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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exceptions to Socialism: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Transformation of Soviet Development in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

In the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet social scientists and planners grew increasingly skeptical that they could draw Central Asian peasants, and especially women, into the industrial workforce, and turned to experimenting with “non traditional” forms of work, such as home labor for handicrafts and consumer goods and family subcontracting in agriculture. This article traces Soviet debates about women’s labor and the family in Central Asia in the context of demographic policy, productivity, and welfare. It argues that the evolution of home labor and other “non traditional” labor policies aimed at Central Asians share two distinctive features with neoliberal-inspired welfare discussions in the United States as well as the emerging politics of entrepreneurship in the sphere of international development. First, all three emerged as a result of social scientists and planners revisiting earlier paradigms after perceived policy failures. Second, despite their pessimistic reading of earlier policy initiatives, Soviet policymakers and their counterparts hung on tenaciously to the idea that state policy could be used to improve people’s lives. By studying the turn towards individual labor and entrepreneurship in the USSR alongside the emergence of micro-credit in international development and changing welfare politics in the US, we can see neoliberalism emerging where universalist policies meet their limits.

Keywords: Development; gender; Central Asia; labor; ethnicity

As economic reforms were taking off in the Soviet Union under the slogans of “*uskorenie*” (acceleration) and “*perestroika*” (restructuring), Valentina Georgievna Chebotareva, a scholar working for the Institute of Party History in Uzbekistan, weighed in on a new law regulating individual labor and what the law would mean for women. “Life itself,” Chebotareva wrote, “has proposed a form of labor so convenient for the housewife: home labor.” The new law, which went into effect on 1 May 1987, “opens up great possibilities for the employment of thousands of women, especially

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those of indigenous (*korennyh*) nationalities, which will enable them not only to raise their family budgets, and later receive a pension, but also to make a useful contribution to social production.”¹ The new law was supposed to make it easier for individuals to hire themselves out for different kinds of labor and to do so formally; the law’s proponents hoped that it would make the Soviet economy more dynamic by, among other things, increasing labor mobility and making it easier for enterprises to hire and shed workers. But, as Chebotareva noted, the law had a special significance for individuals who the Soviet economy had long had difficulty reaching, especially Central Asian women.

While Chebotareva presented home labor as a recent innovation, attempts to draw Central Asian women into production by bypassing the normal labor structures of the Soviet economy through the institution of “home labor” had been around for at least a decade, and drew on practices that reached back into the very first years of Soviet rule. But the 1980s revival of “home labor” and other forms of economic activity centered on the family and practices defined as “traditional” emerged as a specific response to several Cold War-era trends that Soviet planners believed to be problematic. In the decades after World War II, Central Asian planners and their counterparts in Moscow expected that the region’s peasants would enter newly constructed industries, where salaries were higher than in collective farms, and that this would also promote a shift from large patriarchal families to nuclear ones and increase women’s participation in the workforce. Soviet policies were based on universalist assumptions: given the right conditions, Central Asian peasants would behave the same way as peasants elsewhere. But by the late 1970s, Soviet planners found themselves struggling with declining labor productivity and Central Asians’ (apparent) reluctance to leave rural areas and enter the industrial workforce. These twin problems led planners to try a number of solutions that were, in Soviet terms, unorthodox, including promoting home labor and family agricultural brigades.

Although these policies were adopted throughout the Soviet Union, the Central Asian situation was particularly important for supporters of the policy. Researchers had turned to sociology, demography, and related social sciences to make sense of the rural population’s behavior and found that in this region the people enjoying higher standards of living were not urban industrial workers, as their models had predicted and their ideologies had suggested, but rather families on collective farms able to supplement their income with handicrafts and by marketing produce from personal plots, whose size sometimes far exceeded official state limits. In both cases, traditional skills and family cooperation made these practices possible, yet promoting these practices risked further tying Central Asians to forms of family life deemed patriarchal and harmful. By the time Chebotareva published her article, reform-minded planners were building on home labor regulations and insights of the pre-perestroika era as they tried to reconcile the growing demands for economic efficiency with the basic (and fraying) social contract underpinning the union. In the years that followed, these initiatives—originally designed to integrate economically marginalized individuals into the socialist labor forces—gave way to proposals in which those individuals and their families would be the building blocks of a new market economy.

¹V. G. Chebotareva, “Aktual’nye problemy povysheniia sotsial’noy aktivnosti zhenschin v sovremennykh usloviiah,” *Obshchestvennye nauki Uzbekistana* 5 (1987): n.p., 13.

Although home labor, the personal plot, and family brigades were all initiatives concerned with production, they were first and foremost directed at raising the living standards of the producers themselves. All of these policies grew out of the Soviet state's ambitions and commitments to a quality of life that could be measured in terms of income, nutrition, access to consumer goods, living space, longevity, and other indicators: what some scholars refer to as the Soviet "social state" or "welfare regime," which in turn shared many features with the welfare states that took shape in the mid-twentieth century elsewhere.² The particular "welfare regime," or method of redistribution and intervention employed to achieve certain living standards, changed over time.³ Such changes, in the socialist world as elsewhere, were driven by external constraints, such as economic stagnation, budget constraints, and demographic pressures, and by internal critique: Why does the regime fail to do what it claims to do?

Over the last three decades, scholars of the Soviet collapse and the transformations that followed have offered different explanations for the abandonment of state socialism and the embrace of (or resistance to) market-oriented reforms. Since the 1990s, they have explained the embrace of radical market reforms in Russia and some other parts of the former Soviet Union as a consequence of neoliberal reforms advocated by the World Bank, the IMF, and other lenders and advisers.⁴ More recent studies of late Soviet-era economic reforms have complicated this picture by uncovering a wide range of debates on the Soviet economy *within* the USSR, as well as entanglements of Soviet economists with counterparts abroad long before 1991.⁵ Others have sought to explain the emergence of radical economic reform programs in the late Soviet period, and after, by excavating the emergence of a neoliberal subject in Soviet economics and social science. Scholars have identified the "socialist origins of neoliberalism" in debates about population policy among Soviet demographers,⁶ and in the work of reformist sociologists like Tatyana Zaslavskaya to replace the "Homo Sovieticus" with a "Homo Economicus"—a rational economic actor.⁷ Tobias Rupperecht has identified the origins of post-Soviet neoliberalism among disillusioned Soviet economists who wanted to see the Soviet Union

²The term "social state" comes from Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). Whereas welfare provisions in Western Europe and the United States were organized through central government bodies, the USSR continued to rely on the workplace for many aspects of welfare, including health care. Whatever the method of delivery, the point is that the key questions of health, education, housing, and standard of living were the concern of the state as a whole.

³Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022).

⁴Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 133–65.

⁵Tobias Rupperecht, "Formula Pinochet: Chilean Lessons for Russian Liberal Reformers during the Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000," *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, 1 (2016): 165–86; Johanna Bockman and Gil Eyal, "Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism," *American Journal of Sociology* 108, 2 (2002): 310–52; Johanna Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁶I. Leykin, "The History and Afterlife of Soviet Demography: The Socialist Roots of Post-Soviet Neoliberalism," *Slavic Review* 78, 1 (2019): 149–72.

⁷S. Alymov, "Aktivizatsiia 'chelovecheskogo faktora': 'zastoinnye' korni neoliberal'noy sub'ektivnosti," *Antropologicheskii Forum* 37 (2018): 54–92.

transformed into a market economy and believed that transition would require a strong central state to guide it.⁸ Collectively, this research has shown how Soviet sociologists, economists, and reformist planners came to see individuals not primarily as workers, peasants, and Soviet citizens, but rather as utility-maximizing market actors who had to be taught to think of themselves in those terms. It is this characteristic which invites a connection between Soviet economic reform and the emergence of “neoliberalism” within capitalist economies.

At the same time, the existing literature continues to focus on a handful of influential thinkers close to Soviet decision-making centers in Moscow. It has largely ignored the work of bureaucrats, party activists, and planners more intimately involved with managing labor and social welfare. Yet these individuals often saw the shortcomings of Soviet policy up-close and were often the first to sound alarms and offer solutions. Further, the literature on economic reform has mostly ignored the diversity of the USSR and the ways that different regions and groups posed specific problems for planners. A number of contemporary observers, most notably Nancy Lubin, understood the crucial importance of labor, welfare, and demography in Central Asia, but they could not foresee the ways that the “problems” Soviet observers were identifying in the late 1970s or early 1980s would become the roots of reforms not just for Central Asia but for the USSR as a whole.⁹ Finally, while recent works have helpfully moved us beyond the “West to the rest” approach to economic reform, they leave open the question of how to contextualize what happened in the USSR within the broader transformations that took place in late twentieth-century industrialized societies. As Stephen Kotkin argued more than two decades ago, the USSR was involved in processes “not specific to Russia,” including the rise of mass production and mass consumption between the two world wars; it is equally true that the USSR’s move *away* from the industrial welfare state established in the middle decades of the century needs to be understood in light of parallel transformations elsewhere.¹⁰

This article is focused on the history of reform but shifts the focus to rural Central Asia, whose residents seemed stubbornly resistant to Soviet industrial modernity. In what follows, I will trace Soviet debates about women’s labor and the family in Central Asia as they were part of a wider set of transformations enacted in the Soviet economy in the 1970s and 1980s to tackle challenges of productivity and welfare. I do this by tracing how planners and social scientists tried to make sense of this population’s behavior, and used insights gained to design new policies that, ostensibly, drew on practices that these groups preferred.¹¹ I see Soviet interventions

⁸Tobias Rupperecht, “The Road from Snake Hill: The Genesis of Russian Neoliberalism,” in Quinn Slobodian and Dieter Plehwe, eds., *Market Civilizations: Neoliberals East and South* (London: Verso, 2022), 109–38.

⁹Nancy Lubin, *Labour and Nationality in Soviet Central Asia: An Uneasy Compromise* (London: Macmillan, 1984). See also Leslie Dienes, *Soviet Asia: Economic Development and National Policy Choices* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

¹⁰Stephen Kotkin, “Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, 1 (2001): 111–64.

¹¹This article is based primarily on two kinds of documentation: first, specialized journals published in Moscow and in the Central Asian republics, and the studies, discussions, and regulations on labor and welfare questions found in the USSR State Committee on Labor, the Research Institute on Labor (NII Truda), and the Council on Productive Forces, a subsidiary institute of the state planning agency, GOSPLAN. All three organizations had republic-level affiliates, so the collections in Moscow also contain studies and policy

into rural women's labor as an "exception," a term I borrow from Aihwa Ong's work on neoliberalism. In her 2006 book, Ong applied Carl Schmitt's concept of "exception" to the selective application of neoliberal governmentality. Rather than marking out "excludable subjects who are denied protections," Ong uses exception to refer to a "positive decision to include selected populations and spaces as targets of ... neoliberal reform."¹² Those groups who were not sharing in the benefits of industrialization, educational opportunities, or welfare policies, she argued, were encouraged to help improve their lot by turning to self-reliance and entrepreneurship. Similarly, rural Central Asian women of the Soviet Union posed an exception to Soviet economic policies and visions of emancipation. The policies that Soviet officials came to adopt by the early 1980s were not meant to create a space outside of socialism, but rather exceptions *within* the system of how economic activity was usually practiced; they were meant to compliment the planning system rather than preparing the grounds for its replacement. Still, in the years that followed the space for those exceptions grew and began to include a wider range of policies, many of which targeted women and families. Ultimately, as we will see, some thinkers and planners began to understand rural Central Asians not as failed socialist subjects but as successful producers and farmers who could be a model for the post-socialist economy. Home labor—originally envisioned as an opportunity to contribute to state production enterprises without commuting to a factory—transformed into something more akin to labor in a cottage industry, with the producer and her family as an independent economic unit.

I argue that the evolution of home labor and other "nontraditional" labor policies that targeted Central Asians share two distinctive features with neoliberal-inspired welfare discussions in the United States as well as the emerging politics of entrepreneurship in the sphere of international development. First, all three emerged as a result of social scientists and planners revisiting earlier paradigms, based on industrial wage labor, after perceived policy failures. Their policy proposals pointed to the limits of planners' knowledge and offered new ways to think about policy targets. Second, despite their pessimistic reading of earlier policy initiatives, Soviet policymakers and their counterparts hung on tenaciously to the idea that state policy could be used to improve people's lives and tried to incorporate their findings about culture and social values into economic planning.

Turning our attention to the link between family policy, welfare, and economic reform in Central Asia opens up a new avenue for understanding late-socialist reform, the policy choices faced by newly independent states after 1991, and global changes that included the USSR, the United States, and international development organizations. This can help us rethink these global transformations that turned away from state-led development, universalist welfare policies, and a political economy organized around industrial labor in large firms, toward approaches that emphasized individual entrepreneurship and personal responsibility, placed the onus of welfare and security on family units, and limited the state's role in redistribution and welfare. One could explain these transformations by reference to ideological shifts, the effect

proposals from Central Asian republics. Second, these materials are supplemented with Soviet-era dissertations and materials from more popular magazines and newspapers, especially *Rabotnitsa* (The female worker).

¹²Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

of oil shocks in the 1970s, the changing composition of major political parties, the effects of automation on industrial society, or globalization. Many would argue that the inability to fund welfare transfers or investment for development, and the need to keep industry competitive in the face of cheaper labor elsewhere, led to demands for lower tax burdens and a shrinking of the state. My point in studying transformations in the USSR alongside those in international development or capitalist societies is not to suggest any neat equivalence between them but rather, in the spirit of Kotkin's article, to consider the period as a conjuncture and to better understand what made the Soviet case specific and how the response to the conjuncture affected late-Soviet reform and post-Soviet transition.¹³

However, I also want to show that understanding these transformations requires us to look not just at the USSR's similarities and entanglements with its contemporaries, but also deeper into the workings of the bureaucracies and knowledge institutions that studied questions of labor and welfare and formulated policy goals. A full accounting of these transformations must take into account what politicians, social scientists, and planners did when the earlier paradigms met their limits: when segments of the population were stuck in cycles of poverty *despite* welfare transfers, and when some groups were unwilling or unable to join the relatively well-paying industrial jobs that were available. Rather than looking to the works of big thinkers for the origins of neoliberal thought or to international organizations to understand policy diffusion, this case study shows how the people charged with creating and implementing policy gradually changed their views about the population they were meant to transform into socialist citizens.

The policies discussed here were controversial. Some social scientists and planners, while highly critical of dominant paradigms in the late Soviet Union, worried what a focus on family-oriented production might mean for the larger Soviet project of social transformation. Their concerns, and the ways they were addressed in planning and legislation, point to the important differences between trajectories of reform in the USSR and elsewhere. Until the end of the Soviet period, officials took pains to design these reforms in a way that preserved collectivist principles. Only in the USSR's final years did these initiatives take on a cast more reminiscent of market dynamics. Even after 1991, however, as post-Soviet governments embraced *some* of the advice offered by the World Bank and other development institutions regarding promotion of small business and family farming, they firmly rejected the full dismemberment of the social state.

Mid-Century Development and the Social State

Before turning to the details of the Soviet case, it is useful to consider the Soviet turn to promoting cottage labor among Central Asian women alongside parallel developments in the postwar reforms of welfare states in liberal democracies and in international development. Though the political economies of the United States and the Soviet Union were obviously different, their leaders confronted a similar dilemma in trying to apply universalist principles to diverse populations as they implemented development strategies and welfare policies; international development entities confronted similar quandaries on a global scale. In the United States, Lyndon

¹³Kotkin, "Modern Times," 114–15.

B. Johnson's "Great Society" promised to right the legacies of Jim Crow and the shortcomings of the New Deal; international development organizations would help postcolonial states achieve economic development levels of their former metropolises; and in the USSR, a new approach to industrialization in Central Asia was meant to overcome the quasi-colonial relationship established in the years of Stalinist industrialization. In all three cases, a confrontation with the shortcomings of policies based on universalist principles forced a reassessment not just of the policies themselves but also of the kind of knowledge production that went into policymaking; social scientists working *within* the dominant consensus began to challenge it on the basis of their observations. And all three revealed the tensions between a universal social policy that presumes essential similarity in the way people behave, and a politics where ethnic differences are seen to make certain groups more suited for, or even more deserving of, a policy intervention than others.

We might see the concerns of World Bank development specialists or U.S. politicians as being a world away from those of Soviet planners or Central Asian party leaders, but there were important similarities in the problems they confronted in this period. Indeed, it was the apparent increasing similarity between the trajectories of the USSR and United States as industrialized societies that led some economists in the 1960s and 1970s to talk about "convergence between socialist and capitalist systems."¹⁴ After the 1950s, the USSR increasingly turned away from mass terror and mobilization as governing tools and toward wages, housing, and the provision of care and goods.¹⁵ As a substantial body of literature has now shown, the USSR and other socialist states by the 1970s were committed to providing the "socialist good life."¹⁶ But struggling to fulfill that commitment forced officials to confront difficult questions: Why did inequality persist? Why did some people move into jobs that offered higher wages while others did not? How should one define, and measure, the good life?

In the United States (and to a significant extent in Western Europe), the shift away from the welfare state established in the mid-twentieth century began in the 1970s. As the high growth rates of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s petered out across the industrialized world, the consensus that had supported the politics of those years began to come apart. In this context, declining tax revenues and growing debt put pressure on state budgets. Persistent inequality and social revolt prompted critics on the left *and* right to turn against the postwar welfare state. What this led to in the context of American welfare policies was a reorientation not toward greater social investment in individuals but toward formulating policies that would encourage individuals to develop their own forms of capital and rely on their own initiative to pass on capital to future generations.

The U.S. welfare policies of the postwar decades were grounded in a normative understanding of a "healthy" family, which linked successful welfare policy to the maintenance of a nuclear family with a primary (male) breadwinner. In explaining

¹⁴Joachim Zweynert, "Shestidesyatniki Economics, the Idea of Convergence, and Perestroika," *History of Political Economy* 51, 1 (2019): 277–99.

¹⁵Yakov Feygin, "Choosing Stagnation: The Kosygin Reforms and the Rise of Brezhnev's Stagnationary Coalition," *Europe-Asia Studies* (forthcoming, 2023).

¹⁶James R. Millar, "The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism," *Slavic Review* 44, 4 (1985): 694–706; Christofer Scarboro, Diana Mincyte, and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *The Socialist Good Life: Desire, Development, and Standards of Living in Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

the shift away from these policies,¹⁷ Melinda Cooper takes as her starting point the 1965 publication of *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, a report compiled by Daniel Patrick Moynihan that fundamentally shifted the conversation on welfare.¹⁸ Cooper identifies the Moynihan report as part of a broader shift in American politics and an alliance between neoliberals and neoconservatives, both of whom saw the weakening of the “traditional” family to be undermining their respective projects. Moynihan, a sociologist by training and a committed New Deal Democrat who supported Johnson’s Great Society initiatives, argued that the problems of urban African Americans, in particular, were connected to high rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births. While committed to extending government support to African Americans, Moynihan believed that welfare could only play a positive role insofar as it reinforced the nuclear family rather than undermining it. While Moynihan recognized that these problems stemmed from slavery, he nevertheless saw New Deal era programs as contributing to their persistence. If African American families did not conform to the nuclear family envisioned in welfare policies and the idea of a “Fordist family wage” (which allowed a male breadwinner to support his family) then welfare programs and better wages would not raise them out of poverty.¹⁹

The consensus that underpinned postwar approaches to development started to break down around this same time. Developing countries insisted that their poverty was a direct result of continued exploitation by the industrialized states that kept commodity prices low and protected their own value added industries, a critique that culminated in the call for a New International Economic Order.²⁰ Meanwhile, critics of international development argued that development institutions like the World Bank, and the national governments with which they worked, were imposing models of economic life on people and communities who neither desired nor needed the aid being offered. Among other things, they argued, the models developed in the 1950s often ignored women, or the particular ways that women were affected by development. More broadly, from the point of view of development institutions, part of the problem was the failure of economics and other social sciences to render the needs of target populations visible and thus to make accurate predictions about the results of one or another policy. As Tanya Li argues in *The Will to Improve*, national and international institutions took these criticisms to heart. Rather than seeing the population as divided into classes or groups, they reimagined populations “as forming so many natural communities—ethnic, religious, linguistic, territorial, professional, ideological, gendered, aged, and lifestyle-based.”²¹ Having lost faith in

¹⁷Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

¹⁸Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Negro Family: A Case for National Action,” Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965, <https://web.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Moynihan%27s%20The%20Negro%20Family.pdf> (accessed 27 Apr. 2023).

¹⁹Moynihan was criticized on the left for locating the source of problems *within* African American communities rather than in continuing institutional racism, but as Melinda Cooper argues, his critics largely agreed that “any long-term solution to racism would ... require an effort to restore the African American family and the place of men within it” (*Family Values*, 40).

²⁰See, for example, Michael Franczak, *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022).

²¹Tanya Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 233.

defining what people wanted, development institutions turned to techniques like Participatory Rural Appraisal, which “invited ‘communities’ to reveal their geographies, histories, livelihood strategies and institutions in the form of maps, diagrams, charts and lists, using templates supplied by experts.”²² The new development approach was supposed to emerge not from the dreams of planners in distant offices, but from what was really happening on the ground.

Re-imagining of development’s target populations proceeded alongside a debate about gender in development. Esther Boserup’s *The Role of Women in Economic Development* (1971) drew attention to the way paradigms dominant since the 1950s had ignored women, failing to account for their contribution to economic growth and simultaneously ignoring the effects development initiatives had upon them. The book and the discussions it triggered led to initiatives like the UN-sponsored “Women in Development” program. Women were especially targeted with new policies that aimed to promote self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship.²³ One of the early shifts prompted by critiques raised in the 1970s was the promotion of “cottage labor” among women who were unable to join the industrial or white-collar workforce.²⁴

These critiques undermined the development consensus, but they did not spell the death-knell of development as a project of states or development institutions; rather, these institutions incorporated critiques coming from both the left (including feminists) and the right. In the 1970s and 1980s, development as articulated by institutions like the World Bank came to focus on anti-poverty initiatives (most famously in the World Bank’s “Basic Needs” paradigm), and promoting entrepreneurialism, state fiscal responsibility, and financial access for entrepreneurial individuals via microloans.²⁵ Entrepreneurship became the new buzzword; countries that provided opportunities to individuals who could market their skills or invest capital thrived, while those that failed to do so suffered. But academic economists were not the only ones promoting this new paradigm; community-focused research sponsored by development organizations also convinced donors that among the people they were trying to help were potential entrepreneurs who could lift themselves out of poverty if they adopted the right attitude and were not impeded by predatory governments.²⁶ The job of development agencies was to pressure governments to pass entrepreneur-friendly laws, promote the entrepreneurial spirit and skills, and extend credit to small scale traders, farmers, and producers.

Moreover, many of the programs adopted by the World Bank and other development organizations were oriented toward encouraging forms of economic development that drew on people’s cultures, traditions, and social capital. That is, rather than trying to promote growth by forcing industrial modernity on people, they tried to “reconstitute the social networks and cultural practices of the poor as part of

²²Ibid., 234.

²³ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

²⁴ Esther Boserup, *The Role of Women in Economic Development* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970).

²⁵ On microcredit as “anti-poverty development,” see Joanne Meyerowitz, *A War on Global Poverty: The Lost Promise of Redistribution and the Rise of Microcredit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), esp. ch. 5.

²⁶ Li, *Will to Improve*, ch. 7.

the free market,” as anthropologist Julia Elyachar put it in her study of such programs in Cairo.²⁷ The idea was attractive for development specialists and an Egyptian government dealing with structural adjustment because “important sectors of the population could be left to take care of themselves.”²⁸ And while Elyachar primarily studied workshops oriented toward local markets, others have shown how similar ideas shaped development directed at, for example, indigenous groups in South America, who were encouraged to think of themselves as entrepreneurs and market their handicrafts to U.S. consumers.²⁹

In the Soviet context, rural Central Asians seemed most resistant to development strategies as well as to the social state. The area had been colonized by the Tsarist empire in the nineteenth century and the Bolsheviks had claimed to “liberate” it and integrate it into the newly formed Soviet Union on the basis of full equality and respect for national culture. Yet the Stalin era left Central Asia a cotton producer with limited industrial production. In the 1950s, local and Moscow-based scholars and planners argued that the region was ripe for industrialization, pointing to, among other things, the booming population growth there at a time when population numbers in the European USSR were stagnating. They predicted the labor pool would grow even faster as farm labor became increasingly mechanized. Industrialization would facilitate the spread of the social state and education, lift standards of living, and make Central Asians proper Soviet citizens and socialist subjects.³⁰ But where New Deal and Great Society advocates in the United States presumed (or advocated) payment of a “family wage” to a primary male breadwinner, Soviet plans and projections always presumed two earners. In the case of Central Asia, women as well as men were expected to enter the new industries. In Soviet research and policy discussions, “dependency” (*izhdivevnechstvo*)—being supported by a breadwinner rather than earning an income through one’s own labor—was treated as both a social and economic problem.³¹ Dependency was an economic problem because it deprived the system of valuable labor, and a social one because it kept living standards low and prevented individuals, especially women, from participating fully in society.

After the revolution, Soviet leaders tried various approaches to transform Central Asian families. In the late 1920s, the Hujum assault on veiling was a centerpiece of an effort to include women in economic and social life outside the home.³² In the decades that followed, state leaders largely came to terms with the pattern of large patriarchal families that were the norm in the Central Asian countryside. While authorities officially promoted the ideal of a nuclear family with two or three

²⁷Julia Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹Monica C. DeHart, *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Identity and Development Politics in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

³⁰Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), ch. 3.

³¹For example, Russian State Archive of the Economy (hereafter RGAE), f. 399, op. 3, d. 1534, 10–11.

³²Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Douglas T. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Sophie Roche, ed., *The Family in Central Asia: New Perspectives* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2020).

children, they did not actively try to limit the size or composition of rural families. On the contrary, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, planners in Central Asia and many in Moscow saw the region's booming population as a potential labor pool for industrialization in the area, which would compensate for declining birth rates elsewhere in the USSR.³³ In the meantime, the large families provided a labor reserve that could be mobilized to help with the labor-intensive cotton harvest at a time when planners were demanding ever more of the crop.³⁴ Planners in the 1950s and 1960s assumed that mechanization would gradually displace peasants from most of this work, freeing them up for industry.³⁵

Like their counterparts in international development and in the United States, Soviet scholars and planners homed in on the family as they tried to make sense of why their predictions about how people would behave had turned out to be wrong. By the early 1970s, planners and social scientists in Moscow and in the region began to question optimistic assumptions about industrialization's effectiveness and benefits. Central Asians seemed reluctant to join industries, cotton was still harvested using manual labor, and both the cotton economy and industrialization were destroying the environment.³⁶ Planners turned to social science research, including sociology and ethnography, to make sense of these problems. Despite the methodological and ideological limits of Soviet social science, the formal and informal findings of researchers who went out to study rural populations scrambled the assumptions of development models that had predicted peasants would move into industrial labor. It found that many rural Central Asian families were not as poor as official statistics indicated, that they enjoyed sources of income invisible in those statistics, and that large patriarchal families were not simply barriers to progress but were a source of security and livelihood.³⁷

The story of the Moynihan report and that of (Western) development efforts advancing new forms of assessment and new understandings of links between poverty and labor share several traits with what happened as the Soviet planners sought creative solutions to ostensibly intractable problems. The first is the role social scientists played in not just the functioning of the welfare state but also its formation and reform. In all three cases, social scientists working originally *within* the dominant consensus on development and welfare began to challenge it based on their observations. The second common trait is that all three cases point to tensions between a universal social policy that presumes essential similarity in how people behave and a politics in which ethnic differences are seen to make some groups more suited for or deserving of policy interventions. As we will see, rural Central Asians in the USSR, like African Americans, were perceived as behaving in ways that contradicted presumptions of policymakers. But there were also important differences. The United States, and to some extent Western European states, had embraced the transition to post-industrial society, and by the early 1980s a shrinking

³³ Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "Central Planning, Local Knowledge? Labor, Population, and the 'Tajik School of Economics,'" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, 3 (2016): 585–620.

³⁴ Sergey Abashin, *Sovetskii kishlak: Mezhdru kolonializmom i modernizatsiei* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoi Obozrenie, 2015).

³⁵ Kalinovsky, "Central Planning."

³⁶ The classic work on this question remains Lubin, *Labour and Nationality*.

³⁷ Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "Numbers in Space: Measuring Living Standards and Regional Inequality in the Soviet Union," *Yearbook for the History of Global Development* 1, 1 (2022): 155–82.

share of the workforce was employed in manufacturing and services had become a dominant part of the economy. The USSR by and large did not make this shift; it was primarily in Central Asia that Soviet planners began to doubt that an industrial future was possible or desirable. Moreover, the problems the USSR faced in improving welfare and in its understandings of the family's role in economic life were the inverse of the U.S. case. When it came to targeting its most disadvantaged population, in particular, Soviet planners were concerned, not to bolster nuclear families, but rather to loosen the bond of patriarchal families and lessen women's dependence on fathers and husbands by integrating them into the industrial workforce.

Cottage Labor in the USSR

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Soviet planning officials increasingly identified low labor productivity as a fundamental drag on the Soviet economy. Quite simply, Soviet enterprises hired too many workers and had few effective tools to make them work more efficiently. The Soviet commitment to full employment, which could not be abandoned, disincentivized enterprises from investing in and making proper use of labor-saving technology.³⁸ Debates on employment and productivity were connected to demographic questions of labor distribution throughout the USSR. Planners in Moscow were increasingly wary of investing in industries and regions when the economic rationale was doubtful. Because the commitment to full employment was sacrosanct, however, the search for new forms of labor went hand in hand with ideas for how to use less of it.

This is where the role of social scientists becomes particularly interesting. The State Committee on Labor and other planning and research institutes in Moscow and the republics prioritized the search for new methods to improve labor productivity. They had to answer two essential sets of questions: First, why did the introduction of technology fail to improve labor productivity (or why was technology not being introduced at all, as in cotton harvesting)? Second, why were there enormous discrepancies in labor force participation? Regarding the latter question especially, they were forced to confront differences between expectations based on economic models with what they observed with their own eyes.

Studies undertaken by Soviet institutions of economic and labor research uncovered contradictory information. Scholarship that compared population growth to formal employment opportunities found a large and growing number of "unemployed" people in Central Asia; many studies treated all such people as dependents of wage earners.³⁹ Closer observation, however, revealed that many of them were engaged in some combination of seasonal labor on collective farms, work on personal agricultural plots, or other kinds of activity oriented around the home. A report completed by the Research Institute of Labor (NII Truda) in 1979 noted that 19.4 percent of Central Asians were involved in "personal labor," double the Union average, while the number engaged in home or own-plot labor had grown by 795,000 between 1971 and 1977.⁴⁰

³⁸See Alexandra Oberländer, "Cushy Work, Backbreaking Leisure: Late Soviet Work Ethics Reconsidered," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 18, 3 (2017): 569–90.

³⁹For example, RGAE, f. 399, op. 3, d. 1534, 10–11.

⁴⁰State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereafter GARF), f. 9595, op. 1, d. 635, 122.

Soviet officials were certainly aware of practices such as home labor and the importance of personal plots for personal consumption and peasant markets. But these practices, while tolerated to varying degrees, were seen as marginal relative to production and consumption via the state sector. The tools of Soviet economics did not allow scholars to even estimate the possible income of these activities or their broader significance in terms of supplying the consumer market. Economists studied the socialist economy, while these kinds of activity were usually discussed by legal scholars trying to determine the proper boundaries of such activity and the proper instruments for regulating it. As a result, studies attempting to determine standards of living indicated that life in Central Asian cities was better, since (formal) urban employment provided a higher income than (formal) employment in rural areas.⁴¹ But on-the-ground observations undermined those findings.⁴² As Dmitry I. Zuzin, a senior researcher at the Research Institute on Labor, pointed out, his “visual observation” during a tour of the region suggested that the quality of life in Central Asia’s rural regions was higher because people benefited from their personal plots and other income invisible in official statistics. Life in the countryside also entailed a return to “patriarchal traditions,” he went on, but again, he had no statistics to back this up, “because such research cannot be signified in numbers.” Still, he said, “our observations are important for drawing certain conclusions.”⁴³

One of these conclusions was that industrialization had come up short in raising the standard of living and transforming the cultural life of rural Central Asians, particularly women. Another was that the economic activities they undertook on the margins of the socialist economy allowed them to maintain higher standards of living, although at the cost of reinforcing patriarchal relations. But perhaps the most important conclusion was that planners and social scientists needed to ask different questions and be more attentive to how people actually lived, by drawing on sociological and even ethnographic inquiry.⁴⁴ Studies by other institutions confirmed Zuzin’s observations about relative standards of urban and rural living. A research project carried out around this same time by the Council on Productive Forces, a research institute within the state planning agency GOSPLAN, noted that while *family* incomes in Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic republics were higher for urbanites than for collective farmers, the reverse seemed to be true in the Central Asian case. Even an accounting of formally reported income found families in the agricultural sector were better off than their urban counterparts. Some of them reportedly earned up to 90 percent of their income from personal plots, even as those plots were among the smallest in the nation.⁴⁵

A word about terminology is needed here. When Zuzin talked about the kinds of labor he observed in the countryside, he talked of “*lichnoe podsobnoe khoziaystvo*,” the personal plots that had originally been offered as a concession to peasants during

⁴¹For example, RGAE, f. 399, op. 3, d. 1534, 17–18.

⁴²See, for instance, another part of the report cited above, which notes the generally higher standard of living; GARF, f. 9595, op. 1, d. 635, 313.

⁴³RGAE, f. 399, op. 1, d. 1989, 9.

⁴⁴Kalinovsky, *Laboratory*. On sociological inquiry to determine what workers were actually doing with their time, see also Oberlander, “Cushy Work.”

⁴⁵RGAE, f. 399, op 3, d. 1498, 18–20, 40–41. Again, the report may underestimate the size of family plots and income earned outside of the collective farm and enterprise employment.

collectivization in the 1930s. Collective farmers were supposed to use these plots to feed their families but were allowed to sell the surplus on the market. Zuzin also spoke about work “*na domu*,” a term that was sometimes used to denote care-work within the family,⁴⁶ but at other times referred to either informal economic activity or work connected to the “*lichnoe podsobnoe khoziaystvo*.”⁴⁷ In practice, these terms became conflated in the 1980s, with the “*lichnoe podsobnoe khoziaystvo*” covering other forms of family-oriented production beyond growing crops.⁴⁸ As we will see, however, over time the idea of working from home transformed into something more akin to cottage industries familiar from histories of early British and American industries, where independent producers contracted with entrepreneurs and turned inputs into marketable goods.

What Zuzin and his colleagues missed, or could not formalize, was the complex set of practices that tied together the formal and informal economy in rural areas.⁴⁹ Cotton, the primary crop of most collective and state farms in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, required a large labor force that could be mobilized for intensive work, especially during harvests. Rates of mechanization, for complex reasons, remained quite low.⁵⁰ Some of the labor need was met by bringing in urban workers and students, but much of the work was done by women and children who lived on the farms. Their pay was low, but farm managers could find other ways to reward families for helping with the harvest, including providing them with inputs for personal plots, building materials for their houses and other structures, and even off-the-books land for cultivation.⁵¹

Research into labor force participation also changed the way Soviet officials thought about ethnicity. Economic models employed to justify industrialization in Central Asia assumed that peasants there, attracted by higher wages, would move to the industrial sector. This ignored that peasants in Russia and Ukraine had been driven into that sector by a brutal collectivization campaign during the first five-year plan. Because Central Asian peasants were not behaving as models predicted, planners looked more closely at their values, desires, and practices. As Zuzin’s comment suggests, socioeconomic studies carried out by the Institute of Labor and its affiliates also revealed the extent to which the traditional patriarchal family still dominated rural society. According to these surveys, both men and women found it more important to

⁴⁶As when specialists talked about women being interested in going beyond working “*na domu*,” for “*nadmonichestvo*,” or home labor.

⁴⁷GARF, f. 9553, op. 1, d. 4143, 219. See A. Chernayev, A. Veber, and V. Medvedev, *V politburo TsKKPSS* (Moscow: Gorbachev-Fond, 2008), 103.

⁴⁸Note Gorbachev complained about this in discussions about the 1986 law, on 13 November 1986; see *ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁹Peasants under socialism engaging in the grey economy was not a phenomenon unique to Central Asia or even to the Soviet case. See, for example, Martha Lampland, *The Objects of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Francis Pine, “Dealing with Money: Zlotys, Dollars and other Currencies in the Polish Highlands,” in Caroline Humphrey and Ruth Mandel, eds., *Markets and Moralities Ethnographies of Postsocialism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 75–100.

⁵⁰Artemy M. Kalinovsky, “Tractors, Power Lines, and the Welfare State: The Contradictions of Soviet Development in Post-World War II Tajikistan,” *Asiatische Studien-Études Asiatiques* 69, 3 (2015): 563–92.

⁵¹On farm managers and family activity, see Abashin, *Sovetskii kishlak*, 355–56, 378–81, 387–93; and Beate Giehler, “Maxim Gorki and the Islamic Revolution in the Southern Tajik Cotton Plain,” in Stephane A. Dudoignon and Christian Noack, eds., *Allah’s Kolkhozes: Migration, De-Stalinisation, Privatisation and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s–2000s)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2011), 123–47.

have large families than a career, and they especially valued being close to their parents and extended families. Zuzin's observations about family life and production echoed the views of some ethnographers and policymakers who had grown skeptical about the ability of government policy to transform how people lived.⁵²

Still, identifying Central Asians, or at least those in rural areas, as having fundamentally different socioeconomic patterns did not mean abandoning the prerogative of raising their standard of living via their inclusion in the Soviet economy. One idea floated, and eventually adopted, was to promote home labor for rural women. Forms of individual labor existed throughout the Soviet period, usually outside of any formal organization. The idea here was that factories would provide home-bound workers with materials and training, if necessary, and would then pay them for the finished products. By the early 1980s, over two hundred thousand individuals were employed in this way across the USSR, 80 percent of them in "local industries" that produced handicrafts and souvenirs. This represented only 0.15 percent of the Soviet labor force, and while this form of labor seemed most developed in the Baltics and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), it was barely used in Central Asia, Armenia, Moldova, and Georgia. As proponents of home policies note, these areas had all the "conditions for its successful use: a relatively large number of people not engaged in socialized labor, a large number of working-age women with many children, and low population mobility."⁵³

Although there would eventually be one "home labor" law for all of the USSR, the rationale behind that initiative differed depending on where in the country it was implemented. In the Baltic states, which carried out some experiments with this form of labor in the 1970s, the idea was to make it easier for women to have more children and still earn a living.⁵⁴ Thus, it can be seen as part of the USSR's pro-natalist policy. In Central Asia the issue was different: there women already had large families and the challenge was to get them out of the home and less dependent on the patriarchal family. Proponents of home labor, like the Uzbek economist Rano Ubaidullaeva, argued that while more could be done to draw young men into the industrial workforce there were serious limits to how much of the rural population could or should be recruited.⁵⁵ The state, she asserted, should instead encourage home labor, both to help rural women earn a living and to fill gaps in production.

What were these laborers supposed to do? As Zuzin and others realized, *informal* home labor was widespread in the region: home laborers produced clothing, household items like blankets, and other products that were notoriously difficult to get in state shops. Formalized home labor had also been used on a limited basis in Central Asia primarily for handicrafts production under the republic-level Ministries for Local Industry.⁵⁶ In principle, such enterprises took responsibility not just for

⁵²Iulian Bromley and Ovsey Shkaratan, "Natsional'nye trudovye traditsii vazhnyi factor intensivifikatsii proizvodstva," *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo* 1 (1982): 43–54; Iu. Bromley and O. Shkaratan, "Natsional'nye traditsii v sotsialisticheskoi ekonomiki," *Voprosy ekonomiki* 4 (Apr. 1983): 38–47; Iu. Bromlei, "Etnicheskie protsesy v SSSR," *Kommunist* 5 (1983): 56–64.

⁵³GARF, f. 9553, op. 1, d. 4143, 220.

⁵⁴See, for example, "Nadomyi trud," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 24 Nov. 1979: 10; "Nadmonyi trud: vtoroi tur polemiki," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 24 Jan. 1980: 10; "Nadmonyi trud," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 24 Mar. 1980: 11.

⁵⁵RGAE, f. 399, op. 1, d. 1989.

⁵⁶See, for instance, Kayrat Mauletovich Kenzhin, "Deiatelnost' kompartii Kazakhstana po razvitiuiu mestnoy promyshlennosti v gody vos'moy piatiletki," PhD diss., S. M. Kirov Kazakh State University, 1975.

providing the necessary equipment and inputs (raw materials), but also for training the workers. In the best scenario, women who engaged in home labor learned a trade from a highly skilled teacher.⁵⁷ Since many of the products of such enterprises were “traditional” handicrafts, this policy was promoted as marrying tradition and socialist production, combining the charms of artisanal labor with the efficiency of socialist organization.⁵⁸

A new, expanded “home labor” policy was finally codified in a resolution of the State Committee on Labor and the Council of Ministers in September 1981.⁵⁹ The discussion in the committee and the text of the final resolution show how the USSR’s different priorities in regard to welfare, family policy, and production of consumer goods came together. The targets of the policy were the following: (1) women with children younger than fifteen; (2) disabled individuals and pensioners; (3) individuals engaged in seasonal labor; (4) those who could not be employed in the location where they live; and (5) certain groups of artisans skilled in the production of crafts, souvenirs, or “original packaging” for same, whether or not they were already employed elsewhere.⁶⁰ Several things are notable here, besides the effort to fill certain gaps in production: One is the attempt to shift some of the burdens of welfare provision by giving those most dependent on it additional opportunities to earn incomes in flexible ways. Another is the effort to target those who either did not want to move or who were needed in rural areas. A third is the focus on women. The final version of the resolution stated that women could also draw family members into production.⁶¹ In other words, the family (or rather the mother and her children) was now being reconceived as a unit of economic production in a way not seen in the development plans of the postwar decades (though they did harken back to experiments in the 1920s).

The reference to employing children again points to the way this policy was imagined differently for Central Asia than elsewhere. Research showed that families in the Baltics and the RSFSR sometimes desired one more child than they had but rarely wanted more than three. Home labor could thus mean several years of working from home on a flexible schedule until the children were old enough for regular daycare or school. Similar studies found Central Asian women wanted families with at least five children and often ended up with more. In this context, home labor was likely to remain the primary mode of employment for much longer than in other places. Moreover, since these women usually began having children earlier, there was less chance that they would gain skills outside the home. A report prepared for the State Committee of Labor in anticipation of the 1981 regulation stated this explicitly: in general, it noted, home laborers could provide a wide range of services, including furniture repair, translation, editing, typing, and “many others.” All of these jobs implied advanced training or even higher education. By contrast, in rural areas, “especially Central Asia and the Caucasus,” it made sense to use home labor for “well-developed crafts and traditional trades” including rug-weaving and the cultivation of

⁵⁷Aisalkyn Botoeva and Regine A. Spector. “Sewing to Satisfaction: Craft-Based Entrepreneurs in Contemporary Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 32, 4 (2013): 487–500.

⁵⁸Kathryn Amelia Dooley, “Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference: Ethnicity and Consumer Culture in Soviet Central Asia, 1945–1985,” PhD diss., Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2016.

⁵⁹Resolution from 29 Sept. 1981, GARF, f. 9553, op. 1, d. 4170, 235–42.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 238.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 237.

silkworms.⁶² The greatest effect of the policy would be achieved not by training or otherwise transforming the women, but by getting them to use skills they already had or could learn from relatives.

In sum, rural Central Asians, and especially women, challenged planners because they showed little interest in joining the industrial labor force, moving to cities, or shrinking the size of their families. To make sense of this, planners had to find new ways to study the population and to incorporate the insights gained thereby into the planning system. They came to see rural Central Asians as fundamentally different from “slavs” or “balts”: they seemed unsuited to industrial labor yet appeared to have retained “traditional” skills and crafts that they could deploy in ways that contributed to the Soviet economy. The promotion of home labor was not an attack on the planning state, but rather an attempt to reconcile the goals of the planning state with observed reality—“life itself.”

Cottage Labor and Perestroika-Era Reforms

We tend to think of perestroika-era economic reforms as a struggle between conservatives committed to tinkering with the planning system without risking a major overhaul and liberal reformers influenced by international debates and committed to market reforms. But both sets of reformers also had to think about how to restructure the system while maintaining the general commitment to equality, and the presumption that wealthier, more economically advanced republics had to help the poorer ones. If we look at some of the reforms connected to labor and family of the era, we find reform-minded planners building on the home labor regulations and the insights of an earlier era as they tried to reconcile the growing demands for economic efficiency with the basic social contract underpinning the union.

Home labor, like other forms of employment, received greater attention after 1985. Mikhail Gorbachev’s advisers had been urging him even before he became General Secretary in 1985 to stop wasting money on industrial investment in Central Asia, since the population there was only interested in “traditional production” and refused to join the industrial workforce.⁶³ Gorbachev saw cooperatives and entrepreneurship as crucial to reviving the Soviet economy, and especially to fulfilling the demand for consumer goods that the planned economy promoted poorly.⁶⁴ Enterprises employing home labor were presented as being more nimble in their responses to market demands.⁶⁵ Gorbachev extolled the virtues of apprenticeship, where a skilled artisan passed skills on, and lamented that such practices had previously been labeled “exploitative.”⁶⁶ Fears that these initiatives would lead to greater exploitation of children were strongest among Central Asian economists and planners.

The expanded home labor policy was accompanied by several other policies that I cannot detail here but are worth noting. First, the Soviet government expanded the

⁶²GARF, f. 9593, op. 1, d. 4143, 221.

⁶³Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow, doc. 14912.

⁶⁴Christopher Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 71–100.

⁶⁵B. Bolotskiy and S. Golovin, “Razvitie individual’noi trudovoy deiatel’nosti,” *Planovoe khoziastvo* 7 (1987): 87–91.

⁶⁶Chernayev, Veber, and Medvedev, *V. Politburo*, 103.

possibilities for “individual labor”—essentially any kind of labor activity outside of a socialist enterprise.⁶⁷ Scholars and planners working on female employment hoped that this policy would extend the possibilities opened up by the home labor regulations.⁶⁸ Second, Soviet reformers tried to increase agricultural productivity by introducing a system of family brigades, or family sub-contracting. This system, too, had been tried on a limited scale, but was now promoted for wider use.⁶⁹ Under the family contracting scheme, a family could contract with a collective farm to cultivate a certain acreage of land with a given crop and be paid as a unit; it was also allowed to hire additional laborers to help, so long as they were related.⁷⁰ The idea was to increase productivity by stealthily introducing a profit motive.⁷¹ What is interesting about this initiative is the way it reorients economic activity around the family, and also seems to reflect observations about family structures, especially in Central Asia. Again, the Russian countryside had substantially emptied out in the postwar years, and farm labor had become feminized. In Central Asia, by contrast, officials had noted that the better off families were those that earned substantial incomes from their own economic activity, including gardening on personal plots. At a 1988 roundtable on the family sub-contracting system, L. Nikiforov explained that Central Asians had maintained their tradition of “family organization of production,” which made them particularly suited to take advantage of this new form of organization.⁷² He was not alone: the economic journalist Vasilii Selunin, a supporter of market reforms who took part in a two-month expedition to assess environmental and social conditions in Central Asia, similarly told audiences that while the Russian peasantry had been destroyed, Central Asia was lucky because it still had peasants who were “willing to work” and could become successful if given land.⁷³ Finally, Central Asian economists and officials hoped that expanding the personal plots would be an efficient way to move the region’s agriculture beyond cotton. The head of Uzbekistan’s planning institute noted that personal plots covered only 3 percent of the republic’s territory but produced a quarter of its agricultural products.⁷⁴

⁶⁷Christopher Miller, *Struggle to Save*.

⁶⁸Chebotareva, “Aktual’nye problemy”; and also R. A. Ubaydullaeva, “Perestroyka i voprosy uluchsheniia usloviy truda i byta zhenshin,” *Obschestvennye nauki Uzbekistana* 5 (1987): 18–23.

⁶⁹“Semeynyi podriad v sel’skom khozaistve,” *Voprosy Ekonomiki* 5 (1988): 114–15.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 111–37.

⁷¹On the origins of the brigade system, see Chris Miller, “Gorbachev’s Agriculture Agenda: Decollectivization and the Politics of Perestroika,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, 1 (2016): 95–118.

⁷²“Semeynyi podriad,” 120. Nikiforov also included the Baltics in this description. In the Baltics, however, the “tradition” was one of family farms, which were collectivized relatively late, after the Soviet occupation at the end of the Second World War. In Central Asia, collectivization had taken place at the same time as in the rest of the USSR, but the family remained integrated into collective farm life in a way that it did not in other regions.

⁷³Vasilii Seliunin, “Prodolzhat’ tupikoviy put’ nel’zia,” *Pamir* 2 (1989): 10.

⁷⁴Sh. Mirsaidov, “Sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie respubliki v sovremennykh usloviiah,” *Planovoe khoziastvo* (1990): 11–12, 11. A. Gorelkin, “Predlagai uvelichit’ razmery LPKh,” *Ekonomika i Zhizn’* 5 (1989): 55–57. On the genealogy of the “household farms” in late Soviet reform, see Katja Brusch, “The Soviet Village Revisited: Household Farming and the Changing Image of Socialism in the late Soviet Period,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 57, 1 (2016): 81–100.

Not all economists were enthusiastic about these initiatives either before or during perestroika. The head of Tajikistan's institute of economics, Rashid Rahimov, warned that encouraging cottage labor would undermine the social goals of the Soviet Union. Child labor was a bad enough problem in Central Asia, and poorly reflected in official statistics. Rahimov feared that a cottage labor policy would only make things worse by pushing more production into the family.⁷⁵ Similarly, at a 1987 roundtable, Tajik economists betrayed a wariness of promoting "non-traditional" forms of labor.⁷⁶ Khojamamat Umarov, a younger economist at the same institute, conceded that personal plots should play a role in fulfilling demand that could not be fulfilled by large (socialist) enterprises.⁷⁷ But, he warned, "Some economists, seeing a hopeless situation [in the Central Asian countryside], are arguing for [expansion of family plots], since it does not require investments but it keeps people working and producing. But in terms of creating jobs necessary for society, in terms of forming a personality of a new type—a COLLECTIVE personality—[that is] not formed in personal plots, but in a collective."⁷⁸

As Umarov noted, promoting policies like cottage labor and the expansion of personal plots signaled a potentially profound reconfiguration of the link between social mobility and economic development. Rather than empowering women by drawing them into the socialist economy, the state would now allow them to empower themselves as economic agents. Further evidence of this comes from what specialists envisioned could be accomplished by home labor and the other forms of non-state employment in areas that were considered lacking in the development of consumer products, services, and culture. Home labor, of course, was thought to be one way to ensure a supply of consumer products to geographically remote areas, but the effect was limited because home labor was used primarily in "local" industries (*mestnaia promyshlennost'*), which produced a relatively narrow range of products (primarily clothing and handicrafts). But in the perestroika era, social scientists and planners began to envision a wider range of uses for non-traditional forms of employment. For example, they envisioned forming cooperatives to run daycare centers and other services the state had proven unable to provide in rural areas.⁷⁹ Central Asian planners and social scientists had been clamoring for the state to provide more such services since the 1960s, on the premise that once women had access to them they would be liberated to join the workforce and become more modern in outlook.⁸⁰ With the idea of having women organize

⁷⁵RGAE, f. 399, op. 1, d. 1989.

⁷⁶"Osobennosti perevoda ekonomiki trudoizbytochnogo regiona..." *Izvestia Akademii Nauk Tadzhikistana* 4 (1987): 3–87. An editorial note appended to the end of the discussion lamented that "new forms of labor" had hardly come up.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 29–30.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁹T. Kabilov, "Kooperativnoe dvizhenie v respublikah Sredney Azii—magistral'noe napravlenie radikal'noy ekonomicheskoy reformy," *Voprosy ekonomike* 5 (1989): n.p., 45; Mirsaidov, "Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe," 11–12.

⁸⁰This position was well summarized by the Tajikistani economist Honaliev at the 1987 discussion in Dushanbe. Comparing Latvia and Tajikistan, he noted that Latvia had the highest proportion of women in full-time employment and Tajikistan the lowest. When you look at family size, the ranks are reversed. Tajikistan, meanwhile, had four times fewer day care facilities per person than Latvia, 5.3 times fewer eating establishments, and so on. Until these discrepancies were addressed, officials could not hope to get more out of Central Asia's labor resources: "Until the disproportions in socioeconomic development of different

such facilities, which would be state-subsidized but charge fees, the idea of emancipation was maintained, but the responsibility for effecting emancipation was shifted onto the very people the policy was supposed to help.⁸¹

These discussions all contained a tension between whether economic policy should target how people live, or how they *ought* to live. Most of the social and economic policies of the post-Stalin era envisioned boldly transforming rural Central Asians' lives. But the research that had generated the home labor discussions of the late 1970s and early 1980s created a new consensus that the rural Central Asian family was resistant to change. Central Asians were suited to a certain kind of lifestyle and kind of work; though some would join the industrial workforce or pursue higher education, most would remain in the countryside.

Finally, while the original home labor policy presumed that the factory/employer might help women expand their skills, that was predicated on the assumption that people had skills that made it worthwhile to entrust them with working at home. In some reports and publications, these were referred to as "traditional" skills, learned from parents or older relatives.⁸² The idea of employing one's children similarly presumed that one would pass one's skills on to them. For decades, proponents of industrialization had argued that educational institutions, particularly technical schools, had to be expanded to Central Asia's rural areas so as to draw residents into the workforce. But the cottage labor policy, and the idea of expanding family plots, put the onus of training and skills acquisition on individuals and their families.

Home Labor in Practice

After 1981, the government encouraged enterprises engaged in light industry and local industry to make extensive use of this new policy. Soviet mass publications, especially ones aimed at women, proclaimed the advantages of this new form of labor.⁸³ Local party organizations relied on activists to recruit women to engage in home labor.⁸⁴ As Jaymal Tashibekova, the Chair of the Kyrgyz SSR's Women's Committee and member of the party *buro* (it's top decision making body) said, it was up to local activists to approach "every woman not engaged in production [to] find out what she knows how to do ... and explain the conditions of home labor."⁸⁵

Yet reports suggest that the policy barely made a dent in employment patterns. In Uzbekistan, where light industries employed almost 160,000 people in 1983, only 396 were working from home.⁸⁶ Home labor as envisaged in these regulations

regions of the country are resolved, the different economic and demographic situations and the effectiveness of using labor resources will be maintained"; "Osobnosti perevoda," 25.

⁸¹The notion of pay for use services was not new; it had been discussed as a way to help subsidize the creation of such facilities.

⁸²See, for example, I. M. Nurmuhamedova, "Vospitanie detey v mnogodetnoy sem'e," *Obschestvennyye nauki Uzbekistana* 6 (1989): 27–28.

⁸³"I dlia sem'i i dlia obschestva," *Rabotnitsa* 10 (1981): 8; "Nadomnitsa Beliaeva stavit voprosy," *Rabotnitsa* 10 (1981): 9–10.

⁸⁴Tolkun Omurova, "Spetsifika religioznosti zhenschin Kirgizok I osobnosti ih ateisticheskogo vospitanie v usloviah sovremennoi Kirgizii," PhD diss., Kyrgyz State University, Frunze, 1983.

⁸⁵"Na materinskom pole," *Rabotnitsa* 1 (1982): 2.

⁸⁶RGAE, f. 476, op. 1, d. 9076.

required a factory that would deliver raw materials to workers and then pick up the finished product. Light industries were located in urban centers and used relatively advanced machinery; not only was it often impracticable to bring this machinery into the home, but investment in transportation was required to carry the machinery, spare parts, technicians, materials, and products. Home labor did not solve the problem of geography that had plagued industrialization efforts in the previous decade, that the factories were still located too far from potential workers. Local industry (*mestnaia promyshlennost'*), which was usually involved in producing handicrafts or "traditional" clothing, seems to have made more use of the new policy. But it was not only in Central Asia that the effects of this policy proved disappointing; the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* noted in 1983 that the Ministry of Services (MinByt), employed only six thousand home workers in the whole of the RSFSR. In a special report for the city of Rostov, the magazine noted, "What is required is initiative and entrepreneurship. But showing initiative turns out to be harder than changing a legal document."⁸⁷

Planners found it hard to evaluate the larger impact of these policies for the same reason that making sense of rural standards of living had proved difficult in the 1970s. One could collect statistics from factories on their use of home labor, but they could not tell one whether or not this work made much of a difference in women's lives, or how much use they made of child labor, or whether they were also making use of machinery and inputs to produce for the "grey economy."⁸⁸ Nor could they evaluate whether the home labor policy made it possible to compete with the grey economy, either for workers or for market share.⁸⁹ Only in the perestroika era did the Tashkent branch of the Institute of Labor undertake a major research project to study the economic and social effects of home labor and other "non-traditional" forms of employment. It included a survey of 4,600 women with large families who were engaged in some kind of home labor.⁹⁰

Although the final report has proven difficult to track down, some information from that research filtered into other publications. What the perestroika-era research suggests is that, even after new forms of economic activity expanded in the late 1980s, the "target population" remained out of reach. Between 1980 and 1985, for example, the number of women employed in home labor in Uzbekistan nearly doubled, to 13,820, of whom some eleven thousand were women of local nationality (meaning ethnic Uzbeks or Tajiks); the total rose to twenty thousand by 1989.⁹¹ Yet further

⁸⁷"Sluzhba dlia babushki," *Rabotnitsa* 12 (1983): 10.

⁸⁸Curiously, economists seem to have never carried out such research. Questions about the "grey economy" and the possibility of misuse of home labor for income gained outside the socialist economy were discussed primarily by legal scholars. Only in the perestroika era, when non-traditional forms of labor were being expanded, did economists start to weigh in on these questions, and primarily in a theoretical rather than empirical way. See S. Gorokhova, "Nuzhna li nam takaia individual'naia deiatel'nost'?" *Sotsialisticheskii trud* 4 (1988): 108; V. Schetinin, A. Afinogentova, "Individualnaia trudovaia deiatel'nost': organizatsiia i regulirovanie," *Planovoe khoziaistvo* 8 (1987): 105–7; A. Simonian, "Ekonomicheskie metody bor'dby s netrudonymi dohodami," *Planovoe khoziaistvo* 3 (1987): 124–28.

⁸⁹A Rostov factory manager explained to *Rabotnitsa* that one of the difficulties in recruiting senior citizens for home labor was that those who had the requisite skills usually had their own clients, and those that did not were not interested in learning them. "Sluzhba dlia babushki," 10.

⁹⁰GARF, f. 9595, op. 1, d. 771, 19–20.

⁹¹Sayib Raupov, "Opyt i probleme ispol'zovaniia istochnikov popolnenie industrial'nogo otriada rabochego klassa Uzbekistana v 80-e gody," PhD diss., Tashkent State University, 1989, 19.

research showed that two-thirds of the people engaging in “non-traditional” forms of labor, including home labor, were not previously unemployed, but rather were employed individuals switching to working from home or joining a cooperative.⁹²

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan, in particular, made the expansion of *leased* private plots central to its reforms in 1990–1991.⁹³ Between 1985 and 1990, the number of people formally registered as employed primarily in private plots almost doubled, from 655,000 to 1,111,000. This shift was accompanied by an impressive growth in non-cotton farm products, especially those related to animal production.⁹⁴ This led some economists, such as the young academic and future Deputy Foreign Minister Bakhtior Islamov, to argue as early as 1991 that Uzbekistan was particularly well placed to transition to the market economy, since individuals were eager to assert property rights and support the state that would step in to enforce them.⁹⁵

Yet expanding land property rights proved much more difficult than envisioned by optimists like Islamov or the international organizations that became active in the region after 1991. Families who farmed their own plots within collective farms relied on water whose flow was controlled by farm management and, ultimately, by the Ministry of Irrigation. Conflicts over land use sparked by the expansion of family farming almost certainly contributed to ethnic tensions in Osh in 1990 and to the violence that engulfed Tajikistan in 1992.⁹⁶ While this is not the space to explore this issue, it is important to note that the question of how water would be distributed and paid for concerned reformers on the eve of the Soviet Union’s collapse and was never fully resolved. The same was true for other inputs and financing.⁹⁷ The collapse also made private farming less lucrative than it had been when the USSR was one country, with heavily subsidized transport that made it possible for middlemen to cheaply bring Central Asia produce to European markets. After the collapse, not only did transportation costs increase exponentially (compounded by the new difficulties presented by international borders and tariff regimes), but customers in cities like Moscow now had access to imports from beyond the former USSR, if they could afford them.⁹⁸ Finally, even as post-Soviet governments in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

⁹² S. I. Iskanderov, “Osnovnye tendentsii v razvitie kooperativov,” *Obshchestvennye nauki Uzbekistiana* 2 (1988): 17–18.

⁹³ Bori Rahimov, R Pulatov, and Zohid Siddikov, “Formirovanie i funktsionirovanie dehkanskih (fermerskih) xoziajstv,” *Zhizn’ i ekonomika* 11 (1992): 34–36. I. Lopatin, “Kak tvoi dela, arendator?” *Zhizn’ i ekonomika* 12 (1990): 63–67; Abdullo Abdukadyrov, “Chto ugrozhaet arende?” *Zhizn’ i ekonomika* 10 (1990): 27–29.

⁹⁴ Bakhtiyor Islamov and Simon Johnson, “Property Rights and Economic Reform in Uzbekistan” (Helsinki: World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER) of United Nations University, 1991, Working Paper 90).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁶ Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu’s Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World Systems Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 169.

⁹⁷ The issues persist decades after the Soviet collapse. See, for example, Irna Hofman, “Soft Budgets and Elastic Debt: Farm Liabilities in the Agrarian Political Economy of Post-Soviet Tajikistan,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 45, 7 (2018): 1360–81; Brent Hierman and Navruz Nebakhtshoev, “Land Reform by Default: Uncovering Patterns of Agricultural Decollectivization in Tajikistan,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 45, 2 (2018): 409–30.

⁹⁸ Richard Pomfret, “Central Asian Economies: Thirty Years after Dissolution of the Soviet Union,” *Comparative Economic Studies* 63 (2021): 537–56.

turned to family farming to decrease dependency on imports of foodstuffs and raise living standards for the families themselves, they were reluctant to relinquish control over cotton production, since cotton remained the main source of foreign currency.⁹⁹

The home labor policy had a curious after-life in post-Soviet Central Asia. First, with industry collapsing, hundreds of thousands of industrial workers found themselves out of a job and were forced to turn to labor migration or shuttle trading to survive. Still others returned to the countryside, helping their families on their personal land plots, or turned to forms of entrepreneurship. Regine Spector, who has studied small business entrepreneurs engaged in clothing production and repair in Kyrgyzstan, found that many traced their work as entrepreneurs back to the *nadomnichestvo* they had undertaken in the 1970s or 1980s.¹⁰⁰ Second, the kind of work envisioned by the home labor policy quickly became a favored policy prescription of international agencies who entered the post-Soviet space in the 1990s. Even when organizations like the UNDP believed that it was important to “protect the gains” that women had made during the Soviet period, they were skeptical of the state’s ability to directly protect those gains. Instead, they determined, the role of the state, and of international development organizations, was to help expand individual production among women through the market.¹⁰¹

This approach has been embraced, at times, by post-Soviet governments in the region. In an interview with the Radio Free Europe journalist Navbahor Imamova in March 2018, Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Tanzila Narbaeva talked about her country’s vision for women’s economic and social empowerment. Clearly, the purpose of the interview was to signal to a Western audience that, under president Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan was serious about reform. At one point in the interview, Narbaeva spoke of the new government’s commitment to helping women. While it respected their traditional roles within the family, she said, the government also wanted to encourage them to take on roles in the economy: “Let them be able to work from home. Let them be able to have their own enterprise or manufacturing business. Let them be able to thrive in the fields that they choose.”¹⁰²

The notion that the way to empower women is not through welfare transfers or mobilization into the industrial labor force, but rather by encouraging them to start their own businesses, has been pursued with some zeal for three decades, and echoes of this principle are found in a diverse range of initiatives, including micro-financing. Promoting women’s entrepreneurship as a development strategy is taken both by

⁹⁹Richard Pomfret, *The Economies of Central Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 66–67, 70–72.

¹⁰⁰Botoeva and Spector, “Sewing to Satisfaction.” See also Rano Turaeva, “Gender and Changing Women’s Roles in Uzbekistan: From Soviet Workers to Post-Socialist Entrepreneurs,” in Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Constructing the Uzbek State: Narratives of the Post-Soviet Years* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2017), 303–18. A different but analogous case was observed in Azerbaijan, where Azeri women who had stayed out of the socialized industrial and service sectors in favor of grey market trade based out of the home moved into entrepreneurial activities after independence. See Farideh Heyat, “Women and the Culture of Entrepreneurship in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan,” in Caroline Humphrey and Ruth Mandel, eds., *Markets and Moralities Ethnographies of Postsocialism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 19–32.

¹⁰¹See, for instance, “UNDP First Country Programme for Uzbekistan,” Jan. 1995, DP/CP/UZB/1, 2, 10; and First Country Cooperation Framework for Uzbekistan, Dec. 1996, DP/CCF/UZB/1, 5–6.

¹⁰²Navbahor Imamova, “Uzbek Deputy PM: Women are the Strongest Supporters of Reforms,” *Radio Ovozi*, 20 Mar. 2018, <https://www.amerikaovozi.com/a/uzbekistan-dep-pm-usa-un-women/4305889.html> (accessed 11 Jan. 2023).

supporters and critics as paradigmatic of the so-called “Washington Consensus,” or neoliberal development.¹⁰³ And more than anywhere else, in the former socialist world such promotion was in marked contrast to earlier development paradigms.¹⁰⁴ The socialist development tried to pry women from the patriarchal family and put them in the hands of collective under state oversight, but the new, post-1991 development paradigm recognized women as individuals but also accepted their role within the family. The new paradigm, proponents believed, allowed her to truly emancipate herself by becoming the master of her economic destiny, simultaneously helping her community and country transition to the liberal democratic future.

On their face, Narbaeva’s comments appear to be directed at NGO’s and especially international organizations like the World Bank, which have made women’s entrepreneurship a central part of their development program for decades in the post-socialist world and beyond. Yet, as we have seen, women’s entrepreneurship had its own Soviet prehistory. It makes perfect sense that Narbaeva, who after all got her start as an activist working with the women’s section of the communist party in the 1980s, would encourage women to become entrepreneurs working from home.

Conclusions

As Amy Offner argues in her book about U.S. welfare policies and development in Colombia, the neoliberal turn in the 1980s was not a *sui-generis* set of policy prescriptions that replaced the mid-century welfare state, but rather a “remixing” of practices like “self-help housing, decentralization, [and] for profit contracting” which were now deployed in support of a new set of ideas: “The decline of welfare and developmental states thus involved a profound reordering of ideals that masked continuities in practice.”¹⁰⁵ Post-socialist Central Asian states, to varying degrees, took their cues from the attempts to create a mixed economy in the late Soviet era. The arrival of international development organizations after 1991, at the height of the Washington Consensus, similarly brought a new focus on entrepreneurship, civil society, and an austere state usually associated with neoliberal development prescriptions. Yet they took hold in part because of the way policies like the promotion of women’s entrepreneurship worked in practice, resembling what reformers had pursued in the late-Soviet era. Policies like “home labor” were not neoliberal in and of themselves. They were part of a mix of measures devised by Soviet planners as they sought to reform the socialist economy—creating an exception to the universalist paradigm but in the pursuit of universalist goals. But the logic of this exception changed, first with the transition to the market after 1989 and then with the Soviet collapse. The massive social and economic disruptions that followed independence changed the order of priorities and the possibilities for state intervention in society in ways that made it easier for neoliberal development prescriptions to find a welcome reception in the post-Soviet space. The embrace of policies like entrepreneurship promotion, however fitful, was not a simple rejection of the Soviet past but a reordering of policies developed in the 1970s and 1980s under

¹⁰³Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 1–2.

¹⁰⁴Hilary Appel and Mitchell A. Orenstein, “Why Did Neoliberalism Triumph and Endure in the Post-Communist World?” *Comparative Politics* 48, 3 (2016): 313–31.

¹⁰⁵Amy Offner, *Sorting out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 279.

new conditions. Neoliberal reform was no less universalist than was state socialism, of course, even if its boosters claimed that it made space for everyone to become a market actor drawing on their own traditions and practices. The one-size-fits-all prescriptions of the Washington Consensus were adapted, resisted, transformed, and ultimately abandoned just as preceding paradigms had been.

It is clear that the family and culture were no less central to Soviet development debates than they were to those taking place within the United States or in international development. The problem for Moynihan and the neoconservatives was that the African American family was too weak; neoliberals and neoconservatives united in refusing to make peace with this state of affairs, believing the strong family was necessary for a healthy economic and social order. Welfare policies had to be recalibrated to encourage strong families by encouraging people to see family ties as an investment. International development officials incorporated critiques from both the left and right and paid more attention to family and gender issues, but they adopted the language of entrepreneurialism and personal responsibility to help people emancipate themselves.

The problem for Soviet social scientists was that families in rural Central Asian had proven too strong. When Soviet planners promised to raise standards of living, they counted on two-income households consistent with the USSR's *formally* egalitarian gender politics, but these rural families did not fit that pattern. One solution was to shrink the size of the family to lessen the household burden on women and encourage them to enter the workforce, or at the very least to have fewer people sharing the same quantity of resources.¹⁰⁶ This explains why figures like the Tajikistani economist Hojammatt Umarov supported family planning but were skeptical of policies that encouraged family-oriented production. The first promised to increase living standards while advancing social modernization (or, as Umarov put it, the "transformation of personality"). The second could raise living standards but abandoned some of the social goals of Soviet economic policy. The traditional family was not to be challenged but rather incorporated into a new biopolitics of labor. Ironically, it was Central Asian social scientists like Rahimov and Umarov who held out hope the longest that Central Asian families could be radically transformed, while social scientists and planners in the center (and allies like Ubaidullaeva) most readily embraced the notion that they should not and perhaps could not be so transformed. These policies were not intended merely to shrink the state; they represented a reformulation of emancipatory social welfare policies that tried to take into account the limits of planning and of knowledge, and to introduce something like market signals into the welfare state.

If the explanation for the USSR's policy evolution is found in the work of planners and social scientists toiling, often anonymously, to implement Soviet policies and confronting the inadequacies of their own paradigms, what does that tell us about how we should think about parallels between what happened there, and in the United States and Western Europe, and in international development? Clearly, the circulation of ideas and thinkers within and between these blocs is part of the story but that, by itself, is insufficient to explain the transformations that took place. We will need to think about the parallels between what the USSR was trying to achieve as a modernizing, multi-ethnic, post-imperial state and what its main Cold War

¹⁰⁶Kalinovsky, *Laboratory*, ch. 9.

opponents were doing in the same period. Doing so will give us a better understanding of not only late Soviet reform and what followed, but also the specificities of the USSR and its successor states.

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