

AFTER THE WORKER STATE: COMPETING AND CONVERGING FRAMES OF VALUING LABOR IN RURAL KYRGYZSTAN

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This article examines competing and converging discourses on the value of labor in rural Kyrgyzstan. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2006 and 2010, I use case studies of a woman pastoralist, an agricultural entrepreneur, and a Muslim cleric to demonstrate the competing frames of valuation that current work practices are oriented towards. I show how these frames of valuation are situated in the complex history of work in postsocialist Central Asia. The article demonstrates that formally distinct and conflicting ideologies such as socialist and capitalist ideas of labor, concepts of service to kin, and Islamic practice all converge in their emphasis on the moral value of hard work. I show that the main distinction made about different forms and evaluations of work is the kind of collectivity that the labor contributes to. These distinctions allow a greater understanding of the work choices and judgments Kyrgyzstani citizens make, as well as revealing work as an important nexus of personhood.

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It is August 2006, and we are on a pasture at 2,000 meters. I am staying with Anvar and Elmira, their three young children, and a hired shepherd. After lunch the sky turns grey, and strong chill gusts sweep the wide valley. It looks like rain and there is not much fuel left, so we each grab a woven polythene sack and scour the surrounding pasture for dry cowpats. We have been going out regularly to lay out good cow-

pats to dry on the granite boulders that litter the meadows. As the first drops fall, we hurry to check if they have dried by now and gather them into our sacks. But they are not enough, for who knows how long the rain will last: an hour, a week? I check dung still strewn on the meadows for dryness by kicking the cowpat with my rubber shoes. Sometimes I misjudge the pat and get green slime on my shoe. It is satisfying to find a really solid, light cowpat. It is less fun scrounging the ground for small bits of broken cowpats or where the dung has mixed with horse manure, which is useless as fuel. As my sack gets heavier, lugging it becomes more difficult. It is tempting to drag it instead, but that would soon mean many holes in a precious sack. As I dump another armful of dung, my hostess Elmira remarks wryly: "This is our life: collecting shit" (*Bul bizdin jashoo: biz bok terebiz*). In her comment hear bitterness and resignation. But we also laugh. I only realize later what a rude word she used. Despite these hardships, Elmira and Anvar are impatient to move out of their house in the valley by March, eager to set up the *boz üi* (yurt) next to the roaring snowmelt and among thick carpets of purple and orange flowers. Their ambivalence intrigued me: what was it that was so demeaning about pastoral work, and what was valuable?

The purpose of this article is to examine how different conditions, values, and practices affect the place people give "work" in their lives. While it is self-evident that much has changed in the content of work since the end of the Soviet Union, I argue that one important change in the nature of work is the *collectivity* that work is thought to contribute to. I show that the widespread emphasis on the value of work in rural Kyrgyzstan is a result of converging ideas from different sources: expectations according to gender and seniority of service in the kinship economy, Islam, socialist and neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurship.¹ To this end, I discuss the working lives of three informants who all inhabit the same village space and yet have very different work patterns and ideas about the nature of work: the pastoralist Elmira, the Muslim cleric Midin, and Tolkunbek, a farmer and entrepreneur.

I met Elmira, Anvar, and their fellow villagers while conducting ethnographic fieldwork (participant observation and loosely structured interviews) for eighteen months in the Toktogul Valley of central Kyrgyzstan between 2006 and 2008, followed by regular visits. Work was not a subject I intentionally set out to study. Rather, conversations and situations like the one above prompted me to investigate work as something that people not only did, but talked about an awful lot. I found myself surrounded by talk about very different kinds of work: discussions of the mayor's failure to "do anything for us, with the salary he gets," approving comments about a young man assisting his mother on the summer pastures, murmurs about the measly meal a neighbor had offered. Elsewhere people said they had been "working," earning money by attending rallies and demonstrations during the Tulip Revolution in 2005 (Ismailbekova 2011). It may seem a surprising move to classify all these different fields of activity as work. Surely they could also be discussed as "leadership,"

¹ "Value" is used here in the sociological sense: "conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life," as distinguished from value in the economic sense (Graeber 2001:1). My project here is similar to Van Aken's on new constellations in the value of agricultural labor in the Jordan valley (2005).

“kinship obligations,” or “hospitality”? In fact, I would like to follow Kyrgyz ideas in making the opposite move of admitting all these activities under the umbrella of work. Methodologically, I thus pursue a certain linguistic literal-mindedness in examining similarities and differences in the concept of work (in Kyrgyz *ish* and *zhumush*, and in Russian *rabota*) over time and space. The actors I foreground in this article were people I got to know well over a number of years. I chose these individuals as representative of a range of possibilities in the realm of work convictions and practices. Elmira’s, Midin’s, and Tolkunbek’s fortunes thus reflect a broad swathe of economic situations typical of rural Kyrgyzstan, although these examples are of course not exhaustive.² While they each represent a certain economic and social situation, they each have specific life biographies and their own ideas about what makes their life’s work valuable or unsatisfactory. It is these variations in repertoires of value that these actors use in justifying or striving for particular types of work that I will discuss below. The evidence for different sources of work ethic among these individuals points to a larger discussion of competing frames of value, such as Islam, national identity, or neoliberal economics as moral reference points. This could be described as an assemblage of reference points in what Michael Herzfeld (2006) calls the “global hierarchy of value.” I ask what constitutes work as a category for each of these people and argue that one main criteria differentiating their viewpoints is the question of what kind of constituency, what kind of group they feel they are contributing their work to. Whether as a good *kelin*, cleric, or village leader, they each feel engaged in serving a particular group of other people.

The commune I worked in is located in the piedmont, twenty kilometers from the large Toktogul Dam reservoir dominating the main valley. The hamlets along the mountain stream are almost exclusively populated by ethnic Kyrgyz, with whom I spoke Kyrgyz and Russian. Unlike many other settlements in the region, this village was too far from the dam valley floor to be affected by the large-scale displacement of 35,000 people and the local district town to accommodate the reservoir in the 1970s. However, since kinship ties are spatially far-flung, many have both participated in the dam building and infrastructure, while also losing valuable cotton and tobacco fields and homes on the valley floor. There are ongoing struggles for compensation for these losses, while at the same time an even larger dam project was taken up with the help of Russian investment a few kilometers above the present reservoir. At the time of fieldwork, this commune had around 4,200 inhabitants, consisting mainly of two large patrilineages, which often intermarried.³ As elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan, the settlement had grown rapidly after the shocks of collectivization and the Great Patriotic War. It was supplied with electricity in the 1960s and turned into a state farm. As elsewhere in the country, the privatization policies of the mid-1990s were conducted in a fairly haphazard and nontransparent manner, leading to a huge

² The very rich, who have branched out into other types of business, and the very poor, who have lost any land or livestock they might have been allocated, tend to migrate to urban centers with more varied opportunities for work.

³ The exact population figure is not given here, since the commune’s own statistics on inhabitants are not entirely reliable, as people avoid registration or migrate.

loss of livestock and fast-growing income disparities. While livestock was the main product of the region in the late Soviet period, dry and irrigated fields of vegetables, sunflower, potato, and maize crops became more important for subsistence until the recovery in livestock numbers toward the late 2000s.

In the late 1990s, Elmira had been abducted from the nearby town of Toktogul to be married to the son of a family friend. She thus became a rural *kelin*—a young wife, mother, and housekeeper living with her in-laws—rather than realizing her dream of going to medical school. When her husband Anvar lost his occupation as a train conductor in the general retraction of state services, their extended family helped to establish them and taught the city couple the skills of pastoralists. Anvar's older siblings with city jobs asked them to herd their livestock in return for regular gifts of food, clothing, and other necessities. Like other livestock herders, they also exchange their animal products and care for produce from the fields and orchards of their relatives and neighbors.

Ten years older, the farmer-entrepreneur Tolkunbek grew up in an extremely poor household, having lost his father at an early age and with no large cohort of older siblings to take care of the family. He made it to agricultural college and worked first as a veterinary assistant and then as a manager of the state cattle farm in the 1980s. Unlike many other villagers, he actually likes working with livestock and is extremely attentive to their well-being, according to his own lights. Like virtually every other household in the region, he receives substantial gifts (white goods, money to buy livestock, farm supplies, repairs) from two adult daughters working menial jobs in northern Russia.

Yet another decade older, the (unofficial) cleric Midin, on the other hand, did not do well out of the privatization process, for which, as we will see, he blames himself. His family mainly lives off their kitchen garden, a small herd of goats, chickens, and their potato crop, as well as remittances from a son in Russia. Apart from his small farm, Midin is kept busy by requests to assist at weddings and funerals and to pray for sick people. He does not receive or ask for payment for these services, but it is understood that requests are often compensated with some sort of gift. Having sketched the individual fortunes of these three protagonists, let me contextualize them historically.

ANTHROPOLOGIES AND GENEALOGIES OF WORK AND PERSONHOOD

Why does Elmira tell me she is unemployed when she puts in sixteen-hour workdays? What do people mean when they tell me “everyone works for themselves now” (*öz özü üchün*)?⁴ My interlocutors did not always agree on the nature and value of work: what it was and what it was for. As the following ethnography will show, there are strong differences in expectations associated with men and women, social roles and experi-

⁴ It is likely that my interlocutors were particularly insistent on the value of work for two reasons: First, I belong to the group of people who are expected to work particularly hard in Kyrgyz society, namely young women. Second, I come from a capitalist country, and people tended to have strong convictions about what European working lives were like.

ences in making a living and trying to get by. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union that upheld socialist labor as the road to a utopian future, new ways of doing and understanding work have emerged, such as “each to their own.” In my conversations I noted how interlocutors of all ages used the Soviet past as a point of contrast, comparison, and evaluation. In these operations, the rural Kyrgyzstanis I spoke to frequently referred to an undifferentiated, common “Soviet” experience. Rather than distinguishing their personal experience, they compared rural Kyrgyzstani with central Muscovite conditions, or earlier with later decades of the twentieth century. Discussing “the Soviet” could emerge both as a way of highlighting change or claiming continuity.⁵ I treat these comparisons not as reports of “the way things really were” but as an important mode of discussing both experiences of change and ideals about work.⁶

Much of the sociological literature on work is concerned with wage labor and housework (Grint 2005). In contrast, much anthropological writing on work is sequestered in literature that does not bear the stamp of “labor.” Anthropologists, often following their informants’ categories, tend to have a wider view of work than wage labor and include activities that may not earn cash but are nonetheless productive or reproductive.⁷ One pillar of the anthropology of work consists of the experiences of labor migrants, though here the experience of dislocation, demeaning labor, and culture clash often takes precedence over the activity of work as such.⁸ Unlike in sociology, work is not a staple subject of anthropology, but anthropologists of the postsocialist region have frequently studied “workers” (Ashwin 1999; Burawoy 1985; Hann 2003; Humphrey 1998; Kideckel 2008; Kotkin 1997; Lampland 1995; Nam 2007; Rofel 1999). This is not surprising, since the Soviet Union was supposed to be a workers’ state and the “transition” promised new relationships between state and worker, private and public work. What I want to do here is not an ethnography of workers as a social group or class, but to discuss work as particular types of activity that most everybody is involved in. This endeavor can also be read as a form of economic anthropology, an enquiry into the moral economy of work. It is in sympathy with Balihar Sanghera, Aibek Ilyasov, and Elmira Satybaldieva’s (2006) argument on the importance of “moral sentiments” in the economic choices people make.

⁵ Similar uses of distinction and elision between past and present have been noted elsewhere in the post-Soviet region (Jõesalu 2012; Oushakine 2013).

⁶ This article is informed by the scholarship on memory and nostalgia in postsocialist societies (Boyer 2005; Boym 2001; Dadabaev 2010; Oushakine 2007; Pine 2007), but it goes beyond the thrust of this article to discuss the truth value of people’s utterances on “the Soviet” in greater depth. Markovic (2004) and Kõresaar (2004) specifically problematize memories of socialist labor.

⁷ See for example Malinowski ([1935] 2002), Sahlins (1972), and Tsing (1993). In Central Asia there has also been some interest in crafts (Bunn 2000; Dağyeli 2008). Another set of ethnographies deal with “small people’s” work practices, where work appears more as a way of life than a section of life, for example in the work of Anderson (2000) and Vitebsky (2005) in the post-Soviet area.

⁸ On industrial labor see Burawoy (1985), Nash (1993), and Ong (1987). On collective farming see Lampland (1995), Humphrey (1998), and Hann (2003). On migrant labor see, for example, Reeves (2007), Pilkington (1998), and Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009).

Connecting notions of personhood and values of work, some scholars have posited strong generational differences in the postsocialist era about the value of work. Joma Nazpary has described the sudden stratification according to new parameters of wealth that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in Kazakhstan, turning the next generation into young people who find work degrading and prefer being consumers of today rather than planning for a future that holds no promise (2002:6). Lisa Rofel in post-Maoist China detects generational differences of another kind. She finds different attitudes towards womanhood and work in three generations of factory workers: the early socialist generation, for whom going out to work still had some taint of shame or who relished being freed from traditional womanhood; the generation of the Cultural Revolution who value the politics of challenge and opposition at the workplace; and the post-Mao generation of women, who rediscover themselves as demonstratively apolitical mothers and wives (1999:7, 64). Martha Lampland's ethnography of a Hungarian collective farm in the 1980s also distinguishes generational attitudes towards work. Whereas the elderly, remembering peasant farming and the Stalinist era, see work as a personal sacrifice for a better collective future, the younger generation considers labor effort (measured in time) as giving a straightforward return in cash. To them, time is money and therefore, unlike the first generation, labor is not valuable to them for its own sake (Lampland 1995:343, 349). However, the cases discussed here do not all suggest strong generational differences in attitudes to work, if generations are conceived as groups of contemporaries with a common historical experience. Rather, we find agreement among the three examples on the importance of work (whatever activities this includes) and divergence in the sources of justification and constituency of people these conceptions of work are oriented toward.⁹

In the following discussion I examine linguistic definitions of work in Kyrgyz and Russian, then turn to the historical and ideological layers of notions of work people might operate with in rural Kyrgyzstan. The English word "work" is in fact very polysemous, just as the Kyrgyz and Russian equivalents.¹⁰ A cluster of words define "work" in Kyrgyz: the word *ish* (work) is both a noun and a verb. *Ish* can be your affairs and activities, so you may be out on *ish* when you are dealing with some family dispute. You can also say "*anyn bashy ishteit*" (his/her head works) to say someone is clever, that their brain functions well. Someone who is *ishterman* is industrious or diligent, while an *ishmer* is an active person, a master of his craft, or a statesman. Words that are used in a very similar way to *ish* are *zhumush* or the Russian *rabota*. Words that imply a more industrial or wage-labor related sense of work are the Russian *trud* and Kyrgyz *emgek*: an *emgekchi* is a worker in socialist literature.¹¹ Linguistically then, *ish* and *zhumush* are not far apart from the cluster of meanings of "work"

⁹ For a wider discussion of Soviet and post-Soviet professional ethics in Kyrgyzstan, in particular in higher education, see Sanghera and Iliasov (2008).

¹⁰ Russian is widely used in urban areas, sometimes replacing Kyrgyz as a first language.

¹¹ These last two terms were in practice used exclusively to refer to socialist labor, with its ideological overtones.

in English.¹² Yet, the history of labor and current social activities in Kyrgyzstan point to different layers of meaning in “work.” In this article, I follow my informants in translating as “work” the activities that they described as *ish*, *zhumush*, or *rabota*—including negotiating marriages for younger relatives, as Tolkunbek does, or praying for somebody’s health, in the case of Midin.

“Unemployment” is a new official category in the post-Soviet situation, referring to the absence of formal employment, a wage, pension, and most other social entitlements linked to employment in the Soviet era. A large proportion of those pushed out of formal employment and into the informal economy since 1991 have been women (Kandiyoti 1999:9–10). According to censuses of the late Soviet period, between 60 and 80 percent of the working-age population of Central Asia were employed in the state sector, tendency rising.¹³ However, the higher estimates include overmanning of enterprises, seasonal work, and chronic absenteeism. Since the 1960s the problem of “labor surplus” (i.e., threatened unemployment) in Central Asia was a worry, if not officially acknowledged by the Soviet leadership until 1981 (Lubin 1984:58, 70–71). Certainly many Uzbek women found it difficult to find employment and worked from home, raising their children and tending private plots (Lubin 1984:68).

In the Soviet era, not having your work book (*trudovaia knizhka*) registered with an employer excluded you from citizenship rights and social entitlements distributed through the workplace, such as child care, social clubs, and holidays. By the 1960s, all areas of life had a *kollektiv* so that any enterprise became as much a workplace as a community, the place where one might gain recognition by mention on the honors board outside the office and where one might legitimately socialize.¹⁴ The 1936 Constitution enshrined the principle “from each according to his ability, to each according to his work.”¹⁵ The Soviet state celebrated the idea that work—particularly hard physical work—was inherently meaningful and noble. Labor as a means of creating a proper *Homo Sovieticus* was notoriously also used in Gulag camps (Hoffmann 2003:30).

Formal employment and volunteering for state projects legitimated you as a good citizen and conferred rights: it was the only justifiable use of your lifespan

¹² For a similar analysis of the meaning of labor in the Andes see Harris (2007).

¹³ These figures are from Uzbekistan, but Lubin (1984) draws conclusions from them about Central Asia in general. Lubin seems to assume that all women wanted paid work outside the home, which was not necessarily the case.

¹⁴ The “*kollektiv*” in the early Soviet Union referred to the Party, later to working groups such as brigades and enterprises (Ashwin 1999:10–11). Although I have used it very broadly here, I never heard the term used for family or relatives, as this is a group association reserved for the workplace.

¹⁵ One of Berdahl’s informants in East Germany in the 1990s commented on how unthinkable unemployment had been (Berdahl 2010:53). Paid work was not the norm in Central Asia before the Soviet planned economy, which, ironically, first fully commodified labor as a sellable good. I do not have the space to deal with this transition and the more long-term history of work, nor with the important topic of money.

between education and pension. Work, understood as wage labor for the state, was a political act and an act of personal becoming, led by the example of Stakhanovites. Thus, many adults were “civil servants” of sorts, each a specialist cog in the great lopsided machine of centralized planning, be it as a kindergarten cook, tractor driver, milkmaid, or artist. These types of work provided a common basic security and common involvement in a grand plan: the state project of building socialism. Indeed, the pittance of a pension that Kyrgyzstani citizens now receive can also be read as a withdrawal of recognition for a lifetime of work. This monetary denial also denies a dignified participation in social life, cancelling them both practically and symbolically as valued members of local society.¹⁶

The hierarchy of labor among republics distributed work regionally and locally, making the Kyrgyz Republic primarily an exporter of wool, meat, and precious minerals. Until the 1970s, it was common for highly educated workers to be sent from metropolitan Russia to economically and ideologically “less advanced” Central Asian republics. From the 1970s however, the policy of “indigenization” (*korenizatsiia*) brought more (Russian-speaking) ethnic Central Asians into leadership and highly skilled jobs (Lubin 1984:15). The individual benefits of socialist work and degrees of dependency were not equally distributed but conferred according to criteria of authoritative knowledge such as Party membership and formal education for high status specialists such as tractor drivers, economists, engineers, doctors, teachers, and artists. During the Soviet period, access to scarce goods or services was frequently mediated through personal connections, of which one’s profession was often the source. At the moment of privatization in the mid-1990s, being in the loop of information was crucial in enabling the farm management to secure farm property for themselves. For example, it was clear to accountants and farm directors that they would not have to give back or pay for their share of livestock, fears which held many people back from claiming their entitlements.

Socialist ideas of labor inherited an industrial idea of work in terms of time given to an enterprise. Despite the many associated benefits, many Soviet managers had to resort to carrots and sticks in order to make workers not only come to work but also produce something.¹⁷ Workers did not always have a clear interest in producing as much as possible, while at the same time they might well be proud of being workers in a workers’ state. Clearly even in a relatively homogenous “job market,” as elsewhere, degrees and qualities in motivations to work, whether for ideals or for material benefits, varied widely.

The socialist ideal of work was modeled on the factory worker, the vanguard of the revolution, a vanguard with a martial ethos. Peasants and herders were supposed to become *kul'turnyi*, class-conscious rural “workers,” which entailed creating working and living conditions that reflected factory norms: a Taylorian division of labor

¹⁶ Rofel speaks of this celebration of “freedom to labor,” particularly for the generation of formerly secluded women, in the Chinese context as a measure of human worth and source of socialist subjectivity (1999:75–76).

¹⁷ Since these carrots and sticks were always offered by the state in the last instance, this was where the struggle took place, rather than with the enterprise as such (Burawoy 1985:195–196).

and, from the 1960s, increased mechanization and acquiring the same benefits as urban workers, such as pensions. However, kolkhoz workers largely retained a distinctive status, on the one hand, having the opportunity for legal petty trade with produce from private plots and, on the other hand, finding it difficult to change jobs or receive permission to travel (Fitzpatrick 1994:96; Humphrey 1998:4). The collective farms became increasingly stratified, grouping white-collar workers like the chairman and accountant, the skilled, “modern” blue-collar workers like tractor drivers and blacksmiths, and what Fitzpatrick calls the “lumpen” fieldworkers (Fitzpatrick 1994:139–141). The pressure to meet quotas could translate into producing credible figures on paper, rather than actual goods. In Kyrgyz livestock breeding this process was known as making “breeze lambs” (*zhel kozular*), kilos of live meat that flitted on and off the pages of the ledger but never materialized on the meadows.¹⁸ In the accounts of many former state farm workers I spoke to around Toktogul, their production of meat, wool, and children seemed a patriotic service akin to that of a soldier: these were considered contributions to the whole.

The 1990s, on the other hand, inaugurated an era of rhetoric by representatives of the young Kyrgyzstani state and its powerful advisors among international institutions that suggested that there was something deeply flawed about the former economy and work practices, urging radical privatization programs and celebrating entrepreneurship, the ability to strike out on one’s own with a business venture (cf. contemporary Russian conceptions of neoliberal entrepreneurship in Yurchak [2003]). I now turn to the first of the three individuals discussed in order to probe work according to ideals of the kinship economy, Islam, socialist models, and neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurship.

ELMIRA AND *KELINCHILIK*: A FEMALE PASTORALIST SERVING AN EXTENDED FAMILY

Recall Elmira, collecting dung for fuel on the *jailoo* and her comment that “this is our life: collecting shit.” Her day starts at dawn: milking ten cows, processing their milk into cream and yoghurt, then milking the mares and beating the milk in a goat-skin sack for fermentation. After that it is time to make a fire, boil tea, and prepare breakfast, to wash up, and to keep milking the mares every few hours during the day. Her toddlers need attention too, as does the washing, the afternoon meal, the fuel provision, and our water supply from the nearest spring. Just sharing Elmira’s chores for half a day exhausts me. While Elmira moves seamlessly around the *boz üi* from one task to the next, her husband Anvar is lucky enough to have a paid shepherd guard the flock during the day. So he helps Elmira tie down the cattle and mares for milking, puts his hand to chopping vegetables for dinner or turning the centrifuge to make cream. He also gets our food supplies from town once a month or so and goes on condolence visits when necessary. He says their roles will be reversed when Elmira can sit in the warm house in winter with the children and he has to go out and care

¹⁸ Such strategies came to light on a massive scale during glasnost with the “cotton scandal” in Uzbekistan.

for the livestock in the cold: shoveling snow, helping sheep give birth, treating wounds, and providing fodder. But for now I borrow some detective novels for Anvar in town, to alleviate his boredom.

Many *kelins* complain, "There is always work." This is not to say that all women are on the go all day. It is rather that their work rhythm is dictated by unceasing attention to the needs of the family and livestock, the garden and fields. This means that afternoon siestas, tea with friends, and favorite soap operas are often interrupted by tasks such as counting the sheep in or hosting an unexpected guest. The necessity for someone to be there and respond to the needs of people, animals, and crops also means that there is little distinction in time and space between leisure and work. Women's work is thus often more constant and "bitty" than men's work, which happens in more physically demanding, short bursts.

House and farm labor are distributed according to criteria of gender and (relative) age.¹⁹ Men and women have complementary work roles, though these are flexible: it is no dishonor for a woman to saddle a horse or kill a chicken if there is no man or boy available to do so. However, if their counterpart is there it would be a discourtesy for them not to pull their designated load. If someone does not do their designated work, they may even be described as *kishi emes*: not a person.²⁰ To give her best is particularly important for a *kelin* and wife. She is often closely watched for signs of diligence or otherwise, whether she sweeps the yard early every morning, whether she bothers to make her own bread and good, labor-intensive meals. In-laws do not always relax these ideals if *kelins* also earn money at a day job. It is only with the death of her parents-in-law that a *kelin* moves into a new work role, though some delegation may happen earlier if she becomes the senior *kelin* in the household.

Attentive care and application is not the only mark of good work. Almost all work requires skill: caring for livestock and orchards, raising children, sewing quilts, kneading bread dough properly, being an attentive host. But this kind of skill is not necessarily equated with *kul'tura*, although it can be a component of "being civilized." These abilities are conveyed through *tarbiia* (good upbringing) and require *tartip* (order, discipline) rather than *kul'tura*. Elmira has *tartip* in the sense that she does her work without complaint. Elmira's health suffers from the mountain of work she faces every day, and she does regret missed opportunities to gain a formal education. Yet she describes a sense of satisfaction in looking after her much-loved children, in completing tasks well that she only learnt some years ago as a city girl.²¹ Her industriousness has earned her a very good reputation with her mother-in-law and elder

¹⁹ One often cited motivation for marriage by abduction is that the groom's mother wanted help in the household. Similarly, the most often heard complaint about a *kelin* is that she is lazy: this is also the most frequent ground for divorce that I heard from the side of the groom and family. Interestingly, *kelins* amongst themselves tend to complain less about the workload than about the clothes they are permitted to wear (trousers, uncovered hair).

²⁰ Rebecca Reynolds, personal communication, September 2011.

²¹ It is likely, and perhaps ironic, that the very *tartip* girls learn early on at home, as part of their education to being a good *kelin*, allows many girls to excel at school and then at university, as an avenue for escaping the work of a rural *kelin*.

sisters-in-law. In fact, Elmira's in-laws are concerned that with all her caretaking, she neglects her own health. When Elmira gave birth to a fourth child, they lightened her load by sending other dependent young relatives to work the livestock and household with Anvar and Elmira. This *kelin's* contribution to the family economy is recognized and rewarded.²²

Elmira and Anvar tell me, "We work for our children"; they hope to one day put their children through university and build them a modest house in the capital. But from a very early age, their children have also been involved in taking care of the household and farm. The duty to serve the very young and seniors is particularly emphasized in educating girls and at schools. A school poster designed by students illustrates "Precious Ideas," for example the proverbs: "Education adds another head to your head [helps you achieve your aims] and makes you more beautiful" and "Those who forget the testament [labor] of a teacher, cannot handle the tasks facing the Motherland." Grown children later frequently contribute to their parents' livelihood, so it is clear that not only are parents working for children, but children are working for parents and other relatives too, whether earning abroad or keeping the household going at home. Indeed, in the absence of social security, livable wages and pensions, children's labor is essential. But not everyone is fortunate in their children's earning power or willingness to share; this is a frequent source of dissatisfaction and family tensions.

Despite Elmira's busyness, she tells me she has "no work," she is *bezrobotnaia*, unemployed. "The government won't do anything for people like me," she says. The contradiction of being very busy making a living and yet describing oneself as unemployed is not uncommon in Central Asia. Like other respondents, Elmira explicitly compared her situation to her parents' situation in her childhood, the late Soviet period. As Elmira discussed with me over preparing dough for the next meal, a good state should, in her eyes, either create jobs or compensate with unemployment benefit. The demand that the state should "make work" is of course not restricted to post-Soviet citizens; indeed at election times this becomes a particularly important criterion for assessing governments elsewhere too: are they willing and able to create a situation of full employment and thus prosperity? Although Elmira seems to make the best of her situation and is rather successful at embodying the ideal *kelin*, she feels the indignity of "gathering shit" and not learning a profession of higher prestige and income, having had to abandon her dream of medical school. She reflected that had she not fallen out of school into the economic crisis of the 1990s, this might have been different. She certainly wants something different for her five children. Elmira's comments about her work point to a comparative way of thinking about ways of making a living—and indeed, a hierarchical one. Collecting manure, in her eyes, symbolizes the most humble of livings, that of the livestock herder. On the other hand, as they explained over the course of many after-meal conversations, Elmira and Anvar do appreciate the view from their *boz üi*, that their children grow up

²² While her situation could be read as a typical case of exploiting female labor and "false consciousness" of the victims of patriarchy, it should be pointed out that there is an intergenerational "social contract" at work here: Elmira will likely only work like this until she is forty-five or so, then be served by her own *kelin*.

in clean air and sunshine, that their work provides relative security, excellent food, and good cooperation with their extended family. At the same time, Elmira minds that they have no alternatives and that this work does not allow for the *kul'tura* associated with the urban life she once enjoyed.

Elmira knows full well that the nature of the state and economy has changed profoundly from what her parents grew into. Work aims, conditions, and responsibilities have radically shifted. Socialist rewards in rising standards of living, medals, celebrations, and status are no longer available, vestiges being the celebration of Women's Day, Teachers' Day, and Veterans' Day. "Real" work, as a contribution to society, is now limited to teachers, health workers, and bureaucrats, with a possible extension into the plethora of NGO posts. These are precisely the jobs that are not directly linked to industrial or agricultural production. Now only a lucky, skilled, or well-connected minority are state employees, policemen, town hall officials, or nurses. Apart from the top brass, these jobs rarely offer a livable wage. What they do offer is status, a measure of security, and access to networks and opportunities for diverting state funds or extorting fees many times higher than the salary.²³

What are the alternatives? Visions of work are now oriented towards the opportunities that higher education, local investment, or—on a huge scale—migrant labor can offer.²⁴ In each of these positions, it will be significant whether your close working relationships are with relatives and friends or with strangers. Elmira's contribution to the kinship economy is appreciated, but according to other criteria, whether socialist or neoliberal ideals of work and units of social organization, she does not feel her work is recognized, she counts as *bezrabotnaia*. The extended family is an alternative collective to the one projected by socialism or capitalism: the family and neighborhood as the unit of generalized reciprocity, rather than serving the work brigade, nation, or humanity.²⁵ What both kin expect and the Soviet state expected, namely service in the form of respect and work, may look similar, but the units these actions and attitudes are directed towards diverge: on the one hand, the state, nation, and humanity; on the other, the family and neighborhood. These differences are enough to make work for the family or the state look radically different to Elmira. But there are currently further permutations of the idea of "serving people" that are neither economy- nor kin-bound.

²³ Sanghera, Ilyasov, and Satybaldieva (2006) have further discussed the discrepancies between different values, the struggles, and outrage of Kyrgystani citizens at the mismatch between economic ideals of fairness and gain in a more urban context.

²⁴ Migration statistics for Kyrgyzstan often present conflicting data, but they all agree on very high levels of outmigration, both temporary and permanent, since 1991. A conservative government estimate counts 400,000–650,000 labor migrants leaving Kyrgyzstan, representing more than 10 percent of the total population and a much higher percentage of the working-age population (KGINform.com 2014).

²⁵ I am speaking here of different models and ideals rather than actual economic relations in late Soviet Kyrgyzstan: as Jacquesson has shown, kinship structures and other networks of mutual assistance, be they economic or political, remained important and coevolved with Soviet policies throughout the twentieth century (2010:256).

WORK FOR THE *UMMA* OR A VILLAGE: SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

Midin Ake has been keen for us to meet.²⁶ I have seen him several times, officiating at marriage ceremonies and funerals. His wife not being home, he takes it upon himself to offer me homemade bread and jam. Midin Ake tells me how his life was turned around by a dream he had in the 1980s, commanding him to *namaz okuu* (literally, to read the Koran, pray). To *namaz okuu* means becoming an active Muslim, a *moldo*. This implies following religious rules much more closely than the average Kyrgyz: most importantly, praying five times a day and renouncing alcohol. It also means studying the Koran and being asked to lead prayer, to conduct funerals, marriages, and circumcisions. Midin Ake assures me that he used to be a real layabout, a hard drinker, a bad father, and husband who beat his wife. But now, he says, he works very hard for people, visiting to pray for their dead and perform healing ceremonies. This is a duty one cannot refuse, however heavy the burden may be. I hear very similar accounts of conversion from other *moldos*.²⁷ To Midin, the connection between faith and the obligation to try hard is essential. He explains, "People drink because they have no hope. But Islam gives you hope and teaches you *tartip*." Islam is the "cleanest" (*eng taza*) of religions and its stringent rules force your body into discipline: washing and praying regularly, renouncing alcohol, and entertaining proper, cordial, and truthful relations with people.²⁸

Despite these kin-related types of leadership and service functioning widely, "*azyr tartip jok*" (there's no discipline now) is a widespread complaint among people who were socialized in the Soviet Union.²⁹ But not only older respondents often claimed that capacity had now catastrophically declined and had not been replaced by people's own will to work—and to work honestly. *Tartip* here refers to the ability of the state to both force and motivate good work discipline and productivity. *Tartip* appears as both an external force and an internal motivation, one or the other being necessary for good husbandry. Beyond the need to survive, what could indeed be the source of an internal motivation to work? One alternative source of internal motivation is Midin's faith, both as a sense of obligation and sense that justice will be done.

The *moldo* interviewed above went on to describe good leadership as "looking after people" (*el baguu*), like parents or grandparents look after children or as shepherds look after their flock. The successful agricultural entrepreneur Tolkunbek agrees with the idea of serving people, but he conceives of this service quite differ-

²⁶ *Ake* is a southern Kyrgyz term for older brother, respectful form of address for any man older than oneself.

²⁷ For similar understandings of pious works in Uzbekistan see Louw (2007:125). One might also refer to Muslim reformists such as the Jadidists—who were well aware of Max Weber's work on the Protestant work ethic, or prosperity gospels. Similar accounts of conversion can be found in Louw (2007) and Montgomery (2007).

²⁸ Similar views of Islam as a social tool are voiced in Liu (2002:28) and Montgomery (2007:56).

²⁹ Beyer notes similar comments on state *tartip* (2009:172).

ently. He says he has no time to run to the mosque every few hours. But he is frequently out on business, organizing school anniversaries or attending a meeting to bring forward the new village development project. On top of this, he serves as the *uruu bashchi*, the “manager” of his lineage who organizes funerals or helps someone in trouble with the police.³⁰ When I asked the mayor why he did his job despite the difficulties of mediating quarrels in the village, he shrugged and commented that “*elge kyzmat kyluu jakshy*,” “it is good to serve people.”³¹ We have here several different kinds of leaders, Muslim clerics, village officials, lineage “managers” all confirming the importance of *tartip* as a quality of a good leader (whether in a person or institution) and as an effect that such leadership has on followers.³² In all these instances, a leader should have both *tartip* and the authority to enforce or inspire it in others. I heard teachers often mentioning creating *tartip* as one of their primary responsibilities. We also have a bridge between the idea of good leaders looking after people, good shepherding and good parenting, or service as a *kelin*. However, one big difference between the service of a *kelin* and a mayor is that a daughter-in-law does not care for others from a position of leadership.³³

“ENTREPRENEURSHIP” AND “SLAVERY”

Unlike most others smallholders in his village, as a child Tolkunbek always dreamed of being a farmer and looking after animals. This surely accounts for some of his success: he has a real interest in and gets satisfaction beyond wealth from looking after his animals as well as possible. He served in several capacities on the collective farm: moving from driving a tractor to assisting the vet to managing the dairy farm. He is used to checking people’s work and giving advice from a position of authority. On the one hand, he is respected for his success and knowledge, on the other hand, his imperious tone does not make him popular. Nevertheless, he continues to expound on the proper way of doing things—in his view—as a way of teaching, of sharing aspirations, and of modeling entrepreneurship. He certainly has the vision and organizational capacity to deal with his lineage duties and to drive forward a development project.

But his story implicitly acknowledges that wealth not only stems from work but also derives from unequally distributed capacities and resources, knowledge and contacts. Understanding is admired as a legitimate source of wealth while the al-

³⁰ This is not a position to be confused with that of the elder (*aksakal*) who has formal leadership and moral authority as head of the *uruu* (patriline) and may also serve on an *aksakal* court, the lowest official organ of justice.

³¹ A civil servant is a *kyzmatchy*. Another word for service is *teilöö*, used in contexts such as serving customers. The mayor’s motivations were more complex than he lets on here.

³² Gambold Miller and Heady cite Hungarians considering the kolkhoz director as a key figure to success, and people finding him (almost invariably a him) a good leader if he can discipline people (2003:269).

³³ In practice, of course, a *kelin* like Elmira can have substantial authority in the household, depending on their situation, personality, and the respect they have accrued through “good work.” It all depends on the specific household constellations and relationships.

leged abuse of a position of authority draws oblique criticism. In other words, work and the knowledge acquired through work appear as the only legitimate way to material well-being, social recognition, and authority. Tolkunbek's ability to read the signs of the time (obvious in retrospect), to grasp an opportunity, take a risk, show foresight, and fulfill an ambition on one's own is something best described as entrepreneurship.³⁴ Examples of creating a living through enterprise in rural Kyrgyzstan include keeping bees, building small water mills, trading in scrap metal, socks, or vodka, and growing beans. But many of these opportunities require a minimum investment of capital or connections. Or they require seizing the moment during privatization and unfairly acquiring abandoned machinery or beehives. In the absence of the ability to make an investment, opportunities for becoming a hero-entrepreneur are few and far between. So one may well be forced to perform manual labor for someone and take orders as a "slave." Elsewhere, the double bind of the ideal and unachievable entrepreneur has been described as emasculating (Humphrey and Mandel 2002:10). Indeed, falling between the stools of dignified employment and the unachievable hero-entrepreneur goes a long way to explaining the scarcity of farm laborers in a closely related village.³⁵

To summarize, the personal views and life projects of Midin the *moldo* and of Tolkunbek's ambiguous sources of success emphasize the obligation to serve the people, to model and imbue *tartip* and honest *tazalyk*. Elmira clearly also models *tartip* and service. In a sense, this is their definition of what work should consist of. As with the frequent exhortation to work for success, these views and practices have quite different sources, which happen to overlap in their effects. If you want to be successful now, whether as a herder or housewife, the assumption is still that you have to *araket kil*: to make an effort, to try hard, to give your best. Many common proverbs, thought to embody traditional Kyrgyz wisdom, speak of this: "*Köp ishtegen köp tishteit*" (those who work a lot will eat a lot), "*Araketke bereket*" (you will be blessed if you try hard), or "*Adamdin kiiminen taanibait, ishinen taanyit*" (you will not know the person by their clothes but by their work).³⁶ In practice, everybody is, of course, aware of—and hopes to be involved in—personal networks that, for example, hire based on loyalty and sense of obligation or in return for bribes, rather than based

³⁴ Viewing individuals as responsible for success or failures and a mistrust of collective effort has also been noted in Ukraine (Wanner 2005:519, 524).

³⁵ The fact that more kinds of work are acceptable for a woman can be to their advantage in the current economic climate (cf. also Heyat's discussion of Azerbaijani women entrepreneurs [2002]). It is easier to reconcile small trade with a sense of dignified self than for a man (cf. Willis [1981] on class culture that keeps men in low-paid and low-skilled jobs in the UK).

³⁶ One should not necessarily accept the presentation of these proverbs as "traditional" at face value. As Gaigysyz Juraev has noted, the choice of vocabulary and the geographic distribution of these particular proverbs point to the possibility that they may well have been invented by Soviet slogan-makers (personal communication, March 2013). They are nevertheless currently regarded as part of traditional Kyrgyz culture. Lampland notes a very different list of Hungarian proverbs on work: "You can't become wealthy with honorable labor" or "Those who work don't have time to make money" (Lampland 1995:359).

on the quality of the applicant. However, all the people we met above agreed that, in principle, there is no other legitimate, *ethically uncompromised* way to wealth or good standing and authority than hard work. But what kind of work—and for *whom*?

While emphasizing the loss of *tartip*, Tolkunbek and many of his covillagers also expressed a sense of relief at the demise of a centralized economy that often meant being subject to rough treatment by brigadiers exhorting or even dragging people out of their beds to work. It seems there is a new sense of freedom. On the other hand, my interlocutors often cited the Soviet Union as “freeing the people from slavery and ignorance.”³⁷ Indeed, literal slavery was a feature of Central Asian society until the early twentieth century. Slaves could be captured in warfare or bought but were fairly rapidly integrated as low-status kin in the group they joined. In the past, a *kul* also denoted someone who did not know their paternal ancestry—in other words, could not claim belonging to a particular extended family. In most of the forms of work discussed above, there is some form of integration of labor in the extended family. Other forms are integrated in systems of patronage, often framed as fictive kinship, where more senior or wealthy “relatives” employ poorer “brothers and sisters,” for uncertain rewards and some form of protection (Ismailbekova 2011). This kind of patronage, as well as formal wage contracts in the village (i.e., serving someone wealthier), were sometimes mentioned by less powerful villagers with contempt or anger as *kulduk*, “slavery.”³⁸ The description of work for the wealthy as “slavery” can also extend to migrant labor abroad (Reeves 2007:21).

I argue that it is not only the drudgery of sweeping floors or the fear associated with illegality that often makes work in Moscow “slave-like”: it is also that here Kyrgyzstanis are working for people who rarely allow them to belong. This explains why, despite complaints about the lack of paid work in the village, it is difficult to find a reliable farm hand. One respondent explained simply that someone who is working for someone else in the village is by definition a poor person. Therefore helping out acquaintances for money amounts to admitting publicly that you cannot manage without selling their self-determination to others. It puts you in a junior position, like a *kelin* or younger relative, without the benefits of belonging to the group. This is one example of the argument that moral sentiments play a major role in economic choices and that maximizing monetary gain cannot be seen as the main driver in people’s decisionmaking (Sanghera, Ilyasov, and Satybaldieva 2006; Sanghera, Ablezova, and Botoeva 2011).

CONVERGING DISCOURSES IN “HARD WORK” RHETORIC

I introduced Elmira’s work day of hard physical labor, her satisfaction in serving her family on the one hand, her longing and distaste for the *jailoo*, and her early shattered dream of medical school. Tolkunbek’s vision of entrepreneurship and Midin’s

³⁷ This is a stock phrase still found in partially rewritten twenty-first century history books in Kyrgyzstan.

³⁸ Humphrey describes a similar reluctance among Buryats to work in agriculture for a wage, preferring to “help” each other (1998:466, 480).

commitment to Islam as forms of leadership and *taza*, honest work, are further positions joining the chorus that “work is good.” Elmira, Tolkunbek, and Midin all have different work histories and different values associated with them. The label “work” (*ish/zhumush/rabota*) disguises a plethora of activities that may or may not count as work for different actors. Elmira, Midin, and Tolkunbek together clearly operate with a multiple sense of work. In the above ethnography, work appears as a) social duties and mutual help; b) as activities that contribute to a livelihood; and c) activities that count as wage labor. For example, Elmira consciously never stints on her care for family and livestock (a big factor in turning her into a “good person”) but is also resentful about her “unemployment” (invoking the third meaning of work). Elmira’s disgust at collecting dung is not only based on the fact that it is hard physical labor, for this is something both a good Communist and good Kyrgyz *kelin* might be proud of. She is also representing to me, a city girl, how far *boz üis* and sheep are from her idea of European and socialist civilization, ideas that she probably assumes I share. Though a state-led organization of livestock farming that was oriented towards urban/industrial norms of specialized wage labor are part of the way she frames her complaint, I am not sure whether she would in fact prefer a place in a dairy brigade.

In juxtaposing these visions of work, I hope to have shown how these different frames of value jostle with each other, but also how they articulate with each other. I have shown that the pervasively high value of work is fed from different, formally distinct, and consciously conflicting sources of ideology. On the one hand, we have Kyrgyz expectations of the young serving older generations, with particularly young daughters and wives being judged according to these criteria. This is evident in Elmira’s conception of her working life as serving her children and extended family. We also have evidence of a more general encouragement of work in Kyrgyz proverbs and school posters. In addition, we have seen that Islam is understood by practitioners like Midin as a method of self-disciplining and engendering hope and activity in a better future. In all these visions, a better future is said to depend on dutiful work, also described as service (*kyzmat, teilöö*), both in one’s own livelihood and in serving the community. It is also possible to describe service as care, that is being concerned with, attentive to other people, and in the special case of leaders (like shepherds or parents) as protecting and nurturing. A recurring theme in visions of work is making an effort. As the saying goes, “*araketke ber-eket*”: you will be blessed with abundance if you try hard; if not with material return, then with the dignity and respect of a good *kelin*. And if not in this world, then certainly in the next, for example as a Muslim cleric serving the village.³⁹ The ability or will to make an effort, day after day, with faith in positive outcomes, for example of Midin praying five times a day or Tolkunbek taking the very best care of cows, can be described as *tartip*. Although *tartip* is usually mentioned as a positive quality, both as external force and internal motivation, one can certainly also read

³⁹ In some senses this conjunction of feeling can be compared to Weber’s Protestant work ethic, in other ways there are profound differences (cf. Weber [1920] 1978:140–142).

this kind of external disciplining as forcing obedience, an unfree condition. In both cases, however, I think *tartip* would be considered the result of a kind of upbringing or education that fosters skillful dedication to fulfilling a task, whether fostered in the parental home, school, mosque, or Komsomol.

We further find a sense of work as an ethical imperative and legitimization of citizenship in Soviet state rhetoric and in people's complaints about a lack of *tartip*. Although years of labor on the collective farm were recognized as the basis for land distribution in the era of privatization, this does not currently translate into glorifying manual labor as such.

So far, the sources of the good work argument look local: part of Kyrgyz kinship ideology, the experience of lived socialism, and particular versions of Islam. But there is also an emphasis by powerful external institutions such as the US aid agencies and the World Bank—who forcefully encouraged full privatization in the early 1990s—on entrepreneurship as what the new economy requires. This conviction is shared by aspiring businessmen and even very modest political leaders like Tokunbek. Perhaps surprisingly, here free market discourse joins seamlessly with socialist discourse in urging hard work. It is hard to deny that both discourses (on one level opposing) have left their trace on Tokunbek's sense of morality and of themselves as people. As Roy Dilley suggests, the economic model here has "filtered down" into people's "interpretive schemata" as a source of solace and a mode of sense making (1992:23). Since, in practice, hard work is not at all always well rewarded, I take these as descriptions of the way the world and people *ought* to work as a meritocracy. This convergence of discourses and experiences explains the emphasis on the value of work, in the face of widespread unemployment. It should also be noted that this very scarcity is likely to make having a paid job a mark of success, a measure of recognition no longer available to most.

Both the idea of service and entrepreneurship are opposed to the negative image of slavery, a condition where giving service is not a choice, a gift of self-directed activity, or even respectable duty but an onerous necessity and admission of dire poverty. Distaste for such a condition has a very real effect on the rural labor market, both in the kolkhoz era and current scarcity of farm hands. *Honorable* work is an activity carried out for the benefit of people one *belongs* to. In this sense Kyrgyz people prefer control over their work and may reject local employment for similar reasons that Malay young men prefer unemployment to being bossed around on a plantation (Ong 1987:111). If it is necessary to accept to work for people from whom little solidarity is expected, it is preferable to do so elsewhere, for example in Russia, where this undesirable condition does not immediately impact one's social standing back home and where material returns are higher.

So what kind of work do people aspire to, that can both give them the dignity of social recognition and satisfy material needs? It is clear that, in general, Soviet labor ideals and conditions covered all three aspects of work (social duty and help, livelihood, wage labor). Now, they are rarely collapsed into one job or one person's biography. The large-scale withdrawal of the state from the labor market also

means a withdrawal of means of receiving recognition and social inclusion. In the category of wage labor, there is a split between the high status and low incomes of professions, such as teaching, and the high wages and generally shameful content of wage labor abroad. Neither can teaching provide the kind of income that a mid-dling farmer may secure. While the local policeman is likely to display his unofficial income spreading on his midriff, and thus his success as an “entrepreneur” of sorts, this way of working does not earn him respect. In the case of a *kelin* like Elmira the opposite may be the case: she never sees a penny for her honest (*taza*) work but is rewarded with a good reputation and help in the future. She may earn the same kind of respect as the elderly, Soviet-educated schoolteacher collecting a laughably low pension. Now, there seems hardly an occupation that provides a livelihood, professional status, and recognition and is yet not subject to the temptations and accusations of *korruptsiia*.

GOOD WORKER, GOOD PERSON?

If work is the only honorable way of making it, it also appears as a particularly strong dimension of personhood, a project for the self and one’s children, a way of receiving recognition. This is especially the case where work appears as *service*. The wealthy are thus not necessarily thought of as good workers. Even if work does not return just rewards, in the case of Soviet era workers losing their good pensions for example, a working life is still a source of dignity in the face of sometimes desperate living conditions. As pensioners in the village conveyed to me, you can still walk upright in the knowledge that you are a hero mother who raised a dozen children, that the grain you threshed fed soldiers fighting Hitler, or that the children you taught still honor you with speeches at the end of every school year.

Elmira, entering the world of adults in the post-Soviet era, does not fit the general description of young people despising work entirely or seeing it purely as a cash-generating exercise, as described elsewhere by Nazpary and Lampland. However, it should be obvious from the examples above that finding work that is not degrading and feeds self and family can be very hard. Some people retreat from what looks like a hopeless search. I have argued that although everyone knows fortune can deal people a good or bad hand, making an effort is the first step towards well-being of all kinds. Beyond that, one might need a bit of luck, connections, capital, and good relations in the family, but that is not what the project of making a good life for oneself and others must focus on. Statements about hard and lazy workers also turn up as very divergent judgments of the Soviet system, either approving of the strict discipline people were held to or decrying that it did not foster better work discipline. Such assessments are quite different from the statement, “Now there is no *tartip*,” and yet not unrelated: both recognize that work as wage labor was available, even if their assessment with how much vigor and with what motivation it was carried out diverge. They also diverge on where the *tartip* should emerge from: Tolkunbek for example is glad that people have the freedom to develop their own *tartip* now.

I hope to have shown that the multiple sources of invoking work as the source of good things (generating income, generating good persons) create a distinctive pattern: “building socialism,” “entrepreneurship,” “service” to elders and Muslims, as well as “service” as leadership. I hope to have demonstrated that not all kinds of work are desirable kinds of work and that the frames of valuation jar repeatedly: what is proper work in the eyes of Elmira, Tolkunbek, and Midin is not at all the same thing. They all frame work differently, but the frames overlap in emphasizing that work (whatever its content and purpose) should be done. The conceit of standing on your own two feet, independence at the individual or household level (being an entrepreneur rather than a slave) often conflicts with feelings of entitlement and narrative ties that bind countries (the former socialist brotherhood), kin, and paternal state-citizen relationships. Each of the individuals I introduced would draw and weight these links differently.

It is tempting to see kinship as the enduring, Kyrgyz or Central Asian aspect of working lives, with a layer of communist and capitalist (together—industrialized) labor relations superimposed. Can we conclude from the experience of Elmira and the *moldo* Midin and the entrepreneur Tolkunbek that building socialism has been replaced by building a family future and kinship reciprocities as the goal of work? As we have seen, more senior kin and those in need are entitled to help from their relatives. What people mean when they say, “Everyone is for themselves now” (*öz özü üchün*), is explained by asking: *service to whom*? The pastoralist Elmira and the cleric Midin are united in their conception of their daily duties and activities that are “service to the people” as work. Whether collecting dung for fuel, organizing feasts, or teaching at school, we can always describe the activity as making a contribution to a group, be it one’s own children, classmates, the state, or humanity. The difference lies in who each of the people portrayed here are building a better world for: oneself, the immediate family, extended family group, “society,” or humanity. Whether a particular kind of work serves their relevant constituency is one way people judge work and a basic difference between different frames of valuation. It is in this sense that the phrase “everyone for themselves” can be understood: that the collectivity that work is for and the institutional context in which it is done have been reframed. Rather than seeing the survival or resurgence of kinship as the relevant collective entity, I would suggest that serving a group is a continuing aspect of work, which has simply been reframed and reweighted in different collectivities than the Soviet state and *kollektiv*. The jarring of these different frames of valuation is largely due to the common conception of work as a relational practice—but relating to different frames of collectivity. In consequence, work practices—even if they address a similar object of moral reasoning—have changed dramatically in many instances. Different kinds of work have different effects on the scale of *kul’tura* or according to alternative frames of being a good person. In each of the three cases I discussed, Elmira, Midin, and Tolkunbek find basic security and common involvement in a larger scheme of life: religious faith, capitalism, or family love. Unlike slavery, this kind of work implies social recognition and self-worth.

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П О С Л Е Г О С У Д А Р С Т В А Р А Б О Ч И Х : К О Н К У Р И Р У Ю Щ И Е И С Х О Д Я Щ И Е С Я К О Н С Т Р У К Т Ы Т Р У Д А В С Е Л Ъ С К О М К Ы Р Г Ы З С Т А Н Е

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Я бы хотела выразить особенную благодарность людям, оказавшим мне помощь в работе над статьей, а именно – Лоре Адамс, Гульнаре Айтпаевой, Паоло Гайбацци, Гайгысызу Жураеву, Эве Кескюле и анонимным рецензентам журнала Laboratorium.

Эта статья посвящена конкурирующим и сходящимся дискурсам о значимости сельского труда в Кыргызстане (Киргизии). Основываясь на детальном анализе этнографических полевых материалов 2006–2010 годов, я демонстрирую в статье конкурирующие конструкты, полученные в интервью с женщиной-скотоводом, сельским предпринимателем и служителем религиозного культа, содержащие оценки ежедневной трудовой практики. Я показываю, каким образом формировались оценочные понятия в контексте комплексной истории работы в постсоциалистической Центральной Азии. В статье также демонстрируется, что формально отличные и противоречивые идеологии (такие как социалистические и капиталистические идеи труда, понятие родственных услуг и исламская практика) сходны в том, что делают акцент на моральной ценности тяжелой работы. Предлагаемое в настоящей работе определение того, что представляет собой труд и каково его значение в сельском хозяйстве Кыргызстана, учитывает много аспектов и бросает вызов зачастую узко формулируемой концепции наемного оплачиваемого труда, распространенной во многих общественных науках. Я провожу основное различие в формах и оценке труда, являющихся в совокупности самим понятием «труд». Эти разграничения позволяют лучше понять предпочтения в выборе работы и представлений о ней у жителей Кыргызстана, а также раскрывают понятие работы как важного проявления индивидуальности.

Ключевые слова: антропология работы; занятость; рабство; предпринимательство; скотоводство; Центральная Азия; социалистический труд; постсоциализм