqueness of Slavic peoples encapsulated in the communal social order and land tenure, their separation from the European “historical peoples,” and the latter’s “naturally given” social order of nuclear family and private property (Kovalevsky 2005: 157–59). Therefore, evolutionary sociology contained a scientifically grounded projection of Russia’s self-generated and inevitable overcoming of social and political backwardness and convergence with European forms of social and political organization (Kovalevsky 1902b).

At the same time, Kovalevsky’s evolutionary sociology and comparative method were the tools of conceptual organization of the space of the Russian Empire. Following the example of Maine, whose comparative research was framed by the expanse of the British Empire, Kovalevsky conceived of the Russian Empire as the diverse space that could accommodate the comparative exploration of social forms belonging to different phases of universal evolution. Kovalevsky studied the mountainous peoples of the Caucasus, “Little Russian” and Great Russian peasant social organization, and encouraged his students to pursue research in the Cossack customary law. This research produced the panoramic view of different temporalities of social evolution from Caucasian kinship societies to modern “individualistic” society of
Europeanized higher and middle classes of the empire. The grid of the social evolutionary map of empire was located not only in the spatial dimension of the Eurasian space but also in the social axis between the cities and the countryside (Kovalevsky 1891: 33). While the comparative method allowed Kovalevsky to conceptually unite the diverse space of the Russian Empire, evolutionary sociology provided tools for ordering the space of empire into the hierarchy of social and cultural forms. Kovalevsky understood the conceptual ordering of the space of empire not only as a scientific exercise but also as instrumental knowledge that could help the work of imperial administrative and judicial systems and justify the exceptional treatment of certain groups of population. At the same time, his writing on traditional societies in the Caucasus is permeated by disappointment with the difference of the Russian situation from the situation in the British Empire. The Russian imperial authorities were not showing a predisposition toward the employment of instrumental knowledge for the benefit of more rational government of empire (Kovalevsky 1890a: vi–vii). Reflecting on the instrumental value of his research, Kovalevsky displayed an ambiguity: on the one hand, he encouraged interventions based on the idea of progressive reform of legal and social customs of underdeveloped classes of population and “primitive” peoples. On the other hand, he opined in favor of the retention of customary law and structures of traditional society on the basis of the idea of interdependency of law and social organization in a given society and as a way to uphold the stability of the empire through the practices of indirect rule (Kovalevsky 1902b: 280–281).

The evolutionary sociology of Kovalevsky in its second aspect—mapping hierarchies of social advancement toward the norm of the modern society in a given political space—informed his conservative attitude toward the liberal reforms of the early twentieth century. His evolutionary credo that “history does not know leaps” placed him in the position of a critic of radical liberal reformism propagated by the Constitutional-Democratic Party in the context of the 1905 revolution and liberal reforms. The concept of traditional society underpinned his advocacy of exclusion of certain groups of Russian imperial society from modern citizenship based on political participation and equality of civil rights: “Let us imagine a Caucasian mountaineer who discusses some articles of the Criminal Code while being convinced that blood should be wiped away only by blood or compensated with cows and sheep… When a circuit court sentences the murderer-Circassian to hard labor in Siberia, the closest relative of his victim follows him there to exercise the duty of revenge. Such facts are often mentioned in the courts’ minutes and administrative correspondence” (Kovalevsky 1905: 2).
Throughout his career, Kovalevsky remained a scholar committed to the pursuit of comparative sociological research. He viewed favorably the development of American sociology and its platform of empirical study of social structures and behavior. Kovalevsky became part of the research project headed by the Chicago sociologist William Thomas, a specialist in race psychology, criminality, and immigration (Ross 1991: 304, 348, 251). The project was devoted to the study of social structures of East European peasantry in connection to the social behavior of peasant immigrants from Eastern Europe in the United States, which also included the comparison of immigrants of peasant extraction with the “Negro question” in the United States (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–1920). Kovalevsky endorsed the project and helped to recruit Russian participants. He consulted William Thomas on general theory of social evolution and comparative method (Thomas 1912a). As a representative of the empirical dimension of sociological research, Thomas was unimpressed by the promises of “genetic sociology.” In response to Kovalevsky, Thomas stated:

There is a principle called parallelism of development, meaning that different groups living quite apart develop nevertheless similar institutions. It is apparent that this law holds in general, and especially for what may be called the primary social expressions—approval of bravery, censure of treachery, property rights, tribal organization, feud, simple mechanical inventions, magic, the representative arts, and some “shalt nots” answering to the Hebrew commandments. But certain secondary and specialized attitudes, like representative government, free schools, scientific experimentation, and the equal recognition of women, originate slowly or not at all, but are imitated with extreme facility when conditions are favorable. (1912b: 741–742)

There was a conceptual gap between the evolutionist sociology of the nineteenth century that Kovalevsky continued to represent down to the early twentieth century and the new functional and structural sociology grounded in presentism and empirical research. Although Kovalevsky did not resolutely part with his version of sociology steeped in a historical vision of the progressive development of social forms, the case of the international collaborative project on peasant societies and global migration demonstrates his openness toward the new paradigm of functional and structuralist sociology. Kovalevsky was one of the few Russian intellectuals and scholars who parted from the traditional Eurocentric orientation of the Russian intelligentsia and travelled to the United States in 1881 and 1901.
to familiarize himself with the social realities of American society (Kovalevsky 2005: 304–337). He invariably included reviews of American sociology in his surveys of current sociological scholarship and referenced with approval the American model of assimilation in his political pronouncements on the strategies of social transformation of the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century.7 Kovalevsky’s student Pitirim Sorokin inherited this predisposition toward American functional and structural sociological research and continued his mentor’s work on the comparison of social realities of Russia with those of the United States.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ACADEMIC SOCIOLOGY

The institutionalization of Russian sociology occurred first in the framework of the university in exile. It was the Russian Higher School for Social Sciences founded in Paris in 1901 by Ilya Mechnikov, Maksim Kovalevsky, Evgenii de Roberti, and Iurii Gambarov. The school was an outgrowth of the activity of the International Association for Promotion of Science, Art, and Education, which launched its activities in the framework of the Paris World Fair in 1900. The Russian World Fair lectures provided the basis for organizing the permanent university in exile, staffed by dissident professors and an émigré student body. Institutionally, the establishment of the school was made possible by association with the École pratique des hautes études (Gutnov 2004).

Following the Comtean classification of sociology as a generic science, the founders of the Émigré university installed the broadly conceived sociological paradigm at the foundation of the entire curriculum, with evolutionary theory and comparative method as its cornerstones. Apart from courses on sociological theory, the curriculum included courses in Russian and European social history, philosophy, psychology, experimental biology, comparative history of law, public and civil law, political economy, criminology, ethnography, and physical anthropology. These courses were structured in such a way as to give a general introduction to social sciences and provide different disciplinary perspectives on the key questions of the sociological theory of the day. This effort was made possible by the collegial spirit of Russian academics and help from European academics, including Alfred Espinas, Marcel Mauss, Gabriel Tarde, Émile Vandervelde, and Rene Worms, who also taught at the school.

The Russian Higher School for Social Sciences was part of the broader phenomenon of pre-1917 Russian political emigration. The core members of the Russian faculty were academics living in Europe by choice or having
been ousted from university positions by the imperial authorities for political views or defense of university autonomy. The typical student of the school was someone who was barred from the Russian Empire for revolutionary or oppositional political activities. There were also a number of female and Jewish students enrolled in the school who could not enroll in the universities in the Russian Empire due to discriminatory admission policies. This political context helps explain the prime role of sociology at the Paris School. While the Russian imperial government saw sociology as a politically suspect field of scholarship, the faculty and especially the students conceived of sociology as a modern form of knowledge that could be instrumentalized for the purposes of liberal or socialist politics. From the viewpoint of the liberal faculty of the school, sociology was the form of modern objective and applied knowledge and also the form of consciousness of modern society in Russia that was coming of age according to the laws of evolution. Sociology as a form of knowledge was stripped of the metaphysical elements of previous political and philosophical doctrines, or so the Russian sociologists in exile thought. While having many elements in common with Marxism, sociology was free of the reductionism of historical materialism and was particularly suited for scientific exploration of the manifold factors that shaped the economic, social, and political condition of society and the political ideologies that operated in that society. As such, it was a form of critical theory that could “purify the social consciousness of superstitions and errors” and provide correctives for one-sided political visions, according to de Roberti (1905a: 44).

The specific character of the school as the university of Russian political emigration brought burning political questions of liberal and revolutionary politics to the heart of education. The school’s organizers encouraged visits by politicians and public figures as guest lecturers. Thus, Vladimir Lenin gave a lecture on Marxist approaches to the agrarian question in Western Europe and Russia; Viktor Chernov, the leader of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, lectured on the critique of organicist theories; and various representatives of Russian liberal opposition gave their perspectives on the future of liberal political reforms in Russia.

Apart from the Russian party debates that raged through the life of the school, there was another dimension of the politicization of social knowledge: the heterogeneous space of the Russian Empire came to be represented in the framework of non-Russian national movements and their political claims. The school invited lectures from those scholars who at the same time were representatives of national movements in the Russian Empire, like...
Mykhailo Hrushevsky, a historian of the Ukraine, leader of the Ukrainian national movement in Habsburg Galicia and Russian Ukraine, and future head of the independent Ukrainian state. Representatives of the Polish intelligentsia spoke about the historical conflict between the Russian and Polish nationalities and the prospects for reconciliation. The school’s organizers emphasized the importance of the question of imperial diversity and sought to represent it in the curriculum. Several scholars introduced the question of the empire’s diverse socioeconomic and cultural order. Ivan Luchitskii, a member of the Ukrainian national movement in the middle of the nineteenth century and a historian with a strong preference for evolutionary sociology, lectured on Ukrainian communal land tenure. Fyodor Volkov, a Ukrainian intellectual and European-trained scholar of physical anthropology, covered the ethnography and physical anthropology of the Slavic population of the Russian Empire. Mikhail Tamamshiev offered courses on Islam and the Caucasus.9

Already at the foundation of the school, Evgenii de Roberti and Maksim Kovalevsky planned to use it as a model to create a new type of social science curriculum inside Russia (de Roberti, Gambarov, and Kovalevsky 1905: vi). Favorable conditions for the continuation of educational experimentation emerged after the 1905 revolution. The model of the Russian Higher School for Social Sciences served as a template for the sociological curriculum at the St. Petersburg Psycho-Neurological Institute (Akimenko; Ivanov). This institute was even more peculiar than its Paris predecessor. It was the realization of a utopian dream of a group of avant-garde Russian natural and social scientists who sought to create the science for the future: an experimental synthetic science focused on humans as psychosociological phenomena. The author of the idea and mastermind behind the actual project was the academician Vladimir Bekhterev, a famous Russian neurologist and psychiatrist. He argued that a modernizing Russia badly needed, yet did not have, an institute that would synthesize new social knowledge with the natural sciences and the “sciences of the Psyche.” He observed that “Our universities do not have anthropology departments. Our ethnographers have no place to study their discipline. We need to rearrange these sciences on a very broad basis” (Russian Society for Normal and Pathological Psychology 1904). The institute, which had private status and operated on a budget of private donations and tuition, encompassed a number of experimental clinics and a Psycho-Pedological institute (Psycho-Neurological Institute 1907). Sociology was institutionalized in the form of a dedicated chair and inscribed in a very unusual curriculum that offered
courses in anatomy, physical anthropology, criminal anthropology, theories of degeneration, pedology, and social sanitation, among others. As a private institution, the Psycho-Neurological Institute accepted students indiscriminately, attracting especially those who were banned from imperial universities for political offenses, whose admission was restricted on the basis of their nationality (Jews), or who could not compete with better prepared gymnasia graduates for university admission. The register of students at the Psycho-Neurological Institute in 1909–1917 has survived only partially. It contains 5,120 names in total, including as many as 40 percent non-Russian students—Armenians, Jews, Tatars, Germans, and others.10 These students were actively absorbing knowledge that had instrumental meaning for the future scientific reordering of the archaic imperial society and imperial political order based on the perception of difference as a norm rather than as a deviation. Application of a systemic sociological approach to the Russian imperial context revealed that any attempts at society’s rationalization would require a rearrangement of differences rather than their leveling. The ideal future (modernity) of Russian imperial society could have been more rational, institutionalized, and efficient, but it would be no more one-dimensional and monological than the old imperial “backwardness.” Russian experts in the human sciences were gradually becoming aware of this epistemological difficulty.

The emergence of institutionalized sociology during this period was not dominated by one particular paradigm. The populist school coexisted with the neo-positivist school of social psychology and structural and functionalist sociology, and they developed alongside neo-Kantian sociological reflections on the objectivity of social knowledge and value judgments, which were brought into the Russian context by the student of Max Weber, Bogdan Kistiakovsky (Heuman 1998; Vucinich 1976: 125–153). At the same time, the political context of the Russian Empire of the Duma monarchy placed the emerging field of disciplinary sociology at the intersection of ideological movements that sought to redefine the epistemological positioning and political value of social order, social agency, and modernity (Semyonov 2009). On the one hand, Russian political Marxism tried to replace the pluralist theoretical foundation of sociological analysis with economic determinism and the utopian program of a radical remaking of the social order and even human nature. The presence in Russian Marxism of both the modernizing and utopian aspects explains why later in the early Soviet period sociology replaced history as a mandatory subject in the school and university curriculum and why the multiple schools of institutionalized sociology of the
early twentieth century, whether the neopositivist sociology of Sorokin or neo-Kantian scholarship, came to be targeted by Bolshevik ideological censorship and political persecution. On the other hand, the experience of the 1905 revolution gave further impetus to the system of “moral foundationalism” and idealist critique of social reductionism of any sort, including sociological inquiry that interpreted cultural values and legal norms as socially determined (Kolerov 1996; Walicki 1987). In the continuum between Marxist reductionist views of social science and moral and metaphysical transcendent of the logic of social sciences, there existed other variants of politicized social theory, such as the version offered by Petr Struve, who enthusiastically embraced the notion of the survival of the fittest in the competition between the states for the status of great power and control of territory (Struve 1908).

SOROKIN’S “UNITY IN DIVERSITY”

An attempt at a dynamic model of sociological analysis of imperial diversity was produced by the new generation of scholars that began their studies after 1905, most notably by Pitirim Sorokin, who was trained from the start of his academic career as a sociologist. Sorokin’s early biography is a reflection of the dynamically changing fabric of Russian imperial society. Born to a mixed Great Russian and Komi (Zyrian) family, Sorokin was a beneficiary of the Orthodox missionary activities in the Russian North. The Orthodox seminary allowed Sorokin to exit the world of rural crafts and embark on a journey across the social and political space of late imperial society. He moved from the countryside to the city, engaging in the groundwork of revolutionary propaganda on behalf of the Social-Revolutionary Party in the 1905 revolution; experiencing prison life as a political convict; climbing the ladder of the academic profession; being appointed in 1917 as a personal secretary to the head of the provisional government, Alexander Kerensky; fleeing the Bolshevik forces in the underground of the civil war; and founding the sociological department at Petrograd University (Golosenko 1991; Johnston 1995; Sorokin 1950, 1963). Citing the method of what may be called participant observation (Sorokin 1944: 7–8), Sorokin repeatedly mentioned that his life experience informed his interest in sociology and the directions of his sociological research, from the study of mechanisms of social regulation in his first major work, Crime and Punishment, Achievement and Reward, to his major sociological works on social stratification and the impact of the war and famine on social behavior, which were completed prior
to his expulsion from Soviet Russia in 1922. Drawing on his research experience and increasingly seeing sociology as an applied science after the 1917 revolution, Sorokin advocated before the Soviet government a system of sociological education that would encourage empirical research in the loci of rapidly changing society and that would immerse sociologists in the practices of cultural production and building a new system of education in Soviet Russia (Sorokin 1920, 1923, 1991).

Nikolai Kareev rightly pointed out that Sorokin was a representative of a new paradigm of sociology that signaled a departure from the traditions of Russian sociology in the nineteenth century. This was so not only because Sorokin’s theoretical interlocutors were coming from American sociology or because he was one of the few scholars in early twentieth-century Russia whose professional specialization in sociology benefitted from the institutionalization of sociological discipline in the Psycho-Neurological Institute and in the Russian sociological society. Sorokin’s sociology marked the watershed in the development of Russian sociology because “unlike the previous sociological research that had been concerned with the problem of development of society, [he] prioritized the problem of the formation of society” (Kareev 1996: 263).

Indeed, for Sorokin the very existence of society in late imperial Russia was far from obvious. He conducted his first research project on the ethnography of the Komi people in his native provinces of the Russian North, in 1908 and 1909 (Nesanelis and Semyonov 1991; Sorokin 1918, 1990). This research was made possible by his appointment to the expedition that was supposed to produce expertise for the colonization of this region and the resettlement of peasants into the provinces. He was fully aware of the political implications of the work of this commission, as colonization was the motto of the governmental policy of solving the agrarian question without expropriating the lands of the landowning nobility and of nationalization of empire. While making his ethnographic research on the Komi people, Sorokin exposed the work of the commission as fraudulent in misunderstanding the culture and customary law of the local population, underestimating this population’s land hunger, and overestimating the availability of free land for colonization, thus revealing the colonialist aspiration of governmental policy and the conflict-ridden space of empire.

Defining sociology as an autonomous science of the general forms of social interaction, Sorokin’s main question was not how knowledge of society is possible but how society as a space of social relations is possible: “why do people live together on a given territory? Why do they enter into intercourse?
Why do they gravitate toward one another and do not run away? ... The very fact of coexistence and interaction between people is usually taken for granted as something that does not require explanation” ([1920a] 1993: 358–359). Influenced by Leon Petrazycki and his interpretation of law as a psychological and social mechanism of self-regulation in society, Sorokin’s first major sociological work was dedicated to exploration of the impact of mechanisms of social regulation on the emergence of social cohesion (Sorokin 1914). Formally subscribing to the evolutionary sociology of his mentor Kovalevsky, Sorokin displayed no interest in ascertaining the vector of social progress in the sequence of historically formed social orders. Instead, he presented an abstract picture of the work of coercion and reward in the spread and internalization of the social norm in social behavior.

Sorokin produced his major sociological synthesis in the System of Sociology in the early Soviet period, which ran against the ideological current of the day and was dedicated to the problem of social structure. It is important to note that the red thread in this work is the theory of social cohesion and interconnectedness based on the premise of inherent heterogeneity of social space. The two volumes of the System of Sociology conceptualized the structure of society from the level of the individual and the formation of elementary social groups through the level of cumulative social groups (class and nationality) and aggregate social collectivities (the population of a country or the world). Defining the notion of the social through the concept of interaction, Sorokin paid special attention to conflict and antagonism, presenting them as forms of social connectedness. On all levels of analysis, Sorokin stressed the plurality of social groupness and interaction, picking intellectual and political fights with monistic descriptions of society seen through the prism of class or nationality. The element of social dynamics was presented by Sorokin in the form of the emergence, persistence, or collapse of social groupness. The second meaning of social dynamics was encapsulated in the changing configuration of the social structure. Using material from the civil war in Ukraine, Sorokin described the multiple fronts of the war and the plural social configurations that supported these fronts. Those included the struggle between “Reds” and “Whites,” the clash between Russian nationalism and Ukrainian nationalism, the conflict between the urban political forces and rural movements, and the anomie that pitched one village against another. Sorokin attempted to conceptualize his open-ended view of the plurality of social groups and interactions with the concepts of “network” and “multiple souls”: “Networks of interaction ... resemble the network of telephone connections in each given moment. The number of
telephones is the same, but not all of them are in conference at the same
time. . . . The individual is the outcome of projections of the system of social
groups that compete or coexist with each other” (Sorokin [1920b] 1993: 30, 571). The attempt in System of Sociology to construct a dynamic model of “diversity in unity” displayed many tensions. In particular, Sorokin was never able to reconcile his theoretical stance of objective sociology and the study of forms of “real social collectivity” with the promise of the dynamic model of network analysis and multiple identities.

Sorokin’s academic career after his forced emigration in 1922 is beyond the scope of this text, but it must be noted that in his writing on sociology of revolution and comparative analysis of the Soviet Union and the United States one can see a departure from his work of the Russian period. His sociology of revolution focused on the critique of revolution and its purported claim to bring about a significant transformation of social structure. Thus Sorokin’s sociology of revolution stressed the moment of reproduction of the major structural division of society into rulers and ruled and introduced a novelty in the form of value judgment of “normal” and “abnormal” social groups in the revolution (Finkel 2005: 160; Sorokin 1922, 1925). His writing on the Russian nation emphasized the structural, transhistorical unity of the Great Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians and downplayed the presence of conflicts and tensions in the space of the Russian Empire (Sorokin 1944: 29–31, 33–47; 1967).

**POSTSCRIPT: THE UTOPIAN SOCIOLOGIST OF PROGRESSIVIST EMPIRE**

The Russian Empire disappeared virtually overnight, leaving its former inhabitants not without a metropole, which had never been a spatially homogeneous locus anyway, but without a conceptual framework for embracing the variety of local customs and cultures within a single imagined political community. The new rhetoric of revolutionary social engineering marginalized the language of empire and the discourse of fundamental social heterogeneity within the borders of new Russia. Imperial domination of colonies and oppression of minorities could now be located only in the world of imperialism or in Russia’s past, as was claimed in the writings of the historical school of Mikhail Pokrovsky (Barber 1981; Pokrovsky 1966). Within the Soviet Union, the dominant trope of social evolutionism and even revolutionism presented all the existing social and cultural differences as remnants of the old regime, to be effectively erased or reintegrated in the ultimately homogeneous society of the future. Ironically, much of this social engineering
and discursive manipulation had clear imperial and even imperialist implications, but it would be misleading to read unequivocally a hidden imperial agenda into the social analysis of Soviet scholars. The episteme of Soviet social sciences had a complex genealogy of its own and requires a special deconstruction and examination.

Incidentally, the last outstanding sociologist of the Russian Empire remained unknown in this capacity, while his ideas summarized several decades of Russian scholars contemplating the analytical model of complex open-ended societies. This unlikely imperial sociologist is Alexander Chaianov (1888–1937), who became briefly prominent in the Western social sciences in the 1970s as an anointed forerunner of peasant studies, the economics of developing societies, and the emerging field of gender economics (Durrenberger 1980; Harrison 1977; Tannenbaum 1984; Thorner, Kerblay, and Smith 1968). In Russian studies, he is known as an original theorist of peasant economic rationality and peasant farm theory and as an activist in the rural cooperative movement (Harrison 1975; Jasny 1972; Shanin 1972; Solomon 1977, 1978). He was severely criticized by Bolshevik authors in the 1920s and by British and Indian Marxist critics in the 1970s for his nonclassical economic theories (Harrison 1979), but this is the only formal link between Chaianov and the sociology of imperial “irregularity.” Apparently, he viewed the significance of his work differently, as we may judge by the bits of personal information that survived the confiscation of his personal papers after his first arrest in 1930. In 1906, Alexander Chaianov entered the elite Moscow Agricultural Institute, which provided exceptional training in biology (the renowned geneticist Nikolai Vavilov was his classmate) and economics. Although his graduation thesis was dedicated to establishing the southern boundary of the spread of the three-field system of crop rotation in Russia and he spent much time analyzing peasant farm surveys, already in spring 1909 he had admitted to his classmate and girlfriend, Ekaterina Sakharova, that his true calling was sociology.14 Before that, in October 1908, in a letter sent to his academic adviser, Aleksei Fortunatov, he mentioned his two notebooks of “sociological researches,” of which he most valued his attempt to relate data from experimental psychology to certain social facts. He mentioned in particular the founder of modern psychology in France, Theodule Ribot, as his source of inspiration in his theory of personal motivation (Chaianov 1998: 110). In another letter to his professor, Chaianov explicitly expressed his disagreement with the dominant understanding of sociology as dealing exclusively with abstract models and ideal types: “I see sociology not as some abstract science of universal society but,
on the contrary, the science of . . . that actual society bustling and busy around us, the science that not only deconstructs the processes of social life into constituent factors, not only explains and differentiates phenomena, but the science capable of showing further directions for social life” (113). In this letter, Chaianov tried to explain to his positivist mentor that he was interested in the mechanisms regulating the processes of societal self-organization, rather than the general taxonomy of social forms and structures that are insensitive to specific historical and economic circumstances. The next documented statement of Chaianov’s sociological views survived because he published it under the disguise of a literary work on utopia. Written in the second half of 1919 (and published in 1920), the small book *Journey of My Brother Alexey to the Land of Peasant Utopia* was published under a pen name and was set in 1984, almost two decades before the publication of George Orwell’s 1984 (Chaianov 1976, 1977). Awkwardly written, lacking a formal finale, the novella is remarkable for its complex ideological message (Gerasimov 1997). Of special interest is an extensive fictional obituary of one Arsenii Bragin, “a great sociologist” and “patriarch of the science which he founded,” incorporated into the text of the novella. His name may be read as a pun on Chaianov’s name, while his life circumstances stress important episodes of Chaianov’s own biography. Bragin is a fictional alter ego of Chaianov who embodied his ideal of social scientist and his understanding of sociology: “Bragin, who went from social technology to social theory, was fond of saying that the way to create a science of sociology was, first, to accumulate experience in the scientific study of individual practical social problems and, second, to find methods to express social phenomena quantitatively” (Chaianov 1977: 113). Bragin became famous for his field-defining studies, such as “The Rate of Social Change and Method of Measuring It” (which addressed the problem of quantitative description of social processes), “The Theory of Creation, Maintenance and Destruction of Reputation,” and the multivolume “Theory of Political and Social Forces.” These were stages of the realization of his “entire life’s program which he had sketched out for himself in a youthful note” (113), probably the very same note by Chaianov from 1908 that was quoted above. Obviously, Chaianov did not believe in the self-sufficient heuristic value of statistical or taxonomic aggregation of empirical data (Bourgholtzer 1999: 77–78), and he was interested in the sociology of dynamic, open-ended systems, which only partially depended on social structures (such as public opinion or “reputation”). True to his early conviction that the ultimate task of sociology was “showing further directions for social life,” Chaianov demonstrates the
sociopolitical consequences of social analysis conducted by Bragin and his colleagues and followers. In the utopian Russia of 1984, state institutions are customized to suit local needs and peculiarities: “there is parliamentarism in Yakutsk oblast’, while the monarchists of Uglick have set up a local prince . . . , on the other hand, in the Mongolo-Altai territory, a ‘governor-general’ appointed by the central authority rules alone” (Chaianov 1977: 98). All urban centers had been rebuilt into “garden cities,” and the economy is dominated by small production units integrated into cooperative networks. This is a hodgepodge of localities and regional peculiarities, bound together by the social system oriented toward rationalizing the application of available natural and human resources. The ruling political class consists of a loosely organized but distinctive community of experts. To sum up, the utopian society demonstrates the realization of Progressivist ideals (be it the urban-reform, antimonopolist rhetoric; the cult of rational managers; or fundamental disregard for institutionalized politics). But these general ideals of transatlantic Progressivism (Rodgers 1998: 5) are customized to serve the specificity of Russia as empire: certainly a great power but also a social space of the utmost internal heterogeneity. The sociology of this Progressivist empire faces the central challenge of balancing the need for achieving overall coherence with the accommodation of individual and local differences (in theory and practice). In the novella, Chaianov struggles to find a formula to embrace the domination of society by the political class of experts through what can be best described as governmentality, while at the same time avoiding the simplified language of colonialism and exploitation. He attempted to model and analyze the modern, or rather postmodern, Russia as an empire of multiculturalism and diversity, democratic and efficient, and yet still trapped in the dilemmas of the internal hegemony of knowledge and power over the otherness of local knowledge and concerns.

CHAIA Nov’s PROJECT OF A “postimperial” sociology of imperial society brings us to the moment of rupture of Russian history in 1917. This rupture was brought about by the revolutions of 1917, the collapse of the imperial space, and the remaking of empire in the form of the Soviet Union. It would be a caricature view of 1917 to conceive of it as an unbridgeable boundary in Russian history between the late imperial period and the early Soviet period. For the questions concerned in the present essay it is important to note two processes that constitute the watershed in terms of the development of social sciences and the sociological reflection on empire.
Many historians have pointed out that the Soviet Union continued the pathways of the Russian Empire, including the retention of nondemocratic forms of rule focused on “management of vast territory and multiethnicity” (Lieven 2000). Others contend that the Soviet approach to diversity marked a departure from the Russian Empire. The Soviet politics was geared toward the reification of the category of class. Soviet nationality policy aimed at producing a bounded sense of nationhood for the multiple nationalities of the Soviet Union together with the territorial arrangement of multiethnicity in ethnically ascribed administrative territories. The result was the combination of an ideological regime, state-sponsored evolutionism, the dominance of the categories of class and ethnicity in state policy and the episteme of the social sciences, and ethno-territorial federation (Hirsch 2005; Khalid 2006; Martin 2001; Suny and Martin 2001). This was a radical unmaking of the irregular imperial society of differences as the context that had informed the development of Russian sociological reflection. As we argued, it was this context that was refracted in early Russian social theory and sociological inquiry in various ways, including the revolutionary tradition of unmaking the empire, the populist traditions of “learned ignorance” about empire, the evolutionary approach of normalization of the Russian Empire in the European continuum of imperial formations, and the quest for the dynamic model of sociology of imperial society of difference.

The relationship between the system of social sciences and the ideological regime in the early Soviet history was characterized as much by repression and censorship as it was by ambiguity. Arguably, the Soviet regime did not immediately have a ready, comprehensive social theory-cum-ideology beyond the revolutionary rhetoric and praxis. The announced “socialist” revolution, however, implied a radical transformation of the entire society on the basis of properly understood laws of its historical development, and sociology and social thinking therefore acquired supreme political importance. In search of a new social orthodoxy, the new regime encouraged the development of a “true” Marxist social science by establishing a number of institutions of higher learning and think tanks (such as the Sverdlov Communist University, the Communist Academy, and the Institute of Red Professorship). At the same time, the regime embarked on a large-scale process of negative selection, vigorously filtering out all of those ideas and their proponents who sounded alien to communist ideologues. This filtering included forced political emigration (this was the fate of Sorokin), arrests (Chaianov), and censorship. Gradually, the negative selection turned to former ideologues of the socialist revolution themselves, such as the charismatic

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historian Pokrovsky. The two processes, filtering alien elements and creating the true Marxist sociology, eventually converged in the late 1930s, when the Stalinist canon of social sciences was enshrined in a series of discussions and the classic text *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (Commission of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. [B.] 1939). By this time, the social scientists who had survived were forced to accept the new orthodoxy. This period marks the end of the most creative and critical social theorizing that spanned the early twentieth century and the 1920s. But this happened not before a series of theoretical contributions to the initial Marxist sociology was provided by Soviet social scientists, most notably, the theory of historical sequence of socioeconomic formations.

NOTES

The authors wish to thank Sergei Glebov, George Steinmetz, and Charles Steinwedel, whose criticism helped to improve this essay. Alexander Semjonov acknowledges the support of the Center for Fundamental Research of the National Research University-Higher School of Economics.

1. See the analysis of those aspects of European sociology that defined the voluntarism of the French Revolution and redefined politics from the viewpoint of the foundational nature of the social in Wolin (1973: 349; 2004).

2. Cf.: “They acted as utopian socialists, rather than empirical sociologists, when they thought of escaping capitalism by blending the complexity of industrial technology with the simplicity of *obshchina* cooperation” (Vucinich 1976: 63).

3. The term used by Iuzhakov is *inorodtsy* (literally: of different origin, often translated into English as “aliens”). It was initially a legal category for description of nomadic and seminomadic groups of the population in the Russian Empire. At the close of the nineteenth century, it acquired a new meaning: to designate all non-Russian groups of population in contradistinction to the “Russian people.” See the complex semantic evolution of this key category of imperial politics analyzed in Slocum (1998).

4. Kovalevsky’s students reflected their mentor’s preoccupation with instrumental social knowledge. Mikhail Nikolaevich Kharuzhin (1860–1888) was directed by Kovalevsky to the study of customary law in the Russian Empire. He wrote the definitive study of the Don Cossack customary law (Kharuzhin 1885). Mikhail Kharuzhin bridged the worlds of scholarship and imperial bureaucracy, serving as a secretary of the ethnographic division of the Society of the Lovers of Natural Sciences, Anthropology, and Ethnography and as the senior officer in the governorship of Estland.

5. Concluding his ethnographic observations on the role of customary law in the life of North Caucasus mountaineer societies, Kovalevsky writes that “I do not reject the value of the mountaineer courts that had been established previ-
ously [by the imperial authorities in the Caucasus]. . . . such an idea, i.e. to have in the court of justice the elected from the people representatives and to give them a possibility to adjudicate cases in accordance to the ‘adat’ (custom), should be regarded as fruitful and should be taken into account in the nearest reform of our legal statutes and their application to the needs of the Caucasus” (2005: 612–613).

6. Kovalevsky got involved in the project with the help of Samuel Harper, who was an American scholar of Russian political institutions and the son of the first president of the University of Chicago. Harper was tutored by Kovalevsky. Harper was also involved in Thomas’s sociological project. Beyond that project, Harper was involved in the mission of the United States Department of Labor headed by W. W. Husband, which sought to empower the authorities of Ellis Island with adequate knowledge about the flows of immigration and hold in check the German shipping companies that were largely responsible for transportation of immigrants from Eastern Europe (Harper 1945: 78–80).

7. Kovalevsky referred to the United States when he advocated the abolition of civil inequalities among the peoples of the Russian Empire: “History has proven to us that the language and culture of the most numerous group of population enters into everyday circulation without any coercion: the language of this group becomes the language of commercial deals, of the stock exchange and banking. In other words this language becomes not just the language of the state but the language of citizenship. Having resettled to America, Germans keep their schools, yet their children without exception speak English because this is the language of everyday civility. Defined by Turgenev as rich, melodic and ‘great,’ the Russian language gave emergence to the most remarkable literature in the past century, so it does not need the aide of bureaucrats of the Ministry of the Interior or the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment. The use of this language in everyday civility makes this language not just the language of the state or of its cultured groups, but also the language of commerce and everyday life” (Kovalevsky 2002: 257–258).

8. The school’s students were eager to participate in political debates and turn the classes into a struggle between political platforms, chiefly socialist-revolutionary and social-democratic ones. They also demanded a more visible public profile for the school vis-à-vis current Russian politics. (See note 9.)

9. Hoover Institution of War, Peace, and Revolution, 1901–1904, Boris Nikolaevsky Collection, Box 78, Folder 11; Course catalogues, Box 78, Folder 9; “Kocharovskii Affair,” Letters and pamphlets of student organizations reporting on the political clash that happened in the course by Professor Kocharovskii, Box 78, Folder 10; Letter from students calling for a public expression of the attitude of the school to the Kishinev pogrom.

10. Central State Archive of St. Petersburg 1909–1917, F. 115, Op. 2, Vol. 1, 5120d. The institute shared the fate of the Paris school in that the Russian government perceived its curriculum as dangerous and leading to the formation of subversive views on the side of the youth. The government several times contemplated the-banning of educational activities of the institute, leaving it with research-only functions.
11. Sorokin was indebted to his mentor Leon Petrazycki in his thinking about introspective observation and observation of human behavior as methodologies of sociological research (Sorokin 1956: 1154).

12. Sorokin first enrolled in the Psycho-Neurological Institute and then continued his studies in the Law School of Petrograd University under the guidance of Maxim Kovalevsky, Evgenii de Roberti, and Leon Petrazycki. In his official autobiography, Sorokin notes that he was trained as a professional sociologist from the start of his career.

13. The publication of Sorokin’s System of Sociology was carried out against the system of Bolshevik ideological censorship. The print run of the first edition (ten thousand copies for each of the two volumes) sold out within two weeks before the confiscation order came (Golosenko 1991: 84).


15. The original Greek meaning of “Arsenii” and “Alexander” are close, while “Bragin” refers to a traditional peasant fermented alcoholic drink, just as “Chayanov” refers to an equally popular (but nonalcoholic) beverage, tea.

16. Thus, Bragin is credited with creating “the political power of the scattered peasantry” and becoming a political leader of the peasant party. Chaianov was accused in 1930 of creating a fictional anti-Soviet Peasant Labor Party, but in 1917 he had indeed contemplated the creation of a “Broad Peasant Party” (Gerasimov 2009: 212).

17. To get the sense of the zeal with which the censors went after politically benign but sociologically “alien” texts, suffice it to mention that in 1919, the Petrograd Commissariat of Press, Agitation, and Propaganda prohibited the Cooperative Publishing House from publishing The Prince and the Pauper by Mark Twain, the historical novel Prince Serebriannyi by Aleksei Tolstoi, the economic treatise The Paper Money by M. Bogolepov, and The State Bankruptcy by A. N. Zak. The only permitted book was The Moon by G. Klein (Sandomirskii 1919: 24).