

Making Other Worlds Possible

Performing Diverse Economies

Gerda Roelvink, Kevin St. Martin, and J. K. Gibson-Graham



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For Julie Graham







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Post-Soviet Welfare and Multiple Economies of Households in Moscow

Marianna Pavlovskaya

At one end, the party state miraculously withers away, while at the other end the household has been the last hold-out against destitution.

Burawoy, Krotov, and Lytkina 2000, 59-60

While struggles over waged employment and class inequality have been an important focus of social research, other dimensions of the economic lives of households that interact with and affect waged employment have not received similar attention. This is particularly true of the modern societies in the global North where household economies and related economic practices (e.g., informal work, gift economy, informal finances, networks of help, domestic production of goods and services, care for children, sick, and elderly, etc.) are considered by social scientists (and others) to be less important than waged employment and the market-based delivery of services. In the "less modernized" global South, however, household production and other informal and subsistence economies are thought to play an essential role. Feminist scholars have challenged this global binary that elides household economies in the global North; they have brought to the fore the invaluable but unvalued role domestic production of goods and services plays in modern societies (Waring 1990). In addition, the "diverse economy" approach has furthered our understanding of how multiple economic practices fuel the everyday lives of households while being shaped as is formal employment—along the lines of class and gender as well as other dimensions of identity (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Fraad, Resnick and Wolff 1994; Gibson-Graham 1996; Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff 2000; Pavlovskaya 2004; Safri and Graham 2010; Smith and Stenning 2006).



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This chapter examines the multiple and interconnected economic involvements of Russian households during the radical shift of the last two decades from a Soviet to a neoliberal welfare state. The Soviet Union claimed to have solved the problems of social reproduction and emancipated women by socializing housework through provision of low-cost goods and services and creating a widely ranging system of welfare provisioning. The tension between the broad entitlement to welfare benefits and their frequently low quality and actual shortages of consumer goods led Western scholars to characterize Soviet welfare provisioning in terms of both excess, or what I term "exuberance," and lack when compared to Western welfare systems (Collier and Way 2004). The shift to a neoliberal state introduced a logic for welfare provisioning that was new for Russia but dominant in the West: welfare was only for those in need and should ideally be delivered via market mechanisms rather than state "handouts." The expectation was that efficient market-based solutions would replace inefficient state institutions, they would more accurately respond to demand, and eliminate unnecessary services. The exuberant yet lacking welfare system inherited from the Soviet Union was to conform to "rational" Western standards.

In this chapter I examine the ways in which welfare has been provided in the context of changing economic experiences of Russian households. I argue, first, that although the dominant economic discourses that shaped policies of transition in Russia continue to prioritize waged employment in the formal economy, the diverse and often informal economic practices of households have been vital to maintaining social welfare during the economic hardships of the last two decades. Second, it is important to understand the effects that this representation of the Soviet welfare system as both exuberant and lacking has on today's politics, especially, as we turn a critical eye to the neoliberal dismantling of state welfare provisioning in Europe and the United States. Finally, using a diverse economy perspective I would like to position Russian households as a site of ongoing radical renegotiations of the meaning and goals of the economy where, instead of capitalism, community economies that foreground cooperation, trust, and sharing may be emerging. J. K. Gibson-Graham sought to reconceptualize the economy as radically heterogeneous and consisting of diverse economic practices that permeate, in different combinations, economies in various places. My analysis shows that diverse economic practices at the household







scale profoundly affect the multiple economic spaces of post-Soviet Russia (such as formal and informal state and private sectors, for example) at the same time as these spaces are being transformed by national policies of privatization and neoliberal welfare provisioning.

The understanding of how diverse economic practices affect multiple economies on a daily basis is particularly important in the context of neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology emphasizes economic freedom and the pursuit of individual opportunities for the accumulation of wealth as the best way to social security. But it is mute about the flip side of laissez-faire governance and, especially, the effects of extensive welfare cuts amid pervasive job and wage insecurity (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Katz 1998; Peck and Tickell 2002; Wacqant 2009). In post-Soviet Russia, households were forced to absorb the shocks of a dramatic reduction in welfare by taking on these provisioning functions themselves to ensure survival. Drawing on feminist theory I use the term "social reproduction" to refer to welfare provisioning by state and private sectors as well as the informal and often unpaid production of goods and services that takes place within households and communities with a goal to ensuring their well-being. The feminist term "social reproduction" does not situate welfare provisioning as subordinate to capitalist production; it considers social reproduction to be no less fundamental a part of human existence. To sustain well-being, Russian households had to organize many aspects of their economic lives outside the formal economy and around cooperation, mutual support, and exchange (Pavlovskaya 2004; Pavlovskaya and Hanson 2001). I argue that households demonstrated themselves as powerful and autonomous, if contradictory, agents of social reproduction.

In the sections that follow, I first outline the consequences of the shift from Soviet to neoliberal welfare for household economies. Then I examine the strategies that post-Soviet households employ to ensure their survival and well-being. This leads me to discuss their actions as a shift to "autonomous social reproduction." In conclusion, I reflect on several questions: What does an analysis of the Soviet model of universal welfare provisioning tell us about how welfare is provided by neoliberal states? Is "autonomous social reproduction" by households yet another mechanism for the preservation of capitalism in crisis, or should it be read as a manifestation of autonomy and power? What are the effects of making visible the diverse economic practices of households?





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From Soviet to Post-Soviet Welfare

Critics of neoliberalism commonly look to its effects in the global North and South (Harvey 2005; Klein 2008), but it is the postsocialist countries, and especially the nations of the former Soviet Union, that experienced the most intense neoliberal transformation. The rapid privatization of state property in Russia, described as "magnificent" by its proponents (Chang 2006) and a "shock doctrine" by its critics (Klein 2008), has been debated widely across the social sciences and by various political camps (Åslund 2001; 2007; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Sachs 1995). The concomitant and equally astounding demise of the welfare state in the former Soviet republics, has, however, received much less attention. Yet in just a few years, a system of universal social welfare provisioning under "state socialism" was replaced by minimal welfare commitments administered by an authoritarian version of capitalism. An unprecedented transfer of public assets into private ownership took place along with an almost complete dismantling of Soviet-era social security nets. The resulting degree of economic devastation has been deeper than elsewhere in postwar Western Europe (Cook 2007, 11).

Feminist theory and the diverse economy approach both position social reproduction as central to the functioning of a society. Neoliberal theorists, however, whose views dominated the design of the transition policies, see state provisioning of social welfare as a reward for political compliance and an unnecessary and even harmful intervention into the market-based delivery of social services (Friedman 1982; Hoffman 2003). Meanwhile, critical social theories, too, often assign social reproduction only a secondary role because, in their view, only the sphere of production is a site of class struggle. As a result, social welfare has not been a big concern of the politics of transition.

The peculiar mapping of post-Soviet political ideologies also facilitated the demise of welfare provisioning. In the West, welfare provisioning usually is supported by progressive left-leaning politicians, while right-wing conservatives argue against it. The situation in post-Soviet Russia of the 1990s was different. In contrast to the West, the "right" was associated with progressive pro-democracy politics and was opposed by the conservative "left." Progressive "right" politicians saw privatization as the only way to safeguard against the return of the oppressive Soviet system. The post-Soviet "left," led by the former Communist party, rallied against the destruction







of the Soviet Union by democrats and had little popular support at that time. For both "right" and "left," social reproduction was not as important as the fight over the production system (e.g., socialism vs. capitalism) and no one insisted on a separate negotiation of its future. Not a big concern of the day, the welfare system has been taken apart rather discretely, without public debate or popular resistance.

Soviet Welfare

The welfare system that Soviet people took for granted was unique in the modern world. Describing it today on its own terms (while not endorsing the severe political faults of the Soviet state),² feels like recounting a dream that cannot be attained by people of the world today, including post-Soviet populations themselves and the wealthiest nations of Europe and the United States. The welfare services that the Soviet Union provided varied in quality across class and space, especially between urban and rural areas (Zaslavsky 1994) but their universal and mainly decommodified nature stood in stark contrast to Western welfare systems that offer limited, targeted, and marketized welfare services (Collier and Way 2004).

Soviet citizens had guaranteed full employment with a living wage and state-funded retirement; they received subsidized consumer goods and a wide range of free social services, including healthcare, housing, and education (Cook 2007, 24–28; Maleva 2007a). The policy of full employment generated concerns that people "had" to work and not working could lead to penalties for "parasitism." Pensioners, especially former professional workers, were in a position to support their already employed children, who, as beginners, received lower wages than their retired parents. In general, salary differentials were kept low, and working-class occupations were often paid more than entry jobs in professional occupations. The quality of healthcare, education, and child care varied considerably, and so did the size of living spaces ranging from comfortable to tight. Yet, all citizens were entitled to these services (although exceptions existed, and these lived experiences should not be overlooked). All workers, furthermore, had paid sick leave, paid vacation time (although nonprofessional workers had only half the vacation time of professional employees), and access to resorts. Food items and other essential consumer goods were affordable, although not diverse and often in shortage. Cultural consumption included affordable cinemas, libraries, and theaters that, despite state regulation,







offered, in addition to propaganda materials, high-quality and politically controversial literature, film, and performances. To emphasize again, in contrast to Western welfare systems that target only economically disadvantaged populations, the Soviet Union granted the same benefits to all (e.g., low-cost utilities, free housing, child care, education, and health care). In addition, it provided special, mostly in kind, merit-based benefits, the so-called *l'goty* (see below), to targeted groups (e.g., better housing, deficit food items, summer camps for children, etc.) that created higher levels of consumption for these groups (Alexandrova, Ovcharova, and Shishkin 2003; Maleva 2007a; Wengle and Rasell 2008). For example, war veterans (not only Communist Party bosses) had access to special food distribution centers as well as resorts and clinics disregarding their income levels. The categories of "deserving" populations kept growing and eventually reached hundreds of such categories that included alongside labor veterans and military officers, those working in harsh climates.

Curiously, the Soviet state did not provide for those in economic need per se. It both denied the existence of poverty on ideological grounds and kept salary differentials low, which guaranteed basic consumption standards. Yet, families with many children, for example, faced considerable financial constraints. The state finally acknowledged their needs only in 1975 by granting new subsidies for children (Alexandrova, Ovcharova, and Shishkin 2003). In short, despite not addressing the existing class differences and offering services of differing quality, the Soviet state provided advanced levels of basic welfare provisioning and economic security, compared to the rest of the world. Yet, these achievements remain undervalued because the economic theories view them as part of the authoritarian Soviet system as a whole.

Welfare of Lack and Exuberance

While Western scholars generally acknowledge that the Soviet welfare system was comprehensive and provided crucial support to its population (Breslaurer 1978), they have always had reservations in this regard. They often represented it as payment for compliance with a totalitarian political system or an instance of government paternalism from "cradle to grave" that was necessary when there were no opportunities for the accumulation of personal wealth. Neoliberal writers are especially keen to conflate state welfare provisioning with state surveillance. Milton Friedman, for example,







famously argued that free enterprise is a necessary condition for democracy and political freedom, while welfare is detrimental both economically and politically (Friedman 1982).³ Liberal- and social democratic-leaning theorists advocate welfare but only in a limited and needs-based form. In any case, the idea of *universal* welfare is cast as contrary to a market economy and requiring a state that is seen as too strong to implement it. Thus, most Western scholars, from neoliberal to left-leaning, considered Soviet welfare provisioning to be essentially irrational and inferior to what had been or could be achieved within Western liberal democracies.

As Collier and Way (2004) note, the limited research on the transformation of postsocialist welfare provisioning commonly emphasizes what socialism lacked compared to capitalism. This "deficit model" (after Burawoy 1999) leads scholars to evaluate post-Soviet welfare systems according to the degree of reform needed to match Western welfare systems. The yardstick for evaluation of post-Soviet welfare systems is not their ability to provide social protection but the degree to which they align with the needs and resources of the capitalist economy. In this way, most analyses of postsocialism have been permeated by the same capitalocentric thinking typical, as J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996) showed, to neoliberal ideologies and critical discourses.

Another peculiarity of the "deficit-based" logic is that it views Soviet and post-Soviet welfare systems as lacking the rational parsimoniousness of Western systems. The universal coverage of the Soviet welfare system cannot be evaluated positively but is seen negatively as exuberant, excessive, and wasteful. Full employment with a guaranteed income—a dream of working people all over the world—is not seen as providing security but as inefficient and "compulsory." Similarly, universal benefits are positioned as irrational and unnecessary; free housing and child care as wasteful; pensions as a burden on the budget, and so on. In neoliberal thinking, pursuing personal wealth is a much quicker and more efficient path to social security than growing the welfare state (Friedman 1982). Moreover, the whole principle of universal welfare is treated as unfair because subsidies also go to the already privileged populations (Alexandrova, Ovcharova, and Shishkin 2003).

In short, neoliberal ideology has positioned the Soviet welfare system as a price for political compliance as well as irrational and as either lacking or eccentric in its excesses compared to how welfare is delivered in the West. With no value on its own, the welfare provisioning, therefore, was destined to be discarded as an integral part of the Soviet system.







The Post-Soviet Dismantling of Welfare

The pressure to quickly dismantle the Soviet system after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was very strong, and preserving any aspects of it was not on the political agenda of democratization. In stark contrast to the recent struggles for welfare benefits in European countries, the populations of former Soviet republics gave up their much wider-ranging entitlements with perplexing ease.

To be precise, although property and labor market laws immediately changed after the end of the Soviet state, the existing welfare institutions were not officially discontinued. Their transformation has occurred in stages (Cook 2007, 24–28; Maleva 2007b). The first period of radical liberalization in the early 1990s resulted in legalization of unemployment while also ending government subsidies to most consumer goods and reducing subsidies for such services as medical care, transportation, and utilities. The commitment to universal and free education and child care (for infants and up to elementary school) was also discontinued. Such massive withdrawal of subsidies along with legalization of unemployment and privatization of social services took place as the responsibility for much of the social security provision shifted from the federal to regional much less secure budgets (Cook 2007, 25).

A vast Soviet-era system of social rewards to specific groups for their contribution to society (*l'goty*) also began to change but at much slower pace. Although never meant to address poverty, *l'goty* in fact (ironically) became the only type of state support available for millions of rapidly impoverished families even as the state's ability to fund these benefits drastically decreased (Alexandrova, Ovcharova, and Shishkin 2003; Collier and Way 2004; Wengle and Rasell 2008). In the new economic context, however, these remaining components of the Soviet welfare system could no longer mitigate the rapidly spreading poverty. By 2001 more than one quarter of the Russian population was poor, with up to 50 percent at risk of becoming poor (Maleva 2007b; 2011). As the welfare system could no longer alleviate the deepening economic deprivation (Cook 2007, 26), mortality and suicide rates skyrocketed while crime also spiraled (Rosefielde 2001).

The second stage in welfare change began in the late 1990s, when antiliberal opposition to new but widespread and harshly felt poverty finally emerged. This opposition initially fought to keep (underfunded) Soviet welfare benefits in place as the only support for vulnerable populations







(Collier and Way 2004). At this point, the reformers could no longer keep the public and themselves convinced that debilitating poverty, demographic crisis, and social disorganization were natural and temporary consequences of neoliberalization; even the reformers came to see them as obstacles to development and neoliberalization itself. Seeking new ways to spur economic growth by means of social policy, the Russian government, rather unsurprisingly, began reorganizing welfare provisioning according to the targeted, means-tested, and market-based principles of the West. For example, prior to that, all families with children received government subsidies, but from this point on only those qualified as "poor" received these subsidies (Alexandrova, Ovcharova, and Shishkin 2003, 12). Somewhat hindered by the 1998 financial collapse, neoliberal reform of the pension system began in 2002, while labor markets were further deregulated with the passing of the Labor Code of 2002 (Maleva 2007b). Finally, health care and education underwent further privatization by the mid-2000s (Cook 2007).

It was the rise of Putin's authoritarian governance that marked the last stage of welfare transformation by directly engaging social policy on neoliberal terms. Welfare was further liberalized and reoriented toward the logics of the market economy. The passing of Law 122 in 2005 monetized those remaining social benefits and expanded means testing as a way to target provision, primarily for pensions and other benefits to the elderly but also for support for children. Ironically, such aggressive steps were to decrease state funding and responsibility for welfare at a time when state budgets became filled with revenues from oil and natural gas exports (Cook 2007, 27). Financial justification for the elimination of government welfare thus has given way to a neoliberal ideological justification.

From State Welfare to Autonomous Social Reproduction

As explained above, the transformation of the Soviet welfare system has occurred in stages (Cook 2007, 24–28; Maleva 2007b). Some of its institutions kept functioning past the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and continued to provide indispensable support to the impoverished population until the Russian government purposefully dismantled them. But by 2005, when Putin's presidency aspired to finalize tailoring welfare provisioning to the needs of the capitalist economy, the remaining Soviet-era social services could no longer support the swelling marginalized populations.







Despite the popular resistance to the liberalization of welfare (see Wengle and Rasell 2008, 744–46), the state's responsibility for the well-being of population had already been relinquished. With low incomes and high prices for basic consumer goods and services, and the new marketized welfare services providing only a limited support, the burden of social reproduction shifted into households themselves.

Contrary to typical Western and post-Soviet Russian characterizations of the Soviet people as lacking initiative and dependent on the state, they demonstrated creativity and a vast capacity to provide for themselves, share, and reciprocate, as well as maintain social cohesion and responsibility in times of crisis and in the absence of effective institutional support. This capacity for autonomous social reproduction had been forged during the Soviet period because the expansive Soviet welfare system was limited by bureaucracy and shortages that required social actors to engage in diverse economic practices and cooperate in order to maintain standards of living. Doing so was necessary to fulfill important daily tasks, combining full employment (by men and women) with family responsibilities, and navigating the landscapes of consumer goods and services in shortage (Ledeneva 1998). It is these practices of cooperation and reciprocity, I argue, that enabled Russian society to maintain coherence in the post-Soviet period when its capacity for autonomous self-provisioning was exploited to the fullest.

Multiple Economies of Post-Soviet Russia and the Diverse Economy Framework

The diverse economy approach that inspired this book has long been important for my own thinking about postsocialist transformation and household economic practices. Commonly, the post-Soviet change is understood linearly, as a transition from state socialism to capitalism, or, at best, as a triple transition from socialism to capitalism, totalitarianism to democracy, and empire to nation-state (Bradshaw and Treyvish 2000; Offe 1991; for critique see Rainnie, Smith, and Swain 2002). While influential, these views paint the economy in homogeneous terms and the transformation as complete or almost complete. They do not account for policy impacts at various scales, especially at the local scale and the scale of the household (Marston 2000; Pavlovskaya 2004), nor do they address the multiplicity of economic practices and subjectivities inadvertently enacted by this transformation (Pavlovskaya 2013).







My research has sought to understand the post-Soviet transition as a transformation of multiple economies for which the antiessentialist notion of class as a process and the related diverse economy framework have been central (Gibson-Graham 1996; 2006). This approach conceptualizes the economy as always heterogeneous, as always made up of different economic practices (capitalist and noncapitalist) within a particular nation, region, place, community, or household. The model in Figure 11.1 moves beyond the dichotomy of socialism and capitalism and represents the post-Soviet economy as consisting of multiple economic spaces (see Pavlovskaya [2004] for a detailed discussion of this model). These spaces are distinguished by varying combinations of economic practices that occur at the scales from national to household. Using the model, we can connect social actors (e.g., individuals, households, and enterprises) to economic spaces within which their diverse economic practices take place. The macroeconomic shift from "socialism" to "capitalism" in Russia, for example, unfolds as the economic practices flow from the shrinking space of the formal state economy into the expanding space of the formal private sector. In addition, the diagram makes visible the spaces within which many other diverse economic practices beyond state and private sectors function on a daily basis. My hope is that the model is able to account for a wide range of economic practices, geographic scales, and social actors in many contexts worldwide.

Dashed axes indicate that boundaries between these economic spaces are not fixed, their properties often overlap, actors constantly move across the boundaries, and economic practices tie spaces with one another. The model challenges common conceptual dichotomies by showing, for example, that state and private (and nonstate) sectors in the top and bottom parts of the diagram change continuously into each other. The same is true for formal and informal economies in the right and left parts. The point is that although these economies are rarely analyzed in interaction, they are inseparable and must be understood in relation to one another. Each of the resulting quadrants (state formal, state informal, private formal, and private informal economies) also accommodates spaces of predominantly monetized and nonmonetized activities. Finally, a site of domestic production of goods and services—the private space of a household—occupies the center of the model and is surrounded by the economic space of the public sphere. The porous boundary (the dashed line) between the two signifies that people routinely engage into economic practices in domestic and public spaces, thus connecting them by numerous economic ties.





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Using the model in Figure 11.1 as a guide, the diverse post-Soviet economic practices can be placed within economic spaces with certain properties (such as state/private, formal/informal, monetized/nonmonetized, household/public). As the post-Soviet privatization transferred a large amount of economic activity from the state formal monetized economy (the upper left quadrant) to the private formal monetized economy (the bottom left quadrant), state waged employment shrank while Russia's new economic practices in the private sector began growing (for example, waged work in private enterprise, self-employed entrepreneurship, cooperative enterprises, or employment in an NGO). Housework that involves

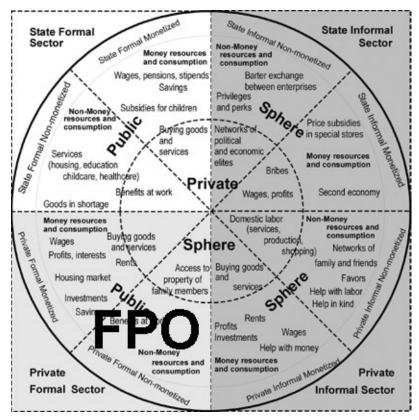


Figure 11.1. Multiple economies in the post-Soviet society. From Marianna Pavlovskaya, "Other Transitions: Multiple Economies of Moscow Households in the 1990s," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 94, no. 2 (2004): 329–51; reprinted by permission of the Association of American Geographers (http://www.aaq.org).







statistically invisible unpaid labor in nonmarket transactions (the private informal nonmonetized economy in the model) takes places within the space of households The informal nonstate economy (the lower right quadrant) also includes work for cash (monetized practices) and unpaid (nonmonetized) transactions involving flows of goods and services through networks of family, friends, and neighbors (such as, but not limited to, child care and elder care, help with food products and other consumer items, and money donations). In the following section, I will use the multiple economies framework to examine the post-Soviet transformation of the welfare system with respect to household economies.

Multiple Economies of Post-Soviet Russia

As the major strategy for creating capitalism, privatization produced a large-scale movement of property, capital, and labor between state and private sectors (from the state formal monetized economy to the private formal monetized economy in Figure 11.1). The reforms of the early 1990s were fast paced, aiming to make the economy privately owned as rapidly as possible. At first, enterprises were privatized, usually by employees who used vouchers that were distributed to all citizens and then by private entrepreneurs via auctions and "loans-for-shares" programs. The private ownership of land was made legal. Housing was handed into private ownership free of charge. Two decades later, however, the results remain surprisingly mixed.

Formal Economy: State and Private

On the one hand, the reforms seem to have achieved their goal of creating a capitalist economy. As much as 80 percent of all agricultural land (Levakova 2006) and 85 percent of all nonagricultural enterprises, providing over 58 percent of employment in Russia (Russia in Figures 2011), are privately owned. On the other hand, individual farmers own less than 4 percent of the privatized agricultural land, and they contribute less than 7 percent to total agricultural production (ROSSTAT 2011). Most agricultural production occurs within cooperative enterprises into which the majority of Soviet-era farms have reorganized themselves. State-owned nonagricultural enterprises provide 17 percent of employment, a share larger than in many other industrialized countries (World Bank 2011, 26),







and a variety of nonstate and mixed forms of ownership have also emerged (Bukreev and Rudyk 2006; Chernykh 2008; Woodruff 2004). In short, where a uniform capitalist economy with Western-style private property relations was the goal, Russian reforms created multiple practices of property that provided a legal basis for the emergence of heterogeneous economic practices (Pavlovskaya 2013).

Thus, the progress and the performance of the capitalist sector in Russia remain much less spectacular than was expected. The industrial output has only recently reached late Soviet levels. Although the World Bank (2012) claims that Russia is now a middle-income country with a GDP per capita of about US \$10,360, the increase in wealth comes from oil and gas exports, which provide income to only a small share of the labor force. The same optimistic study claims that unemployment declined to 6.6 percent in 2011, while the poverty rate, also declining, was projected to drop from 12.6 percent in 2010 to 11.6 in 2012 (World Bank 2012).5 Other studies, however, insist that 40 percent of Russians remain at risk of becoming poor (Maleva 2011). Strikingly, the bottom 40 percent of the population has incomes lower than during Soviet times, and the wealth gap between them and the small group of the rich is growing (Robertson 2011). Thus, even if macroeconomic indicators finally point to a beginning recovery, the lion's share of the Russian population is not thriving in the formal capitalist economy. My question is: what accounts for the population's survival over the last two decades? Certain evidence suggests that informal economic practices have had an important role to play.

Informal Monetized Economy

Numerous studies indicate that a large part, if not most, of the economic activity in Russia is occurring within informal economic spaces. These spaces are colored gray in Figure 11.1 to symbolize their invisibility to statistical calculation, and, therefore, to theory, policy, and action. Not only a post-Soviet phenomenon, the so-called "second economy" played an important role during the Soviet period as well (Grossman 1977). "Off-the-books" transactions between enterprises were pervasive, while unrecorded cash wages complemented the incomes of as much as 12 percent of the Soviet population (Treml 1992). In the 1990s, the informal economy was said to contribute more than 46 percent of Russian GDP, thus supplanting the devastated formal economy as a site of production and exchange







(Goble 1999, cited in Pavlovskaya 2004). It currently provides income for an estimated 18 percent of the population, a proportion considerably larger than in the Soviet period (Maleva 2011). In short, informal incomegenerating economic practices continue to support much of the economic and social provisioning in Russia (also see Round and Williams 2010). The situation with the so-called "subsistence plots for personal consumption" inherited from Soviet times and worked on by families themselves shows that informal production can be a major economic force. Occupying only 4 percent of agricultural land, these plots constitute the backbone of food production and contribute 49 percent of the agricultural output sold and consumed in Russia (ROSSTAT 2011).

Informal Nonmonetized Economy

In contrast to attempts to assess the informal cash economy, the informal nonmonetized economic practices (the bottom right quadrant of the model in Figure 11.1) remain under the radar of the policy makers. The transactions occurring in this economic space typically do not involve money because they directly satisfy household needs as goods and services are produced domestically and delivered through social networks of extended families, friends, and neighbors. During the Soviet era, this economy allowed households to overcome the relative scarcity of consumer goods and services. It involved working long hours (e.g., doing dishes and laundry by hand), building and maintaining social networks, reciprocating favors and friendships, making in-kind contributions, and meeting social obligations (Ledeneva 1998; Millar 1988; Pavlovskaya 2004). One could suggest that participation in these economic practices allowed people a level of disengagement and autonomy from the state that, in the end, led to its unpredictably rapid collapse (see Yurchak 2005).

Welfare: From Nonmonetized to Monetized Economy

The Soviet welfare system can be placed within the state formal nonmonetized economy because it provided many nonmonetized benefits (upper right quadrant in Figure 11.1). However the ongoing privatization and monetization of benefits has redirected welfare provisioning to the state and private monetized economies. At the same time, welfare-like benefits have already become a recruitment and retention strategy in the corporate







world. Large corporations provide benefits to employees after testing their skills and loyalty during a "trial period." These benefits, available to a relatively small segment of the privileged workforce include pension plans, sick days, incremental paid vacations, and subsidies for child care and private schools. Such generous but narrowly targeted allocations replaced the same or similar Soviet-era benefits provided to all of the population. The rest of the workforce, mainly employed in transient jobs, small businesses, the state sector, or the informal economy do not have access to job-related benefits and have to rely on new government welfare policies. Since these policies provide only marginal support, households have had to turn to their own resources and creativity.

Autonomous Social Reproduction in Post-Soviet Russia: A Sketch

The diverse economy approach provides a way to track the increase in social provisioning within households in the post-Soviet period. In the course of interviews conducted in Moscow in the 1990s (Pavlovskaya 2004), I asked my respondents—members of households with young children—to identify all the economic practices important for their household. I then located these practices within the multiple economic spaces of the model in Figure 11.1, which allowed me to understand and compare the survival strategies of participating households. For the purposes of cartographic visualization I grouped household economic practices into four categories that illuminate the ways in which households secure and spend their resources. Thus, formal resources (e.g., wages) and formal consumption (e.g., purchases in stores) include household inputs and expenditures in the formal state and private economy while informal resources (e.g., additional cash income) and informal consumption (e.g., help from relatives with child care and daily domestic chores) include inputs and services that households secure outside the formal economy. From that analysis I produced a map representing the urban geography of household economies that is typically invisible to research and unacknowledged by policy and politics (see Figure 11.2). The circle size of pie charts on the map in Figure 11.2 corresponds to the number of economic practices present in each interviewed household in 1989 (before the transition) and in 1995 (after the transition), while the four portions of each pie-chart reflect the relative significance of its inputs and expenditures. The map shows that all households relied on a mix of formal and informal economies both before and







after the transition. Policies of transition that drastically modified property relations, labor laws, and welfare provisioning aimed to produce effects in the formal resources and consumption practices while having entirely ignored the informal economies and their cornerstone role in the daily lives of households. Consequently, the mainstream policy and research fail to connect class and gender dynamics in the formal economy to those in the informal economic spaces. In other words, although the diverse economic practices utilized by households remain indispensable for societal survival, the society does not acknowledge their existence or the amount of labor, resources, power, and emotions that circulate through their networks.

The policies of transition had high hopes for the capacity of the newly created market economy to respond to consumer demand (see, for example, Sachs 1995). It was expected, for example, that shortages of goods and services typical for the Soviet era would soon be eliminated, resulting in improved lives of women, the primary participants in social reproduction, because households would be consuming in the market economy instead

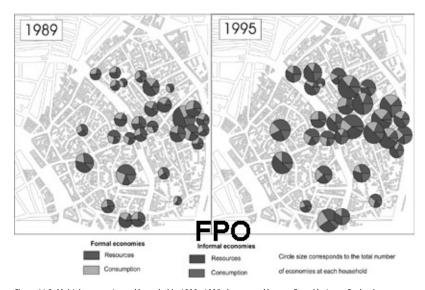


Figure 11.2. Multiple economies and households, 1989–1995, downtown Moscow. From Marianna Pavlovskaya, "Other Transitions: Multiple Economies of Moscow Households in the 1990s," The Annals of the Association of American Geographers 94, no. 2 (2004): 329–51; reprinted by permission of the Association of American Geographers (http://www.aag.org).







of laboring at home after work. The geographies of household economies in Figure 11.2 show, however, that, contrary to expectations, the role of informal economies in the daily lives of households increased after privatization. By 1995 most services in Moscow were privatized but, as we see, households continued to rely on domestic production and consumption. The interview participants explained that they simply could not afford most new services (e.g., food and financial services) because of their high cost. Moreover, although the overall availability of businesses and services in the study area almost quadrupled, most were producer services or services catering to elite consumers. Those supporting the daily lives of ordinary households (such as inexpensive food outlets, laundromats, or day-care facilities) either disappeared altogether or did not grow in number (Pavlovskaya and Hanson 2001). The inadequate levels of welfare provision during the 1990s further exacerbated the situation. The respondents, who all were parents of young schoolchildren, emphasized that the payments they received from the government did not cover even a small fraction of child-related expenses; pensions lost their value; unemployment payments were not worth pursuing; and formal incomes were too low to account for basic household expenditures.

Consequently, households relied even more on informal cash earnings and unpaid domestic production. Thus, the overall number of economic practices per household (as indicated by circle size on map) as well as the relative significance of the informal practices increased between 1989 and 1995. In particular, the number of informal resources per household increased from 4 to 4.8 (see Pavlovskaya 2004, 342, Table 2) with informal food provisioning gaining special prominence: households received food from relatives in the village, bought it directly from rural residents, and grew vegetables at their summer houses (*dachas*). More than ever, households made food preserves in order to decrease expenses for food during winter (also see Clarke 2002; Round, Williams, and Rodgers 2010). They saved by buying food items at more distant but less expensive informal food markets instead of stores downtown near their homes. In addition, households continued to make their own clothes, mend their shoes, fix their apartments, cut their own hair, share child care, and so on.

Moreover, in several interviewed households, women (and some in professional occupations) had left their formal employment—although their husbands were not by any means rich—because of the increased necessity to meet household needs through domestic production of goods and







services (Pavlovskaya and Hanson 2001). In the end, for most urban households the transition to a capitalist economy has augmented the burden of social reproduction and, consequently, their reliance on informal and nonmonetized economic practices.

Research on household survival strategies in other postsocialist contexts supports this conclusion. Burawoy, Krotov, and Lytkina (2000) examined the shift of economic life from the enterprise to households after the collapse of the Soviet state using the case of a timber manufacturing plant in northern Russia. This ethnographic study found that after the plant closure workers relied on multiple sources of provisioning, most of which originated within the families. The capitalist and state sector provided only marginal employment opportunities, while the unemployment and other benefits were meager. It was household survival strategies that prevented families from slipping into destitution and, Buraway, Krotov, and Lytkina argue, society itself from collapsing.

Research by John Round and Colin Williams also documents the continued role of resources and networks outside formal employment and state welfare in the lives of households in the Ukraine and Russia who remain economically marginalized two decades after the neoliberal reforms (Round and Williams 2010). As bureaucracy, racketeering, and corruption hinder the entry into the capitalist economy (also see Ledeneva 2006), households resort to informal survival tactics and rely on their personal networks of support in order to maintain their economic well-being at minimal levels. In Round and Williams's study, 30 percent of the sample reported informal practices to be the primary income source and only 10 percent relied on formal income alone (2010, 189). This suggests that 90 percent of their sample took part in the informal economy one way or another. The authors found that place-based networks enabling the households to mobilize their resources were common among low-skilled workers, professionals, and entrepreneurs alike.

In conclusion, considerable research indicates that post-Soviet societies survived the economic collapse of the 1990s not because of the newly available economic opportunities and not because new welfare policies supported them through the difficult process of adjustment to capitalism. To the contrary, the new policies often prevented ordinary households from entering the capitalist economy and greatly reduced welfare support at the same time. Left to their own devices, household members mobilized personal and community resources (material, logistical, and social)







and developed economic practices for what I call "autonomous social reproduction" that has sustained them now for two decades. By engaging in autonomous social provisioning, households demonstrate self-reliance, creativity, cooperation, and resourcefulness—the very properties usually denied post-Soviet publics in current representations that portray them as disinterested, lacking initiative or entrepreneurial spirit, lazy, and, therefore, struggling in the capitalist economy.

The shift to autonomous social reproduction also reveals the antimodern slant of neoliberal transformation in Russia and throughout global North and South. Such abandonment of social protections and closure of economic opportunities works against the idea of progress and modernization. In the spirit of the "end of history" thesis, this idea is now commonly associated with capitalism (Fukuyama 1989). The transition to capitalism, however, did not set Russian society on the trajectory of modernization and into the affluent postmodern postindustrial future. Instead, the neoliberal reforms have transported most Russian families from industrial socialist modernity into some strange postsocialist antimodernity that is simultaneously postmodern and premodern. It combines information age technologies and mass culture that cultivates spectacle, glamour, and consumption styles accessible only to the narrow elite class with marginal economic opportunities for the majority of the population and involuted social welfare. This neoliberal antimodernity makes the "premodern" need to grow your own food a necessary condition of survival; it forces households to pursue multiple and informal incomes, to rely on social capital to fulfill social reproduction tasks, and to not look to government institutions for support in times of economic hardship.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the usefulness of the diverse economy framework for economic and social policy as a tool for understanding crucial aspects of the economic lives of households not addressed by traditional research. Analyzing the diverse economic practices of Russian households offers new insight into their ability to function amid the economic devastation of the last two decades.

Alongside the highly praised neoliberal reforms that aimed to transform the socialist economy into capitalism, the Soviet system of universal welfare provisioning was slowly and discretely taken away. The key Soviet







provisions of full employment, universal health care, education, retirement benefits, and child care were removed without much resistance or debate as irrelevant to the new capitalist system. Although President Boris Yeltsin's government began regulating unemployment (e.g., the 1991 Law on Employment) and created nonbudgetary entities such as the pension, obligatory health insurance, and social insurance funds (Maleva 2007b), it made no purposeful changes in welfare provisioning. No sound policy addressing the social costs of economic reform was pursued for more than a decade (Wengle and Rasell 2008). In the deeply neoliberal climate of the time, the government concentrated its energies on what it saw as the core of the transition—privatization and economic liberalization. No priority was placed on creating a social safety net that matched the new economic realities with the diminished fiscal capacity of the state. The Russian government quickly lost financial capacity to deliver the same levels of social support and shifted significant responsibilities for welfare to lower, even less financially viable, state levels.

The legal basis for remaining Soviet welfare institutions, mainly in-kind Soviet-era benefits to specific status groups (or *l'goty*), was gone but they lingered indeterminately because the government had no time or political will to remake them in accordance with the new neoliberal regime. Strikingly, these provisions became a major means of survival, although they had never been intended to alleviate economic hardship (Wengle and Rasell 2008). They were taken away by the introduction of monetization of benefits and means testing.

There was surprisingly little debate about the merits of the Soviet model of universal welfare provisioning and whether any of its foundations should be retained. One reason is that it was commonly presented as simultaneously inefficient and exuberant and lacking coherence in comparison to supposedly more rational Western welfare systems (Collier and Way 2004). Another reason is that in general, as feminist scholars have argued, social reproduction has low value in modern economic discourses. It is seen as secondary to the sphere of production and derivative of it. This positioning of social reproduction eliminates the need to negotiate it separately; it is always bundled together with the main economic setup. Thus Soviet welfare provisioning could not be separated from the Soviet system itself and was easily discarded without much debate. As a result, most households found themselves facing the unruly criminalized economy without the social protections they had enjoyed just a few years before. Such double







casualization—by the market itself and by thinned social welfare—led households to what I characterized here as "autonomous social reproduction" or engagement with diverse economic practices that enabled household survival in these strenuous conditions.

I would like to conclude by making the following points. First, it is important to separate progressive social institutions from repressive political systems in order to retrospectively reassess Soviet welfare provisioning on its own merits. Their historical contingency does not prove their necessary connection. It is also important to examine the Soviet model with respect to the levels of welfare it provided as opposed to primarily relating it to Western standards of efficiency. Also, while the opportunity to argue for preserving Soviet entitlements is gone, the fact that they existed in the near past and are remembered well by several living generations could still matter for the articulation of welfare policy at many levels. As a challenge to neoliberal provisioning of social reproduction, a recent working example of universal welfare provisioning could encourage policy makers to seek greater social security for their populations as a norm and not as an exuberant and inefficient exception. Within a democracy, this might create conditions for productive and creative lives, a stress-free retirement, and adequate care for the young and the old.

Second, the diverse economy approach developed by J. K. Gibson-Graham makes it possible to appreciate the contribution of households to the well-being of the society as at least as important as that of the privatized industry or agriculture, if not more so. The postsocialist transformation has profoundly affected not only the formal economy but also multiple economic spaces, including those of households, and it is the engagement of households with diverse economic practices that prevented the post-Soviet society from widespread disintegration. A struggling formal economy and meager welfare support led to greater-than-ever levels of production of goods and services within the informal spaces of households, their networks of support, and communities. The diverse economic practices of these spaces constitute "autonomous social reproduction" unsupported either by the capitalist economy or the state.

Third, the ability of people to self-organize and communally provide for their everyday lives goes largely unnoted because it manifests itself in the informal realm of social reproduction. Neoliberalism disregards even the formal spaces of social reproduction and promotes, when possible, reduction and privatization of social services (Gibson-Graham 1996; Katz







1998), whereas in post-Soviet Russia the "autonomous social reproduction" is largely informal and nonmonetized and, therefore, even less visible. Consequently, it is a contradictory space that, on the one hand, can become a site of heightened exploitation (e.g., increased labor inputs into domestic work and demanding cash generating jobs coupled with traditional gender, ethnic, and age hierarchies) and, on the other hand, a site of possibility where ethical economic practices prioritize cooperation, collective well-being, and mutual support. Unfortunately, the fact that most practices that increase human security remain invisible benefits structures of the state and corporate power. For without receiving any credit, autonomous social reproduction absorbs the destructive consequences of their irresponsible decisions and failed policies.

Finally, it is, therefore, vital to document, analyze, and theorize the role of diverse economic practices so that they gain visibility and credit for the work they do to sustain multiple economic spaces. Visualizing their contributions would enhance the capacity of individuals, communities, civic organizations, and other noncapitalist economic actors to demand that their municipal, regional, and federal governments allocate greater resources to support (and perhaps even regulate in a friendly way) a broad array of economic activity important to household survival (e.g., domestic work, barter, and gift economies). Spaces of autonomous social reproduction and formal welfare provisioning, then, would be valued on their own terms as sites where human security and cooperation make human existence meaningful and fulfilling. Visibility will also make transparent the existing power dynamics and help differentiate between the economies that generate surplus based on class, gender, age, and ethnic and racial exploitation and those that grow based on cooperation and mutual support. It is hoped that these latter economies would become spaces in which new economic relations can evolve.

Notes

- 1. The collective survival of the household also involved relations of obligation, personal sacrifice, and subjugation to customary gender and age hierarchies as well as class exploitation. While not wanting to diminish the importance of these aspects, in this chapter I focus only on the material provisioning practices that households assumed.
- 2. Political repression during the Stalin years and prosecution of political dissidents in the late Soviet period are well known. In addition, the Soviet system







produced limited homelessness, exploited workers, combined legal gender equality with patriarchal thinking, and had controversial national and ethnic policies, among other problems. Nevertheless, I argue that these problems can and should be viewed separately from the progressive elements of the society among which universal welfare provisioning was a primary example.

- 3. The critics of neoliberalism point to the fact that economic liberalization is comfortable with or even intricately connected to and sustained by political repression, policing, and infliction of a large amount of suffering (Harvey 2005; Klein 2008).
 - 4. Calculated based on figures from Rosreestr (2012).
- 5. In the Ukraine, the share of the population surviving at below subsistence levels is even larger, amounting to 20 percent, or 10 million people (Round, Williams, and Rodgers 2010).

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