Untangling gender inequalities in economic transition: the social reproduction of work, food and land in Uzbekistan

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The theoretical debate

• **Market transition** entails deeper division of labour through new forms of wage relationships and labour exploitation> *class stratification (Bernstein, 2010)*

• It affects *assets distribution* and *livelihood* diversification (Cousins et al., 2018)

• **Transformation of social reproduction (SR)** requires a broad framework of interpretation which includes: a) *historical roots* b) *transformation of mode of production* within a and outside of agriculture, c) *the formation of classes and their patterns of accumulation* d) *the nature of the state* (LeBaron, 2010; Mezzadri, 2019; Bhattacharya, 2017)
Economic transformation & SR

• Economic transition affects divisions of labour through new dynamics of *exploitation* different for men and women (Elson and Pearson, 1981) and natural resources –i.e. land- (Cousins et al, 2018)

• Despite the important international political economy work on capitalist market transition, its gender dimension remains underexplored

• *SR* - useful analytical lens to comprehensively understand processes and outcomes of market transition (Angeles and Hill, 2009; O’Laughlin, 1996).

• Missed link between *commodification* processes happening in the market and unpaid feminised *productive and reproductive work* (Razavi, 2009) beyond the dichotomy of formal vs. informal (Mezzadri,2019).
• **food** due to its material specificity, is one of the commodities that can better explain gendered inequalities and enable an analysis of social reproduction through:

• **reproductive work** (double burden) – access, preparation and consumption of food in the household

• **productive** (commodification) - its relations of production, access to the physical-natural means of production, wage-labour classification

**Social reproduction** overcomes the dualism between public and private & commodified versus non-commodified domains (Cousins, 2018)
the context: Uzbekistan

- Independent in 1991, 62% population lives in rural areas, GDP growth rate 7-8% , most populous in CA
- **Strong role of the state** as regulator and market actor in agriculture, visible in land, procurements etc..
- **Cotton** export from 65% to 9% of GDP between 1992 and 2012 (WB, 2013) (the “cotton basket” in Soviet times) - still world's fifth largest exporter and sixth largest producer of cotton
- **High value crops production** (F&V) increased in 2008
Patterns of crop diversification
Gender in Uzbekistan

- High labour-force participation compared to other low-middle income countries (43%-WB)
- Progressive Soviet legacy on education and employment (30% quota system)
- Structural transformation- marketization
- Decline in agricultural employment for both women (26%) and men (18%)
- De-Sovietification of gender norms
Research question

• Rolling back of the Socialist state
• Recent market liberalisation in the HVCs in agriculture
• Slow but new patterns of private accumulation
• New proletarisation-commodification processes

To what extent such agrarian transformation is affecting the reproduction of gendered inequality and value generation?

*Push* factors (market) + *Pull* forces (patriarchal norms)
Methods and data

- Mixed-methods: qual>quan+qual>qual
- Participant observations/ Focus groups/ SSIs
- Purposive survey 120 farmers, 16 respondents were female, in Samarkand on:
  - Food access
  - Land entitlements
  - Time-use
  - Productive and reproductive activities – classification
Results: reproductive work

Who goes to buy food in your family?

Source: Author’s survey data
Who prepare the meals in your family?

- Grandfather: 0.0%
- Grandmother: 10.0%
- Daughter: 20.0%
- Daughter in law: 30.0%
- Wife: 40.0%
- Husband: 50.0%

Type of farm:
- Wheat F&V farm manager and tomarqa: 17%
- Farm wage worker: 20%
- DEKHAN (tomarqa): 30%
- Cotton farm manager and tomarqa: 40%
Food inequalities: Dietary diversity by gender

[Bar graph showing dietary diversity by gender with categories from 5 to 22, and percentage on the y-axis ranging from 0.0% to 50.0%.]
productive work classification:
Does your wife/mother work outside home? (L)
Does your wife/mother work in the farm? (R)
Increased employment opportunity from agribusiness HVCs

• Formal labour as indicator of empowerment?
• Formal wages
• Status of worker
• Possibility of organise as labour

However..
• Gender-specific skills
• Lower wages than men
• Systemic vulnerabilities – double burden
• Just a different kind of dispossession?
Transition but ‘static’ gender inequalities

• Men have exclusionary access to land titles – key in contexts where social reproduction depends on access to natural resources (Cousins, 2018)
• Dynamics of expropriation (Folbre, 2004)
• Women’s work is not recognised AND non monetised> reinforces patriarchy (Razavi, 2009)
• Those elements perpetuates a slow yet dynamic of transition to a deeper and formal division of labour and commodification of food and other commodities that could reduce domestic burden of women (subject to ...)
Conclusions

• Gendered transition of the Uzbek agriculture could be traced, although not exclusively, by patterns of commodification and historically rooted (pre-Soviet) social norms

• Development of job opportunities in the agro-processing industry are shaping new patterns of labour structure which are absorbing women in new patriarchal-dominated regimes outside the household (new venue of tension and negotiation)

• Outcome depends on bottom-up power of organising, challenge social norms but also state policies which regulate K and L (minimum wage, trade union legislation GVC, etc)

• History is not unidirectional but as this case-study demonstrates, it can go backward. The process of transition towards the market economy has deprived many women in post-soviet states of paid jobs (Welter and Smallbone, 2008)

• This case study also disproves the linear thesis of ‘smart economics’ (WB_WID) which argues in favours a clear overlapping between gender empowerment and economic growth.
Thank you!

Q&A
Limitations

• Shortage of primary data, panel data and literature on post-soviet region to compare and contrast
• ‘Bureaucratic’ constraints during fieldwork
• Female only partially represented in the population sample
• The non-monetary economy & non-traded goods play a big role which is not incorporated in national statistics
• Strong role of the “social economy” around the “flex crops” which give further reasons to investigate further social reproduction as a whole