

PARADIGM DYNAMICS OF HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE SOVIET UNION (1931 – 1953)

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Introduction

The study of Soviet historiography during Stalin's reign has greatly suffered from a constant over-emphasis upon the formative and necessary influence of politics on the history-production. The historical field in the Soviet Union, from 1931 to 1953, is utterly and completely denied any autonomy. This brushing-over of historiographical diversity in the Soviet Union is rooted in the lack of balance in assessing the relationship between historical, academic activity and the politics of history. Moreover, I would say that this phenomenon is a by-product of the long-lasting totalitarian interpretation of communist politics. By understanding the political system as totalitarian, and implicitly subjugating all public sphere activity, consequently historians too, their activity and their field of activity become "handmaidens of political authority" (Shtepa). However, this type of approach generates a crucial methodological fallacy: the historian, his activity, his field, and the field dynamics in relationship with the political regime are not subjects of research, but just "mirrors" reflecting the "totalitarian reality"¹. Plenty of authors dealing with the topic of Soviet historiography, because of the above methodological pitfall, are over-inclined to reflect the politics within the Soviet Union in history production at the expense of assessing the multifariousness of developments within the historical field itself. They fail to grasp the one-sidedness of explanations of historiography only through politics, and thus refuse to allow (themselves) deeper insight into the possible profound discursive and historiographical patterns developed during the formative years of the Soviet Union during Stalin's regime.

For example, in the introduction to his book, "Russian Historians and the Soviet State", Konstantin F. Shtepa justifies his approach in the following way: "the development of historical knowledge and historical thought in the Soviet Union is of less interest to us than what is termed the 'historical front'. A front presupposes a struggle, and what interests us most is the political struggle over scholarship in history that has been going on in the USSR since the beginning of

¹ A further observation should be made here. This totalitarian "explanation" of communist phenomena in the socialist bloc was in the 1950s and early 1960s and later in the first decade (and in the same places still counting) of the 1990s a "feel good about the author" method of analysis. As Roger D. Markwick put it, "a hallmark of the totalitarian model was the conviction that 'our' research was 'objective' while 'theirs' was 'ideological'"; Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia – The Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1954–1974*, New York, 2001, p. 23.

the Soviet system. From this point of view Soviet historians are not so much *subject* as *object* [my emphasis], less participants than weapons, in the struggle. On the other hand, this struggle is carried on in part by their efforts and with their participation. In the final analysis, *the struggle finds expression in their scholarship and in their teaching* [my emphasis].² The above quotation overlooks entirely the ambivalence characterizing the relationship between historians and the Party, between history and communism, or between the writing of history and ideology. Another similar theorizing of the position of history production during the Stalin period comes from Alter L. Litvin: “in the Stalin era the Party-state’s total control of archives, journals, publishing houses, historians’ appointments and so on meant that scholarship was entirely subordinate to its whims and dictates: history was the *handmaiden of ideology and politics* [my emphasis].”³ Both statements tell us (but only to a certain degree) more of the nature of the political environment in the Soviet Union rather than indicate the nature of the dynamics of historical scholarship in the country. Interestingly enough, these types of studies loudly assert the immutable state of historiography but they simultaneously apply a continuous, evolutionary analysis to the field. That is, both authors, and many like them following a similar path, are locked into contradiction: they write about the dynamics of a non-dynamic field. The handmaiden/mirror model fails its own methodology – the unitary political field is not reflected into a unitary historical scholarship, and even “hardcore Stalinism” of mid-1930s disconcertingly suffers from the lack of a uniform “historical front” or a clear-cut interpretation of Marxist-Leninist *encoding*⁴ of history.

The present paper attempts to answer to this methodological problem, by offering an alternative approach for discussing the dichotomy politics of history – history-production. My basic statement is that historiography, from the 1930s up to the early 1950s, gradually lost its *autotelic* pretensions (nature?), but attained a *paradigm* equilibrium expressive of the sublimation of the Soviet “ontogenetical” experience. Soviet historiography, in the specific context of Sovietization and Stalinism, indeed “gained” sets of purposes/tasks apart from itself, but at the same

² Konstantin F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, New Brunswick – New Jersey, 1957, pp. XII.

³ Alter L. Litvin, *Writing History in Twentieth-Century Russia – A View from Within*, ed. by John L.H. Keep, Houndmills – New York, 2001, pp. 11-12.

⁴ I am using this term in order to avoid the phrase “Marxist-Leninist ideology”, because it is very difficult to put one’s finger on the book and say this is the wisdom of the “founding fathers”. Encoding seems more useful, as Soviet, and more generally communist historiography is characterized by methodological layer-*ing*. That is, Marxist-Leninist or/and historical materialist tenets blend with Rankean, Weberian, “culturalist”, etc. influences, and/or with other Marxist, nationalist, maybe even liberal theories of history. Actually, the degree of methodological and theoretical mishmash of historiographies under communism(s) could be an excellent indicator of the extent of hegemony, monopoly or dominance of Party-state system over the historical field.

time, it also achieved “an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of”⁵ the historical field. Furthermore, this general process of reaching a paradigm equilibrium also meant the crystallization of “concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science.”⁶

Soviet historiography and the Kuhnian paradigm

Before going further with my description of the alternative this paper aims at offering, I should justify first the choice of the Kuhnian analysis of scientific communities. On the one hand, my standpoint is a continuation of one made by Roger Markwick in his book *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia – the politics of revisionist historiography, 1954–1974*. When dealing with Stalin’s vision of history, he talks about a “Short Course paradigm”. But he goes half-way, by referring only to the *Short Course*, for he seems to focus mainly on Party history and to overlook the importance of historical production within the entire scientific milieu. That is why he falls short in presenting the context of the formation of a historiographical paradigm with a distinct methodology, research aims, and epistemological community. But he touches upon the sensitive issue of the clarification, within the field, of the *significant* and *recognized* “scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to the community of practitioners.” The “*Short Course* paradigm”, when crystallized, was ordering a scientific community, it was generating distributive criteria within the “intellectual field” (Bourdieu), and it was prescribing the activity of teaching, i.e. the secondary socialization by means of history.

On the other hand, I also claim a sort of “interpersonal synonymy”⁷ (Kvastad) with the components of the Kuhnian theoretical framework of scientific

⁵ This quotation and the following represent the two main different senses of the term ‘paradigm’ identified by Thomas Kuhn in the Postscript to the second edition of his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The first one he labels as the sociological sense, while the second he brands “paradigm as exemplary past achievements.”

⁶ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, second edition, enlarged, Chicago, 1970, p. 175.

⁷ Nils B. Kvastad stresses out two definitions for this phrase: (1) “the term ‘a’ in the text U for U’s author P is interpersonally synonymous with the term ‘b’ in the text V for V’s author Q when all occurrences of ‘a’ in U for P mean the same as all occurrences of ‘b’ in V for Q”; and (2) “the instances of the term ‘a’ occurring at the place p1 in the text U at the place p2 in the text V are interpersonally synonymous for U’s author P and V’s author Q if and only if ‘a’ at p1 for P means the same as ‘a’ at p2 for Q.” According to the nature of the concepts upon which I claim such synonymy in my analysis, I alternate between the two definitions. See Nils B. Kvastad, *Semantics in the Methodology of the History of Ideas*, in Donald R. Kelly (ed.), *The History of Ideas – Cannon and Variations*, vol. I, Rochester, New York, 1990, pp. 247-248.

communities, relying upon Kuhn's own assessment of possible broader applicability for his analysis. He states that "to the extent that the book portrays scientific development as a succession of tradition-bound periods punctuated by non-cumulative breaks, its theses are undoubtedly of wide applicability."⁸ This paper states that in the context of the Second Socialist Offensive, of the "Great Retreat" (Timasheff), and of the post-war environment history-production in the Soviet Union passed, in a non-linear fashion, from a pre-paradigmatic, formative experience into one of synthesis of traditions (Russian centric one and the "Marxist-Leninist") to ultimately become a mature scientific field based upon its legitimacy of having identified the set of *recognized* first principles of scientific inquiry. At the same time, the specific crises, anomalies, institutional conflicts, or profiles of authorship determine the possible areas of tension that would lead to breaks and shifts within the paradigm during and after the early 1950s.

To conclude this "justificatory" section, I would also add the fact that Kuhn himself, at the end of the postscript of his book's second edition, was calling for "the study of the community structure of science". And if one takes for granted the strong scientific claims made by history both in the Soviet Union, and in other parts of the world (at least during the time-frame identified within my paper), the Kuhnian method/model seems to open the way for telling a different story about the historical field apart from just that of the political turmoils as reflected by it. This approach might provide answers for several questions such as "How does one elect and how is one elected to membership in a particular community, scientific or not? What is the process and what are the stages of socialization to the group? What does the group collectively see as its goals; what deviations, individual or collective, will it tolerate; and how does it control the impermissible aberration?"⁹ What this paper is tentatively aiming at is to create the analytical space for the possibility of admitting a self-referent existence for Soviet historiography during Stalin's regime.

In order to analyze the "*Short Course* paradigm" and its evolution one should attempt to sketch its main features, resultant of its overall "history". First of all, it should be said that the paradigm had a very specific pre-paradigmatic *formative* period. The latter can be characterized from two points of view: the debates of the 1920s, which basically set up the sets of topical anomalies and recurrent research themes that haunted historiographical debates in the Soviet Union till the 1950s, and even later; and the discussions of the pre-revolutionary period, which structured the historical field before 1917 and also created the "professional" tradition in relation to the society's dynamics and interests. During the 1920s the historical field witnessed an accumulation of "puzzles" ("special

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 208.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 209.

category of problems that can serve to test ingenuity or skill in solution”¹⁰) generated by a different mode of signifying societal reality and development (the communist polity and “Marxism-Leninism”). Both this mode and the different way of questioning-in-search-of-relevance uneasily coexisted with “puzzle-solutions” incumbent within the previous paradigmatic practices of the historical field (Marxist – Non-Marxist; bourgeois – red historians, etc). Subsequently, the 1920s generated a sense of crisis within the field determining the array of topics, institutions and historians which, by 1942, through interaction with the political realm, became the initiators, the targets (also the “losers”), the locations, and the issues making up the overall framework construing the “*Short Course* paradigm”. For this period, the most important authorship areas for the historical field, in terms of later impact and recurrence within the paradigm scientific activity, are the so-called “Pokrovsky School” and the various prominent pre-revolutionary historians (and their mentorship milieus). To exemplify this point I will mention the general characterization related to the issue made by Pankratova in her introductory essay to the seminal collective volume entitled *Twenty-Five Years of Historical Scholarship in the USSR* – a symposium which can be considered final in the sense that it managed to position the “paradigm” in the evolution of Soviet historical thought by means of retrospective synthesis. Pankratova states that “a major handicap in the development of *historical science* [my emphasis] was the anti-Marxist and antiscientific views of the ‘school’ of Pokrovsky. By replacing objective historical knowledge and the study of the concrete development of history with abstract schemes and sterile antiscientific sociological conceptions, ‘the school’ of Pokrovsky held back the development of *civic history* on the basis of Marxist-Leninist methodology (...) It ignored the study of the heroic traditions of the great Russian people.” Consequently, “Soviet historians had to carry out a critical effort of *re-examination* of the negative attitude toward our traditions entrenched in past years and of the underestimation of our glorious past cultivated by the ‘school’ of Pokrovsky.”¹¹ However, the above statements should be taken with a grain of salt; they express a *mood* within the historical field by the end of the 1940s, but they are not entirely accurate of the continuation of persistence of “economist” (the label for Pokrovsky’s school and students) approaches to Soviet and world history. This covered continuation could be proven by later, post-war historiographical endeavors by various authors¹² which could be placed in the

¹⁰ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 36.

¹¹ A.M. Pankratova, *Twenty-five Years of Soviet Historical Science*, in Marin V. Pundeff (ed.), *History in the USSR: Selected Readings*, San Francisco, 1967, pp. 144-150.

¹² A very good example in this sense is that of P.P. Smirnov’s book on *Problems of the Formation of the Russian National State* (1946). “The author attempted to return to the Marxist method, to ‘materialistic conception of history’, which according to the official version, constituted the principal achievement of Soviet historiography. He explained the formation of the centralized

category of “non-cumulative breaks” within the scientific practice amassed within the paradigm environment, and which are indicative of trends in dealing with academic “deviations” and “impermissible aberrations”.

Furthermore, if we now look upon the issue of the pre-revolutionary historical, scientific traditions, the idea of a formative pre-paradigm coalescing of possible pools of puzzles and scientists seems to reach a satisfactory entirety. The pre-communist historiographical tradition is a very important *trace*¹³ of diversity within the paradigm, and it can be archeologically located by means of following pattern(s) of mobility within the scientific community of the historical field during the 1920s and further on. M. N. Pokrovsky, in his report to a Conference of Scientific Research Institutes, held on March 22-25, 1928, signaled out what according to him were the most typical groups of ‘old’ historians: “(1) individualists and consistent idealists in the spirit of Leopold Ranke, represented mainly by S.F. Platonov; (2) followers of Weber and Rickert, such as Petrushevsky; (3) pseudo-Marxists and the ‘economic materialists’, such as Tarle; and (4) renegades for Marxism, of whom Vipper was representative. *Pokrovsky’s classification oversimplified the situation*. Naturally, as a convinced Marxist, he took as his criterion the relation of each historian to Marxism.”¹⁴ In the 1942 collective volume, one can find all these ‘Other-influences’ (and implicitly, maybe, sub-encodings), and others. Again, according to Shtepa, “Grekov [characterized by the same author as “a historian of the most comprehensive stamp, similar to *Platonov* [all the emphases are mine], Rozhdestvesky, Vasenko, Beneshevich, and others, who were liquidated by the Soviet regime”– p. 150] had taken the place of Pokrovsky, together with Bakhrushin, Picheta, Bazilevich, Savich, and other

Russian state by *so purely an economic factor as the modification of agricultural production* [my emphasis] – the introduction of the plow, the transition of the three-field system of crop rotation, and the development of trade relations brought about by these changes.” This approach was challenged both on the basis of its “Pokrovsky-ism” and of its antipatriotic version of the relative backwardness of ancient Russia. See Konstantin F. Shtepa, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-218.

¹³ I am upgrading here the meaning of the word, and I am using it instead of “example/instance”, because I am trying to stress the importance of going along the trajectories of historians in terms of possible continuity of other-than-the-paradigm influences (‘internalized Other-transfers’). That is why, I am coming close in usage to Ricoeur’s concept of “trace”. According to him, “the notion of trace becomes thinkable only if we can succeed in discovering in it what is required by everyone of those productions of the historian’s practice that reply to the aporias of time in speculation.” In Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, Chicago – London, 1988, p. 116. I consider that in the cases of those historians who survived the purges and resumed historical production, one should proceed to in-text analysis and before-and-after comparison to *trace* genealogies of ‘internalized Other-transfers’ (“other” in the sense of non-accepted methodologies or approaches, that is, historiographical sub-encodings). Moreover, one should also add to this the possibility of emulation and mentor-*ing* that could impact upon the new generations of historians produced after in the 1940s. (and arguably this happened in the case of the *shestdesyatniki*).

¹⁴ Konstantin F. Shtepa, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

‘bourgeois scholars’. Many had just returned from concentration camps and exile. Among the repatriates was *Tarle*, who had been the direct target of Pokrovsky’s attacks but who now had become, like Grekov, a leader of scholarship. The history of the Middle Ages was represented by Kosminsky, of the school of Vinogradov-Savin, the pupil and friend of *Petrushevky*. In the field of ancient history Zhebelev and *Struve* held complete sway.”¹⁵ And this list is the shortest one could come up with. The whole extent of these more or less latent possible historiographical sub-encodings within the “*Short Course* paradigm” could be revealed by tracing the whole mobility of the entire scientific community upon which the paradigm was relying. In his conclusion Barber states that “the main element of continuity between the period preceding October 1931 and that which followed it was provided by the principle of *partiinnost*.”¹⁶ The above summary of the historians with non-‘*Short Course* paradigm’ academic formative experiences and scholarly influences seems to seriously counter such statement; it seems that multiple continuities might be *traced* within both the formation and the methodological and/or theoretical content of the paradigm as historiographical sub-encodings. To take a point made by Shteppa, it can be said that there are, at least, two further points of continuity with *some* tendencies of the pre-revolutionary period and of the 1920s in what concerns national history: “the one proving the uniformly high level of Russian culture in all historical epochs, and the other, the complete uniqueness and originality of this culture.”¹⁷

The main addition to the formative pre-paradigm experiences was the primacy of *partiinnost* in establishing the puzzle-solutions and commitment structuring the scientific activity of the historical field. This new element grants the specific ‘flavor’ and identity of the “*Short Course* paradigm”. If historiography is seen as a *mode of communication*¹⁸ (exchange, transformation, translation, explanation and understanding), in the Soviet Union, in order for it to attain paradigm equilibrium, *partiinnost* functioned as its integrative catalyst factor for

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

¹⁶ John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis, 1928–1932*, New York, 1981, p. 144.

¹⁷ Konstantin F. Shteppa, *op. cit.*, pp. 219.

¹⁸ I borrow here the specific usage made of the term “communication” by Abraham Moses as described by Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Culture as Praxis*. The definition he uses is the following: “what the term ‘communication’ refers to is not only its commonsensical referent – exchange of messages between two separate agents but also: anamorphosis (transformation) of one and the same medium, if it takes place between moment *t* and *t+t*’, and remains in an unequivocal correspondence’ with the state of the medium at the initial moment *t*; translation – or the ‘transfer from one symbolic space to another’; explanation – or the ‘transfer from one space of symbolic attributes to another’; and understanding – or the ‘transfer from the phenomenal field to the field of symbols combined in a structure.’ All these types of relations of communication, as well as others, unnamed if only isomorphic, may constitute a structure [my emphasis].” See Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*, London – Boston, 1973, pp. 63-64.

discursive, scientific, and institutional cohesiveness within the historical field. The coerciveness of *partiinost* upon historiography as a mode of communication within the historical field and with the societal realm (structured by the Marxist-Leninist mode of signifying reality) gave a fundamental feature to the “*Short Course* paradigm” – it relied upon complete *identification*, but lack of full agreement on its *interpretation/rationalization*.¹⁹ This falls into place with the overall characterization made by Kuhn of the nature of paradigms: “the existence of a paradigm need not even imply that any full set of rules exists”. It can explain the definition by philosopher V.I. Pripisnov of historical science as “being concerned with specific regularities (*zakonomernosti*) of distinct historical periods.”²⁰ And it can also reassess the nature of the influence of political intervention within the historical field; that which was branded before as the outmost proof of the “handmaiden of politics theory” seems to transform into a most obvious instance of impossibility of “an agreed reduction to rules” within the paradigm and its scientific community. The periodical interventions of Stalin and of the Party into the dealings of the historical field, and its disruption by purges, indeed prevented a “deontological” alignment of history as science, but it also opened the way for scientific organization of the field’s activity just by *mere* practice based upon “tacit knowledge”²¹, which ultimately gave a fundamentally *palimpsestic* aspect of Soviet historiography. I consider this facet of “tacit knowledge” within the Soviet historical field during Stalin’s regime important because it presupposes internalization of the paradigm conditions within the general environment of the formation of a polity-identity and of an all-Soviet culture/society, alongside with specific personal/collective characteristics of the individual historians and their community. The central role within the Soviet historical field of “tacit knowledge”

¹⁹ In the following lines I am developing upon the hole fragment this quote is part of. The complete passage from Kuhn is the following: “scientists can agree in their identification of a paradigm without agreeing on, or even attempting to produce, a full interpretation or rationalization of it. Lack of standard interpretation or of an agreed reduction to rules will not prevent a paradigm from guiding research. Normal science can be determined in part by the direct inspection of paradigms, a process that is often aided by but does not depend of the formulation of rules and assumptions. Indeed, the existence of a paradigm need not even imply that any full set of rules exists.” In Thomas S. Kuhn, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

²⁰ In Hans Rogger, *Politics, Ideology and History in the USSR: The Search for Coexistence*, in “Soviet Studies”, 16, 1965, no 3, p. 266.

²¹ Michael Polanyi shows that this coinage accounts “(1) for a valid knowledge of a problem, (2) for the scientist’s capacity to pursue it, guided by his sense of approaching its solution, and (3) for a valid anticipation of the yet indeterminate implications of the discovery arrived at in the end.” In Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, Gloucester, Mass., 1983, p. 24. I consider important the insertion of such conceptual construction because it can be indicative for the internalization of the element characterizing the *Short Course* paradigm; ultimately the coinage of “tacit knowledge” can be a key for the set of the presuppositions conditioning academic interaction within the highly politicized historical field of the Soviet Union.

is revealed in Hans Rogger's characterization of Soviet historiography in late Stalin era (also with overall validity for the entire period covered by this paper). Rogger, in evaluating this past development for purposes of prognosis for what was to come in the 1960s, identifies the threshold level of scientific practice as resultant of the crystallization of the "Short Course Paradigm": "the best they [historians] can hope for is *continued coexistence* [my emphasis] of micro-law and macro-law, of their professional standards and the political services which they are asked to render, of partial truths and large dogmas."²²

Characterizing the "Short Course paradigm" by means of example

The above quotation excellently describes the fundamentally *eclectic historiographical structuring* generated by the "Short Course paradigm". The latter was the child of its times, one of the developments within the broader phenomenon branded by Timasheff as the Great Retreat. The latter could be said to have started roughly at the beginning of the 1930s, during the later years of the first *pyatiletka*, in the context of the instability created by the Second Socialist Offensive. Timasheff contends that "the main pattern of The Great Retreat had been the *amalgamation of traits* [my emphases] of the historical and national culture of Russian with traits belonging to the Communist cycle of ideas and behavior patterns (...) Through the years of The Great Retreat, they proceeded by *the trial and error method*, advancing here and retreating there, and *selecting* from the historical tradition such configurations as could be amalgamated more easily with their principles."²³ The *eclecticism* of the "Short Course paradigm" was based upon the "Russo-Soviet hybridization" (Brandenberger) of historiographical topicality; and the picture got even more blurred during the post-war period, when history, as a scientific practice societally integrated, had to deal with "the victory in 1945, as the ultimate validation of Soviet state-building, most striking when styled as a feat *without* historical precedent".²⁴ This meant that to the dialectic tradition-Bolshevism a third element was added – the elevating present legitimate on the basis of achieving "a foundational myth for the Soviet society" (Brandenberger).

This situation within the historical field is excellently summarized by N. Druzhinin, (one of the editors of "Voprosy Istorii") in 1949, who, when writing on the issue of historical inquiry and method, stated that: "starting from the concept of class struggle as the basic criterion we should, however, keep in mind that the general regularities (*zakonomernosti*) of the historical process do not exclude its

²² Hans Rogger, *Politics, Ideology and History in the USSR: The Search for Coexistence*, p. 271.

²³ Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat – The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia*, New York, 1972, pp. 354-356.

²⁴ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism – Stalinist Mass and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956*, Cambridge – London, 2002, pp. 183-196.

national particularities.” Moreover, this later development within the debates of the scientific community can even be traced back to some of the contents of the November 14, 1938 decree on Party propaganda, which explained the rationale behind creating the *Short Course* in relation to the community of historians and to history as a science. On the one hand, there is the necessity of a new (clarification of) Marxist-Leninist synthesis: “in producing the *Short Course* the Central Committee has aimed at liquidating the harmful split in the area of propaganda between Marxism and Leninism (...) and which has led to teaching Leninism as separate doctrine divorced from Marxism, dialectical and historical materialism, and the history of the party, forgetting that Leninism grew and developed from Marxism, that Marxism is the foundation of Leninism, and that without knowing this foundation Leninism cannot be understood.” On the other hand, there is the imperative of balancing Marxism-Leninism with Soviet historiography on the basis of topical relevance: “the distortions of Marxism-Leninist ideas on the question of the nature of war in the contemporary period, the lack of understanding of the distinction between just and unjust wars, the role of the individual in history, and the incorrect view of Bolsheviks as *sui generis* ‘pacifists’ (...) In recent times in historical science the anti-Marxist distortions and vulgarizations have been related to the so-called school of Pokrovsky, which perversely interpreted historical facts and, contrary to historical materialism, explained them in the light of the present, rather than in the light of the conditions in which the historical events occurred, and thus perverted actual history.”²⁵ The ambiguity of this explanation (justification) of the rationale of the publication of the *Short Course* had an implicit impact upon the profile of the paradigm itself.

The last statement can be best clarified by means of example. One of the most politically sensitive, but also scientifically productive, sectors of the Soviet historical field from 1938 to 1953 is that of the study of imperialism. This case, in my opinion, is conclusive for a lot of the points made in the above paragraphs. During the pre-paradigm period two schools developed in this historical sub-field, relying on both interpretations of Marxism/Leninism and drawing upon (from or against) the pre-revolutionary debates. One of them was represented by the *nationalizers*, Sidorov and his associate Granovskii, and who contented that Russia had reached an independent stage of finance capitalism before 1917, on the basis of a coalescence (*srashchivanie*) between tsarism and finance capital, and thus opening the way for ‘ripeness’ (*zrelost*) for socialism. The second one was that of the *denationalizers*, whose mentor was Pokrovsky, and highest-profile representative N. Vanag. They viewed Russian economy subject to foreign capital, in a primitive, precapitalist state of development; the consequent inference was that

²⁵ Both quotes are taken from “Decree of November 14, 1938, on Party Propaganda” in Marin V. Pundeff (ed.), *History in the USSR: Selected Readings*, pp. 130-131.

Russian imperialism was an example of old-fashioned land-grabbing.²⁶ The two theories had important political, contemporary implications related to the role of the Russian core in the community of all-Soviet peoples, to the historical prestige of the Soviet Union within the community of European states, to the Soviet attitudes toward national-liberation (and revolution export) movements, and to the issue of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization)²⁷ in respect to Soviet nationalities. At the time of the consolidation of the “*Short Course* paradigm” both theories and scholars had to go through a puzzle-type of situation – to scientifically adjust to the pool of “restrictions upon admissible solution”²⁸. Both of the theories lost and won, both authors lost, but at the end Sidorov institutionally prevailed.²⁹ During the first *pyatiletka* Vanag’s theory lost out in terms of primacy to Sidorov’s, especially because of its provenance from the school of Pokrovsky, but by the time of the appearance of the *Short Course* the semi-colonial aspect of Vanag’s approach became the regularity ordering the historical sub-field of the study of imperialism. But again, this is not the whole story; there are two additional remaining aspects to it. On the one hand, in the *Short Course* it was stated that “it should be borne in mind that before 1914 the most important branches of Russian industry were in the hands of foreign capital [in perfect accordance with both Vanag’s theory of the 1920s but also with Stalin’s dictum that ‘tsarist Russian was an immense reserve of Western imperialism’] (...) Thus the revolution against tsarism verged on and

²⁶ The general information on this debate, its implications, and continuation in the paradigm period is taken from George M. Enteen, Tatiana Gorn, Cheryl Kern, *Soviet Historians and the Study of Russian Imperialism*, London, 1979; Konstantin F. Shtepa, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-285, and from Rudolf Schlesinger, *Recent Soviet Historiography, I-IV*, in “Soviet Studies”, 1-2, 1950-1951, nos 4/1-3, pp. 293-312.

²⁷ This policy attempted to justify the Bolshevik endeavor of making the Soviet power native (*rodnaia*), intimate (*blizkaia*), popular (*narodnaia*), and comprehensible (*poniatnaia*). Thus, “the non-Russian masses would see that Soviet power and her organs are the affair of their own efforts, the embodiment of their desires.” (Stalin) An interesting, but secondary point is that Stalin himself preferred to use the term *natsionalizatsiia*, which titled more toward an idea of national consolidation or building. See Terry Martin, *The Soviet Affirmative Action Empire*, Ithaca, 2002, p. 12.

²⁸ Kuhn states that “If it is to classify as a puzzle, a problem must be characterized by *more than an assured solution*. There must also be rules that limit both the nature of acceptable solutions and the steps by which they are to be obtained.” It is not clear, however, which are the criteria upon which this limiting act appears, if it has an “objective” or just community (contingent) based quality. In my opinion, considering Kuhn’s call for a study of the community structure of science and my explanation of the role of *partiinost* within the economy of the “*Short Course* paradigm” I will see the nature of the above limiting rules as being rooted in the dynamics historical-production – politics of history; Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 38.

²⁹ Vanag was purged in 1936 as an “enemy of the people”; the same with Sidorov, on claims of being influenced by non-Marxist, bourgeois historical approaches. Unfortunately, Vanag lost his life, while Sidorov, by 1938, was restored to the historical profession and made secretary of the Institute of History, which was transferred from the Communist Academy (disbanded) to the All-Union Academy of Sciences.

had to pass into a revolution against imperialism, into a proletarian revolution”³⁰. Two crucial topics are hinted at, and solved: the possibility of “ripeness” (*zrelost*) for socialism in Russian and the relationship of the Bolsheviks with the nationalities of the Union.

At the same time, there was a second track followed by the study of imperialism, that of *raison d'état*. This can be exemplified by the head-to-head comparison that Konstantin Shteppa makes between Pokrovsky's *Russian History in Briefest Outline* and Shestakov's *The History of the USSR Short Course*. Various topics such as the history of the conquest of Middle Asia and the Caucasus, Peter I's reign, the 1812 war, etc are in complete contrast: Pokrovsky vehemently criticizes them in the “purest” Leninist spirit (let's not forget that Lenin himself endorsed his manual), while Shestakov is re-cycling them for the sake of bridging the “Russian” history with the “Soviet” one.³¹ The semi-colonial thesis, whose new main proponent was P.L. Liashchenko, coexisted with a formula of “lesser evil” in relation to Russian expansion during tsarism and/or with acceptance of some “historical traditions” of the pre-revolutionary period. This situation was clarified by 1949, under the following formulation: “the influence of the great events of world history on our country and the reception of the new ideas which had originated in the leading states was only possible in view of a certain level of Russia's socio-economic and cultural development: the definite character and direction of that reception corresponded to the *needs of the internal development of the Russian state*; the new was appropriated and transformed in an independent and creative process within our country.”³² The contrasting /conflicting theoretical stasis of the study of imperialism within the *Short Course* paradigm was accentuated by methodological anomalies approaching the puzzles of this subfield. Enteen specifies that “unable to attack directly the *Short Course* formulation of Russia's economic development, some historians proceeded to repeat the appropriate formulas while actually presenting evidence to the contrary. A few

³⁰ *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik) – Short Course*, chapter IV, in Marin V. Pundeff (ed.), *History in the USSR: Selected Readings*, pp. 113-130.

³¹ For the whole comparison of the two manuals see Konstantin F. Shteppa, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-131.

³² N. Druzhinin quoted in Rudolf Schlesinger, *Recent Soviet Historiography. I*, in “Soviet Studies”, 1, 1950, no 4, pp. 293-312. This passage also takes us back to the point made by Brandenberger about the new theory of the state in historiography after the victory in the “Great Patriotic War” – it appeared from a combination to the historical study of the Russian state, of the Soviet nationalities, of world history, but to it after 1945 one has to add campaigns in the scientific field for “creative discussions” and against “cosmopolitanism” and “borrowings”. If the historiography was discussing the state (either tsarist or Soviet) starting from “what should be done” in the pre-1945 period, after that the state (as Soviet) was asserted as an entity, uncompromised and proud, within the general world historical context.

even drew appropriate conclusion, but without actually pointing out their implications for the semicolonial thesis.”³³

Conclusions

The last statements draw us near the conclusion remarks of the present paper. The description of topical and methodological eclecticism characterizing the sub-field of the study of imperialism within the *Short Course* Paradigm reveals the fundamental palimpsestic nature of the paradigm itself. The latter was a complex of clustered scientific theories and methods of research alternatively losing or gaining preeminence according to their positioning in relation to the exiting restrictions upon admissible puzzle-solution and/or models. Moreover, the paradigm dynamics were relying heavily upon the “tacit knowledge” regulating the nomenclatures of scientific practice and the scientific milieus that ultimately gave the specific profile to the Soviet historical field. The importance of practices such as *diskussia*, *obsurzhdenie* (consideration), or *kritika i samokritika* gave a ritualistic “added-value” to the historical science praxis that created the political padding of the *Short Course* paradigm. Kojevnikov considers that political campaigns in scientific fields had a regular nature, but only “on the level of formal rules and rites of public behavior rather than in the contests and results of the disputes”, thus reinterpreting these ideological discussion as “transfer of rites of intraparty democracy from communist political culture to academic life.”³⁴ This emphasis on scientific

³³ The authors actually give some examples and the historians signaled out by them will be some of the leaders of the *shestdesyatniki*, a sub-community within the scientific field who engineered one of the most valiant attempts to inflict paradigmatic shift by using the Sector of Methodology of the Institute of History. This Sector, between 1964 and 1968, published a series of articles which touched upon issues such as the “specific historical regularities” (*zakonomernosti*), the immediate relevance to the contemporary world of historical writing (*aktul’nost*, which takes us back to the general theoretical topic of the historiographical value of class struggle), the importance of “superstructural phenomena”, the historicism of historical materialism, the nature of the “historical fact”, and the role of *partiinost* in Soviet history. To see a more thorough description of the debates taking place at the time and their impact on the conceptualizations of Soviet history see the chapter *The ‘Hour’ of Methodology*, in Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia – The Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1954–1974*, pp. 155-183. The examples of Enteen et al. are the following: “extensive investigation of archival materials helped focus attention on the existence of monopoly associations, and M. Ia. Gefter and P. V. Volobuev devoted their attention to this aspect of Russian imperialism. Gefter challenged Liashchenko’s concept of the underdevelopment of Russian capitalism and the alleged lack of monopoly associations of the highest type. Volobuev studied the relations between Russian commercial banks and three major fuel monopolies, concluding that three large associations of the trust type existed in the fuel industry by 1914.” In George M. Enteen, Tatiana Gorn, Cheryl Kern, *Soviet Historians and the Study of Russian Imperialism*, pp. 27-28.

³⁴ Alexei Kojevnikov, *Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work: Science and the Games of Intraparty Democracy circa 1948*, in “The Russian Review”, 57, 1998, p. 28.

practicality³⁵, “tacit knowledge”, and “the incompleteness and imperfection of the existing data-theory fit that, at any time, define many of the puzzles that characterizes normal science”³⁶ are the main factors determining “the scientific interest – or scientific value – of a contribution”³⁷ in the Soviet historical field characterized by the *Soviet Course* paradigm. In the present paper, I have attempted to show that from the early 1930s’ till the early 1950s, Soviet historiography has developed, during its interaction with the communist mode of signifying and ordering ‘reality’, a paradigm, the *Short Course* paradigm. The latter featured a distinct scientific community (with its own autonomous dynamics, particular institutional structures, and group allegiances) with a specific *mode of communication* (both substantively, i.e., the “Soviet-Russian hybridization”, and formally, i.e., “the Wittgensteinian language games”³⁸) and a palimpsestic history-production. The paradigm’s relationship with Soviet ideology was based upon a certain degree of scientific leverage that imprinted on the former a fundamentally eclectic nature, which falsifies the theory of history as the handmaiden of politics in the Soviet Union during Stalin’s reign.

³⁵ I derive this term from Kojevnikov’s understanding of “ritual”, which he defines, by quoting from Daniel de Copperet, as “an arena of contradictory and contestable perspectives – participants having their own reasons, viewpoints, and motives and in fact it is made up as it goes along”; *ibidem*, p. 32.

³⁶ Thomas S. Kuhn, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

³⁷ The sense in which I am using this conceptual construct is a strong one, taking in it from Polanyi who identifies three factors characterizing it: “its *exactitude*, its *systematic importance*, and the *intrinsic interest of its subject matter*.” To a certain extent I am rhetorically contrasting here a bit Polanyi’s position with Kuhn with the purpose of showing that the dynamics of a scientific community, its values and institutional structuring determine the appreciation, characterization and acknowledgement of scientific activity and its results, despite the scientific field’s objective, but self-legitimizing evaluative language.

³⁸ See Kojevnikov, *Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work*, p. 50.