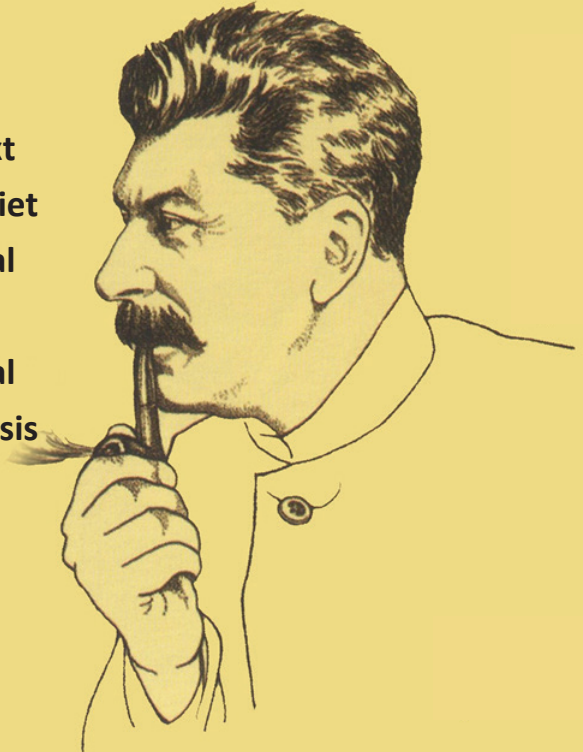


GIORGI TAVADZE

# POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS

## I

The Phenomenon  
of 'Homo  
sovieticus'  
in the Context  
of Soviet  
Ideological  
Dimension:  
A Philosophical  
Analysis



**GIORGI TAVADZE**

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**The Phenomenon of 'Homo sovieticus' in the  
Context of Soviet Ideological Dimension:  
A Philosophical Analysis**

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**EAST EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY**  
**VARLAM CHERKEZISHVILI CENTRE**  
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## INSTEAD OF A FOREWORD OR RIGHT TO PUBLISH: TOWARDS SELF-REGULATING SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY

This will not be a standard foreword. At first I will say a few words about present article and academic context of the topic, and then I will turn to the issue of free dissemination of research output and necessity of free access to it.

Hereby I present the first part of *Postcolonial Interventions: “The phenomenon of ‘homo sovieticus’ in the context of Soviet ideological dimension: a philosophical analysis”*. The article on feminist philosophy in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* motivated me to use the word “interventions” in the title.<sup>1</sup> One sub-heading in this article bears the following title: “Interventions in philosophy”. At first it seemed somewhat odd to me, but then I liked it and decided to use it in the title. “Intervention” means interference, and when I, a philosopher, intervene in the sphere of postcolonial studies, then I am making a genuine intervention: I am choosing “my” authors, I am relying on them and interpreting them on my own way. At the same time, I am criticizing other authors and trying to show inconsistencies in their positions. On the other hand, of course my interpretations are not ironclad. They too could be attacked by others. Therefore, intervention seems to be a risky affair.

The present article is a reworked version of the public lecture “Homo sovieticus in the perspective of the 21st century” delivered at the Institute of International Studies (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wrocław) on December 2, 2019. I am grateful to Prof.

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1 Noëlle McAfee, “Feminist Philosophy”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/feminist-philosophy/> (accessed: 01.11.2021).

Stefan Kiedroń for inviting me. I also want to express my gratitude to Prof. Adam Chmielewski for making me aware of the work by Czesław Miłosz. In addition to this, I want to thank my colleagues from interdisciplinary postcolonial studies working group: Tamar Chokoraia (Caucasus University, Tbilisi), Irakli Chkhaidze (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University), Vladimir Liparteliani (East European University, Tbilisi), and Tamar Koplatadze (Queen Mary University of London). Interaction with them gives me additional stimulus to think over on the issues which are situated on the intersection of different disciplines.

Despite the fact that with regards to postcolonial studies in the recent period much has changed positively in Georgia, I think that more has to be done in order that researchers from different institutions would be able to exchange information on their research more easily. Existing reality – when research institutions tend to form isolated islands – needs to be changed. The core idea behind the interdisciplinary postcolonial studies working group is simple: to establish connections with the researchers working in the given direction and facilitate information exchange between them.

With this I am touching the issue of relationship between research and politics (the latter conceived in the broad sense as opposed to party politics). Postcolonial studies, in my opinion (and I hope it expresses widely shared understanding), should try to analyze the legacy of colonial past. Even more: in what degree is it possible to say that what had happened in the past stays there? Perhaps we live in a colonial present?<sup>2</sup> What kind of dominant discursive currents are currently present in Georgian social space and which of them are linked to former metropole(s)? How is this linkage represented in literary, political, social etc. discourses? Research which concerns these issues should not be self-sufficient. With this I mean the situation when academics, under the pressure of “publish or perish!” principle, mostly think about filling respective fields of their respectable CV-s

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2 The work which immediately comes to my mind with this regard is *The Colonial Present* (2004) by Derek Gregory.

in and preparing themselves for the next round of working contract. Such an understanding of research activity which reduces it to the solely professionalized academic activity (publishing in peer-review journals, seeking “prestigious” publishers for their monographs, feverishly seeking to obtain fundings etc.), roots out the very ethos of genuine scholarship and establishes instead of it cold logic of rational calculation (which is not bad *per se*, but when absolutized leads to the eclipse of reason and irrationality of rationality).<sup>3</sup>

The ideas presented in the lines to follow are drawn from the observation of Georgian higher education reality. I realize that in different countries there are different practices established and that straightforward comparison between Georgia and these countries can be misleading. But I do hope that despite differences there are similarities too and if these thoughts overlap with already existing concerns and if this leads to international discussion, then the preliminary task can be considered as fulfilled.

One of the factors hindering the free development of humanities in Georgia, according to my opinion, is the fetishization and absolutization of peer review, citation indexes and journals with high impact factor. If I am a researcher, say, at some institute, or appointed professor at the university (or both of them), why should the importance of my thoughts depend of the issue of publishing/not-publishing them in some “prestigious” journals? These journals seem to have quite selective editorial policy and the researcher has to wait for acceptance for months. Even more, on the basis of remarks by anonymous editors, researcher might have to make significant changes in his/her paper. I am not denying the fact that the opinion of other (even anonymous) colleagues might be useful and interesting for the researcher who submitted the paper and even help to really improve the work. But for this to happen, it is not necessary to send the paper in the journal with peer review. Nowadays, using the internet, researcher can have intensive communication

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3 See *Eclipse of Reason* by Max Horkheimer and *The McDonaldization of Society* by George Ritzer.

with his/her colleagues who live in the different countries of the world (global Covid pandemic has even more intensified such kind of communication) and it is completely possible to hear useful opinions from them too. I think that *requirement* to publish in the journals with high impact-factor, a practice which has seen widespread acceptance in Georgia, significantly hinders the creativity and free development of humanities. The researcher has to allocate significant time resource in order to “fit” with journal requirements and then to wait patiently. In addition to this, he/she has to consider, in what databases is the journal of his/her choice indexed, and how “high” is its impact-factor. Frequently the access to the content of such journals is closed and they are available only for subscribers. There exists a whole industry of scientific/scholarly online databases, which are owned by private companies. Therefore, there emerges a whole chain of demand/supply which is not linked at all with the idea of *free distribution of scientific/scholarly knowledge*. We have to add the following unfavorable circumstances peculiar to Georgia to get the fuller picture: high hourly load of professors, low salaries, miserable pensions (and bleak prospects for future after retiring), neglect of the research as such (which frequently is valued only when it can be “measured” during accreditation procedures in order to satisfy the standards and is immediately forgotten afterwards), insufficient knowledge of digital technologies etc.

The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), has more than 16 000 indexed journals (as of August, 2021). As it is well-known, the great advantage of this system is that the content of journals which are indexed in DOAJ, can be accessed freely, without any registration and complementary payments. Nevertheless, DOAJ also has its own “quality control process” where several criteria are listed. According to one of them, “[a]ll articles must pass through a quality control system (peer review) before publication.”<sup>4</sup>

Here I want to note that I do not hint that peer review (be it blind or transparent) is outdated and ineffective. I do not have anything

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4 <https://www.doaj.org/apply/guide/> (accessed: 01.11.2021).



against open access peer review journals. I just want to say that we should not imagine peer review system as only mechanism which makes it possible to publish papers and control “scholarly quality” (a term which seems odd to me). I strongly believe, that against the background of contemporary technological developments, scholar should be able to publish his/her paper on the internet and that such papers – which might be uploaded on the official personal webpage of the researcher (e.g. on faculty webpage) or webpage of the research center where researcher is employed – *should “count” in the same manner as the papers published in “prestigious” journals* (in the “counting” I mean the practice now established in Georgian universities – state as well as private – when the university recognizes only the articles which are published in the journals which satisfy the predetermined criteria: that of peer review, indexing in Scopus or ERIH+, impact factor, etc.). I am a philosopher and therefore my example will be drawn from philosophy: if an individual gains PhD degree in philosophy and afterwards becomes employed in the research center or is appointed at an academic position at the university (or both), this means, that he/she is accepted as a member of scholarly community. I argue that this fact grants this individual the *right to publish*: he/she has the right, to publish his thoughts independently and share them through the internet to his/her colleagues. Moreover, he/she has the right that his/her works to be recognized as “scholarly” (without continually testing with formal procedures scholarly “quality” of that individual’s research output). This individual is in the same degree responsible on his/her views when they are published independently, as were it the case, that his/her paper was published in some prestigious academic journal. After all, academic journals are relatively new “invention”. For centuries philosophers were conveying their views through treatises and other literary forms. I think that this excellent tradition should be revitalized in contemporary philosophy (and perhaps also in other disciplines too). Researchers should have the freedom of choice: to publish their papers in academic journals or to use the *personal right*

to publish. I cannot guess why my thoughts should be subjected to the “quality” scrutiny from the side of anonymous experts, when I publish the article with the only purpose – to have an open and transparent debates within the scholarly community. Therefore, I think that transparent peer review within, say, the research center, should be only formal and should not exercise any “control”. If something which I write, is of “low quality” and should be criticized, that will be criticized anyway by scholarly community and the “filtration” of the quality will naturally occur. To say this tautologically (and sometimes tautologies tell us a lot!), the paper which will attract attention, will attract attention and that won’t, won’t.

If the research and HE institutions will implement this practice and enable scholars to publish papers on their personal webpages, then scholarly community will make a big step in the process of freeing itself from forces which are founded on opaque and mercantilist principles and get closer to the ideal of *self-regulating scholarly community founded on anarchist principles*.<sup>5</sup> I am writing “ideal” because I am not expecting that existing power centers (state, business corporations, research centers, universities) will readily concede with regard to this issue. Moreover, I do not think it feasible to imagine scholarly community without any power/knowledge hierarchies. But I suggest that the ideal of self-regulating scholarly community is an alternative which should effectively counterbalance existing power hierarchies. My anarchist program does not go beyond this “republican” position.<sup>6</sup>

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5 I am also thinking of the possibility of creating such platforms where researchers can directly comment on research output of their colleagues via their ORCID accounts.

6 Brian Martin has more fully developed anarchist position (with regards to science). See <https://documents.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/pubs/94raven.html> (accessed: 01.11.2021). Detailed commentaries on this paper go beyond the aim of my discussion here. I am not sure whether the implementation of anarchist science policy (inclusion of non-scientists in science etc.) will have the results that Martin anticipates, but I agree with the general idea of self-organization of science (in our case – scholarship), although I do not consider its full realization at the given stage as feasible.

To anticipate some possible objections: I think it is less expected, that in the case of the implementation of the above-mentioned practice, researchers will suddenly upload on their webpages completely irrelevant and absolutely “non-scholarly” texts: there is always a hidden consensus inside the scholarly community, as what to be regarded as scholarship. This means, that we should not expect that already established professors or the academics at the beginning of their career development will publish poetic volumes or fiction literature. Even in the cases, where published papers will question existing standards and mechanisms, this will not have a bad effect. On the contrary, it will stimulate debate and discussion. Here the peculiarity of philosophical discourse is salient: it is almost universally accepted, I believe, that philosophy is self-reflective enterprise: philosophers not only philosophize, but with their philosophizing they sometimes even change the understanding of philosophy, what is meant under philosophy and philosophizing (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger to name a few). It is true, that the burden of such fundamental changes rests on the shoulders of the few, but this does not mean that only famous philosophers were philosophizing and in our papers we should only discuss what was said by prominent thinkers. Reappropriation of the right to publish (reappropriation – because this right was once enjoyed by philosophers) for the researchers will broaden their creative potential and therefore, stimulate the development of thought.

In the end I want to say final remarks on the present article: initially it was written for peer-reviewed journal, but then I decided to publish it as a part of planned *Postcolonial Interventions* series. I entertain a hope that a reader interested in interdisciplinary postcolonial studies will be able to find in it some worthy theses worthy of discussion.

**Giorgi Tavadze**

Tbilisi,  
20 July, 2021

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# THE PHENOMENON OF 'HOMO SOVIETICUS' IN THE CONTEXT OF SOVIET IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSION: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'Homo sovieticus' is a controversial one. In recently published articles A. Leyk and G. Sharafutdinova consider it as an ideologically laden (in a negative sense) and outdated notion.<sup>7</sup> It is said, that according to the established pattern, 'homo sovieticus' is represented as an essentially passive subject, which allegedly is the helpless victim of the totalitarian ideology. Relying on this understanding, it has been argued, there are attempts to grasp the changes in contemporary society in the framework offered by an 'outdated' 'homo sovieticus' scheme: for example, the rise of authoritarian state in Russia is explained by remnants of 'homo sovieticus' in Russian society.<sup>8</sup> It has also been asserted, that despite its limited heuristic value, the term 'homo sovieticus' implies that socialism was a "regime which produced pathological culture with no elements that could be useful in the new reality".<sup>9</sup> Both Leyk and Sharafutdinova emphasize then the need for more

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7 Aleksandra Leyk, "Between rejected socialism and desired capitalism: social sciences' discourse on the transformation in Poland", *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 23:4 (2016), pp. 643-663 (DOI: 10.1080/13507486.2016.1182125); Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "Was There a "Simple Soviet" Person? Debating the Politics and Sociology of *Homo Sovieticus*", *Slavic Review*, 78:1 (2019), pp. 173-195 (DOI:10.1017/slr.2019.13).

8 Sharafutdinova, p. 174. See also p. 194: "The clearly identifiable synergy on the part of the Russian leader and the masses—dubbed by some observers as the "Crimean syndrome"—unfortunately leads many Russian and western intellectuals, disappointed by the Russian majority's demonstrated lack of immunity to authoritarianism, towards adopting explanations that focus on the "faulty" post-Soviet personality structure inherited by the Russian people as a Soviet legacy".

9 A. Leyk, "Between rejected socialism and desired capitalism", p. 650.

actor-oriented approach: Leyk pays particular attention to the work of social anthropologists which better grasped everyday practices and demonstrated that 'homo sovieticus' was not altogether passive and submissive subject.<sup>10</sup> These researches, according to Leyk, question the thesis that allegedly 'pathological' socialist reality had dominance over individuals' life-choices.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Sharafutdinova prefers an approach developed by Natalya Kozlova (and other approaches similar to the one developed by Kozlova) which does not consider the individual and society as a product of totalitarian state.<sup>12</sup>

This line of criticism is quite straightforward: 'homo sovieticus' is an ideological concept, it is in line with and outdated 'culture and personality' school, it is based on false dichotomy between allegedly passive and ideologically duped soviet individual and 'free' and 'capable' western individual which is flexible and inventive. Contrary to this outdated model which rests on reified dichotomies and has little explanatory power, it has been argued, we ought to prefer and opt for more agency-oriented approaches which demonstrate that allegedly passive and ideologically duped 'homo sovieticus' in reality was active, resisting and inventive in his/her microworld. 'Homo sovieticus' and 'homo economicus' represent "ideologically biased categories".<sup>13</sup> But what is "ideologically biased"? And more generally, what is ideology?

In the present article I do not intend to rescue "old" notion of 'homo sovieticus' as discussed and criticized by Sharafutdinova and Leyk ('homo sovieticus' as essentially passive and victim of totalitarian ideology opposed to free and inventive 'homo economicus'; the model according to which totalitarian regime molds society and its members). At first, I will indicate some methodological inconsistencies on which, according to my opinion, their work rests. Afterwards I will analyze the notion of 'homo sovieticus' in the context of totalitarian state's *attempt* to form a new type of submissive citizen. In this

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10 Ibid., pp. 654-656.

11 Ibid, p. 656.

12 G. Sharafutdinova, "Was There a "Simple Soviet" Person?", pp. 194-195.

13 A. Leyk, "Between rejected socialism and desired capitalism", p. 644.

context the ideas of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault can be very productive, specifically Althusser's conception of ideology and ideological state apparatuses and Foucault's ideas on disciplinary power and surveillance. In line with Althusser's approach, I also suggest that it is better to understand 'homo sovieticus' not as a some constant type sterilized and brainwashed by ideological efforts of the state, but as an *interpellated subject* of dominant ideological discourse which finds himself immersed in the world of material practices of different (even contradictory) *ideologies* (the plural form employed here pretty neatly entails in itself individual "coping strategies" and acumen stressed by agency-oriented approaches). With this the terrain of 'homo sovieticus' is shifted into the more theoretical and philosophical dimension. I also suggest that Mikhail Heller's description of Soviet state's attempts of ideological reworking of "human material" can be read through the framework developed by Althusser. Foucault's ideas on disciplinary technologies and his conception of knowledge/power can also offer illuminating insights when analyzing Soviet ideological state apparatuses. Nevertheless, the fact of the sudden collapse of allegedly omnipotent ideological system indicates the necessity of analyzing counter-discourses (various nationalisms, conceptions of civil society, free market etc.) which, initially suppressed and therefore clandestine, gradually gained in strength and made dominant discourses dated and obsolete.

## 2. IDEOLOGY = SOMETHING NEGATIVE?

According to Sharafutdinova, "[t]he historically-conscious overview of the Levada project undertaken at the moment of the communist system's unraveling reveals a *heavy ideological motivation* undergirding the construction of this concept [*homo sovieticus* – G. T.]." <sup>14</sup> Elsewhere she also mentions "anti-communist ideological leanings of Russian intellectuals", <sup>15</sup> who were deeply skeptical about Soviet system. Similarly, when analyzing binary categories (*homo sovieticus* vs modern man, civilizational incompetence vs civilizational

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14 G. Sharafutdinova, "Was There a "Simple Soviet" Person?", p. 175. Italics mine.

15 Ibid., p. 179.



competence) developed by Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka, Leyk remarks: “the proposed concepts seem to be strongly *ideologically biased* dichotomous categories rather than ideal types in the Weberian sense”.<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere she also calls these notions as “ideologically convenient divisions”<sup>17</sup> and “ideologically biased categories”.<sup>18</sup> These concepts, divisions, categories are fundamentally flawed, because they are “particularly susceptible to ideological bias”.<sup>19</sup> To these authors, then, some concepts are outdated and not scientific, because they are “ideological”. A very *ideological* understanding of *the ideological* indeed! Leyk and Sharafutdinova’s use of the concept of “ideological” deserves a closer examination, because it reveals a specific approach (a highly problematic one, in my view), which claims to be “supra-ideological” and generating “more” scientific truths than other approaches. The question raised by Foucault – “What types of knowledge are you trying to disqualify when you say that you are a science?”<sup>20</sup> - gains a new momentum in this context. Edward Said’s words from his *Orientalism* (1978) are particularly relevant here:

“the determining impingement on most knowledge produced in the contemporary West [...] is that it be nonpolitical, that is, scholarly, academic, impartial, above partisan or small-minded doctrinal belief. [...] [T]he general liberal consensus that “true” knowledge is fundamentally nonpolitical (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not “true” knowledge) obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced.”<sup>21</sup>

It is possible that Levada and Sztompka have reified the notion of *homo sovieticus* at a certain extent, that their analysis reflected historical realities and dominant tendencies of the given time, but from

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16 A. Leyk, “Between rejected socialism and desired capitalism”, p. 649. Italics mine.

17 Ibid. p. 653.

18 Ibid. p. 657.

19 Ibid.

20 See Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976*. Translated by David Macey, New York: Picador, 2003, p. 10.

21 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, pp. 9-10.

this does not follow that their approach was ideological in the sense that it was biased and distorting the reality *and* that notions, concepts and models employed by Sharafutdinova and Leyk are supra-ideological, neutral, scientific and beyond *Zeitgeist*. What are the criteria, according to which the works of Levada and Sztompka should be judged as “ideological” in a negative sense and that of Sharafutdinova and Leyk as “non-ideological” and “neutral”? I want to stress again that the design of the research and conceptual framework employed in research done by Levada and Sztompka are not my focus here. What worries me is negligent use of the concept of “ideological” which is used one-sidedly to attack opponents, but the very authors which use this concept with this negative meaning by the reasons hidden from me (and perhaps from themselves) do not consider the slightest possibility that it can be applied to their research by future researchers as well, who will possibly criticize their approaches for “ideological leanings” (liberal, socialist, cosmopolitan or whatever) and who will explain their methodology with the spirit of the 2010s.

From this position it can be argued that on the one hand, Sharafutdinova and Leyk “expose” “ideological” (read: political) biases in other researchers’ works, but on the other hand, they are implicitly refusing that their own work could be “ideological” (read: political) at any rate. It seems that theirs is the position on which Althusser remarked:

“Those who are in ideology, [...] believe that they are by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology. Ideology never says ‘I am ideological’.”<sup>22</sup>

The theoreticians of *homo sovieticus* were reacting to the historical circumstances and while it is useful not to absolutize their findings it is also necessary not to forget that we too are already immersed in a given historical situation and that our judgments also invariably will be limited by the perspectives available at present, perspectives

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22 Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Preface by Etienne Balibar, introduction by Jacques Bidet, translated by G. M. Goshgarian, London and New York: Verso, 2014, p. 191.

which after decades can be labelled as “ideologically biased categories” by the next generation of researchers.

Another conclusion which somewhat indirectly follows from Sharafutdinova and Leyk’s papers is that all research related to *homo sovieticus* theme seems to be somehow outdated, construed along the lines “totalitarian system vs subjugated personality and its traits”, paying attention to the uniformity of psychological experiences and ignoring human agency and resistance strategies employed by individuals in their everyday lives. Perhaps sociological theories developed to explain the “Soviet man” were static and insufficient to explain dynamic of post-soviet/post-socialist societies, but this should not create an atmosphere of backwardness around the concept itself which still can be used in order to analyze Soviet system’s attempt to create subjected subjects, as Althusser put it.

I think it will also be useful to pay attention to the negative-ironic connotation, which term *homo sovieticus* acquired after the publication of Alexander Zinoviev’s *Homo sovieticus* (1981).<sup>23</sup> This negative meaning was afterwards reinforced by authors like Sztompka, Levada, Tischner and that is why their work is criticized by Sharafutdinova and Leyk. But in their criticism, they in fact devalue the meaning of the concept at all. The overall problem of all these approaches might be what Maja Soboleva calls “the confusion of the concept *Soviet man* with the empiric phenomenon”. She differentiates between political/sociological and philosophical or, moral and ethical concepts of Soviet Man. The latter concept, according to her, has a different meaning. In this context she also introduces a useful distinction between the “*idea of the renewal of humanity*” and “*practical embodying of this idea*” (italics mine). Corresponding concept for the first is “New Soviet Man” and for the latter – “*homo sovieticus*”. The first concept is theoretical, and the second is political.<sup>24</sup> Soboleva’s attempt to separate these concepts is worthwhile, because it restores the independence of theoretical di-

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23 Александр Зиновьев, «Гомо Советикус», Лозанна: L’Age d’Homme, 1982 [Alexander Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus*, Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1982].

24 See Maja Soboleva, “The Concept of the *New Soviet Man* and Its Short History”, *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 51 (2017), p. 65 and 67.

mention, which is undeservedly blurred in another approaches.

Therefore: a). *One thing is to describe the personality, or psychological type under the conditions of totalitarian system and to argue that it possesses some static, uniform features.* This seems for me a dubious enterprise. Millions of people lived in the Soviet state during the almost 70 years of its existence. Of course, it would not be correct to argue that all of them responded equally to the pressure of Soviet state's ideological apparatus and its disciplinary mechanisms. The sheer fact of huge ethnic, religious, and in general, cultural diversity, plus individual traits of the persons affected by ideological pressure exclude altogether possibility of drawing stable, uniform, static portrait of *homo sovieticus* from 1922 to 1991. Ideological pressure, ideological state apparatuses and disciplinary mechanisms were not the same through this period. Therefore, it should be wrong to conclude that Soviet men and women were living in homogenous conditions. Moreover, if we take into consideration Stuart Hall's reception theory,<sup>25</sup> it can be argued that reception of media-messages generated by Soviet state's ideological apparatuses were not homogenic and that these were subjected to scrutiny, criticism and even rejection (this is demonstrated by numerous facts, like Samizdat's publications opening up alternative discursive formations, dissidents' activities, various resistance strategies defying soviet morale at the level of everyday life etc.). I think that precisely at this micro-level the approaches analyzed and supported by Sharafutdinova and Leyk can be quite effective. But the heterogeneity of responses cannot blur the fact that there remained huge and powerful state power with its almost omnipresent ideological tentacles implementing specific material ideological practices confirming and enacting dominant ideological standards, values and norms. And all of these practices were undergirded by normalizing and disciplinary techniques, strategies and mechanisms creating powerful (but not all-encompassing) dominant ideological discourse which was centered around several key concepts: Party, Soviet homeland, Soviet people and soviet man, or *homo sovieticus*, to name some of them.

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25 See, for example, his "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse", in: Stuart Hall, *Essential Essays, vol. 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*. Edited and with an introduction by David Morley. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019, pp. 257-276.

b). *Another thing is systematic attempts from the Soviet state to create, impose, and implement norms, standards, and values related to the so-called Soviet man.* The research in this field might try to elucidate the mechanisms of power involved in these multiple attempts. This can be done by analyzing different surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms (let's call this approach Foucauldian one) or by highlighting ideological fields within which subjects were formed as subjected subjects (let's call this an Althusserian approach). It goes without saying that these are not only available and productive methodological approaches in studying *homo sovieticus*, but only two and that they can highlight the working of Soviet ideological system only from one perspective which cannot pretend to be a universal one (not to say anything about being 'non-ideological'). This perspective of non-universality of available perspectives is an underlying assumption when discussing Althusser's views on ideology in the present paper.

### **3. LOUIS ALTHUSSER ON IDEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES.**

In his work on ideology<sup>26</sup> Althusser contends that a "theory of ideology in general" is lacking in Marxist theory.<sup>27</sup> He differentiates between *a theory of specific ideologies*, which depends on specific social formations (and, therefore, has strongly historical character) and a theory of *ideology in general*. Concomitant to this differentiation is the assertion that specific ideologies have a history, whereas ideology in general does not have a one.<sup>28</sup> Althusser specifies this bold statement referring to Freud's notion of unconscious. Like unconscious, which is a factual givenness (at least for them who assert its existence) and is eternal, ideology too, in general, is a factual givenness and without history.<sup>29</sup>

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26 On the complex issues of publication history of Althusser's texts on ideology, see foreword by E. Balibar and introduction and editorial note by J. Bidet in: Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, pp. vii-xxxii.

27 Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 173.

28 Ibid., p. 174.

29 Ibid., pp. 175-176. Cf. also p. 194: "[T]he formal structure of all ideology is always the same".

Althusser dismisses “repression model” of ideology, that is, a view according to which ideology, in its essence is nothing but a repression and that this ideological repression suppresses individuals by putting a cop (police force) behind them.<sup>30</sup> Instead he is interested “how the ideology realized in the Ideological State Apparatuses works”,<sup>31</sup> or to say this in another words, how does it happen that people act voluntarily and simultaneously in accordance with dominant ideology “without there being any need to post a policeman behind each and every one of them”<sup>32</sup>? And, to ask one more time with Althusser’s own words, what is “the general mechanism by means of which ideology makes concrete individuals *act by themselves*”<sup>33</sup>?

In order to answer these questions, Althusser formulates two theses. According to the first, “[i]deology represents individuals’ *imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence*.”<sup>34</sup> With this thesis Althusser is rejecting a view, according to which “in ideology people represent (in imaginary form) their *real conditions of existence*”.<sup>35</sup> Note the difference: not that some group of people (whether members of elite or subjugated groups) are *actually* representing their real conditions of existence, but what is represented, is first and foremost, only *imaginary relation to the reality*.<sup>36</sup> Althusser himself understood that the question “why is this representation necessarily imaginary?” was particularly relevant here and that is why he posed it, as well as another one: “What kind of imaginary is involved?”<sup>37</sup> But he did not answer the first question immediately and because the issue whether ideology represents real conditions of existence or imagined relation to these conditions transcends the tasks outlined in the beginning of the given

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30 Ibid., pp. 177-179.

31 Ibid., p. 180.

32 Ibid., p. 177.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 181. Italics mine.

35 Ibid., p. 182. Italics mine.

36 Ibid., p. 183.

37 Ibid.

paper,<sup>38</sup> I will proceed to the second question (more relevant to our topic), the answer of which forms Althusser's second thesis.

"Ideology has a material existence", argues Althusser<sup>39</sup> and with this another bold statement he approaches closely the question formulated above, namely, how ideology 'works' on an individual level. Althusser points to the banal truth that individual's ideas originate from her consciousness and that she acts according to them. When individual is visiting church, goes on a strike, or just attending a business meeting in her office located in the skyscraper in the city center, she "participates in certain regulated practices", "act[s] accordance with her ideas" and "inscribe[s] her own ideas as free subject in the acts of her material practice".<sup>40</sup>

Althusser believes that these acts of an individual are "inserted into practices"<sup>41</sup> which are enveloped by material ideological apparatus. An individual always finds himself performing and inserted in some kind of material practices be it praying, attending party meetings or voting. "[H]is ideas are his material acts inserted into material practices regulated by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which (hardly by accident!) his ideas derive."<sup>42</sup>

So, we have the following scheme:

*Ideology (existing in) – material ideological apparatus (prescribing) – material practices (regulated by a material ritual) which – exist in the material acts of a subject.*<sup>43</sup>

After these preliminary theses Althusser formulates his "central thesis":<sup>44</sup> "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects".<sup>45</sup> Althusser

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38 On this issue see, for example, Emilio de Ípola, *Althusser, the Infinite Farewell*, translated by Gavin Arnall, with a foreword by Étienne Balibar, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018, p. 67 ff.

39 Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 184.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 185. Italics by Althusser.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Conf. ibid.*, p. 187.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

(who uses ‘interpellation’ in the sense of someone’s hailing) specifies this at the first glance vague statement by the following example: when someone in the street is hailed by a police officer, the person who was hailed, ‘recognizes’ that he is addressed and reacts by stopping and turning towards the one who hailed him/her. By this very action, i.e. recognizing the hailing, identifying that he/she is the object of the hailing, individual is transformed into *subject*.<sup>46</sup> Ideology functions within a very subjective dimension: “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects”.<sup>47</sup>

The function of ideological recognition<sup>48</sup> is so central to Althusser that

he makes the following conclusion: “*The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.*”<sup>49</sup> To put it another words, there exists a mutually constitutive relationship between ideology and subject. Moreover, Althusser asserts that “*individuals are always-already subjects*”:<sup>50</sup> even before the birth of the individual she is already a subject of ‘familial ideological configuration’<sup>51</sup>: his/her appearance is eagerly awaited, he/she is already ascribed his/her place in the family. Afterwards he/she becomes a subject of scholastic ideology (individual as a subject



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46 Ibid., pp. 190-191.

47 Ibid., p. 188.

48 Ibid., p. 189.

49 Ibid., p. 191. Italics in original. For the criticism of Althusser’s linguistic model of ideology, see Kyong Deock Kang, “Language and ideology: Althusser’s theory of ideology”, *Language Sciences*, 70 (2018), pp. 68-81.

50 Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 192. Italics in original.

51 Ibid., p. 193.



of educational system), then comes legal ideology (individual as a subject of legal system), political ideology (individual as a voter) and so on.<sup>52</sup>

“Ideologies never stop interpellating subjects as subjects, never stop ‘recruiting’ individuals who are always-already subjects.”<sup>53</sup> In this continuing process of interpellation and recognition different (even contradictory) ideologies are superimposed on the same subject which becomes “(several times) subject,”<sup>54</sup> laden with different, sometimes even incompatible ideologies (the example Althusser gives is that of worker who in the factory and during union meetings is enveloped by leftist ideology but as soon as he is at home, reunited with his family, he is caught in the net of ‘petty-bourgeois ideology’<sup>55</sup>).

But this is not the whole story. “[T]he interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the ‘existence’ of a unique and central other Subject”,<sup>56</sup> from which the master narrative (or reasons why individuals should obey the given ideology’s commands) emanates. This Subject (Althusser capitalizes it intentionally in order to distinguish it from mere subjects acting in accordance with ideology) is present in every ideological apparatus: in religious ideology it is a God, in moral ideology it is a Duty, in legal ideology it takes a form of Justice, and in political ideology it has various incarnations – Fatherland, Revolution and so on.<sup>57</sup> Individuals are hailed by Subject and when they recognize this hailing (think of “Motherland calls!”, for example), they act according to the commands, “without a cop behind them”<sup>58</sup> and therefore become subjected subjects of the Subject.<sup>59</sup>

“This means that all ideology is *centered*, that the Absolute Subject

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52 Ibid., pp. 192-193.

53 Ibid., pp. 193-194.

54 Ibid., p. 194.

55 Ibid., pp. 205-206.

56 Ibid., p. 195.

57 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 198.

58 Ibid., p. 197.

59 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

occupies the unique place of the Centre and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals as subjects such that it subjects the subjects to the Subject, while giving them in the Subject in which each subject can contemplate its own (present and future) image the *guarantee* that this really is about them and really is about Him.”<sup>60</sup>

Althusser does not specify the reasons why individuals are responding and accepting Subject’s commands, thereby recognizing Him and becoming His subjects. Indeed, there can be myriads of such reasons. Instead of this, he focuses on the notion of *miscognition*

which is given in the very fact of *recognition* (of hailing / of Subject who hails the individual / of “truths” which individual discerns within the envelope of the given ideology). Althusser argues, that that is miscognized in the recognition, is “the reproduction of the relations of production and the other relations deriving from them”,<sup>61</sup> i.e. the fact of the exploitation of the oppressed. That is why, perhaps, he says earlier, that

“every ideology represents, in its necessarily imaginary distortion, not the existing relations of production (and the other relations deriving from them), but, above all, individuals’ (imaginary) relation to the relations of production and the relations deriving from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of real relations governing individuals’ existence, but those individuals’ imaginary relation to the real relations in which they live.”<sup>62</sup>



“Motherland calls!” Soviet poster.

Author: I. Toidze, 1941.

© <https://gallerix.ru>

60 Ibid., p. 197. Original italics.

61 Ibid., p. 199.

62 Ibid., p. 183.

This means that Althusser believes, that although individual-Subject relationship is constitutive to every ideology, when they respond to the hailing and recognize the Subject by this very fact they miscognize the reality, “the daily, uninterrupted reproduction of the relations of production in the ‘consciousness’ , that is, the material comportment of the agents of the various functions of capitalist social production.”<sup>63</sup> This means, that subjects cannot grasp the ‘true reality’ in ideology, they remain shut in their *imaginary* relation “to the real relations in which they live” and that after the *recognition* the Subject, they act like mythical king Midas who turned into gold everything he touched.

Before I outline in what regard Althusser’s theses might be productively employed to the issue of *homo sovieticus*, I want to express some critical remarks towards his conception of ideology. He writes: “[E]ach subject [...] is subjected to several ideologies that are relatively independent, albeit unified under the unity of the *State* Ideology”.<sup>64</sup> But it is very doubtful that in our globalized world all the ideologies which exert an influence on the individual, can be subsumed under the magical mantra of the state. Individual might be a subject of green or anarchist ideology about which he learnt primarily from the Internet. In such cases it would be the violation of Ockham’s razor to suppose that some state agency is staying behind the webpage which above-mentioned individual is visiting for his inspiration.

Second, Althusser argues that, “recognition gives us only the ‘consciousness’ of our incessant (eternal) practice of ideological recognition. [...] It by no means gives us the (scientific) knowledge of the mechanism of this recognition”.<sup>65</sup> This implies that beyond recognition (which in its essence is miscognition of the fact of exploitation), there is some ‘true’ knowledge, some “scientific” knowledge opening up vistas of ‘real’ reality, the true reality, which is distorted by the process of recognition/miscognition. This new discourse, according

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63 Ibid., p. 198.

64 Ibid., p. 199. Italics mine.

65 Ibid., p. 190.

to Althusser, “tries to break with ideology” and creates a scientific discourse (without subjected subjects) on ideology.<sup>66</sup> It is not surprising, that for Althusser this new discourse is equivalent to “revolutionary Marxist-Leninist political ideology [...], an ideology which has been heavily ‘reworked’, and thus transformed, by a *science*”.<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere he also speaks of “proletarian ideology (above all political, but also moral) that has been transformed by the persevering educational activity of the Marxist-Leninist science of the capitalist mode of production”.<sup>68</sup>

This account is problematic, because on the one hand, Althusser, paraphrasing St. Paul, says: “it is [...] in ideology, that we ‘live and move and have our being,’”<sup>69</sup> but on another hand he postulates the existence of some “transformed” and “reworked” ideology, and the possibility of emancipating subjected subjects.<sup>70</sup> In this regard it can be asked: what are the criteria according to which “revolutionary Marxist-Leninist political ideology” should be considered as transformed by the ‘science’ and essentially different from other ideologies? It seems that Althusser here makes the same move which recently Sharafutdinova and Leyk have made: positing that everything is ideology other than his alleged ‘scientifically’ reworked political ideology. So, every other ideology, than “revolutionary Marxist-Leninist political ideology” are constituted by Subjects and subjected subjects, and recognition/miscognition lies at the very heart of their constitutive material practices. But only in the “revolutionary Marxist-Leninist political ideology” subjected subjects become free and miscognition, lurking from behind the false recognition, becomes the true Recognition. King Midas is again in action. But what is the guarantee that Marx, Engels or Lenin (or persons in power manipulating with their doctrines) are not functioning as Subjects in the same de-

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66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., p. 198.

68 Ibid., p. 181.

69 Ibid., pp. 188-189. For St. Paul’s words, see Acts 17:28.

70 Cf. Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 198.

gree as, say, Fatherland or Duty? What is the guarantee that ‘science’ Althusser speaks about offers truly ‘emancipated’ discourse, whereas other discourses are under the spell of miscognition? I think that it is difficult to find answers on these questions in Althusser’s statements.

Third, and the last: at the end of ideology chapter Althusser remarks that when “nothing is happening”, i.e. when subjects recognize themselves as (subjected) subjects (of dominant ideology), then “the Ideological *State* Apparatuses have worked to perfection.”<sup>71</sup> But “[w]hen they no longer manage to function, *to reproduce the relations of production* in the ‘consciousness’ of all subjects, ‘events’ happen, as the phrase goes [like recently in Belarus, we can add – G.T.], more or less serious events [...]”.<sup>72</sup> I think that a slight revision is appropriate here: it is not necessary to confine successful working of ideology only with “state Apparatuses” and the “relations of production”. Perhaps it is better to expand this scheme and apply it even to non-state ideologies and substitute “relations of production” with “individuals recognizing themselves as subjected subjects to Subject”. After this revision we can formulate the following thesis: when subjects recognize themselves as (subjected) subjects, then *some* Ideological Apparatuses (not necessarily the Ideological *State* Apparatuses!) have worked to perfection, and when they no longer work, i.e. when they are not able (because of many reasons depending on specific historical and social-political situation and subjective motives) to convince individuals to be subjected subjects of the Subject, then ‘events’ happen: for example, individuals ‘drop out’ from the given ideology and embrace another Subject (disillusioned liberal becomes nationalist, for example), or old ideological apparatuses are substituted with another ones, which transform themselves into dominant discourses.

With these critical remarks in thought, let’s discuss the possibility of applying conceptual framework developed by Althusser to the mechanism of functioning of the Soviet ideological state apparatus. Instead of asserting the existence of some fixed properties of *homo*

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71 Ibid., p. 206. Italics mine.

72 Ibid. Italics mine.

*sovieticus* as a product created by state apparatuses, properties which allegedly determine former soviet man's inevitable failure in the immediate post-socialist/post-soviet period, *we need to focus on 'homo sovieticus' as a concept from the conceptual repertoire of Soviet ideological state apparatus, which put an enormous effort in order to disseminate ideas about homo sovieticus* (soviet man as opposed and invincible to its class enemies, a cog in the party's mechanism, never questioning authority of the Party and its directives etc. and etc.) *in order to transform, normalize, and discipline available "human material"*<sup>73</sup> according to the needs of Party (Party = Subject) and in its own image. We have already noted that due to enormous cultural diversity, historical background and many other factors, these ideas, these patterns of soviet man (which varied from period to period, still, according the needs of the Party) were not accepted equally everywhere and that individuals could employ various counter-strategies at micro-levels of societal life.<sup>74</sup> But many individuals accepted this discourse, i.e. responded to the hailing, thereby becoming subjected subjects of the Subject (= Party) and embraced the above-mentioned qualities of Soviet man; some of them even found it pragmatic to accept basic rules of dominant ideological discourse and not to question openly validity of basic concepts (Party, Soviet homeland, Soviet people, Soviet man etc.) and some of them with great probability just lived on without special reflection on these issues. The very fact that Soviet system existed for almost seven decades illustrates the pervasiveness of dominant ideological discourse (putting aside the issue at what degree this dominant discourse affected individuals' consciousness and how to measure this) and perhaps it is very difficult to deny that no political regime in the world can rest *only* on terror and intim-

73 The term "human material" figures prominently in Н. Бухарин, *Экономика переходного периода. Ч. 1. Общая теория трансформационного процесса*, Москва: Государственное издательство, 1920 [N. Bukharin, *Economics in the Transitional Period. Part One. General Theory of Transformation Process*, Moscow: State Publishing, 1920], chapter 10: 'Extraeconomic' coercion in the transitional period, p. 146.

74 I have here in mind the ideas developed by Michel de Certeau in his *L'invention du quotidien*, 1 (1980).

idation,<sup>75</sup> especially if we speak about such a large political entity, as was USSR. Dominant ideological discourse supported by state ideological apparatuses carried on its work: created and reproduced ideas and material practices (enveloped in the web of disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms) with the ultimate aim to preserve, reproduce and strengthen the existing system. And caught in the gravitational field of this dominant discourse, as we have noted already above, many individuals hailed by the system responded to the call and were becoming subjected subjects of the Subject (some of them with sincere beliefs, some on pragmatic grounds, some unreflectively and so on), some of them carried double lives - playing subjected subjects in the public but in privacy or in close circles rejecting dominant discourse and its values<sup>76</sup> and some of them were choosing a very difficult path – open confrontation against the system.

As I tried to show, conceptual framework developed by Althusser

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75 “A system of authority never works only by force, by sheer violence; instead, [...], it works through ideology, through some meaningful procedures.” (Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Edited by G. H. Taylor. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 154). I am heavily indebted to Ricoeur’s above-mentioned work in that it gave me an impulse to apply Althusser’s conceptual framework to the analysis of the *homo sovieticus* issue. For Ricoeur’s discussion of Althusser’s theory of ideology, see P. Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 103-158.

76 In his fascinating book *The Captive Mind* (1953) Czesław Miłosz interestingly described this double game strategy (see chapter 3: *Ketman*. This is the name that Miłosz borrows from Gobineau – “rather dangerous writer” according to Miłosz – in order to describe coping strategies of individuals under totalitarianism). See Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*. Translated by Jane Zielonko. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, pp. 51-77. It is also possible to draw a parallel with de Certeau’s above-mentioned work (see the note 68) which offers more theoretical and nuanced viewpoint on this subject. In the introduction de Certeau speaks about native Indians, who, despite being subjected to the colonization, “often *made of* the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept” (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by S. Rendall. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988, p. xiii). I think that conceptual framework developed by de Certeau (strategy, tactics, antidiscipline etc.) can offer illuminating insights about everyday life of Soviet citizens.

might give us the possibility to see the things in different light. Instead of simple causation scheme where Soviet system is considered as a cause and the soviet man as its product, Althusser's approach, with some modifications, offers a *dynamic* framework focusing on the *mechanism* of ideological state apparatus without making dubious causal connections. Conceptions of hailing, recognition, subjected subject and Subject give us the possibility to avoid unnecessary reification of *homo sovieticus* and direct our attention to the ideological state apparatus which generated dominant ideological discourse. Analyzing this discourse and its modifications through the periods of time might give us useful insights not only regarding Soviet period, but ones that enable us to better understand peculiarities of the dominant discourses in the post-soviet/post-colonial period.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4. MIKHAIL HELLER<sup>78</sup> ON THE FORMATION OF SOVIET MAN.

Mikhail Heller (1922-1997), a Russian historian and émigré of Jewish descent, tried to understand the mechanism of functioning of the Soviet ideological discourse, to analyze its basic concepts, to describe Soviet state's attempts directed towards creation of a soviet man. Heller studied history at Moscow State University. He was arrested in 1950 and sent to labor camp from which he was released in 1956. Soon Heller left for Poland with his wife and began work at the Polish Press Agency in Warsaw. In 1968 he moved to Paris, where he read lectures at the Sorbonne.<sup>79</sup> In 1983 Soviet Union deprived him of his citizenship. This action was an act of "punishment" because in 1982

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77 For the perspective of analyzing post-Soviet countries in the postcolonial framework, see Tamar Koplatadze, "Theorising Russian postcolonial studies", *Postcolonial Studies*, 22:4 (2019), pp. 469-489 (doi: 10.1080/13688790.2019.1690762).

78 Sometimes also spelled as "Geller".

79 For more biographical details from Heller's life see *Вместо мемуаров: памяти М.Я. Геллера*, составители Л. Геллер и Н. Зеленко. Москва: Издательство МИК, 2000 [Vместo мемуаров: памiати м. i. гелера (*Instead of Memoirs: in memoriam M. Heller*), edited by L. Heller and N. Zelenko, Moscow: MIK, 2000. See also, Michał Heller, Biografia, <https://kulturoparyska.com/pl/people/show/michal-heller/biography> (accessed: 01.11.2021)



he, together with Russian historian Alexander Nekrich published *Utopia in Power. A History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present Day* in two volumes,<sup>80</sup> in which both authors sharply criticized the Soviet state. In 1985 Heller published *A Machine and Cogs. A History of the Formation of Soviet Man*.<sup>81</sup> It is the work which I want to read through the lens provided by Althusser's analysis of ideology.

Heller's work is divided in three main parts: 1. *The Goal*, 2. *The Vectors*; 3. *The Instruments*. In the first part Heller argues that the main task of the Soviet state was to create a new man – Soviet citizen. In the second part he outlines main 'vectors', i.e. main directions (infantilization, nationalization of the time and planification, ideologization and totalitarianization) through which Soviet ideological state apparatus channeled its work. The third part describes 'the instruments' or the specific methods and spheres (fear, labor, education, language etc.) which promote the designated goal.

Heller wants to demonstrate that the idea of a Soviet man, obedient cog of a system, was present at the very beginning of the Soviet state. In the first chapter of the first part – *The Beginning of the Experiment* - Heller writes: "The October *coup d'état* was carried out with the purpose of implementing a project and attaining a Goal. Before seizing the power, the authors of the project already knew that the goal could be achieved only by creation of a New Man. They also knew how to proceed."<sup>82</sup> And then Heller quotes Soviet politician and Marxist theoretician Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938) who asserted that

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80 Михаил Геллер, Александр Некрич, *Утопия у Власти. История Советского Союза с 1917 года до наших дней*, London: Overseas Publications Interchange LTD, 1982.

81 Михаил Геллер, *Машина и Винтики. История формирования советского человека*. London: Overseas Publications Interchange LTD, 1985. The work also was published in French in the same year. See Michel Heller, *La machine et les rouages. La formation de l'homme soviétique*. Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1985. For Polish edition, see Michał Heller, *Maszyna i śrubki: jak hartował się człowiek sowiecki*. Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1988. For English translation, see Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel. The Formation of Soviet Man*. Translated by David Floyd. London: Collins Harvill, 1988. Citations below are from this edition.

82 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 25. Translation altered.

in order to produce “*the communist man* out of the human material of the capitalist era” it is necessary to employ “proletarian coercion in all its forms, beginning with the firing squad”.<sup>83</sup>

Heller also quotes propaganda booklet titled *Soviet People* in which it is asserted that “the Soviet Union – ‘the first realm of freedom on earth for the working man’ - had become the ‘motherland of a new and higher type of Homo sapiens: Homo soveticus’.”<sup>84</sup> Although he immediately remarks that this belief in breeding a new ‘human species’ was coexistent with some doubts even in ruling party: sometimes there were expressed doubts whether this ‘New Soviet Man’ adequately satisfied requirements outlined by the Party.<sup>85</sup> “Nevertheless, all are agreed on what is most important; that the creation of a new man is a process which began in the first days of the Revolution. Opinions differ only about how close they are to the goal.”<sup>86</sup> During the existence of Soviet Union, different models of “Soviet man” were designed: in the 1920s revolutionary type was predominant, who was seen as a destroyer of old, “rotten” capitalist world (so called “iron commissars” which were dramatized in many movies and fiction), but after the end of the period of military communism when halo of a ruthless revolutionary soldier somehow faded, ideal of a soviet man was formulated in different words: time came for “Industrial Man”, “Scientifically Organized Man”, “Advanced Communist Man” and so

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83 Ibid. Italics mine. I was not able to find this quotation in: N. Bukharin, *Programma RKP*, 1917, as it is indicated in notes (p. 304). Instead I found this quote in: N. Bukharin, *Economics in the Transitional Period. Part One. General Theory of Transformation Process*, Moscow: State Publishing, 1920, p. 146 (in Russian).

84 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 27. Translation slightly altered: in Russian original there is ‘homo soveticus’ instead of ‘homo sovieticus’. Again, I was unable to find source of the quotation, because on the webpage of the catalogue of Russian National Library I could not find an entry for a booklet *Soviet People* published in 1974 by Gospolitizdat (‘Gospolitizdat’ is a Russian abbreviation for ‘State Political Publishing’). Instead I have found an entry for a booklet titled *Soviet People: Creators of Communism* by N. Zaglada, I. Leonov, and V. Karpinski, Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1962 (in Russian). See [https://primo.nl.ru/permalink/f/df0lai/07NLR\\_LMS008578885](https://primo.nl.ru/permalink/f/df0lai/07NLR_LMS008578885) (accessed: 01.11.2021).

85 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 27.

86 Ibid. pp. 27-28. Translation altered.

on.<sup>87</sup> “Then Stalin proclaimed the “cog” to be the ultimate ideal: Soviet man should consider himself a mere “cog” in the gigantic wheel of the Soviet state.”<sup>88</sup>

At a first glance one can have an impression that ‘vectors’ were changing, because the models of a Soviet man in the 1920s, in 1940s and in 1970s were different. But, according to a Heller, this is not true: all the changes were just variations and not real changes, the main direction was unchanged, the goal remained the same - formation of the individual who would feel herself as a “small cell” of the state organism.<sup>89</sup>

Drawing on Yevgeny Zamyatin’s dystopian novel *We* (1921) Heller expands the analogy of the cog. Zamyatin spoke about “gram” and “ton” put on the plates of a scale, meaning individual and the state. Individual (“gram”) is nothing, state (“ton”) is everything. Hence, if one wants to achieve greatness, it is better to him not to think about himself as a gram, but as a “millionth part of a ton”, as inseparably belonging to this whole together with other grams.<sup>90</sup> From this analogy Heller draws an interesting conclusion, which is close to Althusser’s line of thought:

“In order to attain the goal, it is essential not only that the leaders should want to melt the “grams” into the “ton”, but also that the led - the grams themselves - should *wish* to be merged into the “ton”, welded together into a collective.”<sup>91</sup>

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87 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28.

88 *Ibid.*

89 *Ibid.*, p. 53. In her above-mentioned article Soboleva offers the outline of the history of ethical concept of Soviet Man. She distinguishes three periods in this history: during the first period (1900s-1930s) there were theoretical debates on the nature of a New Man which were launched by A. Bogdanov. During the second period (1930s-1950s) the concept of a New Man was employed mainly for propagandic aims. Finally, during the third stage (from the 1960s to the collapse of USSR) Soviet ethics as a theoretical discipline about the Soviet Man emerged. See M. Soboleva, “The Concept of the *New Soviet Man* and Its Short History”, p. 67 ff.

90 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 28.

91 *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.



“Hail to Soviet People – Creator-People!” Soviet poster. Author: N. Vatolina, 1951.  
 © <http://goscatalog.ru>

I think that this *subjective* “wish”, desire to become the part of the collective is very close to the process by which individuals *recognize* the *hailing* and are becoming *subjected subjects of Subject*. Party representing the state functions as a Subject which hails: “hey, you, revolutionary, builder of the tomorrow!”, “hey, you, industrial man!”, or in general “hey, you, soviet man!”. Backed by discourses under its control, ideological apparatus hails and if sufficient number of citizens recognizes its hail, then the system goes on.



“Have you subscribed as volunteer?” Soviet poster. Author: D. Moor, 1920  
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It cannot be said straightforwardly that Heller is reifying the concept of soviet man. Although the text seems to suggest that ‘soviet man’ has some peculiar features, nevertheless, it is also made clear that these features are not wholly the dowry of Soviet state. In one passage Heller mentions a French movie critic (personality is not disclosed by Heller) who in 1982 at Venice Film Festival, after watching a Soviet movie, remarked that its characters and director seemed to him as visitors from another planet. Heller’s comment is following:

“But if he had looked around more carefully, in his own country - in France or in Italy, or in any other country of the non-Soviet world - he would have discovered in the people many qualities of Soviet man, or readiness to acquire them. It is easy to observe that wherever a Soviet-style regime is set up, it immediately undertakes to create the new man. No sooner had the North Vietnamese army entered Saigon in 1975 than there began the ‘formation of the new man, a new type of people and a new mentality’.”<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, *for Heller soviet man is a specific case of a “new man” – an ideological project of totalitarian state who attempts to transform the “human material” according to its needs.* The characteristics of Soviet man are not peculiar only to him: in different proportions they exist in every human being. But “[i]n a Soviet-style regime, as a result of the process of ‘social conditioning’, these qualities begin to develop, grow and become dominant.”<sup>93</sup> *Every totalitarian state’s ideological apparatus has the same goal: “[t]he determination ‘to transform human nature by force’, is apparent [...] in a growing number of countries, which now make up nearly a third of mankind. From Moscow to Saigon, from Lourenço Marques<sup>94</sup> to Tirana, from Prague to Phnom Penh, from Warsaw to Peking, the experiment is in full swing.”<sup>95</sup> Totalitarian state ideological apparatus hails and demands recognition,*

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92 Ibid., p. 29. Translation altered.

93 Ibid., p. 30.

94 Now Maputo, the capital of Mozambique.

95 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, pp. 29-30. For the global phenomenon of “New Man”, see Yinghong Cheng, *Creating the “New Man”: From the Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009.



“I am no more yours, now I belong to Senya. He took me to hear Lenin’s speeches”.

Soviet poster. Author: V. Khvostenko, 1925.

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it transforms individuals into subjected subjects and employs vast resources under its control in this process. The state becomes ‘a school of social taming’.<sup>96</sup>

According to Heller, systematic attempts of Soviet state’s ideological apparatus to breed a ‘new man’ have their historical roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. In 1860s radical minded students Peter Zaichnevsky, Petr Tkachev, and Sergei Nechayev published proclamations and articles where they demanded wholesale destruction of “imperial party”, emphasized the necessity of “the leaders of the people”, “revolutionary minority”, “people of the future”.<sup>97</sup> This sketch of the person of the future in Heller’s view is a prototype of the ideal of ‘new soviet man’ which should owe its allegiance only to the Party. To say it in Althusser’s words, for Russian revolutionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Subject was the Goal – a revolution, destruction of old regime and

96 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 30. Heller quotes here Viktor Chernov (1873-1952), leader of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party.

97 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, pp. 32-35. See also Michael Confino (ed.), *Daughter of a Revolutionary: Natalie Herzen and the Bakunin-Nechayev Circle*. Translated by Hilary Steinberg and Lydia Bott. LaSalle, Ill.: Library Press, 1973.



instantiation of a new world populated with ‘new people’, “people of the future”. This sublime Goal, according to them, required a new set of morality which rejected traditional moral values with their Kantian categorical imperative.

Although Russian revolutionaries of the 1860s aimed at the liberation of ‘people’, their main focus was not on the ‘people’ proper, but on the higher type of human – a revolutionary. In his *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* (1869) Nechayev described this new type of man as one who is fully devoted to the revolution, rejects public morality and is ready to sacrifice himself as well others to achieve the Goal. This type of ‘new man’ was popularized by Russian novelist and literary critic Nikolay Chernyshevsky in his novel *What Is to Be Done?* (1863). From the other perspective Nechayev’s *Catechism* worked as a stimulus for Dostoevsky who in his *Demons* (1873) offered us a gloomy perspective about this ‘new man’.

Despite Dostoevsky’s sinister diagnosis, the version of ‘new man’ idealized by Chernyshevsky and propagated by Russian revolutionaries of the 1860s had a strong influence on Russian intellectual milieu. Heller notes that Lenin was strongly influenced by Chernyshevsky, Tkachev, and Nechayev. The influence of the ideas of Russian revolutionaries of the 1860s on Bolshevik ideology was explicitly acknowledged by Russian Marxist historian Mikhail Pokrovsky.<sup>98</sup>

Although Heller does not states this explicitly, I think that the following line of thought is implied as the assumption in the chapter which is titled *Homo sovieticus sum* and which follows the chapter dedicated to the influence of the Russian revolutionaries of the 1860s on Bolshevik ideology: by the time when Bolsheviks seized the power in Russia, the ideal of the Russian revolutionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was already fulfilled. The type of professional revolutionary

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98 See М. Покровский, «Корни большевизма в русской почве», в: *25 Лет РКП (большевиком)*, Тверь: Издательство «Октябрь», 1923, стр. 16-22 [М. Pokrovsky, “Roots of Bolshevism in Russian soil”, in: *25 years of Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party*, Tver: Publishing House “October”, 1923, pp. 16-22]. It should be noted again that the title of Pokrovsky’s paper is incorrectly quoted in Heller’s book (instead of *Roots of Bolshevism in Russian soil* there is *Roots of Bolshevism in Russian history*, see p. 304).

with the single goal – to bring the revolution – had been firmly established. But after the conquest of power, these revolutionaries had to design a program in order to govern the vast state. First step had been achieved – revolution destroyed the old regime. Now remained the second step: creation and implementation of positive ideology, an ideology of identification with the Goal. The idea of a ‘new man’, originally limited with “revolutionary minority” quickly unfolded into the project of ‘reworking of human material’ according to the new needs of the Party.<sup>99</sup> And this *attempt* of Soviet ideological state apparatus to create a ‘new man’ is, according to Heller, the juggernaut of Soviet system.

“[...] Soviet history is, in the final analysis, the history of the formation of Soviet man, of the creation of a special set of conditions in which man no longer behaves as the obsolescent *Homo sapiens* did, and in some parts of the world still does, but begins to “accumulate socialist emotions”, to think and feel differently, in a new way.”<sup>100</sup>

This statement, coupled with the thesis developed in the next paragraph and according to which, “[i]n the decades since the Revolution, the social environment has changed and in the new conditions the inhabitants of the land of “mature socialism” have developed *special attributes*”,<sup>101</sup> at the first glance seem to suggest that Heller is advocating only a *static* model of homo sovieticus: brainwashed, dependent on the state and lacking awareness of the wide world. But this is not the case because in the same chapter Heller remarks that qualities of Homo sovieticus can be found “to a greater or lesser degree - in every inhabitant of the world of “mature socialism” or those

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99 Cf. M. Soboleva, “The Concept of the *New Soviet Man* and Its Short History”, p. 72. Nevertheless, the remark that “[...] socialism was achieved in Russia through the long, hard, and tedious work of the economic and social reconstruction of the country, and through the political education of the population” gives an impression that Bolsheviks were relying on thoroughly democratic and peaceful methods. After a few pages though, their violent tactics is mentioned.

100 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 48. Translation altered.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 49. Italics mine.



who have been brought up in it".<sup>102</sup> He also notes that the functioning of Soviet state ideological apparatus is not perfect. The arrival of new wave of émigrés in West in the 1970s and "[t]heir desire to leave their native land was sufficient proof of the *serious weaknesses* of their Soviet education."<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, due to the huge pressure from the totalitarian ideological state apparatus the contrast between former Soviet citizens and western citizens was quite strong. 'Cultural shock' experienced by émigrés in the West, in Heller's view, "immediately highlighted the differences in their attitude to the world and the peculiarities of the Soviet and non-Soviet mentalities."<sup>104</sup> This *miscognition* (I am using here Althusser's term in a different context and meaning) of different reality, this parallelism of distinctive planes, which despite this parallelism intersect each other due to some anomalies, incites Heller to inquire into the mechanism of the functioning of Soviet state ideological apparatuses.<sup>105</sup> He describes this mechanism in the following way:

"All human relations which make up the fabric of society - the family, religion, historical memory, language - become targets. Society is systematically and methodically atomized and the individual is deprived of his chosen relationships, which are supplanted by others, chosen for him and approved by the state. Man remains alone, face to face with state Leviathan."<sup>106</sup>

Tremendous power of this "state Leviathan" was channeled into two directions, "two vectors", as Heller put it: reality and consciousness. Brute force of "state Leviathan" coupled with ideological pro-

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102 Ibid., p. 48.

103 Ibid., p. 49. Italics mine.

104 Ibid., p. 49.

105 In this regard Heller is followed by Soboleva who pays particular attention to the *ideological* dimension when analyzing theoretical concept of New Soviet Man. See M. Soboleva, "The Concept of the *New Soviet Man* and Its Short History", p. 75 ff. Nevertheless, I cannot agree with her, that "[...] this idea [of the New Soviet Man] had to work for the organization and mobilization of the Russian people". Definitely, Russians were not the only people in the Soviet Union.

106 . Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 54.

paganda aimed the same goal: to transform reality and consciousness according to the vision of the founders of Soviet state. One of the major results of this process, according to Heller, was the *infantilization* of Soviet citizens.

The term ‘infantilization’ implies that there exist infants and of course, parents. The role of the parents, naturally, is assumed by a ruling party. Heller quotes Lenin’s statement from 1918: “We, the Bolshevik party, have *convinced* Russia. We have won Russia from the rich for the poor, from the exploiters for the working people. Now we must *rule* Russia.”<sup>107</sup> So party becomes ‘a protective and omniscient father’ (Subject à la Althusser) who can bring Russia to the paradise of Communism.



“Young followers of Lenin: children of Lenin”. Soviet poster.

Author: V. Izenberg, 1924.

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Childhood period can be good or bad. According to Heller, the history of the USSR is a series of painful attacks on the being and consciousness during which Soviet citizens experienced different traumatic shocks. The very first shock was a *Revolution*. Then came the shock of a *Terror* and after it – *concentration camps*, which according to the words of Felix Dzerzhinsky – a father of the Soviet Cheka (state police) were “schools of labour”.<sup>108</sup>

In the context of his infantilization thesis, Heller pays particular attention to the *decree of the Soviet state against illiteracy*. By this

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107 Ibid., p. 58. See also В. И. Ленин, *Полное собрание сочинений*, издание пятое, т. 36, Москва: Издательство Политической Литературы, 1969 [V. Lenin, *Complete Works*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, vol. 36, Moscow: Political Literature Publishing, 1969], p. 172.

108 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 60.



“Illiterate person is blind: he will everywhere encounter misfortune and misery.”

Soviet poster. Author: A. Radakov, 1920.

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*forcibly*. It postulated the conviction that soviet citizens were not able to do themselves anything, even for their own interest, if they were not forced to do so by the state. Therefore, everyone should have been grateful to the government and ruling party.<sup>109</sup>

Policy against illiteracy was a part of a greater – educational – policy of the Soviet state. “Along with the system of primary, secondary, and higher education, a new *system of adult education* was gradually built up.”<sup>110</sup> Heller notes the “gigantic scale” of political lectures (26 million lectures given in 1979 alone) and ideological propagandists (more than 3 million).<sup>111</sup> These ‘pedagogical’ methods were aimed at ‘continuing education’ of Soviet citizens.

But according to Heller, [“t]he most important stage in the shaping

decree of 26.12.1919 which was signed personally by Lenin, all the citizens aged from 8 to 50 were obliged to learn reading and writing. Those who would resist were declared by the decree as punishable under the penal code.

Heller believes that this campaign against illiteracy was very important in the continuing process of formation of a soviet citizen. According to him, it expressed and inculcated the view that even in the sphere of education (not to say anything about different spheres of culture), even in this very sphere, the best way to achieve the goal is to achieve it

109 Ibid., p. 62.

110 Ibid., p. 62. Italics mine.

111 Ibid.

of the “new man” was the shock of *collectivization*.<sup>112</sup> Significant part of the population was forcibly rooted out from the old style of life and deprived of independency. Before the collectivization peasants in the villages were more independent, because medium class families represented strong economic cells in the society. After the collectivization these cells were destroyed and humans became infantilized, completely dependent on the State and its will. The members of Kolkhozs (collective farms) became an inert mass, because they did not have passports. They received passports only after 1970s.<sup>113</sup>



“Comrade, join us in collective farm!”  
Soviet poster.

Author: V. Korableva, 1930.

© <https://gallerix.ru>

After the collectivization came another great shock: the *repressions* of the 1930s which significantly destroyed the web of social relations and implanted the emotion of fear and distrust in the Soviet society. Ensuing result was, in the main, completion of the process of infantilization. Confirmation to this is the fact, as Heller believes, that “Soviet man in the 1980s has begun to feel a yearning for the Stalin era as a symbol of his childhood and youth. It is this feeling which, with characteristic directness, Aleksandr Zinoviev expressed when he

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112 Ibid., p. 63. Italics mine.

113 Ibid., pp. 63-64. “Full pasportization began only January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976 and ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1981”. 70-летие советского паспорта [70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Soviet Passport], Демоскоп Weekly. Электронная версия бюллетеня *Население и общество* [Demoskop Weekly. E-version of the bulletin *Population and Society*], <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2002/093/axiv01.php#> [accessed: 01.11.2021]

entitled his book on Stalinism *The Flight of Our Youth*.<sup>114</sup> To summarize Heller's overall point of view in Althusser's terms, it can be said that Soviet state ideological apparatuses embedded their demands in familial, scholastic, moral, legal, and political ideologies.

One might be tempted to make parallels between Heller's analysis of the functioning of Soviet ideological machine and Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary mechanisms and disciplinary society.<sup>115</sup> Heller's descriptions of methods by which the Soviet state strived to produce docile bodies and minds (infantilization, nationalization of time and planification, ideologization etc.) might be influenced by Foucault's ideas with which Heller was very likely acquainted during his émigré life in Paris.<sup>116</sup>

It has been noted above, that according to Althusser in every ideology "the Absolute Subject" occupies the central place which then interpellates individuals, hailing and subjecting them, but also guaranteeing that all this relationship is built between real and existential bond between subjects and Subject.<sup>117</sup> If applied to the Soviet system, it can be said that Subject here was the Party and that Supreme Subject (let's extend a little Althusser's conceptual framework) was the Leader. With this process – by creating its own Subject and Supreme Subject, in short, its own authority - Soviet state ideological apparatus tried to displace religious ideology and its Subject and Supreme Subject (church and God).

When describing the process of creation of Soviet Supreme Subject, Heller notes that Lenin's deification began even in his life: Lenin was presented as the apostle of world communism, his work *What Is*

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114 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 65. See also Александр Зиновьев, «Нашей юности полет. Литературно-социологический очерк сталинизма», Лозанна: L'Age d'Homme, 1983 [Alexander Zinoviev, *The Flight of Our Youth: A Literary-Sociological Analysis of Stalinism*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1983].

115 See Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

116 his can be a subject of separate study.

117 Cf. Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 197.

*to Be Done?*<sup>118</sup> (1902) was declared as a new gospel; Lenin's life was portrayed as an ascetic (like Jesus), and he was promulgated to be the chosen one.<sup>119</sup> In these instances – to use Althusserian terminology again – we can discern the first material practices of the Soviet state ideological apparatus: creation of the Lenin myth, reproduction and distribution of this myth (brochures, books, movies, posters etc. about the life of Lenin) and thereby creating dominant discourse (in every village library Soviet citizen had the possibility to behold personally the image of the Supreme Subject) which would have been reproduced and reproduced again during the existence of the Soviet Union. These practices were augmented by creation of ideological scientific discourse – Leninism – which was declared as “the highest stage of Marxism” and “only correct teaching”<sup>120</sup> guaranteeing to the subjects that by using the concepts and methods of this new science, they can grasp the very essence of reality.

After Lenin's death his mausoleum became a vivid image of the material practices of the state ideology: hundreds of thousands of individuals visiting Soviet Mecca, responding to the hailing of the Supreme Subject, physically dead but yet undead (recall famous lines from Mayakovsky, also quoted by Heller: “Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live...”<sup>121</sup>), whose words and maxims were put into the action by the Subject (Party), leading the Soviet citizens towards the Goal.<sup>122</sup>

118 It should be noted that Lenin's work bears the same title as Chernyshevsky's novel who wrote it in 1863.

119 . Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, pp. 92-93.

120 Ibid., p. 95.

121 pp. 93-94. See also Vladimir Mayakovsky, “Komsomol Song”, translated by Dorian Rottenberg, in: Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Selected Works in Three Volumes, vol. 1: Selected Verse*, Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1985, pp. 100-103. It might be that Mayakovsky was himself interpellated by the Supreme Subject and answered to his hailing by these lines as he answered to the hailing of the Party by his numerous verses, which were dramatically recited by him in his material practices of recognition (Or perhaps miscognition?). Mayakovsky was not the only artist who responded to the hailing and reproduced the dominant ideological discourse with his own material practices thereby reinforcing it. But he was definitely one of the few who put an abrupt end to these practices by his own decision.

122 It is here that we encounter *integrative* function of ideology emphasized by



“Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live!”

Soviet poster. Author: V. Ivanov, 1969.

© <https://www.sovposters.ru>

As Althusser puts it: “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects”.<sup>123</sup> After the death of Lenin and ensuing fierce struggle for the power within the Party, Stalin emerged as a new Supreme Subject displacing the ‘old comrade’ and moving him into the background. As Heller observes astutely, “[t]he deification of Lenin was completed after his death. The deification of Stalin took place in his lifetime.”<sup>124</sup> Stalin became a superstar, a living embodiment of the Supreme Subject, enhancing his earthly deification by adding his name

to the names of legendary Founders: Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin.

Heller observes also another phenomenon, peculiar to the Soviet system: “[t]he peculiarity of the Stalin model did not consist so much in the existence of the Leader possessing unlimited power [...] Each of the Party secretaries (in a republic, a region or a district) was a mini-Stalin in the area under his control. Stalin delegated a small part of his authority to each of them and required complete subordination

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Ricoeur. Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 261: “In Moscow a whole political system is based on a tomb, Lenin’s tomb, perhaps one of the only cases in history after the Egyptians where a tomb is the source of a political system. This permanent memory of the group’s founders and founding events, then, is an ideological structure that can function positively as an integrative structure.” On the political dimension of the act of foundation event, see Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future. Six Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: The Viking Press, 1961, p. 120 ff.

123 See note 41.

124 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 96.





**“Take up the banner of Marx-Engels-Lenin and Stalin!”**

**Soviet poster. Author: G. Klutsis, 1936.**

<https://gallerix.ru>

in return.”<sup>125</sup> In the totalitarian system the Supreme Subject shares his authority and like demiurge from Plato’s *Timaeus*, creates from the available “human material” secondary deities, mini-Subjects whom he endows with the spark from his divine fire (Heller mentions several mini-Subjects: “Konstantin Stanislavsky in the theatre, [...] Maksim Gorky in literature, [...] Trofim Lysenko in biology”<sup>126</sup>). Absolute power creates mini-power.<sup>127</sup> Even after the short-term critique of “personality cult” the new political elite of Soviet Union realized, that they needed the Supreme Subject which was personal hypostasis of impersonal Subject (the Party): “Stalin’s successors quickly realized

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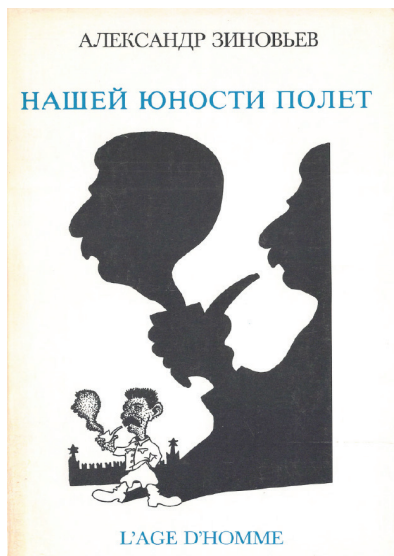
125 Ibid., p. 95.

126 Ibid., p. 96. These mini-Subjects were closely connected to the Supreme Subject. Expressing explicit dissent against their authority “was regarded as a crime against the state and an encroachment on Stalin’s authority”. Ibid, p. 96.

127 One more not so ‘scientific’ and ‘verifiable’ remark: one should not consider creation of mini-Subjects only as a nice metaphor. Fetishization of authority in the Soviet Union had interesting consequences: for example, children in the school were regarding their teachers as so superhuman entities that it seems that significant part of them never thought that their honorable tutors were ever visiting toilets. It seems that this was a widespread belief because I have heard it frequently in Georgia from the generation who visited schools in the 1950s and 1960s. Afterwards, so it seems, Soviet children became more realistic.



that to destroy the authority of the Leader-God would undermine their own “authority” and that of the Party,”<sup>128</sup> “Stalin’s ‘authority’ and the extent of his power served as a point of reference for succeeding general secretaries.”<sup>129</sup> Subsequent general secretaries of the Soviet Union were not able to achieve the status of the Supreme Subject, but this did not hinder them to legitimize their power by the reference to the first Founder and the Supreme Subject (Lenin) and the Party (Subject) – driving forces of the state. “The authority of the Leader irradiates a magical force upon which the Party, the source of the Leader’s strength, rests. Interacting one with the other, they cannot manage without each other.”<sup>130</sup> According to Heller, fascination with this powerful authority was so strong that ‘cult of Stalin’ permeated Soviet literature even in 1970s: Stalin was portrayed as a



mythical hero.<sup>131</sup> Even Aleksandr Zinoviev – dissident writer who emigrated from the Soviet Union and wrote *Homo Sovieticus*<sup>132</sup> - in his work *The Flight of Our Youth* defended Stalin and Stalinism.<sup>133</sup> The appeal of Supreme Subject was almost irresistible.

Heller pays particular attention to the ‘cogs’ of Soviet state’s ideological apparatuses – party activists and propagandists –

Cover of the first edition of A. Zinoviev’s *The Flight of Our Youth* (1983)  
© <https://vtoraya-literatura.com>

128 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 96.

129 Ibid., p. 99.

130 Ibid., p. 99.

131 Ibid., p. 97.

132 See note 17.

133 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, pp. 98-99. See also note 108.

numbers of which he estimates in millions. They are supported by several hundred Marxist-Leninist universities, about 3 000 schools for party activists and vast ideological literature.<sup>134</sup>

“The ideological pressure ought [...] to form the New Man and determine the way he will behave, as a blacksmith’s hammer shapes a piece of metal. It should create a system of thought and action according to patterns approved by the ideology. There is no longer any need to believe, if the *possibility of independent thought has been excluded and the ability to take a critical view of the world has been erased from the mind.*”<sup>135</sup>

Here Heller seems to swing to the rigid model of ideological influence, according to which subjects are simply duped by the ideological machine. Although, his use of “ought” and “should” in this passage suggests that what is emphasized here is more *an intent, a goal* of ideological apparatuses than actual result of their influence on individuals. Nevertheless, I think that Heller constantly oscillates between these two views. As it was noted above, he writes:

“In the decades since the Revolution, the social environment has changed and in the new conditions the inhabitants of the land of “mature socialism” have developed special attributes”.<sup>136</sup>

We also read the following lines: “To Soviet people, on the other hand, the abundance of consumer goods, the wide range of choice, the freedom of movement, the relationship between the state and its citizens, the particular forms of freedom and un-freedom in the non-Soviet world, are frighteningly alien.”<sup>137</sup>

Such lines suggest a rigid view of *homo sovieticus*, a type of personality which was referred in the works of Levada and Sztompka.

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134 Ibid., pp. 101-102.

135 Ibid., p. 102. Italics mine. The last point, alleged impossibility of independent and critical thought under the ideological pressure of Soviet system was particularly emphasized by Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili (1930-1990). Mamardashvili’s engagement with Soviet ideological system deserves special attention and needs to be examined in a more detailed way.

136 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 49

137 Ibid., p. 50.

This oscillation of Heller between two poles – his insistence, on the one hand, that Soviet citizen is a victim of ideological system, which shaped it in its own way, and on the other hand, his remarks that individuals with such traits can be seen in every authoritative system, that Soviet ideological system had its own defects – suggests that Heller does not differentiate clearly between the theoretical concept of “New Soviet Man” and empirical phenomenon of “homo sovieticus” and that he makes same confusion, which is referred by Soboleva.<sup>138</sup>

But, as it was noted above, in Heller’s work human agency is also stressed. In order for ideology to work, individuals should respond to hailing and accept the Supreme Subject/Subject. They have to have a subjective wish, an inclination, some rational calculation, cost-benefit scheme etc. to merge with the greater whole (“People go to the shaman because he claims to have direct contact with the deity”<sup>139</sup>). Only then the system goes on. But precisely in that period when the Soviet ideological state apparatuses seemingly were at their height, with their vast web of institutions and hundreds of thousands of agitators, when ideological pressure was at its apex, the system collapsed, old Supreme Subject (Lenin) and Subject (the Party) were dethroned and new Subjects, new discursive formations, new ideological apparatuses emerged out of the ruins of the Soviet Union. This is something which Heller’s narrative cannot account for.<sup>140</sup> Specifically, sudden

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138 See above note 18.

139 M. Heller, *Cogs in the Soviet Wheel*, p. 101.

140 This moment remains unsatisfactorily explained also in Soboleva’s article on New Soviet Man/Homo sovieticus. Commenting on the final decade of the existence of USSR, she notes: “At that time, the official morality of an ideal Soviet Man began to compete with the non-official moral of the real Soviet man. The real self-understanding of the population of the Soviet Union began to challenge state Soviet ideology. The term “Soviet” gained a more and more pejorative and ironic meaning *due to the increasing awareness* of the discrepancy between the means and ends of the state and the contradictions between the existing conditions of life and official ideology.” See M. Soboleva, “The Concept of the *New Soviet Man* and Its Short History”, p. 84 (italics mine). “Increasing awareness” is here taken for granted but the reasons why this awareness increased, are not suggested.

eruption of nationalistic movements at the end of 1980s and concomitant violent clashes between different ethnicities and quick disintegration of the Soviet system in general prove that Soviet ideological apparatuses, despite their visible power, experienced significant problems by that time. Subjects generated by them in various ideological dimensions (legal, political, moral, educational etc.) were not recognized by individuals as *their* Subjects. To put it in another words, old deities experienced a serious crisis of legitimation. Under the surface of glorious ‘socialist reality’ anti-Soviet discourses ripened and waited for their violent outburst...

## 5. CONCLUSION

I will summarize the conclusion by stating the following points:

- If someone claims that other’s position is “ideological”, i.e. biased and “non-scientific”, this raises serious questions about the criteria employed by an author of such a claim. What if we all are “ideological”, inevitably entangled in a political-polemical dimension?
- The notion of *homo sovieticus* does not mean *only* some human type bred by the Soviet system through experiments. Such understanding of *homo sovieticus* seems to be problematic. It is better to *focus on ‘homo sovieticus’ as a notion from the conceptual repertoire of Soviet ideological state apparatus, which put an enormous effort in its attempts to disseminate ideas about homo sovieticus* (soviet man as opposed and invincible to its class enemies, a cog in the party’s mechanism, never questioning authority of the Party and its directives etc. and etc.) *in order to transform, normalize, and discipline available “human material” according to the needs of Party*. These attempts are documented in ideological discourses created by Soviet state apparatuses.
- Althusser’s conception of ideology can give us some illuminating insights on the functioning of a Soviet ideological state

apparatuses. Although it should be noted, that the author of the present article does not share Althusser's belief in the 'emancipatory nature of Marxist-Leninist science' which allegedly is the only discourse capable to transform ideology into 'true' science. In addition to this, it should be remembered, that Althusser's (slightly revised) conceptual framework is understood here primarily as offering to us, so to say, 'landmark concepts' serving as reference points. There can be numerous other concepts expanding (even rejecting) the given ones.

- In his analysis of the Soviet system Heller's tries to map Soviet ideological state apparatuses' attempts to transform Soviet citizens into obedient subjects. His analysis oscillates between 'rigid' and 'flexible' approaches and he seems not to differentiate between the theoretical concept of "New Soviet Man" and empirical phenomenon of "homo sovieticus" (see above reference to Soboleva). There might be some influence of Althusser's and Foucault's ideas on Heller's thought.
- Heller's analysis does not account for sudden destruction of allegedly powerful Soviet ideological apparatuses. More detailed, in-depth analysis of the emergence of alternative, anti-Soviet discourses is needed in order to highlight the process of the twilight of the Soviet idols.

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