ABSTRACT

Title of Document: COMMUNITY THROUGH COMEDY: CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE RUSSIAN SOVIET *ANEKDOT*.

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The way by which nationality and citizenship are codified in law or used by political entrepreneurs to mobilize populations is different from how individuals make sense of themselves. Although sharing a particular attribute or physical connection offers some sort of relational identity, it is the product of belonging *both* to a category and network of individuals in addition to the *feeling* of belonging which produces a bounded groupness. The Russian Soviet *anekdot*—a politically subversive joke—provides an intimate view into the perspective of the Russian people living under the Soviet regime. The *anekdot* serves as a discourse of "cultural consciousness," connecting otherwise atomized people to a homeland, collective culture and memory. Beyond its transgressive properties, politically subversive texts like the *anekdot* articulate the details of an intimate set of knowledges that insiders "are taught not to know" (Taussig 1999). In this dissertation I look at how the characters and narratives construct (1) the boundaries of "we"—who belongs and who does not by exploring how different groups are "marked" in the *anekdoty*, (2) how the collectivity negotiates their understanding of leaders, institutions and State propaganda as a means of rejecting or reifying aspects of Soviet power, and (3) what sort of collective memory and identity is conveyed through the expressions of the public secret, nostalgia and/or regret. The *anekdot* reveals power dynamics at multiple levels: within the family, between ethnic groups and geographical regions, and between people and state. Together these multiple identities and relationships express a form of "cultural consciousness" among Russians uniting this group in a shared identity and network amid the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

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COMMUNITY THROUGH COMEDY:
CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE RUSSIAN SOVIET *ANEKDOT*.

By

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother for her unconditional love and confidence in me and to AJ, for his inexhaustible supply of love, jokes, and chocolate.

Acknowledgements

This project was made possible by the many thoughtful and insightful people in my life. At its inception, it was my advisor, Meyer Kestnbaum, who encouraged me to pursue this research; to explore questions pertaining to nationalism and collective memory, and to travel to Russia for my fieldwork in order to understand this phenomenon firsthand. I am thankful for his advice and guidance along the way. During my fieldwork in Russia, I was very fortunate to be a fellow at the European University in St. Petersburg, where I benefited from conversations about my project and *anekdoty* more generally with such scholars as Oleg Kharkhordin and Sergei Erofeev. There were many others at the institution whose conversations helped frame my analysis and support the preliminary hypotheses of the project.

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My mother and father first introduced me to *anekdoty,* and many of the puzzles in this project. Through their courage and perseverance—emigrating from Soviet Russia to the Boston Blizzard of '78—they serve as an inspiration in everything that I do. The intellectual adventure was also made possible by my extended family in Russia—Luba, Vita, Alec, Olga and mini-Michelle—who welcomed me into their homes for soups, treats, and gelatinous meat. Their

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Chapter 1 Humor, Politics, and Identities: the *Anekdot*

Brezhnev dies. At the gates of hell, Stalin greets him.

"How are you doing, comrade Stalin?"

"I'm in hell, comrade Brezhnev"

"And how is it?"

"Well, you know, there are two hells: a Capitalist hell and a Socialist hell."

"And which one are you in?"

"I am in the Socialist one."

"And why is that? Out of patriotism?"

"What do you mean 'patriotism'? It's just that it is better here: In capitalist hell, they whip you alive, then they boil you in oil and then they shoot you. In here they do the same, it's just that they often forgot to bring the oil or the whips, the boiler room is under construction, and the gunman is always drunk…"

Article 58 of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) Penal Code defined political humor as "anti-Soviet propaganda," which was a punishable capital offense. During Stalin's reign, over 200,000 documented political prisoners were sent to the Gulag for telling such political jokes or "*anekdoty"* in Russian (Medvedev 1979). Despite being illegal, Russians found ways to tell *anekdoty*, whispering them in alley ways or laughing about them late at night around the kitchen table, sharing their worries and frustrations of daily life with trusted family members or friends. Although shared with hesitation, to only those who they could absolutely trust, these narratives spread far and wide across the Soviet Union (Davies 2007; Graham 2009; Brooks 2001; Bradenberger 2002). The implementation of state policies served to homogenize the daily lives of all Soviet people, so these narratives became salient and meaningful across an incredibly diverse group of citizens. Before the October

Revolution in 1917, over 80 percent of the Russian population lived in the countryside. As a consequence of Soviet industrialization programs, by 1990 the proportion of people living in urban centers had flipped (Utekhin et al 2011). Soviet citizens lived in identical cement block communal apartments in cities, among equally run-down factories and barren markets. They were versed in the same State propaganda and daily hardships. *Anekdoty* evolved into a secret language for those who were fluent in the same conditions of daily life, but who could not speak out or resist publicly or visibly. This folklore enabled Russians to engage in irony and cynicism through "half-word" references to the absurdity of daily life, serving as a means of coping and resistance during uncertain times (Boym 2008).

These narratives served as an important social safety valve, enabling citizens to release frustrations and commiserate in the doomed vision of the Soviet empire to which the Russian people were bound. *Anekdoty* enabled Russians to socially recognize and vocalize that which they were instructed not to know. George Orwell (1945) argued that under totalitarian rule every joke is a "tiny revolution," and in the context of Soviet Russia, the exchange of *anekdoty* undeniably challenged the legitimacy of Soviet power to control and define the lives of the Russian people. Akin to Scott's *hidden transcripts* that serve to undermine power and associated official presentations of support for this power, *anekdoty* served as a means of resistance by challenging the legitimacy of Soviet authority and drawing attention to the contrived and disingenuous performances of compliance of the Russian people before this power (Yurchak 1980). This story of anti-State resistance is important to explore, but we must also be careful not to cast the narratives in the *anekdot* as entirely resistant in

nature. Such a characterization fails to account for the complex relationship between Russians and the Soviet State, other ethnic, racial or religious groups, their families, or between Russians and their own self-image, collective memory and ideations of the future. These multifaceted and dynamic relationships and attitudes are all enmeshed in these oral narratives that are not uniformly acts of resistance. The story is of conflict, but also of support, collaboration and negotiations within the intricate web of meanings and power relations.

In this dissertation, I analyze how *anekdoty* to speak to a number of issues ranging from collective identity, collective mobilization, state reification, and political resistance. I explore how the discourses of *anekdoty* reflect a collective identity that is both reifying of and resistant to Soviet power in that they express both a top-down nationalism akin to Anderson's (1980) "imagined community" and a bottom-up model based upon Herzfeld's (1997) "cultural intimacy" and Taussig's (1999) "public secret." I argue that *anekdoty* foreshadow and lay groundwork for "narratives" (Polletta 1998) and mobilizing "frames" (Snow & Benford 1988) of a cultural movement, through their "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990) nature by giving expression to the otherwise subjugated an voiceless. *Anekdoty* are incredibly "political" in both the traditional sense in terms of engagement with political institutions of power as well as the non-traditional feminist understanding of the political nature of all social categories. My analysis identifies the subjects of ridicule that are explicit or implicit in these narratives in order to understand the collective identity that these stories express. These subjects include the Party, the Soviet State, social problems as well as racial, ethnic, national, and gendered "others." Bringing

these multifaceted discourses of power together, I found that *anekdoty* expressed the "unmarked voice" of the Russian man, by offering a masculine, Russian national identity which contrasted with official discourse that defined the Soviet people at a supranational level and was gender-inclusive and promoted gender, racial, and ethnic equality. Together, I argue that Russian Soviet *anekdoty* expressed a *cultural consciousness* of an otherwise voiceless and atomized people. These discourses expressed forbidden opinions and helped orient a collectivity through historical and cultural contextualization.

I argue that it is important to understand how collective identities are a product of both top-down state-disseminated discourses and bottom-up popularly authored discourses; in some cases, these discourses reify state power and legitimacy while in others they undermine or challenge it. *Anekdoty* challenge the Soviet State's political ideology, economic and social policies, yet in other ways the narratives solidify racial, ethnic, national and gendered distinctions. These gendered, racial or ethnic markers are not created by *anekdoty* themselves, but rather reflect the engagement with Soviet law, Party ideology, popular culture films, television serials and books. Table 1.1 offers examples of how top-down state disseminated discourse both reifies and challenges its only claims to power and definition, as well as how bottom-up *anekdoty* discourses also reify and challenge the power of the Soviet state. The examples included in this table are just a few among many of the many different ways by which these various discourses negotiate with existing power structures in order to strengthen or redefine notions of identity, power and truth.

Table 1.1 Discourse Orientation to Soviet State and Origin of Discourse

	Rejection	**Reification**
Top – Down **(State discourse)**	• Passport policies • Stereotyped characters in films	• National Holidays • Monuments • Formal structures and institutions
Bottom – Up **(*anekdoty* discourse)**	• Ethnic, racial and gendered stereotypes • Disjuncture between propaganda & lived realities • Social problems	• Reference to War Heroes • Reference to Holidays • Centering of Soviet leadership/authority

Although this dissertation focuses primarily upon the bottom-up discourses created and disseminated by *anekdoty*, the analysis is historically situated in the Russian Soviet environment in which such *anekdoty* engage with top-down State-disseminated discourses. As illustrated in Table 1.1, both top-down and bottom-up discourses make political and analytical cuts that in some ways reify Soviet power and the Communist Party's vision of the future and in other ways undermine or challenge it, even if that is not its explicit intention. Further, some *anekdoty* are oriented towards the state and politics-proper, while others vocalize daily struggle and hardship, using humor as a means of coping rather than a claims-making narrative that is oriented towards the state. The power of comedy in bringing about political and social change or in promoting the stability of social institutions are both overlooked in scholarship and I hope that this work will bring more attention to these powerful discourses.

This analytic approach and theory of *cultural consciousness* developed from the translation, coding, and analysis of 1290 *anekdoty* that were randomly sampled from 12 compilations, published between 1951 and 2010. The total number of

anekdoty among these volumes is somewhere between five and six thousand. In order to construct the sample, every fifth joke was included from the compilations and I coded each one in the qualitative software program *Nvivo 9.* My broad theoretical approach was based upon Foucault's discourse analysis (1978) and Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis. These theories and coding schemes are discussed in detail in chapter two.

In this introduction I will give a brief overview of scholarship on humor, collective identities, social movements and everyday resistance, and illustrate how my argument about *anekdoty* lies at the intersection of these articulations of social action. After chapter two, in which I lay out my methodology in terms of theory and application, I then expand upon these literatures in greater detail in chapters three, four, five, and six with both quantitative and qualitative analysis of these jokes[1] in order to flesh out each element of the argument. I also provide a brief history of the *anekdot* as a genre and an overview of other scholarship on *anekdoty.* I do this in order to demonstrate how important it is to interrogate *anekdoty* altogether in order to explore the intersectional discourse that both creates an identity of solidarity for commiserating Russian men, while subjugating other groups through a process of exclusion and scapegoating.

[1] Although there is a difference between the more generic "joke" and the *anekdot,* throughout my analysis, I will use the two terms interchangeably in order to discuss the role of this short-form political humor in the Soviet era. Similarly, the Russian *anekdot* has a history that extends for centuries before the Soviet rule, but the form that I will discuss in this dissertation will be the political, short-form *anekdot* that was prevalent between 1950 and 2000. The *anekdoty* included in this analysis were derived from 12 compilations that were published between 1952 and 2010.

I explore how Russian men in particular are centered by this discourse that serves to, (1) resist the Soviet State, Communist Party and associated ideology, as well as serve as (2) a coping mechanism and means of surviving daily hardships, which ultimately (3) constructed a collective identity for Soviet Russians in contrast to other ethnic, religious, national, and gendered outgroups. I illustrate how *anekdoty* are a rich source of data of the subjugated political identity of Russians (most notably men) that differs in a number of ways from the dominant, state-defined, political identity.

My research found that such subjugated political identities are not simply 100% "resistant" to the state, but serve other functions, such as creating a *cultural consciousness* that unites people in a shared space for self-recognition and self-definition. Akin to Patricia Hill Collins' work that emphasizes the importance of safe spaces for the oppressed to speak out (a space that necessarily must exclude some other groups), *anekdoty* adopt and reify the social boundaries established by Party discourse, constructing particular groups as "other" in order to bolster a Russian collective identity. These narratives express the political identities of the soviet people, highlighting fissures and power structures between racialized and gendered social groups. In addition, *anekdoty* served as means of dealing with devastating realities, political, and social powerlessness. As a coping mechanism, these narratives might also have contributed to the maintenance of a status-quo, in that they provided an outlet for resistance that effected minimal political change. I explore each of these elements in this introduction as well as in the dissertation at large.

Humor, Collective Identity and Political Resistance

If you have lived in another country, traveled abroad, or had friends from another culture, you have probably noticed that humor is not something that translates very easily. You may hear the joke, you may understand the logic that should make it funny, but the joke does not always produce laughter for you the same way it does for other "insiders." This is because it does not reach your core in the same way: it does not speak to your lived experiences, or your identity. Humor is directly tied to one's social location, one's collective identity in relation to other collective identities. As such, studying jokes in relation to the people who told them, provides a window into how these people see themselves, into who they see as insiders and outsiders, into their national identity, and their collective anxieties. Studying the jokes of a people who risk imprisonment in order to tell them, exposes a subversive collective identity, it provides a unique glimpse into the shared experience of state repression.

Of all the forms of communication, humor is arguably one of the most reliant upon cooperative participation between performer and audience. The audience, in order to enjoy humor must "get" the joke. The content of the jokes, characters, settings, and objects of critique are drawn from the environment in which they were created, told, or reproduced. This means that both the performer and the audience must be familiar with the people, events, and contexts presented in the joke and find the particular narrative as particularly surprising and meaningful for the joke to be successful.

A popular type of political humor operates by highlighting incongruities between what "should be" and what "actually is." Sigmund Freud argued that society (the superego) suppresses those thoughts/recognitions of reality that might be dangerous to the stability and/or power of social institutions such as the State, but when an individual's consciousness (the ego) allows these thoughts to surface, the incongruity between the way something "ought" to be and the way it "is" produces humor. This emphasis upon incongruity is especially important in understanding why political humor can be so powerful and popular in societies in which public expressions of opinions and ideas are tightly controlled and/or censored by the government (Yurchak 1997; Drakulic 1993; Ayling 2008). In these societies, political humor serves a means of coping with a painful reality by enabling both the teller and the receiver to participate in shared recognition of the incongruence between the official discourse and personally experienced reality.

The oral nature of such humor or folklore more generally is also an important characteristic of the genre in that it affords a decentralized deconstruction. Oral folklore is ambiguous and anti-essentialist in that it has no fixed or definitive version—the repetition of a joke or song or folktale is a choice on part of the individual teller and each enactment is unique. As James Scott explains in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, "there is no orthodoxy or center to folk culture since there is no primary text to serve as a measure of heresy (1990: 160-1). The very act of telling these narratives serves to reconstitute what is the "primary text" of experience or the lived reality of those who participate. While folklore empowers through its popular authorship, it also affords anonymity or dissociation

from the particular criticism in that the teller is more often not the author and even if in cases where s/he was, s/he often will not admit to it. Therefore those participating in such humor or folk cultures are afforded a bit of protection—if not legally, at least psychologically.

In this dissertation I conceptualize "resistance" as discursive moves that (1) dismantle or chip away at existing power structures or (2) empower subjugated groups through self-recognition and self-definition. Specifically, I treat those *anekdoty* that subvert Party propaganda, State laws, official history, or the legitimacy and authority of particular leaders as forms of resistance. In these situations, *anekdoty* challenge authority by rejecting the official version and offer an alternative description of reality. *Anekdoty* further act as resistance in terms of the voice that is afforded by these narratives. Forbidden opinions may be expressed through these private narratives. As Russians huddle around the dinner table to recount new *anekdoty,* they are able to voice dissent, self-define their personhood and collective identities, as well as commiserate about their daily hardships. As such, resistance is conceptualized as a combination of subversion, communal recognition, and redefinition regardless of the explicit intentions of the performer or audience or the level of visibility of these actions. Unlike organized social movements that seek political recognition from the State, everyday resistance often takes more subtle forms that are more concerned with survival than State recognition.

One of the most popular forms of political humor in Soviet Russia was the type that highlights incongruities or dysfunction. Given that political humor is an

expression of a collective, shared reality, the *anekdot* serves as an exemplar of a process of the formation of collective memory, identities and dissent, and therefore might reveal intimate details of an otherwise-difficult-to-measure collective mentality. During the Soviet era, *anekdoty* were never told in public, because doing so could result in arrest and imprisonment. Children who overheard these jokes around the late-night kitchen table were instructed not to repeat them in school lest their parents suffer negative consequences. There are many self-reflexive *anekdoty* that deal with the very consequences of telling them:

"Comrade Brezhnev, is it true that you collect political jokes?"

"Yes, it is true."

"And how many have you collected so far?"

"Three and a half labor camps."

Between the years of 1929 and 1953 (the height of Joseph Stalin's power), over 18 million Soviet people spent time in the network of forced labor camps called "the Gulag." The prison camps varied in types of labor, some involving the construction of railroads, canals or factories. Similar to other work sites, the camps had economic goals set by the State; therefore the camps needed prisoners as workers. In 1929, many of the inmates of regular prisons were transferred to the camps and by 1930, several hundred thousand peasants and workers arrived annually, arrested for resisting collectivization, telling *anekdoty*, taking potatoes from the collective farm fields, for mishandling factory machinery or being late for work three times—an act

that was considered to be "sabotage." While many landed in the camps for infractions such as those listed above, even more were guilty of nothing at all (Getty, Rittersporn, Zemskov 1993). In 1937, every secret police officer was given an arrest quota, in order to ensure a larger supply of labor and in order to make the quotas, the secret police fabricated cases.

The Gulag camps were supposed to be economically sustainable and profitable, therefore prisoners were given just enough food and clothing to keep them alive and working. Unfortunately, in practice there were never enough supplies and many prisoners died from overwork and malnutrition. Most years, the death rate was just over five percent, but in particularly bad years the death rate was much higher: 15 percent in 1933 (a year of widespread famine), 25 percent in 1942 (the year of the greatest shortages in World War II, and in 1937 and 1938 tens of thousands of citizens were simply executed (Getty, Rittersporn, Zemskov 1993; Yakovlev 2002; Applebaum 2003). What was in store for those sent to the Gulag was unknown, yet rumors about the severe working conditions and high death rates spread far enough to instill a fear of arrest in the Soviet people.

In exchanging these narratives, Soviet citizens were aware of their transgressions, but nevertheless continued to share them as a means of commiserating and coping with hardships of daily life. People would not have risked telling *anekdoty* if they were not certain that the person hearing the joke would not share in the sentiment or understand the context. The fact that *anekdoty* were as popular as they were given the severe risk of being caught telling them, is a particularly important indication that these discourses serve as an important barometer of collective

experience and collective identity formation. These short narratives were especially important in constructing and perpetuating a Russo-Soviet collective memory in that they helped define the histories, values, and goals that comprised that national identity.

Political humor serves as a strong barometer of a collectivity, its associated collective identity, collective memory, and its perception of collective lived realities (Davies 2002, 2007; Critchley 2002). In addition to serving as a barometer of popular sentiments towards the state and official discourses, these jokes serve to circumscribe the collectivity of the "unmarked" Russian by scapegoating and stereotyping various outgroups (e.g. Jews, Ukrainians, Georgians) and subgroups (e.g. women). The construction of an ingroup and outgroup enables discourses—and the people who perpetuate them—to cast blame and responsibility upon some groups/individuals and success and innocence upon others. This type of humor—and its framing of collective memory/identity—is particularly powerful for those nations who must reconcile a difficult past with their otherwise positive collective self-concept. Only in managing these inconsistencies or blemishes, might they be able to focus upon collectively established goals (Heisler 2008). The state's power is codified in law via its ability to establish and maintain systems of meaning and classification and its ability to control the distribution of various resources (Bourdieu 1994). Therefore the ability to effectively challenge the state necessarily involves culture and the renegotiation of such meaning systems (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008: 84-5).

In his seminal work *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson argues that modern technological advancements such as print-capitalism have enabled large

dispersed populations to associate with or self-define according to a collective identity articulated by an "imagined community." He identifies the census, the map, and the museum as exemplars of the process by which such networks of people are transformed into bounded and interchangeable nation units. These three technological innovations are singled out due to their ability to make the abstract idea of identity into something concrete and tangible. For instance, the census enables the state to count the members of a population and describe them in terms of demographic characteristics. The map outlines the territory that constitutes the homeland of an "imagined" community—establishing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion—and finally, the museum delineates a shared history, giving meaning to cultural artifacts and symbols that connect these people. Such a "totalizing classificatory grid," is flexible in terms of its ability to categorize real or imagined phenomenon as "us" or "other" (Anderson 2006: 184). Along with Gellner (1983) and Brubaker (2004), Anderson argues that a nation cannot be reduced to an actual historical community or ethnic group, but that it originates as a constructed myth of the people, their history, and their homeland, creating a singular ideology which envisions their collective mission. This top-down theory provides a lens through which we might better understand the influence of the State upon the construction of an ethnic Russian identity, but it leaves a gap in the analysis about how this identity was actually experienced by those living under Soviet rule.

Discourses that exclude (underpinned by xenophobic ideologies) or include (by reifying Anderson's idea of an "imagined community") are constructed and perpetuated only with a great deal of self-reflexivity and associated embarrassment or

regret. Michael Taussig's concept of the "public secret" (1999) and Michael Herzfeld's concept of "cultural intimacy" speak directly to the tension produced by these discourses that are characteristic of the *anekdot.* Building upon Elias Canetti's (1962: 290) argument that, "secrecy lies at the very core of power," Taussig argues, "that which is generally known but cannot be articulated" serves as a binding force among those who are prohibited from publically expressing personal opinions (p. 5). Such known—but—unspeakable understandings serve to connect those who are divided or atomized by such censorship. Taussig (1999) argues that learning this public secret, learning "what not to know" (49), serves as a means of initiation into a publically silent but silently knowing collectivity. It also serves to circumscribe a population of insiders who are able to negotiate these different sets of institutional knowledge. I experienced this first-hand, albeit after the Soviet regime had already been long over, when I lived in St. Petersburg for my fieldwork in 2011.

My parents and then-seven-year-old brother emigrated from St Petersburg in 1978, so my dissertation fieldwork in Mother Russia turned into a pilgrimage of sorts. I stayed with extended family to conduct my research and met family and friends who often inquired about my project with great interest. They were excited, interested, and always had a few *anekdoty* to share. But once our conversations developed beyond opening friendly remarks, often skepticism emerged: "You won't be able to understand *anekdoty* unless you lived here; unless you were part of *it*." And in some ways, my skeptics were right. I grew up hearing *anekdoty* exchanged around the dinner table by my parents and other Russian friends or family who had come to visit. The crowd of adults would laugh uproariously after each one was told. And to me,

they were rarely funny. I didn't "get it." I didn't live through "it"; I didn't understand the context or the irony. And that was part of the motivation behind this study—I wanted to understand what made these jokes so funny. The laughter was a sign of connection and a sign of understanding. It was also a sign of omniscient insider status.

Michael Herzfeld's (1997) concept of "cultural intimacy," a level of shared understanding and closeness among a group of people, describes an important aspect of the narratives expressed in *anekdoty*. Herzfeld argues that beyond an impersonal, legally based system of classification, what holds a collective group together psychologically is,

> "the recognition of those aspects of cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation" (3).

This definition of "cultural intimacy," theorizes nationalism as both top-down and bottom up, by recognizing the power of the people in shaping the manifestations of collective identities. Opinions and sentiments expressed at this level of cultural intimacy may reinforce the power of those at the top when it projects a collective confidence, but expressions of embarrassment and rueful self-recognition often cast a shadow on the immaculate outward presentation maintained by the State.

Humor and satire have a long contentious history with political regimes and those in power (Ayling 2008). Unlike other forms of literary style, humor and satirical works are of a type more explicitly anti-establishment and threatening to a political ideology, therefore authors and publications of satire are often carefully monitored and sometimes outlawed (Liz and Stephan 1996). Despite totalitarian censorship or other controls of free speech, jokelore has remained part of the independent "culture of contestation" (Lombardi-Satriani 1974), which regularly comments upon official morals and ideologies. As such, there is great utility for social movement and everyday resistance scholars in studying this phenomenon, specifically with the aim of understanding a clear connection between the targets, jokes and the underlying context (e.g. interethnic relations, economic and cultural and historical circumstances). Although *anekdoty* have been studied by folklorists, as anti-State discourse or as expressions of racialized or gendered sentiments, they have not been studied altogether in terms of how they reflect a collective identity that is both reifying of and resistant to the state and how they establish and maintain relationships between different social groups. By studying this genre as a whole, we are able to understand the complexity of sentiments, identities, and relationships that existed under Soviet leadership and the creative ways that the Soviet people coped with this uncertain reality.

In today's globalizing world, with increasing migration and connection between diverse people who speak different languages, practice different religions, and espouse different moral and political ideologies, national identity often takes on more extreme forms of nationalism, sometimes resulting in xenophobia and

interethnic intolerance (Goldberg 2001, Brubaker 2002). Such nationalizing and xenophobic trends are reflected in humor, particularly in the way other ethnic and religious groups are framed. The very inclusion of some groups over others in the discourse of nationality speaks to the visibility of some people over others in a particular historical culture (Davies 2002).

Nationalism attains its power by appearing to be natural and timeless (Anderson 1983; Puri 2004). In his exploration of 'banal nationalism,' Michael Billing highlights how nationalism attains its power by incorporating itself into everyday life and practices. In becoming part of the everyday taken-for granted environment, nationalism serves to construct how we understand the world, who is part of one's collectivity and who is not. This view emphasizes nationalism as decentralized power, which is established and maintained through *production*, rather than merely coercion and restrictions. Akin to Foucault's notion of discourse and biopower, nationalism establishes and incorporates itself into various parts of people's lives in such a way that it goes mostly unquestioned and accepted. Studying which elements of the "official" Soviet or Russian nationalism were uncritically adopted by *anekdoty* versus those elements that were challenged gives us insight into the emergent nationalism that both poaches and dismantles the system from which it emerges.

Anekdoty were authored by the disenfranchised and disempowered. The exchange of these jokes was widespread, but only in private settings, whispered in Goffman's (1959) "backstage." These jokes thrived because all other creative

outlets—such as the theatre, literature or music—were centrally controlled by the state. One could argue that as a result of such censorship and limited venues for personal expression, these creative and critical energies were directed toward humor (Bradenberger 2001). *Anekdoty* from the Soviet Union highlighted the contradictions of the system, and foreshadowed an imminent collapse of the social order. Although it is unlikely that *anekdoty* were responsible for structural changes as macro as the dissolution of the Soviet regime, the narratives do provide intimate insight into the society in which they are invented and circulated (Davies 2002, 2007).

Laughter is often provoked in response to an unresolved tension—which is a reason that political humor is so popular in post-totalitarian regimes which still struggle with issues from its past and its transition forward. After Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet people who had long-before lost faith in the promises of the Party, were in a position in which they could muster some opposition or at minimum, vocalization of doubt. Based upon his analysis of political humor from a number of Eastern European and post-Soviet nations, Douglas Ayling (2008) argues that jokes challenging and criticizing ideologies, states, and regimes are much more common in post-totalitarian regimes than in totalitarian or authoritarian ones. He argues that this is because totalitarian regimes have a relatively dominant ideological component "that articulates a reachable utopia" (Liz and Stephan's typology 1996: 44), whereas post-totalitarian regimes are characterized predominantly by a loss of faith in or commitment to the ideological utopia. This loss of faith is coupled by a general crisis of legitimacy, a combination that created fertile ground for the production and circulation of such politically critical jokes. Despite the formal appearance of

continuity in terms of policy, after Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet Union arguably transitioned from a totalitarian to a post-totalitarian regime, especially by the 1980s which, coincided with the height of popularity of the *anekdot* (1996: 16). Since jokes tend to focus upon those issues of friction or rupture within the social structure--potentially giving way to an emergent counter-discourse--it would follow that ideologically-oppositional political jokes would be particularly popular in post-totalitarian regimes in which official ideological claims and reality fail to map upon each other (Liz and Stephan 1996).

Taussig (1999) argues that learning the public secret, learning "what not to know" (49) serves as a means of initiation into a publically-silent but silently-knowing collectivity. The *anekdot* afforded ordinary citizens the opportunity to name and identify that which is supposed to be unknown, the negative power that Taussig calls "defacement." The *anekdot* reveals this process: using sarcasm and irony to call attention to the act of false and public presentation of Soviet organization and power. The *anekdot* is a venue of expression of the "public secret," and therefore acts as a site of its collective defacement. The anonymous authorship of these texts casts these truths as collective in nature—the wider their circulation, the more profound the secret, and the more transgressive its associated defacement might be. It follows that the act of recounting *anekdoty* was considered to be anti-Soviet, subversive behavior under Article 58 of the RSFSR Penal code, punishable by prison or death. This defacement or "outing" of the secret propels a public transgression that challenges the legitimacy of all the social institutions it calls into question. It serves as an undermining of public complicity and obedience.

The public secret also serves as such insider knowledge which can result in embarrassment or regret, elements that are part of Michael Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy. As such, by studying the *anekdot* we can better understand how the imagined community was experienced collectively and understand the tenuous relationship between pride and embarrassment in the collective identity of the Russian people.

History of the Anekdot

Anekdoty have a long history in Russia dating back to the mid eighteenth century, though its initial structure and subject-matter was so different from Soviet variety that there are many who categorize the two as separate genres (Graham 2009). The original genre of *anekdoty* was diverse, including narratives of: (1) a trivial but factual event in the life of a historical figure, (2) a short account of an unusual fictional event or situation that is then developed into a lengthy literary work, and (3) short stories that were considered to be a subcategory of the folktale. The Soviet *anekdot* combines the features of these different varieties, producing a short, orally-transmitted humorous variety that was able to gain popularity and widespread circulation by the end of the nineteenth century (Alaev 1995; Graham 2009). Vishnevsky (1993) identified the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 Russia and subsequent urbanization and industrialization in the late 19th century as a birthplace of the short form *anekdot*. The total population of Russia tripled between 1863 and 1913, and the number of urban dwellers with peasant backgrounds quadrupled

(Vishnevsky 1993: 83). Although many of these peasants continued to hold land and homes in their countryside villages, they regularly travelled to the cities to work or sell goods which contributed to this intermingling between the city and the country in a regularized fashion. This demographic shift also involved a sharp increase in literacy which enabled oral folk cultures to be transcribed, and for the circulation of such *anekdoty* to gather great speed and volume in the urban industrial culture (Vishnevsky 1993). The new short form variety of *anekdoty* lent itself to exchange in passing: in stairwells, in bathrooms, or to be exchanged in high volume, successively over vodka late at night (Yurchak 1997). This pastime was shared by compatriots, solidifying a shared identity through reference to a common history, identity and fluency in official Soviet rhetoric. Yurchak (1997) argues that the "hegemony of representation" made the Soviet citizen feel as though her/his experience was shared by all other citizens. The "hegemony of representation" referred to the State's control over media outlets, propaganda, factories, schools, textbooks, city construction and other modes of "representation." As such, there was a singular landscape and construction of reality, with which all Soviet citizens were very familiar and with which the *anekdoty* engaged.

The steep rise in literacy following emancipation of the serfs contributed to the process of cultural communication, as well. The decades between the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the October Revolution in 1917 saw the rapid development of "a popular culture based on common literacy" (Jeffrey Brooks, 1985: xiii). The literate peasants, tended "to divide all books into two categories, the godly and the humorous. The Scriptures were the model for the first sort of text, and the

frivolous fairy tale the exemplar of the second. The fairy tale was ungodly, untrue, useless, amusing, and uninstructive" (1985: 32). Until the eighteenth century, the Church was in control of most publications in Russia and since the Church viewed humor as directly related to sin *smekh i grekh* ("laughter and sin" in Russian), only the godly texts were published. It was not until Russian publications were secularized, that satirical and other comic texts began to enter the market. This new literary style expanded upon those oral folk traditions that made their way to the cities from the countryside and upon short, humorous genres (like the short form joke) imported from Europe (Graham 2009).

Satire was celebrated by the Bolsheviks as a potential "weapon" to be mobilized in the service of the Revolution during the 1920s, but was later abandoned in the 1930s by those revolutionaries who replaced this politicized communication with socialist-realist aesthetics (Graham 2009). It was not until after Stalin's death in 1953 that there was a resurgence of such satire: both a toned down form in official publications like *Krokodil*—a satirical magazine that lampooned approved targets such as capitalist countries and racial, ethnic and political groups were perceived as threatening to Soviet power—and the unbridled form of critique in uncensored *anekdoty*. Although the Party was still in power, Khrushchev's repudiation of Stalinism in February 1956 and the subsequent reduction in arrests and sentencing enabled the culture of *anekdot* exchange to flourish. The height of such *anekdot* exchange was from the late 1950s to the early 1990s (Brandenberg 2002; Davies 2002, 2009; Krylova 2009; Graham 2009). It was during this comparatively liberal time: from the 1950s until 2000, that such satire was able to thrive. The coupling of

the state-defined nationalism à la Anderson's "imagined community" with the satirical critiques of daily life and recognition of illegitimate Soviet propaganda or Party ideology served to bind Russians together as a collectivity. The Russians were no longer divided by class or geography as they had been in previous times and their positioning as the "core" of the Soviet Union's multi-national collectivity paradoxically served to reify their national identity. Laughter bound them as a single community in a shared environment.

Anekdoty have generally been studied in Russia by folklorists for whom the performance of joke-telling and the micro-level interaction dynamics are central (Lurie 1992, Abdullaeva 2000; Bauman 1992). In response to the surge in publications of *anekdot* anthologies in 1990, after the dissolution of the USSR, research also began to focus upon the role that *anekdoty* played for the Soviet people (Beckmann 1980; Colombo 1996; Yurchak 1998; Ayling 2008). Despite the increased attention to this genre, there remain few systematic analyses of *anekdoty* as a single corpus situated in a socio-cultural context. I will explore those few works in the section below.

Anekdot Studies

Previous studies of *anekdoty* brought attention to their subversive, anti-State quality; while others have painted the folklore as a tool of exclusion by groups with more power. In fact, *anekdoty* are actually reflections of both power and of resistance. They are used by different groups to produce different results and they express the

mixed and ambivalent sentiments of this people. It is precisely the recognition of these different impulses within the *anekdoty* that make them such a rich source from which to understand popular collective identity formation.

After immigrating to the US from Russia, Alexei Yurchak (1980) was one of the first Soviet insiders to write about *anekdoty* for a Western audience. Based upon his firsthand, ethnographic-like experience, Yurchak explains how Russians were socialized to live double lives under Soviet rule by ways of cynicism and doublethink. He explains, "In late socialism, state-controlled public events became structured as two simultaneous events: an official event, at which shouting of the official slogans and voting in favor of an official resolution were unavoidable and unanimous, and a parallel event, at which many people were engaged in parallel practices and adhered to parallel meanings without needing either to support or to ridicule the official ones" (1980: 163). This alternative mode of resistance that does not entail overt expressions of rejection was appropriate for Soviet Russians who supported some elements of the Soviet system while were ambivalent about others. Yurchak positioned the *anekdot* within this culture of parallel practices and meanings.

What was distinctive about the Russian *anekdot,* as opposed to other humor traditions, is how many of these jokes ridicule the joke-tellers themselves by way of highlighting their public complicity in the doomed Soviet project. Although many *anekdoty* highlighted the absurdities of the system and lies promulgated by propaganda, the "butt" of the joke was not just the Soviet leadership, but also the Russians who remained acquiescent under Party rule. This speaks to Herzfeld's

assertion that cultural intimacy must include an element of embarrassment or shame and is an element of *anekdoty* that has yet to be explored systematically.

Akin to James Scott's (1990) concept of everyday resistance, Yurchak argues that the Russian people learned to navigate and cope with the system through a combination of detached quiet cynicism along with public compliance. For example, "as soon as the meeting would start, everyone's head turned down, and everyone started to read. Someone could doze off. But when it was necessary to make some decision, a certain sensor would click in the head-'Who is voting in favor?' and you raised your hand automatically" (172). Although physically present in the meetings, these party members were operating in simultaneous public and private spaces, publically paying attention and following the rules while in private finding an escape and means of coping. Reciting *anekdoty* was also done in a backstage space: in stairwells during smoking breaks or around the dinner table late at night—the one time of day when a family or group of friends could find some privacy. Anna Krylova's piece (2005) "Saying 'Lenin' and Meaning 'Party': Subversion and Laughter in Soviet and Post-Soviet Society" similarly argues that each *anekdot* reveals simultaneously the cynical and ideal in its subversive narrative. Krylova (2005) argues that *anekdoty* orient towards a hopeful future in which the disjuncture between the reality presented by Party propaganda and the lived reality of Soviet citizens no longer exists. The system of comparison (whether explicit or implicit in the narrative) is always Western capitalism which serves to contrast the Soviets' dysfunctional impoverished communist system with a functional and prosperous capitalist one. In a similar vein, Alena Ledeneva (1998) likens *anekdoty* to *blat* and *samizdat,* the black

market for goods and underground newspapers respectively, in regards to its backstage nature. The *anekdot* is identified as an integral part of this parallel culture of resistance that is contrasted with the official world of obedience and loyalty to the Soviet party.

Another strain of scholarship on the *anekdot* focuses upon ethnic stereotypes that are common in the narratives. Emil Draitser's (1998) *Taking Penguins to the Movies: Ethnic Humor in Russia,* provides a brilliant contextualization for each ethnic group that appear in the *anekdot* repertoire. Draitser focuses on the historical relationships between Russians and the other nationalities and ethnic groups that appear in *anekdoty* in order to explain the origin of such stereotypes and the histories of how ethnic group relations emerged over time. Considering the substantial number of *anekdoty* explicitly about Jews, and the long history of Jewish humor as a means of collective preservation (Lauchland 2009), there are many who believe that some of these *anekdoty* are authored by Jews themselves (presenting Jews as intelligent and successful as a consequence of their creativity) and another anti-Semitic variety that was most likely authored by Russians out of a similar resentment that was felt towards the Georgian (presenting the Jew as cheap, greedy and pilfering the Soviet system only to move to Israel or the United States). Many of these types of *anekdoty* were told among people of the same ethnic group (Draitser 1998; Davies 2002). For instance, when two or more Jews met for dinner, they would sit around recounting the new Jewish *anekdoty* that they had heard from others. Since there was little novelty by way of official media, and the only means of hearing new *anekdoty* was by way of

mouth, these gatherings were an exciting pastime for the Soviet people (Brandenberger 2002; Brooks 2000).

Although *anekdoty* about women are very popular (as evidenced in the compilations and in informal conversations) the research interrogating the gendered implications of these narratives has been very limited. Since *anekdoty* were traditionally told among men, oftentimes while drinking vodka around a kitchen table, misogynist humor was not uncommon (Brandenberger 2002; Draitser 1998, 1999). When three men of the same nationality congregate together (e.g. Georgians, Ukrainians or Russians), they would undoubtedly tell ethnic jokes disparaging other outgroups or praising their own ingroups; regardless of national affiliation, misogynist humor was common among all these groups. Draitser's (1999) *Making War Not Love: Gender and Sexuality in Russian Humor* is one of the few sites that explore this gendered variety of *anekdoty.* Women—wives, mistresses, prostitutes, mother-in-laws—are a popular subject of *anekdoty,* almost exclusively portrayed as the over-sexed, money-hungry, overbearing gender. Infidelity or high rates of suicide and alcoholism among men are blamed on women for being such annoyances. While Draitser (1999) explores these issues of gender inequality in his analysis, he does not contextualize these issues in the broader nationalist framework, which leaves the analysis of different genres somewhat disconnected. In *anekdoty* research it is common to treat different subjects (e.g. racial, gendered or popular culture *anekdoty*) as highly distinctive genres without exploring the relationship between the different objects of ridicule. In this dissertation, I argue that the power structures that are reified through this folklore do not exist in isolation, but rather rely heavily on

intersectional logic of power. In other words, by only looking at one subject of *anekdoty,* we fail to see how the multiple discourses that construct what it means to be Georgian, Jewish, Chukchi, American, and female intersect in powerful ways with those narratives about State power, Party ideology and daily hardships experienced under Soviet rule. Fingers of blame and responsibility are pointed in different directions by *anekdoty* narratives, and in doing so, we see how particular groups are particularly discriminated in law and practice, but also in popular narratives that cast them as contributing to or even benefiting from the Russian man's misfortune. Only by looking at all of these power moves on a single chess board can we truly understand how these narratives serve to "center" and construct what it means to a Soviet Russian man.

Seth Graham's recent work (2009) is one of the first projects to undertake the contextualization of the *anekdot* in a Russo-Soviet cultural and media environment. Graham explains the significance of the *anekdot* as a genre of expression that dialogued with popular culture in television, radio and literature during Soviet times. His work specifically explores intertextuality within the genre of *anekdoty* by focusing on those that make references to movies, books, and television shows and by situating the texts in their historical geo-political context. He argues that many of the most notorious characters of the *anekdot* are drawn from other Soviet cultural works, but then used as a vehicle for critiquing Soviet power or highlighting the absurdities and contradictions promulgated by Soviet propaganda.

Although Graham does not make explicit use of Henry Jenkins' (2005) *Textual Poachers,* his argument is reminiscent of Jenkins' descriptions of *trekkies* and other fan groups who take ownership of the characters in the published stories or movies by expanding the storylines with their own narratives. The actions of these fans become powerful as they extend these stories and characters beyond the screen or book page and use them to make commentary on real-world social issues in a collaborative and improvisational way. The Russian *anekdot* involved similar poaching of propaganda, textbooks, and other State-disseminated discourses, refashioning the morals or arguments of these narratives to better match their lived perspectives.

Anekdoty served as a form of everyday resistance, in taking ownership over the ability to construct truth, yet this analysis was left underdeveloped in Graham's work. Although he did argue that *anekdoty* serve as a self-reflexive voice, responding to the otherwise unidirectional Soviet popular culture, after finishing his work, the reader is left still hungry for elaboration on how these folklore narratives transcend boundaries between the fictional and real, or the playful and subversive. This genre of popular culture *anekdoty* is also explored in relative isolation in that the gendered and racialized elements are similarly left under-theorized.

My work fills this gap in the research by looking at these multiple varieties together in order to understand the intersectional discourse that is articulated by these stories; one that both creates a coping identity of solidarity for Russians while subjugating a number of other groups through a process of exclusion and

scapegoating of particular marked groups. In this dissertation, I look at all of these different genres from a historically and culturally situated perspective, an approach that enables me to understand how these narratives engaged with the Soviet Russian collective identity that in some instances sought to self-define independently of the State, while in other instances these narratives created meaning and bolstered significance through the cooption of state definitions.

Anekdot Discourse as the Perspective of "We"

In this dissertation, I argue that the narratives running across *anekdoty* serve to simultaneously reify and challenge Party rule, define social collectivities and highlight and engage with the conditions of everyday existence under Soviet power. *Anekdoty* engage in the construction and destruction of these numerous discourses that police minds and bodies (Foucault 1977). The narratives can be categorized into those that are (1) identity-based, (2) state-oriented and (3) experience-based. Mapped onto social movement and everyday resistance literature, we see how the discourses expressed in the *anekdot* reflect both types of activism and resistance respectively. Social movements are conceived of as coordinated, identity-based that engaged with the State in an attempt for political power (Klandermans 2001; Tilly 2008) while everyday resistance is typically a spontaneous, needs-based, coping strategy, a set of narratives that do not focus on the state or on collective identities, but rather on the experience at hand (Scott 1985, 1990, 1999; Collins 1990).

As part of my argument, I will illustrate how Michael Herzfeld's (1997) concept of "cultural intimacy" is articulated in the discourse of *anekdot*, and as such enables the outsider to peek into this "insiders only" worldview. Anderson's (1983) definition of an "imagined community" offers an important lens in terms of understanding Russian collective perspective. However, it also overlooks the significant amount of embarrassment for failed endeavors, inward recognition of injustice, or non-ideal actions that are part of national history. It is this "rueful self-recognition" that is captured in the bottom-up concept of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997: 6).

Anekdoty reflect the constructed contours of the Russian "imagined community" in the ways they include or exclude particular heroes or leaders, historical events, and ethnic or religious groups in order to position Russian ethnics as the core population. However, what *anekdoty* express is more than the passive internalization of this state-defined collectivity. *Anekdoty* are active, they involve the "textual poaching" (Jenkins 1995) of characters from Soviet propaganda films and Party slogans. *Anekdoty* adopt such elements, reifying some aspects of power while simultaneously twisting, revising, and reinventing other parts of the story and the truth. The ironic tone of these texts expresses and assumes the disenchantment of both performer and audience. They express discomfort with the current direction of Soviet power, but without offering an alternative direction, the voice admits regret, embarrassment, and insecurity. As such, the *anekdot* exposes a level of "cultural intimacy" via the ways they support or challenge the importance or power of these events and people and redefines how they are understood through the voice of

ordinary people. The inclusion of some national symbols serve to support or authenticate official Party discourse when used uncritically, but in other instances when they are referred to cynically or attacked directly, their legitimacy is challenged.

There have been other scholars who have studied the consequences of legal formulations upon the population's daily life. For instance, Laitin (1995) studied how the Soviet Union was a single unified entity in name, but was rhetorically divided into nations through the passport system. Brandenberger (2002) explored how Russia was positioned at the core of the empire through political and economic dependence as well as through explicit definitions of "the great Russian people" by Stalin and other leaders as 'the first among equal peoples of the USSR'" (277). While it is important to understand how such "categories are proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched, and generally embedded in multifarious forms of 'governmentality'" from above, it is equally as important to understand "the 'micropolitics' of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade or transform the categories that are imposed on them (Dominguez 1986)" (Brubaker 2004: 13). As such, it is important to find ways to access the voice of the collective in order to better understand how it self-constructs and self-articulates groupness which in turn can motivate political action.

Brubaker argues that ethnicity, race, and nationhood are "are not things *in* the world, but perspective *on* the world," ways of "perceiving, interpreting, and representing the social world." Therefore the salience or power of a group lies not in

an external definition imposed by an external force, but rather the belief from within a group (2004: 14). The ways by which people are classified and categorized by race, ethnicity, religion or nationality serve to activate these shared perspectives by invoking common histories or values, but they only exist in so far as the members identify at some level with those definitions. However, Brubaker also argues that such identifications should not be taken as constant (2004: 17). Instead, he encourages us to shift attention from groups to groupness, to treat "groupness as a variable and contingent rather than fixed and given" so that we understand that such cohesion, or collectively felt solidarity is "something that "happens," as E.P. Thompson (1963: 9) famously said about class" (Brubaker 2004: 12).

It is also this construction of "groupness" (and the consequential framing or actions of this group) which I seek to capture in my analysis of Soviet-era Russian *anekdoty*. In this dissertation I will tease out some of the discourses that contribute to the construction of people into "us" and "them," the events (e.g. wars, speeches, laws) which define "our collective history," the leaders and heroes who define "our vision" and the cultural artifacts (e.g. books, movies, folktales, museums, anthems) to which Soviet Russians orient and how these references (or absence of references) express a fomenting nationalism as well as expressions of everyday resistance. These sites of interest are informed by Anthony D. Smith's definition of a nation as "a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories; a mass, public culture; a common economy; and common legal rights and duties for all members" (1991: 14).

I seek to measure "groupness" or "nationness" as articulated by the *anekdoty* in my sample, while keeping in mind that these narratives reflect temporally-specific feelings of belonging and therefore cannot be generalized to contemporary Russians. I call this sense of belonging a *cultural consciousness* that historically and culturally locates this group and allows them to engage in self-definition and develop a political awareness apart from official Party rhetoric. I bound my time period from 1951-1990, and focus upon the Soviet Russian republic. The *anekdoty* in my sample were authored, told and retold due to their ability to make the audience laugh during Soviet times. These jokes may not resonate with contemporary Russians because they speak to a different collectivity; even if some of the members of the two collectivities are the same, the issues and identities may no longer be salient to these same people. Laughter serves as a barometer of salience, of meaningful commentary, identities or incongruities between what should be and what is, that are expressed in these jokes.

Further, I am interested in how the *anekdot* reveals something more intimate and intangible than what is defined as "nation" by a state-authored discourse. I illustrate how the *anekdot* articulated a *cultural consciousness* among those who exchanged them and how the discourses themselves might be considered to be the "public secret" (Taussig 1999). In this study, I reveal the *anekdot* as a discourse that articulates power structures, resistance to the State, and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion among the Russo-Soviet people.

Organization of Dissertation

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I outline the methodology employed in my research of *anekdoty*. Informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), I created a sample of 1290 *anekdoty* drawn from 12 volumes published between 1951 and 2010. In this chapter I give background on the CDA movement and theory and I describe how these *anekdoty* were analyzed by hand and using *NVivo 9* software in order to develop my grounded theoretical analysis of these popular discourses. I explain how these *anekdoty* were coded and how the codes that pattern upon state-disseminated rhetoric serve to both reify as well as challenge it important ways. Included in this chapter are maps of all 158 codes and how they fit into eight broader themes as well as a quantitative overview of discourse themes.

In the third chapter, I explain how the collective identity defined by some *anekdoty* in conjunction with those state-oriented political *anekdoty* articulate resistance to the State and the Party in overtly political ways. I accomplish this by exploring the rhetorical strategies used to challenge and subvert Soviet propagandistic depictions of daily life, the Party's definitions of collectivity, history and future goals. Drawing from Herzfeld's concept of "cultural intimacy," I argue that the *anekdot* reveals a collective identity that may not be visible to the outsider public. This form of collective identity is more profound and sincere since it involves elements that the collectivity may be ashamed of, uncomfortable with, or confused about more generally. These elements do not paint the same rosy picture, or deliberately defined image that the outward presentation of the Soviet state or an "imagined community"

might do. This is important to understand in that the contours of a collective identity, perceptions of present day and historical events and guiding ideologies serve as motivators for behavior. As such, comprehending how these different perspectives converge and diverge gives us a better sense of who this collectivity is, where they came from, and what are their political and ideological aspirations for their future as a nation. Although *anekdoty* were not vocal and engaged in politics-proper, I argue as a form of everyday resistance they were incredibly powerful in challenging the hegemonic power of the soviet state and Party rhetoric by enabling everyday people to personally define their identities, actions, and beliefs.

In chapter four, I analyze *anekdoty* that deal with daily struggle, hardship and coping without the framing of collective identity or politics. I argue that *anekdoty* might be understood as a both a process of everyday resistance and everyday collective coping. In this chapter I make use of Taussig's (1999) "public secret" in order to explain the significance of such "defacement" of official rhetoric and how such voicing of "that what is generally known, but cannot be articulated" (p. 5) serves to undermine the legitimacy and authoritative power of the Party and Soviet State to define truth. The perspective articulated in these narratives is that of perseverance and coping in an otherwise strangulating and highly dysfunctional social world. Although this type is not explicitly targeting the state, the narratives might be understood as "everyday resistance" (Scott 1985, 1990, 1999) in the ways by which they subvert State/Party discourse and engage in self-definition of identities and experiences.

In chapter five, I describe how *anekdoty* reflect a top-down "imagined community" as codified in passport and immigration laws, language policies, Soviet propaganda, official history and holidays and those other state-defined elements of Soviet society that have been internalized and reified in the discourse of the *anekdot.* I pair such real world events and policies with their expressions in *anekdoty* in order to illustrate how Anderson's (1983; 2006) top-down conceptualization of "imagined communities" impacted the Russian people living under Soviet rule, particularly how *anekdoty* reflect the internalization of these census, map and museum-based definitions of community and identity. As such, I argue that *anekdoty* are not simply transgressive or challenging of Party power, but also reifying of it.

In chapter six, I explore how the Russian man is particularly centered in Russian national identity, through the construction of particular social groups as "other." I argue that these outgroup populations are understood not strictly in terms of how the State has defined them in law or propaganda, but also as a tool of exclusion and self-definition of the Russian man. In particular, I focus upon those *anekdoty* that deal with the Georgians, Chukchi, Americans, and women. Other groups are made mention, though these groups are analyzed for particular salience and as ideal types that lay the framework for my theory of *cultural consciousness*. Although the discussion of women comes up in other parts of the dissertation pertaining to family politics or profanity, it is in this section where I discuss how women as a social group are explicitly targeted in *anekdoty.* In exploring how each of these marked groups is presented in *anekdoty,* I also explore how the Russian man is able to occupy the "voice from nowhere."

The concluding chapter connects the different perspectives from chapters three, four, five and six into a holistic understanding of Russian collective identity under Soviet rule, the varied articulations of resistance and power, and lays out contemporary issues of Russian collectivity that may be explored in different ways. I explore avenues for future research based upon those research questions that emerged during research, but did not fit into the scope of this particular project.

Chapter 2 Critical Discourse Methodology

For this study, I have used a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data. In studying Soviet *anekdoty,* I conducted a discourse analysis of *anekdoty* from the Soviet period while contextualizing such rhetoric with historical data about popular culture (influential movies, television and radio shows upon which *anekdoty* are based), events to which *anekdoty* react (speeches by Brezhnev, Chernobyl, first man on the moon etc.), Soviet legislation and migrations of populations within the USSR. My broad methodological approach is drawn from Foucault's discourse analysis (1972; 1977; 1978) and Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (1997; 2001; 2002). I began my analysis exploring the interrelated issues of: "What was the relationship between the *anekdot* and the Russo-Soviet collectivity," with the hopes of understanding what are the discursive formations articulated by the *anekdot* and how they construct the identities of those who tell them. As such, my research focuses upon both the text and the context—a relationship that is fundamental to the CDA framework (discussed in greater detail below).

Sampling

The sample of *anekdoty* analyzed in this study is meant to be thematically exhaustive. Although the subject matter—Russian *anekdoty* from the Soviet era—existed and wielded their power as an orally-transmitted underground folklore, for the purpose of this historical analysis, they are analyzed as written texts that were drawn from published compilations. During my archival research and fieldwork in St. Petersburg

and Moscow, I found 12 published compilations of *anekdoty* that fulfilled the criteria for inclusion: they included Soviet era *anekdoty* and the compilation had a broad range of genres, not centered on a single subject (e.g. Jews, Children, women). These 12 compilations were drawn from the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg, the State Library in Moscow, in addition to contemporary Russian bookstores in both cities. The National Library carries almost every book that has been published in Russia under Soviet rule and the State Library in Moscow is the third largest library in the world with over 17.5 million books, as such, these two libraries served as the primary archives from which I collected *anekdoty*.

These 12 compilations were published between 1951 and 2010, with the mode occurring in 1991. Information about each of these compilations is listed in Table 2.1. While my argument is framed by the *anekdot*'s pre-Stalin and post-Gorbachev incarnations, my sample is drawn from the period of heightened and solidified Soviet cultural policy from the early 1950s until the end of Soviet censorship in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although I have a compilation published in 2010, each of the compilations was focused upon Soviet humor by definition. The 50 years of Soviet history included in my study involved quite a bit of deliberate constructed experiences and narratives with which *anekdoty* engage. Soviet propaganda provided ample fodder for *anekdoty* which often play off or subvert these mass-media representations.

Table 2.1 The Compilations

#	Title	Date Published	Location of Publication	Nationality of Author[2]
1	*Kreml' I Narod: Politicheskie Anekdoty*	1951	Munich, Germany	Russian
2	*Rossia smeetsia nad SSSR. Chitaite anekdoty! Smotrite! Smeites'!*	1980	Paris, France	Jewish
3	Political Jokes of Leningrad	1982	TX, USA	Jewish
4	*1001 izbrannyi sovetskii politicheskii anekdot*	1986	NJ, USA	Jewish
5	*Anekdot: Ul'ibk zhiznii*	1990	Moskovskaja Oblast, Russia	Russian
6	*Anekdotii*	1991	Maikop, Russia	Russian
7	*Sovetskii Anekdot*	1991	Moscow, Russia	*Unknown*
8	*Anekdotii*	1991	Voronezh, Russia	Russian
9	*Sovetskii Anekdot*	1992	Moscow, Russian	Russian
10	*Iistoria gosudarstva ~~Rossiskaya~~ Sovetskovo b Predaniya I anekdotach*	1995	Moscow, Russia	Russian/ Ukrainian
11	*Tonna Anekdotov b Sovetskich*	2006	St. Petersburg, Russia	Jewish
12	*Anekdotii o Politikach ot SSSR do Yeltsina*	2010	St. Petersburg, Russia	Russian

The first four of these publications were published abroad, since it was illegal to publish (or admit to telling) such subversive jokes under Soviet rule. The first was published in Munich, Germany in 1951. This volume contains *anekdoty* that were told during Stalin's time. Although the primary focus of this study is upon those *anekdoty*

[2] In cases where the nationality was not explained in the authors notes or forward or not listed online, I assumed nationality based upon the genealogy of the last name of the author, though these names may have been pseudonyms used by the authors to avoid punishment, especially for those volumes published before the collapse of the Soviet State.

told after Stalin's death, this volume illustrates how such irony and cynicism was present even under Stalin's rule, though perhaps not as widespread or as frequent in exchange. The second volume was also published abroad, in Paris in 1980. The third, published in the United States in 1982, was the only volume in my set that was already translated into English for my analysis. The fourth volume with 1001 *anekdoty* (the largest volume in my sample), was compiled by a Russian Jew who managed to immigrate to Israel in 1970 and publish there before such publications were allowed in Russia. The other eight compilations were published after 1990, when a relatively free press was reintroduced in Russia. Although there is still considerable censorship in post-Soviet Russia, as evidenced by the imprisonment of numerous journalists and other vocal dissenters in recent years, these anti-Soviet jokes no longer posed a threat since the establishment which they challenge has already been dismantled. Appendix A includes a more detailed description of each of the 12 compilations, including descriptions of how the authors were able to compile the assortment of *anekdoty*.

I chose not to limit my sample to compilations published in the first years after the dissolution of the USSR, but rather to extend my sample across this 60 year time frame in order to understand the thematic changes over time. Even though the all the compilations are about "Soviet" jokes, it was interesting to note which particular jokes were selected by the editor as typical, meaningful or most memorable of that era. These choices of inclusion and exclusion may reflect the how the Russian collective memory has developed and changed over time, though is not something I

have extensively explored in this dissertation. It is a topic I may explore in subsequent analyses.

In initially considered looking through the KGB archives in order to provide greater context to these narratives, as well as to increase my sample. In attempt to do so, I was confronted with institutional roadblocks around which I had difficulty navigating. For instance, I showed up at the entrance of the archives early on a Tuesday morning after I had read online that they would be open at 10am. The guard asked me what I wanted. I told him I had come to look at some archival material. He told me that they were not open to the public on this day or any day this week. Accepting his word, I thanked him, turned around and walked away. When I returned home that evening, I told my cousin about the incident. He told me that I shouldn't have walked away, that "of course" they would tell me they were closed, but that I needed to push back. I needed to talk to the *rukovoditel',* or the "boss," and explain that I knew that they were open, and that I had official written permission from the St. Petersburg State University to see these materials. I went back the next day and followed my cousin's instructions. I argued. I asked to see the *rukovoditel'*, and as promised, I was eventually allowed into the archives and was able to access the materials I requested. From this encounter, I learned much more than what I read in the archives, I learned about informal codes and negotiations of power in a culture of second economies and informal politics. Despite my eventual admission into the archives, the organization (or lack thereof) is such that it became abundantly clear that I would need to know exactly what I was looking for before I arrived. Sheila Fitzpatrick described similar difficulties, calling the archival research "ethnography"

in itself (183). As if that were not difficult enough, Brandenberger (2009) points out that officers may have recorded *anekdoty* out of context, transcribed them incorrectly, or completely fabricated the narratives themselves in order arrest Russian civilians. As such, I decided not to pursue this line of research, instead focusing upon publications that were authored by those people who participated in their exchange under Soviet rule.

I found the compilations for this study housed in the National Library of Russia, located in St. Petersburg, Russia, as well as the Russian State Library in Moscow, Russia. The National Library of Russia is the oldest public library in Russia and hosts quite a number of compilations of *anekdoty* that were published both domestically and abroad. The Russian State Library in Moscow holds every book published in the USSR between 1922 and 1991. Using these two libraries to locate *anekdoty* compilations, I was confident that I would find the level of theoretical saturation that was necessary for such a corpus undertaking. I search for "*anekdoty"* (jokes), "*sovekskii anekdot"* (Soviet joke), as well as "*politicheskii anekdot"* (political joke), in the online search catalogues for the two libraries.[3] From the hundred or so compilations that I found, the 12 selected fit the necessary criteria of being Soviet-era *anekdoty* that did not focus on one particular subject (e.g. women, soviet leaders, children), but rather covered a breadth of subjects.

[3] I searched for the various conjugations of these words, since in the Russian language, each word can be written in 6 different cases and three different genders. I tried all possible combinations in the search fields, often beginning the with the stem words.

The compilations selected were edited by diverse people. A common theme among the *anekdoty* is of "ingroup" versus "outgroup," therefore, it was important that my sample included collections that were assembled by people on different sides of these nationalistic boundaries. I sought to include multiple perspectives in order to understand whether the subject of *anekdoty* differ by nationality, yet the analytical focus of the research that emerged was upon the privileged core identity of Soviet Russians, a group who are might be better understood as part of the "unmarked category." Therefore, this sample is only of those *anekdoty* in the Russian language (as opposed to other non-Russian Soviet republic languages) and those that were labeled as both Soviet *and* Russian *anekdoty*.[4] The editors are varied in their nationalities and geographical location. The publishing houses and place of work for the set of the compilations spans the breadth of Russia—from North-Eastern Siberia to Odessa, Ukraine—as well as a compilation published in Germany, Israel and the US. The professions of the editors are also varied, ranging from a neuroscience professor to a human rights activist to a stand-up comedian.[5] Each of the twelve compilations included in the sample was an anthology of Russian Soviet political *anekdoty* and was written in the Russian language except for the one published in the US by Arie Zand after his immigration. Despite being published abroad, the four volumes published in France, Germany and the US (2) each had considerable overlap

[4] Although one compilation in the sample was published in English, they were translated from Russian and not other Soviet republic dialects, seep Appendix A for more detail.

[5] These professions are based on what I could find about these authors in the actual compilations themselves or through additional research, though I was not able to find such detailed information about each author.

with the *anekdoty* from other volumes in terms of repeated *anekdoty*,[6] and similar subject matter. The commonality shared between these volumes allows us to conclude that these data should be treated as part of the same population.

Although there were other compilations published over this period, in order to be included in my sample, the book needed to be focused on Soviet era *anekdoty* in general. This was determined by title, table of contents and/or a general perusal of the *anekdoty* included. Compilations that only focused on one genre: children's jokes, sexual jokes, Jewish jokes or another subcategory were not included in the sample. These types of *anekdoty* were included in the sample, but that the compilation needed to cover a broader range of subjects in order to be included. I made this decision because my research question concerns the (representations of) collective identity of the Russian people.[7] To focus on compilations that were explicitly targeted to one group over another, or to focus on one issue over another, would not be as representative of those jokes that were "collectively shared."

Together, these 12 volumes include several thousand *anekdoty*. In order to create a more manageable sample, I randomly selected one fifth of the *anekdoty* from each of the compilations. Specifically, I began with a random start in each

[6] No two of the same *anekdot* was included in the sample. In the sampling of counting every fifth joke, if the fifth *anekdot* had already been sampled, I moved on to the sixth *anekdot*, if that one had also already been sampled, I moved back to the fourth, then seventh, then third, until I found a unique *anekdot* to add to the sample. Once a unique *anekdot* had been found, I then resumed the counting process, counting five *anekdoty* in order to locate the next *anekdot* to be included in the sample.

[7] It should be noted that all these compilations are geared towards Russian men who more often exchanged *anekdoty* and who were centered by the discourse. The gendered dimension of collective identity formation reflected in these *anekdoty* is addressed throughout the analysis.

compilation (I picked from a hat the numbers 1-5 to identify the first) and then translated each fifth *anekdot* to be included in my sample. In other words, in one volume I began with the 1st *anekdot* and then sampled the 6th, 11th, 16th… while in another volume I began on the 3rd *anekdot* and then sampled the 8th, 13th, 18th etc. My random start was between the 1st and 5th *anekdot* of each volume. If there was a repeat in my sample (i.e. the 5th *anekdot* had already been included in the sample from another volume), I would skip the repeated *anekdot* and move to the next one (the 6th). If the 6th had also already been sampled, I moved back to the 4th, then 7th, then 3rd, covering all the *anekdoty* around the target one until I found a unique *anekdot* to add to the sample. Once a unique *anekdot* had been found, I then resumed the counting process, counting five *anekdoty* from the *anekdot* that was initially supposed to be included in my sample (whether it was or was not due to redundancies) in order to locate the next *anekdot* to be included in the sample.

Such a method has yielded me a sample of 1290 *anekdoty*. I translated the these narratives from Russian into English and compiled them into separate Microsoft Word documents in order to facilitate analysis through Nvivo 9 software. Although there are a number of *anekdoty* in which the humor is involved in a pun, multiple-meaning word or fragment in the Russian language, I made note of such literary elements in parenthetical notes for coding in English. I also kept the original *anekdoty* for reference purposes as I coded and analyzed the sample.

My "archive" of *anekdoty* is not completely exhaustive (an impossible feat to accomplish with an oral folk genre or unpublished texts) but aims to be thematically

exhaustive based upon my extensive search and coding process. It should be noted that more offensive or controversial *anekdoty* were most likely underrepresented in these volumes and as a result in my sample, in that publishers may have chosen not to include offensive narratives in volumes that were sold to a popular audience. *Anekdoty* of the more violent sexist (e.g. rape) or xenophobic (e.g. holocaust) variety were found with limited frequency in these volumes and in personal conversations, but overall were generally rare. Such type of censorship in published texts is to be expected, as it was in conversations I had with Russian men. As a female foreigner, I would not expect to be privy to the same varieties of *anekdoty* that are exchanged among Russian male insiders behind closed doors. Recognizing this disparity, we might infer that these type of outgroup humor may be underrepresented in the sample. I will discuss this issue in greater detail in my analysis section.

Overall, the volumes included in my sample had very significant overlap with repeated *anekdoty* or repeated themes. I found very few *anekdoty* that did not fit into any of my coding categories, therefore I am confident that I reached a level of saturation with the size of my sample. The codes themselves developed through an iterative process of coding and recoding the narratives based on salient themes and power moves. My coding scheme was informed broadly by Foucault's (1978; 1980) understanding of knowledge, discourse and power and more systematically by Van Dijk's (1997; 2001; 2002), Fairclough (1992) Fairclough & Wodak's (1997) critical discourse analysis. I will go into greater detail about my methodology in the following sections.

Critical Discourse Analysis

One is not born with opinions, identities and memories and neither are groups; they are learned and acquired through a collaborative process of self-definition. The collective identity is in part, constructed in semantic space—in terms of the self-attributed physical characteristics, a common set of values and beliefs and an associated narrative or history which constructs the counted individuals as part of a bounded entity that moves together through historical space and time. Discourse similarly plays an integral role in the relationships between different (ethnic) collectivities. Discourse "is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular topic at a particular historical moment… Discourse is the production of knowledge through language. But … since all social practices entail *meaning* and meaning shapes and influence what we do—our conduct—all practices have a discursive aspect" (Hall 1992: 291). Discourse, impels actions, traversing and producing various forms of knowledge. Foucault (1976) argued that regimes of truth function not by enacting a repressive function upon its audience, but rather through the establishment of a code, one is motivated to accept, abide by and participate in the particular knowledge that is established. Every text or image is linked to a referent system or dominant code, with which the intended audience is expected to be familiar.

Knowledge is power (Foucault 1978) in terms of having the ability to defining the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and defining "truth" from an "unmarked" hegemonic voice; and power is relational, therefore discourse is essential in

constructing group identities and associated relationships. Racial prejudices are not innate nor do they develop spontaneously through interaction with the "other." The "other" must be constructed by discourse that is learned through either personal conversations or transmitted through some sort of textual form. Privileges of the dominant group are established and perpetuated through seemingly nonpartisan laws, rules, norms and habits, a discourse that Gramsci (1971) coined "hegemony." It is the interest of the dominant group to defend and legitimate these negative outgroup representations in order to maintain the power and privilege afforded by their class position. Even if they are not conscious of the personal gain afforded by such opinions, they espouse them because the perspective "make sense" according to (their) hegemonic logic (Van Dijk 2001: 146). For all of these reasons, studying discourse is essential in understanding national collective identity, both in terms of the explicit and implicit discourses that bound a group and situate them in relation to other groups along a historical narrative.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is both a method and a theory that focuses upon "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk 1997). The focus of CDA is upon discourse at two different levels—the micro analysis of the particular "token" text dissected and at the macro level—in terms of connecting that particular text to a larger web of meaning. CDA endeavors to understand how discourse connects the micro and the macro through a number of sites including: (1) identities at the individual and group level in terms of how members are constructed as part of the group, (2) how the actions of these members

construct larger social processes (3) how personal and social cognition converge through repertoires of memories, knowledge and opinions and (4) how local contexts are part of the overarching, pervasive social structure and as part of one set of processes, specifically how local and global contexts are interrelated (Van Dijk 1997).

A central aim of my project is to pay attention to "voices of the unheard," in that subjugated groups often "hold markedly different perceptions of the social inequalities that surround them" (Collins 2001: 4), an in studying these discourses might reveal alternative lived realities and experiences that are omitted from the official record. Studying anekdoty helps us understand how Russians living under the Soviet regime understood such incongruity between state propaganda and lived realities.

Although CDA focuses on a great variety of forms of discourse (written, spoken or visual), it is distinguished from other forms of discourse analysis by its particular affinity for the analysis of social and political issues. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) summarize the main tenets of CDA as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated through those who consume,

interpret, and use narratives

7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory

8. Discourse is a form of social action

(Pp. 271-80)

By citing passages from the texts under analysis, those engaging in CDA attempt to identify patterned ways by which some groups (and their associated interests and perspectives) are favored over others. CDA holds that the social construction of text is not merely a representation of reality, but is reality in and of itself-as such, the study of discourse is the study of lived realities. Such analyses focuses on a dimensions of the text including (but not limited to): grammar and style, semantics, rhetoric (metaphor, irony, hyperbole), structural emphasis (headlines, summaries, bolding of text), narrative, intertextuality, hybridity, speech acts, turn taking, intonation, politeness and face-management (Fairclough 1992; Van Dijk 2008). Since CDA is a theoretical method—there are no standard requirements for which discursive strategies are used. Rather, it is left to the discretion of the researcher to decide which methods might best suit the text and social issues under analysis. CDA theoretical scholars describe their field differently and emphasize different properties of the discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis is often (at least in part) politically motivated and therefore goes beyond simple descriptions of the world in order to delineate relationships of injustice and inequality that operates through text and talk. As such, "critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality" (Van Dijk 2001: 352). Rejecting

Weber's goal to conduct "value-free" research, the critical discourse analysis developed as a reaction against the "grand narrative" modernist paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s. Rather, CDA embraces the feminist situated perspective by trying to understand how discourses construct bodies and collectivities in different (and unequal) ways while simultaneously recognizing how scholarship is also socio-politically "situated" regardless of our intentions or efforts to combat it. Therefore there is no centered "truth," but rather a complex web of diverging and converging perspectives and relationships.

In order to understand the web of interconnected forces and structures which produces situated discourses, the structural and psychological contexts must also be recreated. It needs to be recognized that discourse analysis needs to "account for the fact that discourse and social action is being engaged in within a framework of understanding, communication and interaction which is in turn part of broader socio-cultural structures and processes (Van Dijk 1997: 21). While both objective and subjective qualities of the broader context are taken into account by CDA, Van Dijk's (2001; 2008) socio-cognitive approach places emphasis upon the properties of the subjective *mental* representation of the social situation which enables seamless the production or comprehension of discourse. Those more objective historical dimensions of analysis include the temporal and geographical setting, current trends and discourses, the various institutions and socio-political structures which define relationships between groups of people. The more subjective dimensions include the goals of the actors, their knowledge, opinions, values and shared ideologies. In understanding both the objective and subjective elements enables the researcher to

understand "the communicative situation, deciding on time and place of the communicative event, or on which participants may or must be present, and in which roles, or what knowledge or opinions they should (not) have, and which social actions may or must be accomplished by discourse" (Van Dijk 2001: 356). Through such reconstruction, elements of the text that might have appeared to be arbitrary might be recast as integral aspects of the hegemonic discourse. Though not all varieties of CDA focus upon the same issues, they all share these important methodological emphases upon textual analysis and critical social contextual grounding (Fairclough 1992; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Van Dijk 1997; 2001; 2002).

Since I am more interested in what people are doing with discourse (in terms of constructing a politicized collective identity), my analysis will focus on the ways language constructs social relationships (text) and the historical environment in which *anekdoty* are told (context). Context is central to understanding power relationships in that the discourse extends beyond the text to constitute practices, laws and behaviors (Foucault 1979; Hall 1992). Since the context is historical, I have relied upon second-hand sources to reconstruct the interpersonal contexts in addition analyzing the relationship between *anekdoty* and Soviet events, speeches, films and stories. Text and context are intimately connected in the process of constructing knowledge and power. The *anekdot* is a form of ironic discourse in both text (highlighting mismatch between what the Party says and what the Party does) and context (loyal communist workers telling these jokes in back stairwells at work). As such, I will focus upon two sets of discourse as represented in the *anekdot*: (1) the explicitly targeted discourse of the Party which was both challenged for the incongruity between words and actions

(shared grievances) and reified in terms of glorious Soviet accomplishments (positive identity) in addition to (2) the less intentional discourse produced by the collection and narrative of the *anekdoty* themselves in terms of constructing the boundaries of a Russo-Soviet national identity and of the nostalgia and regret associated with a collective memory or future-guided ideologies.

In order to operationalize this system of analysis, I focused upon particular features of the text that operate as discursive moves of power in constructing groups, institutions and ideologies in meaningful ways. In my analysis, I paid heed to those rhetorical and discursive moves that require more than a cursory reading in order to understand. This was especially necessary with a genre that is so ironic and sarcastic in tone. The list of those qualities I particularly focused upon includes:

1. **Rhetoric** of nationalism in the *anekdot* including
    a. Negative **metaphors** of outgroups which emphasize the contrast between them and the civilized ingroup and cast them as deviant or threatening in some way.
    b. The use of **hyperbole** to exaggerate social problems and the association and/or causation by various non-Russian nationalities and other disfavored outgroups which constructs shared grievances as Us vs. Them issues.
    c. At the heart of the analysis of any sort of humor is also **irony**—in terms of how the *anekdot* itself highlights the incongruity between the Party discourse and Party action.

2. **Structural emphasis** of the discourse in terms of the characters, events and time periods that are most frequently involved in the *anekdoty*. What is included in the compilations is meaningful in that it reflects the perspective of the compiler—what subjects are deemed most meaningful or "popular" might differ by editor and her/his historical and cultural location.
3. **Narrative** in terms of which historical events and cultural values and norms are included and excluded in order to construct a positive (and seamless) Soviet and Russian identity and history at both the *anekdot* and Party level discourses.
4. **Intertextuality** of the *anekdot* in terms of how fictional (movies, stories, cartoons) and non-fictional events (Party discourses exoressed through official textbooks, newspapers and political speeches) are interwoven in the world of the *anekdot.*
5. **Semantic** means of constructing Russian and Soviet identity and memory as a singular corpus through both Party and *anekdot* discourse and the semantic reversals of blame ("blaming the victim") and constructing the Other as not merely different, but deviant.
6. **Hybridity** in terms of how elements of non-Russian Soviet republics (individuals, customs, foods, language, historical events) are co-opted and cast as "Russo-Soviet" through the process collapsing Soviet victories and accomplishes with the Russian identity and history.

In terms of how the social context and performance of the *anekdot* constructs national identity and the associated collectivity, I have focused upon:

7. **Irony-** again highlighting the incongruity between Party rhetoric and lived realities, I will look at both the content of the *anekdoty* but also to the contexts, specifically to those places that might seem sacred to the Party, might be attacked from within by these popular narratives.
8. **Face-management -** although there may be fewer linguistic cues to this process, in terms of the complementary contextual analysis, the popularity of the *anekdot* itself reveals the need for this underground discourse with very specific rules of conduct in order maintain a certain public image.

I explored each of these elements across my sample of *anekdoty* in order to understand the multiple levels of meaning making and social boundary negotiation. The focus was upon both intersexual relationships as well as how these texts engaged with the broader social context and the implication of expressed opinions and stereotypes upon social relations.

Analysis of the Anekdot

The above list of discourse qualities guided my archival analysis by enabling me to recognize how the *anekdot* is linked to many other facets of Soviet culture and history in complex ways. Although the text narratives are very rich in themselves in terms of how they employ irony, cynicism and juxtaposition of propaganda with lived realities, there is also a lot to be considered in relation to the historical and cultural

context to which these jokes refer and from which they are drawn. These stories were only found comical among insiders who were versed in the contradictions and absurdities of Soviet life; they were only laughed at by people who were familiar with racial and gendered stereotypes and by those people who lived under a regime of repression that forbade such laughter or recognition at all. In my exploration of how the *anekdot* served to both challenge *and* perpetuate the hegemonic discourse of the Party, I coded my sample into the categories listed below. Figure 2.1 further illustrates the relationship between these coding categories. These categories developed through an iterative process of coding in which I expanded and collapsed concept clusters as they emerged from the archive. The set of coding categories reflects several rounds in which I recoded significant parts of the sample in order to produce a map that appropriately captured the topics and relationships most frequently addressed by *anekdoty.* The final coding structure is presented below in the following maps:[8]

[8] The grey boxes on the left side of the page represent the highest order codes, which are comprised of the ovals to the right, which are subsequently comprised of rounded rectangles, and finally diamonds. The actual shape of the diagram does not have any significance on the relationship between coding categories. Each are hierarchical in structure.

Figure 2.1 The Party Coding Map

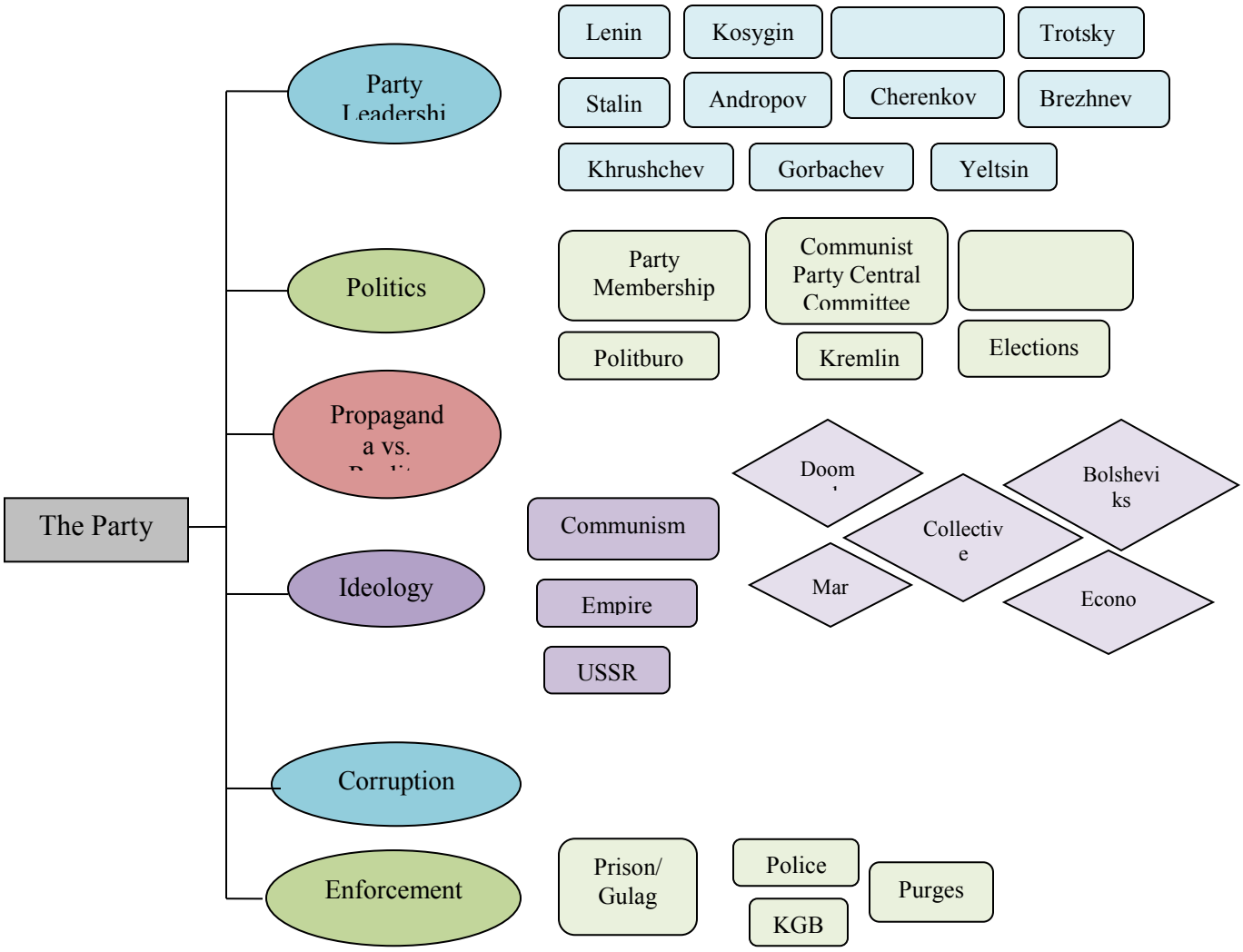


Figure 2.2 Social Problems Coding Map

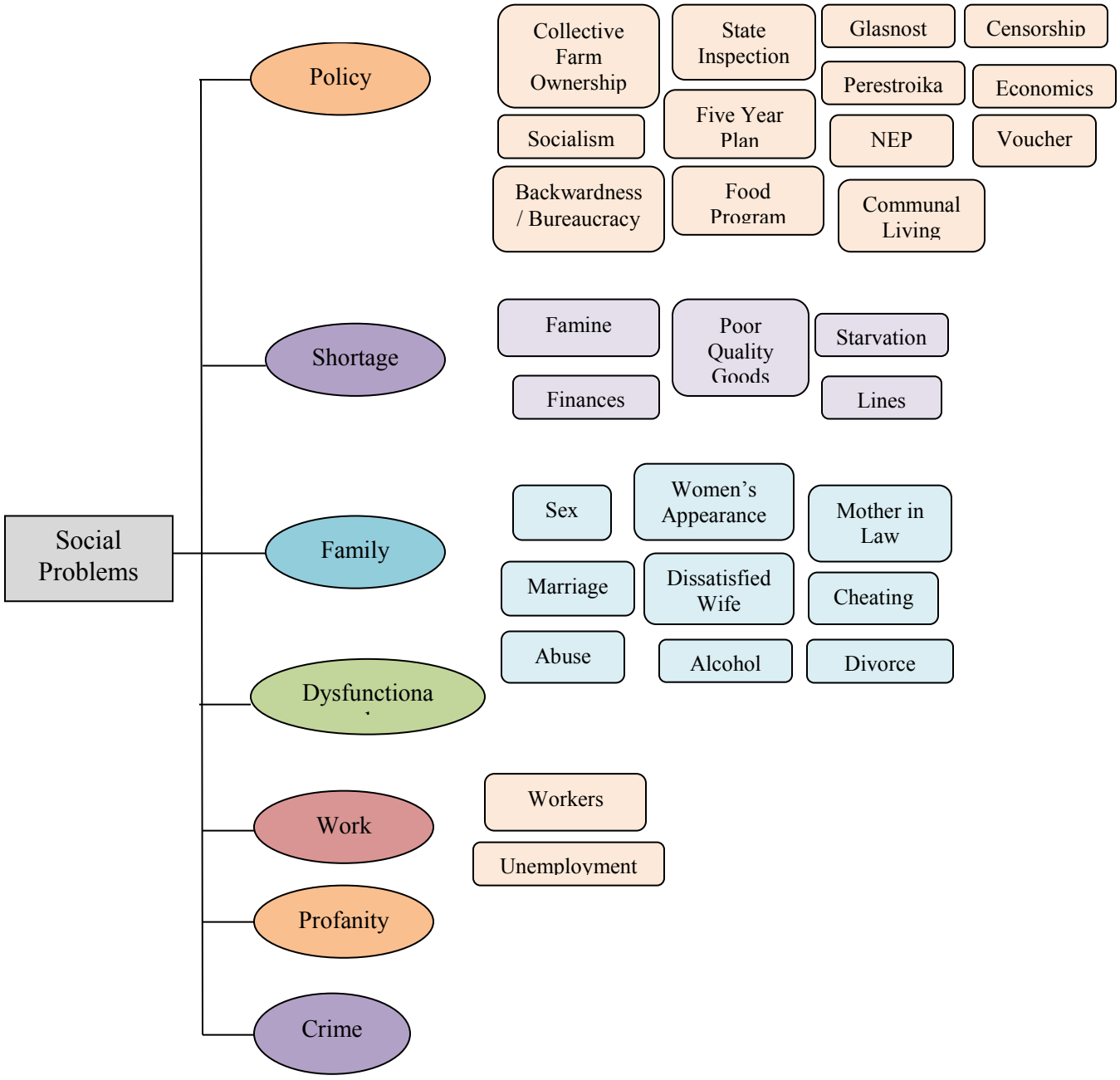


Figure 2.3 Non-Soviet Nationalities Coding Map

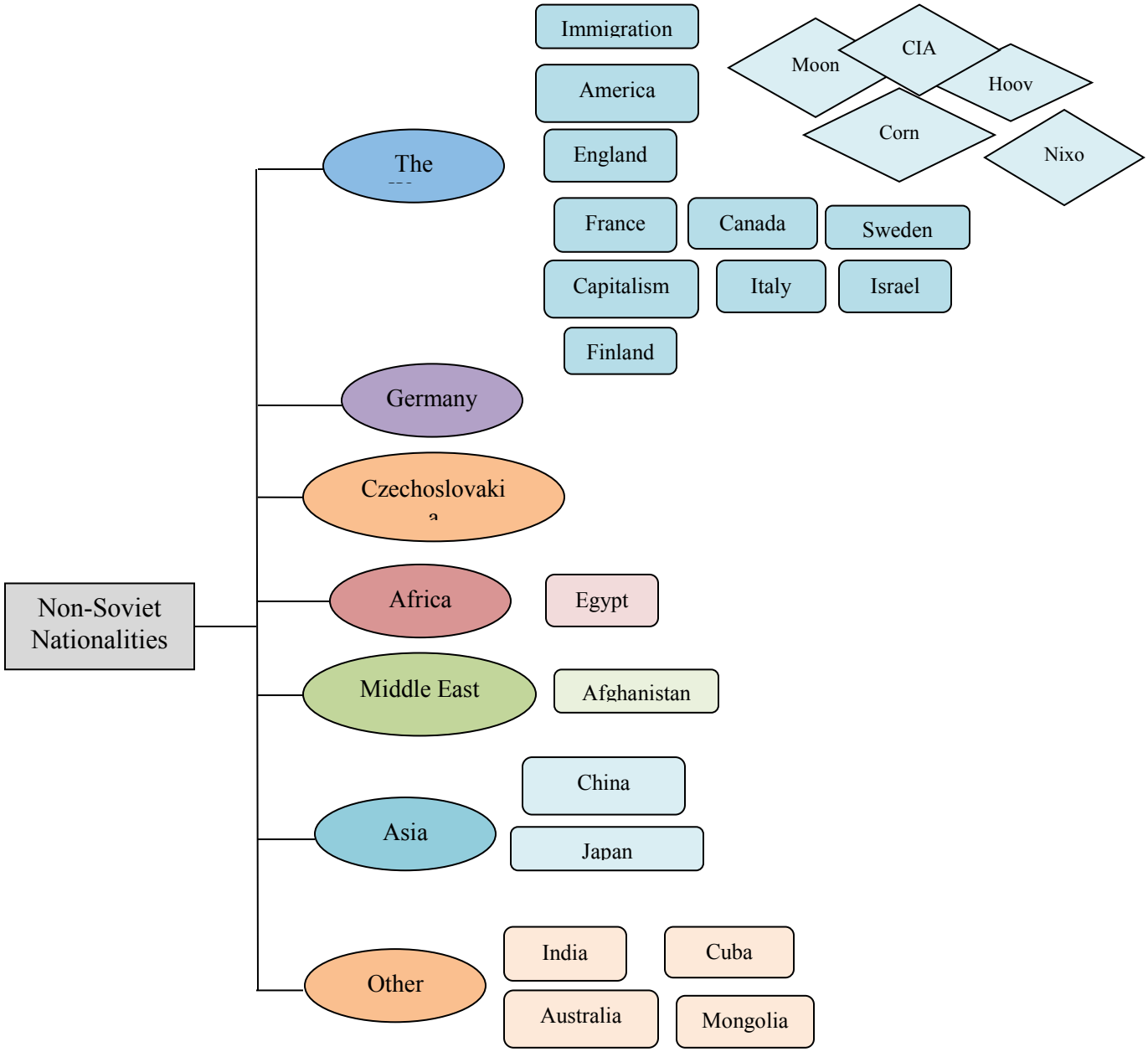


Figure 2.4 Soviet Groups Coding Map[9]

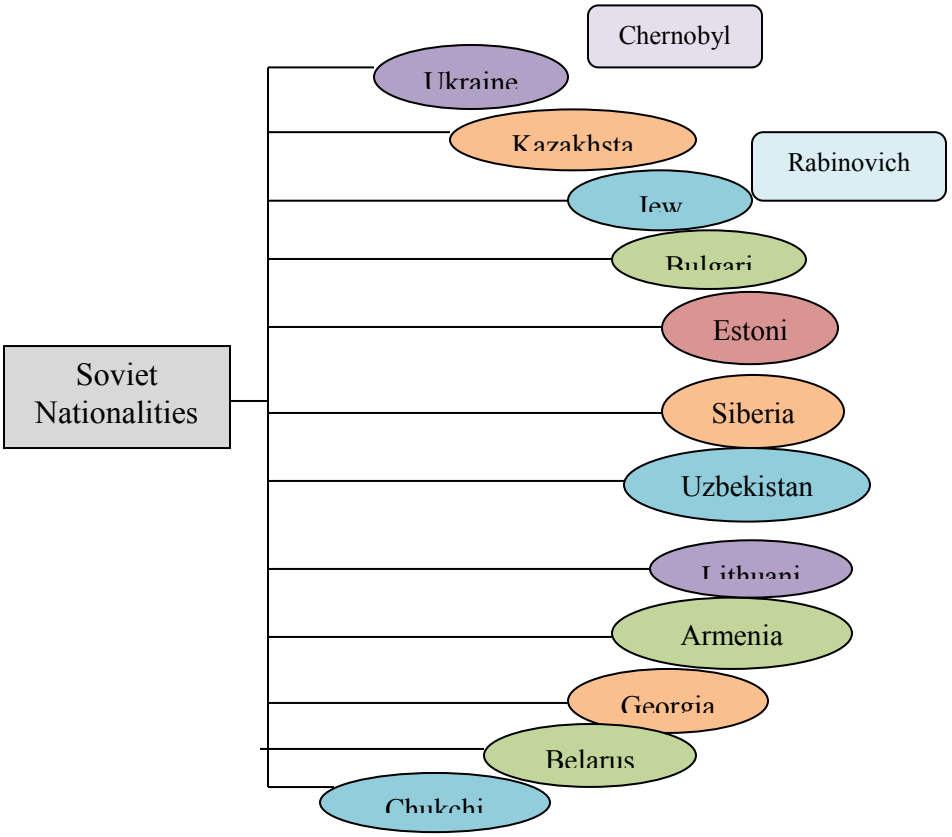
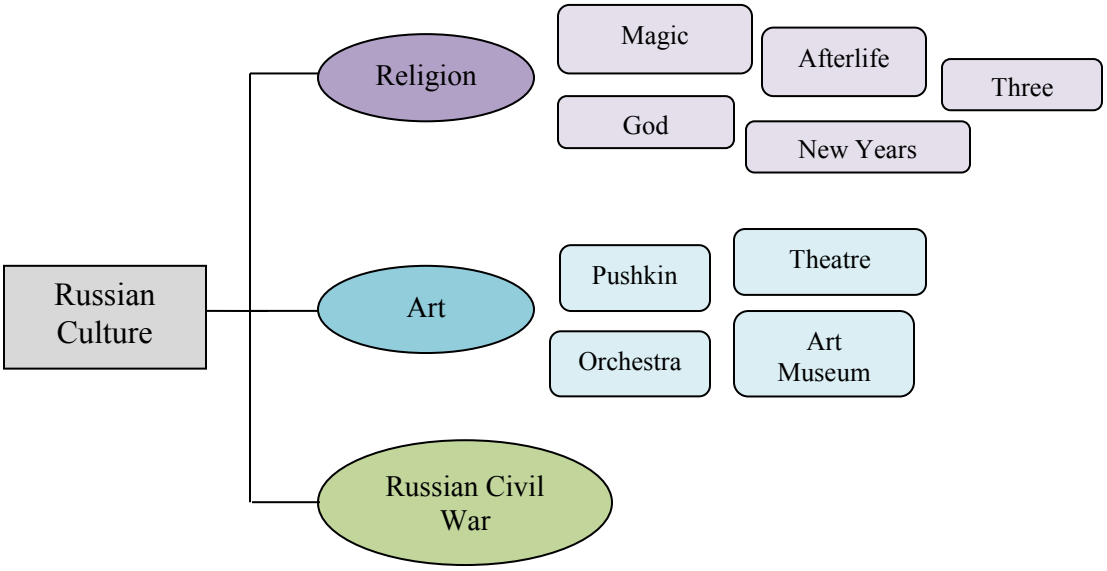


Figure 2.5 Russian Culture Coding Map



[9] The structure of this coding map is different for the sake of space, but should be understood in the same way the other maps are laid out.

Figure 2.6 Collective Identity Coding Map

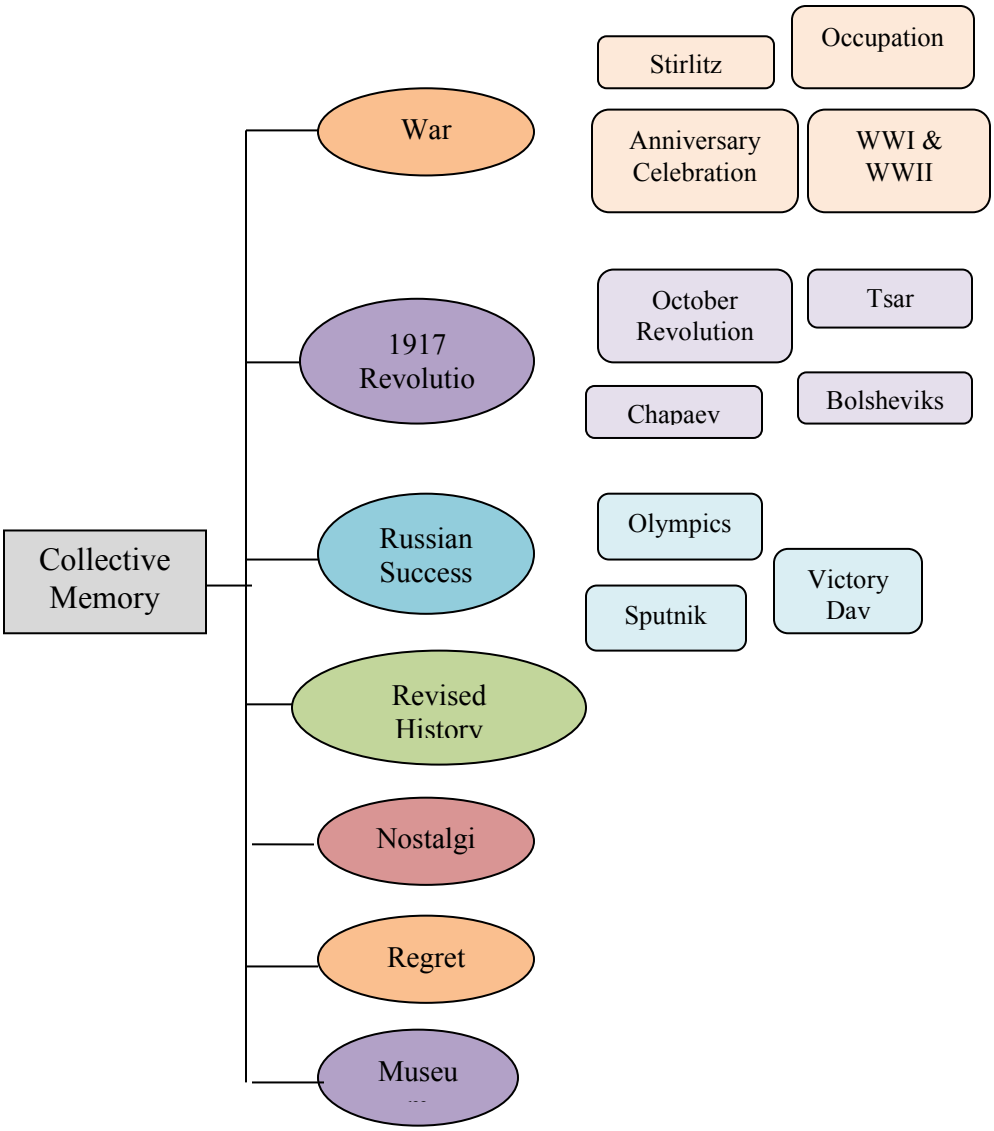


Figure 2.7 Children Coding Map

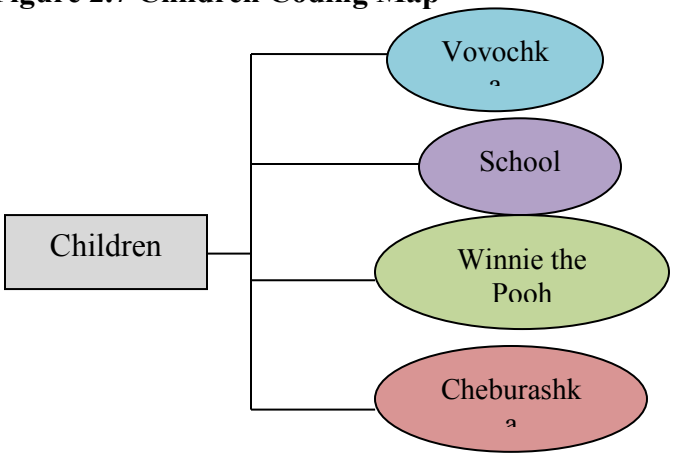
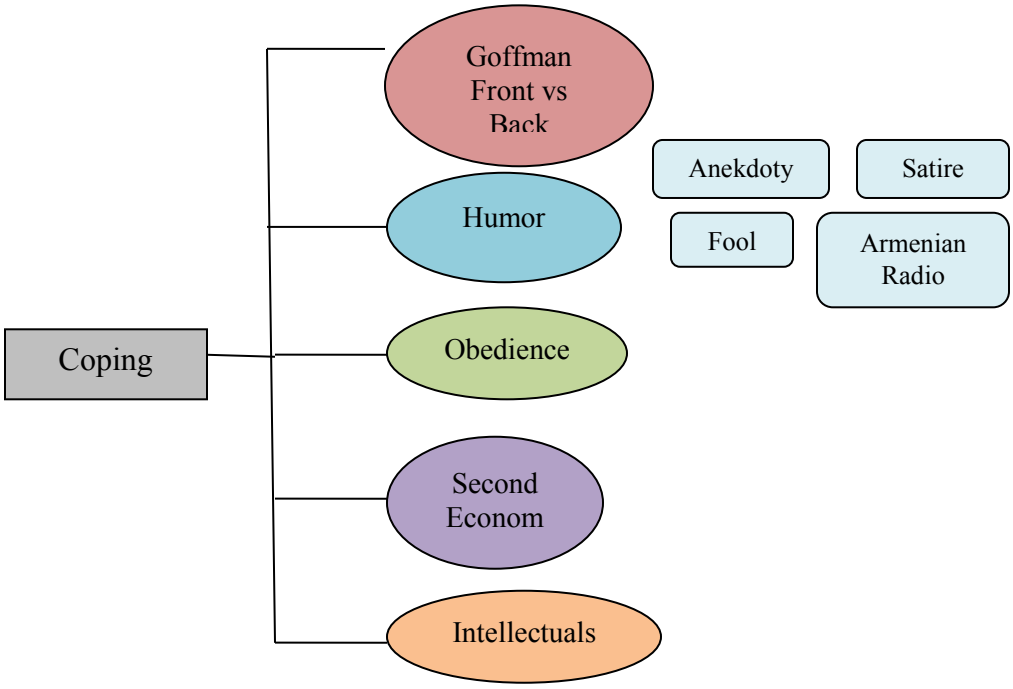


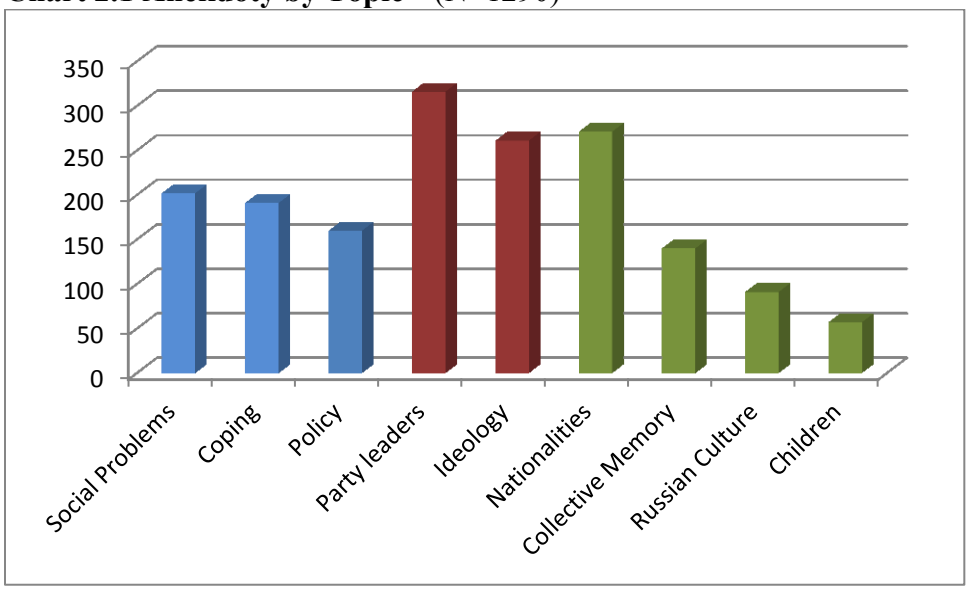
Figure 2.8 Self-Reflexive Coping Coding Map[10]



These maps illustrate the coding structure that emerged after an iterative process of creating, deleting, dividing and merging coding categories. Once all 158 coding categories were established (this includes the removal of those categories with fewer than three references), these categories were lumped into 51 higher order codes which can be grouped into 7 general categories. These categories include *anekdoty* about Party leaders, Ideology, Social Problems, Coping Strategies, Policy, Nationalities, Collective Memory, Russian Culture, and *anekdoty* about children. The breakdown of these categories is displayed in Chart 2.1.

[10] The act of telling *anekdoty* was a process of coping for Russians, but this also emerged as a theme of self-reflexive *anekdoty* that laughed at the culture of laughing and at the ridiculous ways that people learned to cope under daily hardship and struggle. These *anekdoty* were coded in this theme even though all *anekdoty* could arguably be included n a category of coping.

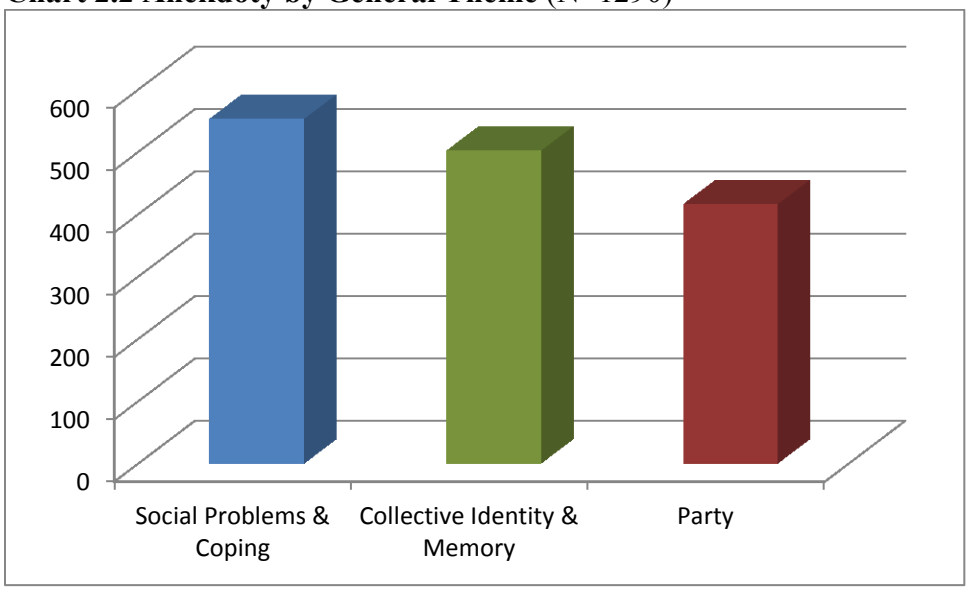
Chart 2.1 Anekdoty by Topic[11] (N=1290)



Based upon an analysis of intersecting codes and connections between *anekdoty* topics and coinciding events, policies, and themes of Soviet daily life, the above arrangement was best suited to explain the relationship between the various genres of *anekdoty* according to the rhetorical and discursive styles I observed in my coding and analysis. These codes feed into the three broad categories of "Party/State," "Social Problems" and "Collective Identity" which are the organization for the next three chapters. The colors represent the broader codes into which they feed: Social Problems, Coping, and Policy are blue, Party leaders and Ideology are red, and Nationalities, Collective Memory, Russian Culture and Children are green.

[11] This table breaks up "The Party" into "Party Leaders," "Ideology," "Enforcement and Politics" and "Social Problems" into "Social Problems" and "Policy."

Chart 2.2 Anekdoty by General Theme (N=1290)



Further breakdown of these three major themes is discussed and analyzed in each of the substantive chapters (3-6). Each *anekdot* in my sample could have been coded in multiple categories, but if it was coded at multiple codes within a single theme, for example if the *anekdot* discussed Stalin, Lenin and Communism, the *anekdot* was only counted once as part of the Party/State category. If it was coded across themes, it was counted in both broad themes.

The primary themes of *anekdoty* can be understood as part of the three categories of subject matter in Chart 2.2: (1) those related to a defined collective identity (Nationalities, Russian Culture, Collective Memory, Children, (2) those in opposition to the state or the Party (Party Leaders and Ideologies), and (3) those of everyday existence, resistance and survival (Social Problems, Policy, and Coping). These three categories intersect in a unique way in order to produce an intersecting discourse of resistance that is simultaneously identity based, state-oriented, and non-state oriented.

The literature has traditionally divided social movements from everyday resistance, arguing that the first is an organized, explicit, identity-based type of activism that is directed towards politics-proper (Bourdieu 1984; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 1998) whereas the latter is conceived as spontaneous, uncoordinated, non-identity based resistance that understands the "personal as political" (Scott 1985, 1990, 1999; Collins 1990; Auyero 2004, 2007). Yet in my analysis of *anekdoty* I found that such a clear-cut distinction could not be made. The *anekdot* serves to both reify and challenge the power of the Soviet regime by virtue of their simultaneous structural assumptions of class, race, gender, sexuality and religion in addition to anarchist sentiments directed towards the Party, the Soviet regime and Marxist and Russian ideologies respectively. The following three chapters explore how these seemingly-contradictory missions (to reify or to dismantle) and are simultaneously articulated via the *anekdot*.

In the next chapter, I explain how the collective identity defined by some *anekdoty* in conjunction with those state-oriented political *anekdoty* articulate resistance to the State and the Party in overtly political ways. The focus is upon the third of *anekdoty* that explicitly engage with State rhetoric, national holidays and other Soviet discourse. These narratives manage to both reify and challenge the Soviet definition of reality by orienting towards a single narrative but challenging elements and underpinning ideologies of this narrative.

In chapter four, I analyze *anekdoty* that are not overtly political in nature, ones that deal with daily struggle, hardship and coping. I argue that *anekdoty* might be

understood as a both a process of everyday resistance and everyday collective coping. The *anekdoty* I draw from for this chapter are primarily from the third about "Social Problems," though many of these narratives also have connections to State/Party resistance or to collective identity, even if these other subjects are not their primary focus. The perspective articulated in these narratives is that of perseverance and coping in an otherwise strangulating and highly dysfunctional social world.

In chapter five, I describe how *anekdoty* reflect a top-down "imagined community" that engages with and reifies particular state-defined elements of Soviet society. I pair real world events and policies with their expressions in *anekdoty* in order to illustrate how Anderson's (1983; 2006) top-down conceptualization of "imagined communities" played out for the Russian people living under Soviet rule and how the discourses running across *anekdoty* are not simply transgressive or challenging of Party power, but also reifying of it. This chapter deals with *anekdoty* from both the State/Party third and from the Collective Identity third.

In chapter six, I explore how the Russian man is particularly centered in Russian national identity, through the construction of particular social groups as "other." I argue that these outgroup populations are understood not strictly in terms of how the State has defined them in law or propaganda, but also as a tool of exclusion and self-definition of the Russian man. In particular, I focus upon those *anekdoty* that deal with the Georgians, Chukchi, Americans and women. These *anekdoty* are drawn primarily from the Collective Identity third of the pie.

Each of these chapters illustrates and explicates my methodological technique through the usage of both charts and in depth analyses of particularly elucidative *anekdoty.* I pair quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to support my overarching argument about the *anekdot* serving as a means of *cultural consciousness* and Russian national definition. I accomplish this by providing proportions of my sample that focused upon the Communist Party, political leaders, social problems, racial, national or gendered groups, popular culture and other subjects of ridicule. From this quantified analysis, I analyze particularly elucidative *anekdoty,* unpacking multiple meanings and explaining the historical and cultural meanings and reflections. Pairing these two approaches together, we are privy to a weighted, grounded analysis that explores those topics that were most popular in the sample, but with an in-depth exploration that enables us to understand the complexity of these discourses that both resist and reify official Party discourse that sought to stabilize and maintain the Soviet political structure.

Chapter 3 *Anekdot* as State/Party Resistance

Jokes did not cause the collapse of the Soviet Union. The collapse was caused by a combination of economic, social, legal and cultural factors including a government rife with contradictions and the development of many local nationalist identities that could no longer be suppressed. Despite this, the influence of these narratives in simultaneously challenging and reifying the legitimacy of Party rule, social categories, and collective histories must not be underestimated. The negotiations of power and constructions of motivating narrative frames and identities within the *anekdot* are strikingly similar to frames used in organized social movements. In a significant proportion of *anekdoty,* there is (1) the construction of a collective identity, that is a (2) coordinated effort as reflected by (a) networks developed around the exchange of these jokes and (b) the fluency in these choreographed discourses of dissent, (3) that is directed against the Soviet State and Communist Party in terms of their critiques and challenges to the legitimacy of Soviet leadership, its guiding ideology, and the projected future. In this chapter, I will explore how *anekdoty* can be seen as a distinctly political expression that pits the people against the State in a number of ways.

Collective Identity and Narrative in State Resistance Rhetoric

Collective identities are of particular interest to social movement theorists, who explore how they are used as collective action "frames" that motivate individuals to act on behalf of collective interests (Snow Benford 1988, 1992; Gamson 1992; Polletta 1998). Framing has been defined by Snow and Benford (1988) as how "social

movement organizations and their agents…assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support and to demobilize antagonists" (198). Frames enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label events and people into meaningful categories (Snow and Benford 1992: 137). Gamson (1992) adds that social movement frames almost always include components of injustice, identity, and agency. He argues such frames construct a situation as identity-based, empowering the group demarcated by the frame to politically challenge or ameliorate a wrong or unjust situation.

Traditionally, social movement theorists tend to pay attention to the role of movement organizers in promoting collective identities through framing process. What remains underexplored are the other, less-calculated processes of movement identity formation. In her account of Civil Rights activists, Francesca Polletta (1998) highlights the importance of narratives—stories, tales, allegories—in the power of framing. She argues that narratives serve as discourses through which frames are "expressed and made concrete," (Fine 1995: 134), and "exemplified" (Benford 1993: 196). These functions are important, but also help people locate themselves in a broader social and historical context which often results in the alignment with particular social causes or issues. Poletta argues that, "Narrative understandings of identity… emphasize the structuring of events into evolving wholes… Narratives not only make sense of the past and present, but, since the story's chronological end is also at its end in the sense of moral, purpose or telos, they project a future" (1998: 140). The process of telling such stories that explain how individuals become a

solidified "we" strengthens a collective identity, making possible the development of a coherent community, or nation (Sewell 1992; Somers 1992, 1994; Poletta 1998). As a consequence, "people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narrative" (Somers & Gibson 1993). These "narratives" or cultural discourses delineate the realm of possible actions and motivations for the associated collectivities.

Such narratives run across Soviet era *anekdoty* and they tell stories that consciously or unconsciously fulfill Simon and Klandermans' (2001) five functions of a collective identity. They define the Russian collective (belongingness), distinguishes this group from other Soviet and non-Soviet groups (distinctiveness), highlights the accomplishments (respect) and values (meaning) of these people, all through a popularly authored discourse that empowers the group to self-define (agency). I term the fluency in these collective discourses, *cultural consciousness.* Russians' fluency in this popularly-authored narrative that defined them as a group, established values and goals produced and reinforced a collective identity and reflected a common literacy and identification at the national level.

Social movement theorists view collective identity as the groundwork of an emergent nationalism, which intensifies resultant consequences of such collectivization since they might motivate collective action. This perception of collectivization and nationalism privileges the institutionalized nation-state. "Minority nationalisms" are only recognized once they become an organized, political entity that confronts the governance of the "nationalizing state," or if they

orient toward a foreign, external homeland state. In *Nationalism Reframed* (1996), Rogers Brubaker argues that nationalism is a form of politics, and that contestation to the dominant nationalism only occurs through direct challenges to power. An implicit assumption of such an argument is that if an opposition does not conceive of themselves as separate "people," that they must still align with the dominant nationalist sentiment or they are not expressing form of nationalism or collective identity. Without formal organization and overt contestation of the dominant nationalism's political sovereignty, such alternative, possibly resistant, nationalist discourses remain unrecognized. This is important in that *anekdoty* express such resistant discourses but did not always express a separate collective identity. The discourses express an emergent nationalism, even if it was not as clear-cut across peoples, or geographically bounded as traditional nationalisms normally appear, as such, they express *cultural consciousness,* that involves self-awareness and agency, but not necessarily with a political goal of collective recognition at a national level.

Although *anekdoty* do not necessarily encourage like-minded individuals to mobilize visually or publically as traditional forms of collective action might appear, their power to chip away at the establishment or express a collective identity that challenges the legitimacy of another naming authority should not be underestimated. Specifically, by revealing more candid and uncensored opinions of the government and other nationalities that otherwise are absent from the hegemonic representation of reality produced by the Party this folklore presents a voice for the oppressed (Yurchak 1997). An *anekdot* only lives on or is retold if it contains some truth; we laugh at jokes because they are meaningful, because they reveal the ironic underbelly

of groups, governments and historical eras of which we are members. The truths they reveal may make us uncomfortable, hence the reason we discuss such issues through parables, fictional characters and exaggerated interactions.

Agent of Socialization into Collective Identity

In Russia, becoming versed in *anekdoty*—accumulating a set of these jokes, knowing how to tell them in succession, how to integrate them into general conversation, and understanding their critiques of everyday life were all part of childhood socialization (Moshkin and Rudenko 1996). Although children's jokes, or high school and college jokes have different subject matter than those *anekdoty* told by adults, in a sense, these jokes teach children what it means to be "Russian"—in terms of who was included and who was excluded from the collective national identity and by learning the defining features of the Russo-Soviet collective memory/history. Children's *anekdoty* make use of ethnic stereotypes, but often by using animals as the subjects of ridicule. The process of "othering" begins at an early age, but in milder and less explicit terms than those used by their adult counterparts. Stories told by the *anekdot* became integrated into the performer and audience's self-concept. These identities and values are transmitted by (1) the popular production of collective knowledge, (2) affording the teller and listener membership to the collective to whom the joke is meaningful and funny, and (3) enabling both to transcend the current reality by making light of it, or expressing nostalgia for something that happened in the past. Other *anekdoty* include children in the narratives in order to highlight the absurdity of nostalgia for imperial Russia. The two

following *anekdoty* illustrate how children yearn for the fictional realities from their bedtime stories rather than a historical period.

A Teacher asked a first grade boy, "Who is your father?"

"Comrade Stalin!" The boy shouted the well-instructed phrase.

"Good. And who is your mother?"

"Our Soviet Motherland!"

"Very well. And what do you want to be?"

"An orphan…"

A delegation of foreign communists came to see a Moscow kindergarten. Before they came, the kids were instructed to answer every question by the visitors with just one sentence, "In the USSR everything is the best in the world."

The visitors came and asked their questions:

"Children, do you like your kindergarten?"

"In the USSR everything is the best in the world!" the kids shouted.

"And what about the food you get?"

"In the USSR everything is the best in the world!"

"Do you like your toys?"

"In the USSR everything is the best in the world!"

At that, the smallest boy in the group started crying.

"Misha, why are you crying? What happened?"

"I want to go to the USSR!"

These *anekdoty* reveal the mismatch between the propaganda "truth" and the lived realities of the Russian people. Although adults were socialized to act in public as though the presentation of reality and reality itself were compatible, behind closed doors, they would laugh or lament the mismatch between these images cast abroad and the daily realities of those living in the Soviet Union. Children, before developing such ability to manage multiple selves and multiple truths, yearned for the utopian vision that was not unlike other fairytale stories that were read to them at night.

Shmelev and Shmelev (2000) argue that in order to tell the *anekdot* one must be versed in the clichés of Russian culture in both form and content. This fluency enables the individual to use the *anekdot* as a "case" in an argument or to be able to tell them in succession around a kitchen table or in another appropriate context. In addition to the clichéd intonation, structure and syntax of the *anekdot*—setting up the appropriate contextual lead up and ending with the jarring, laughter-producing punch line—the socialized Russian must be versed in the characters and historical memories to which the jokes refer. Without knowing the movies and political figures, ideologies and their divergent realities, the joke is not funny. Although the *anekdot* bears some similarity to the proverb or prayer, the *anekdot* differs in that one aims to tell a new *anekdot*, rather than one with "a beard" (an old joke that has been heard before). As such, the *anekdoty* build upon previous *anekdoty*, some only funny if the one referenced has been heard before.

Collective Memory

In addition to the distinction between "us and "them," a collectivity gains strength through a narrative history, one that identifies the collectivity's goals and interests, and which delineates how these interests have been pursued over time. This is often accomplished by the successful construction of a "collective memory" (Burke 1990; Halbwachs1992; Zerubuval 2004; Tismaneanu 1988). Although the Soviet Union was greater in geographic space and population than the land and people of Russia, I argue that the Russian collective memory may be treated conterminously with the Soviet collective memory in regards to a number of important issues. This is not to say that the Soviet memory might be reduced to the Russian one or vice versa, but as the "unmarked" race (i.e. the centered ethnicity, language, and culture), the two perspectives share many central events, language, and nation-defining sites. Some of these important overlaps include that (1) Russia comprised 17,075,400 of the Soviet Union's 22,402,200 square kilometers, the majority of the Soviet population was Russian[12], Moscow was the largest city and capital of the USSR,[13] and the contemporary nation-state of the Russian Federation self-defines itself as its "continuation state" seeking to fulfill the obligations of the former USSR. The geographical or population breadth of the Soviet Union collective memory may be greater than that of the Russian and the temporal historical breadth of the Russian

[12] Especially in the last few years when Russians composed 50.78% of the population.

[13] Moscow had nine million inhabitants and St. Petersburg—formerly Leningrad—was second with five million.

might be greater than that of the Soviet Union's, but the two have served to construct the other in very significant ways. Such collective memory has both cumulative and current aspects: highlighting continuity in some contexts, while integrating new interpretation of the past in terms of the contemporary agendas. As Coser (1992) writes in regards to collective memory, "a society's needs may impel it to refashion the past, but successive epochs are being kept alive through a common code and a common symbolic canon amidst contemporary revisions" (p. 26-7). The past may be revised to align with present goals, but it is never completely overwritten or erased from the public memory.

Since individuals cannot remember all historical events directly, many of them can only be simulated in indirect ways by reading textbooks, listening and participating in festive celebrations in which people congregate together to commemorate historical events and accomplishments. As a result, "the past is stored and interpreted by social institutions" (Coser 1992: 26-7). Groups of people only come to define their collective identity, memory, and history by contrasting its present self-collectivity with its constructed past, and in the case of the Russian collective, this collective past is pre-Soviet and nationalistic in nature which serves to promote a nostalgia for the return of the national identity. Zerubavel (2003) argues that this process of collective construction is often articulated through historical sites, memorabilia and relics, historical analogies, or holidays that celebrate "anniversaries" of events as though it is the "same time"—albeit simply according to a calendar date—enables us to "revisit" our collective past. Although the Soviet project sought to replace nation-specific memories with Soviet collective ones, the *anekdot*'s regular

references to particular events, figures, and pop cultural items serves to construct the collective memory of the Soviet Union.

Anekdoty's reaction to the constructed collective memory invariably produces another collective memory. Nostalgia for pre-Soviet times is a topic of some *anekdoty,* serving to fetishize czarist and "Russian" culture. Below are some examples:

A grandmother was asking her grandson to explain Communism to her.

"They told us in school that when Communism arrives there will be food for everybody—meat, poultry, fresh fruits; the shops will be full of all kinds of goods; and you'll be able to buy anything you want without having to wait in line."

"Ahh," exclaimed the grandmother expectantly. "Just like in the old days under the czar!"

Two old Bolsheviks:

"Remember Vassya, how we how we stormed the winter palace?"

"Yeah, that was a bit hasty…"

Expressed in the above *anekdoty* is regret regarding how the history of events unfolded. In the first narrative, living conditions under the czar are remembered in a utopian, nostalgic fashion and in the second, we hear sentiments of regret as earlier, "hasty" political actions and unrealistic hopes are reconsidered. What is of particular

interest about this nostalgia for pre-Soviet times is that in contemporary Russia, there are considerable post-Soviet *anekdoty* that express nostalgia for *Soviet* times!

Collective memory is not held together because it exists in singular or continuous time, but rather because it belongs to a common group with strong individual ties. The individually experienced collective memory enables the group member to take the perspective of this group, and ultimately adopts its interests (Halbwachs 1992:52). The *anekdot's* recollection of historical events, collective identities and sentiments can serve to construct and define the contours of the national identity in terms of memorialized events, highlighted "Russian" character traits, included and excluded subgroups etc.

The definition of who belongs to the collectivity or who occupies the role of the hero has changed over time. In older, long-form *anekdoty*, the stories operated along class and geographic lines and the tsar was villainized (Alaev 1995; Brandenberger 2009). As the textbooks and official memory was altered to confirm with contemporary Communist Party goals and ideologies, the contours of such a collectivity shifted.[14] James Wertsch (2002) conceives of the collective memory as textually-mediated and conditioned by various cultural instruments such as historical narratives in annals, chronicles and history textbooks. Wertsch argues that there is often a "schemactic narrative template," or common narrative structure to the collective memory story. In Soviet textbooks, Wertsch (2002) identified this pattern

[14] The contours of the collectivity, as reflected by those social groups who are cast as "other" in *anekdoty,* have shifted over time. Unfortunately in this study of printed and published narratives, it is impossible to discern the exact dates of any of the specific *anekdot.* Although it is possible to locate these *anekdoty* within a general time-period by taking into account publication date or the editor's note at the beginning of some compilation, a systematic analysis by date is impossible to conduct with this data.

as consistently ascribing to the following trajectory: (1) A starting point of a peaceful existence which is later interrupted by: (2) an external force which produces some sort of difficulties or frustrations for the people, which leads to (3) a period of crisis, struggle and suffering, that is later (4) is ameliorated by a triumph over the antagonistic group. This actor-hero narrative constructs the past (or stage 1) as a peaceful, problem-free era to which the people want to return. In order for this story line to work, the people who lived through this earlier time must comply in re-remembering this historical with the nostalgia articulated in the *anekdot*.

The Soviet Party's narrative adopted a Marxist perspective that constructs capitalism as the intruding external force that produced a period of crisis, suffering and struggle. In order to believe this storyline, the current time must be perceived as more pleasant or conflict-free than the past. This was not a narrative that many Russians were willing to accept as evidenced by the many *anekdoty* that challenged Party rhetoric and lamented about daily social problems. Russians were aware of this revisionist, triumphant refashioning of the past and expressed their cynicism toward it in *anekdoty.* For example,

Granddaughter: Was Lenin a Good man?

Grandma: Yes, he was a good man.

Granddaughter: And Stalin was a bad man, right?

Grandma: Yes he was a bad man.

Granddaughter: What about Khrushchev? Is he a good man or bad?

Grandma: We'll know after he dies, dear.

Such *anekdoty* as the one above challenge the argument that Russians uncritically believed the collective memory presented in the official realm; instead, these narratives recognize and draw attention to the power of official History to dictate a "truth" that sharply contrasts with personal lived experience. Russians' relationship to this performance is more complex than one of acceptance or rejection. As the core of the Soviet empire, it would follow that Russians want the empire to be glorious and successful, even if they recognize that Party's propaganda that depicts such a glorious and successful empire has little overlap with reality behind it. Similar to the common use of irony in *anekdoty* in order to reflect the daily practice of Goffman's front and back stages, *anekdoty* enable the audience to recognize their shared experiences and backstage opinions with other Russian Soviets who in public rarely dissent.

Zerubavel (2003) argues that the process of constructing a collective identity and associated memory is often articulated through historical sites, memorabilia and relics, historical analogies, or holidays which celebrate "anniversaries" of events as though it is the "same time"—albeit simply according to a calendar date—enable us to "revisit" our collective past. He argues further that such collectivities are often constructed through ancestral ties, in that we link ourselves to other members of our imagined community by thinking in terms of relatives and generations—so that we are "20 persons away from Christopher Columbus" as opposed to 500 years. Knowing that we descend from some common ancestor makes us feel connected.

> "And yet, despite the fact that this pronouncedly *monogenist* vision of all humanity descending from some common ancestor is commonly accepted by

> scientists today, some anthropologists nevertheless advocate an alternative *polygenist* narrative essentially attributing to the various human 'races' altogether separate ancestries…Racism has always played a major role in polygenism" in serving to construct kinship structures in such a way as to exclude other races from one's collectivity of Mankind, and the natural rights or essences of that collectivity" (Zerubavel 2003: 85).

This polygenist narrative was used in Soviet organization in order to distinguish Russians from Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Jews, etc. Although they were all allegedly equal citizens in the USSR, by virtue of their different passport-identifying nationalities, they were not equal. Such differentiation serves as further evidence that Russia served as the core of the imperialist Soviet Union empire.

Coordination in a "Backstage"

Under a totalitarian regime that required resolute compliance in behavior and belief by its citizens, the *anekdot* stood apart as one of the only means by which voluntary collective action, dissent, and identity could be expressed. The *anekdot* enabled the Soviet citizen to manage and express two different selves—the official public law-abiding Party member, and the unofficial, private satirical Russian. The *anekdot* expressed self-reflexive and ironic reflections upon Soviet life. In doing so, they highlighted shared grievances through both the context in which they were exchanged (private/backstage spheres) and the content that blamed the government. They also implicated complicit Russian citizens for playing along.

In his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Erving Goffman argues that individuals are constantly shifting between "front" and "back" stages in various environments of their life. It is on this front stage that people feel greater need to act in a particular way, wear the appropriate mask in order to play the appropriate role of the friendly waitress, warm mother, serious businesswoman etc. Throughout our lives, we play a number of different roles with corresponding "masks." Goffman argues that these roles might be divided into "public" and "private" selves, which correspond to varying levels of self-presentation. Since our public roles often expect more stringent regulation, people may feel more relaxed in their private domains. Such a division conveniently maps onto the lives of Soviet citizens.

Soviet citizens became accustomed to playing the part of the upstanding citizen through participation in political rallies, attending Party meetings, and "voting" appropriately at work. Although the Goffman comparison is elucidating, one must be careful not to privilege the private self as the Russian's "true" self—in contrast to the public "fake" self—but rather appreciate how Soviet citizens became accustomed to living two parallel worlds of actions, opinions and self-expression. The *anekdot* appears more genuine than behavior in the public sphere because it is told in third person and therefore enabled more direct expressions of cynicism and skepticism of the Politburo, Congress and the Party. Yurchak (1997) coined the private, unofficial expressions as "parallel events," "parallel meanings," and "parallel cultures" that existed along official rhetoric, presentation and events. Although official symbols were not taken at face value, they were not openly challenged by

most Russians, since such open dissent often made life even harder than it already was, sometimes with lethal consequences. As such, the ability to participate in parallel events, construct parallel meanings and cultures was a means of survival in Soviet Russia (Yurchak 1997).

The *anekdot* was an exemplar of this process in that it enabled Russians to participate in these parallel universes, by providing a venue to relax one's official presentation without being subject to the label of a disloyal dissident who was denied membership to the Soviet collectivity. Yurchak (1997) explains,

> "For the normal subject the only sensible behavior in the public sphere was the pretense that one did not see the falsity of official claims. I will call this type of relation to the symbolic order in late socialism *pretense misrecognition*. For example, in the early 1980s practically everyone routinely went to *Komsomol*, and other meetings and, especially in the case of the last Soviet generation, routinely paid little or no attention to what was going on there. Practically everyone voted in favor of the resolutions, often while reading a book and oblivious to what the vote concerned. Most people recognized the inevitability of the meetings and the falsity of the decisions taken at the, and precisely for these reasons preferred to feign misrecognition…people participated in two events simultaneously-in the official event (which they pretend to misrecognize) and the parallel event" (p. 171-2)

The ideological power that the Soviet government reined over the people produced this *pretense misrecognition*—the purposeful internal suppression of critical analysis

or rejection of the Soviet order. Realizing that speaking out as dissident would only make their lives—and their friends' and family's lives—more difficult, Russians learned to play the part of the unquestioning Party member with complete irony. *Anekdoty* expressed how nothing could be taken at face value in the Soviet Union—how everything is the opposite of how it is depicted in the media and that the lives of the Russian citizens were defined by the mismatch between ideology and reality. The following two *anekdoty* spoke to this regular contradiction present in Soviet life.

Six Paradoxes of Soviet life:

1. *Nobody worked, but the plan(Five-Year Economic Plan) was always fulfilled*
2. *The plan was fulfilled, but the stores' shelves were empty*
3. *The shelves were empty, but nobody starved*
4. *Nobody starved, but everybody was unhappy*
5. *Everybody was unhappy, but nobody complained*
6. *Nobody complained, but the jails were full.*

In a questionnaire for applicants to the communist Party membership one of the questions was, "What is your attitude to the Soviet authority?" One applicant answered, "The same as to my wife." To the request to elaborate, the applicant explained, "First, I love her; second, I fear her; third, I wish I had another one."

This daily presentation produced a type of humor "in which one admitted not only one's inability to struggle against the official ideology, but also one's inability to struggle against one's own simulated support of this ideology" (Yurchak 1997:178). The political *anekdot* often operated by making fun of the performer and audience themselves in terms of their incongruent self-presentations across disparate contexts. The backstage involved such ironic mutual understanding and cooperative coping mechanisms among citizens, while on the front stage these same people performed unflinching support of the State and its associated ideology.

Anekdoty enable once-strangers to laugh together at their common values and shared experiences—especially at those things that produce great discomfort, fear or internal conflict when openly discussed. The balancing of public and private selves is a forbidden topic of discussion, since it would reveal a loss of faith or express distrust of the Party. Therefore, Soviet citizens might have been unaware of this collective practice if it had not been for the *anekdot,* which expressed such sometimes subtle, sometimes-scathing mockery of the "official discourse." There are many jokes about telling *anekdoty:* about how frequently and repetitively they are told that they are numbered and memorized or about the potential penal consequences of telling them.

> *In prison, jokes are retold thousands of times, so they are numbered to as not to waste time.*
>
> *"Number 67!" Laughter.*
>
> *"Number 52!" Laughter.*
>
> *"Number 41!" One of the inmates starts laughing hysterically.*
>
> *"I've never heard that one before!"*

A competition for the best anekdot has been announced. First prize: twenty five years; second prize: twenty years, and two condolence prizes: fifteen years each.

A judge walks out of the courtroom, laughing loudly. A colleague asks, "What are you laughing about?"
"Ah, I just heard an excellent anekdot," the judge says, wiping away tears of laughter.
"An anekdot? Tell me!"
"Are you crazy? I just sentenced a man to ten years for it."

The self-reflexivity of these jokes illustrates just how ubiquitous the *anekdot* was in this period and just how well versed some Russians were in them. These narratives further highlight how popular they were despite the severe punishment that would befall someone who was caught telling one. This collective perspective might be extended beyond the *anekdot* itself to omnipresence of general criticism and disapproval of the State which only occurred in private spheres where people felt safer from punishment. Although in public Russians had to display their unwavering support of communism and the political leaders who were in charge, we see how *anekdoty* often highlight the empty promises of the ideology of communism and the ineptitude of Soviet leaders. In this way, *anekdoty* offered Russians an outlet for critique and resistance.

Resistance against the State

American sociology tends to define social movements as collective action that is oriented toward the State in terms of legal recognition or political resistance (Piven and Cloward 1971; Tilly, Tilly and Tilly 1975; Gamson 1975; Jenkins 1983). Specifically, the two primary frameworks of political activism studies of "resource mobilization" and "political opportunity" both focus upon when and why social movements are able to develop in relationship to the State at particular historical moments (Edelman 2001; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 1998). Leading scholars in the field, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, define contentious politics as: "episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants" (2001:5). This paradigm presumes that only through formal recognition by those who are in power, does the acting entity have the ability to realize legitimate change. The call for change must be directed towards the State and negotiations must be made through the political system in order for a regime to change its ways. Although *anekdoty* are not visible as overt dialogue with or protest against the state, their anti-hegemonic expressions that reject the state's power to control or define identities serve as an important form of resistance.

Over two-thirds of my sample of *anekdoty* criticized Soviet leadership, communist ideology, State power, or a future under communism more generally. In

order to explore the ways by which *anekdoty* resist the state or challenge its legitimacy, I will walk through these four topics in greater detail.

Political Leaders and Soviet Power

The genre of *anekdoty* that most explicitly challenges the State apparatus is the one that involves narratives about Soviet leadership. Although there has been a debate as to what extent *anekdoty* were told under Stalin's rule (Brandenberger 2009; Sturman 1984; Dolgopolova 1981), from a number of rare published volumes, it is evident the political jokes did begin to some extent as early as 1918 in reaction to the revolution and civil war. Further evidence from these volumes and interviews, indicate that *anekdoty* from the 1920s focused upon the construction of socialism and the Soviet State, and in 1930s about the shortages and famines associated with the new political regime (Brandenberger 2009; Harvard Soviet Social Project).

Chart 3.1 Party Topics (N =722)

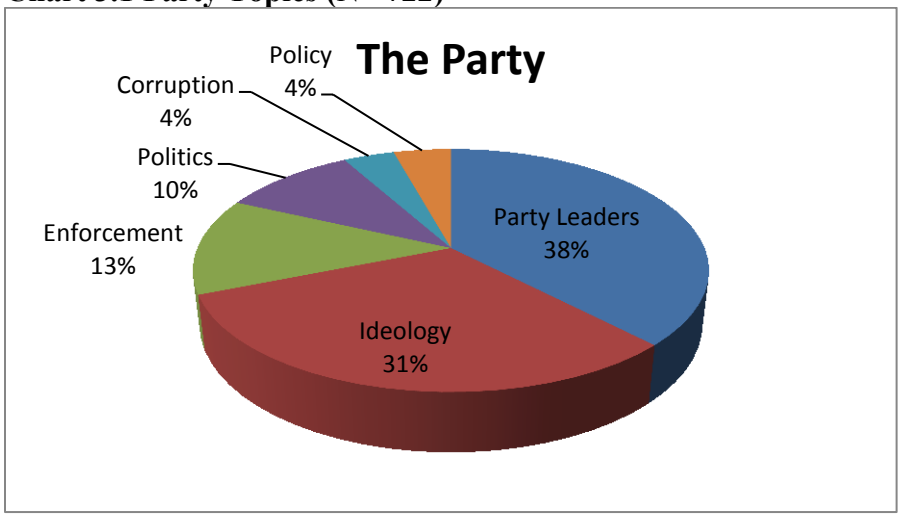
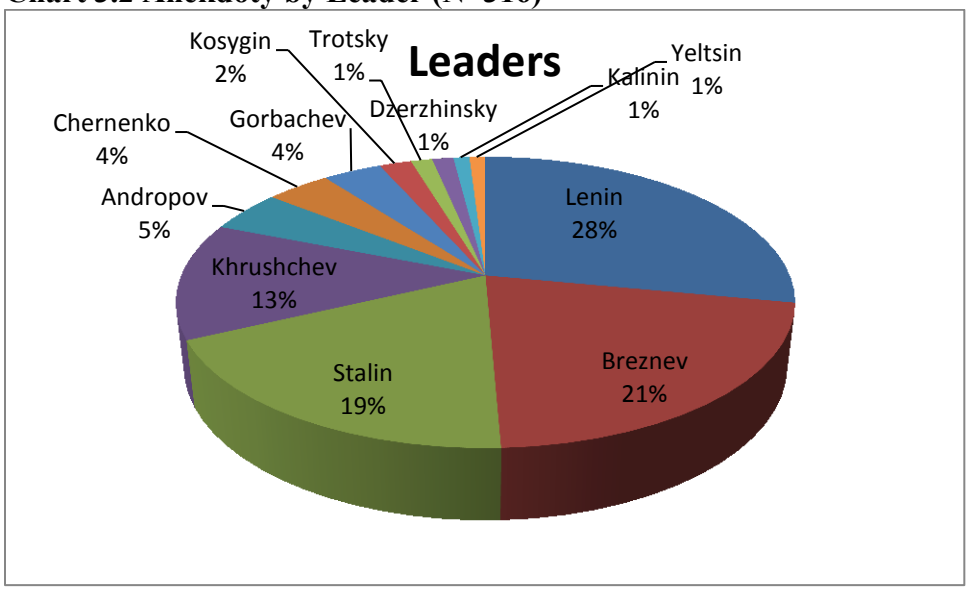


Chart 3.2 Anekdoty by Leader (N=316)



A popular character in *anekdoty* was Vladimir Lenin, the "father" of the Soviet Union. He—and his political and theoretical work—was blamed for the contemporary living situation of the Soviet Russian people who told these jokes. Born Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, he changed his last name to "Lenin" when he became involved with the Russian revolutionary movement in the early twentieth century. Lenin served as the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, and he was involved in the orchestration of the October Revolution in 1917 (Fischer 2001; Service 2000). The storming of the Winter Palace led to the takeover of the Russian Government and the establishment of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, the first constitutionally socialist state in the world. Although Lenin was rhetorically cast as the father of the Soviet Union as a result of his contributions to the October Revolution and Soviet policy, such as the implementation of the New Economic Policy in 1921, few people knew his name or what he looked like until close to his death (Service 2000). Robert Service (2000)

argues that Lenin remained such an influential character due to his institutional legacy. It was his revolutionary activities and the doctrines he left behind that justified these actions and instructed the Soviet people to carry out his vision.

In his first pamphlet, *What is to be Done?,* Lenin argued that Marxists should form a political party, or "vanguard," of dedicated revolutionaries to spread Marxist political ideas among the workers. This theory, coupled with Lenin's *April Theses,* came to be known as Marxism-Leninism, a "pragmatic" Russian application of Marxism. Lenin argued that class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle; Lenin believed that workers must be taught class consciousness (Service 2000). This orientation is the source of much anti-Soviet humor that mocks the idea that this "correct" ideology will bring about a bountiful future of prosperity and equality. Although Lenin died in 1924, it was upon his legacy that the Soviet Union derived legitimacy and hope and therefore he was also a site of incredible cynicism and regret:

> *"Lenin died, but his cause lives on."*
>
> *An Armenian, having read the slogan, said:*
>
> *"Eh, Lenin, Lenin…it would have been better of you had lived but you cause had died."*
>
> *"Lenin was a very, very, kind man," said the school teacher to the children,*

"One day, he was sitting on his porch peeling an apple with his knife and a hungry child came by and asked him if he could have a piece. He yelled 'Go to hell!' and the boy ran off"

The students were confused as to how this illustrated Lenin's kindness, so the teacher explained further, "You see! He could have slit the boy's throat with his knife, but he did not! What a kind man he was…"

Lenin and Lunacharsky went to an exhibit of futurist art in 1920.
"I don't understand anything!" says Lenin.
"I don't understand anything!" says Lunacharsky.

And this was the last Soviet leaders who did not understand anything about the arts

Anekdoty about Lenin differ from those about other leaders, in that Lenin is presented as a kind man who was straightforward and not versed in "the arts." He did not share his apple with the starving boy who crossed his path, but he was a kind man because he also did not slit the throat of the child. This is sarcastic of course, but this narrative does make a point about how kind Lenin was in comparison to his successors (e.g. Stalin) in that he was not directly malicious towards ordinary citizens. Instead, the violence he committed was through his ideological legacy or the power he had that he did not use to help the commoner, an idea that was figuratively depicted in the *anekdot* about the starving boy asking for a piece of the apple. Unlike other leaders who were cast as inept, dumb, wicked, or criminal, Lenin is presented as a delusional

and naïve Russian who acted too hastily, but without malicious intentions. He was cast positively only in juxtaposition to other Soviet leaders who were seen as overtly evil and corrupt.

Anekdoty about Stalin were more explicit in their resentment, disapproval, and desire to live under different leadership or an alternative political system. Few *anekdoty* were told during the height of Stalin's reign between 1930 and 1950, due to the great number of purges and executions under his reign. As a result, the bulk of *anekdoty* exchange began after Stalin's death in 1953 (Dolgopolova 1981). Ayling (2008) argued that most political humor circulates in a post-totalitarian regime, because under totalitarian rule, citizens are too afraid to laugh and many of the subjects are just not funny. Although humor thrives upon repression, if the fear is too all-consuming, then the act of such release is too risky (Freud 1960; Ayling 2008). Although it took some time to become comfortable telling such jokes about Stalin, when they began, they flooded the streets in full force (Yurchak 1999; Brandenberger 2009). The theme of many of those *anekdoty* about Stalin is that of resentment and fear.

> *At a May Day parade, a very old Jew carries a slogan, "Thank you, comrade Stalin, for my happy childhood!"*
>
> *The Party representative approaches the old man.*
>
> *"What's that? Are you deriding our Party? Everybody can see, when you were a child, comrade Stalin was not yet born!"*
>
> *"That's precisely what I'm grateful to him for!" the Jew said.*

Stalin is giving a report. All of a sudden someone in the hall sneezes.

"Who sneezed?" (Silence.)

"First row, stand up. Fire! (A standing ovation)

"Who sneezed?" (Silence.)

"Second row, stand up. Fire! (A prolonged standing ovation)

"Who sneezed?" (Silence.)

"Third row, stand up. Fire! (Everyone in the hall stands and cheers "Thanks to the great Stalin!")

"Who sneezed?" (Silence.)

"I did I did! I sneezed! (One man says through sobs)

"God bless you, comrade!"

Such illogical and dysfunctional terror was common to Stalin's regime. Although laughter was less common under a reign of terror, it appears as though those previously silent critiques were given voice during the time period after Stalin's death. A number of the *anekdoty* compare life under different Soviet leaders. None of the assessments are positive, but we get a sense of the lasting memories or constructed collective memories of what it was like to live under each ruler.

Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev are travelling on a train.

The train breaks down.

"Fix it!" orders Stalin.

They repair it but still the train does not move.

"Shoot everyone!" orders Stalin.

They shoot everyone but still the train doesn't budge.

Stalin dies.

"Rehabilitate everyone!" orders Khrushchev.

They are rehabilitated but still the train won't move.

Khrushchev is removed.

"Close the curtains," orders Brezhnev, "And pretend we're moving."

During Lenin's rule it was like a tunnel: all around was dark, in front was a light.

During Stalin's rule—it was like a bus—one is driving, half are sitting (in prison) and the rest are shaking

Under Khrushchev and Molotov—like an airplane, two are driving, the rest are sick and there is no way to leave.

Under Khrushchev—like a circus: one is talking, the rest are laughing.

Under Brezhnev—like a movie: everyone is waiting for the end of the show.

These comparative *anekdoty* articulate a collective critique of textbook memory. *Anekdoty* offer a populist perspective that serves as a counter-argument to the state-disseminated version of these leaders and their accomplishments. The two *anekdoty* above highlight how people felt living under the rule of these leaders. Ineptitude and corruption were two common themes among such accounts of leadership, yet there were also details specific to particular leader articulated in such narratives. These person-specific critiques contrast with some of the other *anekdoty,* which cast the

leaders and fools or crooks without giving us a sense for what they specifically disliked about their leadership. These are more similar to the ethnic/national variety of *anekdoty* casting groups as dumb or greedy as a means of "othering," these people from the Russian collective:

Nixon asked God when will there be and end to unemployment.

"In 20 years," replied God.

"Sad, it won't be under me!" said Nixon.

Brezhnev asked God when there will be happiness in Russia.

"Sad, it won't be under me!" replied God.

Brezhnev, in Georgia, is buying a watermelon.

- Are these watermelons sweet?

Salesman:

- Yes of course!

Brezhnev:

- May I select one?

The Georgian salesman shows him a watermelon and says:

- Here! Choose one!!!

Brezhnev:

- How can I select just from one watermelon?

The Georgian:

- *And how do you think we all select you? (*in Russian "to select" and "to elect" is the same word: выбирать*).*

The phone rings in Brezhnev's apartment. His wife answers the phone.

"Hello, could you please call Leonid to the phone?"

"And who is asking?"

"I am one of his classmates!"

"Fuck you, you're not a classmate of his! Leonid never went to school."

These narratives reject Soviet leadership by naming particular leaders and criticizing them for their character traits. Although these narratives are not very specific, they express general dissatisfaction with those in power, portraying them as dumb, and inept. When these leader-focused *anekdoty* are told alongside those that discuss the state and its associated policies, the anti-State discourse becomes even more prominent.

Dissatisfaction with the Soviet system was also expressed in general terms about "Soviet Power" without naming the particular names of historical figures or social policies of which people were resentful. The jokes about Soviet power focus upon the structure that is created by this political power and the impact that such structure (or lack thereof) has upon Soviet citizenry. For example:

A question:

What is it like to live under Soviet power?

First answer:

--It's like a bus: one is driving, and the rest are shaking.

Second answer:

--It is like on an ocean liner: the horizon stretches out forever, you're nauseous and there's no way off.

Third answer:

--Every day is worse than the day before it but better than the day after.

A pedestrian walking across the Red Square was struck by a drunk driver and killed.

The militia investigated and filed the following report:

"….Aside from a copy of Pravda, a picture of Lenin, and the new autobiography of Gorbachev, no other evidence of violence was found on the body."

A gypsy is asked to sign up for a state bond. He refuses. They try to convince him:

--Come on, help out the Soviet power!

--What sort of power can it be it it's begging for money from a gypsy?!

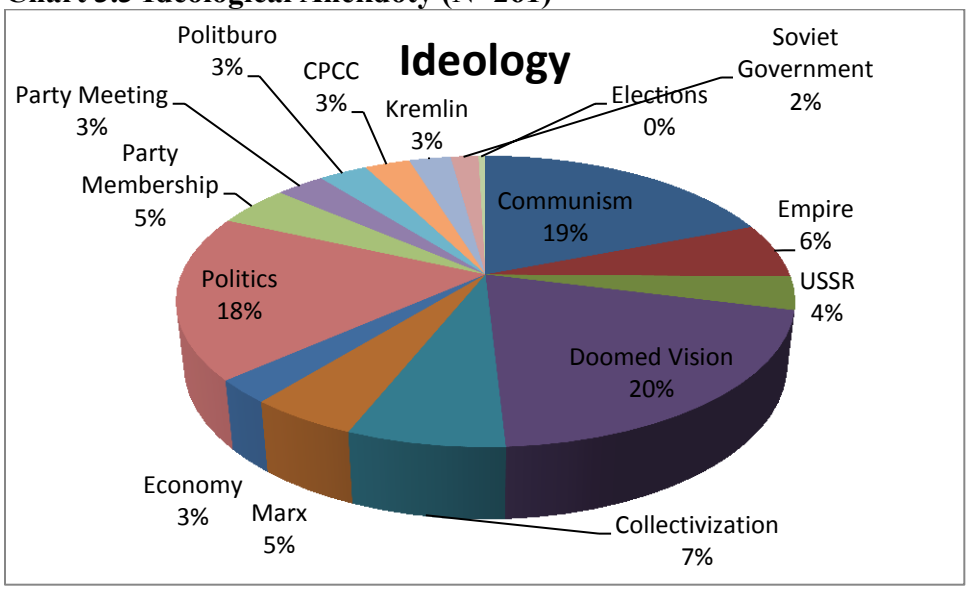
The above *anekdoty* focus upon those people living under Soviet power as opposed to the specifics of the power structure or the leaders. In conjunction with *anekdoty* about specific leaders (Stalin, Brezhnev, Gorbachev etc.) we see the multi-pronged critique made by these narratives—focusing not only on the leaders as unscrupulous, corrupt, or misguided people, but also highlighting the effects of their actions upon the common people who live under their rule. These narratives express dissatisfaction with those people and associated structures that make decisions about their lives, but also a general dissatisfaction with life in the Soviet Union more generally.

Ideology

Russians living under Soviet rule experienced an identity crisis of sorts as a result of the mismatch between two collective images that stood in sharp contrast to one another. The first image, which was often projected abroad, was rooted in the positive collective identity that envisioned the Russian people as part high intellectual culture who were leading a revolution that would lead to prosperity and enlightenment for all Soviet citizens. The second image reflected Russians' everyday struggle for survival, which reduced people to their primitive functions and desires, divorced from their intellectual faculties and lofty visions. This identity crisis is expressed in *anekdoty* that challenge unrealistic ideologies by highlighting hardships of their everyday realities, but also reifying a national identity that is constructed as

superior to the international Marxist proletariat. *Anekdoty* about corruption and theft and self-interested behaviors imply the downfall of this higher sense of morality and purpose of the Russian people, but so do those *anekdoty* that specifically target the communist vision and ideology. The rejection of this ideology serves as a rejection of the Soviet government who sought to codify the Leninist and Marxist ideologies into law.

Chart 3.3 Ideological Anekdoty (N=261)



Below are a number of examples of such *anekdoty* that express such disenchantment and cynicism toward the communist vision.

The shortest joke: Communism.

"Is it true that when communism comes you will be able to order groceries over the phone?"

"Yes it is true, but they will be given to you over the television."

"Is it possible to build communism?"

"To build it, yes. But to live through it—doubtful."

What is "politically thinkable" is defined by the vocal and visible dominant classes. As a result, less powerful social groups become politically silent and invisible. Disadvantaged groups are unable to engage in politics-proper or to challenge the reigning political ideology since they are not recognized as legitimate voices. Yet in these *anekdoty,* which challenge political entities or their underpinning ideologies, enable a creative negotiation and redefinition of what these ideologies represent. Instead of a struggle for power, they afford a "productive" power (Foucault 1980) that redefines the truth. As a result, these narratives serve to reconstitute power and the logic underpinning that power in meaningful ways.

Although the Soviet Union claimed to be a single union of people, it was in fact a political entity comprised of multiple national, ethnic, religious and racial groups. And despite its communist claim to equality, the way such policies played out in practice yielded a nation of complex interconnected inequalities (to be discussed in greater detail in chapters five and six). These contradictions are important to understand in that they did not produce uniform anti-State sentiment as one might imagine. Instead, resistance often manifested as such recognition and vocalization of incongruity between law and practice. In tandem with the subversion of its underpinning ideologies, the legitimacy of the Soviet Union was also threatened by these narratives. James Scott (1990) argued that "hidden transcripts" are not only

direct critiques of the state, but they also show that a major part of one's political experience is through everyday lived realities: everyday life is political. The rejection of ideology is a way of rejecting the Soviet plan for the Russian people. It is a way of challenging whether this ideology is legitimate and can in fact bring about positive change, but it is also a way of taking control over the ability to define goals, dreams and visions at a very personal level. Discussions of what the future would be like if the Communist party remained in power is another popular subject of *anekdoty*.

Future

Marxist and Leninist ideology promised a utopian future with the realization communism. This vision of a future of equality and prosperity was used by State propaganda as a means of justifying contemporary social problems such as shortages, famines, overcrowding in apartments and factories and the general low standards of living. When they acknowledged any sort of hardships at all, state-disseminated discourses cast these adversities as necessary but temporary struggles through which the Soviet state and its citizenries must pass through. The people were all part of the "great Socialist experiment," and as it was the first attempt in applying Marx's theory to real people, there was no other country or people with whom to compare. Yet the narratives expressed in *anekdoty* challenged the idea that the future will be better and brighter than current conditions. Instead, these stories describe a future that is even bleaker than the current state of affairs. The following *anekdoty* express such a sentiment:

A socialist, a capitalist and a communist decided to get together. The socialist was late and said when he arrived:

- Sorry for being late, I was standing in line to buy sausage.

The capitalist asked in response,

-What does the phrase "standing in line" mean?

And the communist asked:

-And what is 'sausage'?

During a meeting with Kalinin, some peasants complained:

--Comrade Kalinin, it's impossible to live like this. We walk around in rags and barefoot.

Kalinin tries to console them:

--That's nothing, comrades, be patient. It's not that bad. There are some countries where people walk around entirely naked.

--How long have the Soviets been in power there Mikhail Ivanovich? Fifty years?

- How will a man who lives under communism look like?

Armenian Radio answers:

- He will have very small hands, since everything will be implemented by the robots. He will have very small legs, since he will be driving, flying or going by boat everywhere. He will have a very small stomach since he will eat only

the high calorie pills. And he will have a very big head, since he will think a lot...He will think all the time about how to get these pills.

These *anekdoty* challenge the idea that living conditions will get better with time; instead they highlight the absurdities of the current system and describe a future where such bureaucratic dysfunctionality becomes even more exacerbated. These narratives reject the ideological underpinning of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and therefore a challenge the legitimacy of these authorities. Another *anekdot* speaks to this disenchantment with Soviet power even more directly:

How was the Soviet system successful?

It was successful in overcoming problems that were absent from other systems.

Soviet citizens were not duped by what the newspapers, posters and movies claimed; instead, these narratives give voice to their critical perspective. Russians did not believe that there was a better a brighter future towards which they were progressing. Instead, these narratives express a cynicism toward the Soviet State in terms of its leadership, guiding ideology and future promises. The folklore character of the "fool" served as one voice that was particularly able to make a mockery of Soviet power, through his naïvely direct remarks and critiques.

The Fool

There were three major "fools" who played central roles in Soviet *anekdoty:* Chapaev, Shtirlitz, and the Chukcha. These characters are used to highlight absurdities and inconsistences in Soviet power, in that the fool is in a special position where he can see things simplistically for what they are, without being brainwashed by propaganda or other discourse. The "fool" plays a prominent role in Russian folklore in that he represents connection to peasant life, which is idealized for its simplicity, morality, and purity. The most famous of the Russian folklore characters is Ivan the Fool, who serves as inspiration for *anekdoty* about Chapaev, Shtirlitz, and the Chukchi. The youngest son of his family, Ivan was known to spend most of his time napping on top of the warm Russian stove, occasionally waking up to perform great heroic feats. He is a hero when necessary, but during daily affairs he struggles to make basic decisions. He listened to his heart rather than his mind, and this image remains central to the Russian vision of the moral character. Ivan was contrasted with his two elder brothers who acted rationally, but single-mindedly in search of profit and military success. Ivan was the "fool" who unintentionally defeats his "clever" counterparts through his direct and moral ways. Boym (1994) argues that it is this idealization of the heroic and romantic by Russian culture that causes the ostracism of the everyday (p. 40). In other words, the "Russian Idea" casts Russians people as capable of revolutions, realizing utopian visions and achieving world domination, but who tend to be less capable with mundane daily endeavors that are perceived to be of

lesser (or negligible) importance (Berdyaev 1947). It is the teleological vision of what can be, without considering the route to get there.

Chapaev

Vasilii Ivanovich Chapaev (1887-1919), was the commander of the 25th Infantry Division of the Red Army who died in battle while swimming across the Ural River in 1919. Soon after his death, Chapaev was canonized in Soviet mythology after the publication of a novel based upon his life written by Dmitrii Furmanov in 1923 and more notably after the release of the Vasil'ev Borother's film *Chapaev* in 1934. These official texts use Chapaev to illustrate Russia's valiance and victory in the Great Patriotic War. As an elite soldier he was a positive hero that represented the glory of Russia and the Soviet Union. He was further memorialized in Soviet jokelore, but in this context he was memorialized as a "textually poached" (Jenkins 1995) character who challenged the official Soviet definition of who he was and what he stood for. Critiques of Soviet power were articulated in a variety of ways: by subverting the pristine, idealized image of Chapaev as an upstanding, moral and honorable man as well as drawing attention to the contradictions in Party propaganda more generally. Below are two *anekdoty* that present these two critiques respectively.

> *Petka is trying to write an essay for a literature class. He sits there racking his brains.*
>
> *"What is making you so miserable?" asks Vasilii Ivanovich.*
>
> *"I have to write this essay on 'What I did yesterday.'"*

"Well, what did you do?"

"The same thing I do every day! I drank!"

"What an idiot you are Petka," says Vasilii Ivanovich. "You can't write that. Go through the essay and every time you wrote "drank," put "read" instead. Replace "bottle" with "book" and then it will sound a lot more cultured."

Petka is thrilled and begins to scratch away: "I got up yesterday morning and read half a book. I thought for half a moment and then read the other half. It didn't seem like enough, so I set off to the shop for another book. On the way I saw Vasili Ivanovich coming towards me… and his eyes were so well read…"

In the Revolution Museum, the guide points out the skeleton of Vasily Ivanovich Chapaev:

And what is that small skeleton next to him?" someone asks him.

"That is Chapaev as a child."

The first *anekdot* characterizes Chapaev and Petka as two dimwitted drunks who struggle to complete a simple homework assignment for class. Instead of heroes whose days are filled valorous and respectable accomplishments, the two sit around drinking all day as the stereotypical Russian man also does. The Russian national identity as a cultured, intellectual people is mocked in this narrative that casts this image as a false, constructed portrayal of reality. The second *anekdot* makes fun of Russian-Soviet museums, textbooks, and other collective memory artifacts that construct history to support the grand narrative of the upstanding, victorious, and

moral Russian people. The skeleton cannot be of Chapaev as a child, because then he would not have lived on to accomplish all the things that his biographers and the film had purported., If he had died so early, then all of the stories about him must be false. Both jokes highlight inconsistencies in the constructed and contrived portrayal of Russian and Soviet history and identity.

Seth Graham (2009) argues that *anekdoty* about Chapaev are "a counterimpulse: to rescue the hero from the pedestal, to liberate Chapaev from both the Civil War chronotope in which he was 'crystallized' by Furmanov and the Vasil'evs and from the abstract epic of Soviet history" (p. 112). The elite image of Chapaev as an honorable hero is challenged by these *anekdoty* that depict him as a foolish alcoholic. This adulterated image of Chapaev challenges the uncritical and unrealistic Soviet discourse about the "Great Patriotic War" and about the honorable Russian man more generally. As a drunk who frequents whorehouses, Chapaev is a mish mash of the elite image of hero and the stereotype of the common man who drinks and sleeps around in order to cope with life conditions. Textually poached from official Soviet discourse, *anekdoty* redefine Chapaev as a true Russian whose vision is not filtered (and warped) by Soviet "honor" but rather through alcohol and women which allows him to see the troubles of society more clearly. *Anekdoty* about the fictional intelligence officer Max Otto von Shtirlitz operate is much the similar fashion as those about Chapaev—subverting the Party propagandistic discourse with the intention of making a mockery of the false public image maintained by such patriotic films and television series.

Shtirlitz

SS Standartenführer Max Otto von Shtirlitz is a character from the 1973 iconic Soviet mini-series *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. Shtirlitz is the name used by the Soviet Army intelligence officer, Colonel Maksim Maksimovich Isaev, who lives undercover in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Working as an intelligence officer, Shtirlitz receives directions from Moscow and collects information about the German military for the Soviet army. The mini-series *Seventeen Moments of Spring* is very patriotic and was regularly aired on Soviet television, especially around Victory Day (May 9th), the day that Nazi Germany fell to the Soviets. Victory day remains one of the most patriotic celebrations in present-day Russia, glorifying the Soviet army's role in the "Great Patriotic War." The mini-series, *Seventeen Moments of Spring,* serves as homage to the war, and serves as part of the collective memory making machine. The movie was and still is a very influential cultural item, so much that it has been called a "cult" classic (Kharkhordin 1999) and "a television blockbuster" (Stites 1992). According to Brezhnev's personal assistant, Leonid loved the show and watched it over 20 times, arranging the CPSU meetings so as not to miss an episode (Olcott 2001). The importance of this show to the collective memory project was central and therefore was part of the "hegemony of representation" (Yurchak 1997) experienced by Soviet citizens. The show was used as a means of solidifying a patriotic collective identity of the Russians living under Soviet rule. In response to this show, *anekdoty* about the main character, Shtirlitz, became quite popular. These narratives challenged this positive, patriotic image of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War by portraying redefining Shtirlitz, the

"intelligence officer," as humorously dense or obtuse. Many of these narratives positioned Shtirlitz as a detective who must solve a mysterious situation, and in these events, he almost always manages to miss the obvious:

> *Shtirlitz came into Muller's office and saw that on the floor was lying the dead man. "The poor fellow was poisoned," thought Shtirlitz, stroking the handle of an ax protruding from the chief's back*.

Another *anekdot* challenges Shtirlitz' ability to think independently, or to think at all:

> *Shtirlitz had a thought. He liked it, so he had another one.*

We might interpret this narrative as a commentary that extends beyond Shtirlitz and *Seventeen Moments of Spring,* to speak to Russians living under Soviet rule more generally. The Russian people were regularly instructed by the Party and the government as to how to behave, which goals to strive for and which ideologies to believe. As a result, there was not a great deal of room for independent thought or independent will. The above *anekdot* speaks to these conditions, specifically how the Soviet system encouraged complacency and group think.

Shtirlitz was intended to represent the idealized image of the Russian man (Graham 2009). As such, he was sober, incredibly loyal to his country and his family. *Anekdoty* about Shtirlitz sought to subvert this image by instead characterizing Shtirlitz as a dumb drunk. In these narratives, Shtirlitz does think about his home and wife often, but he adheres to the idealized Soviet vision of patriotism by subordinating his personal feelings to his civic duty. The following *anekdot* casts Shtirlitz as a dupe who is being cheated on by his wife while he serves his nation dutifully in war:

Shtirlitz received a coded telegram: "You have given birth to a son." A tear slowly rolled down the cheek of the Soviet spy. For twenty years he has been away from home…

These narratives argue that Shtirlitz is being used by the Soviet Army for the benefit of the Soviet empire, but his own needs and dignity fall by the wayside. These jokes challenge the idealized image of Russianness by attacking this central figure in Soviet propaganda.

Chukchi

Another genre of *anekdoty* that challenges official discourse features the Nordic people "*Chukchi*" (*Chukcha* in the singular), who mock Soviet power in very astute, unassuming ways, oftentimes by taking Party slogans literally that serves to reveal the inherent contradictions between official discourse and reality. Jokes about *Chukchi* might be grouped under ethnic humor since they represent a real population from the Soviet Union, yet they differ from other ethnic groups that are commonly represented in *anekdoty* in that they are not perceived as threatening to Russians. Instead, reference to *Chukchi* is used as a means of dissociating from parts of Russian/Soviet culture, or to make Russians look superior in some way. The *Chukotka* Peninsula is the northeastern tip of Siberia just 50 miles west of the Seward peninsula in Alaska (probably that which was "seen" from Sarah Palin's window) and is home to the *Chukchi* people. Most Russians have never been in contact with these people who number around 15,000 and who live in Arctic temperatures (average

temperature in January ranged from 5° to -38° degrees Fahrenheit). It is the only part of Russia that partially lies within the Western hemisphere (east of the 180° meridian) (Gray 2005).

Why have this Eskimo people become so prominent in the Russo-Soviet *anekdot*? Seth Graham (2009) argues that this cycle of jokes was inspired by the 1966 film *Nalchalnik Chukotki* (Head of *Chukchi*). Specifically, he argues that this film made *Chukchi* salient to Russians who for the most part would live their entire lives without personally interacting with this far-East Nordic group. Another explanation for the *Chukchi's* visibility argues that Russians became familiar with this group as consequence of a 1972 English-language textbook that contrasted the happy lives of the Soviet *Chukchi* with the dismal ones of the American Eskimos (Rabinovich (989). In this context, and arguably as an inspiration for the most common stereotype of the naïve, the *Chukchi* serve as the traditional fool that occupies a central role in Russian folklore. This stereotype stems from the perception that *Chukchi* are geographically isolated and therefore must be illiterate and cut off from the general social world. *Anekdoty* about *Chukchi* often focus upon frigid conditions and the perceived simple mindedness of this people:

A Chukchi wants to buy a refrigerator.

"What do you need that for?" the salesperson asks, "You live in Siberia."

"To warm up during the winter—imagine the comfort, it's -40 degrees outside and only 0 in the fridge!"

Once upon a time, a smart boy was born in a Chukchi village. The envious villagers expelled him, however just for being too smart. He gave birth to a new nation—the Japanese.

These jokes act in a similar fashion as the previous outgroups—as a means of bolstering the ingroup presentation of a comparatively intelligent people. Yet the *Chukcha* "fool" was more than just an outsider, he was a political commentator. Similar to Simmel's (1971) "stranger," the *Chukcha* has the social distance from Russians in order to say things that the Russian is unable. His ignorance and illiteracy relegates the *Chukcha* to the "other" category, but it also safeguards him from Communist indoctrination. As a result, the *Chukchi* are able to highlight the illogical events or irrationalities of the USSR in a more explicit or direct manner, a role that was traditionally filled by the Ivan the Fool in pre-Soviet, Russian folklore (Tolstoy 1886). The following *anekdot* uses the *Chukchi's* literal interpretation of Party discourse in order to highlight the illogical focus on the future and the Party's propagandistic portrayal of daily life:

A Soviet journalist interviews a Chukchi man:

"Could you tell us briefly how you lived before the October Revolution?"

"Hungry and Cold."

"And how do you live now?"

"Hungry and cold, but with a sense of deep gratitude!"

Soviets were instructed to appreciate everything in the Soviet Union was heartfelt gratitude. Russians were socialized (by textbooks, Soviet propaganda, parents) to focus on and take pride in collective accomplishments, even if these

"accomplishments" had no positive impact upon their daily lives. The above *anekdot* makes a mockery of this set of values, highlighting how little the situation has changed, despite the outward presentation of happiness and improvement. This false presentation was maintained so that the Soviet Union can maintain an image abroad of prosperity, success, and a satisfied populace. The following two narratives poke fun at the intelligence of Soviet leadership more generally:

A Chukchi comes to the Politburo and says:

'I want to become a Politburo member. What do I need in order to become one?"

"What are you, an idiot?"

"Is that a requirement?"

A Chukcha applies for membership for the prestigious Union of Soviet Writers. He is asked what literature has influenced his work.

"Have you read Pushkin?"

"No."

"Have you read Dostoevsky?"

"No."

"Can you read at all?"

The Chukcha, offended, replies, "Chukcha not reader, Chukcha writer!"

This *anekdot* was very popular among Russians (it was found in every anthology that had *anekdoty* about *Chukchi)*, so much so that its punch line, "*Chukcha* not reader, *Chukcha* writer!" was (and still is) an expression used in regular

conversation when discussing someone's lack of credentials or someone who is perceived to be an overconfident fool. I found this particular *anekdot* in multiple volumes in my sample.[15] The *anekdot* is especially powerful in that it expresses a distrust and misguided bureaucracy of Party leadership and intellectuals. There are multiple meanings to this narrative. One meaning deals with the misguided vision that the Soviet people will become the world leaders across all domains, despite the fact that newspapers, books, television and other sources of education were strictly controlled and censored by the state. State ownership of all production facilities ensured complete control of the content of such media outlets and translations of foreign publications were often produced in a truncated form, accompanied with extensive corrective footnotes. Textbooks and newspapers recounted events with serious omissions and revisions in order to legitimate the actions and vision of current Soviet power. As such, *Chukcha's* response in this *anekdot* captures the absurdity of the idea that Soviets are world leaders in literature, technology, and other innovations during a time when they were isolated by censorship and therefore unable to read or view the accomplishments of the rest of the world. A similar sentiment is expressed in the *anekdot* below*:*

> *What is the difference between a Communist and an anti-Communist?*
>
> *The Communist has read Marx and Lenin. An anti-Communist has understood them.*

These *anekdoty* are less of a reflection upon the Chukchi, but more of the Party, the Soviet regime and the Russian people. They highlight those aspects of Russian

[15] See methodology for explanation of how *anekdoty* repeated in multiple volumes were coded in the sample.

culture that the Russians themselves recognize to be absurd and incongruous with official Party rhetoric.

Many of the ethnic and national minorities are stereotyped by physical or linguistic features in *anekdoty*, similar to Chapaev's speech impediment, and Stalin's Georgian accent. These linguistic markers help identify and distinguish the character in the *anekdot* while simultaneously constructing him as an object of ridicule. The Chukchi are often identified in *anekdoty* by their constant usage of "*odnako*," a word that roughly translates to "however" depending on context. These *anekdoty* are difficult to translate, in that their meaning / humor is mostly linguistic. That said, these *anekdoty* may be understood as "light" stereotyping, in that they construct the group as other, but without especially harsh prejudice. An example of such a "light" stenotype in *anekdoty* is as follows:

On the Soviet-Polish border, a flea runs into a pig. The pig asks:

--Where are you running from?

--From Germany. The Germans are cleaning and scrubbing everything. There's nowhere left to live. And what about you?

--Well I'm running away from the USSR. I just about starved to death when people started to eat up all my slop.

These caricature-like features operate very similarly to those exaggerated characters in fairytales that are employed to help children classify the world into meaningful categories. In the *anekdot* above, the Soviets and the Germans serve as

the butt of the joke. The stereotypes of Germans as incredibly clean and sterile[16] and the Soviets as incredibly desperate and poor are used to make this narrative about the flea and a pig humorous. Chukchi jokes are especially popular among children, and I would argue contribute to the children's socialization by encouraging them to divide the world into "us" and "them" – especially according to nationality. The development of nationalist thinking begins at an early age in that "getting" humor is an indication of group norm socialization and as such integration into the *cultural consciousness*.

Together, the articulations of a collective identity, coordinated effort and resistance to the State, enables us to understand how the discourses that ran across *anekdoty* served as an expression of a political opposition. Both the subject matter and form appear to reflect a collective coordinated effort to resist the discourse and power of the Soviet State. Under leadership that did not listen to its people and under which opposition or free speech was suppressed, these narratives functioned as a type of democratic dissent. These jokes were exchanged within communities of trusted members, where the boundaries distinguishing performer from audience, joke and truth, were fluid and permeable. What was important about such a "safe place" (Collins 1990) is that it created opportunities for self-definition, the first step to empowerment. If a group is not involved in self-definition, then it is being defined by and for the use of others. The *anekdoty* enabled Russians (and allegedly other groups as well) to escape and resist "objectification as the Other" (Collins, 2000: 101).

[16] There may also be a reference to the Holocaust here with reference to cleaning gas chambers, though this would not be the primary interpretation of the *anekdot.*

Such resistance is central to the *anekdot,* but there is a significant number of *anekdoty* which are not directed towards the State, are not resistant toward State definition, and/or do not appear directly concerned with self-definition for political recognition. These *anekdoty*—to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter—are not overtly state-oriented or concerned with revolution or revolt; and yet, they too are intensely *political*. This genre is directed toward the process of coping with everyday struggles and general life under Soviet rule. Their narratives connect people through expressions of repressed sentiments, attitudes and opinions, but there is they are not necessarily concerned with revolution or reform. They do not propose alternative structures and do not always make mention of political entities or goals, they simply give voice to the lived realities of the otherwise voiceless, yet, they, too, are a means of everyday resistance in that they challenge official Party discourse, redefine collective identities and ideations of the future, and generally express a counterhegemonic *cultural consciousness*. This *cultural consciousness* expresses a perspective of lived realities that contradicts and challenges the State and Party's definition of truth and identity. These *anekdoty* are discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 *Anekdot* as Everyday: Coping, Resisting & Surviving

In his seminal work, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Michel de Certeau wrote a history of the "everyday." He did this by tracing the separation between knowledge, "savoir," and knowledge of skills, "savoire-faire." De Certeau focuses on the rhetoric of everyday practice, and upon the regular use of discourse as a way to reinterpret or subvert cultural practices in order to make them one's own. Henry Jenkins (2005) similarly explores the constructed boundary between text and reader, arguing that these readers are not docile consumers of text (cf. Adorno and Horkheimer 2002), but rather that viewers, listeners, or readers engage in a meaning-making process alongside the text, negotiating narratives and power structures and therefore contributing to a "participatory-culture." I believe that both of these models are crucial in the understanding of the Russo-Soviet *anekdot* as a spontaneous, popularly authored discourse that re-negotiates and challenges the meaning of everyday life and produces a *cultural consciousness*.

There is a considerable proportion of my sample that does not engage with politics-proper (the Party, the Soviet State, or guiding ideologies), or with collective identities codified in law or naturalized by the hegemonic culture. This group of *anekdoty* deals with the everyday experiences of those living during Soviet times, often highlighting absurdities and the discrepancies between public presentation of success and riches that contrasted with the private reality of failures and scarcity. The purpose of these *anekdoty* is difficult to pin down post-hoc, but interviews from the Harvard Soviet Social Project support the conjecture that these narratives were used

as a means of coping and connection between citizens who were disconnected or pit against each other in their daily struggle for survival (Brandenberger 2009; HSSP).

Anekdoty are "hidden transcripts" and a means of "everyday resistance" (Scott 1985, 1990; Collins 1990). In *Weapons of the Weak* and *Domination and the Art of Resistance,* James Scott offers counter-argument to Gramsci's theory of hegemony and public compliance. Scott argues that the dominant are able to enforce such public conformity and "voluntary" participation in rituals that appear to support the status-quo (and the power of this dominant class) through the threat of violence. However, Scott argues that such coerced public performances do not necessarily reflect inner consent; instead, these "public transcripts" or the public interaction between the dominant and their subordinates involve a great deal of performativity that is not entirely genuine or the "full story." Therefore, subordinate groups require sequestered spaces that are inaccessible to their oppressors so that they may produce and engage in "hidden transcripts" that contest elite power, reject the status quo, and sometimes rehearse acts of resistance that may later manifest in revolt or revolution.

Hidden transcripts involve the relaxation of public performances: unbuttoning one's shirt, speaking crudely or simply with greater honesty, but in unequal power structures, most often, these backstage interactions involve "everyday resistance" that chip away at elite authority through the power of gossip, rumor and distrust. Scott argues that everyday resistance involves "dress rehearsals" of revolt in that the acts of resistance promote communication among people who otherwise experience their subjugation in isolation and that such hidden transcripts propose alternative conceptions of society that may also weaken the control of elites (1990: 219).

The Soviet regime claimed to have transformed society at every level. Party propaganda presented the Soviet Union as a successful social endeavor fueled by booming business: efficient factories and bountiful shops, well-fed children, and a devoted citizenry engaged in high culture activities and expressions (Brooks 1999). Yet the utopian world depicted by the media had little-to-no overlap with reality (Brandenberger 2002; Fitzpatrick 2005). Although upstanding citizens could not publically dispute the dishonesty of these presentations or challenge the Soviet leadership without risking their lives, the *anekdot* provided a creative and cathartic outlet for critique. Even when not explicitly oriented towards politics or ideology, *anekdoty* illustrate how coping mechanisms and daily struggles shape culture and shape one's politics.

Anekdoty about social problems or the coping strategies of Russians are important to analyze in that they challenge many of the assumptions that social movement literature make about expressions of social, political action. The bulk of this literature focuses upon only those movements that are coordinated, state-oriented, claims-making forms of political (politics-proper) action (Piven and Cloward 1971; Tilly, Tilly and Tilly 1975; Jenkins 1983; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 1998). There is a *state bias* in the literature about social change and political activism, a Western and Marxist orientation that is constructed by the language of rights and citizenship. Such a bias limits the ability to recognize the full spectrum of political responses by "ordinary people" who may respond to economic and political challenges in non-traditional modes. Further, in order to be a social movement, it is assumed that expressions must reflect a collective and coordinated initiative that

seeks to improve the situation for everyone in a society, assumptions that Carolina Martin (forthcoming) calls the *coordination bias* and the *political ideology bias.* The bulk of the literature on social movements operates under these biased formulations, which inevitably results in undervaluing of these alternative (and powerful) forms of social resistance.

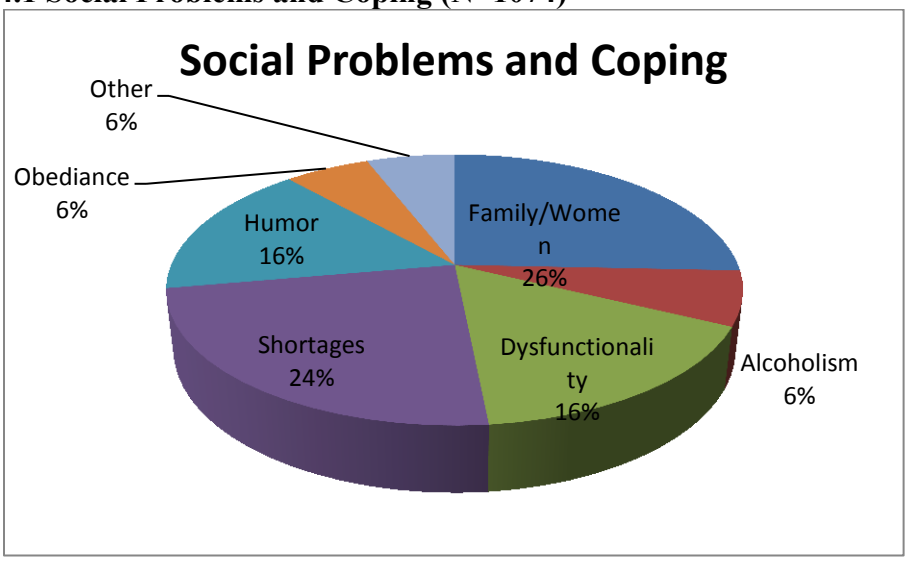
Anarchist scholars argue that this *coordination bias* stems from a modernist-Marxist conviction that "real" or "meaningful" social change "can only be achieved simultaneously and en masse, across and entire national or supranational space" (Day 2005: 8). Although there are a few who have challenged some of these assumptions, emphasizing the importance of multiple strategies towards achieving similar goals (Aparicio and Blaser 2008; Bayat 1997, 2000; Katzenstein 1999), these biases continue to shape the scholarly discourse on these subjects. As such, it is important to consider power relations separately from political institutions in order to understand the potential for political activism to be "productive" power (Foucault 1980), rather than as a struggle *for* power. Foucault (1980) argued that, "power isn't localized in the State apparatus and that nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not changed" (60). Adopting this orientation, it becomes clear that there are a myriad of social sites that have the potential to alter society, and a great variety in the kinds of human interactions that are better thought of as "political."

Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) similarly challenge the assumptions that (1) domination is organized by and around one source of power, and that (2) culture is

separate from structure and secondary in importance. In their research, they argue for a multi-institutional conception of politics that conceives domination as organized around multiple sources of power, each of which is simultaneously material and symbolic (pp. 74-5). They argue that the symbolic and material are intimately intertwined, and that "the system of cultural classification is often a precondition to the reallocation of resources, while what initially looks like a simple request to reallocate resources may ultimately threaten to dissolve social boundaries" (p. 92). Their work is grounded in Bourdieu and Foucault's understandings of cultural classification as a means of reifying and reproducing class inequalities.

This chapter adds a layer to my argument about nationalism and collective power, by challenging the assumption that social action be is explicitly political, coordinated or state-oriented, arguing instead that the everyday is political for those who are surviving against the odds. In Chart 4.1, we can see how a considerable proportion of *anekdoty* in my sample pertain to the coping strategies of the Russian people in dealing with their lived, political realities.

Chart 4.1 Social Problems and Coping (N=1074)



One third of the *anekdoty* in my sample deal with social problems or coping strategies of ordinary citizens. The subject matter of these *ankedoty* describe the ways that Russians felt their culture was shaped by the state. These *anekdoty* portray a people whose everyday lives and culture have been shaped by the state; often in a very dysfunctional way. While the dominant narrative promoted a vision of an equitable state that promoted the success and prosperity of the Russian people, *anekdoty* describe a very different relationship between the state and its people. Although their culture was shaped by the state, Russians were not ideologically brainwashed in to believing everything as depicted by propaganda and ideological teachings. The Russian culture was a product of constant negotiation with these multiple realities and sources of definition. Russian cultue, as expressed in my sample of *anekdoty,* is largely a product of their lived political realities.

Michael Taussig's concept of the "public secret" offers one explanation to account for the multiple and sometimes-conflicting performances that Russians maintain among audiences. Russians know "what not to know" and therefore are able negotiate with various authorities accordingly—with an outward presentation of belief in and respect for Soviet power and its organization, but with concurrent access to another repertoire of knowledge that enables their successful survival under such a dysfunctional and corrupt system. Inspired by Elias Canetti's (1962: 290) dictum that "secrecy lies at the very core of power," Taussig understand the public secret to be the basis of society, social formations, and their attendant knowledges. As "that which is generally know but cannot be articulated," (p. 5) the public secret involves the creation of social subjects who "know what not to know" thereby instituting a

pervasive "epistemic murk" whose core is an "uncanny" dialectic of concealment and revelation, though the secret revealed in this case is qua public secret, not really a secret (p. 49). Everyone knows this "secret," so it is not a secret in the traditional sense, but since everyone treats the knowledge, actions, and opinions as "secret," there is a great deal of self-policing of this publically-closeted information. Taussig believes that this arrangement is the strategic ground of society's power in that the process of collective and cooperative concealment produces a more meaningful shared secret between those who participate in its concealment.

In his definition of the "Russian Soul," Nikolai Berdyaev (1947) insisted that the Russian identity is rooted in a divine or extra-ordinary purpose. In his view, Russians were the "'chosen people'; and also 'a People of the End.' Such people need not be concerned about the process of everyday living and common survival, which is often more difficult than imagining some kind of 'future perfect'" (Boym 1994: 31). Those series of *anekdoty* that deal with the everyday or the unrealistic nature of Russian and communist ideologies push back against this lofty vision of what it means to be Russian. Challenging the Russian Orthodox, otherworldly orientation, these narratives provide their own perspective on the Russian experience and the "Russian idea," one that involves means of coping with shortages and dysfunctionality, family politics, and a self-reflexive genre of *anekdoty* about *anekdoty*.

Anekdot as Network: Coping with an Uncertain Reality

On November 9, 1917, Lenin signed the Bolshevik "Decree on the Press" which shut down all newspapers in Russia that demonstrated "open opposition or insubordination to a worker-government" (Brooks 2000: 3). This decree translated into the Bolshevik nationalization of all publications. There was no pluralism under such law and the official published story was often a fictional glorification of Russian life—sharply contrasting with the more difficult and impoverished lived realities of Russian citizens. As a result, Russians became accustomed to the ironic performance in which official state laws and published documents describe one world—glorious and triumphant--while they live in another—abound with shortages and failures. Although such incongruity has never been easy, I would argue that it is a central element of the Soviet Russian identity and is simultaneously a source of numerous popular, underground coping mechanisms that have also come to define the Soviet Russian condition. Some of these ways have been through *blat*: an informal network-based system of favors through which Russians obtained scarce goods and services, *samizdat*: underground, often-subversive publications, and *anekdoty*. Russians have found ways to create their own communities, lifestyles, and identities through non-centralized, non-censored, and non-policed venues.

In Alexei Yurchak's (1997) description of Soviet Russian's cynical realism, he explains that the people who exchanged these *anekdoty* were not dissidents who sought to dismantle the state since they had little confidence that change was possible under such totalitarian rule. Instead, he argued that life under communism required perpetual theatrical engagement—performing the necessary dramaturgical roles and

pretending to believe these parts when necessary (Yurchak 1997; Goffman 1980). This performance occurred on multiple levels in reaction to different audiences. For instance, there was an "official" version of reality that people recognized as a constructed image that was used to project greatness to external actors. Part of this image was Party propaganda that showed abundance of wealth, prosperity and generally idealized narratives about "happy life" under Communism.

Citizens played by the rules of reality when in public, and even when it became obvious that nobody actually believed this version of reality, people continued to contribute to its production and reproduction. Bradatan (2011) argues that the "construction of this reality was dictated not by any need to 'represent' however loosely, the everyday reality, but rather by a vaguely felt need to 'fantasize' about it and 'dream of a better world. It must have functioned as a mechanism of psychological compensation" (p. 748). Russians did not have a completely distinct public and private self, with one articulating the "true" self, but rather, through a process of socialization, they learned how to act appropriately in different situations and among different people. And that very process of *acting* became a key component of Russian collective identity.

Communities that were constructed out of narratives are not unlike those relationships that developed from call-and-response songs of slaves working in the fields of 19th Century America. Such songs circulated among communities giving voice to social ills, hardship, and struggle; producing hope out of all-encompassing desperation (Collins 1990; Scott 1989). Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) argues that these songs created safe spaces where self-definition (and empowerment) was made

possible. These safe spaces are diverse in nature and enable more complex definitions of community identities. Collins elaborates further: "the resulting reality is much more complex than one of an all-powerful White majority objectifying Black women with a unified U.S. Black community staunchly challenging these external assaults" (Collins 1990: 101). Although these realities are divergent and contradictory in nature since they are no longer able to reduce heterogeneous experiences to a single stereotype, the presented perspective is nonetheless exclusionary. Collins explains that these spaces are safe *because* they exclude: "By definition, such spaces become less 'safe' if shared with those who were not Black and female" (p. 110). Collins notes the tension that results from such a space that necessitates exclusion, but which intends to produce "a more inclusionary, just society" (p. 110). It is necessary to carve out such a "space" for those who typically are scared into submission may dissent or offer alternative perspectives.

In order for this space to work as a place where people feel comfortable speaking candidly and openly, it must necessarily exclude those who might impede this vocalization. An interesting detail about this particular case of analysis is that Russian men—those who were the most common performers and audiences of *anekdoty*—were simultaneously the oppressed and the oppressors. Russian men were voiceless in the face of Soviet power, yet had the voice-from-nowhere in defining "others." As such, we see how this "safe space" did allow for the vocalization of public concern, but simultaneously privileging the social problems and perspective of one group over others. It did not allow everyone to speak out candidly or self-define, instead it served as one way to further the process of "othering" that was produced by

State discourses. The intersectional nature of these narratives that both resist and maintain inequalities is a theme of the Soviet Russian nationalism and is articulated in *anekdoty* that operate as outlets for experienced repression in some narratives, while operating as a form of repression in others.

Coping with Social Problems

Many *anekdoty* deal with serious social issues such as alcoholism, misogyny, suicide, mafia and corruption in addition to more minor issues such as mothers-in-law, money, and cheating. The diverse subject matter enables these narratives to express shared grievances and facilitate recognition that these are not individual problems but rather collectively experienced social issues. Many of these jokes deal with generic situations in which the performer or audience of the joke can identify with the described situation while others have a voice of social commentary.

Patricia Hill Collins also explores the unique perspective afforded by such lived experiences in her book, *From Black Power to Hip Hop*. Collins argues that the "hip hop generation" grew up in a time which the promises of equality and advancement of the Civil Rights movement and proved to be empty as colorblind racism become more rampant and institutionalized. As such, this group similarly grapples with a disjuncture between ideology and practice:

> "This cohort embraces the beliefs of American society concerning individualism, personal expression, and material well-being, yet it also sees how social issues such as incarceration, poor schooling, no jobs, drugs, and

> the erosion of family structures arise not just from individual failures but from racially disparate, group-based treatment" (p. 5).

By paying attention to the "voices of the unheard," Collins demonstrates that "racial/ethnic groups can hold markedly different perceptions of the social inequalities that surround them" (2001: 4). This is an important methodology, which I employed in this study as a means of understanding how Russians living under the Soviet regime understood such incongruity between state propaganda and lived realities and how *cultural consciousness* reflects a unique perspective and interpretation of events that markedly differs from official presentations of reality.

The focus of the following few sections is upon the social problems that were particularly predominant in my sample. I interpreted these frequencies as reflective of social problems that were particularly salient or difficult for the Russian people, and therefore a collective site of negotiation and coping. These social problems may be particularly common in *anekdoty* because they involve complex issues that social groups perceive differently. For example, alcohol was both a social problem and a method of coping—there are those who would classify the high consumption of alcohol as a problem, and others as a blessing. These divergent interpretations may fall along gender lines, or between non-drinkers and drinkers respectively. What comes to be defined as a "problem" and who must assume the responsibility or blame for this "problem" is a theme that is also common to those *anekdoty* that deal with marital and family issues including abuse, infidelity, poverty and misogyny.

Alcoholism

Russia has one of the highest alcohol consumption rates in the world (McKee 1999). Although such consumption has a long history dating back to the tenth century and levels of consumption were difficult to measure under Soviet rule (McKee 1999) one study indicated that by 1965, the consumption of vodka was six times what it had been in 1926 (Davies 1990). The tax on alcohol provided a large part of the state's income, which is arguably the reason why there were so many *anekdoty* connecting the socialist political system to the growing alcohol problem (Zlobin 1996: 227). From the other end of the spectrum, there were those who saw the tax as a deterrent to drinking and resented the State's attempt to control one of their last freedoms. The following *anekdot* describes the social issue of alcoholism at a broader level whereas most other *anekdoty* highlight this issue in more isolated person-level incidents.

> *It is a well-known fact that before communism reaches its final and most perfect form it must first pass through a preparatory period of socialism. Currently, however, the Soviet Union is in an intermediary stage not described by Marx. This stage is called 'alcoholism.'*

This *anekdot* draws connections between Marx's communist ideology and the social problem of alcoholism, which is also necessarily political in nature. Implied in the narrative is that in order to reach this unattainable goal of communism, everyone must drink themselves into delusion or use alcohol as a coping mechanism. These *anekdoty*

are ambivalent in their attitudes toward alcoholism—some view drinking as a means of coping with the dire social reality, while others see drinking as a major contributor to these social problems. There is a Russian proverb, "What is on a sober man's mind is on a drunkard's tongue," as such, we see how there is a wisdom or directness that is valued of the drunkards. The parallel between alcohol and humor in terms of their power to uncover suppressed truths should also not be overlooked (Abdulaeva 1996). Both alcohol and humor enabled people to step out of their otherwise-censored performances and speak in vulgar and contentious ways. Connections between alcoholism and the Bolshevik revolution, storming of the Winter Palace and Socialism more generally were common in my sample. Below is a sampling of such *anekdoty:*

> *October 25, 1917. Revolutionary sailors called Smolny (where the revolution started):*
>
> *- Is this Smolny?*
>
> *-Yes, it is.*
>
> *- Do you have vodka in Smolny?*
>
> *- No.*
>
> *- Do you know where we might find it?*
>
> *- The Winter Palace.*
>
> *- Hurray!!! To the Winter Palace!*

> *"Rykovka," the first NEP-era Soviet vodka, was 84 proof, while the previous, tsarist-era vodka was only 80 proof. People grumbled:*

--Was the revolution really worth that 4 extra proof?

- What is the "Soviet choice"?

- It is the choice between standing in the waiting line to buy vodka or the waiting line to leave the USSR.

These *anekdoty* express shared sentiment about the hopelessness of the Soviet idea and the resulting social problems that have developed. Part of the Russian collective identity is the capacity to outdrink their counterparts, as Erofeev (1997) described the major difference between Russia and her neighboring countries: "On one side of the border they speak Russian and drink more, on the other they drink less and don't speak Russian (p. 100, cited in Draitser 1999: 85). There are many Russian proverbs about the curative powers of vodka for physical and psychological health. As such, alcohol was also perceived as a problem-solving technique, even if it only created more hardships and scarcity. The tone of alcoholic *anekdoty* vary from a light-hearted stereotype of Russians as drunk fools to more serious frames which link alcohol to abuse, corruption and starvation.

A cop stops a motorist. He checks the vehicle and then checks the driver's papers. Unable to find anything wrong with either the papers or the vehicle, the cop decides to go for his favorite trick and pulls a bottle of liquor out of the trunk of his own car and offers it to the driver,

"Would you like a drink?"

"No thanks, I'm driving officer," the motorist responds, puzzled.

"Are you sure?"

"I can't—I'm driving!"

"Well sir, it is your choice. The fine is 800 rubles for impaired driving or 1,000 rubles for not following the orders of an officer of law, it's your choice!"

In this *anekdot,* we see social issues pertaining to alcoholism and police corruption, as well as how dysfunctional situations are produced by defective laws. Forced into obedience to avoid a higher fine, the motorist must play into the officer's corruption and into the stereotype of drunken Russians.

Russian men suffered disproportionately from alcoholism during both Soviet and post-Soviet times. Although Russian men were the population who consumed the most alcohol, entire families were torn apart by alcohol and the men who chose to consume instead of helping to contribute to the support of the family. Domestic abuse was another byproduct of such heavy alcohol consumption and a frequent subject of *anekdoty* narratives, but this subject will be discussed in greater detail in the section about Women and Family later in this chapter. The next three *anekdoty* draw a connection between alcohol and starvation: as a choice either between alcohol and food or of alcohol as a way to deal with impending death.

An America and a Russian historian were comparing notes about their respective leaders who were contemporaries.

"President Hoover is much better than Premier Stalin," the American argued.

"He taught the Americans not to drink."

"Ha. That's nothing," countered the Russian historian. "Stalin taught the Russians not to eat."[17]

A provincial party committee inspector pays a visit to a rural Committee of the Poor. He finds the chairman completely intoxicated.

The inspector asks:

--So how are things going?

--Hic… They're fine… Hic…

--Are the ranks of the village poor contracting?

---Er, yes… they're dying off, all right.

--And how's the struggle with moonshine going?

Rubbing his eyes the chairman replies:

--Hic… We'll have that finished off too, real soon.

Son: Papa, vodka is getting more expensive, it will be difficult for you: you will have to drink less!

Father: No, my son, it will be more difficult for you: you will have to eat less.

These fictional situations blame alcohol for social issues, but also laud alcohol as a coping mechanism for those living under such difficult living conditions. Alcohol offered a mental escape from daily hardships, albeit creating more hardships in its consumption. Since the drinker is always male, the "coping" benefit is notably afforded to one gender at the expense of the other who must deal with the social

[17] This *anekdot* makes reference to the state and was not included in the "social problems" category, but it is included here for the sake of thematic comparison.

problems that are tied to its consumption. The last *anekdot* above draws particular attention to the impact of such rampant alcohol consumption upon families who spend their meager wages upon alcohol rather than food or other necessities, and how alcoholic parents neglect or abuse their children.

Shortages / Famine

After the October Revolution of 1917, the primarily agrarian economy of Russia (and the rest of the Soviet Union) was rapidly industrialized. Guided by a series of ambitious five-year plans enacted by Stalin's government, the entire nation focused the majority of labor upon increasing exports of heavy industrial products such as iron and coal. Part of this industrialization process, was the collectivization of individual land and labor into collective farms, *kolkhozes* in Russian. The belief was that the replacement of these individually managed farms with collective ones would immediately increase the food supply for urban population, the supply of raw materials for processing industry, and agricultural exports. By 1936 over 90% of agricultural land was "collectivized" as rural households entered collective farms with their land, livestock, and other assets (Davies 1980; Heinzen 2004). Collectivization was intended to serve as a solution to the food crises that had developed since 1927, yet the shortages and famines only exacerbated under this new policy (Heinzen 2004). The repeal of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1928 made it even more difficult for peasants since they could no longer sell their surpluses on the open market. Below are a couple jabs at these policies.

A collective farmer returns home from Moscow and announces with amazement:

--It's a miracle, my brothers! They're building now in three months what would have taken three years to build before.

A neighbor interrupts him:

--That's nothing. We've got even more wondrous miracles here. Take a look at our graveyard. Before, it would have taken us fifty years to fill it as full as we have during the past three.

-How do you deal with mice in the Kremlin?

-Put up a sign that says "collective farm." Then half the mice will starve and the others will run away.

Both of these *anekdoty* refer to the spike in deaths after the collectivization of farms. Although the collectivization was supposed to increase food supply, in effect it did the exact opposite and farmers were worked to death. The number of deaths is highly disputed, since many Soviet sources deny famine all together or severely underestimate its fatal effects. The second *anekdot* also makes a joke about the increasing proportion of Russians who wish to emigrate from the Soviet Union as a result of these dire conditions. Living conditions were difficult, and Soviet citizens had to find ways to deal with perpetual shortages and harsh work conditions. These issues touched upon in many other *anekdoty.* Below are just a few examples

This is Armenian Radio! Our listeners asked us: What is the most permanent feature of our socialist economy?

Our answer: Temporary shortages!

A communist boss refuses to relieve a hungry worker engaged in an urgent task

--But I'm exhausted, comrade. I need a break.

--We'll rest when we get to heaven.

Does Russian government believe in God?

What do you think? Who else makes us fast for so long?

Life under the collectivization and industrialization policies posed many challenges for Soviet citizens. Buying basic staples such as food, clothing, and hygiene products such as soap, toilet paper, and toothpaste was a recurring obstacle for Russians. Food shortages were a constant problem and as a result led to regular long lines outside of market shops (Fitzpatrick 2000). There was very uneven distribution of such goods even among the Soviet population as noted in the earlier *anekdot* about the peasant returning from Moscow where construction was successful. Since Moscow and Leningrad had higher tourist traffic they were much better supplied than the rest of the USSR; rationing did not begin until the 1980s in these two cities even if their shelves were also often empty and city dwellers were accustomed to long lines. This is noteworthy in that the presence of goods on the shelves in a state store in a smaller village often could simply mean that these goods were rationed and could not be bought at will (Fitzpatrick 2000).

At a meeting in a factory, a lecturer from the district Party committee tells the workers about their bright future in the USSR.

"See, comrades, after this five-year plan is completed, every family will have a separate apartment. After the next five-year plan is completed, every worker will have a car! And after one more five-year plan is completed, every family will own an airplane!"

From the audience, somebody asks, "What the hell one may need an airplane for?"

"Don't you see comrades? Let's say, there are shortages in potatoes supplies in your city. No problem! You take your own plane, fly to Moscow and buy potatoes!"

A man walks in a bakery:

- You wouldn't have milk, would you?

Salesman:

- This is a bakery. We don't have bread here. The store that doesn't have milk is across the street.

Yuri Andropov was visiting a collective farm to check on the progress of his announced reforms.

"Do you have a house?" he asked the farmer.

"Yes."

"Do you have a car?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"Do you have money?"

"Yes, of course."

"Do you know who I am?" the Premier inquired.

"You're an American spy!" the farmer declared.

"How dare you say that?" the former KGB chief huffed as he reeled back in shocked amazement.

"Because any real Soviet would know we don't have shit!"

These *anekdoty* poke fun at the disjuncture between propaganda and lived reality. As Party newspapers and political speeches bragged about the accomplishments of the Soviet state and the joyous people who live under this political order, the common people struggled under much more difficult conditions: at best freezing outside in in long lines for food, at worst starving or being sent to jail. The outward presentation of a life of prosperity stood in stark contrast with the lived realties of the Russian people. Russians learned how they were expected to act in public from State-run newspapers and television that presented a view of social life that had little to no overlap with reality.

Two old friends meet on a street in Volgograd.

"How's life treating you?" asks one.

"Just great," replies the other.

"Have you been reading the papers?"

"Of course, how else would I know?"

A commissar was visiting a collective farm to check on the season's crops.

"How are the potatoes," he inquired.

"The potatoes are plentiful," a farmer replied, "that if we put them end to end they will touch the feet of God."

"How can that be?" blurted the commissar. "There is no God."

"Well, there are no potatoes either."

Although the big lies and false propaganda could not be challenged publicly, these *anekdoty* give voice to the doubts and criticisms of Soviet people who otherwise had to maintain public complacency. James Scott argues that hidden transcripts serve as dress rehearsals of revolt, and in the narrative about the farmer and the commissar, we get a glimpse of what those living under Soviet rule would say if they could talk back without repercussion. *Anekdoty* were a psychological safety valve in that they enabled the subjugated to act out impulses of rebellion in a safer way, but also that they emancipated them from the straightjacket of naiveté and stupidity that they were required to project in pretending to believe overt lies of the State.[18] Through these narratives, Russians were able to prove to themselves, and to others that they were not gullible fools convinced by Party propaganda. The two major newspapers in the Soviet Union were called *Pravda,* which is translated to "truth," and *Izvestia,* which translates to "news." One of the most popular *anekdoty* in my compilations is as follows:

In Truth there is no news and in News there is no truth.

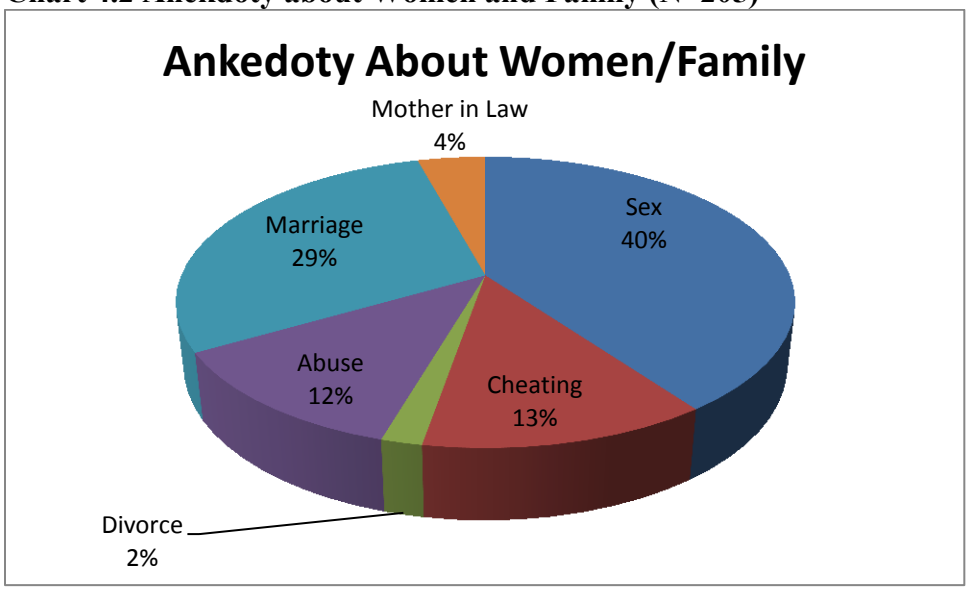
[18] See Chapter three for more discussion on the role of the "fool" in Russian and Soviet folklore in highlighting absurdities and inequities of official discourse.

This *anekdot* was particularly popular in regular conversation as a way of articulating the censorship policy in the USSR and its effect on all forms of media. It also provided a voice of rebellion against outward complicity and support. Although all social problems are experienced to some degree on a personal level, those that occur within the family structure may be even more invisible to the outsider because what goes on behind closed doors (even in a communal apartment) are issues that may be rarely spoken about in public settings.

Family Politics

The trials and tribulations of life under the Soviet regime were not limited to the public sphere. Shortages, famines, repression and other difficulties put significant pressures on the family unit. As a result, many social problems manifested in the private space of one's home—between husband and wife, parents and children, and between neighbors who were cramped into overcrowded living arrangements. Major themes of *anekdoty* about family issues include are included in the chart below.

Chart 4.2 Anekdoty about Women and Family (N=205)



Most Russians living in major cities lived in shared communal apartments called *kommunalkas*. Between two and seven families share such an apartment, each family with one room per family to serve as the living room, dining room, bedrooms and then the bathroom, kitchen, telephone and hallways were all shared among the families. Driven from the countryside by poverty, collectivization, and Soviet industrialization campaigns resulted in a severe housing crisis in the urban districts. *Kommunalkas* were implemented as a "revolutionary solution" in "uniting different social groups in one physical space" (Attwood 2010). Neighbors were forced to interact with each and often knew everything about each other, due to the close quarters (Utekhin et al. 2012) Such overcrowded living space made even it difficult to relax even when home. The following *anekdot* makes a jibe at these living conditions:

> *One day, a school teacher gives portraits of Stalin to three students in her class. The next day, she asks them what they had done with them.*

--I hung the portrait directly opposite of our front door at home so that all entering could see it.

--I hung mine in the corner where the icons used to be.

The third boy remains silent. The teacher asks him:

--And you, Petya, where did you hang your portrait?

--I didn't hang it anywhere.

--What?! Why not?

--There was nowhere to hang it.

--What do you mean, 'nowhere'?

--Well our family lives in the middle of a room. The four walls belong to the four other families who live with us.

Not only does this narrative criticize overcrowded living conditions, but it also criticizes the role that Soviet power has usurped in the daily life of Russians by replacing "the old icons" with Stalin as the new object of worship. The Soviet Union was the first nation to establish atheism as its official religion. Based upon Marx's words that "religion is the opiate of the people," the Soviet state was actively involved in the control, suppression, and elimination of religion through the confiscation of church materials, criminalization of religious activities and teaching of atheism in schools. Although religious activities were outlawed, the way that Soviet citizens were expected to revere political leaders and put up with a life of

extreme austerity with the hopes of a brighter future, were strikingly similar to traditional religious rhetoric. God had been replaced by Stalin and Soviet power.

Marital relations were also stressed by such cramped living conditions and economic hardship. There is a considerable bulk of *anekdoty* about cheating between husband and wives and of the general promiscuity of women. A few examples of such *anekdoty* are below:

A working man comes home and finds his wife in bed with a neighbor:

"Why are you doing such dumb things when across the street they're giving out oranges!"

Late in the evening in a bar, two elegant gentlemen are eating.

"Tell me, does your wife really not say anything when you come home this late?"

"Can't you see sir that I am single?"

"Pardon me! Well then, what is the need to stay out so late and drink so much?"

These stories recount (and normalize) cheating in relationships, but also highlight other related social issues in the process. The first *anekdot* draws attention to the shortages that were common to Russian life. Fresh produce was always in short supply. As a result, whenever there was produce available, one would prioritize getting some before it disappeared, even if that meant waiting in line all day. The focus of the joke is upon the shortages and the stupidity or irresponsibility of the wife, while the fact that she was cheating fades into the background. Both *anekdoty*

normalize cheating, the first does so by not even acknowledging it as something abnormal and the second by treating infidelity as some sort of inevitability produced by the living condition of cramped living quarters. In the statement made by the drinking buddy, it is implied that he is out late drinking avoiding his wife and/or looking for another woman to be with. Other *anekdoty* similarly construct the role of the woman in the household as negative. These issues range from abuse to frustrations with mother-in-laws to incest with children:

Sara had a black eye.

"Who did that to you?" asked a neighbor.

"My husband."

"But I thought he was on a business trip."

"I also thought that…"

A husband comes back unexpectedly

French wife: Jacques, move over, my husband is back.

German wife: Hans! You are two minutes early!

Jewish wife: Haim! Is that you? Then who is this in bed with me?

Russian wife: (falling to her knees) Ivan, hit me, but not in the face.

A call to a veterinarian: "My mother-in-law will come to you with an old dog. Please give an injection of the most painless, powerful drug to put her out of her misery and euthanize her.

Vet: OK… but does the dog know its own way home?

Sister to brother: "Your dick is bigger than Papa's"

"I know," replies her brother. "Mama says the same thing."

A number of *anekdoty* are very inappropriate and offensive. There were four *anekdoty* in my sample that explained how rape was something that women desired, that it was a "beautiful blessing to be so lucky." Domestic abuse was also a theme, appearing in at least ten *anekdoty.* Although these separately are not huge portions of the sample, we must remember that this sample is based upon printed and published volumes of jokes sold to a popular audience. As such, we would expect a level of censorship in these volumes. As such, one would expect that the unpublished oral folklore variety would be more crude and offensive in nature. There are a number of *anekdoty* about women fighting with their drunken husbands and the resultant domestic abuse. These narratives serve to highlight multiple social problems, while normalizing such contentious marital relations. The next *anekdot* describes in detail how these troubles developed inside of the home, especially between husband and wife.

"You know, I think I'm going to abstain from drinking today," says one friend to another, "I think I have developed an allergy to vodka—every time I drink I develop bruises on my body…"

"Well of course I understand you. My wife also has a heavy hand."

A drunk man comes home, tiptoes along the floor and then yells out:

"Wife, start fighting with me, otherwise I won't be able to find the bed"

These narratives of abuse and family conflict are part of a series of *anekdoty* that expresses tensions and conflicts that occurred in the private sphere between family members, most often between husband and wife. Since topics like abuse may be difficult to talk about as a personal experience, these narratives create the space for this discussion, or at least serves to recognize these social problems, without engaging in self-implication. These narratives make light of these serious issues, without necessarily encouraging serious discussion or constructive action, yet the prominence of such problems in the discourse is indicative of saliency—one of the first steps in amelioration. Yet such humor also normalizes or justifies such subjugation. The genre of obscene *anekdoty,* which employs "*mat*," is a particularly strong example of a type of political humor that simultaneously subjugates some groups while revolting against other forms of subjugation.

Profanity / *Mat*

Mat is the Russian term for obscene profanity. Linguists believe that the word *mat* derives from the German word *matt* "dull, weak" and Italian *matto* "mad, crazy." Both the German and Italian words are related to the term "check mate" used in chess, whose origin is the Arabic *eš šâh mât* "the king is dead" (Mikhailin 2004). Similarly, the use of such profanity is a way of challenging the king or the system in power. *Mat* was publishable by law by the Soviet constitution therefore when used it was classified as disorderly conduct or anti-State activity. But *mat'* is also the word for "mother" in Russian, or "mother-related," this is important especially since the

most offensive of these profanities are often directed towards women (Draitser 1999). The common insult associated with the word is "I fucked your mother" or "You fucked your mother"—the first implying the promiscuity of your mother, and the second implying incest. Draitser (1999) argues that *mat* has agrarian origins in folk consciousness, that young men used this language as a means of establishing their maturity and sexual virility (p. 36). Although *mat* is often used without distinguishing the target of its attack—women and/or other objects of ridicule—I will first address the subversive nature of *mat* as related to the Party or State, and then discuss the gendered nature of the profanity.

Gusejnov (2003) argues that there were three distinct uses of *mat* for the Soviet Russian people. He argues the party elite initially used *mat* as a means of uniting insiders, but that over time commoners began to use *mat* to describe hardships and the hopelessness of life. As a result, *mat* began to flourish in social locations where people's freedom was suppressed. Finally, as a way to vent frustrations, *mat* was a source of people's verbal creativity and a reservoir of folk wit. It emerged as a public discourse during the first post-Soviet decade. As a freedom of speech, *mat* served as a way to disrupt the prescribed norm. Since the goal of the Leninist-Marxism was to produce a "correct" worldview to guide the thoughts and actions of the proletariat, *mat* served as a transgressive disruption to the official ideology by being direct and transparent and deriding the exaggerated seriousness of official propaganda" (Gusejnov 2003; Yelenevskaya 2006: 367).

Mat is mentioned here since it was found in a number of *anekdoty* in my sample, though its analysis is more difficult to accomplish in the English language

since the obscenity is often lost or confused in translation. The following *anekdot* serves as an example of such untranslatable narratives.

What's the difference between a diatribe and the Marxist dialectic?

A diatribe helps to set people straight, while a dialectic allows you to spin them in circles. Both are powerful in the hands of the proletariat.

In Russian, the two words "diatribe" and "dialectic" sound similar: *mat* and *diamat* respectively. *Mat* is an abbreviation for materialism as well as the term for obscene language. *Diamat* or dialectical materialism is a complex part of Marx's theory that few Soviets understood. Therefore, *mat* is cast as the "clarity" or the ability for straightforward language, whereas *diamat,* or Marxism, is used to control and confuse people and trap them in a cyclical condition of suppression and oppression. A similar *anekdot* discussing the purpose of *mat:*

Marina, the teacher, asks the class to produce a word that starts with the letter "A."

Vovochka happily raises his hand and says "Asshole!"

Marina, shocked, responds "For shame! There's no such word!"

"That's strange," says Vovochka thoughtfully, "the asshole exists, but the word doesn't!"

Two communists get together. One asks the other:

- Why are you so sad today?

- Well, I'm feeling a bit nervous, they told me to attend a committee meeting, they said they want to listen to me...

- What are you, a nightingale? Why would they listen to you? You are going to be fucked there, not listened to!!!

Such profanity was used as a means of resistance. It was sometimes used against the Party, but was also directed against any form of control or forced politeness or as a means of expressing the public secret, or "knowing what not to know" (Taussig 1999). In the second *anekdot* the discourse implies that to be "fucked" is a euphemism for the control and power over a person. To be the object of affection and/or the object and receiver of a sexual act is constructed as without agency, voice or power.

Although the above *anekdot* is not explicitly about women, it does make reference to a sexual act in which a female is arguably implied. The normalization of heterosexuality is produced not only by the wealth of narratives that assume female-male coupling, but also by *anekdoty* that cast homosexuality as perverse, for which one should be ashamed.

What is the difference between homosexuals and the Secretary General?

The first hugs and kisses in private and the latter in an airport in front of everyone.

Homosexuality is not something openly discussed or displayed in Russia. There is considerable denial about its very existence at all. Draitser (1999) argues that many *anekdoty* attribute homosexuality to non-Russians as a way of dissociating from it entirely. Many of these narratives describe sex as something that a man does to an objectified other—be it a woman or an "other" not-fully-masculine/Russian man. As such, the act of sex is an act of power or control over another—for a man to be on the

receiving end of this sex (or to desire to be on the receiving end) is a sign of his emasculation. The usage of *mat* exacerbates this effect by attributing violence to the sexual act. More examples of *anekdoty* utilizing *mat* that are directly disparaging to women are below.

A husband comes home from work, hungry and tired.

"Wife, give me something to eat!"

"And what is the magic word?"

"God, fuck your mother!"

Petka comes to Vasilily Ivanovich and tells him that he wants to get married, but doesn't want to marry a slut.

Chapaev lines up all the women in his regiment.

"All of you who are sluts, step forward!" he commands.

All but one step forward.

A month later, Chapaev asks Petka how he likes his new wife.

"She's also a slut, Vasiliy Ivanovich. She's just a deaf one!"

Mat is typically used among men, in that these words often refer to sex or sexuality in a vulgar way or are particularly disparaging towards women. The role that these *anekdoty* play in constructing women as "other" or excluding them from the Russian nationalism, is explored in greater detail in Chapter Five and Six.

Self-Reflexive Popular Resistance

Hearing an anonymously authored joke gives voice to one's personal experience and enables the performer and audience to each recognize that s/he is not alone in her/his experiences and associated feelings. The joke reveals the shared experience and the shared discontinuity between image and reality, associated criticism and discomfort with the incongruity. The joke also serves as a means of democratic dissent or critique of the establishment. From the outside, institutions may appear eternal and immutable, yet as Scott argues in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* actions that are not traditionally recognized as rebellion or dissent (i.e. feet dragging, working slower, creating strong community events, art and music etc.) may actually serve to chip away at such institutions in much more powerful ways than are recognized. One of the most notorious variations of a joke is about the consequences of being caught sharing them:

"Could you please tell us about your hobby, Comrade Brezhnev?

"I collect jokes about myself."

"How many do you have?"

"As of today, two prison camps"

Since being caught telling even a non-political *anekdot* could result in imprisonment, a series of *anekdoty* made fun of the paranoid nature of the government which deemed even the most apolitical political. The casual telling of the

anekdot revealed just how easy and frequent such unfounded arrests and deportations were under Soviet rule (Brandenberger 2009).

These jokes cannot transform history on their own and do not necessarily encourage like-minded individuals to collectivize or mobilize publically. That said, they *do* express a shared set of sentiments which in itself produced invisible horizontal ties between citizens, irrespective of a government that some may have perceived to be illegitimate. I call the fluency in these discourses and the resultant connections, *cultural consciousness*. In the same way that James Scott argued in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* and Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought,* this political humor did serve as a way to chip away at the public image of the establishment. The critiques voiced by *anekdoty* in combination with the groups, identities and collective memories that were reified by such narratives, may have contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. An *anekdot* only lives on if it contains some truth; we laugh at jokes because they are meaningful, because they reveal the ironic underbelly of groups, governments and historical eras of which we are members. The truths they reveal may make us uncomfortable, hence the reason we discuss such issues through parables, fictional characters and exaggerated interactions.

The historical role of the court jester was to problematize the social order of the world. The jester was allowed to laugh at the king when no one else was. Comedy serves as a way to criticize in an accepted way, but only under two conditions: (1) if those in power allow it and (2) if the public finds the subject matter salient and

meaningful. There are those who have argued that without some form of censorship—formalized through law or discursively according to a Foucaultian paradigm—there is no need for humor or satire. Humor expressed those ideas and opinions that counter the hegemonic discourse, and therefore brought people together in expressing their "backstage" or private self-attitudes. Further, since the opinions expressed in a joke are found to be meaningful by those who hear them, the joke has a democratic nature. Mikhail Bakhtin's exploration of the Renaissance *carnival* offers a theory of how shared laughter can promote feelings of collectivity. Bakhtin (1984) argues that those attending a carnival are not simply a crowd of disconnected individuals, but rather should be viewed as a collectivity, organized in such a way that defies the socioeconomic and political ranks of those attendees. At the carnival, all are considered equal:

> Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age. … This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, or hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in daily life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (p. 10).

By wearing costumes and masks people can semi-anonymously participate in the absurdity and laugh together at their shared experience. It takes on a universal nature that implicates all of the participants. "The people do not exclude themselves from the

wholeness of the world…he who is laughing also belongs to it." The laughter is ambivalent: it "is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies. It buries and revives. Such is the laughter of the carnival" (Bakhtin 1984: 11-12). This type of laughter and mockery is similar to that expressed in the *anekdot* and of the role of the "public secret" (Taussig 1999).

Bakhtin argues that people who establish informal, friendly relations are able to engage in mutual mockery. Unlike formal settings where only a third person can be mocked, once a level of trust and closeness has been established between two people, the nature of the relationship changes and allows for a more open exchange, including abusive or insulting language that would be shamed in more formal settings and relationships. As such, they tell the *anekdoty* about their shared experiences, history, popular culture and everyday hardships and the laughter is about these external things, as well as about themselves and their participation or membership.

The carnival challenges the idea of a fixed reality or of a single "truth." Instead, the carnival enables the participants to parody the formal official realm, but without directly challenging or rejecting it. Bakhtin argues that,

> "All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with the pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (an l'envers), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crowning and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extra

> carnival life, a 'world inside out.' We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture" (Bakhtin 1984: 11).

We see a similar perspective articulated in the discourse of the *anekdot*. The laughter produced by these jokes is not directed at one individual or one group of people or a singular historical event. Instead, while the laughter is provoked by a particular recounting of the *anekdot,* what makes the *anekdot* so funny is the way that the situation speaks to the absurdity of the everyday reality of this collectivity.

What is left unresolved is the relationship between real attitudes of the performer and audience and those expressed in the *anekdot*. Christie Davies argues the real attitudes of participants of joke exchange cannot be determined by content or in conversational context (1990: 3). Shared joke scripts draw upon historical and mythological stereotypes, sometimes related to historical events or cultural texts. Instead of alleging to understand actual attitudes—even interviews and surveys have proven to be poor measures of such attitudes (Bonilla Silva 1997)—the analysis of such stereotypes and cultural scripts is intended to understand public reactions and perceptions of historical events and groups of people by looking at how they are framed in these jokes. Although it is impossible to measure whether people truly "believe" these stereotypes, their very existence and endurance over time must be recognized as something telling about their salient and influence.

Foucault (1980) argues that regimes of truth function not by enacting a repressive function upon its audience, but rather through the establishment of a code

that people are motivated to accept and participate in its creation and maintenance. Every text or image is linked to a referent system or dominant code, with which the intended audience is expected to be familiar. Knowledge is a primary vehicle of power and control, therefore the collective histories, objects of ridicule, and perspectives upon current affairs in the *anekdot* must be recognized as powerful arbiters of truth. The Russian people who exchanged and perpetuated these jokes were well-versed in *anekdoty's* associated subjective meanings which implicated them in the process of knowledge production and *cultural consciousness*. These narratives may be understood as articulations of a self-reflexive popular resistance that was not necessarily directed against the State or seeking to engage in politics-proper, but instead to establish a self-definition of Russian collective identity and its associated values and aspirations, to maintain a *collective consciousness*. The process of such collective definition will be explored in greater detail in the following two chapters.

Chapter 5 *Anekdoty's* promotion of an "Imagined Community"

"There used to be a saying among Soviet intelligentsia—'to understand each other with half-words." What is shared is silence, tone of voice, nuance of intonation. To say a full word is to say too much; communication on the level of words is already excessive, banal, almost kitschy. This peculiar form of communication "with half words" is a mark of belonging to an imagined community that exists on the margin of the public sphere….Communication with half-words secures the unspoken realm of cultural myths and protects the imagined community from outsiders and, in a way, from its own members. Among the dissidents of half words very little dissent is permitted. If all at once those other halves of words were to be spoken, intimate gatherings of friends might end—in fistfights." (Boym 1994: 1-2).

Folklore serves as an important role in defining and maintaining collective identities, memorializing collective memories, and moralizing the actions and actors involved in these collective negotiations of power and truth (Klandermans 2001; Zerubavel 2003; Polletta 1998; Foucault 1980). It accomplishes these things by constructing a single narrative with internally consistent heroes and villains. Those who are familiar with the folklore (and the historical context to which it refers) are taught who are the perpetrators responsible for particular injustices, who are the victims, and how we should feel about these different (groups of) people.

In a cultural space like the Soviet Union in which it was difficult, if not impossible, to assert any account of reality other that the official Party word, the power of such folklore in defining truth should not be underestimated. In the above passage from *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia,* Svetlana Boym explains how under a regime of tightly controlled public discourse, Russians—who were almost all dissidents in some form due to their words or actions—learned to communicate with "half words." This entire population was versed in the same

textbook history that defined their collective memory, the same propaganda slogans pasted on every exposed wall, and shared daily experiences that served to undermine or challenge these false truths memorialized in common spaces and Party media (Wertsch 2002; Fitzpatrick 1999). As a result of this fluency in truths and false-truths, Soviet Russians were able to communicate with these small bits or "half words," knowing that others could fill in the implied alternative meaning or the entire narrative that a single word might invoke. This type of communication was common to *anekdoty* that regularly reference party slogans, Marxist ideologies, characters from Soviet films, or current events.

Boym (1994) calls such popularly-authored, meaning-making discourses that were pervasive throughout a culture, "mythologies." She argues that mythologies are "cultural common places, recurrent narratives that are perceived as natural in a given culture but in fact were naturalized and their historical, political, or literary origins forgotten or disguised" (4). In the Soviet Union, where there was extreme political, administrative and cultural control and censorship, such "mythologies" played a particularly important role in guiding and informing daily life. They situated the Soviet people in a historical and cultural narrative that positioned them on a trajectory towards prosperity and ideological utopia. They justified contemporary hardships on behalf of collective goals and values. Such "mythologies" served as reference points to which the Soviet people could use half words to communicate politically unsanctioned or subversive attitudes and opinions. They enabled people to speak out, while still using permissible and endorsed words or phrases.

It is the content of the joke that triggers laughter, but it is the social context that makes the narrative meaningful and the content jarring. Even if read in isolation in a textual form, a joke always refers to a social environment, deriving its power from the society to which it refers. Although the temporally local setting carries significant meaning and the power dynamic between performer and audience is important to understand, the actual discourses articulated by the joke are in themselves abundant in meaning and power. The congruence between the social context to which a joke refers and the one in which it is told, has a huge impact on what is found to be funny (Chapman 1976; Bakhtin 1984).

Assuming a situated perspective of reality, there can be no objective reality from which the *anekdot* converges or diverges, therefore, this dissertation does not seek to assess whether the narratives expressed in the *anekdot* are "true to reality." Instead, it will examine the different ways that these stories reify Party propaganda truths versus the ways by which they challenge these truths with alternative, less-picturesque descriptions of daily life. In some cases, the *anekdot* served as an amalgamation of many perspectives of those living in Soviet times, while in others the *anekdot* articulate an unmarked voice, therefore privileging a hegemonic discourse that "centers" the ethnically Russian man. This second category of *anekdoty* most likely severely underrepresents the perspectives of the ethnic, religious and gendered minorities who are often the targets of the jokes (bell hooks 1984; Collins 1990; Draitser 1998, 1999; Krylova 2005). By focusing upon political and topical jokes in relation to their historical context, we are privy to some of the uncensored perspectives of those who lived through the period and the different ways by which

these people negotiated the politics of definition and meaning making. The jokes included in this analysis were published in volumes by a diverse group of authors as such we can treat them as salient and powerful truth-arbiters of the time.

Identity Formation in a Social Context

Identity is a psychological place in the social world and a road map orienting us towards others who also occupy that world. In contrast to individual identity, a collective identity causes people to direct attention to their collective rather than their individual interests and produces a group-consciousness. Simon and Klandermans (2001) identify five functions of collective identity that are requisite for such an identity to take precedence over a person's "individual" or personal identity. These five functions include basic psychological needs, namely, belongingness, distinctiveness, respect, meaning, and agency. Without these functions, people may feel some connection to others, but will not be necessarily motivated to give preference to and act upon collective interests. Collective identities are particularly powerful in that they cause people to discriminate against out-groups in favor of in-groups (Gamson 1992; Simon and Klandermans 2001; Nevo 1985), and influence people's justice concerns (Polletta 1998; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008), their willingness to engage in social protest and general engagement in social action (Melucci 1989; Simon et al., 1998; Klandermans, 2000).

Collective identity is socially constructed and relational in nature. It results from ongoing interaction with other groups in a specific historical, geographical and

cultural environment (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Collective identity implies a demarcation from other groups while maintaining continuity between generations of members (Zerubavel 2003). The process of its construction and maintenance in relationship to historical events, other social groups and collective goals, enables participants to engage in self-reflexive social action (Melucci 1989: 34; Gamson 1992). This is important to recognize since such distinctions have material consequences: they determine how people are treated, how resources are allocated, and who is privileged in the legal system. Gamson argues that,

> "The construction of a collective identity is one step in challenging cultural domination. The content must necessarily be adversarial in some way to smoke out the invisible and arbitrary elements of the dominant cultural codes. No matter how personally important it becomes for participants, it is never merely a fulfillment but a strategic step in achieving cultural changes that are mediated by the movement's external targets" (1992: 60).

Although the "content must necessarily be adversarial in nature," we must be careful not to conflate collective identities with what can often slide into fixed "essentialist" singular categories, such as those of race, sex, or gender, which presuppose that such boundaries on inclusion or exclusion are impermeable and eternal (Somers and Gibson 1993). Collective identities "challenge the logic of complex systems on cultural grounds… linking personal change with external action, collective action functions as a new medium which illuminates the silent and arbitrary elements of the dominant codes as well as publicizes new alternatives" (Melucci 1989: 23, 63). Power

structures are negotiated by such boundary and meaning making, therefore the renegotiation of power is more difficult with essentialist categories that do not bend or lend themselves to revision. In the Soviet context, we are able to see situations in which such essentialist categories did take precedence in collective identification, and as a result made it difficult to for those who opposed the social structure of society to regroup and articulate their collective goals. Individuals belong to many different groups and associated identities, identities that become more salient in some circumstances while falling to the background in others. The changing of roles and identities may was especially common in the Soviet context. During pre-revolutionary times, Russians primarily identified at the class or regional levels while under Soviet rule, their national identity took precedence (Fitzpatrick 1982: 205).

Collective identity is a "social fact" that has *sui generis,* an existence greater than that the mere culmination of people who contribute to it (Durkheim 1982). The collectivity develops from the sum of actions or beliefs of these individual actors into a collective culture that can affect individual consciousness and behavior. As such, collective identity is measured through the analysis of written documents, by studying the symbols of the group, its common language or its group culture, whereas social identity is measured through interviews or questionnaires (Klandermans 1997).

Svetlana Boym (1994) argues that the collective identity was the naturalized or privileged identity of Russians, explaining that, "Russians identify themselves with their duties to the Church, the state, and the bureaucracy; a Russian does not possess an autonomous personal identity independent of his social and religious role" (pp. 75-6). In Russian, there is no word for "private life," the closest the language comes to

this concept is, "*chastnaia zhizn*" which is directly translated into "particular" or "partial life." The concept of privacy was especially absent from Soviet life in that it was considered to be ideologically incorrect and politically dangerous. The concept of privacy is considered Western in nature and reeks of egoist connotations in the Russian language. As a result, Russians were trained to identify at the collective level, orienting themselves towards state-sanctioned collective goals and ideologies (Boym 1994: 73). This was accomplished in large part by State-making initiatives that codified various national and ethnic groups in law and how they were subsequently circumscribed in Party rhetoric.

Anekdoty Promoting an Imagined Community

The tension of the Russo-Soviet collective identity between a supra-national Soviet and a national Russian level was a product of both socially constructed and primordial discourse (Brandenberger 2002; Laitin 1998; Fitzpatrick 1982, 2000). Although newspapers, political speeches, and propaganda rhetoric treated the Soviet Union as an empire guided by a single political ideology and vision of the future, discourses of nationality, race, gender, and religion continued to be employed as a means of defining and organizing populations. The power of those legally recognized categories and groups of people as identified by State discourse in propaganda and textbooks is especially evident in the narratives of the *anekdot.* Who was considered part of the "we" and who was "marked" or cast as "other," was oftentimes dictated by these top-down, State-disseminated discourses.

The USSR did not define itself as a nation-state or a group of nation-states, but through the process of ascribing nationality to component parts of the state and citizenry it introduced the concepts of nationhood and nationality as categories of identification (Laitin 1998; Brooks 2000). These categories served to conceptually divide people. This was institutionalized by the 5th line of the passport, which Soviet citizens carried around everywhere and whose nationality came to define a categorical group identity (Laitin 1998). Such "nationalities," included "Russian," "Jew," "Armenian," "Ukrainian" etc. Yet this arrangement created a paradox in that,

> "The Soviet scheme of institutionalized multinationality was characterized not only by a legal incongruence and spatial mismatch between its two components—national territories and personal nationalities- but also by a fundamental tension, at once conceptual and political, between two independent, even incompatible definitions of nationhood: one territorial and political, the other personal and ethnocultural" (Brubaker 1996: 34).

Citizenship was conferred not by territory of occupation, but by an ethnic-cultural sort of "nationality," yet each of these "nationalities" was associated with a territorial-political "homeland" despite the fact that many of them did not live there. If these citizens had lived in the territory associated with their ascribed nationality, the definitions would have been congruent, but since many of them did not, this created a tension which highlighted the mismatch between state definitions and lived realities—a theme very common among *anekdoty*. This mismatch was most notable amongst Jews, whose "homeland" existed in both a different space and different time: before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1967, their "homeland" was the

historical Palestine of their ancestors—a place that did not officially exist on a map at the time. Unlike personal stories, *anekdoty* in circulation reflected shared perspectives, serving as a gauge of collective sentiments, rather than personal ones. As such, the *anekdot* reified ethnic and gendered boundaries through the articulation *cultural consciousness*. This was particularly accomplished by highlighted the importance or centrality of particular events/political figures and labeling outgroups as "other."

In the same way that contemporary social problems were cast as "necessary but temporary" hardships on the road to a problem-free, ever-abundant communist empire, social divisions such as nationality and gender were treated as temporary and insignificant means of organization by propagandistic discourse. They were treated as labels that would disappear when communism was finally realized despite the fact that these identifiers continued to wield considerable power and discrimination. One *anekdot* that expresses skepticism of such contradictory prophecies:

- Is there going to be a fifth line "Nationality" during the communism?

- No. Instead there will be the question: "What was your nationality during the socialism?"

This narrative challenged Party claims that national identification is something temporary, but rather argued that they reflect an enduring xenophobic trend of the Soviet regime. Laitin (1998) argues that "social solidarities are built on real foundations" (p. 20) in that groups (ethnic, national, religious etc.) are founded on primordial similarities among members, but that as social opportunities change, new identities may be adopted, constructed or reconstructed in order to take

advantage of the situation. Although people did identify as "Russian" before the Russian Revolution in 1917, more often, Russians identified according to class and geographical identities (Fitzpatrick 1982: 205). Arguably, as the Soviets came to power and the Russians were established as the core-elite of this new empire, the most salient identity was that of the national-supranational Russo-Soviet identity in that it privileged all Russians to a privileged space where they might associate with Soviet accomplishments and dissociate from its failures by blaming peripheral nations.

Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that citizens recognized the modern nation-state as a legitimate source of power, citizenship, and identity only if it was able to construct an "imagined community." Anderson identifies the census, the map, and the museum as exemplars of the conceptually bounded and interchangeable units typical of modernist thinking facilitated both the formation of a world economy of nation state in orders to providing the conceptual categorical apparatus for constructing both boundaries and identities through "imagined communities." Such a "totalizing classificatory grid," was flexible in terms of its ability to categorize both real and imagined phenomenon as "us" or as "other" (Anderson 1983: 184). This grid linked every part of the world with relational meaning and a particular place—institutionalizing and fixing understandings of each of these realms. Other scholars have similarly identified the census (Bourdieu 1999) and passport (Laitin 1998) as powerful governmental categorical tools by which a population is defined as the benefactors and beneficiaries of the state. The state in this sense is a powerful "identifier" because it has the material and symbolic resources to impose categories,

classificatory schemes, and modes of social counting and accounting with which various social actors must work and to which non-actors must refer (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 16). The lines of fragmentation were not devised by the *anekdoty* themselves, but rather the opposite: the different groups or identities included in the *anekdoty* served to reflect which of these categories were meaningful and salient and in what particular ways. For instance: Georgians were nearly absent from Russian *anekdoty* until after the New Economic Policy (NEP) was repealed and Georgians were able to profit from selling fresh fruit in Russia (Draitser 1998). Russians were jealous of what they perceived to be Georgians prosperity and began to define this group as amoral, greedy, rich, dumb market vendors. Other national groups in these narratives illustrate the Russian perspective of the world and their own place within it.

One of the prominent Russian cultural "myths" (Boym 1994) or "ideas" (Berdyaev 1947) that shaped both Party-disseminated discourse and popularly held beliefs is the idea that Russian culture is deeply rooted in the great literary classics of nineteenth and twentieth centuries including Pushkin, Tolstoy, Akhmatava. This "high" culture was central to the Russian collective identity and was also promoted by Soviet discourse. The image of the Russian people as literary, cultured intellectuals was something that cultural discourses sought to maintain since it allowed people to maintain a positive self-image. In contrast to Marx, who argued that the proletariat was capable of emancipating itself from bourgeois ideology, Lenin's theory of revolution required that the proletariat should first acquire the "'correct' ideology – the only means that would enable it to acquire power over reality" (Yelenevskaya 2006: 361). This "correct" ideology involved the

circumscription of the "correct" group of people oriented towards the same morals, values and future goals. Such an ideology relies upon a collective narrative (Polletta 1998) by enabling people to locate themselves (or be located) within a repertoire of emplotted stories. The following *anekdot* pokes fun at the contrived nature of this construction of collective identity:

> *The Party announced a contest for the best sculpture depicting the famous writer Pushkin and his Jubilee.*
>
> *The third prize was awarded to a statue of Pushkin.*
>
> *The second prize was awarded to a statue of Lenin reading a book by Pushkin.*
>
> *The first prize was awarded for a statue of Pushkin reading a book by Lenin.*

Pushkin died over thirty years before Lenin was born, therefore it would have been impossible for Pushkin to read Lenin, but this *anekdot* makes fun of how Russian history has cast Lenin as the source of a traditional Russian identity that dates back before his own birth. Yet, the construction of Lenin as the father of the Soviet Union (and Russia) makes the image of Pushkin reading and being inspired by Lenin much more plausible. Regular reference to national symbols is one way by which the exchange of these jokes serves to construct and challenge the contours of such a collective identity (Zerubavel 2003). It enabled a single collective memory to define the population's historical leaders, victories, and cultural values. National symbols serve an important function in creating "nationness" or a sense of cohesion among disparate people. This is especially the case in Soviet Russia in which censorship and

repression produced such disconnect between citizens, friends, neighbors and family. The *anekdot*—that was presumably not authored by teller or hearer—represented a perspective that was salient, but one for which no one had to take responsibility.

Through a process of recursive communication,[19] national symbols help assure loyalty to the nation as they function as "historical 'bookmarks,' links to actual or legendary events in the nation's past. Each time a "bookmark" is actualized (e.g. a flag being saluted or a national anthem played), it is a flashback reminder of our collective history as a nation, a shared past that makes us a nation, bestowing upon each of us a sense of collective identity" (Geisler 2005: xix; Zerubuval 2003). The *anekdot's* habitual reference to national holidays, historical events, heroes and leaders, cultural trends, ethnic and religious groups, political parties, national writers and artists serve to reify the cultural contours of this "we" who participate in *anekdot* exchange.

The boundaries of "we" and the national symbols or events that influence these demarcations do not come from the *anekdoty* themselves, but rather from other forms of media, such as propagandistic films, television/radio series, or nationally syndicated events. Many *anekdoty* refer to such symbols or events such as political speeches, events from the Party Congress, the 1980 Olympics, new laws or commemorative coins; their inclusion serves as evidence of a shared cultural environment and fluency in a particular set of narratives and symbols. Below we are some examples of orientation towards a singular collective history:

[19] By 'recursive communication' I mean that symbols (and their associated meanings) are so enmeshed with other symbols and other articulations of nationness that they appear to be "natural" or "logical" components of the national identity. They are treated as an assumed quality before anyone has the opportunity to question them or demand an explanation.

Is communism going to be built by 1980?

- No, instead of building communism they decided to have the Olympic Games in Moscow.

A friend visited the home of a Russian cosmonaut and found only the children there.

"Where are your parents?" the guest inquired. "Will they be home soon?"

"Father is on a space flight," they replied. "He'll be home soon. But mother went to the store to buy butter. We don't expect her for some time."

The class instructor asked Vovochka, why he came to school with wrinkled pants.

"Yesterday we turned on the television and heard: Lenin's work lives on! Then we turned off the television and turned on the radio. Again we heard "Lenin's work lives on!" After that we were too afraid to turn on the iron."

The first *anekdot* about the Olympic Games argues that the Soviet State is less concerned with the actual project of communism but rather with the outward presentation of success. The second *anekdot* about the child of an astronaut similarly questions of the priorities of the Soviet State. The joke highlights the absurdity of the Soviet Space program that has enough funding and organization to send the first astronauts into space, but how the Five Year Plan fails to secure food in the stores for

the common people. The third *anekdot* makes fun of the redundant and profuse propaganda that was common under Soviet rule – the slogans lost their meaning and this joke, only incite paranoia and fear that Lenin (and the State) is everywhere.

Geisler (2005) proposes thinking of national symbols as a mass media system since symbols are rarely experienced in isolation, but rather in conjunction with other symbols in order to produce and maintain a power structure (flag as power of state, capital as geographic center, currency as economic structure) in addition to cultural membership into the dominant value system. As such, tracing which types of national symbols are expressed in *anekdoty*, we might gain a better idea of what the nation's collective identity looked like at one moment in time. Below are two charts that illustrate the themes of those *anekdoty* that articulate a Russian cultural identity and a Russian collective history.

Chart 5.1 Anekdoty About Collective Memory (N=187)

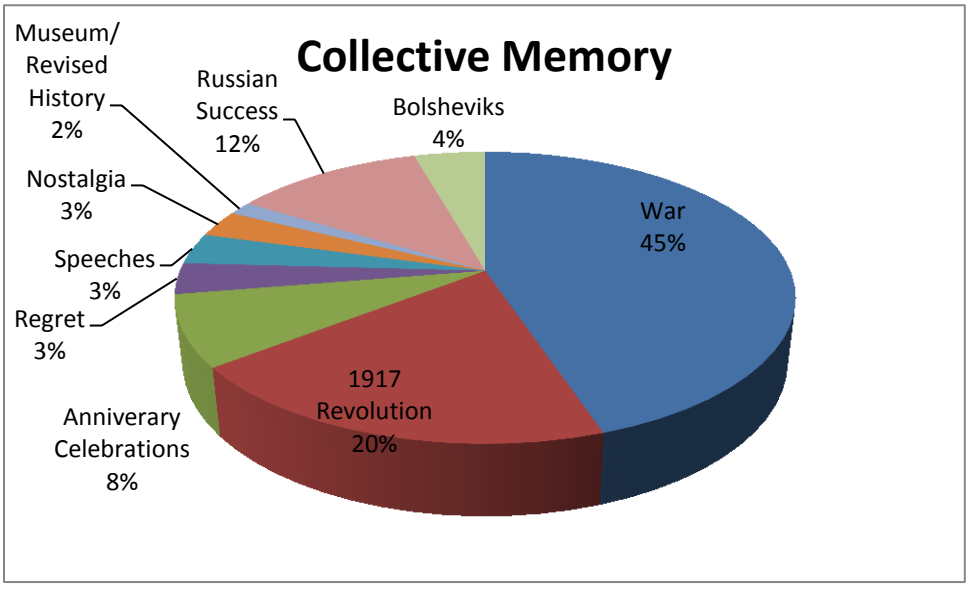
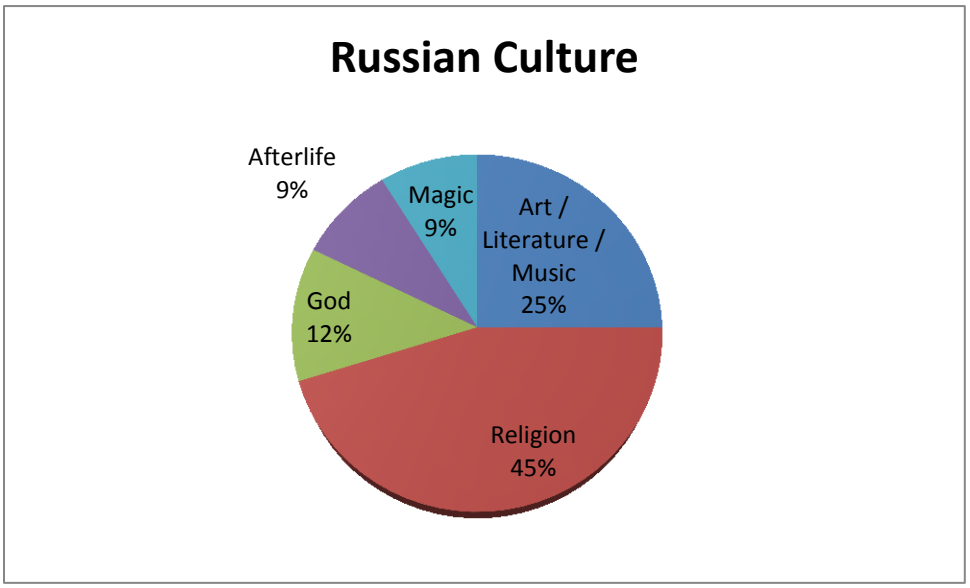


Chart 5.2 Anekdoty About Russian Culture (N=132)



These *anekdoty* serve to reify the concept of a Russian collective identity by orienting around those historical and contemporary events, cultures, and ideas that are distinctively Russian. Anniversary celebrations and symbolic references to war heroes, victories or other nationally based accomplishments remind those who hear *anekdoty,* that identification at the Russian national level is both meaningful and powerful, and something to remember with pride. When contrasted with those narratives about hardships of daily life, the glorious past serves as a discursive strategy in elevating the stateliness of the Russian collective, to focus on glorious accomplishments rather than the harsh conditions of daily survival.

From museums to national holidays, state-mandated textbooks to propaganda films, all Soviet citizens were required to be versed in those cultural elements that together constructed the prideful image of the Soviet Union. Everyone who lived in

the USSR was versed in the collective memory and identity discourse that was so saturated in daily life. As such, the possibility of detachment or repose from the official discourse would have been a blissful escape. The following joke emphasizes a litany of historical events, literature, ideologies, and political leaders in which Soviet daily life was saturated.

> *A Student is taking an oral exam in Soviet history. He is apparently doing well until the professor asks him: "When was the Bolshevik revolution?"*
>
> *"I don't know"*
>
> *"Well then, who wrote DAS KAPITAL?"*
>
> *"No idea."*
>
> *"Who was Comrade Lenin?"*
>
> *"I've never heard that name before," said the student unabashedly.*
>
> *"Well, young man, you must be able to tell me this: Who is Comrade Brezhnev?"*
>
> *"Br-, Br-, who??"*
>
> *"Listen, where are you from?"*
>
> *"I'm of the village Petrov in Siberia…"*
>
> *The professor is thoughtful now, "Petrovka, Petrovka… sounds like a heavenly place!"*

The professor in this *anekdot* is envious of the student who knows little about Soviet History, the foundations of the Party, and the details of the socialist endeavor. These are some of the national symbols that were used by Soviet propaganda to unify

the Soviet people and were central to Soviet education and official discourse. As the Soviet system made life increasingly difficult for its people and the promises of communism were not realized, these founding fathers and utopian ideologies came to be associated with their failures as opposed to their aspirations or promises. To live in Russia during this time and not know these particular details meant that one lived in a place isolated from Soviet power and perhaps a place where the challenges and injustices of daily life were less severe.

Anderson's conceptualization of "imagined communities" is important in understanding the significance of the *anekdot.* In a similar fashion to the newspaper, the *anekdot* connects these otherwise disconnected individuals into a singular collective with a singular homeland, identity, values and set of aspirations. If we accept this proposition, then the decline of the *anekdot* in contemporary culture might be a reflection of a weakening of the "imagined community" or *cultural consciousness* for contemporary Russians as compared to during the Soviet era. Alternatively, the collective identity may be strengthened as protest and satire go public and visible in contemporary Russia—two explanations that I will explore in greater detail in my conclusion.

Who are "We": Anekdoty promoting Cultural Intimacy

With his theory of the "imagined community," Benedict Anderson offers an explanation why citizens were willing to die for their country, in that such a death afforded the citizen the honor of being part of an immortal collective identity and

memory. However, his theory does not ground itself in the action of everyday life. Instead, similar to Gellner (1983), Anderson argues that the citizens lack the ability to shape this nationalism; they simply assume the national identity that is bestowed upon them from the State or those in power. His account also offers only the positive aspects of national identity—pride, victory and honor. What is absent from this account is the aspects of a national identity that are more complicated and difficult to reconcile for a people, a "rueful self-recognition" that "we" are not perfect and that our collective memories and histories involve a modicum of denial and reinterpretation in order to maintain a confident outward collective image (Herzfeld 1997: 6).

The concept of "cultural intimacy" explains how top-down national identities may be internalized, reproduced and refigured. This term, coined by Michael Herzfeld (1997) refers to the active involvement of ordinary people to maintain and redefine a national identity, which involves self-reflexive recognition and reflection as opposed to simply outward pride that is common to state-disseminated discourses. He argues that "ordinary people reify, all the time, everywhere. They, too, invoke solidified histories, rediscovering in the official mythology some aspects that will serve their own cause" (25). Herzfeld stresses the importance of not overlooking these everyday actions in the state's ability to achieve stability (or at least the illusion of it). Building upon Max Weber's definition of the state as an entity that possesses a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, Charles Tilly's argues that nation-states are "relatively centralized, differentiated organizations. The officials of which more or less successfully claim control over the chief concentrated means of violence within a

population inhabiting a large, contiguous territory" (1985: 170). If we accept this definition, it follows that the association with such a war-making collectivity may produce some incongruent feelings of unease or disagreement with the state's "legitimate" use of violence. Embarrassment, regret, denial, and self-reflexive identity construction are at the heart of "cultural intimacy" or nationalism experienced at the individual level and serve as important glue for the national collective identity to stick.

Cultural intimacy expresses the dynamic embedded in *disemia*—tension between outward presentation of confidence and inward self-doubt. Herzfeld argues that the *disemia* exists most extremely for those national groups that have an ambiguous relationship with the constructed ideal images of a powerful culture, in that irony serves as an important resource for political negotiation. In these cases there is requirement of all citizens as part of the collective to maintain a "dual identity, balancing foreign-directed display against sometimes rueful introversion" (Herzfeld 1997: 14-15, 16). These are not merely personal feelings or identities, but rather a collective, cultural representation of intimacy (pp. 6-7).

For Russians living under Soviet rule, such negotiation with official rhetoric was a daily endeavor. Both formal education and Party propaganda were centrally organized and framed in terms of the teachings Marxist theory. Children and adults alike were well versed in Marxism and Leninism as a result of Party propaganda, yet the glorious utopia depicted in this public presentation had very little to do with the actual conditions of daily life in Russia. In an act of rebellion against these false depictions, many *anekdoty* subvert Marxist and Leninist teachings by laughing at

their failed utopian vision, and by arguing that the contemporary social problems (e.g. shortages, famine) are not merely temporary byproducts of the development of communism, but rather a direct product of the socio-political system:

> *The year is 2010. In Moscow, a boy asks, "Grandpa, what is a line?"*
>
> *"You see, some twenty years back, there was not enough meat in stores, so people had to form long queues at the stores' entrances and wait hoping some meat would appear on sale. That was called line. Do you understand?"*
>
> *"Yes, Grandpa. And what is meat?"*

> *Is it possible to build communism?*
>
> *To build it, yes. But to live through it—doubtful.*

> *What is a dry sardine?*
>
> *Answer: a whale that has lived 30 years under communism.*

Each of these *anekdoty* expresses cynicism toward the Communist vision and the collective identity that is alleged to be derived from it. Soviet rhetoric is oriented towards the future, explaining low standards of living as one of these temporary conditions that are necessary in the transition and reconfiguration into a prosperous, class-free society. These *anekdoty* challenge these false promises and express a sentiment of despair and hopelessness if the Communist Party stays in power. Some *anekdoty* make fun of the convoluted and doomed vision of the Party even more explicitly,

At a factory meeting, a member of the district Party committee tells the workers about their bright future in the USSR.

"See, comrades, after this five-year plan is completed, every family will have a separate apartment. After the next five-year plan is completed, every worker will have a car! And after one more five-year plan is completed, every family will own an airplane!"

From the audience, somebody asks, "What the hell do we need an airplane for?"

"Don't you see comrades? Let's say, there are shortages in potatoes supplies in your city. No problem! You take your own plane, fly to Moscow and buy potatoes!"

A speaker says that communism is already on the horizon. Someone asks him: "And what is a "horizon'?"

"Imagine a line where the sky meets the earth and which moves away from us as we try to approach it."

These *anekdoty* challenge official Party rhetoric by describing a future that is worse than the present social situation. These narratives reject the idea that current problems are merely temporary sacrifices for a glorious future under communism, and argue instead that these struggles are merely a foreshadowing of exacerbated difficulties to come. Such resistance and dissent expressed in *anekdoty* may have strengthened the bonds between the Russian people in the safety of an un-policed backstage. Rejecting

the Party rhetoric about economics and history served as one of the first steps in the rejection of a Soviet identity at a supra-national level.

"Russianness" Through Contrast

The joke is an important barometer of group membership given that an experience (attitude or opinion) that is normally isolated within the subject becomes sharable through humor. The taboo, censored, and uncomfortable are more easily conveyed in a third person structure, since the person telling the joke can simply say, "this isn't about me or you," even though the laughter produced is an indication that it is about me and you. Group-specific jokes are only funny if the members of this particular group are the ones sharing them. For instance, it is acceptable for victims of a disaster to tell jokes about the event, though it is in bad taste for those who were not victims to tell the same jokes. There is an informal policing of who may participate in certain circles of joke exchange and who cannot. However, those group-disparaging jokes told among insiders, may not be self-aimed. Instead, these jokes either explicitly or implicitly cast blame on non-group members such as leaders or majority groups are responsible for creating or maintaining the unjust environment in which these unfortunate situations come about.

Although *anekdoty* that challenge Soviet authority bring performers and audiences together through shared laughter and rejection of this definition from without, self-definition at a national level occurs more explicitly when Russians are contrasted with other nationalities.

The most frequent type of *anekdoty* that juxtaposes the Russian with other nationalities involves the Russian with two other non-Soviet men. Most frequently, these two men include a combination of the Frenchman, the American, the German and Englishman. Although this genre of *anekdoty* cycles these different nationalities, most often there are three characters (including the Russian) as a result of the Russian superstition/belief that that in that three is the optimal number of drinking buddies. Soviet folklore treats the number three as having magical qualities. Below we see an example of such a joke which simultaneously serves to construct the desires of the Russian man—to drink with friends, without a desire to return to his homeland and the difficulties of life associated with it—and to stereotype the other men and their nationalities.

> *An American, a Frenchman, and a Russian are the only survivors of a plane crash, somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. They manage to swim to a small island nearby. Lady Luck continues to smile on them—they catch a magical Golden Fish!*
>
> *"Let me go back into the ocean, good men, and I will grant each one of you two wishes," the Golden Fish says.*
>
> *So the American asks for a lot of money and a trip back home.*
>
> *The Frenchman asks for a beautiful woman and a trip back home.*
>
> *The Russian, in his turn, says, "I want an endless fountain of beer on the island. And I want those two back."*

While the American and the Frenchman wish first and foremost to be off of the island, the Russian wishes to be anywhere but home. Russian men most often found

escape from the hardships of Soviet in a setting similar to this deserted island: sitting with three friends at a bar or kitchen table, drinking copiously, and avoiding struggles associated with daily, public life. The juxtaposition of Russians with other nationalities, similarly serves a self-deprecating function, highlighting the positives of another culture in contrast with the Russian's own. We see this structure and function in the following two *anekdoty* as well.

> *An Englishman, a Frenchman and a Russian brag about their wives:*
>
> *"When my wife rides horseback, her legs touch the ground," says the Englishman "not because the horse is low to the ground, but because my wife has such long legs!"*
>
> *"I can hug my wife's waist with two fingers from the same hand," says the Frenchman "Not because I have a big hand, but because she has such a small waist!"*
>
> *"Before leaving for work," says the Russian "I smack my wife's ass and when I return from work, it's still giggling. But this isn't because my wife has a flabby ass, but because in the Soviet Union we have the shortest workday in the world!"*

> *An American risk: choose one out of ten cars, and one will have defective brakes.*
>
> *A French risk: choose one out of ten prostitutes, and one will have syphilis.*
>
> *A Soviet risk: tell political anekdoty with company, and one will be a rat. Everyone knows who he is, but everyone still tells the anekdoty.*

These *anekdoty* operate by using national stereotypes to tell the story. The French are depicted as sex crazed, the American as concerned with money, and the Englishman as government oriented. These *anekdoty* construct the Russian (man) as a hopeless drunk, who lives in a country where nothing is accomplished, and from where everyone wants to emigrate. The abusive relationship between men and women as expressed in *anekdoty* is discussed in further detail in Chapter Four. The intersection of this national juxtaposition with gendered stereotypes produced an intersectional logic that especially privileges the Russian man.

Russian identity is particularly salient in the many *anekdoty* that directly contrast the Russian man with other nationalities in order to highlight his distinctive Russianness. There is another genre of *anekdoty* that is less focused on the distinctiveness of the character or behavior of the Russian man, but more of the doomed vision or daily struggles of the Russian people. Although this theme is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six, below we see how the function on contrasting the Russian experience with other nationalities serves to highlight this despondent perspective.

> *An American, Japanese, and a Russian dentist at an international conference were discussing the relative costs of pulling teeth.*
>
> *"How much does it cost to pull a tooth in the United States?" the Japanese dentist inquired.*
>
> *"Oh, on average forty to sixty dollars," replied the American.*
>
> *"And how much does it cost in Japan?" he asked in turn.*
>
> *"In Japan it costs between sixty and eighty yen," the Asian dentist replied.*

"And how much does it cost in the Soviet Union?" the both inquired of their Russian counterpart.

"In the Soviet Union it costs 3,500 rubles to pull a tooth," the Russian dentist said.

"Why so much?" asked the other two.

"With us it is a very complicated procedure," the Russian dentist explained. "We have to pull teeth through the rectum, because everybody is afraid to open their mouth."

–What is the difference between India and Russia?

–In India one man starved for everyone and in Russia everyone starved for one man.

A farmer in the Zemaitija region of Lithuania, characterized by stubborn, independent-minded folk, was walking along a river bank when he heard cries from the middle of the stream.

"Help! Help!" a man pleased as he desperately treaded water.

"Can you say it in Russian?" the farmer asked without breaking stride.

"Pomagaite! Pomagaite!" He repeated in flawless Russian.

"You see. Now, if you had studied something more useful, like swimming, you wouldn't be in this fix," the farmer said and continued on his way.

In Russia there is a rumor that the schools will soon teach two foreign languages. Hebrew for those who plan to leave and Chinese for those who plan to stay.

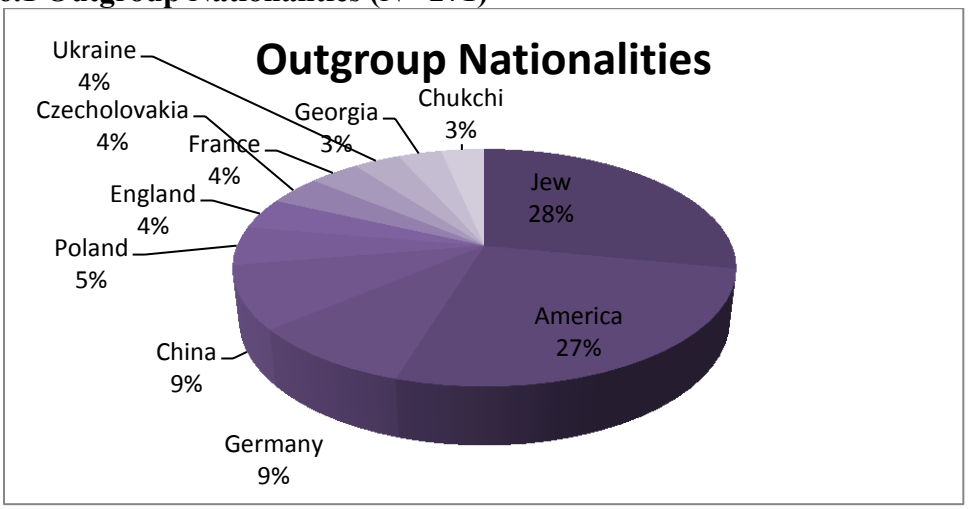
These *anekdoty* that play on the extreme censorship under Soviet rule, the doomed vision of Russian imperialism, immigration by the Jews looking to escape Soviet life or about future conquer by the Chinese highlight the insecurities of the Russians living under a failing regime. By using these other characters, these issues may be addressed in a less explicit ways since Russians might be less comfortable talking about these feelings directly. Therefore, the Russians who exchange these *anekdoty* are able to not only to blame other entities for the failures of the regime, but also to commiserate in daily struggles. These two issues will be explored in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

Chapter 6 Adversarial Attributions: Knowing Thyself through Construction of "Other"

Power relations are rarely symmetrical and a frequent source of group conflict. More powerful groups have greater control over the social environment in terms of material resources and the ability to define "truth" via hegemonic discourses. Such struggles for power do not only exist between groups with established power relationships but also in situations in which power is unstable, and therefore groups are more aggressive in their struggle for self-definition and control. We can see how this was especially the case for Russians living under the Soviet regime, who wished to dissociate from the failures of the Party and self-define a collective identity based upon honor and intellectual superiority.

Chart 6.1 illustrates the frequency with which these various nationalities are mentioned in *anekdoty.* Of 1290 *anekdoty,* 271 involved national groups other than Russians. Chart 6.1 illustrates the breakdown of those 271 *anekdoty.*

Chart 6.1 Outgroup Nationalities (N= 271)



From this distribution it is evident that *anekdoty* about Americans and Jews far surpass the number of *anekdoty* about any other group in this sample. We can interpret these numbers as a reflection of the saliency of these groups within Soviet culture. Soviet propaganda constructed the US as the USSR's major adversary, yet the result was that Americans served as a source of constant comparison and envy. Jews were another group that was prominent in Soviet discourse; with rampant anti-Semitism in both institutional and cultural forms, this group was a constant target of attack. A particularly interesting finding in my sample was that *anekdoty* tended to reify negative stereotypes promulgated by Soviet discourse about Jews whereas they rejected those about Americans. Even in those *anekdoty* that presented Jews more favorably, as the wily trickster who was able to outsmart the Soviet system, the Jew was constructed as "other" in an inassimilable way that Americans were not. I contextualize this discussion in relation to other outgroups that were constructed by the *anekdot* narratives as "others" to varying degrees.

The fact that there are more *anekdoty* about non-Soviet nationalities than Soviets makes it clear who is the audience of these narratives and who is constructed as "other." The greater proportion of non-Soviet nationalities represented in *anekdot* may also be related to the fact that the audience of these published volumes are Russian speakers and therefore more likely of a Soviet nationality, even if they have since immigrated (e.g. for the volumes published abroad). It is also fair to assume that there is at least some self-censorship in these published volumes, therefore sentiments expressed may be only a small taste of an entire genre about a particular group. I factored in this assumption of self-censorship by coding and analyzing every national

and ethnic group. Even if their percentage of my sample was small, their frequency—and associated discursive power—in circulation might be much larger.

Adversarial Attributions: Outgrouping via Ethnic Humor

Group identity exists if there is a population to be included, but also if there are populations to be excluded from membership. Ethnic or out-group humor constructs who is not considered part of the collectivity through the processes of scapegoating and stereotyping of particular subgroups, ethnicities and nationalities. In addition to serving as a barometer of popular sentiments towards the state and official discourses, *anekdoty* served to circumscribe the collectivity of the "unmarked"—and thereby centered—Russian by scapegoating and stereotyping various outgroups (e.g. Jews, Ukrainians, and Georgians). These individuals and groups were either explicitly or implicitly blamed for various negative aspects of social and political Soviet life. Further, through a process of negation—by blaming these individuals and groups for flawed policies, flawed values, or priorities—the values and collective goals of the Russian population were defined and the population of deserving citizens was circumscribed.

The first census conducted by the USSR in 1926 listed 176 distinct nationalities (democope.ru). For the 1939 Census, these nationalities were lumped into larger groups (e.g. four different Jewish ethnic groups were reclassified as one group) or omitted entirely if their numbers were too small. As a result, the list was aggregated into 69 nationalities (Simon 1991). These 69 nationalities lived in 45

nationally delimited territories, including 16 Union-level republics for the major nationalities, 23 autonomous for other nationalities within Russian SFSR, and 6 autonomous regions within other Union-level republics (one in Uzbek SSR, one in Azerbaijan SSR, one in Tajik SSR, and three in Georgian SSR).

Although Russia is a country which hosts over a hundred diverse ethnic groups, it is surprising that only a few of these distinctive ethnic groups are represented in the Soviet and contemporary *anekdot.* The existence of jokes about a particular ethnic group is an indication of the group's visibility in the culture (Davies 1990). Further, their representation in these circulated (and therefore agreed-upon) jokes serves to darken the boundaries established between the collective and the "other." Yet the jokes do not simply expel the "other," but rather serve to construct another collectivity—that of the group to which this "other" belongs. In many cases a group is visible because they are perceived as a threat—in terms of greater success, wealth or intelligence. In order to dissociate from these groups and bolster one's own collective image, these outsiders are constructed as greedy, immoral or foolish.

In ethnic *anekdoty,* non-Russian nationalities are introduced by category and associated stereotypes. The audience must be familiar with the social group's positioning in the larger Soviet power-structure and politics in order to for the punch line to be jarring and meaningful. When not explicitly named, these social groups are referenced by stereotype markers. For instance, the Jew in the *anekdot* can be described as the man with the large nose, as "Abraham," "Moshe," "Rabinovich" or another Jewish sounding name. The short man with the cap is Lenin, while a man

with a large cap, dark skin, and lots of money is a Georgian. As a result, part of the socializing aspect of the *anekdot* is learning to stereotype by appearance or particular qualities. While we recognize that stereotypes persist among many cultures of humor, the lines along which people are divided are especially illustrative of who is considered and "insider" and who is an "outsider" of the particular culture, community, or nation.

In the Soviet-era *anekdot*, the "unmarked voice" was that of the Russian man. When other social groups or characters were included, they were explicitly gendered and racialized in terms of their nationality or geographical region. Such focus on the "other" served to simultaneously circumscribe the "we," and solidify a collective identity. Unlike those categories defined and applied by an external actor (e.g. the state), the identity described through negation in the *anekdot* was arguably reflective of the performer and audiences' "self-understanding." In this dissertation, I explore *anekdoty* about the Georgian, the Chukchi, the Jew, and the American in greater depth. I chose these four groups based upon their popularity among *anekdoty* despite being some of the least populous (Jews), or with whom Russians had the least personal contact (Georgians, Chukchi, Americans). By looking at these cycles of *anekdoty*, we get a better sense of how this humor engages with power structures. Specifically, ethnic humor that operates along those lines of distinction institutionalized by Soviet policy

Georgians

There were few jokes about Georgians before the death of Stalin in 1953 (Bradenberger 2009), which may be related to the fact that Georgia was a highly nationalist nation-state to the South with whom Russians rarely came into contact (Draitser 1998). They were a distinct group, but did not serve to threaten the Russian collective and therefore were absent from the nationalist discourse. After Stalin's death, the Soviet government lifted its ban against private enterprise, allowing small businesses such as fruit and flower stands to reopen while the state continued to control banks, foreign trade, and large industries. This was when Russians first had exposure to the Georgians and other Southern nationalities who were granted permission to open small privately owned enterprises for profit (Brandenberger 2009).

Georgians look very different from Russians with their dark skin and dark bushy mustaches and large oversized hats. As such, they were very visible on the streets selling fruit and other southern produce. Although less than one percent of the Georgian population was involved in this business, the contrast between these presumed-to-be prosperous southern foreigners and the struggling Russians fueled an animosity between these two groups (Draitser 1998). The Georgian was often described in *anekdoty* as the worm in the large cap, which served to identify them by the large hats they stereotypically wore and the negative feelings towards the group as worms who steal from the Russians in duplicitous ways. Russians also participated in various "second economies" or "black markets" in order to alleviate consumer shortages and bureaucratic bottlenecks, but only Georgians were depicted as

materialistic in nature since they appeared to be more successful in these economic activities. This negative stereotype was strengthened by the fact that those Georgians who did make good money tended to spend the money in Russian cities where they were visible to envious Russians, whereas those Russians who made good money, spend their money in Yalta, the Crimea or the Caucuses (Draitser 1998).

An example of this depiction of Georgians as money-hungry and dumb is as follows:

> *In a school in the republic of Georgia the teacher asked the students to tell about their fathers.*
>
> *"Turashvili, tell us about your father."*
>
> *"My father grows oranges. He takes them to Moscow, sells there and makes good money."*
>
> *"Now you, Beridze."*
>
> *"My father grows laurel leaves. He takes them to Moscow, sells there, and makes good money."*
>
> *"Now you, Klividze."*
>
> *"My father works in the Division for the Fight Against Embezzlements and Speculations. When Beridze's and Turashvili's fathers go to Moscow, they always first see my father. So he makes good money."*
>
> *"Now you, Chavchavadze."*
>
> *"My father is a chemical engineer."*
>
> *The class burst in laughter.*

"Children," the teacher said. "It's not nice to laugh at someone else's misfortune."

In Russia, a chemical engineer is the most prestigious profession one could achieve. When children take their entrance exams in the seventh grade, only those with the highest scores can go on to engineering school. Despite its prestige, engineers in Russia and the rest of the Soviet Union struggled to survive on their wages just like all those in other professions. As such, selling fruit—a commodity virtually absent during Soviet shortages and therefore an extreme luxury—was considered more impressive, even if it is perceived to be a result of fortunate happenstance rather than a product of intelligence or achievement. Other *anekdoty* expand upon the stereotype of greedy, overindulgent Georgians by highlighting their dishonest means and condescension in relation to the poorer Russian

In a church, a Georgian prays for money to buy a car. Next to him, a Russian prays for half a liter of vodka. Finally, the Georgian gets annoyed and gives the Russian ten rubles: "Listen, get yourself a bottle and don't bother God with your trifles."

This *anekdot* simultaneously reifies three elements in the *cultural consciousness*: the insensitive and greedy Georgian, the alcoholic Russian, and the lingering of religious traditions in an officially atheist empire. This joke reveals and highlights race-based stereotypes, but also gives us an insider view into an everyday landscape in a Church where Russians and Georgians still believe in God despite the public Soviet rhetoric that seeks to portray the opposite. Another *anekdot* about Georgian wealth makes reference to a Russian proverb about morality:

A Georgian barges into a restaurant, takes a seat at a table, and lets fall with a thud a huge, dirty suitcase on a snow-white tablecloth. A waiter approaches him:

"Shame on you! To drop your dirty suitcase on a clean tablecloth!"

"What's with you dear man? Where do you see a suitcase? It's my wallet."

This *anekdot* plays upon two Russian proverbs about quick money that involves "raking in the rubles by the suitcase" and that the "Russian way" is clean like a tablecloth, unlike the dirty ways of the Georgians (Draitser 1998). Each of these *anekdoty* portray the Georgian's success and prosperity as an exploitation of the more intelligent and honest Russian. In other words, Russians' poverty is explained as the pilfering by other Soviet nationalities, therefore casting blame of the Soviet failures upon these outgroups.

Jews

Some people have argued that *anekdoty* about Jews are so popular and numerous due to the fact that the bulk of *anekdoty* are authored by Jews (Davies 2002; Draitser 1998), or that they were the most hated group by the Russians (Pinkus 1988; Gitleman 1972), and therefore take the perspective of this group more seriously and/or take them as objects of ridicule more frequently than others. Jews were numerous among the intelligentsia (Hoffman 1980) and since Marx was a Jew, many of those *anekdoty* highlighting the destructiveness of Marxism or the Party find ways to cast the blame upon Jews for orchestrating the Soviet agenda. The following *anekdot* articulates this sentiment:

Really those Jews—for themselves they invented Zionism and for the others—Marxism.

This *anekdot* expresses the popular opinion that Jews were responsible for the Soviet experiment (Marx was a Jew) and that they could leave once *their* experiment had gone awry (by immigrating to Israel or the U.S.). Out of the 19 national or ethnic groups mentioned in the *anekdoty,* Jews were in more than a quarter of them. Although Jews were a very small minority in the USSR, they were very visible and salient because of their distinctive accomplishments and recognition before the law. Jews typically had much higher levels education and occupational achievement, and in response, Stalin reinstated an educational quota[20] in order to restrict the number of spots in prestigious universities that Jews could occupy. This quota involved total prohibition of Jewish students from particular schools or occupations or it strictly limited the number of Jewish students in order to make sure the percentage of Jewish students did not surpass the percentage of Jews in the population. The impact of this policy was severe: in 1935 the Jewish enrollment in Soviet universities was 13% of the population, but by the 1960s it dropped drastically to little more than 3% (Palomino 2007).

The "appointments policy" further institutionalized such discrimination by excluding Jews from all key policy-making positions. Whereas the percentage of Jews in the Central Committee of the Communist Party was 10.8% in 1939, by 1970 only one Jew remained in the Central Committee. There were no Jews in the

[20] Imperial Russia enacted an educational quota in 1887 restricting the share of Jewish students to 10% in cities where Jews were allowed to live, 5% in other cities, and only 3% in Moscow and St. Petersburg. This was repealed in 1917 after the revolution, but then reinstated by Stalin.

Politburo or the top levels of the Secretariat and in the sensitive areas of diplomacy, security, foreign trade, and military affairs there were virtually no Jews, at the top levels there was none at all (Palomino 2007).

The passage of the Jackson-Vanik amendment in 1974 that enabled Jews to leave Russia only intensified and solidified the resentment of this group even further. One *anekdot* makes particular fun of this,

In the beginning of the emigration of the Jews, Brezhnev asks a KGB worker:

- How many Jews are there in the USSR now?

- I think about two million.

- And if we let them emigrate freely, how many do you think may leave?

- I think between five and six million.

"Rabinovich" is one of the most popular characters in the Russian *anekdoty;* he is used as a character that stereotypes Jews as smart and crafty in finding improbable sources of income, being cheap and stingy in some contexts, and, in earlier genres, strongly hating the Soviet government (Draitser 1998). One of these anti-Soviet jokes involves Rabinovich discussing the relationship between Jews and Russia with *Pamyat*, a Russian ultra-nationalist group:

Pamyat: Pamyat headquarters, what is the nature of your inquiry?

Rabinovich: Is it true that Jews sold Russia out?

Pamyat: Damn right!

Rabinovich: Great! Could you tell me where I might get my share?

Many other *anekdoty* cast the Jew as cheap and money-obsessed. This stereotype stems from the perception in of Jews as the rich money-grubbing bankers and

lawyers, and from their high educational and occupational attainment in Russia and other countries. The thrifty stereotype also stems from the historical condition of Russians and Jews alike in which food and necessities were scarce—yet the Jew is disproportionately the centerpiece in these narratives that seek to highlight poverty that all groups experienced under Soviet rule. Compounded with institutionalized anti-Semitism, frugality was necessity rather than a talent.

"Abraham, I saved five kopecks"

"How did you do that?"

"I ran behind a tram."

"Well, you would have saved more if you ran behind a taxi"

The above narrative involves a creative and positive interpretation of a potentially anti-Semitic event. Denied entrance to the tram because he was a Jew, the narrator "saved five kopecks" because he had to run after it instead of paying to ride inside. This witty interpretation of an unfortunate series of events mimics the way by which *anekdoty* served as a coping mechanism during difficult times—re-casting misfortune as humorous or even advantageous. The *anekdot* also draws upon the classic stereotype of the cheap Jew who seeks all opportunities to save money. Another *anekdot* that makes light of a serious issue while simultaneously drawing upon the stereotype of the cheap Jew is the one below:

--Rabinovich, where are you going with all of that toilet paper?!

--To the dry cleaners!

This narrative finds a way to make people laugh about the shortages that were common during Soviet times, by showing how the frugal yet wily Jew is able to come

up with a solution to this issue. Most Soviets used old newspapers cut up in squares in place of toilet paper during such shortages. Although this was not a laughing matter in the daily struggle with such scarcity and famine, *anekdoty* afforded people a way to release the stress and anger associated with these conditions. Although the expression of coping strategies and daily struggles were discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, we see how these narratives sometimes employ identity markers (above) and sometimes without (below):

Question: What is more useful — a newspaper or television?

A: A newspaper, of course. You cannot wipe yourself with a TV.

(An alternative response was: You cannot wrap herring in a TV).

This *anekdot* highlights how traditional or intended purposes of items are useless in the dysfunctional world of the Soviet Union. While a television was a luxury in other parts of the world, it was not practical or as enjoyable for the Soviet people for a number of reasons. In order to understand these reasons, one must understand just how strictly controlled media outlets were under Soviet rule. Everything published in a newspaper or broadcast on one of the few channels of television was controlled by the State. The media was a propaganda machine. As such, the idea of the newspaper or television as entertainment or enlightenment is an idea that comes from a non-totalitarian place in which uncensored ideas can be freely exchanged. The other reason that such luxuries like a television were humored to be useless is that people living with shortages and famines had much more pressing needs than that of a television. There were documented shortages or absences of toilet

paper in the Soviet bloc for almost all of the 20th Century therefore, the need for such a basic amenity was much greater than that which could be provided via television.

The theme of money is common among ethnic jokes, sometimes in regards to spending habits (such as the stereotype of the cheap Jew) and others about economic advantages of some groups over others (Georgians or other caucus ethnic groups). If we were to glean economic situations from these narratives, we would assume that the Georgian was incredibly successful and the Jew incredibly poor, though neither stereotype holds. Instead, Georgians and Jews were in similar financial situations as Russians—struggling to survive in an impoverished economy and scarcity of basic staples (Draitser 1998). By casting Georgians or Jews in such economic terms, Russians could focus blame on these groups, rather than upon other Russians or the Soviet state which privileged Russians in a number of socio-political ways (Laitin 1998; Brandenberger 2002).

Although the *anekdot* is anonymous by definition, there were many researchers who believed that a large contingent was written by the intelligentsia or Jews (Lauchlan 2009). Lauchlan (2009) argues that Jews brought to Russia their brand of humor which highlights the irony of being God's chosen while suffering centuries of repression. He argues that this type of humor was popular among Russian "proletariats" who now similarly were a "chosen people" excluded from power. The richest source of this humor was the intelligentsia. They turned to joke-telling after Stalin subordinated Russian writers by making them work as part of the industrial planning. As a result, writers could either devote their writing to the celebration of

Soviet power or they could live backstage and make their commentary in private (Lauchlan 2009).

The source of authorship is significant in that *anekdoty* about Jews might be divided into two categories—those authored by Jews themselves (which casts the group in a more positive light) and those authored by Russians as a means of constructing Jews as an out-group from their collectivity. Although both subcategories construct the Jews as a distinct non-Russian ethnic group, the ways by which they do it—from an external source (Russians) or as an internal self-definition (Jews)—might emphasize negative or positive stereotypes respectively. Although this study cannot distinguish which jokes are told by anti-Semites and which are told by Jews, all of these jokes show cynicism, self-irony and wit that are characteristic of Jewish humor both in Russia and other parts of the world (Davies 2002; Hoffman 1980; Nevo 1985). The jokes are usually told with a stereotypical Jewish accent or mixed with Yiddish phrases. The following *anekdot* speaks to anti-Semitism and the trend of Jewish migration from Russia to Israel or the United States in the late 70s and early 80s.

- *How does a smart Jew talk to a stupid Jew?*

- *By telephone, from New York to Moscow!*

This *anekdot* implies that only a stupid Jew would stay in Russia where s/he is must endure anti-Semitism in addition to the regular hardships that all Russians faced under Soviet power. There were a fair number of *anekdoty* about immigration. This was especially the case after the state of Israel was established in 1948 and the "Law of Return" was passed in 1950 granting every Jew the right to settle in Israel. Despite

the establishment of a Jewish country and the implementation of the "Law of Return," the Soviet Union continued to bar such emigration. In fact, Brezhnev's "diploma tax" forced those who wished to emigrate from the Soviet Union to pay a "tax" back to the state for the "free" higher education they received under the Soviet system. This legislation particularly targeted Jews who disproportionately attended college and graduate school. This was a fee that almost no one living in the USSR could afford to pay. In 1974 the Jackson–Vanik amendment was passed by the United States, legislation that dramatically changed the situation for Jews in the USSR. The amendment restricted trade to those socialist countries which restricted emigration and other human rights to its people. Although the law made no mention of the Jews specifically, this group particularly benefited from its passage, since the Soviet government had to allow Jews to leave if they wanted to maintain "most favored nation" trading status with the United States (Korey 1988; Jochnick 1991). By 1975, over half a million refugees (e.g. Jews, Catholics and evangelical Christians) had immigrated from the Soviet Union to the U.S. and over a million Jews to Israel (Korey 1988).

Although the majority of the *anekdoty* narratives dealt with Jewish immigration to Israel or the US, there were an increasing number that dealt with a unanimous desire to immigrate away from Soviet power as illustrated in the *anekdot* below.

- What is the "Soviet choice"?

- It's the choice between standing in the waiting line to buy vodka or the waiting line to leave USSR.

Although the majority of jokes about immigration were also explicitly about Jews, the desire to leave the Soviet Union was not something limited to this social group. Instead we see a considerable envy articulated in these narratives. The *anekdot* below specifically illustrates how discriminated against Jews were in Soviet Russia, and yet how they were still a source of envy:

> *On a cold winter day, a rumor spreads through the city that meat will be available the next day at the butcher's shop. Thousands go directly to the store and wait in line.*
>
> *After some time, the butcher comes out and says, "Comrades, I've just had a call from the Party Central Committee: it turns out there won't be enough meat for everyone, so all the Jews in line should go home." The Jews leave and the rest wait.*
>
> *After a few more hours, the butcher comes out again: "Comrades, the Central Committee called again. It turns out there still won't be enough meat for everyone, if you are not a member of the Communist party, you should go home." All the non-communists go home.*
>
> *After a few more hours the butcher comes out again and says, "Comrades, the Central Committee called again. It turns out there won't be any meat." The crowd disperses, grumbling how "Those Jews always get all the luck!"*

The irony of this *anekdot* is stark. It reflects the perspective of the Jew, who is a constant target of discrimination and hatred, but who cannot complain or receive pity

since they are the "lucky ones." Even in these cases of overt discrimination (as most forms were since Anti-Semitism was institutionalized and supported by the Soviet state), Jews were constructed as having an advantage over Russians.

The popularity of *anekdoty* about the Jews above all else may be in part a reflection of how targeted this group was in Party propaganda. Although some argue that these politics of defending identities makes it difficult for the creation of cross-group coalitions needed to build a movement for progressive change (Epstein 2000; Gitlin 1993), others argue that a group is only able to achieve the recognition necessary for social action once it has established a firm identity, even if it is essentialist or exclusionary in nature (Carroll and Ratner 1996: 618). The "we" that these movements construct is adversarial, in that it defines a "we" and an "other." This other includes other social groups who are not included in the collective identity, but it also includes the State and other political entities with whom the "we" is negotiating for power over resources and self-definition.

Americans

Anekdoty about Americans accounted for 26% of *anekdoty* about national groups; this was the second most popular group in the sample. What is distinctive about jokes about Americans is that they are not as negative compared to other outgroups. Although Soviet propaganda constructed the US at the major adversary of the USSR (as did the US about the USSR), according to these discourses, it is not clear that this negative sentiment was internalized by Russians. Instead, we see quite a bit of envy

and respect for Americans and for capitalism as a more successful political ideology than communism. The *anekdot* below captures the contrast between perceived impending doom for Russians living under communism and the security of Americans living under capitalism:

> *Rabinovich works at the Kremlin. He sits on Spasskaya bashne to see into the distance and signal the approach of communism.*
>
> *The Americans try to win him over and have him sit on the Empire State building and warn/anticipate of the approach of an economic crisis.*
>
> *No, responded Rabinovich, I need* ***steady*** *work.*

The butt of the *anekdot* is the greedy Jew, but the narrative also casts the Soviet project as stalled and unproductive, in contrast to the successful endeavors of American capitalism. Not only were Russians wary of their own political regime, but they were also cognizant of the warped, inaccurate portrayal of reality that was disseminated by the state in textbooks, films or newspapers. This made it difficult for Russians to be able to accurately compare the merits or weaknesses of two political systems since they had little-to-no information about how the two systems actually operated. The absence of reliable sources of information resulted in cynicism about the communist vision, but also suspicion toward Soviet authorities. The *anekdot* below articulates this sentiment.

> *There is a track competition between the USSR and the USA. There are two runners. The American wins. The Russian newspaper reports: "In the 100 meter dash, the representative from our country was one of the first to cross the finish line. The American was second to last."*

Although Soviet propaganda sought to promote Americans as greedy, exploitive and power-hungry, Russians continued to understand Americans as wealthy, powerful and secure, in a position worthy of envy. The narrative makes it clear that Russians are not duped by the newspaper's false presentation of reality. Everything must be read with a critical eye and a grain of salt.

Yuri Andropov was visiting a collective farm to check on the progress of his announced reforms.

"Do you have a house?" he asked the farmer.

"Yes."

"Do you have a car?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"Do you have money?"

"Yes, of course."

"Do you know who I am?" the Premier inquired.

"You're an American spy!" the farmer declared.

"How dare you say that?" the former KGB chief huffed as he reeled back in shocked amazement.

"Because any real Soviet would know we don't have shit!"

After the lecture on the topic of "Overtake and surpass America," a Jew asks the presenter:

"Could you, please, tell me - when we catch up with America, can we stay there?"

An unemployed American wanted to dramatize his plight a handful of hay, sat at the gates of the White House and began eating it.

Soon the president came out and inquired about the strange demonstration.

"I'm hungry. I have no work. And I have no money to buy food," the man declared.

The President was embarrassed and instructed his strange demonstration.

"I'm hungry. I have no work. And I have no money to buy food," the man declared.

The President was embarrassed and instructed his aides to feed the man and help him find a decent job.

Word of this immediately spread to the Soviet Union and an enterprising Muscovite thought he would try the same at the Kremlin.

He took a handful of hay and started munching on it.

Soon Cherenkov came out and demanded to know what the Muscovite was doing.

"I'm hungry. I have no work. And I have no money to buy food," the Muscovite declared.

"Idiot!" replied Cherenkov. "It's summer now! You should be eating grass! Save the hay for winter!"

Russians laughed about how dire their situation was in comparison to even the most unfortunate in the rest of the world. In contrast to those *anekdoty* that characterized Chukchi, Georgians, and Jews as "other," *anekdoty* do not construct Americans as

intrinsically different. Rather Americans are fashioned as more fortunate than Russians as a result of living under a more equitable and prosperous political regime. In many ways, *anekdoty* express envy and aspiration of Americans as opposed to distrust or bitterness. This is an important finding, in that we see how these narratives enabled Russians to challenge and/or counterbalance propagandistic depictions of the United States with their own perceptions. Russians did not perceive Americans to be the enemy as the Soviet power tried to construct them as, but rather as a group of people living under a freer and more prosperous political system.

> *This is Armenian Radio! Our listeners asked us: What is the difference between the constitutions of the USA and the USSR? Both guarantee the freedom of speech.*
>
> *Our answer: Yes, but the USA's constitution guarantees freedom* ***after*** *speech.*

This characterization of Americans and life in the US has a resistant quality in nature. It rejects the state-disseminated discourse and presents a different interpretation of the situation. This presentation of self-definition and popular construction of knowledge and "truth" is a demonstration of everyday resistance and collective empowerment.

Women

Women were considered to be central to the communist mission, yet in practice, neither the professed equality nor respect was provided for Russian women. In both Marx's and Lenin's writings, the role of women in bringing about and sustaining the revolution is emphasized. Their equality was also a central goal of the movement. In 1919, a year after the October Revolution, Lenin proudly wrote:

> Take the position of women. In this field, not a single democratic party in the world, not even in the most advanced bourgeois republic, has done in decades so much as a hundredth part of what [the Soviet Union] did in [its] very first year in power. [The Soviet Union] really razed to the ground the infamous laws placing women in a position of inequality, restricting divorce and surrounding it with disgusting formalities, denying recognition to children born out of wedlock, enforcing a search for their fathers, etc., laws numerous survivals of which, to the shame of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism, are to be found in all civilized countries (Lenin 1977: 65).

These accomplishments went into effect soon after the revolution. Less than two months after the revolution, civil marriage replaced the rule of the church, in less than a year a marriage code was written that ensured complete equality of rights between husband and wife. Divorce was made very simple: if the two parties both agreed, dissolution took place on the spot. If only one of them wanted the divorce, there was a brief court hearing. When a couple decided to marry, they could choose to take either the male or female's surname. Abortion was legalized and women were given equality in education. Without gender equality, the communist mission could not be achieved (Cliff 1984).

Despite official ideology and initial laws that sought to ensure and protect women's rights, in practice, most Soviet women did not enjoy the same position as men in society, or within the family. Women earned less than men across the board, and while women were numerous in fields such as health care, medicine, education, and economics, very few occupied the most prestigious or highest-paying positions.

Women were also conspicuously underrepresented in the leadership in the communist party (Buckley 1981).

The status of women in the Soviet Union was very similar to the status of food or freedom: propaganda painted one picture, whereas lived reality diverged sharply. In propaganda that was shown domestically and abroad, women were depicted as upstanding communists and soldiers in the war of communism, yet motherhood became a central theme of propaganda. Gender equality in education, the workplace, and in the home was revoked after Stalin came to power. Abortion was outlawed, girls were forced to study home economics and other domestic work as part of their schooling, families were paid to have more children, and women received prizes for bearing greater quantities of them (Schlesinger 1949). As one slogan read: "A woman without children merits our pity, for she does not know the full joy of life. Our Soviet women, full-blooded citizens of the freest country in the world, have been given the bliss of motherhood" (Schlesinger 1949). Women could be equal in the workplace, but only if they fulfilled all of their duties at home.

Tensions between men and women are expressed in a number of *anekdoty,* which cast women as sex-crazed, money hungry and dumb, yet somehow manages to turn situations to her advantage: controlling her husband, her lover, and her children. She is simultaneously weak and powerful—a reflection of the contradictions between ideology, law and practice in Soviet society more generally.

The disparagement of women is common to *anekdoty*. Unlike racial or class oppression that historically constructs concrete communities among racial and ethnic groups or divides classes by virtue of economic means, because gender cross-cuts

these structures, women lack such community recognition or support and they have fewer institutional opportunities for resistance. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argues that, "gender oppression seems better able to annex the basic power of the erotic and intrude in personal relationships via family dynamics and within individual consciousness" (p. 226). This is in part because of gender crosscuts these structures of race and class as the existing community structures provide a primary line of resistance against racial and class oppression but not gender oppression. Collins argues that instead of focusing on these segmented forces of oppression, we would better understand power if we conceptualize it as a matrix of domination, in which different people and populations exist at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression.

Domination does not only operate by structuring power from the top down but through the simultaneous cooptation of the power of those on the bottom to subjugate subgroups of this population. Although Russian women were privileged as an ethnic group in Soviet culture, their financial situation was equally as dire as other groups and as women they denied a voice as they were reduced to sexual objects without capacity for creative or political expression. Many *anekdoty* that focus upon women involve sex, the narratives portray women as simple-minded, greedy, over-sexed, and as objects whose value comes from their bodies as opposed to their brains. Every sort of immoral behavior or poor character trait that is cast upon other ethnic groups is also cast upon the women. Below are a few examples:

A writer is complaining.

"Out of all my books, the only thing my wife is interested in is my checkbook."

A drunk man is on a bus filled with women. He starts to yell out:

"Those in front of me are fools and those behind me are sluts."

Silence. At the next bus stop, he repeats,

"Those in front of me are fools and those behind me are sluts."

Silence. Again, at the next bus stop he says,

"Those in front of me are fools and those behind me are sluts."

Finally a woman replies to him, "How can you say that? I have been married for 20 years to the same man and never cheated on him!"

"Well then, you're a fool. Move to the front of the bus."

"People, I saved a woman from being raped last night."

"How'd you manage to do it?"

"I managed to persuade her."

Two guys are talking:

"What is the most important part of a woman's face?"

"Her mouth."

"What do you mean by that? Her lips or her teeth in a smile?"

"None of that matters. The most important part is that it is closed."

Women are recurrently depicted as superficial, greedy, and horny in the narratives. This construction of gender serves to create and recreate stereotypes about Russian women and their role in society. The second *anekdot* presents the stereotype of

women as a catch-22: women are either a fool or a slut, it is impossible to be neither. According to the communist doctrine women should be treated as equals to men, yet in practice we see how this is not always the case. These narratives similarly reflect this push-pull dynamic of women who are portrayed as dumb and obedient or as smart, manipulative sluts. This dichotomous choice constructs the dumb and compliant women as morally superior, a value judgment that reveals the preferred position of women in society. The final *anekdot* is particularly elucidative of the role that women were expected to play in society—voiceless and under the direction of her male counterpart.

Although we have no idea of knowing exactly what proportion of women and men told *anekdoty,* in the descriptions often given—of three men drinking vodka and exchanging *anekdoty*—it is likely that more men exchanged these narratives than their female counterparts. What is noteworthy is that although women are portrayed as stupid, sex-crazed and immoral, they are also considered powerful enough to be blamed for male problems such as alcoholism and impotence. The sense of helplessness that emerged during Soviet times resulted in such *anekdoty*. Men were frustrated in that they were unable to fulfill the role of the breadwinner or sexual commander; therefore they were unable to feel fully masculine in the way that the culture pressured them to do so.

"You! Do you love me?" a woman asks her husband

And he replies, "Why do I have to do everything your way?"

After the wedding, the groom admits to his bride:

"I'm sorry, dearest, but I am paying alimony for two children."

"There's nothing to be afraid of, sweetheart, it just so happens that I am receiving alimony for two children!"

A wife asks her husband to fix the faucet and toilet. Her husband snarls:

"What do I look like to you, a mechanic or something?"

The next day, the husband came home and saw that everything was fixed. The wife responded that the neighbor came over, fixed everything, and for his work asked her to sing for him or…

"And you did what?"

"What do I look like to you, a singer or something?"

These non-traditional narratives portray the woman as in control. Her power comes from sex and the ability to manipulate men. Although she is cast as immoral, greedy and loose, she is able to control the situation and the men in her life with her body. She is given power, but only if she accepts the definition of her power as sex-based. This negates her ability to self-define and resist gender oppression. This construction of women also pits the genders against each other. Although they may be brushed off as "just a joke," is evident that the traditional roles of men and women continue to permeate the Soviet discourse of gender and family politics and as a result women are caught in an intersecting logic of subjugation.

In this chapter, I have traced the way by which different ethnic, national, and gendered groups have been constructed by *anekdoty* and how Russians understood

their community in relationship to these different social groups and to the State. In these narratives there is the adoption and internalization of state discourse and state definition of "others," but there is also a resistance and redefinition of some of these groups. There are both supportive and resistant qualities to these narratives and divergent sentiments expressed in these stories: envy, disgust, respect, embarrassment, and contempt. This is significant in that the relationship between Russians and these other groups expressed in *anekdoty* is much more complex than it may have been deciphered or measured based upon policy, media depictions or accounts inter-ethnic violence. If we understand collective identity as relational in nature, the idea that we understand who we are in contrast with the "others" around us, then who these "others" are, is very important to the process of self-definition. *Anekdoty* reflect an alternative understanding of identity to the dominant one promulgated by the regime, they reflect the fluency in a *cultural consciousness* that engages in self-definition and power politics at a number of different levels.

Chapter 7 Where have all the *Anekdoty* Gone?

The legacy of the Soviet State continues to affect the lives of contemporary Russians in a multitude of ways. As an example, Soviet law required that workers be able to march to work, therefore many mining labor camps were built directly over the mines. As a result, sinkholes (where the land caves into old holes/mines under the earth) have become common hazards in Russian mining regions where miners burrowed into layers of soluble minerals over the last century. In the town of Berezniki, south of the Ural Mountains, this problem has been exacerbated in recent years, where massive chasms hundreds of feet deep run the risk of opening at any moment. In an interview with the New York Times, one resident of Berezniki, Tatyana Shishkina, explained, "We are afraid but don't know what to do. The mayor says one thing, people say another. We are confused." Tatyana was interviewed in her living room where the ceiling is cracked and appears as though it were about to collapse. The situation in Berezniki can be understood as a metaphor for living conditions in both Soviet and contemporary Russia. People were aware shaky ground, cracks in the foundation, walls, and ceilings, yet how to escape the associated impending doom, remained unclear. The government said one thing, people said another, and the result was confusion. In such a situation, people are left to create their own community as both a system of support and a network of credible information.

There are many stories like this one about the situation in contemporary Russia. In a recent trend, official publications have constructed Vladimir Putin as a

superhero, wrestling sharks with his bare hands and excavating thousand-year-old artifacts in the ocean (Barry 2011). In these stories, the work of animal trainers or archeologists is removed from the story, enabling the narrative of a single superhero politician to take stage—a narrative not that unlike Soviet propaganda about Lenin's or Stalin's accomplishments. In many of these stories, the lines between truth and reality are blurred if not erased entirely. When asked about whether they believe the presentation of Putin's feats in State media, Russians will tell you that the contemporary situation is no different from during Soviet times when reading between the lines and reinterpreting the "truth" as the Party told it was a commonplace survival skill. In order to navigate through these accounts that often have little overlap with reality, Russians have had to develop their own networks and tactics for excavating truths and coping with the hardships of daily life.

In this dissertation, I explored the multiple articulations of power and resistance in the Russo-Soviet *anekdot*. I accomplished this by tracing the contours of the collective identity that was expressed in *anekdoty,* as well as its constituent discourses that are both reifying of and resistant to Soviet power. I demonstrated how these discourses articulated a political identity engaged in multiple power moves: directly challenging the state in some narratives, defining and centering a Russian nationhood that excluded particular racialized and gendered outgroups, as well as describing the various coping strategies of citizens who lived in a dysfunctional political and ideological system. The discourses expressed in *anekdot* narratives reflect a *cultural consciousness*, a self-awareness, self-definition, and a historical-cultural situatedness within ongoing power struggles.

The boundaries of the Russian collective identity were maintained through those narratives that sought to mark and exclude. The Russian identity is constructed in opposition to racial, ethnic, national, or gendered "others," as well as the Party, the Soviet State, and social problems more generally. Not all of these discursive moves were political with a capital P, but they all engaged in the re-negotiation of the socio-political power structure through their involvement of institutions, ideologies, or social and political actors. Through the above analysis and discussion, I offer a new interpretation of this folklore that permeated Russian cities and villages under Soviet rule. I illustrated how together the discourses of *anekdoty* expressed a *cultural consciousness* that reflected a collective identity, a collective memory, a coping mechanism, and expressions of everyday resistance against State power. This systematic analysis was made possible by the large sample afforded by these published compilations, in that I was able to quantify themes and understand which subjects were particularly popular in Soviet *anekdoty.*

There are advantages and disadvantages to this study that focuses upon published forms of this oral folklore. Although Soviet *anekdoty* were defined by their oral and unpublished structure—as forbidden gestures and expressions under severe censorship and admonishment—studying the folklore in written form afforded a systematic analysis that would not have been possible otherwise. If this study was conducted through interviews or ethnographic collection of *anekdoty*, such a macro analysis would not have been possible. This is true for several reasons. Firstly, memory tends to be fairly inaccurate measure of truth. For instance, the narratives we recall might be a product of our current situation—issues that are salient and

meaningful to us now may not be the same issues that were meaningful to us at a previous time, when we initially heard and told *anekdoty*. Not only may we misattribute importance to some narratives over others, but we also may entirely forget particular *anekdoty* in a present context in which those jokes are no longer meaningful, since its relevance is tied to its historical and cultural context.

Secondly, studying *anekdoty* in written form reduces the likelihood that mistakes are made in the recording of these narratives. Across collections there were many repeated *anekdoty,* narratives with similar meaning, but with slight variations. If the *anekdoty* were collected entirely from recollection, such differences may have been erased due to memory or the process of recording.

Finally, as previously discussed, *anekdoty* are shared among insiders, they are only shared among trusted friends and family. Although the legal repercussions for telling *anekdoty* have declined since the collapse of the Soviet Union, informal policing of "appropriate" humor continues today. As such, it would be unlikely as an American female that I would have been privy to the same narratives that I found in these published works. People often tell *anekdoty* that they believe their audience will find amusing, therefore the nationality, ethnicity, religion, or gender of a person often determines the type of *anekdoty* s/he would be told. For a researcher, this might translate into over- or under-sampling of particular subjects. Since this research project focused upon the relationships between different types of *anekdoty* and their subjects of ridicule, studying them in compilations proved more fruitful, than doing so through interviews

Although studying *anekdoty* compilations was beneficial in this study, there were also some disadvantages and challenges that should be addressed. To begin, how people used *anekdoty,* in what contexts, and with whom they were shared, are issues that could only be speculated upon based upon previous scholarship. The height of *anekdoty* exchange occurred at a time when the activity was forbidden and when it would have been impossible to conduct a formalized ethnographic or interview study in Russia. In order to understand these relationships, it was necessary to supplement my research with testimonies of Soviet citizens who engaged in *anekdot* exchange. The relationship between selected *anekdoty* and context in which they told*,* in regards to audience and precipitating event, is something that cannot be ascertained by this study and therefore serves as a limitation. The limitations of this study could not been resolved through interviews or ethnographic work because we are dealing with a historical phenomenon.

Future work might make more extensive use of diaries or other archival material to supplement the arguments with individual voices and perspectives on the matter. These personal accounts may make it possible to measure change over time and explore how opinions of Soviet leadership and power changed over the years. This study utilized historical textbooks or official Soviet publications to contextualize the narratives, but the perspectives of the people who actually engaged in *anekdot* are underrepresented. As such, the conclusions we can draw about how these narratives affected one's experienced collective identity are limited.

The incongruity between official and unofficial discourses is a key component of this Russian identity, particularly as expressed in *anekdoty*. Although Soviet discourse described Russians as a powerful and successful people, *anekdoty* offered an alternative insider perspective of life behind the curtain, a description that often revealed intimate social problems, embarrassment and insecurity. These narratives capture something that no official narrative can do: they show how Russian political identity was enmeshed with the incongruences and lived realities of live under Soviet rule, irrespective of the outward political ideology. They also illustrate how national sentiments remained strong among Russian men, through a process of outgrouping and scapegoating other ethnic and national groups. Women were also constructed as "outsiders" who were not centered in the Russian national collective. Together, these *anekdoty* reveal rhetorical negotiations with Soviet power, social problems, as well as ethnic, national, and gendered "others," that were necessary in order to produce the contours of a Russian political identity. This work contributes to research about gendered nationalism: how national identities rely upon modern logic of identification, subjugation and exclusion of particular subgroups.

Anekdoty also articulate a type of everyday resistance, not unlike the types explored by James Scott, Javier Auyero, and Patricia Hill Collins. This form of social action is under-theorized most likely because it often goes entirely unrecognized. Social movements seek political recognition in a very public and visible way, while everyday resistance frequently operates through culture and informal institutions of the family and social networks as opposed to organized political structures. Despite this, such resistance engages in meaningful agency and as a result contributes to the

self-definition of oppressed groups who are otherwise entangled in a matrix of domination (bell hooks 1988; Collins 1990).

Some have argued that *anekdoty* disappeared after the dissolution of the Soviet Union due to the greater opportunities for freedom of expression or diminished censorship. Although *anekdoty* do not wield the same power and influence today as they once did, the idea that their disappearance is a result of a renewed freedom of speech seems particularly misinformed. This explanation seems particularly inapt, considering the stuffed ballots of Vladimir Putin's elections, the trials and mysterious deaths of outspoken journalists, and 2012 incarceration of the punk rock band Pussy Riot for an anti-Kremlin musical performance in an Orthodox Church. After Vladimir Putin's first election in 2000, there was a resurgence of *anekdoty,* especially online, challenging the legitimacy of his position. Protests have been more common in post-Soviet space, but participation in these public and organized acts of resistance can have very dire consequences—social exile, prison or death. As a result, it seems as though the need for such underground expressions of dissent and coping with continuing hardships still exists as evident in the following contemporary *anekdot:*

> *The Chairman of the Election Commission comes to Putin after the election:*
> *"I have good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first?"*
> *"The bad news," replied Putin.*
> *" The Communist Party candidate got 75% of the votes."*
> *"Holy crap!" – cried Putin. "What is the good news?"*
> *"You got 76%."*

It is true the popularity of *anekdoty* has declined in contemporary Russia, yet what is interesting is how they continue to be exchanged online among Russians living abroad. How contemporary Russians use *anekdoty* was out of the scope of this project, since the focus of the study was upon the Soviet Russians. Because there was not enough space to interrogate the post-Soviet variety of *anekdoty* and the type of people who exchange them, future research might explore how this community and collectivity abroad continues to engage in *anekdot* exchange in online forums. Russian expats living abroad maintain the collective memory and identity articulated by the *anekdot* in a way that may be different from those who remained in Russia.

An argument I make in this dissertation is that *anekdoty* are intimately tied to a collectivity that is defined by their narratives, therefore the decline of their exchange in contemporary Russia may not be related to freedom of speech, but instead a reflection of a fractured collectivity, of people who no longer identify at this national level. Instead, people may identify along class lines or party lines, or perhaps the sense of a collective identity and memory is something that has declined entirely in post-Soviet rhetoric. Out of the scope of this dissertation were also the *anekdoty* of non-Russian Soviet nationalities since the emphasis was upon those narratives exchanged by Russians in their native or primary language. However, it would be interesting to compare Russian *anekdoty* with the jokelore of other Soviet populations in order to see how the relationships between these national and ethnic groups are constructed differently from other vantage points. Further, the perception of the Party, Soviet State or other institutions may differ by group, opinions and perceptions that may be captured in other cultural jokelores as they are in Russian *anekdoty.* Future

research might also engage in an ethnographic exploration of contemporary Russians to better understand where the creative energies and resistance have been directed.

In her ethnography of post-Soviet Moscow, Olga Shevchenko (2009) explores the new identities that have emerged among Muscovites in the late 1990s, divided along class lines and coping with an uncertain landscape of politics, health care, and underground economies of knowledge and goods. The expression of such new identities and social issues presents possibilities for future research that might explore the presence and absence of *anekdoty* among contemporary Russians or other non-Russian, ex-Soviet collectivities and how such discourses engage with contemporary social and economic politics of Russians in the world today. I plan to explore these new forms of everyday resistance and cultural forms of protest in future work through intensive interviews and ethnographic exploration.

At the end of *Domination and the art of Resistance,* James Scott writes,

> "When the first declaration of the hidden transcript succeeds, its mobilizing capacity as a symbolic act is potentially awesome… if the results seem like moments of madness, if the politics they engender is tumultuous, frenetic, delirious, and occasionally violent, that is perhaps because the powerless are so rarely on the public stage and have so much to say and do when they finally arrive" (1990: 227).

The collapse of the Soviet Union was not necessarily one of these "moments of madness," yet recent protests in contemporary Russia that challenge the legitimacy of

elections, publically deride corrupt government officials and other dishonest businesses may be an indication of such "tumultuous, frenetic, delirious, and occasionally violent" politics. The argument that *anekdoty* have disappeared because censorship has been lifted or that people feel safe to speak out is a laughable conjecture—especially in light of those dissidents that have been indefinitely imprisoned[21] or mysteriously "disappear"[22] after speaking out against the government.

The disappearance of *anekdoty* in contemporary Russia may indicate how hidden transcripts are becoming public—journalists and protesters speaking out and voicing dissent in public spaces. Unlike the social movement model that would expect these hidden transcripts to develop into an organized, systematic revolution against the state power, in contemporary Russia, we see bursts of protests and vocal, visible resistance to the State. The resistance against the state is not uniform in its interests or intentions and seems to be anything but organized. Despite this frenetic formation, this resistance may still be incredibly powerful in affecting social and political change. Just as *anekdoty* originated in small villages that told different local stories, we see how these isolated, but visible expressions of protest might begin to create cultures across people and places.

[21] On February 17, 201,2 five members of the group staged an illegal performance in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Their actions were stopped by church security officials. Three of the members were charged and found guilty of "hooliganism" and eventually given a prison sentence of two years.

[22] A report and database published by the International Federation of Journalists in 340 deaths and disappearances of Russian journalists since 1993 (journalists-in-russia.org accessed October 19 2012).

This research has developed the concept of *cultural consciousness,* an awareness and worldview that enables people who are atomized by repressive forces to connect and find a sense of meaning and belonging. This consciousness may be resistant to power in some situations, while reifying of it in others. As a coping mechanism and means of collective identification, it offers the collectivity a social, cultural and historical location within a repertoire of emplotted stories. In this dissertation, I have demonstrated the importance of paying attention to and analyzing cultural expressions such as the *anekdot,* in order to understand the sentiments and national identities of the people who participate in their consumption and exchange. Political motivations, identities, or actions are not easily discernible from outward or public behaviors. Opinions are not always directly expressed due to censorship or the respondent's own ambivalence. Studying popular culture discourses, voices from below, can provide the researcher with an intimate view into tight-knit communities that do not regularly open up to outsiders. It also enables us to understand the political nature of even the seemingly most benign—it's just a joke after all, right?

Appendix A: The Compilations

1. **Andreevich, Evgenii. 1951 *Kreml' I Narod: Politicheskie anekdoty.* Munich: Glolos naroda.**

This compilation was found in the Russian State Library in Moscow, Russia. This volume was published in Germany in 1951, making it the earliest of all the compilations in this study. Although the height of *anekdot* exchange occurred only after Stalin's death (1953-onward), the *anekdoty* in this volume dealt with many similar themes as those in other volumes. The *anekdoty* in this volume tended to be more morbid or gruesome, referencing famine and death camps, though many of the sentiments were very similar to later anthologies. Nothing is known about the author, the last name is Russian, though it might be presumed that it is a pseudonym in that the author risked her/his life in publishing such anti-Soviet sentiments at the height of its power and control.

2. **Verner, Artur. 1980. *Rossia smeetsia nad SSSR. Chitaite anekdoty! Smotrite! Smeites'!* Paris: Ritm, 1980.**

This collection was found in the Russian State Library in Moscow. Artur Verner was a Russian Jew, born in Tula, Russia. In Soviet Russia, he was a distributor of anti-Soviet *samizdat*; abroad he worked for Russian broadcast radio that was aired on the BBC and Radio Canada International. He was originally trained as a doctor and served in the Soviet military before immigrating to Israel in 1971 and then to Germany in 1974. The anthology of *anekdoty* was assembled from Verner's personal

anekdoty exchanges as well as the various *samizdat* and radio pieces he had read and heard over the years.

3. **Zand, Arie. 1982. *Political Jokes of Leningrad*. Austin, TX: Silvergirl, Inc.**

This volume was found in the St. Petersburg book store, House of Books. Based upon the last name, we would assume that the author is Jewish, and the publication location indicates that the author may be a Jewish émigré. The *anekdoty* in this anthology had considerable overlap with other anthologies and seemed worth including in that it was published before the dissolution of the USSR and it reflects another perspective upon the Soviet State and the Party as well as daily living conditions in Leningrad. The title and the forward indicate that the *anekdoty* included in the volume were heard by the author when living in Leningrad-now-St. Petersburg. As such, the volume offers a rich source of firsthand experiences with these narratives.

4. **Telesin, Iulius. 1986. *101 izbranni sovetskii politicheskii anekdot.* Tenfly, NJ: Ermitazh.**

This volume was found in National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. The *anekdoty* in this compilation were collected by the author over 10 years leading up to its publication. Telesin explains that many of them were written down on napkins before the 1970s when it would have been impossible to write them elsewhere. He says that most of the *anekdoty* were heard or told in the last few years before he emigrated. Telesin says that the book has "many authors," in that many of the jokes have been published by others, but also that he was told these *anekdoty* by such a wide variety of people and it would be impossible to properly credit each person for each

contribution. Instead he explains that these narratives are the creation of a nation and a network of connected people. Telesin explains that the jokes included do not reflect his taste, but rather that he felt that it was inappropriate to censor the *anekdoty* of others. Specifically he preemptively says that before you get mad at him about offensive *anekdoty,* remember, "I DID NOT COME UP WITH THEM!" Telesin has organized these 1001 *anekdoty* in a chronological and topographical system, but even this, he explains, is his own tailoring and does not necessarily reflect how others would classify or organize. Each section is prefaced by a short historical blurb about the significance of the particular category of *anekdoty.*

5. **Shatzkii, R. 1990. *Anekdot: Ul'ibk zhiznii.* Tula: Prioksko knizhno izdatel'stovo.**

This compilation was found in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. The collection includes over 1000 *anekdoty* that were derived from many different sources, including published and unpublished books, magazines and diaries as well as personal conversations. Although the compilation did include some works that were published (and therefore state-sanctioned), the book is published in 1990 before full censorship had been lifted, and the *anekdoty* in this volume were very similar in tone to the other collections, therefore the narratives were considered part of the target population.

6. **Roblesh. 1991. *Anekdotii.* Maikop, Russia: Ad'geyskoe Knijnoy.**

This publication was found in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. The author explains that the compilation is a selection of those *anekdoty* that he heard during the Soviet years. He encourages the readers to use the *anekdoty* when spending free time with friends, when bored waiting in a long line, or when driving with friends. These recommendations imply that this is the way he collected these narratives over the years before it was safe to publish them in written form. After the Revolution, published forms of *anekdoty* disappeared, but he explains that this was not because people were laughing, but rather because they were doing so in private. Unlike some of the other authors, this author does claim that he selectively included only those that he found to be funny or representative of this particular era of time.

7. **(no author). 1991. *Sovetskii Anekdot.* Moscow: Datastrom.**

This compilation was found in the Russian State Library in Moscow. Although the forward does not explain how the *anekdoty* were compiled, it does note to the reader that s/he will encounter jokes about politics and everyday life, students and army officers, as well as the classic Soviet characters of Shtirlitz, Vovochka, Lenin, and the other Soviet leaders. The compilation is intended to provide the reader with a wide breadth of topics and characters.

8. **Posvezhinov, Igor. 1991. *Anekdoty.* Voronezh, Russia: Literaturno-chudozhestvennoe izdanii.**

This compilation was found in the Russian State Library in Moscow. The author argues that jokes reflect the health of a nation. For this reason, he includes both those *anekdoty* that he finds humorous and tasteful, and those that he finds sorrowful and crude. He argues that it is important to see all of the varieties in order to understand the sentiments and realities of a people. The *anekdoty* are from the author's own recollection, as well as the recollection of others with whom he consulted in the creation of this volume. The author explains that he has intentionally included both crass humor that ought to make the reader cringe as well as intellectual *anekdoty* that require careful thought and reflection. The authors says that he has not distorted or censored these narratives and voices, therefore the *anekdoty* in the collection are representative those that were exchanged by Russian people.

9. Kluckinoe-Vituk, M. U. 1992 *Sovetskii Anekdot.* Moscow: Russian Encyclopedia.

This publication was found in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. The anthology was compiled right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, therefore the *anekdoty* are still fresh in the editor's memory and he is able to distinguish new or "fresh" *anekdoty* from old ones that "have a beard." Kluckinoe-Vituk says that he has included Soviet *anekdoty* from as far back as he remembers in the middle of the century until 1991. He does not explain how he collected the *anekdoty*, but argues that *anekdoty* do not exist in isolation but are told in succession, which implies that this was the context in which he heard them. He explains how *anekdoty* are always

engaging with other *anekdoty* or cultural phenomena, creating a historical, social, and cultural landscape that surround the people who tell them. He encourages the reader to understand these relationships as s/he reads through the collection, which he says is reflective of a "national consciousness".

10. Borev, Iurii Borisovich. 1995. *Istoriia gosudarstva sovetskogo v predaniiakh I anekdotakh.* Moscow: Ripol.

Iurii Borev is a writer and scholar with a doctorate in linguistics. In his preface, Borev explains that he has been collecting *anekdoty* for over half a century from a variety of personal and literary sources. Borev argues that *anekdoty* are intellectual folklore, a conceptual combination that was oxymoronic before the Soviet Union. In nineteenth century Russia, intellectuals directed creative energies toward written texts, in the form of letters or published literary works. Oral folklore was the text of commoners and farm workers who were often illiterate or lacked the spare time to read. Yet the censorship of the Soviet Union forced the creative impulses of intellectuals into the commoner's tradition of folklore, since satire or documentation of other anti-Soviet sentiments were a punishable capital offense. Oral folklore was more difficult to confiscate or punish. As a result, *anekdoty* managed to transcend class and geographical boundaries, uniting both intellectuals and commoners in laughter. He argues that this genre brings together these two groups most frequently around historical *anekdoty* that bring together literary references to the high culture of Pushkin as well as the lived experiences of intellectuals and commoners alike.

Shared history and shared experiences are the common denominators that he found most popular in his anthology of *anekdoty*.

11. Trachtenberg, Roman. 2006. *Tonna anekdotov sovetskikh.* St. Petersburg: Astrell, SPB.

This volume was found in the St. Petersburg bookstore, House of Books. Roman Lvovich Trachtenberg was a Russian radio host and actor. He compiled the *anekdoty* in this volume from personal recollections as well as those jokes that were submitted to him online. As a comedian and Soviet citizen, it is likely that many of the *anekdoty* included in this volume were told or heard by the author before and after it was legal to tell them.

12. Koshelev, Pavel. 2010. *Anekdotii o Politikach ot SSSR do Yeltsina.* St. Petersburg: Vedi.

This volume was found in the St. Petersburg bookstore, House of Books. This anthology of *anekdoty* was assembled by Pavel Koshelev, who served as the deputy of the Department of Culture for the Leningrad Town Party Committee during the Soviet Union. Although the *anekdoty* are not referenced, the author says that he often remembers the particular circumstances in which he first heard them or who initially told each narrative to him, though he does not include these details in the collection. The *anekdoty* in the collection come from the author's parents, close relatives,

teachers and friends in high school and college. Some of the jokes come from his friends who served in the Politburo of the Party Committee or those who served in the KGB! Although there were many who did suffer for telling or hearing *anekdoty,* the author believes that none of his friends or family who told or laughed along to these jokes suffered any legal repercussions.

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