An Analysis of post-Soviet Masculinities Through the Dacha Debates in Ukraine

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Dear Humanities Fellows Participants:

Since I am sharing my article manuscript that received a “revise and resubmit,” I thought it would be most helpful to us all if I explained the journal context and described the key concerns the reviewers shared. I am very excited about this R & R, because it is from Gender & Society, which is a top ranked (usually #1 or 2) gender studies/women’s studies journal, and approximately top 20 for sociology in the U.S. So, I am admittedly stoked and nervous about getting revisions right (perhaps, procrastinating a little as a result). The journal editor works hard to be inclusive of all types of methodologies and theoretical perspectives, as long as the author is able to substantiate these areas and, importantly, demonstrate important insights into gender studies.

In the review process, four individuals reviewed my manuscript, then the deputy editor re-examined it with the reviewer comments to look for patterns shared between all four reviews (the reviewers were split in their decision: 2 suggested R & R and 2 suggested rejection). The deputy editor and editor tipped the balance to R & R and described three main concerns, two of which I am still trying to sort out in my mind:

1) The reviewers all suggested I simplify my analysis by sticking to a narrower analysis of masculinities in post-Soviet Ukraine/societies. Some felt I could not connect these masculinities to globalization, although one or two thought it was plausible but with significant revision. Everyone told me to take the informal work discussion out of it (too much).
   a. In simplifying “what” contribution I am making (to masculinities literature), one or two of the reviewers suggested I weave women’s perspectives in with the analysis of the men (working-class and professional/state worker). I think I will do this, but am curious to know what others think about this.

2) The reviewers were also interested in seeing more examples among men that illustrated their views of the dacha and suggested I be sure to consider the possibility that individual men may have contradicted themselves as they described their views and practices with the dacha (summer gardens tended by urban dwellers). I agree that I need to re-analyze the individuals I include in the manuscript to see if there are possible contradictions. Yet…
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a. Heads-up: I will be arguing in my letter to the reviewers that I can say something about masculinities even though I only have particular individuals (Pavel, Sergei, and Mayor Popov, namely) representing such views. To argue my position, I am reviewing literature about and by Michael Burawoy’s “extended case method” and another sociologist’s similar idea called, “forensic sociology.”

b. Part of my current problem is my slippery language in the manuscript that sounds like I am trying to generalize (in other words, saying all working-class men feel this way) rather than looking to the individuals as placed particularly by their social status in contemporary Komsomolsk, Ukraine.

c. What I need help framing is my position, arguing that using individual cases (specifically, using an individual’s descriptions and actions) can tell us something about larger, structural processes (globalization, or “market transition”). Some of you might be sympathetic to such a position, especially if trained in ethnographic work or in other disciplines in which case studies are accepted methodological practices. Case studies, though, in sociology (I would imagine political science, too) lost favor as statistical analysis gained steam over the 20th Century. Although there is a resurging respect for the “little case study,” anyone using it in a sociology journal must make a solid argument to defend its use. So, I look to you to help me formulate a way to support my use of individual cases, or to wave the red flags that you know reviewers/editors will bring.

Other notes: I have only recently returned to this revision and am working on, 1) making sure the reader understands what a dacha is by the first 1-2 pages of the manuscript and, 2) replacing “neoliberal globalization” with “market transition.” With regard to the latter revision, I consider “market transition” the specific term for globalization in post-Soviet societies.

Naturally, you are welcome to find other faults (or strengths) of this work.

Okay, I will leave it at that! Thank you very much for any time you can donate to my cause. I intend to submit this by the end of November. See you next week. Leontina
Abstract: Bearing historical and cultural significance in Slavic societies, dachas (or summer gardens tended by urban dwellers) have become a major source of food production over the turbulent years of post-Soviet social change. Yet, despite the significance of the dacha, culturally and in food production, its role as an economically effective means for urban families to make ends meet has made it a subject for debate among locals and among scholars. This article explores masculinities in post-Soviet Ukraine via local dacha debates about the Ukrainian dacha’s worth and purpose. Using extended case method, this article examines how local men’s desires to sustain or acquire privileged status in the town of Komsomolsk underpins gendered and classed responses to post-Soviet market transition. It finds that older working-class men, rather than relying solely on economic benefits as defined by the market, perceive the dacha to be a place of empowerment where they can work with their hands and be a meaningful contributor to their households. In sharp contrast, men who are state workers are apt to rely upon hegemonic market logic to discredit the dacha’s worth. Masculinities, as identities asserted in relation to others, are further illuminated by comparing the ways women participants in this studied described the meaning and worth of dachas in contemporary Ukraine. As men in this study jockey for privileged status through how the dacha may or may not serve them, it is apparent that women remain subordinated by both perspectives. Analysis of how these various perspectives diverge from and converge with one another reveals the ways in which power is differently situated during market transition.

INTRODUCTION

Factory downsizing, production slowdowns, and enterprise closures were typical throughout the former U.S.S.R. in the 1990s, the first decade of what has been called “market transition.” Large numbers of women and men, who had expected to work at the same place all of their lives, found themselves precariously employed. In cities like Komsomolsk (the location for this study), in which only one or two major enterprises existed, workers had few formal avenues for finding employment. Informal work became common, yet western development agencies considered such work a deviant form of economic activity, a survival strategy, and a sign of incomplete development (PERC 2009; Kravchuk 2002; Kupets 2005). Portes and Sassen-Koob (1987), though, found that informal work arrangements have prevailed no matter the extent to which capitalism was embedded in a society’s fabric. Such findings show that informal work must signify more than the incomplete functioning of capitalism. For these reasons, researchers of informal economies have become interested in understanding how social conditions combine
with individual’s motivations for participating in informal work arrangements (c.f. Author et al. 2004; Southworth 2006; Williams and Round 2007). This article examines one area of informal activity, namely peoples’ practices at, and perceived role of, the Ukrainian dacha. Bearing historical and cultural significance in Slavic societies, dachas (or summer gardens tended by urban dwellers) have become a major source of food production over the turbulent years of post-Soviet social change. Yet, despite the significance of the dacha, culturally and in food production, its role as an economically effective means for urban families to make ends meet has made it a subject for debate among locals and among scholars.

Men and women’s subjective understandings of culturally significant arenas like the dacha cannot be separated from their historical conceptions of economic relations and, by extension, conceptions of masculinity/femininity. These conceptions attempt to revive once-dominant ideologies – such as Soviet socialism - that resist changes related to market transition. This process is examined by following the heated debates among komsomolchan (Komsomolsk locals) regarding the purpose, meaning and social worth of household summer gardening at the Ukrainian dacha. This analysis seeks to advance masculinities research in post-Soviet Ukraine. Men raised within socialist ideology must deal with the conflict arising from the seemingly oppositional value system associated with market (specifically capitalist) ideology. This article builds upon globalization studies; illuminating the historically- and temporally-specific ways in which gender and class relations shape meanings of work and social change in post-Soviet contexts (Connell 2007).

DACHA DEBATES AS PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL MEANING

Jane Zavisca’s 2003 examination of dacha debates in Kaluga, Russia, offers an entry point for tracing how the relations above – market transition, gender, and class - converge and
are expressed in people’s thoughts and actions. Her work deviates from others’ research on post-
Soviet dachas, which typically tried to scientifically measure the economic purpose and worth of
the dacha for Russian households (c.f. Clarke 1999; Humphrey 2002; Rose and Tikhomirov
1993; Shlapentokh 1996). According to her, the way in which the dacha has been measured in
these studies is limited to a specific western conception of value. Instead, she sought to
understand the subjective meanings people in Kaluga attached to the dacha, which would
demonstrate how the use of the dacha can be substantiated using different premises. According
to her, the cultural debates about the dacha,

…reflect [peoples’] dispositions toward capitalist transition, and their trajectories in the
shifting stratification order. An important resource for coping with recent changes in
Russian society, the dacha provides not simply a source of food, but a discursive arena
for debating the rationality and morality of transition to a market economy (Zavisca 2003,
786).

In other words, what has been lost in the viewpoints seeking to understand the economic
practicality of the dacha, which is often the viewpoint of development agencies and economists,
is that post-Soviet social change has demanded both a shift in economic values and a shift in
social values (c.f. Polanyi 1957 [1944]). In a similar vein, Dunn (2004) found in her study of
factory workers in post-socialist Poland that economic change required workers to change their
sense of selfhood, and not just the way in which their work was organized.

Zavisca observed that diverging descriptions (which often were contradictory even for
the same individual) are connected to each person’s ability to employ his or her power to
represent the real “truth” about dachas (2003, 791):
Dacha discourses and related practices of use and disuse serve as strategies for attempting to convert (or block the conversion of) either economic or cultural capital into “symbolic power,” that is, the power to represent the social world to others. In the post-Soviet context, representing the “truth” about the rationality and morality of governing society through markets is a central stake in the struggle for symbolic power…

Thus, Zavisca found that locals’ differing, and sometimes contradictory, perspectives in the dacha debate reflected the varying degrees to which people subscribed to the rationality and morality embedded in emergent market hegemony. They also illuminate that symbolic power is asserted through discursive techniques for representing themselves, their relationship to the dacha, and to others.

The current article follows from Zavisca’s work to explore post-Soviet social change and stratification in Komsomol’sk, Ukraine. It expands upon her analysis by including consideration of how gender and class intersect and create different techniques for people to assert power. The changing contours of gender and class stratification makes this process challenging, since the symbolic potency of some values (such as, collective identity) is dwindling, while once stigmatized values (such as, profit seeking) gain prestige. Different social positions may be reflected in locals’ debates about dachas, since the dacha is a domain for expressing power. I suggest that gender and class relations may be disclosed in this discursive arena, and are illustrated in how social groups differently relate to the new economic and moral order. How gender and class are negotiated in post-Soviet Ukraine may be traced in how people assert and contest one another’s perspectives and experiences with the dacha. Men’s and women’s sense of inclusion during social change is reflected in what they think people ought to do with the dacha.
Likewise, for those who have access to a dacha, the dacha’s worth and meaning are revealed in what people actually do on the dacha.

In these debates, I specifically examine how older working-class men describe the purpose and meaning of dacha work and how these meanings may differ from professional men’s and women’s perspectives. I examine the discursive arena of dacha discussion as a complex process in which individuals seek consistency, or ontological security\(^1\), between how they perceive the way things ought to be and how they are able to act upon this perception given social constraints. For men who were once the symbolically privileged by way of their social location as industrial workers, the dacha is an institution that enables them to realize their worth as working-class men who are strong and productive providers. Dacha work is relaxing, because it is a means to express their masculinity in a form consistent with Soviet days gone by. In other words, older working-class men find ontological security by protecting the dacha from economic marginalization. For this reason, even if their quest for dacha truth is not consciously an act of resistance it nonetheless may be considered an expression (symbolically and in the act of working the dacha) of contested masculinity. It asserts power through “masculinity,” since their dacha truth accepts the patriarchal dividends accrued in preserving a gendered division of labor that burdens women.

GLOBALIZATION, GENDER AND CLASS ANALYSIS IN POST-SOVIET SOCIETIES

Contested Masculinities

In Ukraine, working-class men’s thoughts and actions pivot upon their sense of inclusion in, or exclusion from, the market. They share with U.S. white working-class men a similar definition of masculinity centered upon men as producers and breadwinners (Ducat 2004; Fine et al. 1997; Stein 2005). Ukraine’s marketization emphasizes business and entrepreneurship, which
marginalizes industrial workers in a fashion paralleling deindustrialization in the U.S. But, because globalization is oriented toward capitalist development, older working-class men responded to this threat to their power by asserting their own definition of how to be manly in post-Soviet context.

While some groups of men lose status in the process of globalization, others are in positions to enjoy status stability and to access power. It is these groups’ interests to maintain changes that serve them. Because it depends upon regulation, it stands to reason that power relations (gender and class) will be embedded in the process of this system’s evolution and maintenance. Connell (1998, 15) observes that neoliberalism “speaks a gender-neutral language of ‘markets,’ ‘individuals,’ and ‘choice,’” yet it is regularly assumed “the ‘individual’ of neoliberal theory has in general the attributes and interests of a male entrepreneur.” In other words, even though the agenda coupling “the market” with civil freedom appear rational, free, and objective in its delivery, it is very much a gendered and classed process. Moreover, since the minority of elites governing this process still largely comprises men, the interests of this elite will be shaped by these men’s desire to keep their power both as the ruling class and as ruling men. This held true in the town of Komsomolsk. The network of the most powerful (upper-level administrators for the city, upper-level administrators at the mine, and large-scale garment manufacturing) was predominantly a network of men who were upwardly mobile in the Soviet era and who continued to be so under conditions of market transition (Author 2005).

For the above reasons the men of the professional class are juxtaposed with older working-class men in this study. As older working-class men have perceived threats to their privileged status in Soviet society, members of the professional class have experienced relatively stable status. Although members of this class may include upper level administrators of
businesses, this study focuses upon individuals who work as city administrators and essentially function as representatives of the state. Being representatives of the state, it would be these individuals’ work that, according to Gramsci, ensured the maintenance of hegemonic political and economic programs (1992 [1957], 153). These are individuals whose professions link them directly to capitalist development programs. They attend workshops organized by international development organizations, during which participants learn techniques for making a business friendly environment and for assessing their effectiveness toward this goal. The assessment tools participants learn instill a particular way of measuring and determining worth, and this process is consistent with market logic.

**Women in post-Soviet Gender Relations**

In examining how contests over power are reflected in the dacha debates, much of this article investigates contested masculinities between hegemonic and local forms. It also shows that these different forms of masculinity protect male privilege despite contesting changing values and power relations. Charlotte Hooper points out that it is risky to examine only the conflicts between masculinities, since this can obscure men’s oppression of women (Hooper 2000, 61). Even if some groups of men lose out in relation to more powerful groups of men, or in relation to hegemonic masculinity, the men who lose still work to protect their power over women. As Espiritu (2003, 131) observed in her study of Filipino experience in the U.S., “rather than join women against oppression…[Filipino men] reclaim[ed] their masculinity in other spheres.” Therefore, it is necessary to understand that even though some men are disempowered in the context of post-Soviet social change, they still accrue a patriarchal dividend (Connell 1998; hooks 1984).
Since the Soviet Union collapsed, feminist scholars in Ukraine and Russia have observed a “renaissance of patriarchy” (Posadskaya 1994; Rubchak 1996; Zhurzhenko 1999). In Ukraine, this “renaissance” has led to “increasing emphasis on traditional gender roles, and widely held assumptions in mass consciousness that business is a masculine occupation” (Zhurzhenko 1999, 246). Thus, even though some men (like the older working-class men I encountered in Komsomolsk) may be culturally obsolescent with the privileging of market arrangements, it is still men who are largely perceived as worthy of the most prestigious social positions. Ironically, the dividends men continue to accrue with the renaissance of patriarchy are masked by a belief that “Ukrainian women are now strong – perhaps too strong – and Ukrainian men are now too weak” (Hrycak 2007, 153). According to Zherebkin, however, the ideal of the self-sacrificing woman prevails and serves to offset what is perceived as a culturally disturbing trend in Ukraine. The strong, yet self-sacrificing, woman aims “to support the uncertain subjectivity of the man who is anxious” (Zherebkin 2006, 278). Within the renaissance of patriarchy, older working-class men seeking security against shifts toward capitalist market arrangements in their social order do not necessarily resist oppressive systems. Even though their resistance to hegemonic masculinity is meaningful, this resistance is limited in its efforts to counter market transition. This is the case since working-class men’s resistance still relies on subordinating women’s roles and status. The perception that “women are too strong and men are too weak,” may reflect insecurity during the reorganization of work in which privileged work is no longer industrial but white collar. Business sense prevails over brawn. If one is excluded by these new arrangements, then this process could be looked upon as making men “weak.” This representation of changing conditions for privilege enables a sense of continuity, a sense of ontological security.

RESEARCH IN KOMSOMOLSK, UKRAINE
The following analysis is based on fieldwork conducted from May 2002 to January 2003 in Komsomolsk, Ukraine. Its location in central Ukraine makes it an interesting place politically in the country, since it is a region that usually aligns itself more closely than western Ukraine with the “east” (Moscow and the Russian Federation). In fact, approximately 25 percent of the town’s nearly 52,000 residents are Russian ethnics who moved to Komsomolsk to work for the main employer in town, a mining company, Poltava Gorno-Obogatitel’nyi Kombinat (Poltava GOK). Thus, the social dynamics observed in this particular town may share similarities with other company towns in central and eastern Ukraine, and even in the Russian Federation, but could possibly diverge from those in western Ukraine. Komsomolchan tend to unify around Slavic culture and identity, seeing more similarities than differences between Ukrainians and Russians. This also means that Russian is widely spoken, although this is beginning to change in younger populations (individuals younger than 20).

Research was conducted through a collaborative relationship between the author and the city administrators of Komsomolsk. Komsomol’s municipal administration initiated contact, seeking help in designing and conducting a city-wide survey that would examine the state of residents’ living conditions. Over the entire period of fieldwork, I engaged in participant observation, which involved spending time with residents as they went about everyday tasks. Some of the everyday tasks included traveling with komsomolchan to their dachas to help weed and harvest, helping with errands in town, and working regularly at the Komsomolsk city offices. Participating in these activities enabled me to examine daily problem-solving strategies for locals and how they varied across gender, class, and generations.

In addition, I collected 28 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in Russian. Twenty of the interviewees (with ages ranging from 25 to 62 years) were selected using
stratified, random sampling from the total number of survey respondents. The sampling frame for these twenty interviewees was stratified by gender and work arrangement (informal and formal). Household gardening was one of the activities included within the “informal work” stratum, even if one or more household members held jobs in the formal economy. Household interviews sought a couple of different things. First, they enabled me to verify if the information surrounding work arrangements recorded in surveys resembled the ways households described their day-to-day circumstances in a less structured arrangement. Second, it allowed me to comprehend households’ experiences and feelings around social change, learning what this change has meant ideologically and in practice.

Eight of the in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants (six women and two men whose ages ranged from 40-50 years) who were selected for their knowledge surrounding Komsomolsk’s work history and structure. Like the 20 interviewees sampled from survey respondents, key informants were komsomolchan. They had lived in Komsomolsk over the entire period during which the Soviet Union began to weaken and then collapse during the 1980s, and had lived through the tumultuous 1990s. They were strategic as informants since (at the time of the fieldwork) they held professional posts with different responsibilities, such as the director for social benefits distribution, the director for the employment center, the city mayor, and small business entrepreneurs in the garment industry. Other than the entrepreneurs, informants held similar occupational status during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Thus, key informants enjoyed a relative degree of stability and prestige when compared to average komsomolchan.

Evident in my interactions with komsomolchan was their constant awareness of my social location as an American woman visiting their city and country. My American identity symbolized for them the luxury of being a member of the elusive middle-class, which most
obviously was seen in my ability to travel abroad and to stay in foreign locations for extended periods of time. Most peculiar to *komsomolchanchan* was the fact that I, a woman, would choose to live away from family for several months all by myself. This reinforced an attitude about American women that involved a combination of curiosity, admiration, and suspicion. In the following analysis, I include interviewee’s references to my American status, since these references show very clearly how *komsomolchanchan* compared their experiences to what they assumed were my particular experiences. These assumptions were largely established by the heavy doses of western influence people encountered on a day-to-day basis in Komsomolsk by way of cultural, economic, and political institutions.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DACHAS IN POST-SOVIET UKRAINE**

At the time of my research, Komsomolsk had undergone significant work reorganization. Poltava GOK was still the largest employer in Komsomolsk, employing over 50 percent of the workforce in the city. But, other than the mining enterprise opportunities for employment were generally limited. This was especially true for women who comprised around 36 percent of Poltava GOK’s workforce.

Informal work arrangements had become a regular part of peoples’ lives. Informal work arrangements were not only relegated to the unemployed. Low wages, wage arrears, and poverty-level retirement pensions encouraged individuals and households with formal sources of income to seek such work, too. According to the city survey results, residents typically worked in such areas as garment sweatshops, unlicensed street vending, temporary migrant work, and household gardening (Author 2004). Some of these activities were highly differentiated by gender, such as temporary migrant work, of which men were more likely to take advantage than women (Author et al. 2006). Household gardening, though, was not gendered in the same way, since it was
locally accessible and all members within a household were usually responsible for some aspect of its maintenance. It was also the most common form of informal work. At the time of this research, over fifty-one percent of Komsomolsk residents in the survey sample reported having a dacha. National statistics illuminate how important household gardening has been for Ukraine economically. Household garden plots have been credited for feeding Ukraine’s people throughout the 1990s, with 98% of Ukraine’s potatoes estimated to be cultivated by households - not by industrial agricultural firms (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2002).

Household gardens in the former Soviet Union generally consist of two types: the private household plot and the dacha. Attached to single-family dwellings (not the tenement homes found in Soviet planned cities), private household plots have been traditionally used for subsistence (Clarke 1999). Often, relatives from urban areas will visit and help cultivate these private household plots, as they are an important source of food for extended family. The other type, the dacha, is a summer garden located in the countryside to which urban dwellers travel to tend and to enjoy. Dacha plots are usually four sotkas (four-hundredths of a hectare, or almost one-tenth of an acre). This was the most common garden type used in Komsomolsk and is the focus of this article.
In the Komsomolsk area, Poltava GOK allotted most existing dacha plots to its workers. The enterprise sharply increased the number of land plots allotted to workers by the late 1980s and early 1990s, which residents described as the enterprise’s way to compensate for fewer production hours, lower wages, and wage arrears. City dwellers traveled considerable distances to and from the dacha. Komsomolsk locals, for instance, reported spending anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour to travel to their dachas. Most Komsomolsk gardeners (89 percent) felt the yields from their garden significantly contributed to their household budget. Yet, not everyone was convinced that dachas were worth the time and money.

Despite indications that food production on the dacha has helped compensate for times of scarcity, its meaning and worth to Ukrainians’ lives was controversial. Depending on one’s social membership, it represented different things – negative and positive. These perceptions revealed one’s sense of inclusion and security in the process of social change. The underlying assumption guiding this article, therefore, is that the “dacha debates” in Ukraine capture the
various ways in which people – women and men of different social classes – contest masculinities and gender subordination by contesting the meaning and worth of the dacha, both locally and in the capitalist world-system.

GENDER AND CLASS IN CONSTRUCTING THE DACHA’S WORTH

Local debates about the social purpose and meaning of the dacha expose how post-Soviet gender and class relations are negotiated. Because the dacha is historically significant in Ukrainian (and Russian) culture in prerevolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods, these relations also interact with generational backgrounds. The following analysis focuses upon older groups of people, mostly in their 40s, who grew to be working adults in the Soviet period and who needed to navigate the new work environment of the 1990s.

Working-class men and the threat of cultural obsolescence: Pavel’s story

During fieldwork, older working-class men who worked dachas tended to value dachas for their productive capacity and for their symbolic importance to Ukrainian tradition. A rich example is illustrated through an interview with Pavel. Pavel was a 56-year-old man, who was married to a woman named Maria and was a father of one adult daughter. Officially retirement age, Pavel continued on as a low-level brigade leader at Poltava GOK. Because his job was considered hazardous he was eligible to retire, but in doing so he would have experienced a significant drop in his income. Thus, as long as the mine let him stay on, he was happy to take both a pension and regular pay.

Pavel reminisced about the Soviet days in which he would have been able to afford retirement, but now, “nobody pays anybody anything. But for you [in America] people get a pension and go on world tours” (IN December 2002\textsuperscript{viii}). This comment revealed how the U.S. was portrayed via popular media as the ideal society in Ukraine. For many, a barrage of exotic
images from the U.S. constantly portrayed life to people in Ukraine that life was better “over there.” For a man like Pavel, who was raised all his life to be critical of the United States, and especially of its mode for producing wealth, portrayals of America as the ideal society were difficult to stomach.

There are yet other cultural changes that further threatened Pavel’s sense of relevance within his own society. Along with the idealistic images of U.S. retirees enjoying a carefree retirement was the understanding that the only Ukrainians to enjoy similar levels of wealth and worldliness were those who pursued capitalistic ends. At one point during the interview, a brief exchange between Maria and Pavel arose after I asked about current living conditions in Ukraine,

Maria: …we have businessmen who live well. They can travel abroad, but we…

Pavel [interrupting]: Yes, that’s where it’s heading, but what can we do? We can’t all be businessmen. Someone needs to be a simple person, and not a businessman.

By interrupting his wife, Pavel revealed his frustration that businessmen lived well at the expense of the regular, “simple person.” In fact, he lamented, “Yes, that’s where it’s heading,” which suggests Pavel was facing a moral dilemma in a world in which businessmen succeeded and left the simple person, someone like Pavel, behind. Faced with this dilemma, Pavel could follow the motions and accept his own obsolescence (the declining role of the “simple person”), or he could assert his own set of practices and ideals that might counteract the trends that threatened his position. I contend this is the role the dacha played for Pavel.

During the interview at his home, Pavel showed off all of the produce he and his wife raised on the dacha: various sorts of dried beans, fruit preserves, preserved cucumbers and
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tomatoes. He also showed me his system for making wine; stored in a very large, clear glass bottle under the dining table in the living room.

Figure 2. Pavel’s Winemaking System.

Moreover, and consistent with Zavisca’s observations, he described his dacha work as leisure. The dacha was a place where he could be meaningfully productive. He owned his product and he provided for his family. Below, is how he described why he had the dacha.

I asked Pavel why they got the dacha land in the first place. Was it out of need? He said that it was simply something he wanted. He felt like he wanted to spend his free time doing something out in the open air and with his hands. He felt that growing up in the countryside influenced this desire to be out in the dirt instead of sitting at home watching TV, or other things that people do to relax. His relaxation was realized on the dacha, and they were rewarded with produce (FN December 2002).

Throughout Pavel’s tour of his and his wife’s garden products he beamed with pride. He described how growing up next to the land made him feel a connection to it now, and time at his
dacha provided him an industrious way to relax out in the open air. Pavel’s life pride in his dacha work shows that he perceived such work, and the actual doing of this work, as a potential source of empowerment. It was a place he could assert his own definition, a definition that did not focus upon the market values of the business class, but one that valued connection to land, manual work, and food production.

Professional men’s voice of reason: asserting hegemonic market logic

I – or, my parents, actually – have a dacha and they still insist on raising vegetables. But, I keep telling them that it would better serve them to just raise roses and other pretty flowers and simply relax there.

--Alexander Popov, Komsomolsk City Mayor (FN November 2002).

The discussion so far has emphasized how shifts toward market-driven economics has meant older working-class men like Pavel have been susceptible to status loss over the course of post-Soviet transformation. But, compared to whom? If it is argued that local working-class men’s masculinities were subordinated as market transition took place in Komsomolsk, then it is important to compare their perspectives with komsomolchan who stood to gain under these new arrangements.

The emphasis on making Komsomolsk a modern, business-friendly town had placed certain groups of people in advantageous positions. The mine’s upper-level managers, the city’s upper-level administrators, and some of the owners of large-sized garment firms were among those encountered during research who were positioned well in the changing political and economic climate. The current analysis examines the viewpoints of upper-level city administrators who were representatives of the state and, therefore, individuals who reinforced hegemonic practices and ideals (Gramsci 1992 [1957]). I focus upon upper-level city
administrators because these individuals were directly connected to western-led reeducation programs that aimed to build programs supporting democratic, market-led social institutions in Ukraine. Thus, these were the individuals who were most likely to reflect the ideals of emergent capitalist hegemony.

In my interactions with upper-level administrators, the manner in which the worth and purpose of the dacha was evaluated appeared objective: it was measured by one’s emotional attachment to, or rejection of, a traditional way of life. Assessing the dacha was instead a rational process (the application of market logic) that calculated the total costs and benefits of dacha work. Costs and benefits were objectively quantified by simply estimating the market value of total inputs (travel, tools, and labor time) and total output (produce). Since the market determined these values, the individual using them to assess the worth of the dacha could argue that this was scientific fact, and not a personal value judgment.

Upper-level city administrators in this research tended to calculate market prices of all inputs in weighing the costs and benefits of dacha gardening. For instance, while walking me home from the city offices one evening, Sergei described how he and his family reached the decision not to work a dacha:

I brought out a notepad and wrote out line-by-line each expense that would be involved in travelling to the dacha and back, the tools, the fertilizer, the pesticides, how much my wife and I earn at an hourly rate, and how much time would be involved raising produce and canning it. I then wrote down the different vegetables and fruit we would raise, estimated the amount we would likely harvest, then calculated how much these amounts would be worth at the market. When I added up all the expenses and compared that to how much our produce would be worth at the market, it just didn’t add up. The costs are
far greater than what you save in raising and canning your own food. It makes more sense to just buy it at the market (FN August 2002).

While not everyone applied the same mathematical rigor as Sergei to estimate the market value of food raised on the dacha, upper-level administrators shared the same conviction: the dacha was a waste of time and money. In breaking away from the traditional norms that defended the cultural worth of the dacha, objective calculation of its real worth via exchange-values allowed professional men to hold traditional, or emotional, attachments at a distance. In distancing from cultural connection to the dacha, such individuals managed to cope with threats to their ontological security as they endeavored to fit into the new societal order.

The city mayor, who applied neoliberal concepts of the market, the individual, and free choice, was a central actor within the network of city elites and he exhibited the attributes and interests idealized within capitalist ideology. He had not lost status in the process of Komsomolsk’s marketization, and was in fact being considered for a ministerial appointment with the national government. During his interview, we discussed how approximately 70 percent of the individuals surveyed reported they earned less than the subsistence minimum each month. At one point in this conversation, I shared with him that several interviewees working for Poltava GOK described how even they, purportedly the highest paid workers in the region, were experiencing hardships as a result of declining pay over the past decade. To this, Mayor Popov replied (IN November 2002),

….let’s look at our production base – (Poltava) GOK. If…workers’ wages at the mine are the highest among equivalent industries in Ukraine, then wouldn’t management and stockholders of the mine be able to raise questions about a significant increase in wages? There is no such idea [to raise wages], because in other places [in Ukraine] it is not high,
and people aren’t running away to any place else from here…What is necessary is that everything go well everywhere, then it would be good here. What is necessary is that it be good there, and it is necessary that we not interfere with realizing one’s potential.

What supported Mayor Popov’s answer was a logic that accepted the development of a labor market for determining wage levels and labor supply. Hands were tied, since, if the mine was to compete effectively, it had to keep wages down – especially when wage levels were even lower every place else. At the same time, it was considered unwise to artificially tamper with workers’ wages, since this would reduce workers’ motivation to work hard. In Popov’s words, “it is necessary that we not interfere with realizing one’s potential.” The competition between different regions in Ukraine was especially troubling for the mayor. But, turning to the natural forces of the market allowed him (as well as the mine’s management and shareholders) to be absolved of any negative consequences arising from his decisions. The process of marketization was a process that obscured power and the role decision makers, like the mayor, played in residents’ day-to-day life.

The mayor’s use of this logic, a logic prioritizing the unencumbered functioning of the market, shows that he accepted and promoted the ideology of neoliberal globalization. No doubt his steady upward mobility reflected the fact he had accepted, or at the very least decided to play along with, market ideals. It also demonstrates how he was in an advantageous position to reinvent himself in the context of social change. His privileged experience and outlook on his future seems to have shaped his perspective on the Ukrainian dacha, which he shared after our formal interview:

After I turned off the tape, we talked about dachas. When I told him that I asked folks about dachas in my interviews, he sat back in a manner of amusement and looked up at
the ceiling. “Ah, the dachas! Why don’t people here just give them up? Yes, they can be a
place to relax, but as a means to get by they are just a waste of time. Getting there and
back takes time, labor there is immense, and you hardly get anything in return. I – or, my
parents, actually – have a dacha and they still insist on raising vegetables. But, I keep
telling them that it would better serve them to just raise roses and other pretty flowers and
simply relax there” (FN November 2002).

Mayor Popov’s response reflects again a viewpoint that considered only the expenditure in time,
labor, and money on the dacha. In fact he was amused by the whole idea that people like his
parents would still resort to the old (Soviet) custom of raising food there. And, revealing the
level of privilege he enjoyed, he instead felt the dacha’s only value existed in its ability to bring
aesthetic pleasure and, subsequently, relaxation.

These examples reflect how a certain way of thinking about socially-desired things like
time, money, and leisure influenced perspectives surrounding the worthiness of dacha activity.
This is not to say that such logic was entirely absent during the Soviet period. Evident in its
environmentally devastating extensive practices, the Soviet industrialization process reflected the
growth paradigm inherent to western modernity, which favored mass production over (primitive)
small-scale production like household gardening. Likewise, as Lampland (1995) has observed in
her work in Hungary, market logic was alive and well under socialism. The argument I raise,
however, is that the logic employed by representatives of the state during my fieldwork was
distinct from working-class men in my study who took into account benefits – working with
one’s hands, realizing one’s self, producing good quality produce - that are difficult to quantify.
The fact that these other benefits were trivialized by a scientific and value-neutral way of
thinking reveals how less powerful groups’ values and contributions do not count within the
system of capitalist economics (c.f. Waring 1999; Polanyi 1944). The market logic became hegemonic, since it became embedded in professionals’ consciousness as common sense and, thus, undermined working-class men’s sense of themselves, or the tools they used to maintain ontological security during changing social relations.

Women’s Views of the Dacha: Oppression and the Gendered Division of Labor

In examining how contests over power are reflected in the dacha debates, much of this article investigates contested masculinities between hegemonic and local forms. It also shows that these different forms of masculinity protect male privilege despite contesting changing values and power relations. Apparent among the men in both groups is the consensus surrounding the notion that the dacha is a place to relax. This common association is consistent with the historical conception and use of the dacha in Slavic culture (c.f. Lovell 2003). Examined through women’s perspectives, the fact that men in both groups shared this ideal means that the dacha was viewed as men’s domain, a place cultivating the values embedded in a traditional masculinity: men as breadwinners, as enforcers of rules, as providers, as strength. The dacha is one place where men could still feel powerful and have something to show for it – either by their ability to work the land and produce high quality produce, or through their ability to afford leisure and to consume natural aesthetics.

However, men’s association with the dacha’s purpose to leisure was challenged when contrasted with women’s viewpoints. For many professional women with whom I worked on dacha plots and interviewed, the dacha was not a place to relax. On the contrary, it represented dirty and difficult labor that only added to their, and their household’s, burdens. These burdens were carryovers from the Soviet past, but were also considered to have worsened with the harsh
impact of post-Soviet transition. In this latter perspective, women more directly depicted the changes since Soviet collapse as difficult psychologically and in material relations.

**Women’s dacha truths: ontological insecurity and working the triple burden**

In this last section of analysis, women’s relationships to dachas are compared with men’s perspectives described in the preceding sections – emerging professional (hegemonic) masculinity and local, working-class masculinity. The women described here were professionals and lobbed similar arguments against the dacha as men working in the same spheres. However, their specific gender experience with the dacha stirred divergent, critical perceptions of the dacha in the new social order. Some women described the dacha as problematic, because it had lost its traditional role as something to be proud of and to enjoy. Instead, the dacha had become a sad symbol of their culture’s loss of status, its impoverishment. As a means to reject the dacha, women contended that the dacha was a waste of time, labor, and money. The views among these professional women reveal a class-based pattern similar to the men of the professional class who espoused the values imbued in emergent market hegemony. Yet, their calculations were not only based upon calculating total exchange-value of harvests, but of the unfair burdens they – as women – took on in order to manage the dacha along with other socially ascribed responsibilities. Women within this group lamented that the post-Soviet dacha had lost leisure status, that they experienced it instead as a burden, and that this added burden amounted to very little reward.

The dacha grew to symbolize overall decline in society, especially people’s declining living standards. In depicting the dacha in this way, women revealed a crisis in ontological security that was connected to social crisis, which differed from the men’s positions described above. Working-class men conjured an image and experience with the dacha, which was
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reminiscent of (Soviet) days that had passed. It enabled them to be hardy, strong, and meaningful contributors. Men of the professional class trivialized the dacha’s productive capacity (it was not worth the time and money). Both groups of men could imagine it as a place for leisure. In contrast, women I interviewed described the dacha as having lost its luster. The dacha’s decline was essentially the canary in the coalmine: the emotional bond to the dacha died with the impoverishment and corruption of Ukrainian society. This representation of the dacha illuminated feelings of ontological insecurity. As Tania, a 28 year-old lower-level supervisor at the city offices explained,

> The dacha used to be something people enjoyed and it held a certain degree of status in [Soviet] society. But, that has all changed. Now, people work on the dacha to survive. It is no longer a luxury symbol, but a symbol of how bad things have gotten (FN August 2002).

Other women echoed Tania’s view. Victoria was a 56 year-old retired grade school principal. She boasted the health benefits of *ekologicheskie chistye produkty* (ecologically pure produce) that families raised, but also felt the dacha reflected the rampant poverty among Ukrainian families. She herself did not own a dacha plot, but would trade services with friends for the use of part of their garden plot. I accompanied Victoria several times over the summer as she took the 30-minute bus ride to her garden plot. Each time she would ask if people had to do this in America, to which I answered “no” every time. She would remark, “People live a hard life here. You will never have to know what it is like to have to raise your own food, or go hungry” (FN June 2002).

Raisa (an upper-level city administrator in her mid-40s), fed up with the view that the dacha helped households overcome financial insecurity, was not at all happy about having a
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dacha. She still had not convinced her husband to sell it, despite persistent attempts. Her husband had been a mineworker most of his working life in Komsomolsk and earlier in the famous Donbass Region of Ukraine. According to Raisa, he refused to sell it since it was an important safeguard against hard times. Her family’s dacha was strictly for produce cultivation, constituting land and a simple storage shed for tools. She complained that they had little time to go out there. The poor conditions of being dirty, hot and sweaty far outweighed the reward of harvesting *ekologicheskie chistye produkty*. After all it was she who would need to figure out a way to cook or preserve the vegetables and fruit, not her husband (*FN* June 2002). Raisa concluded later in the summer, “It is better to just get rid of those dachas and build a factory on that land instead! Earning wages would be a much better use of residents’ time (*FN* September 2002).”

![Canning Tomatoes at the Dacha](image)

**Figure 3. Canning Tomatoes at the Dacha.**

One Saturday, I traveled with Raisa to help harvest strawberries and to weed at her and her husband’s dacha (*FN* June 2002). Her dacha neighbors were also out (they had a nice 2-story
cottage and a double plot of land). My friend already knew I was fascinated with gardening and the dacha’s cultural significance in Slavic cultures. She was amused with what she considered my “romantic vision” of it. Before we went on this trip, in fact, she teased me by promising that I would get to see just how romantic and relaxing a trip to the dacha was. When we worked in the garden (which was admittedly quite hard on my back), my friend remarked loudly to her neighbor (another woman),

Hey, my friend, here, really likes our Ukrainian dacha. She likes gardening in the open air, but I tell her it is too much work. [It is] just another way to waste our precious time. Her neighbor, nodding and chuckling at the same time, looked at me and replied,

Ah, I would much rather buy my tomatoes than sit here tying tomato vines to a trellis all day in the sun. This is so much work with so little reward. You are welcome to come here any time you like to help me and to enjoy our life on the dacha!

The number of hours and types of tasks men and women fulfilled on the dacha were not measured during this fieldwork. However, it was evident that the work following preparation, cultivation, and harvest was usually women’s task and was often a sore subject for women. Canning felt like a triple burden heaped onto them as a result of working a dacha.

Although most of my experiences with women on dachas were with members of the professional class, the responsibility of preserving dacha produce was foremost perceived as a burden – not a source of pride – among working-class women, too. When interviewing Pavel and his wife, this gendered division of labor was a delicate subject:

I asked what the division of labor was like at the dacha. Who performs what tasks? Pavel firmly answered that they [he and his wife] did the same work. I asked, “Including the preserves in the jars?” He nodded and started to say, “Yes,” but at this moment I noticed
his wife giving him a funny look. I could not help but jokingly remark, “Looks like
maybe you direct your wife on how to do the preserves?” Maria laughed, nodded and
exclaimed, “Yes, that’s more like it!” Pavel, shaking his head, replied, “No. I can’t direct
her on those types of things” (FN December 2002).

In my fieldnotes I described Maria’s facial expression as “funny,” but it was an expression that
abruptly flickered across her face the moment Pavel began to answer, “Yes.” I felt the urge to
joke, since the moment immediately felt awkward, it was clear that Pavel’s answer annoyed
Maria. Making light of the situation felt at that moment the best interviewing strategy to avoid an
argument. However, once I asked if he “directed” Maria’s work (since, after all, he was a
supervisor at the mine), he made it clear that the work he boasted about sharing on the dacha did
not include canning food. “Those types of things” were understood as women’s work.

DACHA MEANING AND THE QUEST FOR ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY

In places like Komsomolsk, globalization manifests itself in specific ways that are obvious, yet
that are also imperceptible. In the midst of globalization and dramatic social change,
komsomolchan express their anxiety through discourse and practices that are meaningful to local
culture. Because it carries local, cultural relevance the dacha is a subject around which women
and men may contest the process of globalization and the different ways gender and class
relations shift. Debating the purpose and worth of the dacha in Ukraine can enable individuals to
comply with, or to subvert, larger processes by expressing to others what the dacha is. When
asked to describe their motivations for household gardening, older working-class men did not say
outright that gardening was a means to “assert their manliness.” Rather, the repeated references
to “the market,” the privileges of the business class, the desire to work with one’s hands, and a
clear gendered division of labor suggested a desire to maintain power as a productive man,
husband, and father. This effort is, likewise, a pursuit of meaning in life that is somehow consistent with how things used to be. It is a quest for ontological security in a strange new world in which parasitic business behavior is now socially acceptable, if not glorified. Informal work arrangements like household gardening allowed men to have some control and to be producers and providers of food. Thus, activities like household gardening have been potential sites for keeping their cultural ideal of masculinity viable and intact during the dramatic cultural and ideological shifts from Soviet to post-Soviet life.

Because their ability to be producers and breadwinners was central to how they understood masculinity, older working-class men sought avenues to continue their roles as producers and providers. In seeking to maintain some semblance ontological security, these men subverted capitalist development by setting their own priorities which deviated from those the globalization professionals and institutions prescribed. Their local activities were not consciously subversive. Nonetheless they were subverting some of the methods by which komsomolchan are absorbed into the global market for labor and goods. Rather than calculating the value of their dachas by estimating the market costs and benefits, they attributed value to their dachas that was difficult to quantify. In their efforts to find local means to hold onto their manliness, to maintain their roles as producers and providers, they simultaneously were bucking the system. Viewed in this way, their actions were very much as political as the white working-class men observed in U.S. studies. Except, in their negotiation with capitalist hegemony, they sought power through informal means of work at the dacha.

This analysis of older working-class masculinity, however, should not be romanticized as subverting power structures entirely, as it is evident that the women in this study identified differently with dacha work. In other words, it was evident that men relied upon subordinating
women in their lives as a means to assert power. Although the dacha could be a relaxing place for men, a domain for them to feel empowered, the women I encountered were more likely to begrudge the burdens dacha work added to their daily responsibilities. The fact the dacha was common among families in Komsomolsk indicated, in fact, how desperate times had come for Ukraine in post-Soviet social change. Professional women shared similar views as men in related working roles, the view that the dacha was not worth the effort. They, however, seemed more apt to view the dacha as a symbol of poverty, a loss of status that took place as times changed. In this way, they reveal their specifically gendered relationship to the dacha. The dacha represented to them a living expression of the greater burdens women felt as a result of the specific nature of social change in Komsomolsk.

NOTES

i For clarity, this article will refer to post-Soviet social change as the popularly used term “market transition” even though the term “transformation” (implying multiple paths of change) is more conceptually appropriate. The process of “market transition,” the specific form of globalization in post-Soviet societies, is similar to what Gramsci referred to as “liberalism” and what is commonly called “neoliberalism” today. This ideology is reflected in the new side of the dacha debate, which claims it is economically impractical and a waste of time and money. Antonio Gramsci described liberalism as a theoretical perspective linking economic freedom (aka, the market) to civil freedom. Its proponents defer to market laws, believing their unencumbered functioning will, likewise, free the individual. Yet, Gramsci contends this is not a political economic system ruled by natural forces but by state regulation (1992 [1957], 153).

ii Giddens employs the concept “ontological security” to connect the individual’s self-identity to the structural processes inherent to globalization (or, what he calls the late modern age).
Ontological security refers to “a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual” (1991, 243). This means that one may carry views, and act upon them, that resist structural processes, but the individual may not perceive or articulate them as such.

Market logic is basically conceived as the calculation of costs and benefits through the narrow use of exchange values. This type of logic, although not absent in the Soviet system (c.f. Lampland 1995), was a primary tool used for professionals’ assessment of the dacha’s worth and purpose.

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The ogorod (kitchen garden) is another variety, but only twelve respondents reported using this type of garden plot. Because it is not as commonly used, it will be excluded for the discussion.

The conversion is 100 sotkas = 1 hectare = 2.4 acres.

Specific, quantitative information about Komsomolsk residents’ dacha use is derived from the results of the city-wide survey.

During analysis in this article, in-depth interviews are denoted by “IN” and fieldnote entries are denoted by “FN.”
In fact, he was appointed as Minister of Housing-Utility Economics of Ukraine in March 2007 (Unian News Agency 21 March 2007). According to the same article, Oleksander Popov served the KGB from February 1987 to April 1993. He was elected mayor of Komsomolsk in 1994.

x She did finally convince her husband to sell the garden plot to their dacha neighbors in 2004.

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