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CHAPTER TWO

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND RECONVERSION OF ELITE: FORMER NOBLES IN SOVIET SOCIETY AFTER 1917

SOFIA TCHOUIKINA

The fate of Russian nobility, a group that had been suppressed and nearly liquidated after the October Revolution, began to interest Russian society in the late 1980s, which was a period of historical reexamination. This newly found interest inspired a wide scope of social action: the previously obscure memoirs of aristocrats were found and published; genealogical research became widespread among the descendants of nobles; the post-Soviet nouveau riche began to imitate the lifestyle of prerevolutionary nobility; and some decrepit palaces and estates were reconstructed, or even in very rare cases the ancestral estates were privatized by the descendants of owners. In several Russian towns associations of descendants of nobility were formed. Provincial museums augmented their exhibits with information about the noble families who had historically resided in the area. Small towns constructed statues commemorating their old regime mayors. Émigrés of noble descent began to return to Russia and to participate in the reconstruction of the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, 1997). The return of the memory of nobility to the social scene was all the more spectacular, considering that in the preceding decades it was completely absent from the public life of society. In the interwar period, from 1917 to 1941, the prerevolutionary elites were often mentioned in newspapers as negative personages, remnants of the old order, subject to discrimination and repression. After World War II these "former people" disappeared entirely from public discourse.

Post-Soviet appeals to the memory of the Russian aristocracy rarely alluded to the experience of those descendants of nobility who actually lived their lives in the USSR. While currently the image of the Russian

prerevolutionary elite is very important as an invented tradition (Hellberg-Hirn 2003) the consequences of the social suppression of nobility within the structure of Soviet society have been largely ignored.

Historical research has focused on the adaptation strategies of the old elites and other marginalized groups of Soviet society in the 1920s–30s on the basis of archival documents (Channon 1987; Rendle 2008; Smirnova 2003). My article highlights the process of the dissolution of the former nobility in Soviet society from a sociological perspective, exploring the creative potential of collective memory and its ability to form social groups and boundaries. This study seeks to understand how the collective memory of the tsarist regime influenced the adaptation paths of the former nobles in the post–revolutionary Russia; the impact of the memory of survival in the Stalinist Russia in forming new identities and social groups in the postwar era; and finally the echoes of the prerevolutionary elite's transformation in contemporary Russian society.

My analysis centers on twenty-three in-depth biographical interviews, which I conducted in the mid-1990s with women and men born in the 1910s into noble families. I also exploit other autobiographical sources produced by that generation—memoirs, letters, family chronicles—contrasting them with the interviews and memoirs of representatives of other social strata who were interviewed in their were young in the 1930s.[1] My respondents, who were born on the eve of the October Revolution, witnessing waning years, were born on the eve of the October Revolution. Their youth corresponded to the demise of the old regime in their childhood. Their youth corresponded to Stalin's modernization of the 1930s; and their adult lives played out in postwar Soviet society. This generation of nobility willingly or unwillingly contributed to the formation of a new social structure, having become an inseparable part of it. Not only had they integrated into this society as individuals, but they also formed a particular social milieu within Soviet society.

This research is inspired by the discussion among French sociologists about the role of collective memory in the long-term reproduction and reconversion of the old elites.[2] This discussion makes use of Maurice Halbwachs's concepts of "social frames of memory" and "collective

[1] For these purposes I used interviews from the archive of Renvall Institute for Area Studies (Helsinki), conducted in 1997–98 by K.Gerasimova and myself.

[2] I use the word *elite* in a general sense, without referring to discussions about meritocracy, democracy or power elite. The term "old elite" I use to designate the descendants of the privileged families of the *ancien regime* (nobility, gentry, catholic and protestant bourgeoisie) whose descendants belong to the upper class or to the upper strata of the middle class and for whom family memory functions as a sort of resource in their social life.

memory," (Halbwachs 1992) while the concept of "reconversion" of social position issued from the theoretical perspective of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, Boltanski, and de Saint-Martin 1973).

The concept of "reconversion" explains the mechanisms of indirect reproduction of social position of an elite threatened by a social decline. Reconversion is most often effectuated under the pressure of circumstances, following from the impossibility of reproduction of the class position by ordinary means. In this theoretical approach the class position is defined by the volume and the structure of capital (social, economic, symbolic, and cultural). Reacting to decline, individuals and social groups tend to mobilize the existing capital in order to transform their mode of existence and obtain some missing resources and gradually their social position changes. When statistically a social or professional group significantly diminishes or disappears, it means that behind these figures hides the process of reconversion by hundreds or thousands of people.[3]

French sociological studies of elites from the 1990s provide me with a detailed empirical account of the process of reconversion of the descendants of old elites in the twentieth century and the role of collective memory in this process (Saint-Martin 1993; Mension-Rigau 1990, 1998; Le Wita 1998; Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1989; 1995). A collective belief in the social existence of a group, despite social change and the loss of privileges, and a belief in the group's originality and superiority form the background for the construction of group boundaries and for the persistence of a model of education. An effective intergenerational transmission helps to effectuate a long-term reconversion of symbolic, social, and cultural capital into economic capital, and thus maintain a relatively high social position and avoid decline. In this sense, collective memory can be seen by and of itself, as a form of capital.

Despite the fact that the life paths of the European nobility and upper-class bourgeoisie in the twentieth century are incomparable to their Russian counterparts (given the difference in their respective historical situations), this theoretical approach proves useful in understanding the Russian case. The autobiographic sources, especially interviews, made possible the study of functioning of the memory of stigmatized and disenfranchised elites as a collective representation and as a social practice.

[3] For example, instead of inheriting a family business, the descendants of entrepreneurs can invest in a quality education, obtain prestigious diplomas, and become top managers. Thus the number of entrepreneurs would decline, whereas a group of managers would emerge. This case is described in Bourdieu, Boltanski, De Saint-Martin, *Les stratégies de reconversion.*

I will first examine the characteristics of the noble memory under the tsarist regime and the first wave of reconversions in the 1880s, then I will pass on to the study of the coping strategies of the elder generation of nobles (parents and grandparents of my respondents). In the third section I will describe the pattern of education at home in the Soviet period based on the collective memory of the old education model, then I will examine the influence of Soviet educational institutions and the formation of a new milieu of Soviet society on the base of the old elites. Finally I compare the family memory of the Russian former nobles with their French counterparts.

Noble Memory and the First Wave of Reconversion at the End of the Nineteenth and Beginning of the Twentieth Century

There were numerous and varied aspects of noble collective memory at the end of the nineteenth century: genealogy and family history, the ancestral estate, all kinds of memorial objects, configuration of relations within the milieu (neighbor network in the provinces, network of alumni, balls, etc.). All these different forms of collective memory served as family memory, because the extended family was a nucleus in which all the activities intersected. Of course, by the end of the nineteenth century, as was observed later in the Soviet period, some nobles consciously broke relations with their milieu of origin, but the majority of individuals tended to rely on social relations and thus reproduced the collective forms of living where the instrumentalization of the past played a central role.

Transmission of family memory was an indispensable part of the process of upbringing and education, as a family's past was itself a status symbol. The stories of glorious ancestors told to children—which were often illustrated by portraits hanging on the walls of manorial estates—spoke of notable, often glorious, events in which ancestors had taken part. The moral of these stories was that a young member of the family was predestined to serve the family and the country as did his relatives. The young listener was in turn later to become an example of virtue for future generations. Knowledge of genealogy, of the family's coat of arms, and of well-known relatives all gave one the opportunity to be accepted into circles of people of same social background.

The average noble family history at the beginning of the twentieth century was not free of ambiguities. The last quarter of the nineteenth century was in many ways a critical period for the Russian nobility. With the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and the series of "great reforms" of the

1860s the strong position of agrarian elite was undermined and gave way to the development of capitalism in the country. The following decades saw significant changes in the economic condition of nobility and gentry; elite social classes of a new type began to form, and the estate of the landed gentry became more and more stratified; part of it gradually transformed into capitalist landowners, the other part was ruined. The less fortunate landowners migrated to the towns and cities, reconverted themselves into the "bourgeois" professions, and dissolved into the urban educated middle classes. The fate of unprofitable noble estates was omnipresent in the imagination of the epoch, as is reflected in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. The high aristocracy also lived through a period of crisis, as even the richest families who possessed multiple estates and could afford to live from land rent saw their fortunes decline and were forced to find new solutions to stabilize their status and income. Possible solutions included investments in natural resources, purchasing actions in or constructing factories and various companies, and last but not least being employed by the military or civil service.

The traditional family order, even if it was still decidedly patriarchal, was destabilized as well. The economic crisis of nobility affected both men and women: while men were increasingly forced to seek gainful employment dowerless noblewomen faced decreasing marriage prospects. Whereas their sisters were often left in a state of celibacy, impoverished noble men sought the daughters of rich entrepreneurs with large dowries: fusion of nobility with the new elites was becoming commonplace.

Schools for women became more numerous and diversified; in the period the first schools of higher learning ("courses") for women were formed, providing instruction in history, literature, foreign languages, and medicine. Unmarried women increasingly worked and came to be financially autonomous rather than living as dependents within the extended family. Marriages based on love became more frequent, but were often confronted by resistance within the family. World War I, which took many men's lives and stimulated women to start working outside family, struck once more at the traditional order (Meyer 1991).

On the eve of the revolution, many occupations were still prohibited for the higher classes and could be practiced only as a hobby. The custom to opt for a traditional education and occupation (in jurisprudence, the military, or agriculture) was maintained to a large extent, but a modernist search for self-realization by profession penetrated the noble milieus. The circle of acquaintances of both landed and urban nobility became more socially mixed. University students, professionals, and artists were received willingly as guests. The fusion of different milieus of the Russian

educated strata was very active.

Despite the evident crisis of the noble estate, it continued to exist; and not merely de jure. Prestigious schools and various mechanisms of social protection continued to reproduce social inequality and impede the rise of educated commoners in society. A large section of the noble estate tried at all costs to maintain their habitual lifestyle. Faced with economic decline and the rise of the new elites, symbolic markers creating appearance of nobility became extremely important. The instrumentalization of the past played a crucial role in the justification of the nobility's social status. The noble families mobilized all forms of memory in order to validate their privileges. At this time a noble was increasingly defined by how much he or she was anchored in tradition—by the influence of this tradition on his childhood, education, life path, and biography.

As difficult as the economic and political crises in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were, the symbolic superiority attached to the representatives of noble estate and their own sense of distinction had not been seriously challenged before 1917. The wealthy bourgeoisie and non-noble bureaucrats attempted to copy the aristocratic lifestyle; the alternative bourgeois capitalist identity had not yet formed, therefore the bourgeoisie in Russia did not yet represent a social class with political clout (Mironov 1999; Clowes, Kassow, and West 1991; Balzer 1996). The October Revolution brought about a total change in the symbolic order of Russian society. Former distinctions like a title, a famous family name, a graduation paper from a prestigious educational institution, the possession of real estate and landed property turned into forms of "negative capital." As a rule, the wealthier and more notable the family was under the old order, the more persecuted it was under the Soviet regime. Consequently, after 1917 gentlemen who did not emigrate and stayed willingly or unwillingly in the Soviet Union faced the problem how to survive, how to adapt to the new regime, what to be, with whom to associate, how to feel, and how to bring up their children.

Negative Symbolic Capital and Reconversion Strategies Among the Adults in the 1920s–1930s

The Legal Status of a "Former Noble" in Soviet Society

In early Soviet society, a "former noble" was not only a negative propagandistic image—it represented a lawful social status. From 1918 until 1936 the welfare state policies of the Soviet Union were characterized by legal discrimination of some groups of the population on the basis of social background. The disfranchisement of the "former exploiting classes" was inscribed in the constitutions of 1918 and of 1926.[4] The representatives of those negatively privileged "classes" were designated as "former people." The latter were granted full rights in Soviet society only under Stalin's constitution of 1936, but de facto discrimination continued in the late thirties, and only the Great Patriotic War put an end to it. Belonging to an alien class was defined on the basis of biographical information reported by a person himself and recorded in official identifying documents. Biographical questionnaires and autobiographies, which had to be filled out at every bureaucratic installation, served as powerful tools of the Soviet regime, controlling how one was identified and could self-identify. Facing this inquiry in their daily life, every individual had to find a compromise between loyalty to family, to their own circle and narrative, and loyalty to society and the new political order. For more than twenty years family name and family history were at the center of the state's attention and were subject to manipulations by Soviet citizens.

If the whole population of Russia was more or less concerned with accommodating their social background to ideological dogmas, it was a particularly painful problem for the former nobles. They had to navigate a path between fear, repression, and discrimination springing from their class origins and their traditional pride in the very same. The rejected past persisted in many ways; it survived in objects and in the people themselves—in speech, manner of being, and corporate habits.

The problem of a "loud name" and of everyday discrimination was not lived in the same way by all the former nobles. In the Russian language there is no particle equivalent to French *de* or German *von*, which reveals the noble origins of the family name. Therefore, only a handful of families of high aristocracy whose names were widely known faced the problem of social background systematically. They indeed faced unjustified repressions much more than the average gentry families who migrated to the big cities from the provinces. Indeed, as both historical research and memoirs show, throughout this period of discrimination titled aristocrats were arrested systematically at each wave of repressions and spent much of their lives in prisons all throughout the Stalin times (Ivanov 1997).

The titled aristocrats were very numerous among emigrants abroad

[4] The early Soviet ideological notion of "class" is not to be confused with sociological notion of "class." It rather resembled an estate, while the belonging to Soviet "classes" was ascribed on the base of biographical information in the questionnaires. This peculiarity of the Soviet system of stratification is explained in the article by American historian Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class."

during the civil war (1918–21). Speaking foreign languages fluently, having relatives in the other countries, and sometimes also possessing real estate and accounts in foreign banks, they opted for exile more often than the less-fortunate gentlemen. However those who had not emigrated before the mid-1920s could not effectuate their emigration later on. Even the old and helpless persons who were invited by their émigré relatives were refused departure and were forced to remain in the USSR.

An average noble family could to some extent assimilate themselves into the urban population. The "ordinary former people" hoped to survive and to succeed in the Soviet society, the more so as according to the official propaganda, the useful members of society ("toiling elements") had the chance to be valorized by the state. The memoirs, interviews, and letters show that disregarding their possible disgust towards the Soviet regime the majority of adults tried to work and become full-fledged members of society.

In spite of the high unemployment of the 1920s and the ideological directives against class aliens, nobles were employed willingly. The postrevolutionary society was characterized by mass illiteracy and disorder, and every person having a certain level of education (who could write, count, effectuate administrative work) was valued in the labor market. The attempts to overcome illiteracy and to organize "cultured leisure" for the workers also presupposed the participation of educated people; thus, many nobles were employed by workers' clubs, libraries, theatres, cinemas, schools, kindergartens, museums, universities, and other institutions. Others worked as typists, bookkeepers, or accountants. Nobles occupied different occupations, both prestigious and humble. Those who had the diplomas of elite prerevolutionary institutions had much more difficulty in professional integration than those who had more neutral university diplomas. But in general everyone could find a professional niche in this dynamic society, especially so beginning with the first five-year plan (1928–32). However, if it was relatively easy to find employment, it was also easy to be fired during a purge. Therefore a typical biography of adult men and women of noble origins is characterized by frequent change of occupations and even professional spheres.

To review, the most common way around the problem of social background was to succeed in the Soviet labor market, eventually disassociating from one's social origins. A successful career served as a kind of expiation of ancestral sins. If the former people were needed at their workplaces, their background was forgiven or forgotten. Thus the former gentlemen and gentlewomen exploited any means available in

order to find a suitable niche and to earn their living, working in those places where they were irreplaceable and where they might be surrounded by other employees of the same milieu. Those who succeeded had enough material resources to live on, their everyday life was relatively stable, and they tried to introduce some elements of their prerevolutionary lifestyle at home.

If before the revolution the noble estate was stratified economically, culturally, and politically, the life paths of the former nobles after the revolution were characterized by a far wider diversity and variety of choices, circumstances, and chances. The experience of reconversion of a social status was one of the few experiences common to all generations of former nobles living in Soviet society. It was a compulsive, painful, and inevitable effort of using their skills and knowledge acquired in their previous life to eke out a decent existence in a new context.

The elderly came to serve as the image of aristocratic decline in Soviet newspapers. Especially spectacular was the poverty of old women who lived without pensions and could rely only on relatives, old acquaintances, or on themselves to survive by engaging in the shadow economy—giving lessons, sewing, making decorations for clothing and interior, while a few managed to find official employment by schools and libraries. These elderly women of the old regime represented the prostrate grandeur of the old regime.

The middle-aged nobles undertook multiple efforts to find a more stable professional niche, but the frequent change of occupations was typical for their professional trajectory due to persecution, migrations, and temporary work in seeking a better-paid and socially more acceptable position. As for the younger representatives of the former people, they faced discrimination in applying to educational institutions, entry often being refused to them because of their alien social background. They were forced to seek sustenance in the shadow economy or to opt for working-class jobs in order to obtain a status of a "toiler."

While discrimination of the former nobles in the labor market and education was pervasive, it was neither systematic nor logical. It depended on local authorities, the personality of decision makers, and eventual requirement of certain professional profiles. However, the necessity to prove that you were a "toiling element," a useful member of society, was nearly equal to physical survival. To solve the problem of housing shortage, the "nontoiling elements of alien social background" would be evicted from their housing in order to accommodate workers who came to be cadres in nearby factories. Some former nobles resided in large communal apartments, often trying to share housing with their relatives,

living not much worse than other demographic groups, according to the miserly norms of the era. But these conditions were humiliating compared to their previous life situation, and the feeling of relative deprivation, of spiritual and material losses, of general decline of their milieu was very painful for them.

In the first years following the revolution and the civil war the attitude of the former nobles towards the Soviet regime was far from uniform. Some of them hated the new power, whereas others felt neutral towards it and were ready to be loyal citizens, to live and work in Soviet Russia. Whatever opinions different individuals had held previously, by the beginning of the 1930s, after the show trials against the engineers and academicians, the general attitude of disenfranchised old elites towards the Soviet regime was a mixture of fear and distrust. This distrust sprang from groundless purges at educational institutions and places of work, resettlements, exiles, and arrests. Denunciation from a hostile neighbor or colleague or even the naive utterance of a child at school could be sufficient to cause major problems for the entire family. Thus, fear and a guarded attitude towards any unknown person resided in everyone ascribed to an "alien" class.

If everyone was forced to try and find a means of existence and to assure a secure professional niche, the degree of his or her integration into Soviet society varied greatly. The subjective factors, for example, attachment to certain principles, to religious feeling and practices, to one's own and family's past, played a very important role in the trajectory of an individual and family. To facilitate the analysis that follows, we can classify the multiple efforts and choices in three ideal types, different in their attitude to the past and to the present.

The "Conservative," "Progressist," and "Passeist" Strategies

The most widespread strategy, which I have labeled the "conservative" strategy, was to integrate into Soviet society accompanied by one's extended family—i.e., being a "Soviet specialist" in public and a "former noble" in private. It was the most natural way of adaptation that reconciled the inertia of habits with the challenge of external circumstances.

The "progressist" strategy of integration into Soviet society was a rupture with the milieu of origin, necessarily accompanied by migration to another town, dissimulation of social background or public repentance, and the beginning of a new life; that is, persons who accepted the idea that the Soviet regime was progressive and adhered to demands of the Soviet

ideological order. It was typical for those following this path to act according to the requirements of Soviet ideology. This meant no association with the milieu of nobility, backed by fear (or by the conviction) that the values of nobility and of the tsarist society did not have any chance in the future. "Progressists" were ready to effectuate a complete transformation of one's own private life, getting rid of the elements of the old lifestyle at home and raising their children as Soviet children, rather than nobles.

On the opposite end, there was the "passeist" integration path, which consisted of ignoring whenever possible the surrounding reality in order to live in the memory of the good old days. The label "passeist" comes from the French word *passéiste,* which means a person attached to the past. This term was sometimes ironically used by the Russian nobles themselves, who tended to speak French. This path was more common among the elderly, and relatively atypical for middle-aged former nobles, especially those with small children. Passeists refused to work in Soviet institutions, earned money only in the shadow economy and only within their own milieu (giving lessons, effectuating work for church, translating, working as editors, sewing, typing, etc.). The passeists frequented churches and impressed on their descendants the necessity of doing the same. They maintained an archaic outward appearance, refused to be informed of current events and Soviet society (e.g., ignoring newspapers and radio), limited their circle to those whom they had known before, and cultivated the distinctions of the old regime (e.g., the superiority of nobility over bourgeoisie). Accepting the idea of themselves as being marginal and, as they said in the French manner, *déclassé*, they were proud of it and sought self-realization in the private sphere, reconstituting with fervor an old-fashioned world of their own.

Our research shows that both progressist and passeist strategies served to impede intergenerational transmission and caused conflicts with descendants in their adolescence and youth. The strategy of rupture with the milieu of origin was related to dissimulation of many facts of history and personal biography, and these secrets proved painful in the communication between children and parents (Rosenthal 2000; Semenova 2000; Tisseron 1996). The passeist path also did not facilitate the intergenerational dialogue, because the descendants, unable to seek advice from those adults resolutely turned to the past, often were under the influence of Soviet educational institutions and ironically became in the end fervent Komsomol members and communists. The less parents were integrated into society, the more the society could influence their offspring.

As for the conservative strategy of integration and its impact within the family as a whole, it contributed to the ability of adults to influence their own children; these adults were well integrated into society and capable of orchestrating the education of their offspring. The conservative strategy allowed for control over both private and professional choices. The effective transmission of cultural heritage, norms, and values, as will be shown in the following sections, contributed to a "natural voiding" of noble origins and the construction of a new identity among future generations. At the same time it contributed to their reproduction as a social milieu in Soviet society. In the next sections we will investigate the mechanisms of sociostructural functioning of collective memory within conservative families.

"Happy Childhood" and "Golden Youth" Restoring the Collective Memory of a Scenario

On the surface the life of former nobles during the Soviet period did not have much in common with that of the tsarist period, but the community based on common socialization and values was gradually regrouping. The sociostructural function of collective memory and its role in the reconversion of social status is particularly apparent in the process of raising children and adolescents.

Providing an appropriate education of their children and grandchildren was a difficult task for adults. Not all parents were able to control what sort of education their children received. Employment was often irregular and daily life very difficult; as a result a certain number of former nobles were forced to sacrifice their descendants' education. To provide a noble education required relative stability in regards to employment and housing, a presence of a certain number of family members, i.e., grandparents, and at least one employed man in the family. The full and extended families that managed to maintain affluence were relatively rare, and the periods of stability were often short-lived. But those adults who were well integrated into society, finding some level of affluence and maintaining the image of loyal "Soviet specialists," tended to reproduce the "old school" education pattern at home. They managed to transmit some of their cultural heritage, practices, views, and moral principles of their milieu of origin.

Understanding that they were to prepare their offspring for an adult life in Soviet society, they nevertheless extolled the virtues of the familiar educational model in which they themselves had been raised. The collective memory of the prerevolutionary times, in fact, found its creative realization in the attempt to give to children a "happy" childhood and a

"golden" youth in spite of the times of troubles and to construct from the remnants and shadows of the past a coherent, useful, and updated present. To do so, it was necessary to reconstitute a larger circle of families with similar social background. Indeed the desire to educate their children stimulated the reconstitution of a social network that had suffered the attrition of war and emigration.

To explain sociologically the phenomenon of reconstitution of the "happy childhood," we refer to the concept of "collective memory of a scenario" suggested by French sociologist Roger Bastide (1970). Assessing the theory of Halbwachs from the perspective of the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, he remarks that the notion of collective memory as a collective representation lacks corporal and dramaturgical aspects. Under certain circumstances the communities that habitually organize a common mise-en-scène, be it a ceremony or everyday life rituals, will reproduce them in a new context if a certain number of participants remembering an old scenario are present. They will perform that scenario, "repairing" it, replacing the missing elements with new ones, inventing fresh elements more adapted to current realities. After some time, they will forget the original scenario, but they will be able to reconstitute a robust spiritual community with its own mythology and rites. The reconstitution of such a community impacts the social structure of society, because instead of disappearing, a declining social group reemerges. This process allows for the survival of multiple immigrant communities throughout the world, and as my research shows, it is the same pattern followed by "internal emigrants" who are strangers in their own country.

The prerevolutionary education model called a "happy" childhood held tremendous weight among the nobles and is described in Russian literature, for example, in Leo Tolstoy's *Childhood* (1852). Originally it presupposed the upbringing of a noble child in an ancestral estate, but by the end of the nineteenth century this pattern of education became typical for all strata of educated Russians, not merely the nobility and gentry, but also the urban educated middle classes. But there were still some slight differences in the education of the nobles and non-nobles. These differences were invented and cultivated by the noble families themselves. Childhood was seen as a formative period of life, which had to provide the foundation of all aspects of a personality—moral, cultural, spiritual, and communicative (Wachtel 1990). My research shows that the postrevolutionary upbringing reproduced, in fact, the two major foundations of elite education: the filtration of acquaintances and construction of a sense of social exclusiveness.

Home Education and Control over One's Circle of Friends

> I was kept in absolute isolation, in the isolation of the nineteenth century. And from this nineteenth century in 1930 I came to school, where there were red pioneer ties. I went to school at age twelve. They did not want me to go to school, because of contacts with other strata of the population

Thus Nina Platonovna Panaeva, born in 1918, described her adolescence. Her father perished at the front during the First World War; her mother, a young widow, became a teacher of foreign languages at a university in Leningrad. Nina and her mother were living with Nina's grandparents. Her grandfather, a well-reputed doctor, had many patients "from good families." Nina's circle of friends was entirely orchestrated and controlled by the adults, and consisted partly of children of their acquaintances, partly of her grandfather's patients.

> Up until 1930 all parties took place in our flat, because we still owned a sixty-five-meter long hall. I remember, once there was a ball, organized for a girl for her sixteenth birthday. We not only organized parties, but also dancing lessons at home. . . . By the age of twelve I knew all the ballroom dances. And I loved them for their plasticity, melody, and dresses.[5]

Public schools were the object of all manner of communist experimentation and were incapable of delivering a systematic education. Those parents who were not satisfied with school programs tried to organize alternative teaching at home with the help of grandparents and private teachers. In such cases, as Nina's case, children had to pass state-held exams every year. This alternative teaching was possible until the year 1930, when schooling became obligatory for everyone. Those adolescents who were taught at home and then went to school found out that they were better educated than their classmates. On the other hand they were not integrated into the social life of their peers and felt themselves strangers in public institutions. Those respondents who came up under experimental teaching in the 1920s told amusing stories about the school programs, but regretted later on in life shortcomings in their education. New methods of teaching, like the "complex teaching method" and the introduction of "polytechnic elements in education" (Berelowitch 1990; Geiger 1968; Figes 2008) left deep impressions on the memories of the children of the 1920s–30s.

Free time away from school was filled with different activities, educative and entertaining, sportive and intellectual. Grandmothers tried to

[5] Interview with Nina Platonovna Panaeva (b. 1918).

teach foreign languages and read fairy tales from their home libraries in English, French, or German, while the reading aloud of more serious books was practiced with adolescents. All manner of knowledge and skills—poetry, music lessons, drawing, history, geography—were taught wherever possible by members of the older generations. Parents would sell all their valuable objects (furniture, jewelry) in order to pay for private lessons or courses.

Leisure practices were formative, and they were an important part of education. The grown-ups tended to entertain themselves in the old fashion. They played cards and games of high society, played the piano, staged theater pieces and charades. In the 1920s, when many families still had adequate living space, they managed even to organize relatively large receptions. Ekaterina Voschinina[6] remembered that in the most difficult years of the Civil War (1918–21), they organized dancing evenings in order to forget their daily troubles. Her mother made cakes out of the available products, her grandmother played the piano, and the young ladies and gentlemen came to dance. They were happy even if some of them were not properly dressed for these occasions because of shortages of clothing. The imitation of the high life came closer in the 1920s to its prerevolutionary analog than in the 1930s. In the thirties the rupture with the old times became more evident.

Communication between the former nobles was complicated by the presence of hostile neighbors in communal apartments who observed their life and could denounce the "alien conduct" of the "former people" (Gerasimova 1999, 2002). That is why those families who could afford it tried to rent a country house for the summer. Several families tended to rent rooms for summer in the same village. Those who could not afford it (for example, passeists' families) were invited to pass some time in the country by their more fortunate friends. Far away from eavesdroppers the "former people" could communicate more freely, reproducing to some extent the habits of the estate country life; benefit from a socially suitable neighborhood; and organize for their offspring suitable company. Thus, the effective parental control and the orchestrated friends' circle prevented the descendants of nobility from exterior influences. They spent time with children and adolescents from similar families who shared with them this particular pattern of socialization.

[6] Interview with Ekaterina Iljinichna Voschinina (b. 1909).

Exclusiveness and Exclusion
Constructing of a Sense of Social Difference

If socialization and education of the children of former nobles was influenced by the collective memory of the old times, it was no less influenced by the contemporary context, and especially by fear and by the stigma that this milieu bore.

Communication between immediate family members sharing the same household was subject to strict discipline and measures of safeguard in the face of the eventual presence of neighbors or other strangers.[7] Emotions and opinions were rarely expressed directly. Most families developed a special language of parent-child communication in the postrevolutionary era. It became common to express opinions concerning public or social events without putting them in words. To share an opinion about public and social events, family members used elaborate communicative instruments like irony, grimaces, euphemisms, sarcasm, humor, and foreign language idioms, all of which served to consolidate the family. The interviewees recalled that they did not remember discussions about political events at home, but they knew the attitude of their parents towards the Soviet reality. Similarly, they recalled that their parents did not instruct them as to how to behave at school, what to say or what to hide, but the children of former nobles revealed that they clearly understood how to behave in public. In conclusion, children and adolescents knew what their parents thought and understood why they thought so, despite the fact that they could not recall any concrete discussions. These measures of safeguard were useful, so that that the adolescents could not reproduce any dangerous discourse at school or in someone's home. Nina Platonovna Panaeva[8] recalls:

> I was not brought up with hatred towards the Soviet regime; rather, I would say that by their own behavior they directed me to ignore it, ignore it whenever possible. So, I had a notion about that, but no one taught me, no one imposed it on me. . . . We had a feeling, that the walls had ears. That was why even in French we did not discuss all that much. And most important, we understood that these discussions were useless. If even we would not be exiled to Solovki after such discussions, we would not change anything anyway. And last but not least, we did not know anymore

[7] Orlando Figes in his book *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* shows that whispering and fear of neighbors were typical for the whole Russian population, not only for the former people.
[8] Interview with Nina Platonovna Panaeva (b. 1918).

> what was bad and what was good.

In this family special secret codes were used to inform family members about danger:

> When my parents said in French *les trois lettres*[9] that meant that someone was probably listening to what we were saying, and we immediately switched to French, which was not understood by this public.

Some families used the opposite strategy and stopped using foreign languages. For example, Natalia Borisovna Vetoshnikova[10] remembers that her parents did not teach her French, which was spoken by all adult family members "probably because they did not want me to be *rara avis* at school."

If ever words were used to discuss political and social events it was in the form of jokes and anecdotes. As Ekaterina Iljinichna Voshinina[11] recalled: "After the October revolution, the attitude to the regime was critical, with humor. Humor we had not lost. Lots of anecdotes were circulating."

Only an initiated person could decode these anecdotes. For example, one sarcastic joke from the noble milieu dates back to 1935, a time of mass exile of people of noble origin. Sometimes nobles had to leave the city in twenty-four hours; therefore the exiled persons had the right to buy tickets without waiting in line. A dialogue in line: "Comrade, why are you buying tickets before me, you were not in the queue!" "Because I am a countess."

Regarding family history, the most dangerous was to reveal the high social status of ancestors, which the Soviet regime measured by titles, ranks, and possessions. These formal details of the biographies of ancestors were most carefully "forgotten." The grown-ups tried to dissimulate all the dangerous information that a child or adolescent could by chance tell to a stranger.

The decision to dissimulate social background in the official documents was taken most often by individuals living separately from their relatives, but sometimes such a decision could also be taken collectively, according to mutual consent. Dissimulated information usually concerned parents' origins, their prerevolutionary profession and

[9] They referred to GPU, secret police of the early Soviet period, predecessor of the NKVD and later of the KGB.
[10] Interview with Natalia Borisovna Vetoshnikova-Samarina (b. 1921).
[11] Interview with Ekaterina Iljinichna Voshinina (b. 1909).

incomes, and relatives in emigration. One of the strategies consisted of
stressing the insignificance of the rank that their grandparents held; for
example, it was typical to write about one's ancestors "a poor landowner"
or "a petty landowner," "a low-ranking officer," "a low-ranking official,"
"an impoverished noble."

Another possibility was to elaborate on a cover for one's whole life
and to forget the truth. Irina Evgenievna Gedroits[12] remembered: "My
parents died. My grandmother burnt my birth certificate and got a new
one. There it was written father–soldier, mother–medical sister."

Irina Vladimirovna Arnold[13] also hid her social background in the mid-1920s:

> I entered the Pedagogical Institute in 1924. In my questionnaire I wrote that I came "from the lower middle classes." For some reason they did not check. And there was one more circumstance—my aunt worked in the geophysical observatory and could help me through her trade union. And my sister Tanechka tried to enter next year. She wrote in her questionnaire that she had issued "from nobility" and she was not accepted, although she passed all the exams well. . . But she had her own difficulties. . . The noble background she could not hide anyway, because she married a descendant of Dostoyevsky, and the social background of Dostoevsky was well known. . . . At that time a questionnaire with Dostoevsky was a bad questionnaire. . . . As you know, at that time he was not taught at schools. Having such a famous family name did not help; on the contrary, it impeded. . . . A person with an obstacle in the questionnaire was in trouble. The questionnaires asked family history in great detail: "Where is your grandmother buried?" "Are your parents alive?" "What are they doing?" or "Where is their grave?" "Do you have relatives abroad?" I always kept a questionnaire in my writing desk and always copied very attentively everything, all that was there, so as not to contradict myself.

If members of the former noble families themselves were eager to forget about their social background, the state kept on reminding them about their family roots. All former nobles born before 1920 faced discrimination more than once in life, either at school or entering institutions of higher learning and the Komsomol. As Ksenia Dmitrievna Medvedskaia[14] put it:

> We tried not to use the word *nobleman*, to hide. But we were forced to write it in the questionnaires. They asked about social status and social background. "Social status"—"employee," and "social background"—here you are, you had to write "noble."

[12] Interview with Irina Evgenievna Gedroits (b. 1915).
[13] Interview with Irina Vladimirovna Arnold,(b. 1908).
[14] Interview with Ksenia Dmitrievna Medvedskaja,(b. 1910).

Some of the bearers of such names tried to use their being descendants of well-known families or persons in critical situations. One such story was told by Ekaterina Iljinichna Voshinina. In her youth she had a friend, Tanya Perwolf, whose mother's maiden name was Bestuzhev-Riumin, a famous name dating back to a well-known participant of the Decembrist Uprising in 1825. In the critical situation (arrest) they tried to declare themselves the descendants of "a first Russian revolutionary." E. I. Voshinina recalled the life of this family in the 1930s:

> I was impressed by their awfully neglected flat—a consequence of the helplessness of the elder generation of the family and of general poverty. Dust everywhere. And despite that, the coziness of ancient furniture and dark portraits on the walls. One portrait of a chancellor of the times of Tsarina Elizabeth—Count Aleksei Petrovich Bestuzhev-Rumin. Another one, a darkened portrait of the Decembrist himself. . . . My first thought: "Why aren't they afraid?" In my family all portraits of ancestors were hidden or destroyed. Later on I got to know that it was the Decembrist Bestuzhev-Riumin who helped the old Perwolf out of trouble. And how!!! His immediate savior was his wife, who produced an impression of being so helpless and maladapted to life. But when her husband was taken into prison during one of the many waves of arrests, she collected all the documents of her great-grandfather Decembrist and managed to persuade the representatives of the regime of the absurdity of their attack towards the descendant of a first revolutionary. The officials stood agape, impressed by the stream of her words, and freed Perwolf.[15]

Another case was reported by Varvara Vasilievna Burlakova, who had been married in the 1930s to Prince Petr Andreevich Gagarin. She remembered:

> The family of my husband, though they were aristocrats, could also be counted as Russian intelligentsia, because the father of my husband was a left-winger. He had founded the Polytechnic Institute in St. Petersburg. There he had defended all the revolutionary students. . . . And that was why Lenin gave him a safeguard document. The following was ordered: "Do not disturb Andrei Grigorievich Gagarin, and always give him enough kerosene for his scientific work." This paper was taken to the Lenin Museum, and we possessed a copy of it, and once it helped us. . . . In 1935

[15] Ekaterina Voshinina, *Tanya or The Deserted Home of the Descendants of Bestuzhev-Riumin*. Unpublished essay manuscript from the private archive of the author.