

Hello all,

Thank you all so much in advance for your feedback and comments on this draft of my dissertation chapter! As it stands, this will be chapter 4 of my dissertation, which is titled “A Space Called Home: Housing and the Construction of the Everyday in Russia, 1890-1935.” Broadly speaking, my dissertation studies the urban working class home as a way to better understand how the culture of the everyday was constructed during the long revolutionary period. As this is the first chapter of the dissertation I have fully drafted, I would appreciate your thoughts on how the chapter is working: if the examples are effective, if there are other avenues I should pursue, if the narrative flows well, etc. I am also beginning the process of transforming this chapter into a manuscript for journal submission, and I would be very grateful for any advice on how to make this chapter work better as a “stand alone” piece.

Thank you,
Deirdre

Chapter 4: The Kitchen
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In 1931, in the midst of a campaign by Bolshevik activists to fundamentally alter the space of the kitchen, a poster was released.¹ In the poster, a woman wearing an apron kneels in front of a tub filled with dirty laundry. Just off to her side on a nearby table, a collection of cookware and food wait. As soon as the labor of laundry is done, a meal will need to be prepared. This woman’s work is far from ending. Yet breaking up the monotony of this scene is another figure. A second woman, dressed in a striking red dress, holds open the door of the dank and dusty apartment, revealing the dazzling array of amenities the new Soviet world has to offer. Cafeterias and communal kitchens, along with nurseries, workers’ clubs and factories, wait outside in gleaming modernist buildings. These buildings aren’t empty either. The cafeteria is full of people eating. A group of women play and relax nearby. Without the need to do food

¹ Gregorii Mikhailovich Shegal’, “Doloi kukhonnoe rabstvo! Daesh’ novyi byt.” Poster, 1931.

preparation or other daily forms of household labor, the poster implies, the world of leisure opens up to women.

The woman wearing the apron peers out past the woman in red, looking beyond the space of her kitchen into this new world. Although her head faces away from the viewer, making it impossible to see the expression on her face, her head is perked upwards; she is clearly intrigued by the possibilities arrayed in front of her. The woman in red, standing confidently in the doorway, aims her gaze downwards towards the woman wearing the apron, a smile on her face. She knows this world is alluring. “Down with kitchen slavery!” the text of the poster reads, as a message from the woman in red to the women in the apron. “We have a new way!” The message was clear: the kitchen as it had formally existed had been superseded. When faced with these alternatives, these representations of a new Soviet modernity, what woman would choose to remain laboring alone in a dark kitchen?

More than any other space within the home, the kitchen consistently attracted the ire of Soviet activists and officials. This poster was one polemical strike within that larger campaign, arguing that while previous attempts to transform the kitchen had failed, the new world of Soviet modernity would essentially make it irrelevant. This ire—as well as the resultant desire to transform the space of the kitchen—reached its apex around the time the poster was published, and it shows both the intense animosity towards the space of the “old kitchen” as well as the vision of what could replace it.

Yet it was not the first time that elites had expressed intense displeasure towards the space of the kitchen. In the late Imperial period, liberal elites and reformers had already railed against the space of the kitchen, calling it unhygienic and critiquing its role in gender formation. They too created alternative visions of the kitchen, and in some cases even put these visions into

practice in homes they designed for low-income or needy populations.² In these houses and apartments, the kitchens were often communalized, both for practical and ideological reasons. The concept of a communal kitchen, planned and instituted from above, is famously associated with the Bolshevik project, but its roots go back much further.³

The similarities in liberal and socialist visions of the kitchen should not necessarily be surprising. As Daniel Beer's work on scientific progress has shown, although Russian liberals and socialists disagreed strongly on many questions about government, they shared a belief in the possibility of scientific progress. In addition, both ideologies nurtured a strong distrust of the ability of society's ability to organize itself in a rational fashion, instead insisting that a strong guiding hand would be needed.⁴ Just as Beer found the roots of Bolshevik social programs in liberals' writings, so too do the liberals' plans to transform the space of the kitchen bear many similarities with Bolsheviks' later plans. This chapter draws attention to those linkages, noting that although the plans come from very different ideological backgrounds, the desire to manage the space of the kitchen and questions about hygiene and labor (particularly women's labor) were shared concerns.

The liberal and radical re-imaginings of the kitchen also shared another similarity: the assumption that because their programs would be helpful and beneficial, that they did not need to

² See, for example, TsIAM, F. 179, op. 23, d. 801, ll. 3-4ob; TsIAM, F. 179, op. 23, d. 1053, l. 4.

³ Svetlana Boym wrote extensively about the dominance of the Soviet communal kitchen in historical memory. As Boym points out, the restructuring of the Soviet apartment into the *kommunalka* brought with it a host of new names. "The designs for new collectivity and new ways of living demanded a new language," she writes. This process gave the impression that the *kommunalka*, and all of its components (including the kitchen), were fundamentally new and revolutionary, whereas in fact, many were drawing upon longer historical trends. See: Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1994), chapter 2, quote on pp. 126.

⁴ Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 3.

seek the approval or even consent of the urban populations who used the kitchens. Plans to redesign a space, particularly a space used everyday, are by their very nature invasive; in these plans, concerns about the disruption of residents are mentioned only peripherally, if at all. In both the late Imperial and the early Soviet periods, plans called for officials or professionals to enter homes, or to shift around residents from space to space.⁵ These plans were not made to limit disruption for residents; indeed, in many cases, the point was that they were disruptive.

This chapter traces the history of debates over, and the changing nature of, the space of the kitchen. It examines the anxieties that drove both late Imperial reformers and early Soviet radicals to both attack the kitchen and propose alternatives to it. It examines the slippages that occurred between the occasionally fantastical plans that were created, and the actual realization of the plans. While drawing attention to the differences in anxieties and worldviews between late Imperial reformers and Soviet planners, this chapter also argues that their plans ignored the views of residents, due to a belief that they knew what was best, as well as a distrust of residents. Perhaps nowhere does this dynamic manifest more clearly than in discussions over communalization. Although many urban kitchens were already communalized due to space constraints, reformers and officials in both the late Imperial and early Soviet periods formulated their own ideas of what planned communalization should look like, and placed those ideas at the center of their plans. It is this interplay between anxieties, planning and distrust that is at the core of this chapter.

⁵ For an example from the late Imperial period, see: S. Fedorovich, “Kvartirnaia inspektsiia.” *Gorodskoe delo* 1, No. 17 (September 1, 1909): 867-870, which proposed requiring inspections of working class homes to allow municipal inspections to ensure they meet basic sanitary requirements. For the Soviet period, see: N.V. Ostrovskaia, *Rabota molodezhi v zhilishchnoi kooperatsii (Seriia kul’turno-bytovoï raboty zhilkooperatsii)* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Tsentrozhilsoiuz, 1928), 13-15, which proposed sending youth volunteers into homes to teach women how to cook more effectively.

For the majority of residents of Imperial Russia, the idea of a communal kitchen would have been laughable, simply because there was no designated space known as the kitchen. In a typical peasant home, or *izba*, the hearth served as a multipurpose space, used for cooking, heat, light and, in some cases, certain forms of work. The hearth was based around a stove, which could be either “white” with a chimney or “black” and without one. In her account of village life from the late 1890s, the ethnographer and scientist Ol’ga Petrovna Semenova Tian-Shanskaia describes the smoke build-up caused by the chimneyless variety. “I myself cannot stay more than ten minutes inside a house while the stove is being fired, but peasants get used to it,” she writes. “Peasants believe ‘black’ stoves are much warmer than the ‘white’ ones. I do not know if this is true, but I can say the smoke continues to irritate one’s eyes long after the stove door has been shut.”⁶ Yet in the increasingly urbanizing spaces of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Russia, as living spaces were increasingly broken up into discrete rooms, the notion of the hearth gave way to that of the kitchen, or *kukhnia*. Yet what the kitchen looked like and how it functioned was anything but standardized.

In the urban working class apartment in late Imperial Russia, there was no single type of kitchen. Indeed, some of the more sub-standard apartments did not have access to a place to prepare food. Included in this category are not only the notorious flophouses (known as the *nochlezhki*, which charged just for a place to sleep for the night), but also apartments rented full-time but which lacked any amenities beyond essentially a place to sleep. For apartments and

⁶ Olga Semyonova Tian-Shanskaia and David L. Ransel, ed. Trans. David L. Ransel with Michael Levine. *Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 119.

houses that did have a kitchen, the quality and access to the kitchen varied widely. The majority of housing structures in urban areas were small, one- or two-story wooden houses; these would often have a single room dedicated to serve as the kitchen. In some cases, though, the kitchen for residents of one small building would be located in another house, meaning residents would have to leave their building and go to another location any time they needed to prepare food. In the increasingly common multi-story apartment buildings, the layouts of the kitchen varied as well. While some would contain a kitchen in every apartment, many were built to have a single kitchen on every floor, or even one for the entire complex.⁷ There was no standard idea of how the kitchen should be placed within the layout of the urban apartment.

In apartments and houses that did contain kitchens, there was also no standard idea on how the kitchen should look or function. While many houses and apartments did have an independent room for the kitchen, the problem of severe overcrowding meant that these rooms often served a dual purpose as both kitchen and bedroom; several residents could sleep on mattresses or cots within the kitchen when it was not being used to prepare food.⁸ Many kitchens contained a *pech'*, which was a large brick stove that took up much of the room and was used for both cooking and heating.⁹ The kitchen would also often serve not only as a place for food

⁷ In a report published by the Statistical Department of the Moscow Municipal Authority, the authors urge the creation of a standardized method of accessing rent. As a part of this project, they list the common features of apartments within the city, including within the kitchen. These descriptions are drawn from common features described within this report. See: *Otchet statisticheskogo otdeleniia moskovskoi gorodskoi upravly: O vyrabotke norm dlia otsenki zhilykh pomeshchenii* (Moscow: Gorodskaiia tipografiia, 1887), 7-8.

⁸ An example of this common practice can be found in the following well-known autobiography: Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov and Reginald E. Zelnik, ed. and trans., *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semën Ivanovich Kanatchikov* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1986), 85-86. Kanatchikov writes that he lived for a while in a two-story wooden house in the Nevskii Gate region of St. Petersburg (in the south of the city), in which he and a second resident slept in the kitchen on cots.

⁹ Vladimir Giliarovskii, *Moskva i moskvichi* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-klassika, 2015), 146.

preparation, but also for eating. For those who worked close enough to their residence to return for lunch, the kitchen would serve as a meeting place. At the ring of the factory's lunch bell, the workers would head home and gather around a large pot, out of which they would all rush to grab the choicest spoon-full. In short, the kitchen served as a multi-faceted space: although primarily the site of the gendered, feminized labor of food production, it was also a place to eat and to sleep.

As the population of Imperial Russia became more and more urban, the question of how urban apartments should be designed increasingly attracted the attention of more and more reformers. It was in this vein of critique that reformers began to look at how the kitchen could function within an urban environment. Many of these plans were based on the core principle of turning the kitchen into a communal space. Although these multiple plans had different goals—some aimed to affect public health, others were concerned about the kitchen as a social space—all of the plans had the common element of communalization.

The kitchen already was, however, a very communal, multi-faceted space. But because the existing form of communalization arose out of issues of overcrowding and high prices, and the lack of a central plan was deeply unsettling to many reformers. Although many liberals supported the idea of communal kitchens, they saw the existing kitchens as disorganized at best, and actively harmful at worst. Communal kitchens without central organizing or oversight were to be discouraged and transformed. In her book *Popular Hygiene*, “Female doctor” (“*zhenshchina-vrach*”) M. I. Pokrovskaiia drew particular attention to the problems of unplanned communal kitchens. In addition to often lacking proper ventilation due to poor construction materials, Pokrovskaiia asserted that unplanned communal kitchens were more likely to be dirty

and unhygienic, as no individual residents felt responsible for making sure the area was clean.¹⁰

Essentially, while seeking to create regulated communalized kitchens in their own planned housing, liberal reforms decried the *de facto* communalization that had sprung up all across urban Russia. Hygienic concerns were at the center of this worry.

Given the devastation that outbreaks of communicable diseases wrecked upon Russian cities in the late nineteenth century, it should not be surprising that one of the first concerns leveled against the urban kitchen was a matter of hygiene. Of all of the diseases that spread throughout urban Russia in this period, perhaps cholera was the most deadly. An epidemic in 1892 resulted in about 250,000 deaths; after this particularly deadly outbreak, smaller outbreaks continued to wreak devastation throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century. Every spring, wrote the commentator E. Sviatlovskii in the prominent reformer journal *City Affairs* (Gorodskoe delo), the question of how to prepare for the onslaught brought by the disease was raised, and each year, the disease continued to ravage the cities.

The problem, Sviatlovskii continued in his 1909 article entitled “The Role of People’s Cafeterias in the Fight Against Cholera,” was that all of the preventative plans to fight the outbreaks were long-term plans that would take years to complete. Creating an improved canal system throughout the city and as requiring homes to have plumbing were both useful plans, but they were not feasible for short term planning. None of the measures currently in place, such as field hospitals, were meant to be preventative; they were all just stopgap measures to prevent as many deaths as possible. In short, the situation was dire. “Hannibal is already at the gates,”

¹⁰ M. I. Pokrovskaia, *Populiarnaia gigiena* (St. Petersburg: Tipo-litografiia Iu. Ia. Rimana, 1893), 183-184. Pokrovskaia argued for the importance of improving hygiene through nationalistic language, writing, “a sickly and weak people cannot become rich, strong and great” (pp. 1).

Sviatlovskii wrote.¹¹ Sviatlovskii saw the kitchen as both the root cholera problem, as well as a key to providing a more immediate solution. To fight cholera, he noted, Russian officials had launched a campaign to try to stop people from drinking water that had not yet been boiled, but they had never considered how water was used in cooking. “How much food is washed in boiled water?” asked Sviatlovskii, before answering his own question by supposing that, generally, most food was washed in un-boiled water if it was washed at all.¹²

Sviatlovskii believed that the answer to the problem of food preparation lay not in teaching residents of the city to wash their food in boiled water, but to take the task of food preparation away from them. He proposed creating a series of “people’s cafeterias,” in which people of all incomes would be able to come and buy a meal that had been prepared using properly boiled water. Having access to such a resource would help to protect the most vulnerable populations from infection. In Sviatlovskii’s vision, the communalization of the kitchen was a protective step, made out of desperation but designed to prevent further death and suffering. Implicit in the subtext of his argument, though, is a claim that this step needed to be taken because residents were unable to take care of their own health.

Sviatlovskii was not the only contributor to *City Affairs* to propose radical steps in the kitchen to curb the cholera epidemic. In a piece entitled “Apartment inspections”, the author S. Fedorovich proposed allowing municipal medical inspectors unfettered access to kitchens across St. Petersburg in order to check if they met basic sanitary standards.¹³ Although the onus to repair in order to meet the basic standards would fall on to the landlords’ shoulders, the plan did

¹¹ E. Sviatlovskii, “Rol’ narodnikh stolovykh v bor’be s kholeroiu.” *Gorodskoe delo* 1, No. 7 (March 25, 1909): 288. Sviatlovskii’s belief that the issues of canalization and plumbing would not be quickly resolved was correct; these two issues would continue to plague Soviet officials for decades.

¹² *Ibid.*, 288.

¹³ Fedorovich, “Kvartirnaia inspektsiia,” 867-868.

still open up the space of apartments to inspectors, without seeking the input or approval of the residents. Fedorovich insisted such a bold step was necessary, as it had been helpful in quashing cholera epidemics in other countries. “The fight with cholera in Hamburg in 1892 showed that the most effective way to fight this ‘asiatic guest’ is, aside from food aid, improvements in diet and sanitary housing,” he wrote.¹⁴

In each of these writings (Pokrovskaia, Sviatlovskii and Fedorovich), the role of gender is curiously quite absent from discussions about the kitchen. Although the kitchen was a highly gendered space, and food preparation was done primarily by women, and these plans would involve reshaping that space, all of the authors minimize the role that gender plays in their plans. Take, for example, Sviatlovskii’s plans to create people’s cafeterias that residents can use in lieu of their unsanitary kitchens. In his plan, the most important aspect is that those preparing the food should be professionally trained, in order to guarantee the food is not contaminated. For that goal, he proposes staffing the cafeterias with doctors, paramedics, female and male nurses, orderlies.”¹⁵

It is also worth examining the ways in which Sviatlovskii’s, Fedorovich’s and other plans ignored the concerns of working class residents, therefore marginalizing the residents in discussions of their own housing. It is also important, though, to understand that these plans came out of a period in which reformers worried intensely about their inability to enact change.¹⁶ For example, although there were laws in place to punish landlords for keeping their holdings in

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 868.

¹⁵ Sviatlovskii, “Rol’ narodnikh stolovykh,” 291. The terms used in Russian are “*vrachi, fel’dshera, sestry i brat’ia miloserdiia, sanitary*”.

¹⁶ Many scholars have noted the pervasive worries liberals had in the late Imperial period about their own effectiveness. See, for example: Beer, *Renovating Russia*; Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

excessively unsanitary conditions, the few legal victories were not particularly punitive. In one such case from 1908, argued in front of a Magistrate's Court (*Mirovoi sud*) in the Vosnesenskii section of Moscow, two sanitary officials from the Basmannyi District were called in to testify.¹⁷ The case was against a landlord named S. E. Kostiukov, for the crime of renting unsanitary lodgings to workers.¹⁸ Although Kostiukov was convicted, he was fined just 10 rubles.¹⁹ In other words, even the rare legal victories were not particularly momentous. Read against this backdrop of worries about their own efficacy, plans like Sviatlovskii's and Fedorovich's can be seen as so expansive and intrusive not because reformers had the power to enact them, but rather because they lacked it. The wide scope of the projects may be a reflection of their lack of realization.

Reformers in the late Imperial period were not completely bereft of power or control, though. As Adele Lindenmeyr explored in her groundbreaking work on charitable societies, poverty relief and philanthropic organizations offered a way for reform-minded liberals to enact change while often dissolving the differences between the state and a nascent civil society.²⁰ One of the few places in which liberal reformers could affect the issue of housing was in the creation of low-income housing projects.

The lack of affordable housing around the city meant that many residents relied on these charitable housing projects, which were often lead by reformers and reform-minded city officials. In response to this growing need, the Moscow Municipal Management (*Moskovskoe Gorodskoe Upravlenie*) worked in conjunction with donations from some of the largest estates in Moscow to create "low cost apartments" for residents. These apartments were not rent-free, but

¹⁷ TsIAM, F. 1296, op. 5, d. 1., ll. 1-1ob.

¹⁸ The court case was titled "*Delo po obvineniiu Kostiukova S. E. v antisanitarnom sodержanii zhilogo pomescheniia, sniatogo dlia pabochikh.*"

¹⁹ TsIAM, F. 1296, op. 5, d. 1., l. 16.

²⁰ Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice*, esp. chapters 5 and 9.

the rent was calculated to be at a rate that was meant to just cover the expenditures involved with running the apartment building. After the death of merchant and landlord Gavril Gavrilovich Solodovnikov in 1901, one-third of his sizeable estate was given to the Moscow Municipal Management in order to build two large, multi-corpus apartment buildings, which would be able to hold about 2000 people in total.²¹ Other, smaller donations were solicited and collected by the Moscow Municipal Management, with the purpose of providing housing to residents who would otherwise likely only be able to afford lodging in one of the city's *nochlezhki*, or for-profit nighttime only flophouses.²²

The plans for the apartment complexes built using donated money from estates were not standardized, even within the city of Moscow. Some of the buildings were meant to house families, whereas others were for individuals. Some made the sleeping spaces communal (e.g., in the barracks style) while others kept that space private. Some provided facilities for childcare, such as *iasli*. Despite these substantial differences, one important commonality exists across multiple buildings: the kitchens were designed to be communal.²³

Making the kitchens a communal space could serve multiple purposes. From a logistical standpoint, it save valuable funds, allowing the extra money to be redirected elsewhere. Considering the high demand for affordable housing, creating as much room as possible for new residents was a high priority. In addition to serving a practical purpose, such a layout allowed the reformers to reinforce certain social goals. Firstly, it promoted a specific notion of gender roles. In complexes that housed individuals, the majority of whom would be younger men, the communal kitchen gave a space for the few women there to group together and perform the

²¹ TsIAM, F. 179, op. 23, d. 801, ll. 27-27ob.

²² For example, the landlord Goriunov left the city enough money to build a large, multi-corpus apartment building for low-income residents. See: TsIAM, F. 179, op. 23, d. 1053, l. 1.

²³ TsIAM, F. 179, op. 23, d. 801, ll. 3-4ob; TsIAM, F. 179, op. 23, d. 1053, l. 4.

gendered food preparation labor. In complexes that housed families, the communal kitchens were spaces for the women in the families to socialize. Indeed, the complex funded by Solodovnikov's trust included plans to hire a woman to work permanently in the kitchen, in order to teach the poorer women who lived there how to best prepare food and how to interact with each other. The communal kitchen was clearly seen as a space in which reformers could try to influence the behaviors and social lives of women. Unfortunately, no archival traces remain to indicate how the women who lived in these buildings reacted to such attempts.

In each of the previous examples, the housing that was created was specifically for very low-income populations; often the residents were unemployed or irregularly employed at the time of their arrival into the housing complexes. Such houses, however, were not the only spaces in which reformers tried to influence the layout of living spaces, including the kitchens. One such example was through the Society for the Fulfillment of Housing Needs Among Officials of the Moscow Municipal Management (*Obshchestvo dlia udovletvoreniia kvartirnoi nuzhdy sredi sluzhashchikh po Moskovskomu Gorodskomu Upravleniiu*).²⁴ Founded in 1910, the Society's goal was to provide affordable housing for poorer employees of the city government.²⁵ Due to rising costs within Moscow, municipal officials were increasingly unable to afford sanitary housing; in a 1911 report, a survey sent to municipal workers revealed that 69% lived in "damp,

²⁴ It is worth noting that although scholars have pointed to the ways in which volunteer and charity societies offered elite women ways in which to enter a nascent civil sphere (see: Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice*, 125), the board of the Society for the Fulfillment of Housing Needs was entirely composed of men. Only men are listed in reports from before the Society's founding in 1909 (TsIAM, F. 174, op. 1, d.1, l. 4), from 1910-1911 (TsIAM, F. 174, op. 1, d.5, l. 5ob), and from 1914 (*Obzor deiatel'nosti Obshchestva dlia udovletvoreniia kvartirnoi nuzhdy sredi sluzhashchikh po Moskovskomu Gorodskomu Upravleniiu za 1914 god* (Moscow: Gorodskaiia tipografiia, 1915), 16).

²⁵ Housing was to be made available on a first come, first serve basis for employees making less than 1500 rubles per year. See: A. Zhuravlev, "Dom gorodskikh sluzhashchikh." *Gorodskoe delo* 5, No. 5 (March 1, 1913): 300.

chilly apartments,” 66% lived in apartments without access to plumbing, and the average resident had access to 8.6 square meters of space (or 1.9 squared *sazhen*’). These substandard apartments were also not inexpensive; some municipal employees reported spending up to 70% of their salary on housing expenses.²⁶ The Society asked for wealthier employees of the Moscow Municipal Management to contribute a small portion of their income (1% for a 10 month period), so that they would be able to begin construction.²⁷ The efforts were successful, and by 1913, they managed 384 apartments, spread across Moscow in multiple apartment buildings.²⁸

One of these buildings created by the Society for the Fulfillment of Housing Needs was a five-story building on Donskaia Street in southern Moscow, which housed 78 municipal officials and their families.²⁹ Each individual apartment was quite spacious, with either 3 or 4 rooms and total space ranging from 52.3 to 84.2 meters squared.³⁰ Given that space within the individual apartments was not at a premium, it might be expected that the apartments would include a kitchen. Rather than place kitchens within the individual, private apartments, though, the designers decided instead to create communal kitchens, accessible to all the residents.³¹

Why have the kitchens be communal? The individual apartments were not particularly cramped; there would have likely been room to include a cooking area. There was also no

²⁶ TsIAM, F. 174, op. 1, d. 5, l. 1ob.

²⁷ TsIAM, F. 174, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 3-4.

²⁸ Zhuravlev, “Dom gorodskikh sluzhashchikh,” 300.

²⁹ *Obzor deiatel’nosti Obshchestva dlia udovletvoreniia kvartirnoi nuzhdy sredi sluzhashchikh po Moskovskomu Gorodskomu Upravleniiu za 1914 god* (Moscow: Gorodskaiia tipografiia, 1915), 6. Although the majority of residents (43/78) worked for the Moscow Municipal Management itself, some worked for the railroad (9), hospitals (9), schools (7), related “external agencies” (7), and two were on pension.

³⁰ TsIAM, F. 174, op. 1, d. 5, l. 15.

³¹ *Obzor deiatel’nosti Obshchestva dlia udovletvoreniia kvartirnoi nuzhdy sredi sluzhashchikh po Moskovskomu Gorodskomu Upravleniiu za 1914 god*, 50-51. The annual report notes that the kitchens have been stocked with new gas stoves, and that residents have access to cold storage within their apartments, presumably to avoid theft or misuse of food.

program in place to train women and force socialization, as there were in housing projects aimed at low-income populations.³² In other words, these liberal planners saw value in the idea of a communal kitchen, and not just as a means to conserve space or to teach lower class women about sanitation and elite conceptions of socialization. These kitchens were communal not because material limits dictated that they had to be; they were communal because the planners wanted them to be and designed the building as such. The communal kitchen, organized from above by elites, could have been seen as a space to transform social relations, to open up connections among the wives of civil servants and to break down the social disintegration that liberals feared was engulfing rapidly urbanizing Russian cities.³³ For liberals who increasingly felt themselves trapped between, in the words of scholar Laura Engelstein, “the power of darkness below and the darkness of power above,” creating communal spaces to fight against social isolation and disintegration could have been seen as liberatory.³⁴

In the period following the October Revolution of 1917, the kitchen remained a site that attracted attention and worries. In some ways, the Bolshevik vision of the kitchen that emerged in this period was driven by much different concerns than those that emerged in the late Imperial period. Although the issue of gendered labor had always been central in discussions of the kitchen, it unsurprisingly drew particular attention after 1917. Yet out of these worries about labor (and to a

³² See the discussion of the housing complexes funded by Solodovnikov’s trust.

³³ In one example, the journalist Vladimir Giliarovskii’s account of the slum of Khitrovka (one of the worst slums in Moscow if not in all of the Russian empire) pointed to the ways in which the densely populated temporary housing drove people apart. See: Vladimir Giliarovskii, *Moskva i moskvichi* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1955).

³⁴ Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 24.

lesser extent, hygienic concerns) emerged a similar plan: the dominance of the communal kitchen. Like the liberals of the late Imperial period, Bolsheviks in the early Soviet period saw planned communalization as a solution to their worries. Some even went further, proposing the abolition of any form of the kitchen in favor of cafeterias (*stolovaia* or *bufet*, plural *stolovye* or *bufety*), where residents would be able to buy prepared food. The plans to replace kitchens with cafeterias within apartment buildings never became commonplace; *stolovye* became much more popular at workplaces rather than domestic spaces. However, the concept of the planned communal kitchen became hegemonic in a scale unheard of in the late Imperial period.³⁵

The ascendancy of the planned communal kitchen arose as a reaction to a specific series of concerns and worries, the most pressing of which was women's labor. The space of the kitchen was a highly gendered one, and as a result, the burden of work within the kitchen fell on to women's shoulders. Attacks on the kitchen allowed activists interested in the "women question" (or the *zhenskii vopros*) to frame their discussion of women's issues in terms of class. Although there were many activists dedicated to the problems facing women, the idea of framing gender as even potentially more important than class was anathema in Bolshevik circles. As Barbara Clements points out in her work on the Bolshevikki, or female members of the Bolshevik Party, most activists dedicated to the "women problem" actively condemned feminism as a bourgeois ideology and refused to prioritize women's concerns about class issues.³⁶ In order to look at the issues facing women, activists had to focus on how they related to questions of labor. Looking at the space of the kitchen allowed such an analysis. By critiquing how the space

³⁵ Many scholars have written extensively about the dominance of the communal kitchen in Soviet domestic spaces. See, for example: Boym, *Common Places*, chapter 2; Paola Messana, *Soviet Communal Living: An Oral History of the Kommunalka* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Lynne Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private Life in Public Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

³⁶ Barbara Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 18.

of the kitchen affected women's work, these activists could address women's concerns while couching their critiques primarily in terms of the language of labor and class.

Bolshevik thinkers critiqued gendered kitchen labor from multiple angles. For women who also worked outside the home, the kitchen represented the additional work that needed to be done beyond wage labor. "Women's work is never sweet, but never is it so onerous, never do women live in such hopelessness, as do the millions of working women living under the yoke of capitalism during the heyday of factory production," wrote prominent Bolshevik activist Aleksandra Kollontai.³⁷ For women who did not work elsewhere, the kitchen was viewed as an isolating space. The woman who knew no world outside of her kitchen became a trope in certain Bolshevik circles, used for the dual purpose of fostering pity for the women while also creating a benchmark against which Bolshevik activists could measure their progress. In an article written for the newspaper *Evening Moscow (Vecherniaia Moskva)* in 1935, a correspondent named Vladimirov drew upon both purposes. "Before the revolution, having labored for 10 to 12 hours in a factory or plant, the worker returned exhausted to his small corner apartment, unable to satisfy his cultural needs. His wife knew no other life outside of the kitchen, doing laundry and childcare."³⁸

These activists also proposed a solution to the kitchen aspect of the "woman's question": they aimed to reduce the burden of domestic work on women, both in terms of time and isolation, through planned communalization. By communalizing the kitchens, they would end the isolation of those women who supposedly "knew no other life outside of the kitchen." Eventually, some aimed to go even farther and to professionalize food preparation, turning it into

³⁷ Aleksandra Kollontai, *Sem'ia i kommunicheskoe gosudarstvo* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Kommunist", 1918), 8. Kollontai uses the word *babyi* for women, a term loaded with pejorative connotations.

³⁸ GARF, F. A314, op. 1, d. 194, ll. 10-11.

a waged position. Essentially under these professionalization plans, women would be hired to perform labor they were already doing. Where capitalism had devalued domestic labor, Kollontai argued, professionalization would reverse this course and provide importance to women's labor.³⁹ "There will be no domestic 'slavery' of working women!" wrote Kollontai. "Women under a communist state will be dependent not on their husbands, but on the strength of their own labor."⁴⁰

Plans to communalize or even professionalize the kitchen raised questions about space. As mentioned earlier, due to constraints in a rapidly urbanizing Russia, the space of the kitchen was rarely used only exclusively as a space for food preparation and eating; oftentimes, in crowded houses, one or more residents would use it as a place to sleep. Officials debated over whether it should retain its multipurpose role, or if it should be more clearly delineated as a space connected to food preparation. Some even went in the opposition direction, proposing making the kitchen into a formal bedroom for domestic workers. In the article "The Organization of Residential Kitchens," published in the bi-monthly journal *Housing Cooperation: Housing and Construction (Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: zhilishche i stroitel'stvo)*, the author (listed only by the initials E.G.) proposed turn kitchens into living spaces for domestic workers and their families. "In connection to [the need to economize space] in the west, especially in Germany, there has been the rise of the so-called residential kitchen, i.e., space used simultaneously for the goal of cooking and residence," E.G. wrote. E.G. also tried to position his proposal in terms of

³⁹ For Kollontai's argument about the devaluation of female domestic labor, see: Kollontai, *Sem'ia i kommunicheskoe gosudarstvo*, 11-12.

⁴⁰ Kollontai, *Sem'ia i kommunicheskoe gosudarstvo*, 22.

childcare, noting that such spatial arrangements would allow domestic workers to keep a “sharp eye” on any young children they had.⁴¹

Although plans to formalize the kitchen as a living space never fully materialized, it continued to operate as one in an unplanned fashion. The kitchen as a living space often became a focal point in apartment disputes, as people would try to move into the kitchen in order to gain residency in a building, and then try to use that residency status to gain access to one of the other rooms. In one such case, elaborated in the journal *Housing Cooperation*, a divorced husband brought his elderly mother from the provinces to Moscow to live in the kitchen in the building he had shared with his wife. After establishing his mother as a resident, he petitioned to be given back the room he had shared with his now ex-wife and their two children. A People’s Court (*narsud*) agreed on the basis that the elderly mother needed to be given a proper sleeping room, and evicted the ex-wife and the two children from their room to the kitchen. The divorced wife then countersued, and a Provincial Court (*gubsud*, or *gubernskii sud*) reinstated the wife and children’s right to the apartment, per the original divorce settlement. Due to disputes like these, individual houses were encouraged to prevent residents from settling in the kitchen.⁴² This discouragement towards the kitchen, though, did have more big exception: domestic workers given the dubious exception of being allowed to continue to live in the kitchen. In *Housing Cooperation*’s “Q&A” column (*Voprosy i otvety*), a writer for the journal said that although

⁴¹ E.G., “Ustroistvo zhiloi kukhni.” *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 4, No. 47 (December 6, 1925): 885. E.G. also notes that one potential caveat s/he sees about having young children in the kitchen is the possibility that they could create unhygienic circumstances.

⁴² “Zhilishchnoe delo v sude: Vselenie materi k synu.” *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 4, No. 29 (August 2, 1925): 263.

domestic workers should live in the housing space of whoever had hired them, if the kitchen was habitable, they would also be permitted to live there.⁴³

Overall, though, if the kitchen was to serve as a site of increasingly communalized and perhaps even professionalized food preparation, officials reasoned, then it could not longer be used as a living space. These new boundaries were constantly being tested, though, both by lower level officials and by residents. In the January 1927 issue, the bi-monthly journal *Housing Cooperation: Housing and Construction (Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: zhilishche i stroitel'stvo)* published a letter to the editor, in which the author mentioned that he or she lived in an apartment in which the kitchen had no heat. As a result, the letter read, residents frequently cooked on small kerosene stoves in their rooms or in the hallways. As the kitchen was rarely used, the apartment manager was planning on using it to house more residents (how he or she planned to house people in a room with no heat was never mentioned). In a reply to the letter written by one of the journal's staff members, the reply made it clear that such plans to use the kitchen for a purpose outside of food preparation, for whatever reasons, would not be allowed, and the residents should try to stop his or her apartment manager. In addition, the reply said, the apartment manager should be required to provide heating in the kitchen, and take any steps needed to ensure the kitchen quickly becomes "used communally." Exactly how the resident or even the apartment managers was supposed to take these steps is not elucidated, but the message

⁴³ "Voprosy i otvety." *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 5, No. 28 (September 5, 1926): 903. The question of providing domestic workers with housing was often a thorny issue, as space was at a premium. In another case, residents of a commune ask if they need to provide a recently hired worker (*prisluga*) with living space; the magazine says only founding members of the commune need to be given space. See: "Voprosy i otvety: Zhilishchnoi Komissii Kommun. doma rabochikh MKKh." *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 2, No. 8 (1923): 30.

is clear: the kitchen was now to be a space meant to serve a specific purpose, and its role as a multipurpose space was to be eliminated.⁴⁴

With the space of the kitchen more clearly delineated, the spatial requirements for professionalization had been established. If the impetus to professionalize domestic workers—in particular, those involved in food production—existed, though, the means did not exist. Professionalization required a great deal of funds for salaries, as well as organization, and immediately following the revolution, both of these were in short supply. As a result, there was a large emphasis on volunteerism. Within the space of the kitchen, organizations called for members to provide their labor in communal kitchens. These calls for help, which were often issued by youth organizations, often made no references to gender, in an attempt to begin to erase the gendered assumptions about kitchen work.

In one call for volunteers, published in a book called *The Work of Youth in Housing Cooperation*, the author N.V. Ostrovskaiia framed kitchen work as a matter of public health. “In our country, the culture of nutrition and cooking, for all intents and purposes, remains deficient,” she wrote.⁴⁵ “The issue of hygienic, sanitary housing and food for workers is just waiting to be addressed by young people, by contemporary people who are crucially interested in building their own ‘tomorrow,’ in which they will live and exist.”⁴⁶ This appeal was based both on duty as well as an underlying idea of superiority: as youths, they had a better idea of what the “new everyday life” should look like, and they had a responsibility to put that into practice. There was no reason, Ostrovskaiia wrote, that the kitchens needed to look like the kitchens of their

⁴⁴ The letter to the editor and the reply can both be found in: *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 6, No. 2 (January 16, 1927): 20.

⁴⁵ N.V. Ostrovskaiia, *Rabota molodezhi v zhilishchnoi kooperatsii (Seriia kul'turno-bytovoï raboty zhilkooperatsii)* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Tsentrzhilsoiuza, 1928), 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

grandparents.⁴⁷ “Young people need to go and join sanitary-health work, to group their energy and interests of young men and women around solutions, to arouse the interest of our fathers and mothers, and to bring about a friendly, collective offensive against the villainous habits and legacy of the dark years of slavery and poverty.”⁴⁸

Ostrovskaiia’s book was far from the only source to make the appeal, and requests for volunteers continued for decades. In 1934, the Ministry for Housing Communal Services of the RSFSR sponsored an article to be run in major newspapers such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, which praised a group called the “Young Leninists” for their volunteer work. It was only through this work, the article insisted, that society would move away from the “old life.”⁴⁹ Groups specifically involved in the management of housing also actively promoted volunteerism among their members, often specifically targeting women. The Central Union of Housing Cooperation, or *Tsentrozhiisoiuz*, printed slogans on banners to encourage women to volunteer. “Amateur labor provides the guarantee of victory on the housing front!” and “Women, become a builder of the new everyday life through work at a housing cooperative!” read two such slogans.⁵⁰

Outside of this small system of volunteerism, there were also hesitant steps to professionalize some aspects of food preparation at domestic sites. Individual homes boasted have cafeterias, in which residents no longer needed to prepare food. In an article from 1922, a Moscow house nicknamed “Home of the Workers” (*Dom rabochikh*) was featured prominently in the journal *Housing Cooperation*. The complex, which held about 100 apartments, featured communalized cafeterias in addition to other social services, such as nurseries and reading

⁴⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹ GARF, f. A-314, op. 1, d. 162, ll. 17-18.

⁵⁰ GARF, f. A-7790, op. 1, d. 374, ll. 45-45ob. Other slogans include: “Housing Cooperation: a school of collectivity,” and “Towards a new everyday through Housing Cooperation!”

rooms.⁵¹ Later, when houses or apartment buildings were designed to include cafeterias, journals like *Housing Cooperation* would praise them, including mentions of the growing number of professionalized kitchens in its “Chronicle” section.⁵² The rise of communes, or homes in which residents pooled their resources to live collectively, also often included cafeterias. The individual rooms, an article on one such commune read, were spacious enough to include kitchens, but in order to foster a collective mindset, all cooking was centralized.⁵³

Most of the attempts to create cafeterias in which food preparation was not only communalized but professionalized, though, occurred at sites of work rather than domestic spaces. For example, in 1923, the journal *Woman Worker (Rabotnitsa)* published an extensive chronicle of life at “Prokhorovka,” a Moscow fabric factory that employed thousands of women. The purpose of the profile was to provide a description of a factory working with the limited means available to create the best possible life for employees. As a result, while the working facilities were mentioned, the focus was on the spaces for workers to live. Mentioned prominently among these spaces were the newly created cafeterias. These cafeterias, the article read, allowed the mostly female workforce to eat well, without having to worry about the work associated with food preparation. While workers in “America, Finland, Switzerland, Germany” had no such support, workers in this factory could eat warm meals in a communal setting. “The

⁵¹ “Iz vidov rabochikh domov: ‘Dom rabochikh’.” *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 1, No. 2-3 (October 1922): 34.

⁵² See, for example: “Khronika: Novaia stolovaia–kukhnia.” *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 6, No. 32 (August 21, 1927): 22.

⁵³ Sol. Gurevich, “Pokazatel'nyi dom-kommuna.” *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 6, No. 29 (July 31, 1927): 5-6.

meals are not modest,” said the article. As a result, the cafeteria served about 350 to 500 people a day.⁵⁴

Still, even as the idea of the cafeteria as an institution linked to the workplace and not the domestic space became increasingly dominant, organizations and their members still explored the possibility of professionalizing food preparation within the home. The first moves to organize and professionalize domestic labor took place almost immediately following the 1917 revolution. In 1918, a group of domestic workers attempted to unionize, at the All-Russian Congress and Conference of the Trade Union of Domestic Employees.⁵⁵ Although the trade union was short-lived—records from it disappear after early 1920—during its two-year existence, it tried to organize aid for unemployed members, fought for the promotion of women to leadership roles (as the vast majority of its members were women), and tried to organize domestic workers in all nationalized houses.⁵⁶

After the collapse of the All-Russian Congress and Conference of the Trade Union of Domestic Employees, many other institutions began to become involved in questions of domestic labor. One of the most prominent involved parties was the burgeoning housing cooperative movement, organized under the institution The Central Union of Housing Cooperation, or Tsentrozhilsoiuz. Tsentrozhilsoiuz and other “housing-rental cooperative partnership” organizations aimed to create a type of housing in which residents would assume a large degree of control in the decisions about their housing, decisions the larger organizations

⁵⁴ N. Sanzhar’, “‘Prokhorovka’: Moskovskaia fabrika Trekhgornoi manufaktury” *Rabotnitsa* No. 10 (Oct. 1923): 28-29.

⁵⁵ GARF, f. R-5554, op. 1.

⁵⁶ See: GARF, f. R-5554, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 77-77ob; f. R-5554, op. 1, d. 2, l. 16; f. R-5554, op. 1, d. 3, l. 16

assumed would eventually lead to increased communalization.⁵⁷ Although groups like Tsentrozhilsoiuz were not primarily interested in regulating domestic labor, their larger interest in making housing increasingly communal coincided well with the desire to shape the space of the kitchen.

Tsentrozhilsoiuz's role was primarily a managerial one. The organization was intended to act as an umbrella over the thousands of "housing-rental cooperative partnerships," or ZhAKT homes, spread throughout the Soviet Union. These housing-rental cooperative partnerships were usually small: most had control over a single building (or even just part of a building) and had just a few dozen members. Tsentrozhilsoiuz was supposed to monitor the progress of the movement, while simultaneously providing a sort of guidance to subtly steer individual housing-rental cooperative partnerships in a specific direction.

As a part of this managerial role, Tsentrozhilsoiuz sent out numerous surveys to its members, aiming to assess exactly what sort of "new everyday life" was being created in the thousands of individual ZhAKT homes. In these questions, the kitchen increasingly became a matter of concern. In surveys from 1925, Tsentrozhilsoiuz's Department of Communal Education (*otdel kooperativnogo prosveshcheniia*) began to ask questions about the space of the kitchen and the type of labor occurring there. The survey takers wanted to know whether communal kitchens and cafeterias were available to ZhAKT members. What other

⁵⁷ The housing-rental cooperative partnership movement (*zhilishchnoe-arendnoe kooperativnoe tovarishchestvo*, or ZhAKT, plural ZhAKTy) became a common form of housing in the 1920s; for more on the origin of the movement, see chapter 3. There was a less-common form of housing also managed by Tsentrozhilsoiuz called the housing-construction cooperative partnership (*zhilishchnoe-stroitel'noe kooperativnoe tovarishchestvo*, or ZhSKT), in which residents pooled their capital with the goal of eventually being able to build a new residency. Within both the ZhAKT and ZhSKT movements, the tension between the desire to allow residents to make decisions about their housing situations (primarily through housing committees, or *domkomy*), and the expectations that the residents would make decisions in a certain way, is explored in chapters 5 and 6.

“organizations for the creation of a new life” were there, beyond the communalization of food preparation? How involved were women in this work?⁵⁸

Tsentrozhilsoiuz officials ascribed so much importance to these surveys because, to them, they did more than just give a picture of the material circumstances of residents; they also gave a snapshot of how the quality of living movement was shaping these residents' every day lives. The addition of communal kitchens and cafeterias was supposed to reduce the burden of food production and transform women's labor.⁵⁹ As a result, the officials believed, women should be inherently interested in these programs, as they had the most to gain from them. "In view of women's prominent role in the programs of everyday life," read a report written by a Tsentrozilsoiuz official, "it is necessary to energetically attract the masses of laboring women to economic, managerial, cultural-educational work and to the building of a new everyday."⁶⁰ Tsentozhilsoiuz even created slogans to try to pique women's interest and gain greater involvement. "Women, become a builder of the new everyday life through work at a housing cooperative!" read one.⁶¹

Ultimately, though, the goal of transforming the space of the kitchen remained tied to professionalization. Tsentrozhilsoiuz began to actively encourage individual ZhAKT homes to hire women to work professionally within the communalized kitchens (as well as in other areas

⁵⁸ GARF, f. A-7790, op. 1, d. 374, ll. 41-41ob.

⁵⁹ Like earlier efforts from the late Imperial period reformers or from the volunteer movement in the Soviet Union, *Tsentrozhilsoiuz* also saw its measures as helpful from a sanitation point of view. In a report by N.I. Ostrovskaia called "The Cultural and Education Work of Housing Cooperation," she claimed there existed a direct correlation between sanitary and cultural levels. The focus on sanitary and health concerns, however, was unsurprisingly not nearly as pronounced as the focus on labor. See: GARF, f. A-7790, op. 1, d. 374, ll. 12-13.

⁶⁰ GARF, f. A-7790, op. 1, d. 374, l. 14.

⁶¹ GARF, f. A-7790, op. 1, d. 374, ll. 45-45ob. Other slogans include: "Amateur labor provides the guarantee of victory on the housing front!", "Housing Cooperation: a school of collectivity," and "Towards a new everyday through Housing Cooperation!"

of traditionally gendered labor, like laundry). Hiring women to take on these tasks would essentially transform the communal kitchens within each individual ZhAKT into a dual kitchen and cafeteria; women who lived in the building would be free to use the space of the kitchen, but there would also be designated food preparation workers.

In 1932, this encouragement transformed into a concrete plan to hire women for professional jobs in food preparation within individual ZhAKT homes. The plan called for hiring thousands of women already living in ZhAKT homes, and having them provide domestic labor that would assist in the day-to-day management of the homes. Such a plan, wrote the organizers, would transform "mothers and housewives" into "productive labor for housing cooperation." Although the initial plan was overly ambitious—the goal was originally to hire 200,000 women within the Moscow (and 13,500 in the surrounding region), 61,000 in Leningrad, and a few thousand in each of the smaller cities (for example, the industrial city of Ivanovo was supposed to hire 11,500 women)—many ZhAKT homes did hire women for this express purpose at smaller numbers.⁶²

This plan to professionalize women within the housing cooperative system also shows how the gender dynamics of the debate over the kitchen had changed. In the 1920s, Bolshevik activists had used the space of the kitchen as a means of speaking about the women's problem. Many calls for volunteers in the kitchen had expressly asked for both male and female volunteers, as a way of questioning the labor assumptions of the time. Of course, these interrogations of gender assumptions were far from the norm, and for most women, the assumption that they would do the work in the kitchen never changed. The language of the call

⁶² GARF, f. A-7790, op. 1, d. 285, l. 14. For a comparison, the population of Moscow was around 3 million at the time, meaning such a plan would have involved over 10% of the women in the city.

for professional workers, though, shows the solidification of gender norms. The purpose of the jobs, the report said, was to provide labor opportunities for “mothers and housewives.” Gone were any debates over the gendering of labor, and gone were any assumptions that these “mothers and housewives” would be able to find work elsewhere.

By the time Tsentrozhilsoiuz had created this plan, much had changed about the space of the kitchen. Although the kitchen had long been a communal space in practice, Soviet officials had demarcated the space of the kitchen and largely removed its former multipurpose associations. This transformation becomes especially apparent when looking at plans for constructing future homes. Given the massive shortages in construction materials that plagued the early Soviet Union, there were very few early plans to build new housing stock. A majority of the work within the first years of the Soviet Union’s existence, therefore, was focused on how best to utilize the housing that already existed. Still, although it was extremely difficult to find the means to build, many architects and theorists began to speculate about what a new form of Soviet housing would look like. In one of these early attempts, the architect E.V. Vilents-Gorovits created a book called *Workers’ Housing: Example Projects (Rabochee zhilishche: Primernye proekty)*, in which he and a team of architects proposed a series of model homes.⁶³ In each of the homes, the kitchen exists as a distinct space; it is never used as a multi-purpose room.

The plans in Vilents-Gorovits’ works also offer insight into the planners’ views of planned communalization of the kitchen. In the introduction to the work, Vilents-Gorovits laid out where he and the other planners stood: he was very critical of barracks and other communal housing (presumably mostly factory housing), which were created to fit as many people as

⁶³ These examples should be taken as largely theoretical, given the authors themselves acknowledged that it would likely be many years before large scale construction of any housing projects could begin.

possible into a small living area. “In reality, from a sanitary point of view, as well as with the goal of creating a peaceful way of life, the accumulation of a large number of people into a single space is both harmful and undesirable,” Vilents-Gorovits wrote. “If, given the current economic realities, we are unable to create an ideal situation in which every worker has a separate living space, then in any case we can avoid placing 20 people into the same room.”⁶⁴

Yet in spite of these worries over the health risks of communalization, most of the plans in Vilents-Gorovits’ work called for communal kitchens, a cafeteria, or both. Even as he cautioned about an overuse of communal spaces, he still saw a value opening up the kitchens. This decision held fast across different groups of people: it was used in barracks for single men, as well as in a family-style apartment building.⁶⁵

Missing in these debates is any indication of what residents would have thought about the larger plans to communalize their kitchens. Measuring residents’ reaction is a difficult task: residents of course never think as a monolith, and even examining a single person’s opinion is difficult as it is subject to change. Soviet officials, however, tried to keep track of the general trend of popular opinion towards the communalization of the kitchen. As the transcript from a meeting of the All-Union Central Council of Professional Unions in 1931 shows, what they found was not positive:

“I think that it is necessary to say a few words about the so-called collective type of housing. We have increased this type of apartment from 1928 to 1929... As we well know, this type of apartment has a very large number of rooms with one kitchen. I want

⁶⁴ E. V. Vilents-Gorovits, et al., *Rabochee zhilishche: Primernye proekty* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo N.K.T. “Voprosy truda”, 1924), 5.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Vilents-Gorovits, et al., *Rabochee zhilishche*, 8 and 13-14 for plans for workers’ barracks and family-style apartments, respectively.

to establish what kind of relationship workers have with this type of apartment. From the words presented at workers' organizations, we can see that workers are absolutely dissatisfied with apartments of this type, because living with a couple of families in a single apartment breeds disputes and uncleanness... We should not lose heart in our type of socialist housing, in which the kitchen should be painlessly wither away and the residents transition to collective dining."⁶⁶

Although officials noted that they tried to guarantee that residents had a certain amount of space within the kitchen per person—two square meters per family was seen as a minimum⁶⁷—many residents intensely disliked having to share the kitchen with their neighbors. Indeed, in some cases in which residents of sub-standard housing petitioned officials to build new housing for them, they particularly specified that they wanted private kitchens.⁶⁸ Far from “painlessly withering away,” residents often called for a return of the private kitchen.

The goal of the transformation of the kitchen was to transform residents' experiences through the manipulation of space and labor. In both the late Imperial and early Soviet periods, this concept was central in how elites both saw the kitchens as they existed, and imagined how they could change. In both cases, elites saw the urban kitchen as an archaic and perhaps even dangerous creation. Although many kitchens were *de facto* communalized due to restrictions on space

⁶⁶ Comments from Comrade Murav'ev. See: GARF, f. R-5451, op. 15, d. 418, l. 1.

⁶⁷ GARF, f. R-5451, op. 15, d. 418, ll. 1-2.

⁶⁸ For example, the workers of the Paraskii Repair Works Factory in Kazan' asked for additional housing in 1918, noting their current buildings housed about 1800 people in 164 apartments. In their petition, the workers specifically ask that families be provided apartments with an attached private kitchen. See: GARF, f. R-130, op. 2, d. 78, ll. 14-14ob.

within a quickly urbanizing Russia, planners worried intensely and sought to replace it with a type of communal kitchen that they had organized.

In the polemical poster that opened this chapter, the creator of the poster casts the Soviet conception of the kitchen as a strong break. The old style of the kitchen, like the “old everyday”, would “wither away” and replaced seamlessly with the gleaming city laid out in the poster.⁶⁹ Yet as this chapter has shown, Bolshevik thinkers were not the first to have this vision. When liberal elites and reformers from the Imperial period were given input on designing kitchens, they too promoted the idea of a communal kitchen that had been centrally planned. Although this plan sometimes emerged out of practical concerns, liberals choose communal kitchens even when they were not necessary. The Bolshevik plans did eclipse those from the late Imperial period in scale; the communal kitchen became a regular feature of homes. Bolshevik planners also pushed farther, attempting to not only communalize the kitchen, but to replace it with cafeterias in which food would be professionally prepared at affordable prices.

When examining the space of the kitchen, it is clear that 1917 is far from being a stark divide. A more effective break than one between the Imperial and Soviet periods would be along very different lines: between elites (liberal reformers and Soviet officials, for example) and residents. Although far from a perfect dichotomy (it ignores, for example, that elites too were residents in their own buildings and very much affected by housing policy), highlighting the gaps between these two groups illuminates much about visions of the kitchen. In both cases, the plans to create a new vision of the kitchen emerged out of uneasiness about residents’ abilities to

⁶⁹ In a call for a new type of housing, the editor of *Housing Cooperation* N. Popov-Sibiriak repeatedly stated that it needed to be a break from the “old everyday.” See: N. Popov-Sibiriak, “Rabochie doma: Na vystavke proektov rabochego doma.” *Zhilishchnoe tovarishchestvo: Zhilishche i stroitel'stvo* 5, No. 1 (January 1926): 58-59. See footnote 66 for the quote on the kitchen “painlessly withering away,” a statement that echoed the tenant of Leninism that the state would eventually wither away.

manage their own kitchens. The plans they did create did not seek the approval or input of residents; they were justified ideologically. Although in the poster from the beginning of the chapter, the woman in red looks down at the woman on the floor, presumably to measure her reaction, there were very few such checks in unveiling actual re-imaginings of the kitchen. This is not to say that these plans were entirely unappealing to residents; indeed, many residents would have appreciated them.⁷⁰ But unlike the woman in red in the poster, the elites of both the late Imperial and Soviet periods were too busy looking at the gleaming kitchens they wanted to create, and never looked down to see the reaction of the residents.

⁷⁰ In an example from a much later period, Boym discusses nostalgia and longing for the space of the communal kitchen. She quotes a former resident of a Leningrad *kommunalka*, who says: “At least if worse comes to worst, even after peeing in your teapot they will still call an ambulance for you if you need it, or lend you a little bit of salt for your cooking,” the former *kommunalka* resident says. “It is this little rough-grained salt that I miss.” See: Boym, *Common Places*, 150.