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Rachel Remmers March 18, 2021

Privatizatziya and *Prikhvatizatziya*: The Struggle for Land in Post-Soviet Russia

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Abstract

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Mikhail Gorbachev began reforming agricultural production in 1985, but his reforms were too little, too late. For nearly seventy years, collective farms in the Soviet Union created social and economic safety nets for the rural populations who worked on them. Yeltsin's decision to privatize the entire agricultural system and the collapse of the USSR brought about a breakdown of the rule of law and legitimized the massive secondary/underground economy that had previously aided Soviet citizens in securing scarce goods. This privatization scheme was rapid and left former collective and state farm workers unemployed and often dispossessed. Few farmers were able to establish their own private enterprises in the face of resistance by rural elites. Those-that did enter into private farming were preyed upon by the increasingly influential rural mafiyas (mafias). The widespread violence and rural dispossession of the post-Soviet period gave the petty rural oligarchy an opportunity to grab land, opening the door for wealthy oligarchs to buy up huge swaths of land in the twenty-first century. How did these oligarchs come to control so much land in Russia? What happened to all the agricultural producers who worked on former state and collective farms? This thesis will explore the effects of privatization and dispossession and sheds light on just how the oligarchy capitalized on the chaos created by organized crime networks operating throughout Russia in the post-Soviet period.

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Introduction

"This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper."

– *The Hollow Men,* T.S Eliot

Most of the world remembers the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 as an anticlimactic end to seventy-five years of ideological tension with the West that permeated many countries all over the world. For most people, the dissolution of the USSR meant the end of communism and the introduction of capitalism into society, but this process was not so simple as these labels imply. In less than two decades, from the late 1980s and into the early 2000s, three consecutive leaders, Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin, sought to reform the agricultural sector with Gorbachev attempting small reforms, Yeltsin committing to rapid, full privatization, and Putin legalizing massive land grabs in the early 2000s. In the USSR's 1977 Constitution, rural communities and their agricultural production were at least nominally privileged as one of two 'ruling classes' of the Soviet Union alongside the proletariat. However, when privatization began in the 1990s the individual farmers who had worked the land for generations were shunted to the side. The agricultural sector of the Soviet Union underwent incremental reforms beginning in the late 1980s with Gorbachev's plan to encourage family farms, but even after years of experience as head of head of Soviet agricultural policy in the Politburo before becoming President, he was unsuccessful.[1] He tried to make collective and state farms profitable and to move more rural workers to individual family farms, but his reforms would be seen as fatal half measures.[2] Ultimately, these rapid reforms and the overall rushed nature of Gorbachev's *Perestroika* policies, essentially his attempts to introduce marketization, reform stagnate industries, and

[1] Karen Brooks, "Gorbachev Tries the Family Farm," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 44, no. 10 (1988): 26.
[2] Ibid.

revitalize semi-private agriculture, led to widespread decline in agricultural productivity and paved the way for the dispossession of the rural population.[3] When Boris Yeltsin took office in 1991of the Soviet Union's rump state, the Russian Federation, he planned to completely eradicate former Soviet structures, but his attempts at rapid and hurried privatization led to one of the greatest examples of land-grabbing in recent history. Later, when Putin took office in 2000, he solidified Yeltsin's worst excesses by ensuring that wealthy elites were able to buy and run incredibly large farms that pushed aside small, private farmers.[4] The peasant opposition to privatization, coupled with the unequal and inefficiently bureaucratic manner in which land grants were distributed, dispossessed millions of workers of the land to which they were entitled, while simultaneously creating space for rural mafias and oligarchical control.

This land grab could not have been accomplished without the rise of rural mafias and large-scale violence in the countryside. Throughout the Soviet period and into the 1990s, the concept of economic crime differed from that which is understood in the West. Planned economies were famous for their shortages of consumer items, and the Soviet Union was no exception. In order for people living in the USSR to get their hands on scarce goods there was a need for a parallel, shadow economy that worked in conjunction with the planned economy.[5] This was not the only type of crime that spiked during the 1990s, but violent crime and the

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[3] Chris Miller, "Soviet Industry, Sichuan Style: Gorbachev's Enterprise Reforms," in *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 76. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469630182_miller.10.

[4] Wegren, Stephen K. "Russian Agrarian Policy Under Putin." *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 43, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 28, https://doi.org/10.1080/10889388.2002.10641192.

[5] Gilles Favarel-Garrigues, *Policing Economic Crime in Russia: From Soviet Planned Economy to Privatization*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 32-33; Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms : Market Bolshevism against Democracy*. (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), 263; Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), XXVII; Federico Varese, "Is Sicily the Future of Russia? Private Protection and the Rise of the Russian Mafia," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 42, no. 1 (May 2001): 198, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600008225.

emergence of mafia-like protection rackets grew out of the chaotic privatization process.[6] The crime rate across Russia increased by 70.5 percent between 1989 and 1992, but the root of the issue was caused by a breakdown of the rule of law and the emergence of ineffective court systems.[7] The court system in Russia was slow-moving and incredibly inaccessible for the average citizen. Legal reform was slow in post-Soviet Russia, and the struggle to address legal issues bled into all aspects of the transition process, from the power of mafias who did not fear legal redress to the rural population's inability to acquire land through the court systems. When combined with the marginalization of private farmers in rural areas, the breakdown of the rule of law and rise of protection rackets is unsurprising.[8] Marginalization of private farmers and their subjection to exploitation from racketeers deterred many people from attempting to leave collective farms, and those that did often never received land at all. Since there were no legal repercussions for failure to provide land to those seeking it, the next step for many of these hopeful individuals was removal from social safety-nets, and dispossession.

The concept of dispossession goes hand-in-hand with what Russians call *prikhvatizatziya*, or land-grabbing, essentially the corrupt expropriation of land by those with political connections, rather than the local populations for which it was intended. While some people were fully dispossessed of their land and livelihoods, others simply lost their jobs and were forced to rely heavily on trade occurring on the black market to make a living.[9] Another manner of survival in rural areas in the 1990s was through *blat,* a commonly used word in Russia to describe relationships of reciprocity, which can be loosely translated to "useful connections."[10]

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[6] Reddaway and Glinski, 261.
[7] Varese, 206.
[8] Jessica Allina-Pisano, "Land Reform and the Social Origins of Private Farmers in Russia and Ukraine," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 31, no. 3–4 (April 2004): 505. https://doi.org/10.1080/0306615042000262661.
[9] Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*, 25.
[10] Alena Ledeneva, "From Russia with Blat: Can Informal Networks Help Modernize Russia?," *Part of a Special Issue: Russia Today* 76, no. 1 (April 15, 2009): 257-258.

Blat helps to describe the manner in which agrarian reform was conducted in the post-Soviet space, because for many people surviving the many shortages of an economy in transition was only possible through networks of mutual aid defined by friendship. It also played a role in privatization because provincial authorities were far more likely to help those they knew and liked, rather than just anyone seeking aid during the transition period. *Blat,* however, is not to be confused with corruption. Alena Ledeneva defines corruption as “the use of public office for private advantage,” whereas *blat* is rooted in and almost indistinguishable from friendship.[11] This distinction cannot be overlooked, because to equate *blat* and corruption would undermine these networks of reciprocity in communities across Russia.

The multifaceted nature of Russia’s full economic breakdown in the mid 1990s was due in part to the poor state of the Soviet economy just before the dissolution of the USSR, but also due to Yeltsin’s poor fiscal policy decisions that were advised by American economists.[12] The continuous decline of the Russian economy and agricultural productivity caused the poverty rate in Russia to skyrocket from 7.9 percent in 1991 to 69 percent in 1993, but it also made rural producers vulnerable to the rising rural mafias and emerging oligarchs.[13] People without any real hold over their land and without the sufficient funds to attempt to register their land in court were left in incredibly precarious positions. They had no way to make money on their own, and very little chance of fighting off the oligarchs who had already amassed their wealth “in the energy and industry sectors.”[14] Oligarchical control of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and fuel for

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[11] Ibid, 258.
[12] Naomi Klein, “The Capitalist ID: Russia and the New Era of the Boor Market,” in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, (New York: Picador, 2008), 248.
[13] David John O’Brien, Stephen K. Wegren, and Valery V. Patsiorkvosky, “Poverty, Inequality and Subjective Quality of Life in Rural Russia during the Transition to a Market Economy: 1991-2006,” *Poverty & Public Policy* 3, no. 2 (2011): 11. https://doi.org/10.2202/1944-2858.1089.
[14] Oane Visser, Natalia Mamonova, and Max Spoor, “Oligarchs, Megafarms and Land Reserves: Understanding Land Grabbing in Russia.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3–4 (July 2012): 909. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2012.675574.

tractors already placed them in positions of power over farmers who could not work without directly or indirectly lining the pockets of the oligarchy. Many former collective farm workers were well versed in the farming techniques required to grow crops, but "collective farm leaders and specialists made all the technical decisions" regarding farm management.[15] This issue, along with the fact that new farm owners did not have networks of support to rely on for fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides and other necessary farm equipment, mean that they struggled to achieve a level of productivity that would allow them to turn a profit.[16] As many of these individuals struggled to become self-sustaining in their farms, oligarchs amassed wealth in other newly privatized industries. When Putin finally legalized the buying and selling of land in 2002, these oligarchs were fully prepared to begin investing large amounts of money into Russian land that had been unproductive for nearly a decade.[17] The rural mobsters who had been exploiting rural workers for years and preventing them from becoming more independent, directly and indirectly aided the Russian oligarchs in their quest for control of the land. In rural areas, this emerged as farmers' forced participation in expensive protection rackets organized by local mafias that had filled the space left by the state's retreat.[18] Ultimately, the combined quest for power and control by both the rural mafias and newly wealthy oligarchs allowed them to work together in dispossessing and disenfranchising the rural working class so that they could get ahead.

Caroline Humphrey discusses the complex issues that arose from Russian privatization and how it led to the creation of a new group she terms 'the dispossessed.' Her arguments approach the issue of privatization from a sociological and anthropological perspective, even

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[15] Katherine Verdery, "The Death of Peasantry: From Smallholders to Rentiers," in *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 192. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv1nhm40.14.
[16] Ibid, 191.
[17] Visser, Mamonova, and Spoor, 904.
[18] Varese, 207.

though it is often studied as an economic and political event. Humphrey links this new group of 'dispossessed' people to the rise in organized crime and the explosion of the shadow economy.[19] Humphrey is not the only scholar who addresses dispossession and the shadow economy, but rather she has added to the historiography on the subject.[20] Her approach focuses on the formation of a Russian identity after the tumultuous period that brought about the end of the USSR in 1991. Her work goes hand-in-hand with that of Katherine Verdery and Jessica Allina-Pisano, despite their analysis on different regions, ethnicities and nationalities in the former Soviet Union. All three discuss how the rapid privatization effort left many without work or purpose. These authors, with Allina-Pisano writing about Russia and Verdery focusing on Romania, view privatization through the lens of anthropological study and utilize a methodology that is common in the field of anthropology.[21] Their findings, despite being specific to one region or ethnic group, push back against the Western economist's theory that in order for a privatized agricultural sector to flourish there had to be subjected to an economic shock therapy.

The idea of 'shock therapy' was pushed by Jeffree Sachs when he went to Russia in the 1990s to aid with the transition, and he was backed by some of the leading political and economic figures in the world such as Larry Summers, Bob Rubin and Bill Clinton.[22] However, their efforts to shock the Russian economy into free-market capitalism were unsuccessful and

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[19] Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism,* XXVII.

[20] The shadow/secondary/parallel economy is discussed at length in: Alexander Vorbrugg, "Not About Land, Not Quite a Grab: Dispersed Dispossession in Rural Russia," *Antipode* 51, no. 3 (June 2019): 1022-1026. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12523; Stephen Wegren, "How Peasants Adapt: Large Farms and Farm Managers," in *The Moral Economy Reconsidered: Russia's Search for Agrarian Capitalism : Russia's Search for Agrarian Capitalism*, 61–104, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=308265. ; Jessica Allina-Pisano, "The Two Faces of Petr Arkad'evich: Land and Dispossession in Russia's Southwest, ca. 2000," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 71 (2007): 70–90.

[21] The concepts of dispossession, marketization and shadow economies have been studied in a variety of post-socialist contexts, see: Nazpary, Joma. *Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan*. London, United Kingdom: Pluto Press, 2001. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=3386177.; Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania*.

[22] Klein, 248.

left the country shattered. Yeltsin and his reformers sought to introduce a market economy in Russia through the five pillars of shock therapy: "liberalization of prices, control over money and credit, eliminating budget deficits, opening Russia to foreign-direct investment and privatizing business."[23] The literature produced by economists of this era focused on finding an economic reasoning for the failure and looking solely at the effects it would have on markets. However, Humphrey, Verdery and Allina-Pisano analyze shock therapy's repercussions through the lens of political science and anthropology, rather than focusing specifically on policy and key shock therapists such as Yegor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais.[24] These authors are essentially trying to unravel the social effects that privatization brought about in rural communities, and how the worlds of former collective farm workers were changed when Yeltsin began privatizing land.

This thesis seeks to draw a connection between privatization, the rise of rural crime and their later support of oligarchs seeking to purchase or control massive swaths of Russian agricultural land. I am particularly interested in the areas left unconnected by the vital works produced by Humphrey, Verdery and Allina-Pisano. While they set the stage through anthropological study of post-Soviet rural communities, their work is generally contemporary with the issues they discuss. I hope to expand up on the idea of shadow markets, dispossessed people and overall struggle for land in the Russian countryside. This will be done by analyzing rural populations and their struggle to obtain land promised to them by Yeltsin, and then linking the vulnerability of these populations to the rise of organized crime. While other scholars have addressed the issue of organized crime, few have written comprehensive social histories of the

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[23] Christopher Hugyen, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Boris Yeltsin and the Failure of Shock Therapy," *Constellation* 3, no. 1 (2012): 64, https://doi.org/10.29173/cons16287.

[24] For an in-depth analysis of shock therapy, inequality and comparisons between various post-socialist transitions see: David Ellerman, "Pragmatism versus Economic Ideology: China versus Russia," *Real World Economics Review* 52, no. 10 (2010): 2–27.; Thomas F. Remington, *The Politics of Inequality in Russia*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=713065.

connection between a dispossessed and vulnerable rural population, rural mafias and the eventual control of agricultural land by oligarchs in the early twenty-first century.

This thesis will unravel the difference between *privatizatiziya* (privatization) and *prikhvatizatziya* (land grabbing), and analyze the challenges resulting in land-grabbing and massive social shifts in the agricultural sector of Russia beginning in the 1990s. More specifically, by examining literature produced by anthropologists, sociologists, economists and political scientists I aim to gain an understanding of how rural society functioned and struggled in the Soviet and post-Soviet period, with particular attention to 1985-2002.[25] The analysis of this highly complex period will proceed as follows. The first chapter will analyze Gorbachev's tentative reforms; the second will focuses on Yeltsin's rapid privatization; the third will detail the effect of these reforms on the rural population by emphasizing such processes as dispossession and the rise of organized crime; finally, the fourth chapter will examine the emergence of Russian oligarchs that started during Yeltsin's period and continued and flourished during Putin's presidency.

The methodology used in this paper is mostly qualitative, but also utilizes quantitative data, and has a particular focus on the lived experience of the post-Soviet transition period. In order to understand the mindset of the average person living in the post-Soviet world about

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[25] For additional analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet rural life, see: David J. O'Brien, and Valery V. Patsiorkovsky, *Measuring Social and Economic Change in Rural Russia : Surveys from 1991 to 2003*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006); Liubov Denisova, *Rural Women in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*, translated by Irina Mukhina, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010). http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=589583; Liubov Denisova, *Rural Russia : Economic, Social, and Moral Crisis*, (Commack, N.Y.: Nova Science, 1995); Mark Kramer, *Travels with a Hungry Bear : A Journey to the Russian Heartland*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Caroline Humphrey, *Marx Went Away--but Karl Stayed behind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Melissa Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia Transformation in Buryatia*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014); Grigory Ioffe, Tatyana Nefedova, and Ilya Zaslavsky, *The End of Peasantry? : The Disintegration of Rural Russia*, (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); Jessica Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Land Rights in the Black Earth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

which I wrote, I have relied heavily on Russian newspaper articles, interviews with reformers and even scholarly works produced by Russian authors. Due to how recent this history is, there is a notable lack of archival sources used in this thesis, but because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, travel to Russia was not possible during the past year. The lack of archival sources, however, has been rectified by extensive secondary sources and newspaper articles which permitted me to understand better the emotional burden of the privatization of the land. Indeed, newspapers oftentimes offer the best insight to how citizens felt during the period of privatization. Archival sources offer data and statistics, but often leave out the vital part of this history: namely, the changing social landscape and its vulnerability to rural mafias and oligarchs. The evidence found in articles and transcribed interviews reveals not only the dissatisfaction and disillusionment felt by many individuals in rural communities, but also portrays more graphically how economic and political collapses were felt by the average person. Through these accounts it was possible to uncover the connection between the influence of *prikhvatizatziya*, rural mafias and the increasing power of the oligarchs in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Gorbachev's Reforms: The Soviet Agrarian Landscape in 1985-1991

"We stubbornly marched on and never thought of retreating."

—Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika*

It is often noted in the newspapers of the day that in order to understand the intention of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, one must look at his upbringing, childhood and youth. Long before Gorbachev was President of the Soviet Union, before he was the Central Committee Secretary of Agriculture, he was just Mikhail Gorbachev, born in 1931 to a family of collective farmers in Stavropol'kai during "one of the biggest manmade famines of the century."[26] He came to power in 1985, not as a leader with a loose grasp of the agricultural sector, but rather someone who had lived the experience of collectivized agriculture and all the struggles that came from working on a collective farm. The collective and state farms operating when Gorbachev became General Secretary were first created under Iosef Stalin's first Five Year Plan in 1929, and they were "mechanized agricultural unit[s] producing for the state in the same way as large commercial farms produce for the market in a capitalist system."[27] State farms were very similar, but rather than labor being provided by those with nominal tenure over the land, state farms paid laborers wages.[28] It is important to note that the ineffective and unproductive collective and state farms that Gorbachev inherited when he came to power in 1985 were not idyllic places that perfectly encapsulated egalitarianism and collective ownership. From their inception, life on collective farms became strictly hierarchical, and "such stratification resulted in a marked

[26] Chris Miller, "Gorbachev's Agriculture Agenda: Decollectivization and the Politics of Perestroika," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 1 (2016): 98, https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2016.0007.
[27] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants : Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 39, http://web.a.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=5b302ea8-9620-4c3f-bd53-6de90c46386e%40sdc-v-sessmgr03&vid=0&format=EB.
[28] Ibid, 39.

difference in pay, access to goods and standard of living."[29] This systemic inequality and stratified hierarchy made life on collective farms difficult for anyone not among a privileged class, and these problems persisted even as Gorbachev became President in 1985.

Gorbachev becoming Secretary General in 1985 could have meant successful economic and social reforms that would have saved the USSR from its pervasive stagnation, but the politics and infighting occurring among Party members blocked many proposed reforms. Economists, political scientists and historians have debated Gorbachev's failure to effectively reform the agricultural sector in his *Perestroika* policies, and a common consensus is that had Gorbachev "focused on farms rather than industry," *perestroika* may have been successful.[30] Included in these agricultural *perestroika* policies were a "restructuring of the country's agricultural bureaucracy" and "adopting farm leasing on a wide scale."[31] However, Gorbachev understood the complexities of the rural landscape, and his years as the secretary of agriculture did not leave him entirely unprepared to deal with the outdated and stagnant Soviet agrarian policies. He acknowledged the hinderances caused by a planned economy and drawing on his experience in Stavropol'kai he stated that "employees' incomes must strictly depend on end production results" across all industries.[32] Gorbachev did not begin his reforms with the agricultural sector, although doing so would have made sense given his upbringing and previous role as the secretary of agriculture.

When he took power in 1985, Gorbachev had a full grasp on the Soviet Union's economic situation. When he was still a young politician he had been approached by the then

[29] Samantha Lomb, "Personal and Political: A Micro-History of the 'Red Column' Collective Farm, 1935-36," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* 0, no. 2404 (January 20, 2016): 4. https://doi.org/10.5195/cbp.2015.209.
[30] Miller, "Gorbachev's Agricultural Agenda: Decollectivization and the Politics of Perestroika," 95.
[31] Ibid, 107-108.
[32] Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country in the World*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 86.

head of the state planning committee, Nikolai Baibakov, to propose a military budget cut in an effort to reduce state spending, which he rejected.[33] The military was not the only sector of the economy that was exempt from budget cuts proposed by Gorbachev and his reformers when he became General Secretary of the USSR. However, the fact that even as a young politician Gorbachev was well-aware that there were parts of the state budget exempt from proposed cuts indicates the rigidity of many of the Soviet institutions Gorbachev was preparing to inherit. Among the sectors of the Soviet economy that were deemed 'untouchable' by Gorbachev and his predecessors were "the military, the farms and the energy sector" due to the fact that in order to preserve state socialism, state-owned industries needed to remain solvent.[34] This was done in part because these sectors held an incredible amount of political power, but also because Gorbachev intended for *perestroika* to simply be a "reform designed to overcome stagnation (*zastoi*) of the previous twenty years."[35] However, these programs coincided with the 1986 collapse of oil prices, which was a key export for the Soviet Union and when these prices collapsed it became nearly impossible to sustain other costly reforms.[36] From the onset of Gorbachev's reforms, he made it clear that he wanted to preserve the Soviet state, and simply revitalize the socialist economy that he inherited from the Brezhnev era. This was in line with how Soviet citizens felt about their own situation, and surveys indicate that while "significant

[33] Chris Miller, "Gorbachev's Gamble: Interest Group Politics and Perestroika," in *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 59, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469630182_miller.9.
[34] Miller, "Gorbachev's Gamble: Interest Group Politics and Perestroika," 60.
[35] Marc Garcelon, "The Specialist Rebellion in Moscow and the Genesis of a Revolutionary Situation," in *Revolutionary Passage: From Soviet To Post-Soviet Russia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005) http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bt278.6, 36.
[36] Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65-67, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=279425.; For additional reading on the effects of the oil price crisis, see: Raszewski, Slawomir, "The Political Economy of Energy in Russia," in *The International Political Economy of Oil and Gas*, International Political Economy Series, (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2017) 23-39.

majorities favored *perestroika* and a market economy… they did not want such practical outcomes of a market economy as free prices, unemployment or rich people."[37] However, the Soviet Union's economy could not be revitalized with Western capitalist economic models, and neither could a revival of Stalinist policies reverse the decades-long stagnation.* There were a plethora of issues plaguing the Soviet Union, and a stagnate economy was only one of them.

One of Gorbachev's first decisions as General Secretary was to tackle the rampant alcoholism that he believed was hindering productivity and heavily contributing to the stagnation that had begun under Brezhnev. Within two months he had "launched [the government's] antialcohol campaign" designed to curtail drunkenness at work and in public spaces.[38] However, this won him no favors among Soviet citizens who had become used to being able to buy vodka at low prices. Under these new policies intended to curtail alcoholism, a half-liter of vodka cost "10 rubles, which was around a day's pay for the average worker."[39] Vodka sales per capita were significantly decreased as well, because it "could be bought in only a limited number of shops and within limited hours."[40] This policy was successful in decreasing Soviet alcohol consumption, with diseases, crimes and accidents "involving alcohol… were reported to have fallen by 25-40 percent in the first two years of the campaign."[41] While it was true that alcohol consumption fell significantly, the state also lost nine billion rubles in sales tax revenue that could have been used to fund the expensive reform programs Gorbachev enacted.[42] The official

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[37] Mark Harrison, "Coercion, Compliance, and the Collapse of the Soviet Command Economy," *The Economic History Review* 55, no. 3 (2002): 399.
*This was tried in Romania but was unsuccessful, see: Katherine Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).
[38] Anna L. Bailey, "Soviet Policy Doublethink," in *Politics under the Influence: Vodka and Public Policy in Putin's Russia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018): 24, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt21h4vnw.6.
[39] Bailey, 24.
[40] Bailey, 24.
[41] Miller, "Gorbachev's Gamble: Interest Group Politics and Perestroika," 62.
[42] Brooks, 28.

statistics show that the program nominally achieved its goals, but its unintended consequences led to an increase in people's reliance on the unofficial, home-brewed liquor market.

The anti-alcohol campaign was designed to prevent excessive drunkenness and increase productivity in all workplaces. However, many critics of the campaign believed that although data showed alcohol consumption decreased "people turned to home-brewed liquor, *samogon*."[43] The claim that people turned to *samogon* only when they could no longer afford to buy vodka is not baseless claim, mainly due to the prevalence of home-brewed liquor prior to Gorbachev's campaign. While home-brewed liquor has been prevalent in Russia for centuries, this did not equate a consistent and safe manner of brewing it, especially in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Nominally the anti-alcohol campaign was effective, but in reality *samogon* was still widely used and posed health risks because it often included 94 percent ethanol and a host of other chemicals.[44] The official statistic for death due to alcohol poisoning in the USSR between 1988-1989 was 8.7/100,000 people, but over the next decade during the height of the illegal alcohol trade that figure more than tripled to 28.7/100,000.[45] As the state cracked down on the official sale of alcohol under Gorbachev, people were forced to unregulated and often unsafe alternatives. *Samogon* can be found throughout Russian history as a means of connection for rural communities, but it also was a means of subverting state control.

Home-brewed liquor has a long history in Russia, not only in social settings but it also had a major role in the shadow economy that existed throughout the Soviet period. Beginning in the Soviet period and continuing into the years after the dissolution of the USSR, "moonshine

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[43] Miller, "Gorbachev's Gamble: Interest Group Politics and Perestroika," 62.
[44] A. M. Stickley, Leinsalu, E. Andreev, Y. Razvodovsky, D. Vagero, and M. McKee, "Alcohol Poisoning in Russia and the Countries in the European Part of the Former Soviet Union, 1970 2002," *The European Journal of Public Health* 17, no. 5 (October 1, 2007): 447, https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckl275.
[45] Ibid, 445.

[home-brewed liquor] was compensation to workers," especially those not officially employed on a state or collective farm.[46] This indicates that alcohol consumption increased in rural communities, and also that new federal laws did not carry the influence and weight they once did.[47] While the equivalence with moonshine and hard currency is difficult, it has been well documented that alcohol such as *samogon* was accepted as a form of payment in rural areas and older generations only expressed discontent with "the proliferation of households engaged in moonshine production" in the post-Soviet period.[48] Alcohol as a form of payment was thus something that many rural people were unconcerned about, and it was even expected to share the *samogon* with one's employer after completion of a job.[49] Alcohol consumption was normalized during the Soviet period, these sentiments did not spring up out of nowhere, and this normalization posed problems for Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign. Not only had Gorbachev lost the support of many Soviet citizens through his decision to limit vodka sales and consumption, but the campaign also undermined his own plan for economic reform.

Even as alcohol consumption fell, there was not a long-term increase in productivity as Gorbachev planned. The hope had been to remove the influence of alcohol and increase productivity through ensuring workers were sober during work hours. However, Gorbachev's campaign did not take into account the amount of the federal budget that came from taxes collected on vodka. Losses due to the "falling sales of vodka… 15 billion" rubles, but there was no way for the State to make up these losses in their current economy.[50] The government was

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[46] Douglas Rogers, "Moonshine, Money, and the Politics of Liquidity in Rural Russia," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 1 (2005): 63.
[47] Vladimir Treml, "Soviet and Russian Statistics on Alcohol Consumption and Abuse," in *Premature Death in the New Independent States*, (Washington, D.C., UNITED STATES: National Academies Press, 1997), 225, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=3375686.
[48] Rogers, 63.
[49] Ibid, 66.
[50] Miller, "Gorbachev's Gamble Interest Group Politics and Perestroika," 64.

losing billions on the official, planned economy as they limited the amount of vodka that could be sold legally. However, the rural shadow economy flourished in this time as the use of moonshine and other home-made liquor skyrocketed. In the town of Sepych, a rural village whose primary employer was a large state-farm during the Soviet period, use of moonshine as a form of currency specifically undermined the anti-alcohol campaign.[51] Additionally, it was a key part of the shadow economy that powered the Soviet Union during times when citizens had little access to liquid assets.[52] As the central government lost incredible amounts of revenue from the alcohol limitations, thus reducing the amount of liquid assets circulating in the market, these rural areas like Sepych relied more heavily on barter and their long-standing informal economies. However, the situation would only continue to worsen as Gorbachev attempted to make major economic reforms without reducing the budgets of the major sources of state spending.

In the years following his controversial alcohol ban, Gorbachev attempted reform at many levels of industry, politics and the broader economy. In an effort to offset the cost of *perestroika*, the Politburo went ahead with the plan to print more rubles rather than cut the budgets of the military, energy sector and farms.[53] In 1986, before inflation became astronomically bad, Gorbachev noted that wages were increasing for state farmers but that "there [was] not enough to spend money on" in rural towns.[54] Inflation did not solve the shortage of material goods and foodstuffs in the Soviet Union, rather it simply drove the price of these items on the black market up a significant amount even the official, state-set price remained fixed despite inflation.[55] These constant shortages and unreasonably high prices of consumer goods

[51] Rogers, 65.
[52] Ibid, 64.
[53] Miller, "Gorbachev's Gamble: Interest Group Politics and Perestroika ," 65.
[54] Betty A. Laird, and Roy D. Laird, "Glasnost, Perestroika, and Gorbachev's Rural Policies: The Built-in Contradictions of Soviet Socialism,." *Studies in Comparative Communism* 23, no. 2 (June 1, 1990): 119, https://doi.org/10.1016/0039-3592(90)90034-J.
[55] Miller, "Gorbachev's Gamble: Interest Group Politics and Perestroika," 66.

caused widespread discontent with rural populations because of frequent rationing and limited retail options, and Gorbachev was forced to expand his *perestroika* policies to include the agricultural sector.[56] Thus, in 1988 Gorbachev decided that rental contracts would "be offered to families or small partnerships, who will lease land and equipment as individual entrepreneurs," but access to markets would become the next obstacle for these producers to overcome.[57] This decision to allow individuals to attain a minimal amount of autonomy over land was a massive change from the Soviet policy of collective and state farms that had been in effect since Stalin's collectivization of the 1930s.[58] This change in Soviet policy was a landmark alteration of collectivized agriculture that prompted citizens to become pseudo-property owners.

The failure of Gorbachev's previous economic reforms, specifically his attempt at using the neoliberal economic policy of printing more currency, forced him to finally address the issue of bankrupt and unproductive farms. In an effort to deliver on his promises of actionable change, Gorbachev planned to implement a combination of "state and collective farms and small contract farms" that would be a blend of communal and individual land ownership that existed prior to 1917.[59] With the retreat of the state from the everyday lives of state and collective farm workers came a whole host of problems because "a consumer is expected to make independent decisions in a market economy," rather than rely on state subsidies and provisions.[60] Additionally, remaining on the collective or state farm "provided community and security" that was necessary for survival in the absence of adequate marketization.[61] These policies might encourage

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[56] Michael Ellman, "The Contradictions of Perestroika: The Case of Agriculture *," *European Review of Agricultural Economics* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 6, https://doi.org/10.1093/erae/18.1.1.
[57] Brooks, 26.
[58] Brooks, 26.
[59] Brooks, 27.
[60] Karin M. Ekström, Marianne P. Ekström, Marina Potapova, and Helena Shanahan, "Changes in Food Provision in Russian Households Experiencing Perestroika," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 27, no. 4 (September 2003): 295. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1470-6431.2003.00322.x.
[61] Stephen K. Wegren, "Rural Reform and Political Culture in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 2 (1994): 220.

entrepreneurship and worker autonomy from the state, but the actual implementation of decollectivization and privatization was met with discontent from rural producers and provincial leadership.

Decrees from Moscow were issued often throughout Gorbachev's time as President of the Soviet Union, but that does not necessarily mean provincial authorities and farm management would acknowledge these new laws and reforms. In the West, the Soviet Union was portrayed and perceived as an all-powerful authoritarian state, but in reality there were complex structures of power that influenced rural life more than simply Gorbachev himself. These structures of power are referred to as a social contract in the USSR, essentially "political support for the regime was contingent upon the regime providing economic and social security."[62] As Gorbachev's regime continuously failed to meet the standard of living many Soviet citizens had become accustomed to, the social contract between state and civilian began to collapse. Very few regional leaders and agricultural producers were incentivized to implement Gorbachev's policies of decollectivization and land reform. After Gorbachev's establishment of rental agreements for collective farmers, "local officials were supposed to make available 'at no cost or by means of lease with an option to purchase, land and buildings for production and other activities, as well as plants and facilities."[63] In rural areas specifically, collective farms and their managers "often provided the *only* source of many goods and services," which placed them in a position with incredible power over rural communities.[64] Control over consumption was an incredibly powerful tool of social control, and this was exemplified in rural communities. This is not

[62] Stephen K. Wegren, "The Rise, Fall, and Transformation of the Rural Social Contract in Russia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 2, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X(02)00056-9.
[63] Favarel-Garrigues, 114.
[64] Sarah Birch, "Nomenklatura Democratization: Electoral Clientelism in Post-soviet Ukraine," *Democratization* 4, no. 4 (December 1, 1997): 45, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510349708403535.

necessarily an insidious practice, because one state farm director stated that the goal of support was to improve "everyday living conditions of [their] workers, provide necessary help with foodstuffs" and to help people use their salaries more effectively.[65] However, due to the breakdown of the social contract and the fact that collective farm managers and provincial authorities did not want to relinquish the control they had enjoyed during the earlier Soviet period, privatization changes often went unacknowledged.

Alongside the collapse of the social contract came the increasing importance of an underground economy that had been active throughout the Soviet Union's history. Due to constant shortages throughout most of the Soviet period, many people became accustomed to the presence of an underground, parallel economy in which they could find products not available on any official market. The existence of an underground economy undermines the common belief by Western observers that the USSR was an authoritarian state that had total control over its citizens. In reality, these underground, or parallel economies reflect a loss of state control that was only exacerbated and increased during the shortages during Gorbachev's presidency. Economists have argued about the implications of such widely used underground economies and "according to Gérard Duchene's view, this process had several effects: it 'invalidated the law', created 'widespread tolerance', eroded the 'supremacy which the members of society had accepted' and, ultimately brought about a gradual 'reversal of morality.'"[66] While there is a clear move away from state control anytime there is an underground, shadow economy present, the increasing reliance on it during Gorbachev's era does not necessarily reflect a change in morality. Rather it simply the natural reaction to the constant shortages of material goods, and it further reflects the complex notion of corruption versus the Russian concept known as *blat*.

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[65] Allina-Pisano, *Post-Soviet Potemkin Village*, 50.
[66] Favarel-Garrigues, 38.

Throughout Russian history, long before the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Russians made the distinction between corruption and networks of reciprocity they called *blat*. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the shadow economy of in Russia was booming, and while there were certainly cases of corruption, often the transactions occurring in a shadow market typically happened simply because hard currency had become worthless, and bartering was common. This manner of transaction harkens back to the late Imperial period when the agricultural producers and farm workers conducted many of their transactions by bartering goods.[67] *Blat* is not corruption, it is a network of reciprocity where favors "needn't be repaid immediately or in cash," setting it apart from bribery or corruption that require cash transactions for favors.[68] Understanding this aspect of the rural Russian mindset is incredibly useful when discussing the end of Gorbachev's presidency and the beginning of Yeltsin's era. As Gorbachev instituted policies that would allow for families or small groups to lease former collective farmland, it became clear that there was a gap left when the government withdrew their social support for agricultural producers on collective and state farms.[69] The collapse of the rural social contract occurred rapidly between the years 1985-1992, and left many families and individuals without state support that they had relied on for so long.[70] Thus, as state support for agricultural producers disappeared, inflation skyrocketed and a complex new system of leasing land was introduced, the rural sector was left with only local officials and their own networks of reciprocity to support them.

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[67] Mark Lawrence Schrad, "Vodka and the Origins of Corruption in Russia," in *Vodka Politics: Alcohol, Autocracy, and the Secret History of the Russian State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 94, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=1591070.
[68] Ibid, 94.
[69] Wegren, "The Rise, Fall, and Transformation of the Rural Social Contract in Russia," 4.
[70] Ibid, 9.

On the individual worker level, Gorbachev's proposal of decollectivization and the move toward family rental of farmland did not garner much support. As it turned out, many individual farm laborers did not want to take on the risks of private farming and would rather remain a part of the collective or state farm where they were guaranteed a wage.[71] The costs of leaving a collective or state farm may far outweigh the potential long-term benefits, because there is no guarantee that other workers would leave the collective or state farm, or that individual, private farmers would have access to agricultural inputs like fertilizer and seeds.[72] According to Zhores A. Medvedev, a dissident Russian agronomist, biologist and historian, "small operators [could not] easily separate from the network a parent farm provides," especially when it comes to agricultural inputs and heavy equipment.[73] There was no reason to take on more risk than necessary when the system in place already promised money to agricultural producers. Additionally, as the state-manufactured inflation continued to soar liquid assets became increasingly worthless. In order to preserve the social structure that many of these workers already had in place, they opposed these rental schemes introduced under Gorbachev's reforms.

Under the Soviet system, the individual worker was not responsible for all the decisions that came with farm planning, and many were woefully unprepared to begin making strategic agricultural decisions that would result in a bountiful harvest.[74] Collective farm managers "made all the technical decisions" regarding farm management and strategic planning, while the labor of collective and state farm workers was only input of a highly mechanized agricultural system.[75]

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[71] Jessica Allina-Pisano, "Land Reform and the Social Origins of Private Farmers in Russia and Ukraine," 490.
[72] Frederic L. Pyor, "When Is Collectivization Reversible?," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 1991): 4, https://doi.org/10.1016/0039-3592(91)90019-3.
[73] Ibid, 5.
[74] Katherine Verdery, "The Death of a Peasantry: From Smallholders to Rentiers," in *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 192. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv1nhm40.14.
[75] Ibid.

Essentially, Gorbachev's policies of breaking up bankrupt collectives and state farms was asking former collective farm workers to take on all the additional responsibility of the collective farm manager, but without the guaranteed salary. Even after Gorbachev's private plot campaign had been fully instituted, rural people still claimed that private farming could not feed the country with one woman even saying "we need our state farms! Who will feed the people?."[76] It is no wonder that Gorbachev's agrarian policies were unpopular among the rural working class. Without any kind of safety net from the state, and only interpersonal networks of reciprocity to support them, rural producers were not incentivized to gamble on Gorbachev's new policies.

Gorbachev never pushed for full-scale privatization that characterized Yeltsin's presidency, but he did introduce groundbreaking agrarian policies that began the work of undoing Stalin's collectivization in the 1930s. Gorbachev's top advisors argued that the reason for *perestroika*'s failures was because the USSR did not follow in the footsteps of China and did not begin with agrarian reform.[77] Gorbachev's decision to delay more radical agrarian reform was intentional; it reflected his desire to avoid full-blown privatization and instead make more conservative changes that would not disrupt the Soviet economic system.

A tentative reformer, Gorbachev both initiated and yet slowed down agrarian reform so that he could focus on supporting the pillars of Soviet society. Clearly committed to the Soviet socialist market economy, he wanted to make the agricultural sector profitable, but within the confines of the USSR's economic model. In spite of his life and career experience on collective and state farms and the hindrance of the stagnation he inherited from past Soviet leaders, Gorbachev, in his agricultural reforms, followed the slow process, a decision that ensured his

[76] Myriam Hivon, "Local Resistance to Privatization in Rural Russia," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 18, no. 2 (1995): 19.
[77] Miller, "Gorbachev's Agricultural Agenda," 115.

policies were insufficient for the scope of the crisis and were far too reserved to save the Soviet economy. This was due in part to the fact that Gorbachev was unwilling to stray too far from the Communist Party line; he could not simply renounce Stalin's disastrous collective farm movement of the 1930s without undermining his own authority. Furthermore, on top of trying to maintain elements of the planned economy and reform the agricultural sector, Gorbachev dealt with constant in-fighting among Party members and, thus, could not be viewed as the sole architect of the demise of the Soviet system. These political conflicts became a challenge to Gorbachev's reform, since no one on his team could agree on the best course of action. Depending on who was asked, his policy recommendations were viewed as either too radical or too conservative, or both. Yeltsin, who was on the rise in the political scene during Gorbachev's time in office, witnessed the opposition Gorbachev faced, which was also intensified by his highly unpopular anti-alcohol campaign and intricate, slow-moving bureaucratism.

However, Boris Yeltsin viewed *perestroika*'s and Gorbachev's failures as his opportunity to gain power. Yeltsin was unafraid of abandoning the Soviet model of agriculture and instituting of a private property regime that would put an end to collectivized agriculture that had dominated for sixty years. While Yeltsin may have been unafraid of wide-scale privatization, he did not institute egalitarian and effective policies. In contrast, Yeltsin's laws regarding the legalization of privatization led to one of the largest land-grabs in modern history. Whether or not this was Yeltsin's intention, he decided to choose a team that could be "a kamikaze crew that would step into the line of fire and forge ahead, no matter how strong the general discontent may be."[78] Hoping to avoid Gorbachev's errors, Yeltsin moved quickly with an intensity Gorbachev

[78] Padma Desai and William Harmless, "Part I: Reform Maximalists- 1 The Wrecking Ball," in *Conversations on Russia: Reform from Yeltsin to Putin*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 79. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=271252.

could not master. Consequently, the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed full-scale privatization at break-neck speed, but with unexpected, inconsistent and mutually nullifying results.

The Smoke and Mirrors of Yeltsin's Agricultural Reform in 1991-2000

"We don't have the strength for sustaining an Empire."

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia*

The collapse of the Soviet Union was multifaceted and was brought about by multiple factors, one of which was unquestionably Boris Yeltsin's personality and his manner of leadership. The election of Boris Yeltsin as president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) in June 1991 marked the beginning of the end of the Soviet period, and with that change came a barrage of new reforms and policies intending to push the Russian Federation into a market-based economy. Since Yeltsin had long harbored intense dislike for Gorbachev, the clashes between the two became altogether apparent when Gorbachev accused Yeltsin of being a populist, while Yeltsin did his utmost to outshine Gorbachev.[79] In seeking to do everything that Gorbachev could not, Yeltsin focused upon the need for privatization, including the privatization of the rural holdings. Even before he was elected president, Yeltsin, in contrast to Gorbachev, called "for the allocation of land to the peasants."[80] There was no easy way to go about this change, and whatever were Yeltsin's intentions, historians and economists now look back on the Russian reforms of the 1990s and almost unanimously agree that they did far more harm than good.

The reforms Yeltsin pushed for were intended to begin marketization and privatization, but that dramatic shift led to a chaotic breakdown of social structure. With Yeltsin's marketization reforms the government's "control of society was loosened" and this created space

[79] Marc Zlotnik, "Yeltsin and Gorbachev: The Politics of Confrontation," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 133, https://doi.org/10.1162/152039703320996740.
[80] Ibid, 142.

for “new forms of corruption and criminality.”[81] Yeltsin followed advice of Western economists, intent on implementing neoliberal economic policies, such as “financial and trade liberalization and deregulation… changing public budget priorities and according the same treatment to foreign and domestic firms,” that would force the Russian economy to quickly become a major world player.[82]

However, this did not go as planned. One thing Yeltsin and his advisors brushed off in an effort to revitalize the economy was a careful development of the legal infrastructure necessary to secure and uphold agrarian reform. After roughly sixty years working on either collective or state farms, rapid introduction of economic reform policies alongside a new land-privatization scheme only helped to consolidate power in the hands of a few while dispossessing millions of farmers. Before this, however, there was just Yeltsin and his fellow reformers trying to “create a market economy by top-down, ‘Bolshevik’ methods” and his strategy was termed “market bolshevism” because of the speed and top-down methods they used to entirely restructure the former Soviet economy.[83] His struggle for privatization was opposed by the Duma, Russia’s parliamentary governing branch, and this politicization allowed for the emergence of a “bare-knuckled struggle for property” that would characterize the privatization process throughout the 1990s.[84] While trying to bring about one of the largest shifts in ownership in recent history, Yeltsin also played political hardball with fellow reformers and other elected officials.

Boris Yeltsin was more a product of his environment and good timing than any incredible political savvy and influence. In August 1991 members of Gorbachev’s government who wanted

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[81] Hugyen, 65.
[82] Moises Naim, “Fads and Fashion in Economic Reforms: Washington Consensus or Washington Confusion?,” *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2000): 508.
[83] Reddaway and Glinski, 34.
[84] Andrew Barnes, “Comprehending Turmoil: Post-Soviet Russia as a Struggle for Property,” in *Owning Russia: The Struggle over Factories Farms and Power*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 1.

to preserve their power assaulted the White House, which was led by newly elected president, Boris Yeltsin, and filled with reformers, and while they failed they did allow Yeltsin to take on an "outstanding" role during the attempted coup.[85] He did this by climbing "on one of the tanks and denounced the aggression as a 'cynical, right-wing coup attempt.'"[86] This placed him in the perfect position to consolidate power after he humiliated Gorbachev by "signing a decree disbanding the Communist Party in Russia."[87] His actions during the August coup catapulted him into popularity and in "September 1991, 81 [percent] of people approved of his performance."[88] The attempted *coup d'état* in August 1991, known as the August *Putsch*, proved that "Gorbachev and the Soviet system were fatally weakened" by the event, and Yeltsin was able to cement his power.[89] This support from the Russian people enabled Yeltsin to begin his reform process, the first step was securing special powers from parliament to "issues laws by decree rather than bring them to parliament for a vote" he would be able to fully reform the Russian economy.[90] Absolute power like this often leads to further entrenchment of corrupt governing bodies, and Yeltsin did not relish giving up his power so he issued Presidential Decree No. 1400 that "dissolve both the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet, and called new parliamentary elections for December 12th," the Constitutional Court removed him from office.[91] The interim president appointed was Rutskoi, and he sought to take control through an armed

[85] Zlotnik, 155.
[86] Naomi Klein, "Bonfire of a Young Democracy: Russia Choose 'The Pinochet Option,'" in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 221.
[87] Zlotnik, 156.
[88] Daniel Treisman, "Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime: Russia under Yeltsin and Putin," *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (2011): 590.
[89] Lilia Shevtsova, "The August Coup and the Soviet Collapse," *Survival* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 1992): 5, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396339208442627.
[90] Klein, "Bonfire of a Young Democracy: Russia Chooses 'The Pinochet Option,'" 222.
[91] John B. Dunlop, "Sifting through the Rubble of the Yeltsin Years," *Problems of Post-Communism* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 2000): 6, https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2000.11655864.

rebellion that would give him control of the government.[92] Luckily for Yeltsin, he was able to take the White House and "the rebellion was crushed."[93] Yeltsin supported the democratic revolt in favor of the constitutional order in 1991 so that he could take power, and then crushed the same movement in 1993 in order to maintain his power. Yeltsin was willing to use violence in order to push privatization, marketization and his economic reform programs.

While Yeltsin was successful in his resurgence to popularity, his reforms continued to be generally unpopular in the government and especially in rural Russia. The highly bureaucratic nature of the former Soviet state had created many provincial authorities who loathed the idea of property or economic reform that might challenge their positions. In rural regions of Russia, the "political instability added to the burden that local leaders faced."[94] When combined with many leader's resistance to privatization the reality of Russian reform became even more chaotic. Rather than address the growing divisions throughout Russia, Yeltsin sought to continue his rapid 'shock therapy' reforms despite national outcry for him to cease. Yeltsin's approval rating was at its peak in 1991 and then continued to steadily decline throughout the remainder of his presidency.[95] Yeltsin came to power as a hero in the eyes of the Russian people, but this role did not last as the chaos and suddenness of his reforms fundamentally altered the way many Russians lived their lives.

It was not only the people of Russia who were dissatisfied with Yeltsin's sudden reforms, but the also the other branches of the Russian government. As he continued to grab power and tried to further cement himself as "Tsar Boris" as he would call himself in the second half of the

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[92] Ibid, 7.
[93] Ibid, 7.
[94] Jessica Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth*, 53-54.
[95] Treisman, 592.

1990s, political institutions and other leaders attempted to curb his power.[96] From the onset of Yeltsin's plan for reform there was hesitation about his methods, and when he requested his special powers from parliament this marked the beginning of the end of any transparent reform process. Because Yeltsin promised to have revitalized and reformed the economy within one year, he chose to follow the approach Moscow mayor Gavriil Popov called "the nomenklatura, apparatchik approach" where the best assets were given to the leaders rather than distributed equally.[97] In Russian the term *nomenklatura* refers to positions of power in the Soviet Union that would have held by influential members of the Communist Party.[98] In Yeltsin's Russian Federation, these same people held their positions of power, just under new titles. During the early days of privatization this group was especially concerned with holding onto their power by changing "the façade of the decrepit [Soviet] system, to legalize the property relations that had formed spontaneously within the system," and creating "*nomenklatura*-bureaucratic state capitalism" so that they could continue to prosper.[99] Even as economic reform was beginning, some members of the *nomenklatura* were "openly or covertly allied with the burgeoning underground empires of the shadow economy."[100] This allyship between authorities in the new Russian government and powerful individuals in the underground economy reveals the cracks in foundations of Russia's reforms. With the inclusion of powerful players in the shadow economy, the new Russian social contract is described as "antisocial" because of it excludes the general Russian people.[101] The legitimization of the shadow economy and subsequent breakdown of the social contract left many people flailing, especially because the *nomenklatura* who had once

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[96] Reddaway and Glinski, 32.
[97] Klein, "Bonfire of a Young Democracy: Russia Chooses 'The Pinochet Option,'" 222.
[98] Reddaway and Glinski, 11.
[99] Egor Gaidar, "How the Nomenklatura 'Privatized' Its Own Power," *Russian Social Science Review* 37, no. 3 (May 1996): 7-8, http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/10.2753/RSS1061-1428370323.
[100] Reddaway and Glinski, 33.
[101] Ibid, 243.

been at least nominally concerned with the working class became obsessed only with their personal comfort and power.

As the centralized state retreated from the everyday lives of Russian people, individuals were left with no support system outside of their local community. Russia barreled through high-handed economic reforms that were intended to shock the economy into productivity, but the everyday worker was left to pick up the pieces of their former lives. In no part of Russian society is this clearer than in the agricultural sector. During the breakdown of the Soviet system, one key question was about how to handle the issue of land ownership and use. Gorbachev's attempts to reform the unproductive agricultural sector did not amount to much, and Yeltsin's rapid privatization scheme left people in arguably worse positions than they were in before his presidency. After his rise to power in 1991, Yeltsin declared that all the state and collective farms still in existence would need to have reorganized by 1993.[102] While Yeltsin made a number of decrees regarding agriculture, there was little in the way of guidance on rural privatization. Yeltsin wanted full privatization but did not want to spend the time and effort on ensuring that property distribution was equal and fair. The path to privatization was heavily debated amongst Yeltsin and other government officials, but in 1992 Yeltsin used his special powers from parliament to institute the voucher system.[103] The voucher system would freely distribute shares of collective and state farms, but notably the location of these shares did not need to be specified, and Yeltsin decreed that farmers could supplement their shares from a "regional land fund" or through leasing.[104] It was Yeltsin who pushed for privatization of former

[102] Hivon, 15.
[103] Andrew Barnes, "The Next Big Thing: Property in the Era of Mass Privatization and Land Reform, 1992–94," in *Owning Russia: The Struggle over Factories, Farms, and Power*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 74, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv2n7mgv.9.
[104] Ibid, 88-89.

collective and state farms, but the "individual ownership of arable land" was not guaranteed until the ratification of the 1993 Russian Constitution."[105] Before the constitution however, the agricultural sector underwent a period of rapid change that brought about the legal end of nearly seventy years of collectivized agriculture.

Yeltsin's voucher system created widespread chaos as former state and collective farm workers attempted to take hold of the land their vouchers promised to them. For many state and collective farm managers, the idea of privatization and decollectivization threatened their positions. These vouchers gave former state and collective farm workers the option to reorganize into "associations of farmers, joint-stock companies or individual/family farms."[106] Joint-stock companies were very attractive to farm management personal because all of the former functions of a state or collective farm could remain the same despite having legally privatized.[107] This means that employees and managers could retain their former positions, after the land vouchers had been transferred to the joint-stock company. Roughly 95 percent of state or collective farms underwent some form of restructuring, but one third of these farms retained their earlier structures from the Soviet period.[108] These new 'joint-stock companies' were simply state and collective farms under a new name. Managers retained their power through the move to a joint-stock company, and even though collective and state farm employees had been offered land vouchers so that they could start their own private farm, many remained on the same land. This is due in part to the fact that after "70 years of specialization within agricultural enterprises… a tractor driver in a [state farm] barely [knew] anything about pigs or cows," and would thus be

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[105] Carol Scott Leonard, "Rational Resistance to Land Privatization: The Response of Rural Producers to Agrarian Reforms in Pre- and Post-Soviet Russia," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 41, no. 8 (December 1, 2000): 608, https://doi.org/10.1080/10889388.2000.10641160.
[106] Hivon, 15.
[107] Ibid, 16.
[108] William Cooper, "The Economy," in *Russia: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn Cooper, (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, The Library of Congress, 1998) 328.

unable to effectively run his or her own fully functioning farm enterprise.[109] Additionally, private farmers were cut off from the networks of support provided by collective farms, meaning they had to manage agricultural inputs and earn money for themselves independently.[110] However, this was only one barrier that rural working people had to overcome in the path to private property ownership. The more abstract and virtually unfixable problem was the fact that corrupt elites were able to seize land while simultaneously dispossessing the average collective or state farm worker.

The privatization process was far from egalitarian, and the vouchers that were distributed to different farmers were so disorganized that it was nearly impossible to actually claim the land. Just as was the norm during the Soviet period people used connections to obtain "scarce goods," and these same rules "helped determine who could obtain land for farming."[111] This speaks to the fact that receiving land vouchers was reliant more on personal connection than on an equal process implemented from the top-down. Those who benefitted the most from this manner of privatization were the rural elite, such as local officials, former state and collective farm managers, and other individuals in positions of authority. In some cases, local authorities would simply tell individuals who applied for land "that none was available" while simultaneously well-connected elites received huge swaths of farmland.[112] Due to the high level of urban-bias in the Russian reforms, very little attention was paid to the agricultural sector and rural elites were left to their own devices during the privatization process.[113] Since the average state or collective

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[109] Hivon, 17.
[110] Maria Amelina, "Why Russian Peasants Remain in Collective Farms: A Household Perspective on Agricultural Restructuring," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 41, no. 7 (October 1, 2000): 494, https://doi.org/10.1080/10889388.2000.10641154.
[111] Jessica Allina-Pisano, "Land Reform and the Social Origins of Private Farmers in Russia and Ukraine," 494.
[112] Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth*, 89.
[113] Oane Visser and Max Spoor, "Land Grabbing in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The World's Largest Agricultural Land Reserves at Stake," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 2 (March 1, 2011): 309, https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2011.559010.

farm worker was unwilling to attempt private farming, space was created for well-positioned local elites and those within their networks of support to acquire huge swaths of land. This unequal process of land distribution was essentially ignored at the federal level, and local authorities were able to carry out these corrupt privatization processes without involvement from Moscow.

Moscow's general disinterest in agriculture allowed for rural elites to manipulate and influence the voucher system in ways that would serve themselves and their close connections well over the next decade. Those with "social capital and informal networks that provided access to bureaucrats and production factors" were able to receive land through the voucher system, and this typically boiled down to two groups of people: rural state and farm elites, and people on the margins of rural society.[114] People considered to be on the margins of rural society were "ethnic minorities and immigrants from other Soviet republics, transplanted urbanites, single, middle-aged women and people in low positions on former collectives."[115] Women were completely left out of shock therapists economic reform plans primarily because reformers celebrated the "new Russian man" that could emerge during privatization.[116] However, due to the fact that they were shunted by the national reformers, rural women did not pose a threat to the rural elite, and were thus sometimes granted private plots when their male counterparts may have been denied. Throughout the history of the Soviet Union being on the inside of a group that could provide support was crucial to success, and it was not until the convoluted privatization process that being an outsider became a tool for acquiring land.

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[114] Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth,* 91.
[115] Ibid, 91.
[116] Esther Kingston-Mann, "Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union and the Russian Republic: The Majority as an Obstacle to Progress?," in *Women, Land Rights, and Rural Development : How Much Land Does a Woman Need?*, (London: Routledge, 2018), 78, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315170138.

Because *blat,* informal networks of reciprocity, remained so vital to many rural communities being accepted into the community could literally be a matter of life and death. In Russia in the 1990s, a collapse of the social safety net, eradication of socialized medicine and rampant unemployment and inflation increased mortality rates for men across the country, and strained work relations negatively impacted life expectancy for both men and women.[117] Marginalized individuals would not have benefited from *blat* or broader community support in the rural Soviet Union, so when it came time to take on the risks of becoming a private farmer there was little holding these people back. Due to their isolation from the "ordinary networks of social and economic interdependence" these farmers were willing to accept the risk of private farming because they were unafraid of losing any standing in the community.[118] The ostracization of private farmers from rural communities was not new in the post-Soviet period, but rather was a continuation of a Soviet practice. In rural communities, private farms were seen as inadequate producers and were resented because of the governmental support granted to them in the days of early privatization in the hope of inspiring more people to take up private farming.[119]

The agricultural sector throughout the Soviet period had never been incredibly productive and only through state funding it was able to remain functional, but when state and collective farms were privatized the productivity on farms dropped by 30 percent in the 1990s.[120] Through all the chaos of privatization, it became increasingly clear that farm managers who had no interest in relinquishing their positions were determined to hinder fledgling private farmers. This

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[117] Bruce P. Kennedy, Ichiro Kawachi, and Elizabeth Brainerd, "The Role of Social Capital in the Russian Mortality Crisis," *World Development* 26, no. 11 (November 1, 1998): 2033, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(98)00094-1.
[118] Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth,* 92.
[119] Hivon, 19-20.
[120] Irina Bezlepkina, Arie Oskam, Alfons Oude Lansink, and Ruud Huirne, "Development and Performance of Russian Agricultural Enterprises, 1990–2001," *Post-Communist Economies* 16, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 443, https://doi.org/10.1080/1463137042000309557.

was often done by demanding that those petitioning for land "first acquire appropriate machinery" before they were granted land, because many of the crops grown could not be harvested by hand.[121] Thus, it was nearly impossible for private farmers to become productive without having first purchased the expensive equipment necessary to harvest crops. Without the land to plant on or the machinery to harvest, it was nearly impossible for new private farmers to accumulate capital necessary to expand their farms and sell excess agricultural products on the free market. Additionally, if farmers chose not to attempt private farming and rather rent plots from former state and collective farms still "lost other resources and opportunities for capital accumulation" because of how agricultural land was divided into shares.[122] Yeltsin's unwillingness to address growing inequality across the agricultural sector allowed rural elites to become further entrenched in their power.

With Yeltsin focused primarily on implementing marketization while trying to remain in power beyond his one year of special privileges, the process of privatization was left mostly to provincial authorities. Those few private farmers who were successful in obtaining land through the complicated voucher system explained it was "practically impossible to obtain land through normal channels."[123] A fledgling private farmer detailed his attempt to establish a new farm nearby a collective but was thwarted by the chairman of the collective who considered the area "his turf" and "decided unilaterally" to stop the new private farmer.[124] Essentially, rural authorities had full control over who was to be given land, and who they simply did not feel the desire to help.[125] This ensured that these authorities were able to control the land in the same

[121] Jessica Allina-Pisano, "The Two Faces of Petr Arkad'evich: Land and Dispossession in Russia's Southwest, ca. 2000," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 71 (2007): 78.
[122] Ibid, 79.
[123] Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth,* 93.
[124] Ibid, 178.
[125] Ibid, 93.

manner that they controlled collective and state farmland during the Soviet period. In order to preserve some of the authority that these local leaders lost during Yeltsin's marketization and privatization policies, they ensured that agricultural producers remained reliant on them. In 1993, rural authorities went so far as to take land away from farmers who had received vouchers for and found the location of land promised to them under the "Law on Land Reform" and "Law on Peasant (Private) Farms."[126] No rural elite relishes the idea of losing their influence, but in rural Russia where these local authorities had been thriving under the highly bureaucratic system of the Soviet Union there was a sudden realization that private farms would bring about the end of their power. Additionally, because ability to influence the bureaucratic process in rural Russia relied so heavily on relationships of mutual benefit, the farmers who had their land seized by the authorities had virtually no way of getting it back. Federal authorities were entirely out of reach for most rural people because even the head of Ivanovo's Social Welfare Department explained they had "contacted the federal agencies" for help with policy changes but had received no reply.[127] When even provincial authorities could not receive aid or a short response from the national leaders, it is unsurprising that local farmers could rely on no one except for the rural elites. Moscow's authority was waning, and the ability of provincial authorities to carry out dispossession speaks to the decentralized nature of Russian agricultural reforms.

This method of power-grabbing was not ignored by local populations, and many people were well-aware that local elites were seizing power in a way that was unjust. Many people recognized and agreed that "privatization allowed those in power to gain control of property" in

[126] "With the Start of Spring Planting, Efforts to Dispossess Private Farmers Are Expanded," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, May 5, 1993.
[127] Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, "Central Weakness and Provincial Autonomy: Observations on the Devolution Process in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 15, no. 1 (January 1999): 95-96, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.1999.10641465.

a way that was entirely different from their roles on state and collective farms.[128] Having control of the property itself was entirely different from a state or collective farm manager's role under the Soviet system. By default, these people would have had power, but they did not have any legal control over land itself. One farmer in Kaluga described how when he tried to remove his land from the joint-stock company that had been formed from the collective farm and "rent it to a neighboring farmer," the manager refused his request.[129] This change in post-Soviet Russia created space for a select few individuals to rise to power through their connections. When fifty-two farmers wrote an open letter to local authorities in 1993 demanding that their ownership of private farms be recognized, they were not equipped to battle a bureaucratic machine that required personal relationships with leaders to bring about any effective results.[130] This manner of dispossession reflects the autonomy with which local authorities operated. As Moscow struggled to bring about effective economic and political changes, a power vacuum opened in the countryside that was filled by local government officials and former farm managers. Rather than allow private farmers with a significant experience in agriculture to become successful on their own, officials granted land to people on the margins of rural society "because they posed no threat of competition to local large-scale enterprises."[131] Being a member of a marginalized group could be beneficial, but it still required a certain level of rootedness in the community for local elites to provide land. For instance, one woman was inexplicably denied land in a neighboring district for her cows after a local elite asked her "what do you think this is, a bazaar?," whereas a woman from the community likely would have had an easier time obtaining

[128] Stephen K. Wegren, "State Withdrawal and the Impact of Marketization on Rural Russia," *Policy Studies Journal* 28, no. 1 (2000): 58.
[129] A. Samoilov, "Sevodniya Fermeram Prinadlezhit Tol'ko 6% Pashnii. Zemlya Po-Prezhnemu u Chinovnikov," September 27, 1995, https://aif.ru/archive/1644512.
[130] "With the Start of Spring Planting, Efforts to Dispossess Private Farmers Are Expanded."
[131] Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth,* 93.

the land.[132] Essentially, people were chosen by local leaders to receive land based if they were members of "rural society with the least to lose," meaning they would not pose a significant threat to the power and influence held by rural elites.[133]

With this contextualization, it is no surprise that the fifty-two farmers who wrote the letter to their local authorities were dispossessed of their land right as it became clear that they were dedicated to becoming a competitive enterprise that was independently successful.[134] Without the support of any kind of network behind them, private farmers struggled to hold out while trying to make ends meet. Thus, it would be more desirable for authorities to grant land to individuals with no ties to the community because they would lack both the social capital and funds to establish a productive farm. Those rare private farmers who did manage to find some success were constantly bogged down by local leaders and even fellow villagers, for example one private farmer "had his haystack burned by another villager" simply because he had successfully created a private farming enterprise.[135] The opposition to private farming from both local authorities and fellow community members discouraged many from seeking out legal avenues to obtain the land they were promised with the voucher system.

The rapid shift from a collectivized agricultural system to a private property regime was chaotic and left many rural agricultural laborers without a certain path. For many people, the vouchers they had received per Yeltsin's law in 1991 were worthless. Land promised to former collective and state famers was impossible to locate, and when they attempted to solve the issue with the help of local bureaucrats they were sent in circle trying to find the right person to help them. It became clear during the early days of privatization that the entire process would not be

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[132] Jessica Allina-Pisano, "Land Reform and the Social Origins of Private Farmers in Russia and Ukraine," 502.
[133] Ibid, 492.
[134] "With the Start of Spring Planting, Efforts to Dispossess Private Farmers Are Expanded."
[135] Hivon, 18.

equal and fair to all former state or collective farm workers. Local authorities were more willing to aid individuals who posed little to no threat to their own personal success, and this allowed rural elites to retain the majority of the control over the land. Very few people without a strong connection to local leaders were able to obtain the land Yeltsin and his reformers had guaranteed with the voucher system. However, privatization did happen, but it was really only effective for former state and collective farm managers or local authorities who had enough social and political capital to pull off a large-scale land transfer to themselves or whoever they had decided to help. Yeltsin's reforms between 1991-1993 mark the beginning of the widespread dispossession of the 1990s, as many agricultural producers, without a collective farm to fall back upon, were left without a means to support themselves and their families.

The speed of privatization notwithstanding, its scope proved to be too narrow; its manner enriched and strengthened the power of the *nomenklatura* while leaving common people without any legal infrastructure that would protect their access to the land. Yeltsin's reforms were not egalitarian or equitable for collective and state farm workers and their managers. The enrichment of the rural *nomenklatura* occurred under Yeltsin; this class of agricultural producers capitalized upon Yeltsin's desire to carry out a complete overhaul of the agricultural sector in an incredibly short period of time. Consequently, former Soviet elites were able to retain their power and influence while Yeltsin's administration focused on marketization and the introduction of capitalism into urban areas but did not carefully monitor the privatization process in rural areas. The chaos of the early 1990s was also a driving factor in the ineffective implementation of privatization laws, the result of which allowed the former *nomenklatura* and well-connected agricultural producers administer Yeltsin's reforms in a way that most beneficial to this very small but highly elite portion of the population.

The political events of that decade contributed to these processes. On the one hand, the 1991 revolution that permitted Yeltsin to solidify his power and 'defend' the fledgling democratic process won him favor among the Russian people. On the other hand, the violent destruction of the democratic revolt that attempted to remove Yeltsin in 1993 sowed mistrust in the highest office of government in Russia. In rural areas, this meant that communities were forced to rely on local elites rather than seek guidance from any national leaders, and this reliance, in turn, opened the door for the corruption and violence that would permeate into private farms and business in the 1990s. *Blat*, mutual aid and cash-brokered transactions were all important during Yeltsin's presidency, and they jostled together within rural communities in constant flux. There were also other consequences of this profound social upheaval: unequal privatization coincided with the emergence of organized crime and there was an upsurge in racketeering that devastated rural communities while protecting the power of the *nomenklatura*.

The Rise of Rural Precarity: Dispossession and Lack of Legality in 1991-2000

"Families close to [the Thieves] always prosper."

–Vera[136]

As Yeltsin instituted reform from the top throughout the 1990s, it became clear that the new system was not working for everyone and that rural communities had to rely on informal support systems. In many cases this was an intentional consequence of privatization: it was to be expected that the decentralization of power would provide an opportunity for personal advancement among local elites. As the post-Soviet state withdrew from citizens' everyday lives, they required more community and local support to fill the gaps left by Soviet-era social programs and subsidies. Often, this created a need for rural people to turn more frequently to *blat*, or personal relationships of reciprocity, a habitual social practice, "so quintessentially Russian that it defies literal translation."[137] While these relationships were indispensable for many people who were struggling for survival in these new economic systems, *blat* could not be of use to those operating entirely outside any official system. There emerged, therefore, an especially vulnerable class of people who had been dispossessed of their livelihoods and could not rely on useful connections defined by relationships of mutual aid. While *blat* was an integral part of community life, it was also deeply embedded in the power structures present through the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.[138] The manager-employee or local official-resident relationship in Soviet spaces was often viewed as paternalistic, and the change from communism to

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[136] Tobias Holzlehner, "'The Harder the Rain, the Tighter the Roof': Evolution of Organized Crime Networks in the Russian Far East," *Sibirica: Interdisciplinary Journal of Siberian Studies* 6, no. 2 (October 15, 2007): 61.
[137] Schrad, 93; Rogers, 68.
[138] Alena Ledeneva, "'Blat' and 'Guanxi': Informal Practices in Russia and China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 1 (2008): 129.

capitalism could not undo the deeply embedded mutual reciprocity of these relationships.* In the quickly changing social scene, however, *blat* in the countryside could not protect community members from rising crime rates and the uptick in violence that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet legal system. In the absence of state control and a strictly enforced legal code, organized crime and protection rackets were able to fill the space formerly held by the Soviet state.

As the former social order in the rural sector broke down, people scrambled to recover from the loss of government aid and the inflation caused by shock therapy. Yeltsin's shock therapists were determined to "disentangle and sever property rights and economic activity from the reciprocal social obligations within which—from the peasantry's perspective—they had always been historically embedded."[139] From the very onset of privatization, there had been a desire to transform the social fabric of Russian rural society, but not offer any alternatives for how people could provide for themselves and their families without social networks of support and reciprocity. Even as central authority was pushing further privatization and encouraging people to break away from their networks of reciprocity, there was a "47 percent drop in per capita monthly income" from 1992-1996.[140] This means, that as household income was decreasing, jobs were disappearing and government social securities were being withdrawn, the rural working class was still being pressured to extricate themselves from their social networks of mutual aid. This is illustrated through the life of Igor Stroev, an 83-year-old, double-amputee war veteran living in a small village Butyrki, who must rely on networks of support such as "'walkers,' or tractor drivers, who help him to deliver firewood" because his home did not have

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*China has a similar network of reciprocity known as *guanxi* that is rooted in Confucian values of reciprocity and communal aid. For close analysis of *guanxi* and *blat*, see: Ledeneva, Alena. "'Blat' and 'Guanxi': Informal Practices in Russia and China." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 1 (2008): 118–44.

[139] Esther Kingston-Mann, "The Return of Pierre Proudhon: Property Rights, Crime, and the Rules of Law," *European Journal of Anthropology* 48 (2006): 124.

[140] Ibid, 124.

central heating.[141] The reliance upon informal support networks, especially those not offered by the state, defines rural poverty in Russia during the transition period. Without mutual-aid relationships and networks of reciprocity, many people such as Igor Stroev would not have survived the reform years.

During Gorbachev's reign in the late 1980s one of his key reformers Alexander Yakovlev stated that "bureaucratism is a kind of lawlessness," and this could not have proven more effectively than during Yeltsin's reforms in the era of mass dispossession.[142] Newly dispossessed individuals were then forced to operate outside of the official circle of rural life with very little social capital and virtually no one to rely on in difficult times. In rural areas, a new class of dispossessed people emerged contemporaneously with the shift toward privatization. Due to the fact that private farming was strongly discouraged by communal farm managers, often those who chose to leave communal farms were entirely cut off from the networks of support upon which they would have once relied.[143] Without community support, it was very difficult to exist in a world that operated almost entirely through mutual aid if an individual had nothing to offer. While these people were certainly living outside the traditional circles of society without employment, networks of support, and property, they can also be understood as "people who are themselves no longer possessed."[144] This means that not only are these people dispossessed of livelihoods, but they themselves are dispossessed by their society. They are no longer members of a community as they would have been during the Soviet period, and that loss speaks

[141] Sergei Shubin, "Networked Poverty in Rural Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 4 (2007): 591.
[142] Stephen F. Cohen and Katrina Vanden Heuvel, *Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev's Reformers*, 1st ed (New York: Norton, 1989), 50.
[143] Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 11.
[144] Ibid, 21.

immediately separates them from any other rural people who had retained some sort of position on a former collective or state farm in the transition period.

The creation of this new class of the dispossessed in Russia brings to light the most controversial issues of privatization in the 1990s. As land was grabbed by those with desirable political or social connections, many were left out from privatization entirely. One example of this was the Karl Marx Collective in the Buryat Republic of the Russian Federation, where a collective farm decided to entirely privatize in the early 1990s but only six months converted back into a collective farm, only this time they had gotten "rid of two hundred laborers."[145] These people, left without land or employment, quickly became a part of the dispossessed. Private farming was always painted as an incredibly risky venture, but this outcome was the real-life version of an absolute worst-case scenario. In the post-Soviet countryside, many people who were left landless and jobless opted to become moonlighters. One example of a moonlighter was well-respected rural producer in the town of Sepych, who often used his personal tractor to plow the fields of other community members in exchange for money or moonshine.[146] This work differs from the mutual aid experienced in *blat*, because there was a clear expectation that payment would be made in exchange for the service provided. In the same space as this farmer finding additional work outside of his regular job by plowing fields, a new type of moonlighter also emerged. As unemployment with the privatization of state and collective farms, many people searched for new ways to make a living and moonlighting became the only option. Even if some workers remained employed, there was no guarantee that they would receive their wage because in March of 1996, only 62.8 percent of workers received their wage in full, 13.7 were

[145] Ibid, 23.
[146] Rogers, 72.

paid in part, and 23.5 were not paid at all.[147] However, in many rural towns the moonlighter who worked odd jobs to supplement unpaid or partially paid wages was often considered "morally positive."[148] Contrarily, unemployed people who used moonlighting as their only source of income were viewed as "morally suspicious."[149] People who solely worked as moonlighters were not contributing to a collective enterprise, whether it be a joint-stock company or a someone else's farm, but rather they floated and worked only when they could. They resembled the dispossessed in the sense that they lacked rootedness to a particular place and occupation, but they were not entirely unemployed and still earned a wage doing some form of work. This disparity in community acceptance of individualistic work reflects the growing issues for newly unemployed and dispossessed individuals, because once these people lost their socially acceptable occupation they were cut off from their community as well.

As dispossession became more widespread people needed a way to make money to survive, even if that meant operating outside of the realm of what had once been socially acceptable. In the case of officially unemployed moonlighters, there were often only a few ways they could be paid for the work provided. On rare occasions they were hired by wealthier families and paid "only in cash," an entirely separate process from *blat* and mutual aid, which was defined by its cashless transactions.[150] Immediately this created a sense of the 'other,' where unemployed people worked for money rather than favors. This isolated them from the rest of the community and placed them in a vulnerable position where they were required to find a means of survival in an unfamiliar way. In the town of Sepych, where moonlighting for cash was common,

[147] Theodore P. Gerber, "Getting Paid: Wage Arrears and Stratification in Russia," *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 6 (2006): 1821, https://doi.org/10.1086/499511.
[148] Rogers, 72.
[149] Ibid, 72.
[150] Ibid, 73.

young men would also work for payment in “bottles of moonshine that they took with them, rather than consumed with their employer” as was typical through mutual aid relationships.[151] This portrays the way that Soviet and post-Soviet informal economies merged in the wake of rapid privatization and massive inflation. Because state and collective had been operating in a deficit for quite some time, when they privatized management was not prepared for operating without government subsidies and required loans to try to offset layoffs.[152] However, as is clear by the rises in moonlighting and the explosion of the shadow economy, government subsidies and dwindling employment options on farms could not stabilize the rural sector.

Throughout the Soviet Union, the underground economy served as a support system for people who were unable to attain scarce goods through traditional channels. The shadow economy functioned separately from the networks of mutual aid, because in the Soviet era it was an example of how “the priority shifted from duty [to the planned economy] to self-interest.”[153] This means that the economy served to undermine Soviet control, and that people throughout the USSR did not submit to the rules of the planned economy but rather used the shadow economy to their advantage to subvert state control. The average total informal expenditure between 1969-1990 was 23 percent, and during the same time period the informal expenditure for collective farmers alone reached 51.6 percent, meaning that collective farmers engaged more with the informal economy than other workers in the USSR.[154] The prevalence of the shadow economy during the Soviet period speaks to its continued presence throughout 1990s and beyond in the

[151] Ibid, 72.
[152] Maxim Boycko, Andrei Schleifer, and Robert W. Vishny, “Privatizing Russia,” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, no. 2 (1993): 176.; Policies regarding bankrupt farms would change under Putin so that resources were not being wasted on “chronically unprofitable farms” and were instead directed to farms with the greatest potential for profitability, see: Wegren, Stephen K. “Russian Agrarian Policy Under Putin.” *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 43, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 26–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/10889388.2002.10641192.
[153] Favarel-Garrigues, 38.
[154] Byung-Yeon Kim, “Informal Economy Activities of Soviet Households: Size and Dynamics,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 31, no. 3 (September 1, 2003): 538, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-5967(03)00052-0.

new Russian Federation. As Yeltsin's reforms progressed, there was a significant effort made to integrate the shadow economy "into the official economy" throughout the 1990s.[155] The new government acknowledged that to try and completely outlaw many of the practices of the shadow economy, such as moonlighting and the sale of scarce goods, would only increase the profit of illegal traders and businesspeople. However, the attempt to legitimize the practices of the secondary economy blurred the lines of legal and illegal, and even moral and immoral, that had been so clearly drawn during the Soviet period. These efforts carried with them suspicion that "attempts to legalize the shadow economy amounted to collusion between liberal reformer and criminals," and that the criminals often held greater influence than their political counterparts.[156] People were mistrustful of the reforms because there was a common sentiment that the legitimization of the underground economy would only legalize the corruption that had been common in the bureaucratic machine of the Soviet Union.

As aspects of the shadow economy were legitimized within the new Russian Federation, it became clear that while many people who bought and sold goods unofficially were everyday people filling the gaps created by shortages, there was also an illegitimate criminal element to it. In rural areas, the increased fear of crime was not born out of conspiracy or a dismay toward changing policies because armed robbery specifically had more than doubled between 1991-2001.[157] As individuals were able to obtain land "the increase in property owners and economic transactions was not matched by clear property rights legislation."[158] A mafia emerged in part from "predatory privatization, which was called reforms," but also because the state was very

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[155] Favarel-Garrigues, 150.
[156] Ibid, 151.
[157] Sang-Weon Kim, and William Alex Pridemore, "Social Change, Institutional Anomie and Serious Property Crime in Transitional Russia," *The British Journal of Criminology* 45, no. 1 (January 2005): 83.
[158] Frederico Varese, "Is Sicily the Future of Russia? Private Protection and the Rise of the Russian Mafia," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 42, no. 1 (May 2001): 203. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600008225.

disconnected from the people, and forced regular people to rely on organized crime in the 1990s.[159] Both in the minds of the rural people and in the reform themselves, rural organized crime came to replace the state structures that had disappeared with Yeltsin's privatization and broader economic reforms. Those who were able to procure land through the voucher system were left with very few protections or rights to with their land what they wanted after state withdrawal. Despite the rapid privatization and bureaucratic overhaul that Yeltsin put in place, land rights remained fluid and the letter of the law was left up to the interpretation of local elites. In agricultural areas with high potential profitability like the Black Earth region, people could be forced off their land by enterprising elites or corporations.[160] Land rights were not clearly spelled out in the new laws of the Russian Federation, and thus left new landowners in vulnerable positions.

The vague nature of the property laws instituted by Yeltsin created an incredible amount of leeway for local elites, and the attempts to legitimize the shadow economy blurred the lines between legal and illegal more than ever before. While life in rural Russia relied on *blat*, work on former state and collective farms and availability of the shadow economy, the state's inability to provide "rights and enforce them, undermine[d] not only trust in the state, but also among its citizens."[161] While the dispossessed remained an incredibly vulnerable population in Russia, property owners as well found themselves at the mercy of local racketeers and mafia groups. Some farmers would have their property, like livestock, taken from them by local crime leaders

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[159] Joseph Kobzon and Stanislav Govorukhin, "Dialogi: Est Li v Rossii Mafiya?" *Argumenty i Fakty*, December 6, 1995. https://aif.ru/archive/1644826; All Russian language sources were translated by the author.
[160] Vorbrugg, 1016.; A very similar manner of people being run off their land so that elites and corporations can take control occurred in Brazil, see: Manzi, Maya. "The Making of Speculative Biodiesel Commodities on the Agroenergy Frontier of the Brazilian Northeast." *Antipode* 52, no. 6 (2020): 1794–1814. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12655.
[161] Varese, 207.

and were told by racketeers that if they did not pay a monthly fee they would not be protected.[162] Essentially, the state's inability to enforce their own vague laws left new landowners to fend off an entirely new form of criminal in the Russian countryside. Rural producers found themselves "squeezed between an organized crime and a police force unwilling or unable to help" them remain independent from the rising organized criminal networks.[163] As a result of the new reform policies "policing had slipped largely outside of the grasp of the centre," and as seen from the rapid dispossession of many rural producers, local elites in rural areas were often more interested in self-advancement than the betterment of the citizens they were supposed to serve.[164] Since the beginning of reform the state had been "losing its ability to ensure law and order," which continued to be exacerbated by decentralization and the consolidation of power in the hands of local elites.[165] The police were not immune from the corruption and lawlessness occurring on the heels of reform. A common occurrence was policemen demanding "bribes for minor infractions" but even more severely a number of high-level officers in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) were "implicated in investigations of organized crime activities."[166] The intersection of organized crime and the state was nothing new in Russia, but rather became more pervasive in the post-Soviet period. Just as the new urban elites were grounded in Soviet practices of managing collective and state farms, Russia's new "mafiya" was rooted in Soviet organized crime.

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[162] Varese, 208.; Caroline Humphrey, "'Icebergs', Barter, and the Mafia in Provincial Russia," *Anthropology Today* 7, no. 2 (1991): 13, https://doi.org/10.2307/3033166.
[163] Mark Galeotti, "Perestroika, Perestrelka, Pereborka: Policing Russia in a Time of Change," *Europe-Asia Studies* 45, no. 5 (January 1993): 773. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668139308412123.
[164] Ibid, 779.
[165] Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire : Lessons for Modern Russia*, translated by Antonina W. Bouis (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 177. http://discovere.emory.edu/discovere:default_scope:01EMORY_ALMA21173013690002486.
[166] Theodore P. Gerber and Sarah E. Mendelson, "Public Experiences of Police Violence and Corruption in Contemporary Russia: A Case of Predatory Policing?" *Law & Society Review* 42, no. 1 (2008): 12.

The prevalence of the shadow economy in both the USSR and the Russian Federation can be linked to organized crime and rural mafias. However, *mafiya* in Russia is not synonymous with organized crime or the black market, but rather describes a familial cell outside the state apparatus.[167] Throughout Russian and Soviet history, crime rates increased as citizens felt abandoned by the state, and because of the Soviet prison system, these like-minded individuals were thrown together in Soviet labor camps where they formed networks of support entirely separate from the state.[168] Organized crime existed throughout the Soviet period in various forms, but in the 1960s Soviet gangsters began working as middlemen in the 'grey' and 'black' markets "circulating privately produced goods or state materials with the tacit cooperation of factory managers" and party leaders.[169] Because Yeltsin and his reformers were so intent upon legalizing aspects of the shadow economy and continuing with shock therapy, "this nomenklatura-criminal market was legalized in its primordial form" in the 1990s.[170] This legitimization sparked the normalization of criminal activity, and "according to some estimates from Russian law enforcement, criminal organizations control[led] over 30,000 enterprises" in the early 1990s.[171] In the rural areas this lawlessness allowed for the flourishing of a new kind of gang culture, not born out of the Soviet prison system but governed by similar laws as those organized mafias. While organized crime in urban areas differed from the rising criminal activities in rural areas, many of the groups' ventures remained the same. The state was

[167] Reddaway and Glinski, 110.
[168] Ibid, 111.
[169] Stephen Handelman, "The Russian 'Mafiya,'" *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1994): 86. https://doi.org/10.2307/20045921.; During the Soviet period the KGB, the USSR's intelligence agency, often fought against organized crime and spent a good deal of time combatting corruption, see: Duhamel, Luc. *The KGB Campaign against Corruption in Moscow*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.
[170] Reddaway and Glinski, 306.
[171] Serguei Cheloukhine, "The Roots of Russian Organized Crime: From Old-Fashioned Professionals to the Organized Criminal Groups of Today," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 50, no. 4–5 (December 2008): 367. http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/10.1007/s10611-008-9117-5.

unwilling to eradicate organized crime because "the state mainly relie[d] on the criminal strata of the population," because they were both so influential in the shadow economy and because the state was often intertwined with organized crime.[172] Unemployment, a breakdown of the rule of law, and an unwillingness to combat corruption and criminal activity in the government created space for mafias and racketeers to prey on vulnerable populations.[173]

In October of 1993 Yeltsin issued a Presidential Decree that "instructed executives at every administrative level to assess, within a two-month period, the demand for land by citizens for private plots… and other uses of small land plots," but did not include property rights.[174] This decree subsequently led to further dispossession and unemployment and pushed people further into the hands of organized criminals for protection. One must assume that the dispossessed were the foot-soldiers of these gangs. There are obviously cases where "individuals may be members of gangs and 'dispossessed'," but often the dispossessed lived "in shattered worlds" and lacked the "actual rootedness" enjoyed by members of street gangs and organized crime.[175] Thus, organized crime and criminal networks in rural areas is not necessarily the same as that which was flourishing in urban centers. Unlike urban areas where organized crime had a plethora of different forms, in rural areas organized crime was characterized by the protection rackets that private farmers were forced to join in order to protect their property.

In the early 1990s, immediately following the 1993 privatization law, organized crime really crystallized in the form of protection rackets and loan sharks. As the Soviet system transformed into the new Russian Federation, many former government employees found themselves

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[172] Kobzon and Govorukhin, "Dialogi: Est Li v Rossii Mafiya?"
[173] A good example of rural gangs and their structures can be found in: Humphrey, Caroline. "Traders,"disorder," and citizenship regimes in provincial Russia." *Uncertain transition: Ethnographies of change in the postsocialist world* (1999): 19-52.
[174] Stephen K. Wegren, "Politics and Property Rights in the Yeltsin Period, 1992–99," in *Land Reform in Russia: Institutional Design and Behavioral Responses*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 57.
[175] Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*, 31.

unemployed under this new system. Throughout the reforms "an increasing number of dismissed officers and soldiers from the Army, the KGB and the police" found themselves looking for jobs, and their primary skillset was "physical force."[176] Unlike former collective farmers, these people were experts in violence and had had entire careers centered around their use of force before relocating to rural areas to establish private protection firms following the breakdown of the Soviet Union.[177] These individuals would fall under the category of unemployed, rather than the dispossessed, because unlike the rural dispossessed they were often never promised land shares through the voucher system. Sometimes these new protection rackets just had personal connections with intelligence personnel, such as Sergei Baulo, a former Navy scuba diver and boxer, who controlled a criminal group in Vladivostok that provided protection to "the Vladivostok Base of the Trawler and Refrigerator Fleet OAO (VBTRF) and ZAO Roliz where a relative of his headed the company's in-house security."[178] The proximity of these protection rackets to the state became a major issue in rural Russia, as many of these former military, intelligence and police officers used their training or connections to make a profit at the expense of the rural population.

The unemployment of former intelligence, military and security personnel placed them in vulnerable positions, in which they relied on the skills learned from their previous occupations to once again make a living. After these personnel lost their jobs, they often flocked to private security firms that would provide "protection" for those who paid them.[179] Private security firms worked hand-in-hand with protection rackets, because they often were the ones who approached

[176] Varese, 193.
[177] Vadim Volkov, "Violent Entrepreneurship in Post-Communist Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 5 (1999): 748.
[178] Holzlehner, 72.
[179] Varese, 193.

business owners and workers to force them to join the protection rackets.[180] Private security firms exist around the world for a number of different reasons, be it the protection of important persons or assets, and while this also occurred in Russia many of these firms also extorted money from the rural working class. These strong-arms contributed to the uptick in crime around Russia in the 1990s, and this is seen through the 70.5 percent increase in crime rates in 1992 since 1989.[181] In 1996 alone there were 135,000 economic crimes discovered, and 92,000 of these economic crimes were "of increased danger."[182] As the state continued to lay off former security personnel, the number of private security and strong-arm debt collectors rose on the streets. However, these new private security firms both created the need for security and provided the security to customers because everyone doing business in Russia needed a roof. In the rural areas, private farmers feared both for their crop and for their lives and in the Urals farmers were "allowed to carry shotguns" to protect themselves.[183] For example, "private farmers in the Kemerovo region, Siberia, have seen many armed visitors to their farmsteads take away their cattle and poultry," which of course could be prevented if the farmers bought protection from local racketeers.[184]

Agricultural regions remained incredibly vulnerable to protection rackets and organized crime because they were often far from major metropolitan areas and their safety was in the hands of local officials, many of whom worked to actively dispossess former state and collective farm workers for their own benefit.

[180] Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*, 114.
[181] Varese, 206.
[182] Marziiva, Svetlana. "Reket zhil, reket zhiv, reket budet zhit." *Izvestiya*. July 17, 1996, 130 edition.
[183] Varese, 209.
[184] Varese, 208.

Yeltsin and his reformers raced to introduce a market economy in Russia in the hopes of legalizing the shadow economy that had allowed Soviet citizens to obtain scarce goods since the beginning of the planned economy, but in their haste a strict legal code and judicial system were left behind. Local elites were able to consolidate their power through accumulation of land that was supposed to be dispersed between former state and collective farm workers. In many cases, people who had once been employed on state or collective farms found themselves unemployed and entirely cut off from any system of support. At the same time as these individuals were systematically abandoned by the State structures on which they used to rely, rural mafias and protection rackets emerged to offer support to new private farmers and business owners that was no longer provided by the police. Those who could no longer find means of survival within legal and official channels were forced to operate outside of them, within the shadow economy, newly forming mafias, or simply drifting and finding work as they moved. The legitimization of activities deemed illicit during the Soviet period allowed for individuals who had been accumulating wealth and social capital for decades to emerge at the front of the privatization movement. With more money in the bank and more influence over various sectors of the government, an emerging class of what would be known as oligarchs capitalized on sudden reforms and lawlessness when privatization began. Oligarch groups became embedded with organized crime through their employment of "former senior KGB staff, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the central government."[185] These former intelligence and security personnel often had close ties to organized crime, and their rise to power through alignment with both criminal

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[185] Serguei Cheloukhine and Joseph King, "Corruption Networks as a Sphere of Investment Activities in Modern Russia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40, no. 1 (January 29, 2007): 112, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2006.12.005.

organizations and businesspeople helped oligarchs to carry out what would soon be one of the largest land grabs in recent history.

As Yeltsin's reforms broke down the community structure in rural areas, people who had once depended upon state or collective farms were forced to rely more heavily upon *blat*. However, as shown above, *blat* could not fill every gap left by the retreat of the state; nor was it able to fix any real issues. Dispossession remained an altogether devastating side-effect of Yeltsin's reforms. Not only were the dispossessed ignored by the state, but they were also forced to operate outside of their communities that had once aided them through *blat*. In time, *blat* became simply a band-aid for the unemployment, underemployment and dispossession plaguing rural communities. In addition to dispossession, rural communities faced rising crime rates. The solution to these was yet another level of the organized criminal networks.

As the state security apparatus dissolved, former members of the KGB, police and military created private protection companies that forced business and farm owners to buy into their protection. These new social structures were able to capitalize on the chaos of produced by Yeltsin's top-down reforms. The threat of violence guaranteed that these organized protection rackets would thrive, and the price of protection ensured that private farmers would never become successful enough to challenge the local elites. Additionally, the legitimization of the shadow economy blurred the lines between legal and illegal, which allowed for organized crime and well-positioned elites to grab even more power and wealth during the transition period. Dependency on local elites and protection rackets increased throughout the 1990s, and agricultural producers were being systematically dispossessed or left with little choice but to work for the emerging new class of wealthy landowners. However, this problem would only worsen as oligarchs became more interested in agriculture and agricultural land.

New Classes: Dispossessed and Oligarchs in 1991-2002

"Buy land, they're not making anymore."

—Mark Twain

For the average agricultural producer, the chaos of the 1990s often left them with even less than they had possessed in the Soviet period, and by the end of the twentieth century 39.4 percent of rural inhabitants lived in poverty.[186] Often, this rural poverty left agricultural producers with only the option of subsistence farming, and between 2000-2003 farming on a personal plot constituted 32.4 percent of rural income.[187] The continued lack of productivity in the agricultural sector hindered the marketization of this area of the Russian economy and prevented the typical farm worker from benefitting at all from privatization. As the percentage of unprofitable farms reached 89 percent in 1998, dispossession, coupled with new farm joint-stock companies being uninterested in making a profit and surviving solely on government subsidies, hindered economic advancement in rural societies.[188] Farm managers and local elites had successfully held onto the power they amassed during privatization by preventing average agricultural producers from collecting their shares of former collective and state farms. These strategies of *nomenklatura* privatization were not uncommon throughout Russia, but this emerging rural petty oligarchy was a microscopic version of the true oligarchs that were coming to power in urban centers. The rise of the oligarchy in Russia can be attributed to the manner in which privatization occurred, essentially a mad rush of new policy changes that benefitted a select few individuals with the right connections, at the right place, at the right time. The

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[186] Christopher J. Gerry, Eugene Nivorozhkin, and John A. Rigg, "The Great Divide: 'Ruralisation' of Poverty in Russia," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 32 (July 1, 2008): 596, https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bem052.
[187] Constantin Ogloblin and Gregory J. Brock, "Household Income and the Role of Household Plots in Rural Russia," *Applied Economics and Economic Development* 6, no. 1 (2006). https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1240506.
[188] Wegren, *Russian Agrarian Policy Under Putin*, 34.

oligarchs were able to build their wealth through acquisition of formerly state-run enterprises, such as in the banking and mining sector. By the time this privileged elite became interested in agriculture, widespread dispossession because of managerial and local resistance, combined with low productivity created an opportunity for massive land grabs. Many farms had carried former Soviet structures into a new form and operating at a constant loss was not new to many farms across Russia, but it did make the process of privatization and marketization incredibly difficult, especially for wage workers who relied on a productive harvest.

Despite all of the changes occurring in Moscow, and all of the legislation that was passed by Yeltsin with the intention of creating a land market in the countryside, the entire privatization process proved to be ineffective in allowing private citizens in rural areas the opportunity to engage in said market. This was due in large part to the fact that the economy in rural Russia was incredibly weak, and this "depressed the land market" and few people were incentivized to become landowners because "agriculture was so unprofitable."[189] Between the years of 1992-1995, the average area of private farm plot did not increase, despite area of the plots increasing from 7,804 hectares (ha.) in 1992 to 12,011 ha. in 1995.[190] Land sales were often small, but the amount of land being traded was miniscule because "less than 1 percent of agricultural land was involved in purchase transactions annually" between 1993-1999.[191] With land being bought and sold in small, disjointed plots, the agricultural sector's productivity fell even further behind other industries that were also struggling to continue producing during the 1990s.

The general lack of a land market in Russia was coupled with a change in productivity for private farmers, and even large farms that were a continuation of former collective and state

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[189] Stephen K. Wegren, "Politics and Property Rights in the Yeltsin Period, 1992–99," 72-73.
[190] Federal'naya Sluzhba Gosudarstvennoi Statistiki [Federal State Statistics Service], "Private (Peasant) Farms," (Russia in Figures, 2008), http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b08_12/IssWWW.exe/stg/d01/15-09.htm.
[191] Wegren, "Politics and Property Rights in the Yeltsin Period, 1992-99," 72.

farms. Reformers had hoped, through shock therapy and decollectivization, to stimulate the economy and inspire greater overall Russian productivity. However, this backfired monumentally because in "1998, more than 80 percent of Russian farms had gone bankrupt" leading to widespread unemployment and underemployment.[192] Unemployment and decreasing productivity plagued Russian farms during the 1990s and contributed to the disillusionment that many rural producers had toward private farming. It was not only a matter of labor and land that prevented these new private farmers from being successful producers, but also that they did not have access to farm equipment, the necessary tools to make said equipment run, or "funds for inputs such as seed, fertilizers, and perhaps pesticides and herbicides" that were vital to a successful harvest.[193] This issue came to the forefront of the agricultural sector in 1998 when a massive fertilizer shortage occurred when farms across Russia "had 41 percent of [the fertilizer]" they needed for the harvest that year.[194] Even without the added stressor of a shortage, these farmers had "no money for buying fertilizers" due to continued inability to make a profit from their land.[195] The issues faced by private farmers, such as low productivity and the fact that by "the mid-nineties, 74 million Russians were living below the poverty line" stood in stark contrast to the massive profits made in other recently privatized sectors.[196] At the end of the 1990s, the agricultural sector and the people who worked in it were spiraling into poverty just the financial crisis of 1998 occurred.

The economic crisis exacerbated unemployment rates and highlighted the ineffectiveness of many of Russia's earlier reforms. Due to the largely cosmetic natures of Russia's reform

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[192] Klein, "Bonfire of a Younge Democracy: Russia Choose 'The Pinochet Option,'" 237.
[193] Verdery, "The Death of Peasantry: From Smallholders to Rentiers," 190.
[194] Alexey Filatov, "Russia-Agriculture," *Itar-TASS* (Moscow, Russia), March 10, 1998. https://dlib-eastview-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/browse/doc/2949588.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Klein, "Bonfire of a Younge Democracy: Russia Choose 'The Pinochet Option,'" 238.

policies, particularly in the rural sector where state and collective farms transitioned to become joint-stock companies under the same management from the Soviet period, the Russian banking system was incredibly underdeveloped.[197] During the 1998 financial crisis "banks did close down temporarily" and if citizens had their money in the bank, they "lost most of them."[198] The ruble was rapidly devalued by the Russian government in a preventative measure after witnessing "turmoil in the Asian markets" that caused anxiety in Russia.[199] The devaluation of the ruble and subsequent collapse of the Russian banking system caused a sharp increase in poverty "from 22 percent in 1996 to 33 percent just after the crisis."[200] A poor economy and loss of savings did not inspire the average Russian to attempt to expand their business ventures, but an elite group of business people were able to weather most of the economic crises of the 1990s.

The Russian oligarchs are well-known around the world, and many of them were able to come into major political and economic power during Yeltsin's first term as president.[201] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel prize-winning Russian writer, announced to the State Duma in 1994 that Russia's government was an oligarchy, meaning that the real power remained with the former ruling Soviet class but had begun "posing as democrats."[202] He argued that the Russian people remained under the control of the same class, only under a new name and with fewer restrictions than they had during the Soviet period. Many of the earliest oligarchs worked closely with the government during the privatization period, and "when millions of people were

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[197] Mikhail Dmitriev, "Economic Reform versus Rent Seeking," in *Russia After Communism*, ed. by Anders Åslund and Martha Brill Olcott, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 112. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1mtz6h7.10.
[198] Ibid, 112.
[199] Michael Loshkin and Martin Ravallion, "Welfare Impacts of the 1998 Financial Crisis in Russia and the Response of the Public Safety Net," *Economics of Transition and Institutional Change* 8, no. 2 (July 2000): 270. https://doi-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/10.1111/1468-0351.00045.
[200] Ibid, 276.
[201] Reddaway and Glinski, 15.
[202] Reddaway Glinski, 478.

receiving their wages and pensions with up to a year of delay" bankers used these funds to "speculate in short-term Treasure bonds… and other securities."[203] This meant that new Russian oligarchs were turning massive profits and accumulating exorbitant amounts of wealth, even while unemployment and poverty increased throughout the country by benefiting from "disaster capitalism."[204] Not every choice made during the 1990s was intended solely to benefit oligarchs, but rather reformers were in the midst of attempting to stabilize the Russian economy, and this stabilization process "came at the expense of ordinary citizens."[205] Even as reformers sought to stabilize the economy and decentralize the political structures in Russia, the wealth gap continued to grow, and oligarchs began expanding their industrial control into sectors outside of banking.

This small group of privileged individuals who were able to grow their wealth in banking managed to secure investments into other industries throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Extractable resources like oil, natural gas and chemicals used for fertilizer became the new focal point for the nouveaux rich of Russia. It was not unusual for oil and mining companies to be sold for a fraction of what they were really worth, and the oil company Sidanko encompasses this sentiment exactly: a 51 percent stake of the company was sold at $130 million in 1995, and in 1997 that same share would be valued at $2.8 billion.[206] Companies were snatched up at artificially low prices by the emerging oligarchy because of their close connections to the banking systema and the influence they had over the privatization process at large. Oil, natural gas and other chemicals were a safer option than other investments, because

[203] Reddaway and Glinski, 480.
[204] Naomi Klein and Neil Smith, "The Shock Doctrine: A Discussion," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 4 (August 1, 2008): 582, https://doi.org/10.1068/d2604ks.
[205] Peter Rutland, "Neoliberalism and the Russian Transition," *Review of International Political Economy* 20, no. 2 (April 2013): 338, https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2012.727844.
[206] Klein, "The Bonfire of a Young Democracy: Russia Choose 'The Pinochet Option,'" 233.

the rest of the Russian economy would not be able to function without these resources, particularly the agricultural industry and because they were an excellent export opportunity. The agricultural sector, although struggling to increase productivity and fully privatize, will always be reliant on fertilizers for crops and oil to power equipment during planting and harvesting. The agricultural sector proved interesting for oligarchs in more than just their consumer patterns, the land itself became a point of contention as oligarchs attempted to grab land.

The chaos of land privatization and widespread dispossession of rural producers freed up a significant amount of land that the state had owned during the Soviet period. The farms that were being acquired by outside investors, which was a rare occurrence, were usually bought with "the goal of asset-stripping" and the land would be left unused.[207] This contributed to but also benefited from rural dispossession of former state and collective farm workers. The process of receiving, finding and registering land was made so difficult that in many cases it was more economical to sell the land plot than fight for it. Additionally, many of the former state and collective farms had been operating at a loss for quite some time, and when privatization occurred "their lands ended up in the hands of creditors in order to pay off farm debts," often to energy companies like Gazprom and Lukoil.[208] The recently privatized energy industry was already in the hands of oligarchs, and now these individuals were acquiring land in the form of debt payment. The acquisition of land on the part of the oligarchs in the 1990s and into the 2000s primarily occurred because "after the appropriation of the energy and industry sectors [the oligarchs] are looking for new frontiers of development."[209] However, under Yeltsin's land reform policy of 1993 and subsequent laws on private property, it was still illegal for wealthy

[207] Visser, Mamonova, and Spoor, 906.
[208] Ibid, 906.
[209] Ibid, 909.

businesspeople to buy huge swaths of land. This began to change when Vladimir Putin became President of Russia on 7 May 2000 for his first term, and the relaxation of the laws on private property began.[210]

Throughout the 1990s land tenure was confined to those who received vouchers from the government for their work on collective or state farms, and recipients of the vouchers would have the option to lease out said land. Essentially, this confined land tenure almost exclusively to the countryside where people were already well acquainted with the agricultural industry. With Putin's inauguration as President came sweeping changes across the agricultural sector. There were a number of reasons that oligarchs became interested in agriculture, from the ease with which they are able to launder money through the buying and selling bankrupt enterprises to the influence it would provide them in provincial regions.[211] Essentially, agriculture and the regions where agriculture was the common source of income began to look like an opportunity for wealth expansion for many oligarchs. However, the issue remained that large-scale land purchases were still illegal. This is why in March of 2002 "a group of oligarchs, businessmen, governors, State Duma deputies and a deputy agriculture minister" gathered to form a "union to lobby the government on behalf of the country's farmers and investors in the food industry."[212] This was a mere two years after Putin's first term as president, and the oligarchs and influential officials already felt that a shift had arrived. The union formed notably left out any actual farmers or other members of the population for whom the group claimed to lobby. However, this

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[210] Natalia Panshina, "Preparations for Putin's Inauguration Coming to a Close" in *Itar-Tass Weekly News*, May 7, 2000. https://dlib-eastview-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/browse/doc/2852988.
[211] Fyodor Boldyrev, "Roga i kopita [Horns and hooves]," Kompaniya, May 11, 2001. https://ko.ru/articles/roga-i-kopyta-107573/.
[212] Alla Startseva, "Politicians, Businessmen Form Agriculture Lobby," *Moscow Times*, March 13, 2002, https://dlib-eastview-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/browse/doc/245129.

group of influential Russians seemed to be the push that the government needed to bring about land reform.

The union of elites that lobbied on behalf of agricultural producers and investors saw actionable change a matter of months after their first meeting. In July of 2002, Federal Law of July 24 "On Farm Land Turnover" was passed that introduced more concrete property rights and also legalized the buying and selling of farm land.[213] Thus, the era of controlled privatization had passed, and anyone was able to buy and sell land as they pleased. The law included clarifications of property rights and how citizens were able to fully control the land they owned, and also provided them the opportunity to control the land they received through the voucher system as they saw fit.[214] While this law proved to be useful and desirable for the oligarchs and wealthy businesspeople who saw the potential for profit in the agricultural sector, it also had the potential to further dispossess agricultural producers despite its promise of property rights. The rural population at the time struggled to remain independent in the era of mafias and racketeering, and a law that provided the wealthiest people in Russia the opportunity to invest in a new industry spelled disaster in many places. The average farm worker in 2001 regardless of if he worked on someone else's farm or worked for the joint-stock company to which he had added his land, had the lowest salary between farm managers, farm specialists and private farmers.[215] Thus, these are individuals with limited access to funds and nothing to fall back on apart from the voucher that had been given that promised a land of some number of hectares.

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[213] "Federal Law No. 101-FZ of July 24, 2002 on Farm Land Turnover (with the Amendments and Additions of July 7, 2003, June 29, October 3, December 21, 2004, March 7, July 18, 2005, February 5, 2007)," adopted by the State Duma, https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/rus_e/WTACCRUS58_LEG_36.pdf, accessed on 10 March 2021.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Stephen K. Wegren, David J. O'Brien, and Valeri V. Patsiorkovski, "Winners and Losers in Russian Agrarian Reform," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 30, no. 1 (October 2002): 19. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150412331333222.

It was not only oligarchs who had made their fortunes in the newly privatized industries that were interested in controlling land and resources in rural areas. Former collective farm managers and local authorities had been able to amass incredible power that placed them in the right position to withhold land from interested oligarchs. Throughout the 1990s, a period of chaos and constant threat to one's livelihood, "job security for managers, at least, increased as the decade wore on."[216] Many of these farm managers were able to increase their economic standing by supplementing their salary with the "sale of household production," something that was easier for this class of people because they had an easier time securing a private plot of land with which they could become entrepreneurs.[217] Additionally, they were able to hold onto power acquired through privatization by preventing new farms from entering the nearby areas. The power of these farm managers would pose a threat to new land investors, as they made up a kind of local, rural oligarchy that controlled much of peoples' lives in these regions. Thus, as Putin's law came into effect and land was available for purchase as it had never been before, the average agricultural producer was being pulled between incredibly powerful oligarchs and the local elites who controlled much of their day to day lives.

Oligarchs and local elites worked to obtain or maintain control over rural lands, while the local, working populations continued to be left out of the privatized land market. It was the wage worker who suffered the most during this period of massive wealth accumulation for the very privileged few, and this was most clear in the Russian countryside. The wealth and political capital accumulated by the oligarchs throughout the 1990s allowed for them to hold incredible sway over policy and change in Russia. This group was able to capitalize on the limited marketization and lack of concrete property rights within the agricultural sector as a whole. Due

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[216] Ibid, 12.
[217] Ibid, 20.

to the fact that the average farm wage worker did not make enough money to utilize or have access to the emerging markets around Russia, they remained almost entirely dependent on farm managers and local authorities. Their lives were dictated by the ability of said manager or official to pay them on time and to advocate on their behalf to the federal government. The rising rural oligarchy was loath to relinquish the power they had accumulated since the beginning of Yeltsin's privatization in 1993. Be they rural or urban oligarchs, the typical agricultural worker in this period lost considerable amounts of security and social wellbeing so that the nouveaux rich could continue to profit exponentially. One concerning new trend of the early 2000s is the emergence of agro-holdings in the Russian agricultural sector. Still there is "no legal definition of agro-holdings" and they remain an understudied aspect of current Russian agricultural trends, but they pose an imminent threat to the already precarious positions of smallholder farmers.[218] In 2003 "more than 90 agro-holdings were active in 25 regions" and by 2006 the number of agro-holdings jumped to 319.[219] Ultimately, these massive land-holding corporations eat up arable land in Russian rural areas, leaving private farmers with even fewer options than they had in the 1990s.

The lawlessness of the 1990s and early 2000s culminated in incredible amounts of uncertainty for rural populations, and an incredible amount of wealth for oligarchs. The oligarchs were able to capitalize on the loss of security for rural populations and buy out huge swaths of land, resulting in the emergence of agro-holdings. This new form of land ownership conflicts sharply with the promises made to rural populations in the 1990s, when they were told that they would be given the opportunity to enter into private farming or establish agricultural joint-stock

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[218] Vasily Uzun, Natalya Shagaida, and Zvi Lerman, "Russian Agroholdings and Their Role in Agriculture," *Post-Communist Economies* 0, no. 0 (March 1, 2021): 1, https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2021.1886787.
[219] Visser, Mamonova and Spoor, 906.

companies. These were of course, empty promises for many individuals and after oligarchs gained control of newly privatized industries such as banking and fuel, agricultural land appeared to be the next opportunity for investment. The subsequent land-grab led to further dispossession of rural populations, and the power structures that emerged from it resembled a quasi-feudal dynamic, with rural communities working the land they do not own with few options to leave. With a declining quality of life and few possibilities for personal advancement, agricultural producers have become reliant on the oligarchical class in order to maintain their way of life.

In 2002, when Putin legalized land purchases at the behest of oligarchs and government officials, the situation for small-time agricultural producers became even more dire. Prior to 2002, the primary threat to private farmers came from two sources that were intimately interconnected: rural organized crime gangs that controlled protection rackets and local elites who had power over the day-to-day lives of agricultural producers. This means that those few people who had been able to break into the land market had to operate in a position of constant disadvantage, and this only grew worse as oligarchs began buying up land. In many parts of the Russian countryside, farms were turning into quasi-feudal structures with wealthy landowners reaping the benefits from the work of a local population who had few options outside of the farm. As oligarchs accumulated wealth from the agricultural sector, rural producers sank more deeply into poverty with fewer chances for escape due to the constant nonpayment of wages and limited options for growth within the village. The stratification of society became ever more apparent as the number of impoverished and dispossessed people in the Russian countryside grew, just as oligarchs were collecting billions in revenue from industries such as energy, banking and, after 2002, agriculture. The differences in wealth acquisition were altogether

startling: during the early stages of privatization, the future oligarchs were deemed important and influential, while many former collective and state farm workers were not.

Conclusion

But things went even worse in Russia itself. Before a national recovery could take place (in the 1990s), both morally and economically the forces of darkness quickly won the upper hand; the most unprincipled thieves enriched themselves through the unimpeded plundering of the nation's property, anchoring society's cynicism and the moral harm already perpetrated. That was a great catastrophe for the whole of Russia.

--Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Interview with the *New York Times*, 2006

The disastrous repercussions of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin's agricultural reform policies dispossessed agricultural producers through systematic privatization that benefited almost exclusively those individuals in positions of power, or those with strong connections to influential people. Privatization is often described as cosmetic in rural Russia because many of the former Soviet structures remained in place on former state and collective farms. This *nomenklatura* privatization allowed for the consolidation of power in the hands the local elites and created a kind of power vacuum which was filled by local mafias and increasingly influential oligarchs. Because of his policies that created space for mafias and oligarchs, Yeltsin remains a controversial figure in Russia today. While he protected the fledgling democracy in 1991, the policies he instituted in the following years were nothing short of disastrous. According to Jessica Allina-Pisano, the retreat of the state during Yeltsin's reforms allowed farm managers and local elites to manipulate the privatization process for their own benefit. This was done in order to prevent private farmers from taking any business or success away from former state or collective farms: private farming, as it became an attractive option for former collective and state farm workers, was viewed as a threat to the power of former collective farm managers. With the retreat of the state, the imposition of a new and highly fluid rule of law allowed for the rise of rural mafias and presented an opportunity for oligarchical control in the late 1990s and early

2000s, as these new levels of corruption came to characterize the new social structure of the agricultural sector. At the same time, according to many scholars, notably Alexander Vorbrugg, Caroline Humphrey, Jessica Allina-Pisano and Stephen Wegren, this period of new concepts of legal versus illegal contributed to the creation of a class of dispossessed people in rural communities.

Land ownership in Russia, and even the pseudo-ownership observed during the Soviet period, is a kind of social relationship. These relationships are an integral part of successful farming in Russia, because land ownership in rural areas indicates a connection to community and networks of mutual aid. Russian concepts like *blat* and the informal economy influence how people view land ownership and attempts to introduce a land market often clashed with these longstanding social relationships. In a matter of a few short years, there was entire overhaul of the concept of land ownership and rural producers were forced to reconceptualize their notions of community and transactional exchanged intended to replace mutual aid relationships. The Russian reform process was, therefore, a major shift in what social relations really meant, and, as privatization and reform progressed, rural communities struggled to survive even as massive amounts of wealth were accumulated by a few well-connected individuals.

From the very onset of agricultural reform under Gorbachev, a process that reached alarming results under Yeltsin, there was a clear lack of interest in preserving the way of life for the rural population. Chris Miller notes that while Gorbachev was interested in bringing about agricultural reform, the politics at hand hindered any sort of effective change that could have possibly revitalized the agricultural sector. As full-scale privatization took off under Yeltsin the process became only more unequal. The general reluctance to support private farmers on a national or local level contributed to systematic dispossession that not only stripped rural

producers of land but, according to Alexander Vorbrugg, also removed them from social networks and placed them in vulnerable positions of dependency. According to Jessica Allina-Pisano, local elites and farm managers carried out privatization in name only and worked to isolate farmers who attempted to become entrepreneurs through private farming by excluding them from *blat* and other networks of necessary aid. Some members of marginalized communities were able to receive land from local authorities because they did not pose a threat to former collective farms, being a member of these groups did not promise success after privatization.

Russian women suffered the most under this new system of farming, because they were often left out of the policy decisions regarding private farming and were expected to work on farms while also caring for the household. Carol Leonard calls the work of these rural women "factories in the field." Combined with the household labor expected of women, the situation created what Liubov Denisova refers to as a 'triple burden lifestyle.' While these women, who were deemed unthreatening to rural elites, may have been granted, this did not guarantee their success and comfort in the years to come. Dispossession remained a very real threat for the average farmer who had been unable to legalize their land tenure under Yeltsin's voucher system of privatization. At the same time, the farmers who were successful in private farming suffered under mafia-controlled protection rackets.

Russia's privatization process is often compared with that of other post-socialist countries, such as China and other Eastern European countries. Chris Miller has documented the ways in which Soviet politicians observed and attempted to emulate aspects of China's privatization process. However, it is important to note that China and most Eastern European countries in the Soviet bloc did not ever have fully collectivized agriculture. The bulk of the

farming was organized around household farms, and when it came time to reorganize the rural sector around private plots, the shift was accomplished in a much smoother fashion. Russia, on the other hand, entered into highly mechanized collective farming under Stalin in the 1930s. The sudden move from widespread collective farming to individual plots in the 1990s created immeasurable chaos in the agricultural sector. The resulting lack of state supervision over these processes provided the perfect opportunity for rural elites to hold onto power they had accumulated during the Soviet period.

These key mistakes made during Russia's rapid privatization will not be easy to rectify, for they created space in land ownership for the Russian oligarchs who were able to buy up formerly state-owned enterprises in the energy and mining sectors. These individuals, who possessed both incredible amounts of financial and political capital, went on to influence policy in ways that would benefit them without any concern for the average working-class Russian. With the wealth and influence amassed through the energy, mining and fuel sectors, a whole new class of oligarchs formed lobby groups to legalize their massive land acquisitions in 2002 during Vladimir Putin's first term as president. Since then, the number of agro-holdings companies has skyrocketed. As oligarchs became interested in agriculture, agro-holdings, or mega-farms, grew rapidly in the early to mid 2000s. The implications of this type of farming are profound for rural communities in Russia, because massive swaths of land controlled by a group of elites and worked on by farmers who do not own the land resembles a kind of quasi-feudalism. Having capitalized on the chaos brought about by rural mafias and protection rackets that preyed on rural populations, the oligarchs came to control the land through their ability to out-purchase the average private farmer.

The breakdown of Soviet social relations and the rise of a market economy that worked only for a small elite can be attributed to both neoliberalism, and the corruption of the reformers. Russia in the twenty-first century is, indeed, a startling example of how neoliberal policies in a post-socialist transitioning economy can be manipulated to benefit a small minority, while abandoning the majority. The average collective farm worker did not have a hand in how reform would be carried out in Russia, and their views of land ownership were not taken into account when neoliberal policies were implemented by Yeltsin and his reformers. By replacing what a 'rule of law' should mean in Russia, reformers and elites were able to become wealthy from the legitimization of the underground economy and manipulation of policies for themselves. Today the Russian oligarchs are able to capitalize on *nomenklatura* privatization and accumulate wealth in ways that former collective and state farm workers could not.

By contrast, Russian agricultural producers suffered a number of devastating blows to their communities through the whole twentieth and now the beginning of the twenty-first century, from Stalin's violent collectivization, Gorbachev's tentative reform, Yeltsin's rapid and unequal privatization, and finally Putin's choice to solidify the worst of Yeltsin's grievous errors. Rural communities left with few rights and little land in the 1990s have become entrenched in generational poverty, while rural elites, mafias and oligarchs have been able to gain incredible wealth and influence since the breakup of the Soviet Union. The intersections of *blat*, new transactional relationships, and increasingly powerful organized crime syndicates have challenged long-term views of land ownership and the state, which in turn created a kind of power vacuum that is being filled by oligarchs and protection rackets. The inequality and chaos of land reforms from 1985-2002 have left the Russian rural sector in an arguably worse position than they were in during the Soviet period. Agricultural producers receive even less state support

and rely more heavily on mutual aid and informal economies that are altogether incapable of filling the gaps left by the state's retreat.

With all the radical changes, Russia's history of collective and state farms is still deeply felt by Russian agricultural producers today, and these sentiments impede the introduction of a land market. There is no simple way to introduce a new kind of 'rule of law' and a functioning, accessible land market in Russia, because this was already tried in the 1990s and resulted in disaster capitalism and the rise of Russia's oligarchs. Privatization, on the whole, has left rural communities in precarious, quasi-feudal positions, and perhaps in time the new 'rule of law' and land markets will be institutionalized and more equitable in the countryside. However, the whole manner of instituting change will have to be slower than what had already been tried, provided that the government can really be intent upon avoiding the mistakes of previous history and consolidating equitable land markets in everyday reality.

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