

How to Be a *Khoziain* in a Transforming State: State Formation and the Ethics of Governance in Post-Soviet Russia

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The rapid and pervasive changes of the past decade and a half have thrown the political field wide open across the former Soviet bloc. An extensive array of actors has laid claim to the mantle of the postsocialist state, seeking to siphon off its resources, to leverage its putative power, and often to do both in the same breath. At the same time, others have fled the institutional and discursive purview of the state, taking advantage of the near disappearance of centralized authority in the early 1990s to stake out powerful non- and quasi-state domains. The density of these strategies, which in practice have been complementary as often as contradictory, has made for nothing short of an ethical thicket for postsocialist citizens and state functionaries alike.

Such was the environment in which debates about local and national governance percolated during my research in Sepych (pop. 1867), a former state farm town in the Russian Urals. These debates, and the practical dilemmas that gave rise to them, often featured the Russian concept of *khoziain* (khuh-ZYAH-eeen; variously: master, owner, administrator, boss, man of the house; pl. *khoziaeva*). What qualities did a proper *khoziain* possess? What capabilities and actions were good evidence of one's status as a *khoziain*? What domains did various *khoziaeva* command, how, and to what effect? Were those attempting to consolidate power in the town/district/region/country proper *khoziaeva* at all? Over countless conversations and interactions that featured the term or its derivatives, I came to understand that being a *khoziain*—and being in relationship to one—was a

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matter of historically situated practice, fraught with moral quandaries and intricately caught up in political and economic transformations extending far beyond the borders of Sepych. The “how to” of this article’s title is intended to capture the puzzlement, uncertainty, and doubt that so often marked disputes about how a *khoziain* in post-Soviet Sepych should and could act.

In order to understand these debates and predicaments, and to suggest their significance for theories of state formation and governance more broadly, I combine insights from the ethnography of the state with theories of ethics and moral practice. My argument proceeds in five parts. The first section outlines my case for adding considerations of ethics to the array of approaches to state formation commonly drawn on by anthropologists and their fellow travelers in history and historical sociology. The second section provides a closer examination of the semantic field of *khoziain* terms in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia and introduces the post-Soviet attempts to municipalize state power in which my ethnography is situated. The third and fourth sections analyze and compare in some detail the shifting relationships between households and potential *khoziaeva* in Sepych’s two primary institutions: the now privatized state farm and local organs of the Russian state apparatus. I conclude by bringing together relationships among households, the privatized farm, and the local state administration in the context of a contentious town meeting.

STATE FORMATION, GOVERNANCE, AND ETHICS

Any particular incarnation of the modern state, George Steinmetz (1993: 15–18) suggests, is likely a complex and multi-faceted enough beast to demand the combination of multiple theoretical strategies and perspectives.¹ This is perhaps especially the case when large-scale transformations such as the end of socialism and the global reorganizations associated with post-Fordist capitalism are part of the picture. My own arguments about post-Soviet Russia pay particular attention to the conjuncture of states’ struggles to gain monopolies over a range of transactions on their territories and the historically formed ethical sensibilities informing those whose daily task it is to navigate such transactions.²

¹ Ancillary to the approach to governance and the state I adopt is the by now widespread—though not universally shared—contention that sharp analytic distinctions between “state” and “society” or “state” and “economy” buy into states’ own reification of their power and collaborate in obscuring the ways in which that power operates. The assumption that the state is not an “it” is nothing new to historical sociology or anthropology, nor is it proprietary to any one theoretical stance (see, for instance, Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Coronil 1997; Herzfeld 1992; Steinmetz 1999; Verdery 1996). The task at hand is, as Timothy Mitchell (1999: 77) puts it, to historicize the connections between the specific material practices and specific ideologies that constitute—and, as I will argue here, do not constitute—the field of the state in particular times and places.

² A more comprehensive approach to recent Russian state formation would need to incorporate several other elements, especially attention to the nation portion of the nation-state. I am also mindful that many, following Foucault, would counsel seeking post-Soviet governance in dispersed

Many theories of the state work from some variation of Weber's claim that the state can be defined as the unit holding monopolies—especially over legitimized force and currency transactions—in a given territory (see esp. 1978: 54; 178). Although most famously deployed in accounts of early modern state formation in Western Europe, this family of theories has been quite useful in the study of the postsocialist world, where it has not been at all safe to assume that states have successfully consolidated monopolies over anything.³ Vadim Volkov's (2002) study of the Russian mafia and associated "violence-managing agencies," for instance, charts the initial disappearance and, nearly a decade later, the slow reemergence of the Russian state's monopoly on legitimized force. David Woodruff (1999) makes a similar claim for monetary consolidation, using detailed studies of barter and cashless networks in the energy sector to argue that the Russian state failed to exert sovereignty over currency exchange. Although I take some inspiration from the ways in which Volkov and Woodruff frame the issue of recent Russian state-formation as a set of struggles between state and non-state actors for substantial control (monopoly remains too strong a word) over different sets of transactions, my approach also differs in significant ways.

To begin with, my focus is not on a particular item of exchange—such as violence or rubles—but on historically situated expectations about how one might go about governing by attempting to consolidate control over any one or several types of transactions. My arguments will be grounded in the minutiae of particular exchanges in Sepych, but my aim will be to show how these exchanges illuminate the ways in which struggles between state and non-state actors are locally understood through shifting expectations about—and possibilities for—what is understood to be good governance. This is a *cultural* field; indeed, as I will argue shortly, it is an ethical field. My primary claim will be that shifting concepts of what it means to be a *khoziain* are one key part of how different actors (state and non-state) in Russia attempt to extend control over various domains of exchange and at multiple levels. Put another way, being a *khoziain* in Russia, or failing to be one, is a *constitutive* element of post-Soviet governance, not simply, as some might suggest, an epiphenomenal item of cultural curiosity to be dismissed on the road to more accurate rational choice or interest group theories.

The territory outlined by Volkov and Woodruff is, therefore, not entirely sufficient for my goals. Anthropologists and others influenced by the cultural turn

discursive and disciplinary formations rather than in the state field. Elizabeth Dunn (2004), Thomas C. Wolfe (2005), and Alexei Yurchak (2002), for instance, have usefully applied Foucault-inspired theories of governmentality to postsocialist transformations. I do not see their arguments as anti-theoretical to the approach I adopt here, but reconciling these different approaches would require a higher level of theoretical and ethnographic integration than I am presently prepared to attempt.

³ On the application of theories of early modern state formation to the postsocialist context, see especially Ganev (2005).

have considerably expanded the array of elements we might include in theorizing struggles within and over the state field. In addition to the material processes of state formation prioritized by classical social theories, these approaches suggest, states also—perhaps even primarily—employ a variety of representational and discursive strategies to convince citizens of their unitary nature and power (Steinmetz 1999). Theories of the “state effect,” defined by Mitchell (1991: 94) as “the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make [state] structure appear to exist” feature prominently in this move (see also Abrams 1988). So, too, do ethnographies of how and when states, or indeed non-state entities, are able and unable to create such effects (esp. Nugent 2004). How, these studies ask, do states lodge their claims to coercive power in their subjects’ minds, bodies, and imaginations? The same question might, of course, be productively asked of non-state organizations like the Russian mafia, an entity as much imagined to be all-powerful as actually exercising meaningful control. And it must be asked not only of overt state building projects themselves, but also of the expectations by which the legitimacy of those projects is debated and assessed by variously situated parties. I therefore ask throughout this study how talk about what a *khoziain* is and does figures in struggles to consolidate power within and among competing state and non-state domains. Moreover, I show how the expectations that ground this discourse are themselves in a state of flux, in some cases expanded by new possibilities emerging from the process of rural decollectivization, in others hemmed in by new laws and regulations.

To establish the broader significance of these assertions, I find it helpful to link the literature on state formation I have just outlined to recent anthropological approaches to ethics and moral practice. Michael Lambek (2000), for instance, argues programmatically that Bourdieu-style practice theory stands to gain substantially from more developed attention to the ways in which practice is determined not only by habitus and strategies for conversion among different kinds of capital, but by considerations of virtue and the good (see also Laidlaw 2002, Robbins 2004). Mikael Karlström (2004) suggests that the emphasis on occultism and witchcraft in recent analyses of African politics leaves unexplored processes by which many Ugandans aspire to rehabilitate moral communities. Neither Lambek nor Karlström wishes to ignore the insights that anthropology’s recent focus on power has yielded, but they find it inadequate for understanding the dilemmas and aspirations of morally situated persons. In a similar vein, I argue that attention to ethics and moral practice provides a way to link the competitive field of state formation to the discourses and imaginations about proper or virtuous governance to which variously positioned actors strive, succeed, and fail with respect to particular moral communities.⁴

⁴ James Scott (1976) employed the term “moral economy” to refer to local notions of justice and exploitation in peasant communities. Although there are certainly resonances with his work here,

Thinking about the shifting ethics of being a *khoziain*, that is, provides one way to link the roles of discourse, imagination, and practice in governance, and to situate all of these elements socially and historically.

Furthermore, I would argue that this approach to ethics is particularly well suited to analyses of the postsocialist moment. Existing bridges between theories of morality and state formation—such as Corrigan and Sayer’s “moral regulation” (1985: 4)—examine the ways in which states, as an intrinsic part of their cultural formation, work to cloak their diverse statements in a single moralizing garb that renders natural and normal what is in fact particular and contingent (see also Moore 1993). However, in different ways across the former Soviet bloc, the failure of fledgling states to endow their statements with an aura of moral sanctity has been overdetermined: by complicity with socialist-era regimes; by the general weakness of central authorities (at least until the late 1990s in Russia); by disenchantment with the course of “transition”; and, perhaps most of all, by the difficulty in convincing citizens that anything about these times has been normal. In such an environment, as Burawoy and Verdery (1999) have argued, the everyday expectations, instincts, and sensibilities that comprise key parts of an ethical field take on particular salience across multiple domains—governance among them.

To summarize, the approach I take to state formation and the ethics of governance has several components. First, it understands governance as a field of material and moral contestation, both within the field of the state and along the often-fuzzy borders between state and non-state domains. Second, it incorporates the analysis of discourse and practice, viewing both as constitutive of, and intertwined sorts of evidence for, shifting ethical sensibilities. Third, it seeks to move between the largest of scales, especially by locating postsocialist transformations within global reorganizations of culture and power, and the quite small scales comprised by everyday exchanges in a rural town. Fourth, it is resolutely historical, accounting for the trajectories of past discourses and practices without relying either on a teleological narrative such as a “transition to capitalism and democracy” or on essentialized notions of “political culture” or “national character.”

SITUATING SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET *KHOZIAEVA*

The primary context for my arguments will be the municipalization reforms of the 1990s and early 2000s, reforms designed to strip state functions from Soviet

I am less inclined than Scott to limit this moral economy to a bounded unit of analysis—such as “a peasantry”—on which states act (a tendency that persists in Scott’s more recent analytic distinction between states’ abstract knowledge and localized practical knowledge [*metis*] [1998]). I prefer to see a single, larger—indeed, global—moral field inhabited by unevenly distributed, manifestly unequal, but not entirely bounded and incommensurable expectations and sensibilities about the constitution of persons and proper relations among them. This position is, I believe, closer to what E. P. Thompson (1971) had in mind in his writings on moral economy. See also Munro (1998).

state farms and, at the same time, fashion new “organs of local self-government” as the main state presence in the countryside. I begin, however, with the Soviet period. Although the internal workings of socialist-type party states are by now well theorized and I do not intend to add to these understandings here, I do want to indicate the centrality of *khoziain*-style relationships to the Soviet—and specifically Russian Soviet—brand of East European socialism. These Soviet-era sensibilities about governance became, in the post-socialist era of municipalization, at once the target of successive reforms from above and a key resource for townspeople in Sepych to draw on as they worked to resituate themselves with respect to emerging state and non-state forms.

Socialist societies, with their centrally planned economies and “rational redistributive” organization, created special conditions for accumulation and exchange. As an ideal type, they are usefully conceptualized as a kind of “wealth in people” system.⁵ Wealth in people refers to a mode of accumulation analogous to but quite different from the accumulation of wealth in capital central to capitalist systems. In socialist contexts, the importance of collecting people was a response to the widespread shortage created by socialist central planning (see Kornai 1980; Verdery 1991; 1996; Lampland 1995). In order to make ends meet in conditions of shortage, socialist citizens trafficked in all manner of rights and obligations outside the official plan. Built up over time, these rights and obligations created networks that could be deployed for purposes as varied as putting dinner on the table and meeting (or fudging) quotas at a large enterprise.

These connections did not simply facilitate everyday “getting by” (Ledeneva 1998; Fitzpatrick 1999) and form certain kinds of “embedded” persons (especially Dunn 2004). They were also central to governance, to the ways in which members of the party-state bureaucracy consolidated power, administered the domains they were responsible for, and strove to shore up their often-tenuous legitimacy. To advance in this system, one accumulated not capital but people—in the shape of rights conferred and obligations owed through larger and larger networks (see Easter 2000). Successful managers of socialist enterprises were those who could most adroitly wheel and deal in networks that extended far beyond their own firms. For party-state bureaucrats, the accumulation of wealth in people through all manner of unofficial exchanges was the royal road to ironing out kinks in the supply chain, deploying labor power when

⁵ See Konrád and Szelényi (1979) on “rational-redistribution.” Caroline Humphrey’s (1998) monograph on collective farms in Buryatia was the first to draw attention to the Soviet system as a “hierarchy of administrative rights held in practice” and to identify the importance of this organization for the flow of vertical and horizontal exchanges I outline here. I prefer “wealth in people” to “rights in people” because I think it more accurately captures obligations as well as rights (see esp. Dunn 2004; Verdery 2003: 61–63) and because “wealth” draws attention to the importance of accumulation. See Guyer (1995) for an example of the ways in which anthropologists have analyzed “wealth in people” in African contexts.

necessary, quieting rumblings of discontent, and plotting one's path to higher positions in party-state and, thus, to still greater access to wider networks.

These ideal-typical tendencies of socialist systems were, in the course of the twentieth century, grafted onto and refracted through the myriad preexisting patterns of governance spread across the former Soviet bloc. In the Russian case, the term *khoziain* and its derivatives played an important role in this process.⁶ Anxious to avoid bourgeois capitalist terminology, early Soviet visionaries preferred *khoziaistvo* (economic organization) to *ekonomika* (economy) to refer to the national economy (Humphrey 1998: 78). Soviet economic production was, in significant ways, to be conceptualized as household production writ large (see also Jowitt 1992: 127ff.). At the highest level was the *narodnoe khoziaistvo* or "people's economic organization." Soviet agriculture as a sector was *sel'skoe* (rural) *khoziaistvo*, and the collective and state farms constituting the sector were, respectively, *kollektivnye khoziaistva* (or *kolkhozy* for short), and *sovetskie khoziaistva* (or *sovkhozy*). In many areas of rural Russia, including Sepych, individual households also continued to be termed *khoziaistva*, as they were in the pre-Revolutionary period.⁷ Thus, in Sepych as elsewhere, the official tiers of party-state administration bore the label *khoziaistvo* at each level, from the union-wide "peoples' economic organization" right down to the rural household.

Although not in official terminology, those who administered these nested domains were often called their *khoziaeva*. In this term and the everyday activities of those to whom it referred resided many of the practices of administration, property rights, and power characteristic of socialist systems more broadly. Ken Jowitt (1992: 143), for instance, echoing Alexander Gershchenkron's earlier formulation (1966: 310), suggested that the primary tendency within the Soviet system was for the "*khoziaistvennik* to become a *khoziain*"—the economic administrator/functionary to become the owner. State or collective resources in one's administrative domain, that is, had the tendency to become one's own resources, redirected into channels outside the plan. Indeed, the ability to accomplish such transformations—impossible shortage into successful subsistence, contradictory demands from above into improvised local solutions—were central among the elements that *made* one into a proper

⁶ Here I intend "Russian" in the cultural-linguistic sense. The fact that Sepych has been almost entirely ethnic Russian long into the pre-Soviet past enables me to skirt the tangled issues of Russification, Sovietization, and nationalities policy that would complicate the analysis of ethics and governance still further in non- or partially-Russian areas of the former USSR. See, for instance, Humphrey (1998) on Buryatia and, further afield, discussions of the *zadruga* state in Eastern Europe (Verdery 1996: 64). There is a good deal more to Russian *khoziain* terminology than I can cover in this article. Paxson (2005), for instance, provides a sustained and rich discussion of the metaphysical and otherworldly dimensions of *khoziain* concepts in rural Russia. See also Hachten (2005) on *khoziaistvo* in the middle Soviet period.

⁷ In other Russian areas, the term *dvor* predominated.

khoziain of a particular *khoziaistvo*. This transformative capacity of *khoziaeva* will be central to my analysis of the post-Soviet period.

Concepts of *khoziaistvo* and the practices of *khoziaeva* were thus fundamental to the official and unofficial workings of party-state governance and the networks of rights and obligations in people comprising it. In the countryside, these elements figured prominently in the unequal division of party-state power among state or collective farms (the privileged economic units of *khoziaistvo*), Communist Party organs, and rural soviets (the lowest rungs of Soviet civil administration). As Humphrey (1998) has shown, rural soviets were by far the weakest of these three vectors, owing to the fact that they produced almost no goods useable for the networking and off-the-books deals necessary to the accumulation of wealth in people. Enterprise directors, by contrast, had relatively easy access to precisely these goods.

The state sector reforms animating new predicaments about *khoziaeva* in Sepych during the 1990s and early 2000s were designed to change all of this, especially by eliminating the state functions assigned to enterprises.⁸ Through the municipalization of state power, envisioned by the Yeltsin administration as proceeding hand-in-hand with rural privatization, the Soviet party-state was to be pruned back and replaced with a leaner and more effective set of state institutions.⁹ The Soviet “cultural sphere,” including such components as Soviet Houses of Culture, was to be transferred to organs of local self-government (*organy mestnogo samoupravleniia*), heirs to the Soviet-era rural soviets.¹⁰ Responsibility for rural infrastructure, too, was to shift from the rapidly privatizing agricultural enterprises to local municipal authorities. Snowplowing, sidewalk construction, and streetlight maintenance, for instance, were all slated to become the domain of the local state administrations rather than state or collective farms. Notionally, that is, the business of privatized rural enterprises would become just that: business.

Over a decade after it began, however, municipalization was neither either easy nor complete in the Russian countryside. In fact, it might well be argued to have failed in many areas, at least judging by the standards of

⁸ In this article, I do not treat the fate of Communist Party organs, the third of the three vectors of rural power in the Soviet period.

⁹ For a policy-centered review of municipalization, see Healy et al. (1999) and the references therein.

¹⁰ Russian law makes an important distinction between “the state” (*gosudarstvo*), at federal and regional levels of governance, and organs of self-government (*organy mestnogo samoupravleniia*) supervised by local administrations (*mestnye administratsii*) at district and lower levels (see, for example, Alferova et al. 1998; World Bank 2003a). Although important in structural terms, this was not a distinction that carried much weight in everyday discourse and practice in Sepych. For one thing, the specialists in the local administration carried out most of the transactions in the province of the *gosudarstvo*, including such important matters as the distribution of pensions. See Kharkhordin (2001) for an exhaustive working through of the Russian concept of *gosudarstvo* in history and political theory and Gel'man (2002) and Evans and Gel'man (2004) for instructive analyses of local self-government.

those whose ideas of what proper state formation should look like charted the course of municipalization. Many local administrations had consolidated little power and enjoyed even less legitimacy. They often struggled mightily with the newly privatized farms, officially non-state actors but endowed with resources, expectations, and personnel that were all heavily inflected with Soviet-era sensibilities about proper governance. The balance of power between Soviet rural institutions as they began “the transition” was, however, but one of several factors inhibiting the planned pace of state formation.¹¹

EXPECTATIONS OF *KHOZIAEVA* PAST: HOUSEHOLDS AND AOZT SEPYCH

State Farm Sepych was created in the summer of 1965, cobbled together almost overnight from several smaller collective farms in one of the Soviet Union’s periodic drives for agricultural economies of scale. The farm was primarily a milk and meat operation, meaning that its several divisions harvested grain and cut hay to feed their own livestock, which were in turn milked and slaughtered at rates set to fulfill production plans handed down from above. State Farm Sepych gained considerable fame throughout the Urals during the 1980s for over-fulfilling its quotas, a testament to the first-class contacts of its director, Andrei Petrovich. Sepych, therefore, met the Yeltsin administration’s first decrees on decollectivization in late 1991 from a relatively well-positioned point in the rural socialist economy. Allowed several choices by the new laws, the membership of State Farm Sepych chose “closed joint stock company” (*Aktsionernoe Obshchestvo Zakrytova Tipa*—AOZT) status on the strong advice of Andrei Petrovich. This vote allowed the farm to retain much of its Soviet-era brigade structure and permitted only current and former employees to hold shares, vote at meetings, and hope for yearly dividends. In opting for this course, they rejected, as did the vast majority of rural enterprises across the Russian Federation, the option of simply disbanding into constituent households.¹²

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, AOZT Sepych was what Humphrey has usefully termed a “suzerainty” (see esp. 2002: 5–20). As scholars across the former Soviet bloc have noted, the retreat of centralized authority

¹¹ Municipalization did not fail everywhere, a prime case of success being Moscow under Mayor Yurii Luzhkov. A broader consideration of post-Soviet municipalization might seek to identify the factors leading to these reforms’ divergent trajectories in different domains. At a still wider scale, China presents an interesting case for comparison: as Oi has shown in her discussions of “local state corporatism,” rural Chinese economic reform was often driven by relatively powerful local municipal authorities (1995; 1998). I thank a *CSSH* reviewer for bringing Oi’s work to my attention.

¹² On the course of decollectivization and the array of options available to rural enterprises in Russia, see Humphrey (1998: 444–81) and Wegren (1998). In 2001, new laws governing the organization of enterprises forced Sepych to change its name again, from AOZT Sepych to SPK (Agricultural Production Cooperative) Sepych. This change brought few, if any, immediate consequences for its organization or operation; for the sake of clarity I stay with AOZT Sepych to refer to the farm in the post-Soviet era. On the crucial importance of farm directors, see Lampland (2002).

resulted in a “parcellization of sovereignty” (Verdery 1996: 205–7) that allowed bosses at multiple levels to exert substantial control over their former domains and govern them with a high degree of autonomy (see also Garcelon 2005 on “feudalization”). In Volkov’s and Woodruff’s analyses of Russian state formation, discussed above, it was these bosses, not state agencies, who often enjoyed near monopolies on violence and currency transactions.

The residents of Sepych usually spoke of this process in terms of what they considered to be left of the nesting levels of Soviet *khoziaistva*. In the most commonly expressed view, the reforms beginning with Gorbachev’s *perestroika* had eliminated the higher levels of *khoziaistvo* that most townspeople had grown up with: visible (if not always enthusiastic) participation in the Soviet agricultural sector and national “economic organization.” What remained was the *khoziaistvo* of AOZT Sepych, which nearly everyone continued to refer to as the “the state farm.” Even when they did not use the term “state farm” to refer to AOZT Sepych, the phrase “in our economic organization” (*v nashem khoziaistve*) usually referred to whatever happened to be going on in the commercial farm at the time. Remaining, too, were all townspeople’s individual household economies, the lowest level of *khoziaistvo*. “We all live on our own *khoziaistva* now,” one middle-aged man told me, in response to my question about how things had changed since the end of the Soviet Union. With the national, sectoral, and regional levels of *khoziaistvo* gone or at least rendered far less visible by the elimination of central planning, most townspeople worried that AOZT Sepych would be next to disappear.

Their worries were not unfounded. Although the vast majority of collective and state farms across the Russian Federation had initially opted for conversion to one or another form of private shareholders’ corporation, many of these privatized farms were unable to sustain their operations. Bankruptcy, failure to repay loans, and numerous other factors forced many privatized commercial farms to drastically scale back their operations and payrolls over the course of the 1990s. Often, they disbanded entirely, dividing up what was left of the farm assets among creditors and shareholders. This was, in fact, the case in several of the farms near Sepych that I visited. In these towns and villages, I was often greeted with the comment that it was certainly better to live in Sepych, where “people were still organized.” Where there was no more collective *khoziaistvo*, my interlocutors often used a collection of *ras/raz*-prefixed verbs (denoting dispersal) to describe both the farm infrastructure and the people in the associated towns and villages: pulled apart (*razobrali*), broken up (*razorvali*), split apart (*razkololi*), or even bombed out (*razbombili*).¹³

¹³ See also Pesmen (2000: 67) and Paxson (2005: 103–7) on *ras/raz* verbs.

The continued existence of a *khoziaistvo* above the level of individual households, that is, was the key indicator of what sort of moral community might be expected to exist there as well.

Townpeople in Sepych often worried that they, too, would “go to pieces” (*razvalivat'sia*), either by the time the next big bank loan came due (the pessimistic scenario) or when Andrei Petrovich stepped aside or died (the optimistic scenario). In my conversations about AOZT Sepych, Andrei Petrovich was often lionized as a strong *khoziain*, a linchpin holding the households of AOZT Sepych together into a moral community in the face of this lurking danger. In turning now to the specific exchanges on which his status as an effective *khoziain* rested, I focus on the shifting field in which Andrei Petrovich and households in Sepych created new kinds of post-Soviet relationships. My concern, in other words, is with the new relationships between two levels of *khoziaistvo* and the ways in which they were cemented through exchanges entered into by their respective *khoziaeva*: Andrei Petrovich (and often his brigade leaders) at the level of AOZT Sepych and heads of household at the next lower level. I will argue later that these relationships played a role in undercutting the local state administration's attempts to consolidate the kinds of power and legitimacy envisioned by municipalization reforms.

The most frequently discussed category of relationship between AOZT Sepych and individual households was the monthly payment of cash salaries to the farm's employees. During my visits to Sepych, everyone in town who worked received cash salaries, whether from the commercial farm or other employers. The mid-1990s crises of demonetization, payment in kind, and lengthy delays in salaries were over, but they were a recent enough memory to keep townspeople slightly apprehensive about coming paydays. As important as these salaries were for households, the commercial farm also permitted—and even encouraged—its workers to elect *not* to take cash. The combination of cash salaries, credit, and possibilities for transfers among employees' salary accounts points, I will suggest, to a significant reshaping of the moral community constituting Sepych's *khoziaistvo*. Whereas the Soviet-era State Farm Sepych employed a greater proportion of townspeople and served as the official center of gravity for nearly all the rest, the privatized AOZT Sepych was, in its official capacity, composed of a far more restrictive set of employees and households. Those no longer part of AOZT Sepych found themselves outside of significant—but, as I discuss below, not by any means the only—circuits of exchange marking membership in the *khoziaistvo* and official relationships with its *khoziain*.

Salaries in the commercial farm were, by-and-large, lower than those in other organizations in town. Andrei Petrovich made up for this deficit by creating opportunities for the nearly six hundred townspeople who worked in AOZT Sepych to acquire a range of goods and services by purchasing them against their coming salaries—flexibility that was not possible in the strictly monitored

budgets of the state organizations discussed below.¹⁴ Moreover, in the case of services that could be provided by the commercial farm, such as plowing a household plot or mowing a meadow, AOZT Sepych provided steep discounts to employees and their immediate families. The accounting office simply subtracted the cost against employees' future salaries. The standard cost of commercial farm services for non-employees was nearly twice as high as it was for employees. Unless they made special arrangements with Andrei Petrovich or some side deal with a brigade leader (possibilities I will discuss presently), non-farm workers had to pay for services in cash, full price, at the cashier's office.

In 2001, one of the most heralded accomplishments of AOZT Sepych was to open its own stores, at which workers could make everyday purchases against their current and future salaries. The commercial farm payroll, run out of the central accounting office, was in fact a mass of debits and credits, not only in accounts at the new commercial farm stores, but among commercial farm workers themselves. Money could be transferred among workers to settle debts or collect money for a common purpose. If, for example, it was someone's birthday and the brigade or smaller group planned to celebrate at work, money for a group gift could be collected directly from everyone's payroll account. On one such birthday, the woman who was organizing the celebration commandeered an entire bus from the commercial farm, piling all of her guests into it for a picnic in a faraway meadow. When I asked the driver what he was getting out of the deal, he replied that she would write off a bottle for him; that is, she would simply transfer twenty rubles for a bottle of moonshine to his salary account from hers.

The various provisions for credit and cashless exchange associated with commercial farm salaries thus provided opportunities for farm employees to even out some of the bumps of economic "transition" that came with unexpected bursts of inflation or demonetization. Here then, was one set of ways in which Andrei Petrovich and the leadership of AOZT Sepych acted as *khoziaeva* to their employees, enabling a range of relationships that traced the borders of a new kind of moral community coterminous with those of the membership of AOZT Sepych. Their actions mitigated some inequalities in town (notably the lower salaries paid by the commercial farm) by establishing others—through cut-rate services and credit offered exclusively to employees.

At the same time, these possibilities further isolated those newly unemployed townspeople—Humphrey's "dispossessed" (2002: 21–39)—who had no salaried employment anywhere and to whom the now-private AOZT Sepych had no obligation deriving from employment. Indeed, many non-farm employees in

¹⁴ Although broadly similar opportunities existed at a much smaller scale elsewhere in Sepych—schoolteachers could buy bread in the school cafeteria against their salaries—this form of credit was a much-discussed benefit of working in the commercial farm.

town chafed at AOZT Sepych's provision of store credit and salary transfers, charging that these transactions were manifestly unfair because they were provided exclusively to commercial farm workers. From Andrei Petrovich's perspective, which he outlined to me on numerous occasions, he was "working for people" and "taking care of his people." In his eyes, those townspeople not working in the farm fell into several categories: those who should be working in the farm (his opinion of the unemployed); those who were employed elsewhere and were thus someone else's responsibility; and those who were making money through their own entrepreneurial activities. Each of these groups had to find routes other than official salaries and their various manipulations to access farm resources. By contrast, those townspeople who did remain in the commercial farm had not only a broad set of options for taking their salary, but also a new set of obligations to the director, all of which served to further solidify his power as *khoziain*.

A second significant set of relationships between the two levels of *khoziaistvo* I discuss here took place through non-salary transfers of goods and services from the commercial farm to individual households. These reworkings of the pervasive patronage-style *khoziain* relationships of the socialist period became a source of abiding uncertainty in the post-Soviet period. Because they are more heavily tinged with the Soviet past than cash transactions, they are also a prime place to highlight the role of expectations and imaginations about *khoziaeva* in the field of post-Soviet governance. If salaries were regular and relatively depersonalized, patronage-style exchanges were irregular, highly personalized, and open to all manner of negotiation through competing moral claims. If salaries and their various permutations staked the borders of a new moral community around the private AOZT Sepych, patronage blurred them, for anyone in Sepych could request these sorts of unofficial transfers. Finally, if the moral dilemmas of how to be a *khoziain* had been largely settled with respect to salaries over the course of the 1990s (some residual grumbling aside), they remained manifestly unsettled when it came to patronage. Under what circumstances should Andrei Petrovich allot resources to townspeople who did not work in the farm? What to do with those whose requests should technically be dealt with by fledgling state agencies or without any outside help at all? How to keep the farm afloat as a business and, at the same time, continue to increase his wealth in people by instilling obligations in as many townspeople as possible—obligations that reinforced his sterling reputation as *khoziain* both in and beyond Sepych? Such were the daily dilemmas of the director's office.¹⁵

¹⁵ To a lesser extent, they were also the dilemmas of lower-level officials in the commercial farm. In ways not possible with salaries, employees at lower tiers of the commercial farm might act as patrons in ways similar to the director, doling out tractor time or other favors upon request (and often without the knowledge of their superiors).

In contrast to the usually quiet halls of the local state administration building, the offices of AOZT Sepych were almost without exception busy and chaotic. When he was not there, Andrei Petrovich was assumed to be—and usually was—off working his contacts in the district and regional centers. When he was there, he not only dealt with the day-to-day problems that arose in the commercial farm, but also with a seemingly never-ending parade of visitors to his office, nearly all of them bearing one request or another, from small loans to construction materials to discounted grain. I usually caught Andrei Petrovich in his office as well, where the general confusion meant that he was often dealing with multiple requests and questions at the same time.

On one occasion, I found myself in the director's office with Anton, a young, unemployed, and frequently drunk man who was there on his second trip to see the director about his elderly father's damaged roof. Andrei Petrovich asked if Anton had counted how many tiles they would need to redo the entire roof. Anton replied that they had counted fifty-two sheets, and at fifty rubles a piece, that would come out to 2,600 rubles.¹⁶ Andrei Petrovich wrote the number down on a piece of paper, stared at it, and said slowly, "That, of course, is awful." He looked up at Anton, "And this is for the barn?" "No, no," replied Anton, "for the house itself." Andrei Petrovich thought some more and reached for the phone to call in his chief accountant. When the accountant arrived from her office downstairs, Andrei Petrovich summarized the situation and said, "let's try to get him the roofing material for, say, half price, for 1,300. It's for his father's work." The accountant replied that she didn't quite know how they would manage that, but they would figure something out. Andrei Petrovich turned to Anton and said that the next big order for roofing shingles would probably be placed in a couple of months. He would speak to the head of the construction brigade to make sure that they ordered enough to have fifty-two pieces left for Anton to work on his father's house. Anton murmured his thanks and shuffled out, leaving Andrei Petrovich, the accountant, and me in the room. Anton himself didn't work, Andrei Petrovich said pointedly, and paused. He shook his head at the expense and said, "His father's very ill, and practically blind now. He might not even live to see his new roof." He paused again, and then went on, "But it's for his father's work. Even if he dies, his wife will still have to live there." When the accountant left, Andrei Petrovich complained to me that these requests were undermining his efforts to run a normal business, especially when he could no longer count on much in return. "Look at all that housing we built for people," he said by way of example, "and then [with privatization] they just waved their hands [goodbye] at us."

¹⁶ Just under \$100, or three to four normal months' salary, had Anton been working a low-skill job in AOZT Sepych.

Anton's roofing project is but one example of the dilemmas that attended the patronage doled out by Andrei Petrovich in his role as *khoziain*. Against Anton's lack of employment and the prospect of little in return, the director weighed other rights and obligations in people. In his explanation of his decision to grant the 50 percent discount, the generational cycling of rights and obligations is especially noteworthy. Although I was unable to find out what Anton's father's position in State Farm Sepych had been, it is safe to assume that he was, many years ago, on the receiving end of Andrei Petrovich's patronage while in the socialist workforce. Like many others, Anton's father stayed in Sepych rather than leaving in the Brezhnev-era rush to the cities, and labored in the state farm. When his labor was expended and he retired, Andrei Petrovich repaid that labor by providing a discount on roofing material ("it's for his father's work"). In so doing, he created, or at least hoped to create, a new set of obligations to AOZT Sepych in the next generation—Anton.

As a result of transactions like this, Andrei Petrovich's wealth in people continued to be enormous. Everyone owed him for something. His rare multi-generational wealth in people was, in fact, too enormous for some. The power that accrued to the director through his ability to use farm resources to aid all of his workers and many others in town meant that, for many townspeople, patronage was something to be called upon sparingly. When, for example, the commercial farm was unable to pay its salaries in cash during the mid-1990s, the proportion of compensation to workers that took the form of non-cash patronage increased exponentially. Due to the scarcity of money in town and people's inability to obtain goods elsewhere without money, requests poured into the director's office for all sorts of aid. As one friend put it, annoyed at having had to supplicate herself all the time, "Andrei Petrovich was like a king (*karol'*) then." *Khoziain* relationships, that is, could go too far.

By 2000, circumstances had made it harder and harder to be a king, or even just a solid *khoziain*. Many townspeople complained that the farm, and Andrei Petrovich, no longer took care of them the way it, and he, once had. Old women complained that the director refused to provide a truck for free to install a new stove in the town church. (Earlier in the 1990s, the farm had underwritten the construction of most of the church.) One friend, when I mentioned an article in the district newspaper that spoke of Andrei Petrovich in typical glowing terms of "working for people," shook her head and said, "Maybe a few years ago, but not anymore." Even Anton later grumbled to me that, if Andrei Petrovich had really been looking out for his people, those shingles would have been free. The ethics of being a *khoziain*, were, then, a continual field of debate and moral claim-making. Andrei Petrovich attempted to curtail the amount of patronage he gave out so as to tend to the farm and its members in difficult economic circumstances. At the same time, those same circumstances led to more patronage requests. What was the balance

between the firm's attempt to stay solvent and Andrei Petrovich's desire to keep accumulating wealth in people; between old obligations and new obligations? Some of the reasons the director struck the balances he did will become clearer when I discuss local state agencies. First, however, I discuss a final vector along which objects moved from the *khoziaistvo* of AOZT Sepych to individual households all over town: theft.

By one friend's approximation, two-fifths of AOZT Sepych's grain disappeared into private hands over the cycle from fall harvest to spring sowing. His estimation is valuable not so much because its accuracy can be confirmed—it cannot—but because it conveys a sense of the scale this vector of transaction occupied in townspeople's imagination of how individual households in Sepych related to the commercial farm. By all accounts, theft from the local agricultural enterprise had increased substantially in the post-Soviet period. Back in the collective farm era (1929–1965), I was told, many people found it difficult enough to smuggle home handfuls or shoefuls of grain. But with privatization, increasing domestic herd sizes, and the availability of private transport, some townspeople stole grain in cartloads to feed their domestic livestock and make at least some profit on their sale (compare Humphrey 1998: 463–64).

Theft from other private households was extremely rare and universally condemned, but stealing from the commercial farm occupied a gray area in local expectations about propriety. Most townspeople I knew claimed that theft was, in general, not the proper way to go about obtaining inputs for their household economy. Under “normal” conditions, with reasonable salaries and a fair market, they would prefer to avoid having to steal to get by. But as it was, many cited the need to “survive” (*vyzhit*) in their domestic economies by stealing a bit: if all of the profits from selling a fattened calf were eaten up buying the grain to feed it, what was the point of raising livestock? Theft from AOZT Sepych came with a range of tentative explanations and justifications that point, once again, to the refiguring of the moral field between levels of *khoziaistvo*. The old view that the fruits of collective labor were there for the collective taking—“everything around is the collective farm's, everything around is mine” as the ironic Soviet-era saying had it—no longer rang quite as true now that AOZT Sepych occupied a hazy middle ground between state enterprise and private business.

Like salaries and patronage, theft mitigated emerging inequalities, instabilities, and risks in the household sector through recourse to the next higher level of *khoziaistvo*. But it did so in different ways, with different implications for the kinds of moral relationships it imagined and, quietly, created. Unlike salaries, theft was an option for most households, not just employees of AOZT Sepych (although paying off a guard or other farm employee was often part of the deal). Unlike most patronage transactions, such as Anton's request for roofing materials, theft did not involve the director's office or any

official commercial farm circuits. It was never, that is, a direct way for Andrei Petrovich to accumulate wealth in people.

His brigade leaders were, however, another story. Townspeople commonly assumed that higher-ups in the commercial farm made off with many more tons of grain than did rank-and-file workers. If a combine driver could manage to sneak a couple of tons for his household, then his supervisors were likely diverting several tons to their own households and those of their families. One combine driver confided in me that he had split two tons with a neighbor who drove the “getaway” truck, but his supervisor had asked him to set aside nearly ten tons for himself and his family. Being a *malen'kyi khoziain* (“small-time boss”) at lower levels of the farm bureaucracy, then, often meant facilitating a good bit of theft along with more visible patronage. But whatever moderate rights and obligations in people circulated under cover of darkness along with stolen grain, accumulated wealth in people at these levels never rivaled that of the director, in good part because it could never be made a matter of common knowledge. There were some signs that Andrei Petrovich was moving to bring theft—the only vector of exchange between the commercial farm and households that did not increase his wealth in people—under his purview as well. He talked on several occasions, including at the annual meeting of shareholders I attended, of shifting this form of risk and inequality reduction to the official accounts of the commercial farm. He set one of the long-term goals of the commercial farm as providing a set amount of grain to workers’ households each year as a condition of employment, “so that people don’t have to look around for grain” each year. The extra “official” grain would mean that theft would be less necessary. Townspeople, in other words, would have to look, as in so many other ways, to him.

In addition to featuring in this sort of tug-of-war for wealth in people between bigger and smaller *khaziaeva* at different levels of the commercial farm, theft could figure in broader characterizations of Sepych—and not just AOZT Sepych—as a moral community. A family who had lost a pig or calf to sickness, for instance, might—although not by any means easily—replace it with one purloined from a division of AOZT Sepych in the middle of the night. By turning to the commercial farm to deal with unexpected misfortune, they lessened the drain on the family members or friends they would have otherwise had to call on and avoided new obligations to the director.

Theft as a means of social insurance and marker of moral community came up in several conversations on this topic, often in comparisons with neighboring communities (and usually at my prompting, given people’s general reticence to talk about it). For instance, on one of my periodic visits to neighboring towns where the former state farm had disbanded entirely into individual households, I spent the better part of two hours listening to the local head of state administration explain why things were far better in Sepych. He talked, in particular, about the benefit of salaries over attempting

to make one's way exclusively on a household economy, about the importance of feeling that one is a part of an organization, like AOZT Sepych, bigger than oneself, and about Andrei Petrovich's great skill at diverting resources to Sepych. His town no longer had any of these possibilities. Near the conclusion of our conversation, I asked, "if there's no commercial farm here, from whom do people steal?" Although caught momentarily off guard by a question posed more directly than was perhaps advisable, he responded that this was, in fact, one dimension of a serious problem in town. It was much harder, as well as far more objectionable, to steal from private owners; in this town, there were only private owners. Unexpected events, whether from external economic causes such as inflation or simple misfortune like the death of a cow, had to be absorbed by an already-strapped household sector in which people were already becoming, in the head of administration's words, more and more "split apart" from each other.

Stolen goods, like the items that changed hands in salary and patronage transactions, are windows onto sensibilities about what kinds of exchanges were possible and proper in postsocialist times. But, I have suggested, they are also more than this. Situating the practices and discourses attending these transactions within a larger set of shifting expectations about what it means to be a *khoziain* and administer a *khoziaistvo* opens the analysis into the broader field of struggles for post-Soviet governance. This is a field, as I have been arguing, that cannot be fully understood without attention to the dimensions of ethics and moral practice in the struggle between state and non-state actors. All of the transactions I have discussed so far passed, in one way or another, through an officially non-state entity, AOZT Sepych, and often through the person of Andrei Petrovich. As I will show shortly, Andrei Petrovich's efforts to tend to his *khoziaistvo* were significant—but not by any means the only—factors constraining attempts to municipalize the state in Sepych by empowering the new local state administration.

Before I develop this side of the comparison, though, it is useful to ask: What to do with all that wealth in people? Why amass it? Many townspeople assumed that Andrei Petrovich used his golden reputation to cover the appropriation of a modicum of AOZT Sepych's resources for himself and his family. I have no direct evidence for this, but it would be consistent with the practice of many others in his position. His high level of prestige and the number of obligations owed him meant that this presumed vector of transaction between AOZT Sepych and one particular household (the director's) was tolerated by most (see also Lampland 1995: 262–66). Indeed, it was expected that a proper *khoziain* would take care of himself in the same breadth as he took care of those in the domain he administered. However, to take care of oneself in this way without *also* attending to others in the *khoziaistvo* would no longer be characteristic of a virtuous *khoziain*, but someone who was *delovoi* (entrepreneurial, business-oriented)—an adjective indexing

self-interested exit from a moral community, rather than virtuous governance of it.¹⁷

There was also another reason. What, one might reasonably ask, was Andrei Petrovich still doing way out in Sepych anyway? He had long been a member of the highest Soviet and post-Soviet committees in the regional center and spent much of his time on the roads back and forth to meetings about the future of agriculture in the Urals. Why had he not converted this extensive network of connections into a higher position? It was not, in fact, for lack of trying. In the mid-1990s, Andrei Petrovich ran for head of district administration, an elected office responsible for all state operations in the larger district of which Sepych was a part. He lost. In a close election, I was told, most people in Sepych voted against him, in order to keep him from leaving his post as director of AOZT Sepych. I have no vote tallies to confirm this explanation, but its imaginative logic is precisely that of *khoziain* relationships transformed anew in the post-Soviet period. In this account, one common Soviet-era answer to the question of what to do with wealth in people—turn it into a higher position in the party-state bureaucracy—was thwarted by the votes of the accumulated people. Wealth in people did not get one *entirely* as far as it could in the Soviet period.

REMAKING THE STATE? HOUSEHOLDS AND THE LOCAL STATE ADMINISTRATION

I now turn more specifically to the fate of post-Soviet municipalization reforms designed to reshape the lowest levels of the state apparatus. I compare—as people in Sepych often did—the privatized AOZT Sepych with the new local state administration, the two primary competitors in Sepych's local field of governance. In contrast to the leadership of the commercial farm, low-level state officials' everyday efforts to accumulate even moderate wealth in people and outline a new kind of moral community have been less than successful. The results were largely failed state building, lack of legitimacy, and weak state presence in domains that townspeople considered crucial to rural life. Although there are several reasons for this ongoing process, some of which were particular to Sepych and others that likely obtained much more generally, my focus is on exploring those most closely connected with the dilemmas of how to be a *khoziain* in Sepych.¹⁸

¹⁷ I owe this point to Roz Galtz.

¹⁸ I do not, for instance, consider electoral politics. In 2000–2001, the post-Soviet heads of local administration in rural areas were not elected, but rather were appointed by and served at the pleasure of elected district-level heads of administration, who were usually based in the most urban area of the district. This arrangement meant that district heads of administration had some incentive to appoint relatively weak local heads of administration for distant rural areas of their district like Sepych. If at least some of the lower-level heads of administration were weak, their superiors at the district level could concentrate their resources on the urban center where most of the votes were. Rural heads of administration then took all of the heat from annoyed townspeople and villagers, while their superiors could attempt to skate above the fray and publicly blame their appointees

Of the three heads of administration in Sepych since 1991, I was best acquainted with Faina Timofeevna. Once an employee of State Farm Sepych, she was appointed head of administration in the late 1990s. Her portfolio included directly supervising some state functions, such as infrastructure maintenance and Sepych's kindergartens, as well as coordinating activities among the local representatives of the Russia-wide ministries with a presence in town, including school (Education), hospital (Health), and club and library (Culture). Faina Timofeevna and the specialists she worked with thus had responsibilities both to their own state employees—from accountants to chauffeurs to town hall furnace workers—and to the residents of Sepych as a whole. They worked closely with other specialists at the district level, and most days saw either a visit to Sepych from district level state functionaries or representatives from Sepych heading to the city for meetings and to deliver paperwork.

In discussions of the effectiveness of local state agencies, townspeople at large often began with gender. Elsewhere (Rogers 2005), I have discussed expectations about the differential competencies of men and women in managing Sepych's households. Husbands were usually considered to be more adept at making connections and contacts that revolved around informal exchanges of labor, non-monetary deals, and theft. Wives, on the other hand, more often controlled the household inputs and outlays of cash associated with salaries and purchasing in stores. While this division of labor often privileged women at the level of households, the reverse was often true when gender expectations were extrapolated to the local administration as household writ large (compare Burawoy et al. 2000). If, in other words, it had long been possible to think in terms of two *khoziaistva* at nested levels of local economic organization (whether Soviet state farm or privatized AOZT) and individual household, municipalization placed a new question before townspeople: was the local civil administration now *also a khoziaistvo*? What *was* the status of the town as a moral community distinct from, if substantially overlapping with, AOZT Sepych? What characteristics were required to administer it properly?

The lack of explicitly coordinated economic activity in the administrative domain of Sepych made it tricky to apply *khoziaistvo* in its standard usage to the local administration, and most did not. Nevertheless, townspeople were much more united in their opinion that, whatever Sepych as unit of civil administration was, it desperately needed a *khoziain*. As I walked through town with friends, they would often point to burned out streetlights, missing sidewalks, or

for less than satisfactory work. I have no direct evidence of this in the case of Sepych or the surrounding region, nor was this suggested to me by townspeople; I present it merely as a logical possibility deriving from the distribution of elected and non-elected officials in this region.

other dilapidated infrastructure now in the purview of the local administration and assert, “See, Sepych has no *khoziain*.” In conversations about local politics, I often heard *khoziain* in its adjectival form: the biggest problem in Sepych was that Faina Timofeevna was simply “not *khoziaistvennaia*.” Andrei Petrovich, on the other hand, was lauded as “*shipko* (very) *khoziaistvennyi*.” “It’s easier for a man to cut deals” (*muzhchine legche dogovorit’sia*), I heard time and time again. For many in Sepych, gender was a sufficient category of explanation for the relative weakness of the local administration. For them, the additional factors I discuss below were, however real, not especially pertinent: a truly skilled *khoziain* would be able to manage any adverse situation and transform it into the successful administration of the domain in question. But the same townspeople also admitted that far from all men in town were sufficiently *khoziaistvennyi* for the job of head of administration. Moreover, Faina Timofeevna’s predicaments were shared by her fellow bureaucrats—men and women—at multiple levels of the state administration. For all its local popularity, then, gender alone is not sufficient for my analytic purposes.

As they went about their duties, state officials in Sepych were often hampered not only by the weak heritage of rural civil administrations from the Soviet period that stacked the deck in Andrei Petrovich’s favor from the get-go, but also, in many cases, by the very post-Soviet municipalization reforms that were intended to reimagine and revitalize the state. Of particular concern to state officials in the early 2000s was the creeping audit culture arising from new regulations aimed at gaining control of the federal budget and combating “corruption” through strict new accounting procedures.¹⁹ These new regulations came in the wake of battles over the federal budget throughout the 1990s. In 1998, for instance, an estimated 50 percent of state funds flowed outside the budget. Central authorities in Moscow often used the flexibility afforded by these off-budget accounts to negotiate with and attempt to buy the loyalty of leaders in Russia’s powerful regions (Solnick 1999). The sheer scale of the non-budgetary transactions at all levels, and their significance in influencing political alliances, fostered widespread international critiques of “corruption” and lack of transparency in Russia. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, partially in response to these critiques, and in close consultation with advisors the IMF and World Bank, authorities in Moscow embarked on a wide-ranging plan to bring all state inputs and outputs into a single, auditable, and transparent budget and treasury system

¹⁹ My understandings of “corruption” in the following argument are influenced especially by Dunn (2004), Gupta (1995), and Herzfeld (1992), all of whom frame their discussions in terms of clashing systems of accountability and transparency. Krastev explores “corruption” as a form of protectionism and provides an important genealogy of the concept in neoliberal times, pointing out that it was not so long ago that “corruption” was considered evidence of emerging democracies, rather than something to be stamped out at all costs (2004).

(*kaznacheistvo*).²⁰ The accounting reforms that contributed to ongoing headaches in Sepych should thus be seen as one corner of the much higher-level and broader attempts by the Russian state to end the 1990s-era parcellization of sovereignty and reassert state monopolies across many domains. These reforms were aimed precisely at the activities in which *khoziaeva* specialized: a fully functional, rational, transparent state bureaucracy would have no need for transformative and improvisational skills.

Conversions to treasury accounting were staggered across the Perm' Region and across units at each level of state administration. Sepych's own complete conversion to Treasury accounting was not scheduled to take place until the mid-2000s, although rules and regulations for state budget expenditures were already tightening in 2000 and 2001. Several rules already in place stood out in my conversations with state employees: non-cash expenditures were forbidden; all payments had to be processed through the state bank; there was no provision in the budget for gifts of any sort; no items that disappeared from inventory could be written off without evidence of where they had gone; and all transactions had to be recorded in log books that were frequently checked by higher-level treasury officials. At an informational meeting about the coming treasury reform, one of Sepych's local officials asked why such a system and the multiplying accountants and bureaucrats that came with it were necessary. The answer she received was quite direct: "so there will be more control over you." "Monitoring, monitoring," muttered another state official, when I asked about the new system.

These new regulations, I was often told, made it increasingly difficult for state officials to create the various rights and obligations in people that circled so effectively through the commercial farm and that townspeople, frustrated state employees included, viewed as key evidence of the existence of a proper *khoziain* and a healthy *khoziaistvo*. The evaluation of state exchanges involving salaries, patronage, and theft was often couched in negative terms—what was impossible, objectionable, or downright offensive—rather than in terms of what could be accomplished with a little effort. I should be clear: the examples below do not constitute an argument that the state officials I knew were annoyed that new regulations prohibited them from engaging in activities that benefited them or their friends. Even if such benefits might have been one outcome of being a *khoziain*, the state officials I knew were intensely critical of their fellow bureaucrats who profited excessively from their state positions. As in the case of *khoziaeva* in AOZT Sepych, one could legitimately take care of oneself only along with, not by ignoring or at the expense of, those in one's domain. In the abstract, budget and treasury

²⁰ Diamond (2002a; 2002b), Odling-Smee (2004), and World Bank (2003b: v–xii; 13) describe these efforts and the international consultations that shaped them.

reforms were completely blind to these crucial distinctions of good and bad governance. In practice, the picture was more complicated.

Theft is the easiest point at which to begin. Many of my conversations about inputs to households from various state and non-state institutions took place during conversations in the school, the library, or the local administration offices. When I asked about the importance of theft in general, I was often reminded that people usually took things only from the commercial farm, not state institutions. This configuration owed as much to the kinds of items around the workplace as to regulation or anti-corruption campaigns. As one woman who worked in the school put it, looking around her office, “What am I going to steal from here? This piece of paper?” Her husband’s commercial farm job presented him with considerably more opportunities for creative inputs into their household. With the increasing demands of domestic economies, it was not the implements of state bureaucracy, culture, and education that were the most necessary and desirable.²¹

However, one set of concerns and dilemmas about theft from the state revolved directly around the strictures new auditing regulations placed on state employees. Many state employees resented the new demands for audit and the implication that, if left to their own devices, they would simply walk off with everything in their workplaces. One of the kindergartens in an outlying village, under the jurisdiction of the local state administration, provides a case in point. The long-time director of the kindergarten (her official title was “manager of economic organization”—*zaveduiushchii khoziaistva*, or *zavkhoz* for short) was a vociferous critic of new auditing measures. On one occasion she used dishes as the primary example of her dissatisfaction. In the Soviet period, she told me, the kindergarten was a unit of State Farm Sepych. If she had an inventory of 100 plates, and, in the course of the year, the children dropped twenty of them, she would have to go to the director of State Farm Sepych and ask him to sign a statement writing off the twenty broken plates. Now, with new auditing rules in place, if there were twenty broken plates, she would have to save the shards of each and every plate in order to show the auditor coming from the city at the end of the year. She took exception to this lack of trust and the implicit assumption that she and her colleagues were stealing plates out from under kindergarten children’s lunches. On auditing days, rather than worrying about things that might be stolen by her employees, the kindergarten director’s biggest concern was to

²¹ As long as AOZT Sepych continued to “hold together,” land, an important item of potential conflict in other rural settings (e.g., Verdery 2003) was in fact not much of an issue in Sepych. The vast majority of the land around Sepych was leased to the commercial farm by its members as part of the terms of the incorporation of AOZT Sepych. “If,” AOZT Sepych disbanded into constituent households, a member of the local administration said to me on one occasion, “then it would be war” (compare Humphrey 1998: 473). As it was, there was sufficient and only mildly contested land for haying and small-scale grain growing.

remind her staff to make sure none of their personal cups or spoons, brought in from home to temporarily replace broken ones, were left lying around. If they were, they might be counted in the audit and claimed forever as state property.

Although strict auditing procedures already applied to her inventory, they did not yet apply to the payment of fees. She therefore often took payment from parents in potatoes or vegetables to feed the children in the kindergarten cafeteria. Fee payments in kind allowed families to keep more cash on hand and the cafeteria to regulate its food stores, but the director didn't know how long this off-the-books accounting possibility would last. In this case and in others, state officials and employees resented the implication that they would steal. That they might have was not the point: they bridled at the suggestion that they did not know exactly how much it was possible to steal without undercutting their ability to do their job effectively. Here, then, an important part of their ability act as *khoziaeva*—by judiciously responding to the situations at hand, making deals as necessary, and balancing rights and obligations in people—was being eroded.

Like theft, patronage from state officials was not as high a premium as it was from the commercial farm. The local administration had no tractors, no construction materials, no grain, and few of the other items essential to the survival of domestic economies.²² State officials could perhaps give small favors to friends or family members when it came to allotting land for haying or building. They could help to speed paperwork through various higher levels of bureaucracy. Their frequent trips to the city on state matters were a source of rides and favors for their employees and others, but this, again, counted for comparatively little. Rarely did I hear any state officials, from the head of the Sepych local administration on down, referred to in anything close to the ways in which townspeople spoke of the advantages of a connection to Andrei Petrovich or other highly placed employees of the commercial farm. Anti-corruption measures, of course, were aimed precisely at staunching the flow of these kinds of favors from state officials. Many of my acquaintances in state jobs thought that their higher-ups had gone just a little too far in this matter.

The regulation and auditing of gifts provides a clear example of attempts to curb anything remotely resembling patronage, as well as the social and political consequences of these regulations for those attempting to govern in accordance with their own and citizens' expectations. The local state administration

²² In many local administrations where the local Soviet-era enterprise had disbanded entirely, local heads of administration had put together a "working group" (*khozgruppya*), which usually consisted of a tractor or two, perhaps a combine, an electrician, and some plumbers. Households could pay small fees to the local administration for the use of these specialists, and the administration itself would use them to care for local infrastructure. Given the influence of Andrei Petrovich, it is perhaps not surprising that no such group existed in Sepych, and that most townspeople looked to AOZT Sepych for such services.

frequently came upon situations that required the presentation of gifts. There were gifts for the oldest townspeople on the Elderly Persons' Day, token gifts at state functions such as the anniversary of the library, or gifts to the commercial farm on Agriculture Workers' Day. State employees and townspeople expected these gifts; they were in many ways the heirs to Soviet "moral incentives" to labor marked by omnipresent certificates and lapel-pin medals. Giving official recognitions that did not simply recognize heroic socialist labor was one way to make a distinction between AOZT Sepych as business and the town of Sepych as separate, larger, moral community. Faina Timofeevna, however, was consistently confronted with a serious dilemma: there was no money in her budget for gifts and it was practically impossible to move money around for the purchase of gifts. Frustrated, she had long since decided to simply buy gifts with her own money when official functions called for them. The situation would be even worse with the coming advent of full-scale treasury accounting reforms, she said to me. Some state employees in nearby cities, who were already working under treasury accounting, testified that it would indeed be still harder.

One urban culture worker I knew worried for weeks in advance of the House of Culture's anniversary party that she was not going to be able to present her career employees with flowers. Treasury system accounting meant that she was not allowed to purchase gifts from her state budget. There was a provision that allowed state agencies who brought in their own money—such as library fees for photocopying—to use some of that money for gifts. But in those cases, there was still a tax on gifts and taxes could not be paid with money from the federal budget. As a result, I was told, the person who received the gift was technically required to pay taxes on the gift and fill out all of the appropriate paperwork. "Can you imagine that?" she said to me. It was hardly a gift, she went on, if you had to turn around and ask the person to pay some minuscule taxes on it. Another culture worker—this one employed in the regional center of Perm—told me, with similar barely disguised outrage, that his office was not permitted to buy flowers for actors and actresses on opening night, even when they were distinguished guests visiting from other cities.

In all of these cases, auditing measures intended to eliminate the ability of state officials to give gifts—presumed to be evidence of corruption and influence-peddling—severely hampered the ability of state representatives to enter into moral relationships with their citizens, garner trust in their workers, or create the wealth-in-people-style obligations that continued, even if in new ways, to be diagnostic of the proper consolidation of power within a given domain. There were, to be sure, many types of manipulation available to get around the system. Faked receipts from trusted store employees abounded, and, particularly in small administrative units, agreements could be reached with Treasury officials to look the other way for limited purposes that usually did not involve personal enrichment. There were, in the end,

flowers for the House of Culture employees at their anniversary party, although all of the receipts were for different purchases. The state culture official in Perm' told me that, for the opening night of their play, they had bought flowers for all of the visiting actors and counted them as set decorations (legal) rather than gifts (illegal). As one culture worker working under Treasury accounting put it, "We're Russians. Of course we'll find a way around it."²³ But her comment was offered more in resignation and weariness than in delight at her own inventiveness. The space for manipulation was getting smaller and smaller, the stakes lower and lower, and the satisfaction at getting around the system harder and harder to enjoy. It was becoming a major victory to be able to present a bouquet of flowers to those who had worked in their state jobs all of their lives. At least for these low-level state bureaucrats, the size of the obligations that resulted was approaching the point at which the obligations were no longer balanced by the rights that had to be expended in making the transaction work at all. Was it even worth it to try to be a *khoziain* anymore?

Faina Timofeevna sometimes wondered just this, especially when it came to Sepych's infrastructure. Caught in the sorts of predicaments I have described above, she was repeatedly put in positions that resulted in incomplete projects, dissatisfied workers, and angry townspeople. Even before the accounting reforms, there was little money in the local administration's budget for employees who could be assigned to install new streetlights or construct new sidewalks for Sepych's muddy roads. Forced to skimp, Faina Timofeevna frequently relied on family and friends or hired moonlighters known for their dubious work habits. The low-salaried pay for work in the furnace rooms that heated state buildings meant that these jobs were revolving doors; state officials were constantly beating the bushes for workers. More than once I saw Faina Timofeevna or a subordinate walking door-to-door late in the evening looking for a substitute stoker. Whenever it snowed, she relied on those townspeople with access to their own tractors to plow many of Sepych's public streets of their own good will (the local administration was already in debt to the commercial farm for several tens of thousands of rubles worth of snowplowing services). Some townspeople had simply begun changing the bulbs in the streetlights outside their houses on their own, shouldering the expense so that their children could see on the way to school. One of the biggest setbacks for the local administration one winter was that Faina Timofeevna's brother broke a rib at his job in the commercial farm, making him temporarily unavailable to do miscellaneous state jobs for free. His injury revealed just how much she relied on him for work that did not need to be compensated from her budget. The scope of obligations and allegiances Faina Timofeevna was able to create was barely bigger than her family.

²³ See Herzfeld's instructive discussion of the ways in which bureaucratic practices become refracted through national stereotypes (1992: 72).

Faina Timofeevna's efforts were tireless and often heroic in the circumstances, but the results were often considered unsatisfactory—an injustice only some townspeople appreciated. When full-scale Treasury accounting arrived in the coming years, Faina Timofeevna said, life would get even worse. She would no longer be able to transfer even limited sums among her accounts, as she still could to a degree, and all payouts would have to be signed for and take place through the state bank rather than her office. Circumstances would require even more flexibility, precisely the kind that would disappear with increased audit. The local administration would become more dependent on individuals and other institutions in Sepych. Already, the situation meant that the much more flexible leadership of AOZT Sepych could ride to the rescue of struggling state-sector projects. No longer legally obliged to care for townspeople, Andrei Petrovich and his brigade leaders could cast their assistance to the local administration as pure generosity. Andrei Petrovich's increasing wealth in people was, in part, directly premised on Faina Timofeevna's decreasing ability to create obligations in townspeople.

CONCLUSION

In the fall of 2001, Sepych convened its annual public town meeting (*sel'skii skhod*). The meeting, held in the auditorium of the House of Culture, was sparsely attended, with only about sixty townspeople and a delegation from the district administration present. Faina Timofeevna began with her annual report on the activities of Sepych's local administration. She spoke for about ten minutes, covering the various details of the local administration's projects during the year and drawing particular attention to the fact that, with a considerable amount of effort, she had managed to keep all of Sepych's kindergartens running throughout the year (other administrations across the district were forced to close some of their kindergartens for months at a time due to lack of funds). During the comment period after her report, the criticisms began, with what I later learned was unexpected intensity. Many townspeople who spoke focused on infrastructure. The fall months had been particularly rainy and muddy and the lack of planks for sidewalks in even the muddiest sections of town was a repeated item of complaint. Others talked about how dark Sepych was at night—how could the administration not take better care of the streetlights?

Several speakers pointed to what they saw as the heart of the problem: in their view, Faina Timofeevna simply did not find ways to work around obstacles. She did not “get out there and talk to people” or “get people together,” in the words of two speakers. Toward the end of the discussion period, his name having been invoked many times already, Andrei Petrovich took the floor. He agreed, he said, with criticisms about the roads, sidewalks, and streetlights, which, he pointedly reminded townspeople, had not been taken care of for years and were no longer the responsibility of the commercial

farm. He went on to compare AOZT Sepych to the local state administration: “We take care of our own [in the commercial farm],” he said, “and we can’t take care of everyone else, too.” These tasks were now the job of state institutions; he was just the director of the local business. Nevertheless, he continued, he would be glad to help—if Faina Timofeevna would invite him to meetings to ask, which, he claimed, she had stopped doing. At the end of the meeting, the representative from the district administration, who until that point had remained nearly silent, stood. He noted that the level of dissatisfaction in the room was far higher than in any of the previous years he had been to Sepych’s town meeting and promised that he would convey this to the head of district administration. He also underscored that the district administration did not believe there was any cause to remove Faina Timofeevna from her position. He exhorted her to work harder in the coming year.

The high level of dissatisfaction with the work of Sepych’s head of administration at the town meeting was heavily overdetermined, as I have been showing for numerous less public conversations and transactions. General contributing factors included the relative weakness of local state administrations from the outset, their continuing lack of sufficient resources from above, and, especially in the early 2000s, budget and anti-corruption reforms that undercut many attempts to work around these problems. Additional factors more specific to Sepych were Andrei Petrovich’s massive store of multi-generational wealth in people located outside the state and a gender gap in expectations about the capacities of the heads of AOZT Sepych and the local administration.

My goal in this article has not been, however, simply to outline and weigh the multiple factors that contributed to the balance of power between state and non-state institutions during post-Soviet municipalization. I have also sought to approach these factors from the perspective of Sepych, where shifting practices and discourses associated with what it means to be a *khoziain* have powerfully shaped the entire field of contestation that is postsocialist governance. The comments at the town meeting are most comprehensible from precisely this perspective, one that incorporates expectations and sensibilities about the ethics of governance as a central element of analysis. Townspeople’s criticisms that, kindergartens notwithstanding, Faina Timofeevna did not work around difficult situations with sufficient alacrity and did not “get people together” (i.e. accumulate wealth in people), generalize specific complaints about Sepych’s infrastructure into overall lack of a proper *khoziain*. Similarly, Andrei Petrovich’s comments skillfully positioned him at once as the already unquestioned *khoziain* of the non-state domain of AOZT Sepych and as ongoing potential *khoziain* to the new overlapping domain of the state administration—if, that is, its representatives cared to place themselves further in his debt. The town meeting, like so many other debates and predicaments in post-Soviet Sepych, took place on the

irreducibly ethical terrain of dilemmas about how, in word and deed, to be a *khoziain* in a transforming state.

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