

“Family Venture” [*Semeinoe Delo*] in Kazakhstan:
Intergenerational Mobility among First-Generation Entrepreneurs
and their Adult Children

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the processes of intergenerational mobility among Kazakhstani first-generation entrepreneurs (FGEs) and their adult children. More specifically, the thesis asks how business continuity and individual career trajectories intertwine under changing market conditions. The thesis moves beyond linear and unidirectional models of mobility that assume a complementarity between parental forms of capital (education, networks) and effectiveness of their investments in children (Becker et al., 2018). In contrast, the present study conceptualizes intergenerational mobility as historically situated and culturally mediated processes – a family venture (*semeinoe delo*, rus.) -- where different value regimes and shifting forms of business organization shape how forms of capital are transmitted, transformed, and, sometimes eroded. *Semeinoe delo* here is an etic term that is used to capture non-individual, economic but also moral, affective, and relational character of practices oriented toward ensuring continuity.

Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Karaganda and Astana, as well as qualitative interviews with eight families related to mid-sized entrepreneurship, the study focuses on how value regimes associated with a Soviet legacy and with present-day neoliberal subjectivity become interpreted by different generations at the nexus of business and family. While FGEs accumulated economic and social capital through flexible and often informal practices, some reinforced “cultural deservedness”, as referenced in moral hierarchies that distinguish higher education and meaningful labor from business practices that were perceived as unintellectual and “dirty”, such as bazaar trading or sales direction. Reproducing this hierarchy in parenting styles and in business management, such FGEs facilitated an avoidance among their adult children to join their companies due to a misalignment between the inherited moral stances and limited adjustment of FGE-founded companies to an increasingly complex market realities. More

specifically, the young adults found it hard to make sense of the parental businesses due to their “informality,” “messiness,” and unfulfilled expectations of a “professional” organizational environment.

However, even when business continuity is doubtful and accumulated capital no longer reinvested, the families recalibrate intergenerational mobility venture beyond business. This dissertation extends the suggestion to shift attention to occupational self-directedness which predispose children of entrepreneurs for jobs with high extent of autonomy beyond parent-child dyad (Aldrich & Kim, 2007). Particularly, career choices are structured by morally valorized trajectories that are perceived as effective in terms of family histories with a sufficient extent of work autonomy or security. For example, the job could have high extent of autonomy but if it is not prestigious in a familial understanding, it would be symbolically sanctioned or considered as temporal.

At the same time, the study identifies conditions under which intergenerational business cooperation becomes possible. When both the FGEs and their adult children prioritize the enactment of a neoliberal subjectivity when one is an investable portfolio (Feher, 2009), they can seek the optimization of the family business and the overlapping life realms. However, the need for “professionalization” of business – as a moral and organizational project – can facilitate intergenerational cooperation but can also distort it. If the FGEs lead the “professionalization”, based on ideals of constant self-improvement, age-defying learning, and superiority of modern business education, they can make the family businesses desirable career opportunities for their adult children, enabling forms of family-work “optimization” in which care and self-care co-exist.

In contrast, when the adult children assume responsibility for “professionalization” while their parents resist the ideal of the self-reflexive portfolio, intergenerational cooperation does

emerge, but it is distorted by a competing value regimes and moral hierarchies. Family conflicts over superiority of approaches and a contested generational hierarchy obscure the importance of hybrid and contextual business practices, which are not only “professional” or only “informal”.

Taken together, this thesis addresses debates about mobility and inequality in capitalism. Rather than enhancing investment efficiency, parental education, networks, and other forms of capital mediate the formation of capitalist subjects, as these processes unfold in continuous interaction with economy, market dynamics, or forms of business organization specifically, that simultaneously shape the possibilities of social mobility.

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Introduction

“I’m such a snob,” 28-year-old Laura Sabitova laughed as she scrolled her playlist while driving me to her apartment in a vibrant riverside area in Astana. She worked as a freelance digital designer and took pride in her refined taste in music, her aesthetic vision, and foreign education. “I am a lot like my father,” said the young woman.

Laura’s 60-year-old father, Kairat Sabitov, is a first-generation entrepreneur (FGE), and as he emphasized himself a “Soviet trained engineer”. Being born in a city in the family of young Soviet specialists (university graduates) in the early 1960s, Kairat himself has always emphasized academic excellence and cultural distinction from those who do not share his taste in literature, music, art, and etc. Through this upbringing, his two children “inherited” the moral hierarchy of work in which intellectual and creative labor appeared dignified.

“All this,” Laura said later in her apartment, pointing to the modern appliances and her brand-new car in her parking slot, “is my father’s achievement, not mine.” Such humility is mixed with guilt. Neither Laura nor her older brother took the lead in their father’s once profitable construction supply company. He accumulated capital in the 2000s with its peak in the mid 2010s but gradually withdrew from everyday management, delegating control for everyday operations, sales, “messy” construction site, and stressful negotiations to a distant relative, and finally lost the business in 2020. While Kairat’s son avoided the constantly demanding environment shaped by “dirty work” and continuous stress over risks, responsibility, and deadlines, and Kairat’s daughter emphasized not being “interested” in such work, that relative eventually established a competing firm, taking most of the clients and employees with him.

Laura’s half-joking self-identification as a “snob” in terms of music choice illustrates a broader family context in which family origin continued to shape what counted as legitimate

interests, aspirations and life trajectories. Despite the opportunities in business established by the father, the normative borders tied to Sabitov family's lifestyle resemble what Bissenova (2012) and Rivkin-Fish (2009) described as Western bourgeois lifestyles, which was several decades ago tacitly promised to the educated white-collar workers in the Soviet society. These imagined lifestyles did not align with the "dirty work," aggressive conflict-resolution practices, and ethically ambiguous behavior that were part of everyday business-making in the father's company.

The gap between what the young adults desired and what their father could offer to them was widened by Kairat's limited efforts to continuously transform the company since its creation in the early 2000s. The paradox tied to the ideas around dignity and the contemporary practical messiness is particularly visible in the anxieties of the Sabitovs about stalled mobility and declining living standards, especially when contrasted with other entrepreneurial families in which distinction was performed not based on refined taste or academic achievements, but based on the way they develop or expand their businesses.

Two hundred kilometers away, in Karaganda, I met twenty-three-year-old Renata Smirnova, whose pride was rooted not in refined taste or the number of books she read, but in being useful to the family business, which her parents had scaled up, evolving from a single meat-selling stall in the local bazaar to the company which "hardly anyone matches in Karaganda." On their trajectory from a small mining town near Karaganda, Renata's parents focused on opportunities for profit-making, practical skills, and day-to-day problem-solving. The practice of improving the business and focusing on business-specific education helped them to introduce formalized and specialized organization, rational instruments used in daily operation, and optimize the strategy.

Seeing her parents adapting to the rapidly changing market and expanding the business, Renata also found working for her parents very useful for her managerial experience and overall “portfolio”. Compared to the informal, “messy” pre-transformation company's organization, where “everyone was responsible for everything,” Renata understood and admired the language of business transformation. Unlike her older brother who tried to join the family business in the 2010s, Renata's entry into the labor market coincided with her parents’ decision to enroll in a costly executive training delivered by a well-known U.S.-based business adviser, who promised to give tools for the structural transformation. Before this turn, the young woman only witnessed negative experience of informal and unclear responsibilities causing constant conflicts between her parents and her brother. With the reorganization led by her mother, Renata came to view the family enterprise as an all-around beneficial project.

The meat business per se is not something that the Smirnovs prioritize; instead, profits and their profit-making knowledge and experience, which they can invest in further accumulation as if they became assets themselves: “If the meat business stopped being so profitable, we, with our “brains”, would do something else,” said Renata. Her parents were no longer the self-taught all-rounders from the 2000s but experienced executives with cutting-edge skills whose all lives were inseparable from their business. Renata, in turn, followed them, learned from and along them, being trusted, promoted, and secured.

The two cases offer a stark contrast, which is one of the focuses of this dissertation. The FGE Kairat Sabitov avoided business transformation and downgraded the importance of the knowledge related to management, sales, and everyday operation, while his daughter Laura Sabitova avoided his informally structured business, which seemed incompatible with her understanding of dignified or understandable work. Moreover, she avoided the “meaningless”

pursuit of profit in general, declining her father's repeated offers to invest in whatever business ideas she might propose. Her ideals constrained her career aspirations in entrepreneurship while enabling opportunities in other occupational directions. Simultaneously, the young woman worried about the inability to maintain the same elevated living standards as a self-employed designer in comparison to the period when her parents provided for her. In the example of Sabitovs, it can be said that the entrepreneurial legacy discontinued before it even began, as Kairat lost business and disrupted capital circulation by trusting too much control to a person who was not interested in his further upward mobility and by buying real estate, and other material assets rather than reinvesting money.

In contrast, the Smirnovs' commitment to control business, learning to optimize (business processes and family-work realms), self-management (getting new, valuable skills), and constant capital reinvestment keep sustaining the livelihoods the family is accustomed to. Moreover, Renata Smirnova gained managerial experience and entrepreneurial "brain", which positioned her toward business in her career aspirations. Whereas Laura Sabitova felt guilt and fears of falling behind after avoiding business inheritance and choosing self-employment, Renata Smirnova felt highly confident in her work, her enhanced human capital, and a closer family connection.

I open this dissertation with these two contrasting trajectories of intergenerational mobility among entrepreneurial families in Astana and Karaganda, not only because they represent the poles in outcomes of entrepreneurial continuity (seemed failure and success). What is puzzling is the expectations of what constitutes cultural capital, intergenerational mobility, and family "success", and the practical messiness. Across the fieldwork, I met FGEs who passed the performance of distinction based on echoes of the cultural capital of Soviet intelligentsia on to their children but did not collect the fruits of modernity's teleological promise: children, allegedly, have not

outperformed them, failing to expand the business or multiply capital. In contrast, other FGEs, despite lacking focus on high cultural capital or on the promise of inevitable progress regarding their children, “succeeded” in reproducing entrepreneurial continuity in their children, seeming to invest more in prospects for continuity or social ascent. Finally, there are cases in which adult children inherit a strong prioritization of formal education and cultivated taste, yet, in contrast to their parents’ avoidance of continuous self-management and business transformation, assume full responsibility for adjusting the business. In doing so, they acquire highly-valued knowledge and skills aligning with the contemporary economy and market demands. However, due to the parent-child misalignment, continuity is achieved at significant emotional and moral cost, complicating any idealized picture of intergenerational succession.

These contrasts matter because they complicate contemporary concepts of intergenerational mobility – one’s change in the socio-economic status relative to the previous generations -- which assume that parental human capital complementarities enhance the effectiveness of investments in children's development, thereby reproducing inequality across generations (Becker et al., 2018). Based on an ethnography with eight FGEs with adult children in two Kazakhstani cities, this dissertation aimed to disentangle how the families manage multilayered intergenerational mobility processes in “transitional” economies where the echoes of past social origin may still be present while the business environment rapidly changes. Although this dissertation does not focus on debates over class, I draw selectively on the concept where relevant, orienting toward E. P. Thompson’s relational understanding of class as a process rather than a category: “something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships” (Thompson, as cited in Kesküla, 2022).

Drawing on Keskülä's (2022) proposal to study processes of social change (e.g. “processes of precarization” that the children of formerly stable working class undergo) in the contemporary context where class reproduction is unstable and uneven, I focus on processes of intergenerational mobility as a broader category aimed at individual occupational choices, relation to family capital (e.g. a child contributes to its increase), and self-perceived socioeconomic status (SES) as contributors to social and economic positions. Entrepreneurial continuity here is one trajectory which can contribute to upward direction of the positions as the capital accumulated by a parent continue to be reinvested, while alternative intergenerational mobility trajectories can include precarious employment, civil service, freelance, etc.

While Becker's et al. (2018) theory assumes parental skills and education translate into productive intergenerational transmission, reproducing inequality, the focus on FGEs and the consequences of post-socialist transformation complicates this. Drawing on an anthropological perspective on capitalism and culture as co-producers of each other, where kinship and gender shape accumulation, rather than being outside factors (Yanagisako, 2002), this dissertation emphasizes the significance of intergenerational mobility as culturally and historically situated processes – a family venture (*semeinoe delo*, rus.) -- in which values and forms of business organization shape how capital is accumulated, transmitted, or sometimes immobilized. My data shows that while parents' human capital, indeed, is passed on to the next generation, it may facilitate business succession and upward mobility prospects in some cases, but in others, constrain business continuity by producing moral distance from the reality of informal business practices. Rather than enhancing investment efficiency, human capital in these contexts mediates the formation of capitalist subjects.

In Part I, this dissertation frames the self-perceived Soviet intelligentsia's belief in a deservedly elevated status due to high cultural capital as cultural deservedness, which may constrain the FGEs from neoliberal pressure for constant self-management and business “professionalization”. In turn, their adult children who “inherit” cultural deservedness along with ideals about what contemporary business should be, avoid enterprises of their parents. As a result, the young adults might not form “a desire to own and control the means of production” (Yanagisako, 2002, p.5), which makes them far from “bourgeoisie” (not a fixed class position but a social formation defined through ownership and authority in Yanagisako). Instead, they can choose employment or be self-employed specialists. Yet this is not the story of rupture because the research participants might continue the social origin and cultural deservedness patterns beyond the parent-child dyad.

Part II focuses on how ideals of human capital neoliberal subjectivity (Fehér, 2009) lead to the pressure to optimize family-work overlap, which can facilitate the formation of the desire to own and control means of production, no matter social origin and former Soviet stratification. Yet, this is not always a story of success, because the generational moral asymmetry can entail relational costs for the family part of the optimization. The thesis shows how entrepreneurial continuity among FGEs’ adult children is not a natural outcome of potential capital inheritance (its various forms) from a FGE parent, but culturally mediated practices intertwined with the exigencies of the business environment for “professionalization” and multiple regimes of value.

Historical Background

The marketization process followed divergent trajectories across former Soviet republics, ranging from gradualist to more radical programs of economic liberalization. Kazakhstan belonged to the group of countries that implemented “shock therapy” reforms including the withdrawal of

the state from economic coordination, cuts to public support, and privatization of state property which rapidly began to transform macroeconomic performance, social mobility, and labor market. On the macroeconomic level, the “disorganization” as the context where the rapid marketization unfolded was seen the main reason for the economic underperformance: the cumulative decline of GDP over two-fifth from 1991 to 1995 in Kazakhstani case (Pomfret, 2005). Rapid price liberalization without the institutional infrastructure of a market economy, protracted disinflation after hyperinflation, and the disintegration of centrally planned production networks into which Kazakhstan’s mono-towns had been tightly integrated contributed to the organizational collapse. By the 2000s Kazakhstani transition to market economy was institutionally “complete”, yet the fortune was shaped to a greater extent by integration into the global commodity boom of hydrocarbons and metals which lasted until 2014 (Pomfret, 2019).

However, the social consequences of the dissolution of the socialist system and marketization crystallized as Soviet-era social protection and employment security were dismantled alongside the legacy of institutional weaknesses. In the 1990s, Kazakhstan experienced extensive brain drain as the ethnic Russians and Germans who dominated among educated urban professional population compared to the local minority left the country. Still, out of the Soviet successor states, Kazakhstan was characterized by high living standards and endowment of human capital based on the extent of university graduates (Pomfret, 2019). More generally, the post-Soviet context -- most extensively illustrated in studies of Russia -- experienced a decline in intergenerational mobility as a change in the socio-economic status relative to previous generations (Gerber & Hout, 2004), alongside with the mobility decline throughout the lifetime (Patino, 2008). While all over the Soviet state social mobility was actively supported and working class had more mechanisms to access expanded opportunities, post-Soviet states largely withdrew from this role.

As competition for prestigious positions and higher incomes intensified, relatively privileged strata mobilized their inherited forms of capital to secure advantages for their children (Gerber & Hout, 2004). In Kazakhstan this is particularly emphasized due to the privatization of extensive state assets tied to previous high extent of industrial integration, through which a small group of “oligarchs” accumulated disproportionate economic and political power and came to dominate key sectors such as finance and media (Pomfret, 2019). The analyses informed by a moral economy perspective emphasize how rent-seeking forms of wealth generation have concentrated resources in the hands of elites, further constraining social mobility (Sanghera & Satybaldieva, 2020).

At the same time, beyond the literature interest to polarities such as emerging elites and population negatively affected by rising inequality, Central Asian societies have also heterogeneous population situated in between. Tommaso Trevisani (2022) addresses the importance to study “an often-overlooked space in between the newly rich and newly poor,” referring to it as the “new middle strata” (p. 112). At the same time, the population the author refers to is not entirely new and is heterogeneous in every Central Asian state. Soviet moral hierarchies and the forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984) are partly inherited and enacted by people in new economic and value settings, so some of the advantages could be reproduced. For example, those among former Soviet intellectual workers and university graduates who could succeed after the marketization, instrumentalized their cultural capital and cultured-ness as a justification for their social and economic outcomes (Bissenova, 2012). While there are of course the major population with graduate degrees who became marginalized and felt fallen behind during the challenges of post-Soviet transformations, the Soviet “mass intelligentsia” (educated skilled

workers like engineers, doctors, teachers (Stein, 1951)) still reproduce the narratives of worthiness (Bissenova, 2012; Rivkin-Fish, 2009).

In this sense, post-Soviet “middle” positions not always represent a rupture with the past, but sometimes an inherited hierarchies and ideals of modernization. Along with the egalitarian agenda of the, allegedly, classless Soviet state, the tacit agreement between the ruling Party and skilled professionals allowed the latter ones to perform “middle-class values” in their lifestyle and unofficial positioning as superiors based on taste, erudition, and moral dignity in comparison to the “backwardness” of the manual workers, peasants, and marginal, rural population (Dunham, 1990; Patino, 2008). This dissertation’s focus is beyond the elites as not only they could secure desired status and economic outcomes in market economy. Gerber (2018) highlights the important role of the economic course and policies per se that contributed to the upward mobility of people along with education, class of origin, and social connections. Indeed, the skills, and knowledge of educated professionals, technicians were mostly not in need in labor market because of the new directions that did not require production. The command economy overemphasized spheres of heavy and military production and disregarded trade, spheres of goods, and services. However, it is important that those among the first ones who could rapidly learn to navigate the new conditions, could make it play into the hands of their endeavors. While large state-owned productions closed down, private firms mushroomed: free market not only constrained but also opened up various opportunities for some people to start private enterprises.

While knowledge and skills in technological innovations and other “hard skills” were no longer highly relevant, people from various occupational origins flung themselves into the unknown field of trade and services in search of income. Central Asian research emphasizes the everyday challenges and opportunities of “accidental” or shuttle traders (*chelnoki*, rus.) who

explored the market economy and newly forming business environment through trial and error (Sahadeo, 2011). While traders enormously contributed to the economic advancement and processes of intra- and intergenerational social mobility (Mukhina, 2014; Satova, 2021; Schröder, 2020; Schröder & Schröder, 2017), there is a noticeable gap in the literature on Central Asian small and medium enterprises (SMEs) beyond import-based garment trade. One of the objectives of this dissertation is to complicate the narrative around “middle strata”, business, trade, and the highly-valued knowledge and skills.

In the more contemporary period, the Soviet economic legacies have less impact on market and business environments of entrepreneurs; rather, the pressures of global economy have become inevitable part of it. Following the 2008 crisis of finance, Kalb (2025) describes the state of economy is characterized by constant crisis management through financialization, digitalization, and speculative investment instead of aiming at long-term stabilization. The COVID-19 pandemic in this regard intensified already existing inequalities and insecurity. The author sees the everyday life of individuals and households through the perspective of main carriers of responsibility for the economic risks. This dissertation focuses on business owners who have accumulated relatively significant economic capital and who are positioned at the forefront of these pressures, even if they are far from institutional or political agents of global finance. Operating in volatile and unevenly integrated markets and niches they are directly exposed to global pressures of finance-led development logics, technological advancement, and intensified competition. Rather than achieving desired security, they entered continuous circles of capital accumulation and reinvestment.

In such settings, Central Asian entrepreneurs especially experience the pressure for the rapid change in the very “modus operandi” of business-making. First-generation entrepreneurs,

who had to be the self-taught all-rounders, explored entrepreneurship with little formal guidance in the 1990s, since the very formation of entrepreneurial fields was still in process (Schröder & Schröder, 2017). For instance, the initial business-making practices of the first Kyrgyz entrepreneurs who remained economically active up to the present lose relevance (Schröder, 2021). At first, entrepreneurship was oriented toward rapid profit, involving informalities, even rule-bending and opportunistic behavior. The contemporary business approaches are increasingly guided by “rather global corporate values, such as ‘reliability’, ‘accountability’ or ‘transparency’” (p. 228). It is within this layered historical landscape which is inseparable from social and economic dimensions characterized by reconfigured hierarchies and persistent ideas, this study situates its focus on intergenerational mobility, with each of these dimensions examined in detail in the theoretical part that follows.

Theoretical Background

Particularly relevant for this dissertation is what the two cases in the opening vignette signaled about -- a shift in the normative horizon of “value and worthlessness” within the contemporary regime, which Marxist anthropologists define as “dominated by global financialized techno-capitalism” (Kalb, 2025, p.6). At the same time, scholars had eschewed the notions of universal capitalist logic with abstract capital and classes since Marx, but rather being “constituted as particular kinds of persons through historically specific cultural processes” (Yanagisako, 2002, p.5). Specifically, theorists emphasize the capitalist system not just as an economy, rather they focus on its consequences that structure society within the framework of capital’s demands. While marketization policies in post-socialist societies played a crucial role in reshaping “the very foundation of what it means to be a person” (Dunn, 2004, p. 6), it is far from pure economic determinism. To avoid the dichotomy between economy and society, where the capitalist system,

with its rules, is seen as a unifying structure, I draw on theories that emphasize the dialectical relationship between the two.

While acknowledging the asymmetry in power between structural global pressure and people's response to a greater or lesser extent, the theorists like Don Kalb (2025) and Sylvia Yanagisako (2002) constitute critical anthropology that disentangle real-life practices, processes, differences in response, in resistance, and in alignment to “totalizing structure” that both constrain and open up opportunities. Drawing on Yanagisako's claim that capital owners and workers are made, not born, this thesis is particularly interested in how and why adult children of first-generation entrepreneurs/owners of capital reproduce business continuity by joining family business and/or reinvesting family capital - as family inheritance is one of the primary determinants of one's relation to the means of production - or reproduce broader social mobility patterns avoiding entrepreneurship.

Moreover, it is important to note that the analytical usefulness of the “post-socialism” has been widely debated, particularly in relation to younger generations who never directly experienced being Soviet (Ibañez-Tirado, 2015). I also do not use this as a generational identity or a description of the contemporary context. However, for the purpose of understanding social mobility trajectories, the present moment is an opportune time to address the long-term impact of the Soviet-era value regimes on economic action, among others. Moreover, emphasis on Sovietness of values often means familiar language and symbols that people use as a response to a changing social and economic context (Kesküla, 2012). The parents who participate in this research belong to a cohort whose career trajectories began amid the opportunities of marketization. They entered these processes not from a vacuum, but with value compasses shaped by Soviet systems of stratification and moral evaluation. Orientations such as cultural deservedness

continued to inform both what kinds of entrepreneurial practices were pursued and where the limits of acceptable activity were drawn, though were negotiable.

Three decades later, their children navigate young adulthood in markedly different settings. While they have been affected by ideals of market rationalities (Junisbai & Junisbai, 2020), they also inherit familial expectations, moral hierarchies around work, and aspirations formed through their parents' experiences. Moreover, given the extensive scholarship in Western contexts demonstrating how parenting styles shape the reproduction of socioeconomic status and inequality, this dissertation also draws on to analyze the oral histories of research participants in Kazakhstan, while critically re-examining their assumptions through locally grounded perspective (Gillies, 2005; Lareau, 2011; Streib, 2011). As the young adults take their first independent steps in the labor market, this moment offers a suitable context to examine how intergenerational mobility is negotiated and enabled over time.

Multiple Value Regimes

Since Kazakhstan, which was part of the Soviet Union, transitioned from a planned economy to a market-based one, entrepreneurialism has increasingly taken center stage in the value landscape. The “shock therapy” reforms of the 1990s rapidly began to transform the labor market, shifting the value landscape. At the same time, the narrative of capitalist transformation and transition must be applied with caution. In the absence of Western-style capitalist mechanisms and systems of service provision and commodity distribution, Soviet society already included the informal economy, forms of consumerism, a “native regime of consumption,” or “proto-entrepreneurs” (Humphrey, 1998; Koroteyeva & Makarova, 1998; Nikula & Tchalakov, 2013). It can be argued that the structural shift to a market economy valorized the previously informal

“entrepreneurial spirit,” while the new opportunities rewarded those open to rapid self-management (Gerber, 2018).

Moreover, capitalism and capitalist action are constituted from ambiguous value regimes that sustain livelihood, whereas post-socialist actors specifically are fluent in multiple value systems (Narotzky & Smith, 2006; Stark, 1996). For example, evidence from ethnography with Russian family businesses shows moral frameworks of entrepreneurs incorporating multiple and sometimes conflicting values: associated with Soviet past egalitarian ideals, reciprocity, nostalgia for socialism, with the ones associated with neoliberal condition such as self-interest, commodification, and competition (Tereshina, 2019).

Still, this dissertation specifically shows how two often contradicting and sometimes overlapping discourses of worth can shape career trajectories and processes of intergenerational mobility. First, I refer to former Soviet “intelligentsia’s” belief in the natural translation of the high cultural capital to middle class lifestyles (Bissenova, 2012; Rivkin-Fish, 2009) as “claimed cultural deservedness” because the term captures the constructed connection without downplaying the research participants’ hard work in acquiring the credentials, compared to words like “entitlement”. I show how among former Soviet university-educated participants and their children claimed cultural deservedness might shape the business practices, ideas around work, and processes of intergenerational mobility. While a growing body of ethnographies exists on “shuttle traders” showing that petty and garment trade was perceived as necessary but morally costly work, this dissertation show the practices of business people who completely avoided it as an option. Educated in Soviet times, specialisty (educated professionals) often managed the stigma and could invest in the best education for their children so that they could avoid “dirty” work (Kemel, 2020; Satova, 2021; Schröder, 2024; Yessenova, 2006). In turn, this thesis shift the focus on these

stereotypes keep shaping entrepreneurial practices: businesses other than the resale of garments and petty trade or continuing the prioritization of production over sales and finance today. However, I contextualize the intergenerational mobility processes within the pressure of neoliberal subjectivity as an ideal.

The first part of the dissertation focuses on the initial formal and informal entrepreneurial practices of profit-making as a response to the pressures of past ideals. I situate high evaluation of Soviet education and “cultured-ness” not merely as memory but a socially produced valuation system that privileged certain forms of knowledge while marginalizing others (Kassymbekova & Chokobaeva, 2021). Within the broader logic of the Soviet modernization project, these narratives continue to shape perceptions of classed and cultured personhood today. Engaging in entrepreneurship meant renegotiating value hierarchies. The FGEs participating in this study are not a monolithic group, but heterogeneous actors, who are constrained and enabled by structural pressures. In practice, they complicated the binaries presented in their narratives. While some research participants with working-class and rural origins, indeed, felt less constrained to start from selling meat or other goods at local bazaars, they might then invest in cutting-edge business knowledge, framing this through the language of business transformation and improving “human capital.” In turn, others, being “proud Soviet specialists,” tried to avoid trade as much as possible, and as a result, found different ways of business-making. However, it turned out they had to start with trade, low-level positions in sales or “legitimized” their trading experience with the nature of the goods they resell (e.g. the case of gold and precious stones business from Chapter 1) on their way to ownership.

Regarding the values associated with the “new order”, the large body of literature particularly distinguishes a political-economic ethos that valorizes entrepreneurial subjectivity as

the neoliberal condition. The ideal is an individual who is a proactive, rational, responsible, risk-taking, and flexible agent (Brown, 2005; Fehér, 2009; Foucault, 2010; Gershon, 2011, 2016). The infiltration of economic rationality into personal domains is leading to an increasing overlap between previously separated realms. For example, Michel Fehér (2009) pointed to a marked difference between neoliberal condition with its normative “self-entrepreneur” and liberal capitalism with its “free laborer” in blurring the boundaries between private and public realms. The family and work, intimate and commodity realms, reproduction and production spheres – all contribute today to the valorization or devalorization of human capital or one’s “portfolio”. According to this shift, one must not only be productive and efficient, but first and foremost an investable asset, who attracts credit, attention, is worth hiring and promoting, etc.

Furthermore, as this research studies families, care constitutes one of the important elements of the entanglement. As the welfare state becomes limited in neoliberalism, the literature theorizing the outcome of that can be particularly helpful. The realms of care and self-care become inseparable too in modern neoliberalism. Lessenich (2011) conceptualized one of the main principles of neoliberal governmentality as “subjectivation of the social” -- the social risks are fully placed on individuals. The social good is redefined from a collective result to an individualized achievement, realized through ideal subjects who govern themselves in ways that are simultaneously presented as care for society: “moving people into an ethical relationship to society as a whole, making them want to serve society by protecting it from themselves, i.e., from the risk they pose to society if they do not act as responsible selves” (p. 315). Moreover, the economic volatility combined with limited social safety nets redefine care and care practices as an asset that valorize one’s portfolio (Lee, 2018). Studying the social entrepreneurship in Seoul, the author conceptualizes the social economy in South Korea as hybrid spaces where moral aspirations

and sociality are subjectified as assets of rational individuals. Drawing on care and care work (or affective labor) used as instruments of self-enhancement, this dissertation explores how the overlap between family (and economic care for loved ones) and work (business and capital accumulation) can be optimized by some research participants through business continuity.

On the one hand, joining family firm in this value landscape might be seen as the most ideal path for the FGEs and their families. Working together for the sake of further individual and familial capital accumulation optimizes already overlapping realms of family and work, reproduction and production, economic care for the family members, and economic self-care. At the same time, the dissertation reveals the paradox. In the same framework of the neoliberal values, the business, where the practices are unclear for the children, might not seem worth joining and investing their lives into. While the young adults in this study were socialized within multiple value regimes, not all of them might inherit hands-on practices of business-making. In contrast, privileging cultural capital and formal education, without entrepreneurialism and real practice, might fit employment or self-employment more than a formation of another entrepreneur in a family.

Family Firms

Anthropology understands kin-business overlap as embedded within capitalism, rather than being anti-capitalist in logic or being less modern or productive kind of capitalist practice (Yanagisako, 2002). Significant body of literature investigate how kinship and entrepreneurship shape each other under conditions of economic flexibility and uncertainty. Some scholars focus on structural precarity and unstable labor market where kinship gives reliable access to cheap and flexible labor. In unstable economies such as South European, reliance on family labor is not merely a cultural preference but a practical necessity (Goddard, 1996). As Narotzky and Smith

(2006) support this claim, mobilization of kinship relations becomes economic resources in flexible neoliberalism, blurring the boundaries between family obligation and productive activity. Evidence from Central Asian context shows more nuanced picture: business run through kinship not only take but also give. Drawing on quantitative data from Kyrgyzstan, Castañeda Dower et al., (2022) shows that while kin-based business organization can increase short-term profitability through access to trusted in-networks, they may simultaneously constrain business expansion and further accumulation by limiting reinvestment due to obligations to support out-networks. Therefore, while kinship can become the facilitator of extraction, linear models of capitalist expansion do not always align with practice everywhere.

Conceptually, family firms differ from nonfamily ones due to the structural, cognitive, and relational embeddedness of the owning and controlling family, which shapes goals, outcomes, and governance approaches of business. Family embeddedness is an organization's exposure to familial relationships, which can facilitate but also constrain business development (Zellweger et al., 2019). The authors categorize three dimensions where embeddedness operate: structure (who is connected to whom, business structure), cognitive level (shared meanings and morals), and relational level (trust, obligations, emotions), though as members occupy multiple roles simultaneously the three forms are in interaction. The embeddedness increases ability (access to family and firm resources) and shape willingness (readiness to follow particularistic financial or nonfinancial goals). This is also connected to capitalist reproduction. Capitalists, like workers, are made, not born, claimed Sylvia Yanagisako (2002). Along with socially and culturally reproduced productive capacities (skills and knowledge), unlike workers, entrepreneurs have “desire to own and control the means of production” (p. 5). Kazakhstani firms where parents and children work together or avoid provide a compelling context for understanding how interacting and sometimes

contradictory value regimes, ideas about generation, age, and kinship shape the ability and willingness to act in ways that satisfy familial and individual goals and produce (or do not) “capitalists.”

While I rely on the distinction between ability and willingness -- or the productive capacities and desire to own and control capital and business -- this framework is oriented toward family firms as analytical units, other literature approach family firms as everyday practice. Based on a study of medium-sized businesses in Central Anatolia, Deniz (2022) approaches kinship as social construct of relatedness (extending ties based on shared blood) which is a mobilized resource within capitalist relations. Such kind of relatedness works as a moral framework where obligations and loyalty are invoked. However, kinship as a moral domain co-exists with kinship as a tactic, which situationally can be activated and deactivated when it constrains the logic of accumulation. While zooming in on parent-child kind of relatedness also shows the moments where kinship can be deactivated situationally (e.g. what research participants describe as “learning to distinguish the realms of family and work”), still this particular entanglement is qualitatively different due to the layers of affective ties, altruistic intentions and succession desires.

At the same time, the overlap between family and business can take very different forms depending on a variety of value and life organization regimes. For instance, farming business in Hutterite colonies where life is organized in non-individualized manner and labor is based on relatively low specialization contribute to well-being of families (Nordstrom & Jennings, 2018). Less specialized work facilitate flexible labor substitution, birth-to-death care is guaranteed by the colony: those in need and unable to work receive help. Moreover, many members of a community easily “blend” family and work spending extensive time with family and involving children in collective labor while also feeling instrumental, capable, and supported. Similar dynamics may be

found all around the world, and variety of Kazakhstani businesses can be approached from the perspective of mutual labor substitution, but this is not the case in this study.

The firms examined in this dissertation operate in urban business environments characterized by increasingly specialized and formalized labor, where labor substitution and family-work “blending” is difficult, while economic care is prioritized over its other ways. Even the cases of informal businesses, which changed little since its initial “1990s like” approaches, are still based on specialized knowledge and labor where directions like production, sales, human resources, legal, and accounting are controlled by the owner family or figure of an FGE, who redistributes work to other professional figures. In turn, the cases that introduced further business transformation can be related to farming but differ from Hutterite-like one in many ways: research participants adopted formal organizational and managerial structures, introducing standardized production and quality-control systems, which require specialized managerial knowledge and training.

Moreover, the research participants internalize the aforementioned subjectivation of the social which increasingly relocates responsibility for managing risks across the life course on individuals and families. Under these conditions, “professionalization” of business – defined later in this Introduction -- and its degree can play a crucial role in shaping willingness of adult children to join the family firm and the possibility of optimizing the overlap between family and work, care and self-care. For some young adults, particularly those whose cultural deservedness and formal educational trajectories do not align with the practical realities of their parents’ businesses, joining the business which is in stagnation and requires transformation might seem far from an optimal choice. Instead, they seek other ways of caring for their families, even if it does not have anything in common with economic care for them. By contrast, in families where parents have adopted a

portfolio-oriented approach to managing business and assets, joining family business may become a great investment in optimization of overlapping family and work, care and self-care realm, individual self-enhancement and familial upward mobility.

Processes of Social Mobility

Social mobility can be approached in one's lifetime or across generations within kin. Intergenerational mobility in classic sociological perspective was typically measured through correlations between income, education, or occupational class of parents and children. Recent studies addressed the multilayered nature of studying mobility. Motiram and Vakulabharanam (2020) emphasized not only measurable indicators, but the importance of various social aspects like access to power, as well as the necessity to study mobility and inequality in the broader context of neoliberalism and its ideologies.

Classic Becker-Tomes model assuming the altruistic intentions of parents toward their children, approached the intergenerational mobility through the investments in children's human capital (Becker & Tomes, 1986). This explained the link between mobility and inequality as high-income families invest more based on the resources. However, recent extensions to the model give a more nuanced understanding of the process: parents' own human capital, its complementaries like access to networks, increase the productivity of investments they make in their children (Becker et al., 2018). This extends the understanding of the persistence of advantages as structural and cumulative among the upper income and elite families. While Kazakhstani first-generation entrepreneurs, even with the substantial in the global level capital, cannot be equated to the elite dynasties in the West, the context of rapidly changing moral landscape and business environment questions the very notion of "productivity" in our understanding of intergenerational mobility.

In terms of entrepreneurs specifically, business literature is more interested in proposing practical solutions such as to a “willing successor problem” or categorizing family firms according to the nature of intergenerational relations. However, it often overlooks the influence of a wider social structure. The authors suggest passing on intangible capital and the importance of close relationships between a parent and a child as the decisive aspects in the “successful” intrafamily succession and reproduction of socioeconomic status across generations (Hopp et al., 2019; Parker, 2016) Leiß and Zehrer (2018) distinguished between communication types models in family firms, ranging from Authoritarian Protection to Co-Evolutionary Development. While the figures of the individuals and their private interrelations play an immense role, the theoretical perspective of social mobility within social sciences can make the question more comprehensive, as it does not exclude other trajectories other than business.

Throughout the dissertation, entrepreneurial continuity and intergenerational mobility are both important and interrelated but distinct: continuity refers to the survival and transformation of the enterprise or reinvestment of capital created by a parent in business, while intergenerational mobility captures broader shifts in the social and economic positions of family members across generations. Aldrich and Kim (2007) brought the general factors shaping intergenerational continuity of occupational attainment into studies on entrepreneurs. Instead of looking for specific skills and training among children of business people, the authors suggest shifting attention towards their “occupational self-directedness” [...] which predisposes children [of entrepreneurs] not only to self-employment but also to other occupations with high autonomy.” (p.72). The data on Kazakhstani first-generation entrepreneurs show the need of going beyond parent-child dyad as the young adults can also orient themselves towards reproduction of secure, stable and prestigious careers of their grandparents, aunts and uncles. Gender also might play a role. For

example, some daughters from the perceived “Soviet intelligentsia” might choose autonomy/prestige (like freelance in education, creative industry which require taste). In contrast, some sons might choose state service, following in the footsteps of their grandfathers, uncles, favoring security/prestige. Therefore, if, from the one point, they can be viewed as in the process of downward mobility (they are just owners of transferred possessions but not investing them to engage in production cycles) compared to parents, from the other perspective, they ensure intergenerational mobility reproduction through the prestige of the occupation which is compatible with the highest status in a broader family.

Parental Involvement

Regarding intergenerational mobility and continuity, existing research has extensively documented parents' strategies for passing on advantages to their children. While school is a strong tool for socialization and reproduction, children do not enter it as equals because of the primary socialization they experience within their families. We have evidence that children from families with higher income have intense special training to acquire privileges by the time of entering the labor market (Lareau, 2011), they have confidence and a sense of exceptionality (Gillies, 2005), discipline to study (Souza, 2011), and cultural knowledge on how to succeed in educational institutions starting from pre-school settings (Streib, 2011) to university (Lareau et al., 2016). However, we know less about how parents continue to be involved in their children's career trajectories and life projects after they become adults.

Economic changes made adult children longer depend on their parents (expensive education, houses, medicine). Even in the times of unpredictable crises, young adults have different standing depending on socioeconomic statuses (SES) of their families. Studying students during the COVID-19 lockdowns, Elena van Stee (2023) proposes the concept of “privileged

dependence” of the young generation on their parents with privileged SES, when parental support are not only material but also advisory which can impact the broader direction of career and life trajectory. The parents can play a significant role in shaping their children's career aspirations, job application practices, and even the decision to start their own families.

Overall, parental involvement and intergenerational transfer occur not only during childhood but also continue to be influential in shaping the trajectories of young adults. However, it is essential that people with vastly different understandings of what is important in life may fall under the umbrella term of “people from a privileged background” or be considered and self-define as “middle class.” This is not a homogeneous group, while their intergenerational continuity practices are inseparable from a capitalist society where certain groups are more empowered and others are disempowered. For example, while elite mothers may not engage in unpaid caregiving practices - some have paid personnel for this - they still may devote unrecognized labor to their children aimed at maintaining cultural capital through various educational institutions (Kromidas, 2022). At the same time, some parents may emphasize being “a good family member and religious congregant” over their children's highly valued labor market portfolio (Streib as cited in van Stee, 2022).

However, this body of literature does not consider the context of accelerated changes in the market and society, where generations of parents and children may have diverse experiences and environments where social mobility occurs. For example, in the case of the conventional and disappearing working class of miners in Kazakhstan, their children can be seen as either undergoing the process of precarization or, if it is affordable within their social capital, entering other “citadels” with secure employment, such as the public sector (Kesküla, 2022). Parents who share some of the meanings of what was once a class consciousness with their peers within the

“citadel” of the coal industry, which partially retain work security of permanent workers, do not have much in common with their adult children. While the last generation of the Fordist working class is unable to significantly assist their adult children in terms of work and social mobility in the neoliberal era, this is also a case with some of the first-generation entrepreneurs in this study, taking into account the rapidly changing market and business environment, which is also discussed later.

Bidirectional Mobility and Familial Mobility

At the same time, a body of literature exists on social expectations regarding the responsibility of young adults in maintaining the social mobility of their parental family. Research in some Asian contexts emphasizes the tensions between “old and new life scripts” for young adults and the relationship that two generations have with these scripts. The rhetoric of neoliberalism, emphasizing “progress” and “modernity,” blames “traditional” and “pre-modern” family norms for posing constraints to the free market and the mobility of young adults (Hickel 2014, as cited in Bulloch, 2021). The interdependency of generations is perceived as a limitation on individuals' desires for self-mastery. While ignoring the position in social stratification in which groups live, progress discourse makes the lives of young adults even more complicated because of additional pressures and expectations placed on them. The young respondents emphasize the importance of autonomy and individual development, while also having a deep sense of obligation to their families and a desire to improve their living conditions (Bulloch, 2021). The author claims that ideals emphasizing individualism, autonomy, and freedom do not replace the ideals of relationality and familism. Instead, both became even more intense. Furthermore, many participants in this dissertation emphasized that their own limited access to “global” education

heightened expectations toward their children, who were perceived as having opportunities the parents themselves had lacked.

While I focus on two generations, I am also attentive to the impact of and for other relatives beyond the parent-children dyad. Olga Nieuwenhuys (2020) emphasizes that literature assumes the dyad in terms of who cares for whom and in what period of time. Yet in practice, especially in the Global South, older children take responsibility and care for their younger siblings while their parents are at work, ill, and more. While my research participants are from relatively privileged backgrounds, the research participants who are older children in families feel responsible for influencing the preparation for the future career paths of their younger siblings if they feel that parents can no longer give up-to-date and highly-valued advice and involvement. At the same time, this again proves the importance of multigenerational effect on mobility. My young interlocutors are not only influenced by their parents and their career paths but can also be directed toward the work trajectories and opportunities available to their grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.

Age expectations are also an important part of my research. Some young adults and their labor forces are also viewed as cheap, convenient, and, more importantly, valorized by the service economy and its needs for workers with special embodiment, aesthetics, and tastes. Deindustrialization is a key shift in which youth became a part of the service provision sector rather than production, along with un- and underemployment. The domination of this sector influences the subjectivities of young people as workers. For example, working-class masculinity in the industrial period valued and disciplined different attributes as opposed to service labor. For instance, highly valued workers in today's sectors of the fashion industry, hospitality, and entertainment are those with tastes in pop culture, music, and certain aesthetics "to make the experience of customers pleasurable" (Farrugia, 2021, p.380). This dissertation also found that the

young generation tends to represent similar subjectivities of educated, versatile, polite people with tastes in pop culture and trained “vision” of what is “modern”, especially in marketing, this might be not enough to lead the business transformation. At the same time, the generation of parents from various backgrounds is more diverse, though some choose to “enhance their portfolio” with highly-valued for advanced business environment knowledge and skills, and others prioritize other aspects. I demonstrate cases where parents and adult children learn from each other, where parents resist changes and new trends in business, and where the adult children entirely rely on parental vision and business processes maintained by their parents.

Rapidly Changing Business Environments: the Degrees of Professionalization and Moral Hierarchy

While we know that the market is constantly changing, and business literature suggests rapid responses to discontinuous changes such as crises, the pandemic, and technological sophistication worldwide (Kreiser et al., 2021; Mouzas, 2022), there are certain specifics in the market transformation in former post-socialist societies. Over the past three decades, the mode in which business people produced their surplus moved beyond informality. The all-rounder, self-taught “accidental entrepreneurs” (Schröder & Schröder, 2017) explored entrepreneurship with little formal guidance, since the very structuration of entrepreneurial fields was still in process. In the case of Kyrgyz entrepreneurs, in Schröder's study (2021), the research participants described the evolving business environment through the emic term “professionalization”, which the author conceptualized as a shift from a versatile, self-taught entrepreneurship mode toward the specialization of business. In contrast, the research participants in this dissertation did not use “professionalization” as an emic term, but also captured related characteristics of transformation: “more formal and digitalized,” “changing,” “more competitive” market, and etc.

Still, this dissertation adopts Schröder's (2021) analytical framework of contemporary business-making as "supposed to be knowledge- and skill-based" and "guided by rather global corporate values" (p.228). However, instead of the etic term "specialization", I use "the degrees of professionalization" as the umbrella term for the "new demands of business environment". While the research participants often framed the outsourcing of functions such as Social Media Marketing (SMM) or legal services as evidence of business adaptation to increasingly complex environment, the quality and high cost of it still require seeking alternatives from business people.

At the same time, the "professionalization" part of the term illustrates the connotation of moral orientation toward work practices shared by the research participants. Anthropological scholarship on post-socialist market reforms has argued that novel standards does more than regulation; they also establish new social hierarchies and regimes of power such as modern versus backward, and morally suspect workers (Dunn, 2005). For example, in the case of an Estonian corporation, the introduction of a new corporate code of ethics by the new advanced market-era management functioned not only as technical reform but also as a redefinition of symbolic boundaries between "modern" and "backward" ways of work. By implementing globally standardized corporate values, the management implicitly orientalized the existing work ethics of miners as inferior and morally suspect (Kesküla, 2012). Similar processes happen in the enterprises of the participants in this study. The transformative practices operate both a set of organizational practices and as a moralized project structured through evaluative distinction such as outdated versus modern, practice-based versus knowledge-based, informal versus formal, which are guided by the notion of modern business education -- these research participants refer to business training, business literature or content.

Throughout this dissertation, I have identified uneven, gradient organizational transformation practices, a continuum along which enterprises occupy different positions but approached as dichotomies. While I can group the cases under the labels given by the research participants such as “stagnating”, “old-fashioned” or “professionalized”, I see them as heterogeneous. Therefore, I focused on the degrees of formalization, operational rationalization, and specialization of the business organization as the main components of business “professionalization” strategies of the research participants’ enterprises based on what the research participants claim and what I observed.

Formalization is the response of companies to environments that have grown more complex and codified, requiring written regulations (Schröder, 2021). the extent to which documents, taxation procedures, and internal organization are reported to be formalized and adhered to. The research participants sought not only to meet market needs but also to withdraw from lower-level daily operations by delegating tasks. While some FGEs transformed their organizational structures, making them more formalized (Part II, Chapter 4), it is more evident in comparison. For example, I illustrate the cases with low formalization in Part I, Chapter 2: the responsibilities are unclear, responsibility is blurred and overloaded, so the majority of decision-making is concentrated in the hands of the owner or one or two trusted people. In contrast, the examples of formalization degrees in this dissertation include defining clear roles and regulations in internal documentation (e.g., Organizational Chart), formally established and adhered-to hierarchical accountability (where the owner does not participate in many decisions), formal communication channels (e.g., memos, sluzhebki), and more.

The next “professional” component of internal structure is the degree of operational rationalization as introduction of efficiency, standardization, and predictability. This includes

automation of repetitive tasks through technology (e.g. smart technologies to manage production), the importance of guides, accurate digital inventory systems, video surveillance for employees, etc. While some research participants introduce such rationalization, others do it partially or avoid completely, continuing to make calculations in paper notebooks and tolerating forms of dishonesty by employees, justifying it by difficulty of obtaining evidence or an alternative to “market-type” rationality such as the symbolic capital of a benevolent employer.

Finally, the degrees of specialization focuses on delving deeper into the occupational responsibilities of employees and continually developing their expertise. The FGEs who utilize this principle encourage learning and advanced training courses for their employees, valuing more profound knowledge and skills to trust and delegate decision-making in the transformed system. They might outsource responsibilities to “professionals” and executives while others can allow the concentration of key directions (e.g., in marketing, production, and finances) in the hands of multifunctional and loyal family members or friends, even though they lack competencies.

The research participants believe that transformation of business practices is needed to avoid stagnation in a more complex market, yet it is inseparable from ideas about age, family, and moral hierarchies. I show how the pursuit of “the degrees of professionalization” led by the FGEs could unite them with their children against “backward” employees, whom the young adults help to “educate” or how conflicting understandings of “good” and “bad” business practice, age, and generation distort real between the parents and children.

Concluding the theory subsection, this thesis conceptualizes processes of intergenerational business mobility as product of the mutual constitution of economy and society, in which capitalist demands are mediated through historically specific moralities, subjectivities, and family relations. Building on the perspective of neoliberal condition and human capital, I show how marketization,

limited welfare, economic volatility, rapidly changing market and overlap of previously separated realms shape mobility patterns. Also theories of family firms, multigenerationality and bidirectionality of mobility and business transformation within capitalism, demonstrating that economic change is simultaneously moral and relational process, will be relevant throughout the chapter of this thesis.

Methodology

The focus of this research is processes of intergenerational mobility between “accidental entrepreneurs” parents who turned the opportunities of marketization into building economic capital and ownership of business, and their adult children who are in the initial stage of their career paths. Fieldwork was conducted intermittently between December 2022 and December 2023 and combined semi-structured interviews with extended participant observation. The core material consists of twenty seven semi-structured formal qualitative interviews with eight entrepreneurial families, followed by follow-up multiple informal conversations and later engagement with selected participants. Additionally, I carried out focused periods of workplace observation, including three months in the office of “Quality Construction” (real estate development company in Astana with a principal office in Karaganda) and two weeks at the factory and headquarters of the Kazakhstani Tea Company. This involved accompanying participants to work-related meetings, shadowing managerial interactions with employees, and observing everyday organizational routines. Additional participant observation took place more occasionally, primarily during interview visits to workplaces or to homes of research participants when possible.

I excluded those extreme cases where first-generation entrepreneurs accumulated their initial capital due to their ties to state resources or a criminal past, although completely distinguishing those realms from business is impossible. Therefore, some of my informants

worked as government servants or occasionally negotiated with criminals, so this social capital could be one aspect that influenced their career trajectory. Nevertheless, I excluded those participants who held high positions and used them for personal gain, or those who engaged in illicit activities and converted their possessions into a source of income.

The sample does not include “precarious entrepreneurs” who engage in small retail businesses or self-employment that hardly covered a household's needs and whose living standards were far from high, which is often the case in post-socialist contexts (Tereshina, 2019). While the state narrative of business as salvation influences some groups and encourages their entrepreneurial activities, often structural constraints are too strong to overcome indebtedness and hard self-exploitation (Ikonen, 2013). The research participants are middle strata of entrepreneurs: not corporations, not survival oriented petty entrepreneurial activities, who reported having accumulated capital or assets with a minimum estimated value of USD 1 million. The exceptions are two cases which were in the process of accumulation of such capital (where the joining of the adult children facilitated such business expansion). The perspective of the employees and family members is not in the focus of this dissertation, unless some of their commentaries is presented and stated.

Family #	Pseudonym	Place of work (modified to protect confidentiality)	Kin status	Social origin and education	Place of business	Age	Source of information
1	Beksultanov Kanat	“Quality Construction” (property development company, co-owner)	FGE father	Rural, Soviet university	Astana	57	Observation at work place, multiple conversations, one focus group with father and son together; four semi-structured interviews.
1	Beksultanov Bakhtiyar	“Quality Construction” (co-owner, CEO)	SGE son	Urban, Kazakhstani university	Astana and Karaganda	27	Observation at work place, multiple informal

							conversations, three semi-structured interviews.
2	Igor Yussupov	Owner of a farm and concrete plant	FGE father	Urban, Soviet university	Astana Karaganda	51	One interview at the work place
2	Karina Yussupova	Private English tutor (later project manager at international company)	The oldest daughter (two more brothers - one studies at European university; another studies at school)	Urban, foreign university	Astana	26	Multiple informal conversations (2023, 2024); two semi-structured interviews.
3	Mira Tasbulatova	Jewelry boutique owner	FGE mother	Rural, Soviet university	Astana	61	One semi-structured interview.
3	Amina Tasbulatova	Self-employed in education	The oldest daughter (one more brother - self-employed as a taxi driver)	Urban, foreign university	Astana	35	One semi-structured interview.
4	Kairat Sabitov	Owner of “Almaz & Co” (An authorized equipment distributor providing technical support and asset maintenance to infrastructure companies)	FGE father	Urban, Soviet university	Astana	60	Observation at family celebrations; two semi-structured interviews.
4	Laura Sabitova	Self-employed as graphic designer	The youngest daughter out of two children	Urban, foreign university	Astana	28	Multiple informal conversations; one semi-structured interview.
4	Almas Sabitov	Civil service	The oldest son out of two children	Urban, Kazakhstani university	Astana	31	One semi-structured interview.
5	Erlan Ospanov	Co-owner of “KazDrill Equipment” (An authorized dealer of	FGE father	Rural, Soviet university	Karaganda	55	Agreed to participate but non-interviewed

		geotechnical and drilling machinery)					FGE (reported by his daughter).
5	Dinara Ospanova	Co-owner of “KazDrill Equipment”, formally Head of International Relations	The oldest daughter (two more sisters - works at Big4 and works at medical company in IT; and one brother studies at school)	Urban, foreign university	Karaganda	30	Three semi-structured interviews.
6	Akhmetov Turar	Owner of “Kazakhstani Tea Company”	Father FGE	Rural, no higher education	Astana	53	One semi-structured interview at the work place.
6	Akhmetov Damir	Chief Development Officer at “Kazakhstani Tea Company”, Director of AD BRANDS (company within a company)	The oldest son (one more sister – a teacher at school; and one brother studies at school)	Urban, Kazakhstani university with foreign faculty	Astana	27	Observation at work place; multiple informal conversations; four semi-structured interviews.
7	Danil Rybakin	Owner of “Vector”- a multi-city supermarket network	FGE father	Urban, no higher education	Karaganda	(b. 1978 - Passed away in 2020)	N/A
7	Alina Rybakina	Successor owner of “Vector”	The oldest daughter (two more sisters, one is in university, one studies at school)	Urban, foreign education	Karaganda	25	One semi-structured interview.
8	Elena and Valerii Smirnov	Owners of "Delicacy" meat company (including the integrated vertical chain from farming to processing and distribution)	FGEs mother and father	Urban, no higher education, later Kazakhstani university	Karaganda	48	Agreed to participate but non-interviewed FGEs (reported by their daughter).

8			The youngest daughter (older brother, Denis Smirnov, not interviewed, but discussed based on family members' accounts)	Urban, foreign education			
	Renata Smirnova	Sales Director and HR at "Delicacy"			Karaganda	23	One semi-structured interview.

Table 1. Overview of key characteristics of research participants and data diversification

The study draws on eight families of FGEs across construction, food processing, and retail sectors, and their children who either work in family business or build independent career trajectories. The sample varies in terms of perception of the social origin and degrees of business “professionalization”, which shape processes of intergenerational mobility and capitalist subject formation. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of participants.

Although the fieldwork was conducted primarily in Russian, many research participants were bilingual in Kazakh and Russian, used code-switching, and linguistic nuances. However, language did not emerge as a clear analytical boundary structuring entrepreneurial strategies or intergenerational trajectories. The bilingual entrepreneurs could emphasize their origin as a Soviet intelligentsia, while other bilinguals could experience rural-urban mobility only recently (1990s) but already actively pursue cosmopolitan business practices, including learning and speaking English to expand international networks. The complexity of experiences of the research participants complicated any simple dichotomization between Russian-speaking/modern and Kazakh-speaking/traditional, so linguistic differences do not serve as explanatory framework.

Throughout this dissertation, references to business growth, decline, success, or stagnation reflect the research participants' own evaluations, rather than based on measured economic indicators. For example, company could still bring the satisfying profits as it specializes in the production of essential goods, yet be described as stagnating and problematic if more formal and complex organization was failed to be introduced and it required high extent of owner's involvement, who in turn no longer wants and can be involved. In contrast, the research participants can position their enterprise as expanding and adapting to volatile market because of the complex measures they have been implementing, though I do not have or asked for measurable evidence of that.

Research Positionality

I am privileged because the participants acknowledged the “elite” status of the educational institution I represent and my status as an aspiring “scientist” (uchenyi). Even though most of them noted that they respect “real” sciences, such as economics, or applied programs like an MBA, more. However, I am far from being more privileged than my research participants. In the case of my young participants, who are the adult children of first-generation businesspeople, it is difficult to “measure” our qualitatively different socioeconomic statuses and put them on a hierarchical pedestal. They all have or have access to everything that is accessible to me and beyond. Most of the young people are generationally close to me: I was born in 1994, and the years of birth of my young research participants range from 1988 to 2000. They all hold degrees and have studied, or could afford to study, at Western universities. Seven out of eight know English, three are also fluent in Kazakh and Russian, and they have been asked to read my dissertation when it is published, which will be accessible to them, except for, perhaps, academic jargon.

While there is still a problem with the gap between “academy” and “the field” in anthropology, “being here” and “being there” (Geertz, 2007), “the field” for me is where I live, some of my young participants are my friends, relatives, relatives of my relatives, and my acquaintances. I also developed a friendly relationship with some participants, new people to me, during my data collection. I follow their and their companies’ Instagram pages. I have even been using their products and services before the data collection. So, my “field” is a part of my “normality” as a local of Karaganda and Astana¹ and not far from my identity as a researcher or as a “rooted anthropologist” (Bissenova, 2021). At the same time, I have also faced the drawbacks of this identity. For example, the issue of trust in recruiting participants: many business owners did not want me to snoop around their enterprise, while, perhaps, it would be easier to believe in the pure academic interests of a foreign ethnography. Additionally, my perspective may be influenced by an insider's bias (although I attempted to remain reflexive at every stage and consider the feedback of my committee), as well as ethical considerations regarding the preservation of participants' dignity while disclosing details of their work and family lives. At the same time, I am not engaged in business in Kazakhstan, so I do not share the sentiments, anxieties, and everyday issues of entrepreneurs. Overall, the everyday inner world of the companies where I observed, as well as the logic of the interlocutors related to work, working with relatives, and inheritance, etc., was new to me.

I am far from being an authoritative voice to represent the voices of the research participants. Moreover, their voices are not silenced at all. Five out of ten young adults actively post on their Instagram blogs, where they construct aspects of their lifestyle and identity as

¹ I live in Karaganda and study in Astana, my parental family is in Astana too. The distance between my two homes is slightly more than 200 kilometers and takes about 3 hours by car.

workers/self-employed individuals, or entrepreneurs. They sometimes cover the topics I am interested in. For instance, the concrete steps in their career trajectories, related aspirations, and anxieties. Of course, the tensions between the two generations are neither present there nor within our first interactions. Therefore, I approach these texts and narratives critically as well.

The parent generation was not even interested in reading my work, though some showed that they “legitimized” the symbolic capital of Nazarbayev University. Those who agreed to find time to speak to me did so in a didactic manner, representing their paths as an example to follow for youth (which I do not challenge, but instead try to neutrally illustrate). Even those participants who did not choose the path of constant “modernization” and business “professionalization,” which today means studying global business ideas, having foreign partners, and fluency in English, were more privileged than I was anyway, due to their higher forms of economic, social, and symbolic capital. Still, I was unable to meet with all the parents due to distrust and/or tight schedules. The young adults even told me that their parents warned them to avoid many topics related to informality, exact numbers, and more. The participants also asked me to preserve confidentiality and change their names and their brands’ names.

Research Methods

The dissertation draws on 27 formal semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and observation. Observational material was analytically important in revealing discrepancies between ideas and practices, particularly in relation to family relations, emotional tensions, workplace hierarchy, and organization of business operations. I was unable to access all the workplaces where my participants work for several reasons and this also shows the reality of firms. While some of my respondents own entire buildings with production and offices where I could observe, others work from home because they delegate all operational processes to others and can

coordinate some issues through phone calls. One family turned their second apartment into an office during the COVID-19 lockdowns because they did not want to pay office rent while they were not even allowed to enter the building. In addition, the father and the daughter were left as only permanent workers because they had to lay off other employees and outsource the accounting, legal, and marketing departments back then. The company continued to operate there during my fieldwork, even though the business was thriving. They hired several people to delegate the work responsibilities they previously took on themselves, yet they hesitated to allow me to observe their home-based office. While I could undertake participant observation in three of my cases at their workplaces, I also “hung out” for a long period with most of my young participants because either we knew each other or they were friends, classmates, or relatives of my friends and relatives. Considering that some of my young research participants did not need to be in the family business to be eligible, and some worked from home or in agencies with limited access, such as state services, I did not observe all workplaces of the young generation as well. Yet I knew the families of some of them, having visited their homes, participated in their celebrations, gone on trips with them, and kept in touch with them in my daily life. Moreover, the topics we discussed in the framework of my data collection were also present in our usual discussions: education, family, career paths, aspirations, and more.

In the case of the snowballing recruitment through my network or those who found out about the study from social media, I also talked with their employees where possible, neighbor-businesses of their businesses, and other relatives of the parent-child dyad that I was focusing on and everyone who could and wanted share more about the families, the businesses, and the family businesses to create a richer picture. Therefore, sometimes I use my knowledge related to the study

about research participants that I have acquired during official fieldwork, but also before and even after it.

This qualitative research is based on observations, semi-structured interviews, and conversations with interlocutors. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, fully transcribed, and systematically coded and analyzed using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. The coding process combined inductive categories derived from the empirical material with theoretically informed analytical themes.

Key Contributions and Overview of the Chapters

This dissertation examines how different discourses of worth (cultural deservedness and neoliberal human capital) shape the intergenerational mobility processes of FGE families in the context of a rapidly changing business environment in Kazakhstan. Theoretically, it contributes to a nuanced understanding of the relation between parental human capital and intergenerational mobility beyond the stable economies of the West. While human capital stays influential in understanding of the persistence of intergenerational advantage, conflicting value regimes, rapid economic change and advancing business environment should be taken into account in societies with short history of free market, and echoes of former hierarchies. The dissertation shows that parents' education and professional skills do not always enhance the productivity of investments in children, if it means entrepreneurial continuity as it optimizes the overlapping family and work realms, familial and individual upward mobility, economic care for family and self-care. Inherited forms of competence and values contribute to the processes of reproduction of advantages and privileges which were and stay highly valued today (forms of cultural capital) but may become misaligned with emergent market logics, constraining business continuity. In the cases where entrepreneurial continuity anyway occurs, the inherited and conflicting morality generate

intergenerational tensions, though there is a cooperation and mutual help in practice. The dissertation argues that entrepreneurial continuity among FGEs' adult children is not a natural outcome of potential capital inheritance from an entrepreneurial parent -- but a culturally mediated practices intertwined with the exigencies of business environment to "professionalize" and generationally uneven moral expectations.

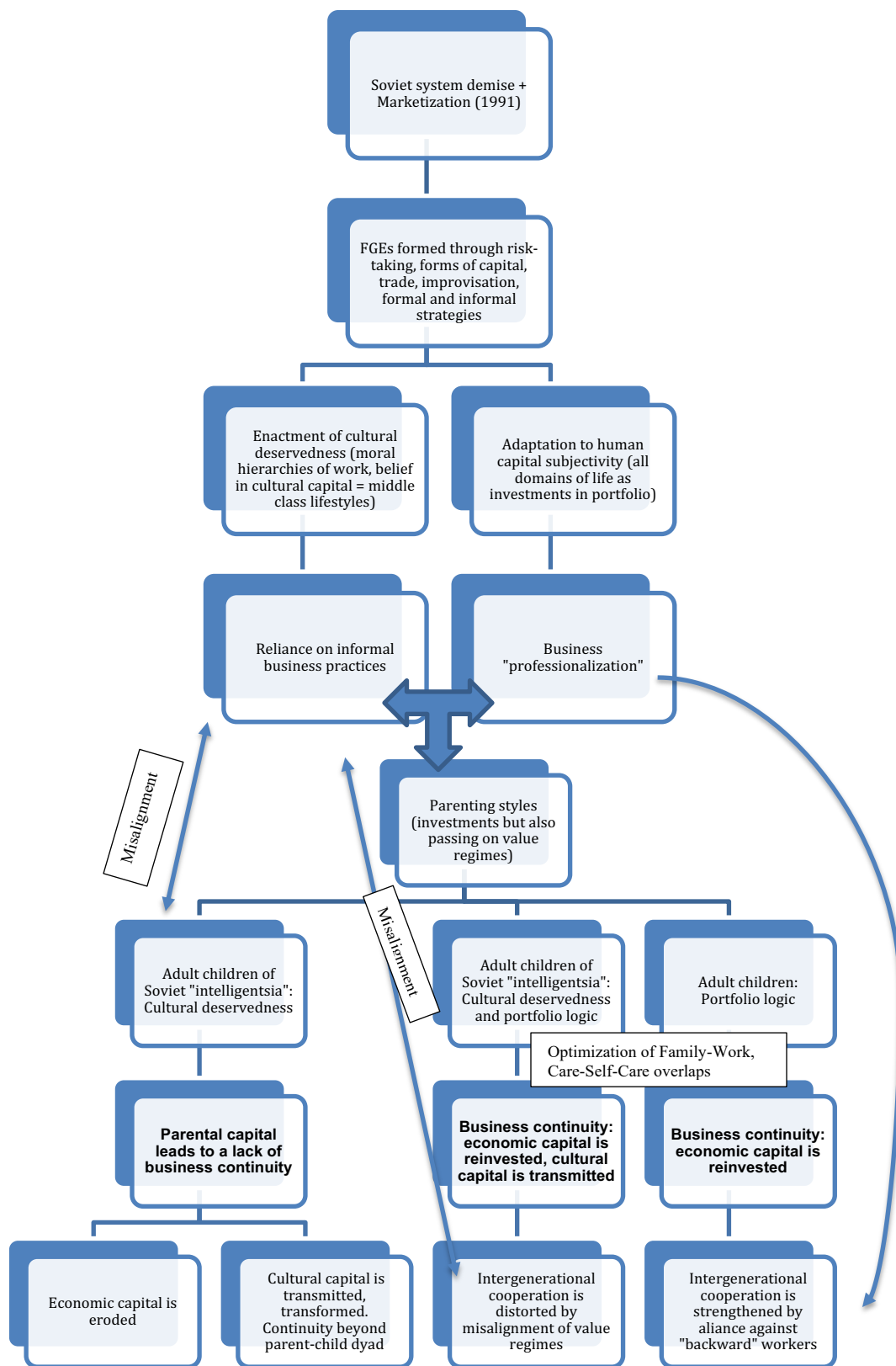


Figure 1. Processual-relational conceptual model of intergenerational mobility as “*Semeinoe delo*” -- familial mobility project (economic accumulation, relational and affectional relations).

Part I focuses on how an entrepreneurial legacy might fail because the FGEs have not made their businesses' investable for the adult children who, in turn, inherited a focus on cultural capital but not the practice of problem-solving in a real-life business environment. In these cases, a gap exists between the parents' and children's understanding of conducting business in today's rapidly evolving market. I highlight the focus on subjectivity that prioritizes cultural deservedness, originating from the past belief in a deservedly elevated status and living standards resulting from the accumulation of cultural capital in families self-referencing as “intelligentsia,” emphasizing their Soviet education. I demonstrate how certain business practices have aided their upward mobility, which they tied to their Soviet education (Chapter 1), and at the same time, how this might constrain the intergenerational entrepreneurial legacy from continuing and family-work optimization from occurring (Chapter 2). However, Chapter 3 addresses the alternative responses to this “undesired” situation by the research participants and shows the importance of intergenerational mobility beyond the parent-child dyad.

To explain the importance of cultural deservedness, I draw on the oral histories of early business upward mobility trajectories of the FGEs who reinforce their high cultural capital in Chapter 1. By comparing the entrepreneurial practices and ideas of FGEs who were born into “intelligentsia” families with those of FGEs who achieved cultural capital accumulation in Soviet universities and cities from distant villages, this chapter highlights the heterogeneity of upward mobility trajectories. Having strong prejudices against trade and stigmatizing bazaars as places for business-making due to their deservedness to avoid “dirty work”, in fact, all the FGEs showed

proactiveness, flexibility, and adaptability in their daily attempts to seize the opportunities of marketization.

Chapter 2 examines the aforementioned FGEs in the current era of an advancing market environment. Facilitated by age, they instrumentalized their cultural deservedness to escape the rush of constant self-management while hoping to enjoy the same elevated living standards. Because this stance fails to align with the “human capital” ideals, their adult children avoid their parents' businesses, which are perceived as “incomprehensible” and “old-fashioned” due to their mostly informal organization, which is dependent on the figure of the founder.

Focusing on the cases where adult children of the FGEs distanced themselves from business and entrepreneurship, Chapter 3 contributes to our understanding of the broader processes of intergenerational mobility by illustrating how different culturally meaningful practices (e.g. reciprocity as a non-direct transaction) help to navigate family tensions arising from failed business succession and desired family-work optimization. Moreover, the failure of family-work optimization does not necessarily mean the failure of intergenerational continuity. I demonstrate how young adults' occupational self-directedness toward prestigious careers - in its familial understanding - contributes to intergenerational continuity, even though it extends beyond the parent-child dyad. In search of autonomy in work (like their entrepreneurial parents) or work securities (important in precarious and flexible economy), the young adults might continue the paths of other relatives with “prestigious” careers (grandparents, aunts/uncles) or follow new prestigious occupations tied to cultural deservedness (intellectual work requiring high cultural capital, taste).

Part II explores “family firms,” where children joined their parents' businesses in the rapidly evolving post-2020s market. Chapter 4 introduces cases where the lack of cultural

deservedness facilitated the reinforcement of portfolio subjectivity by FGEs and the “professionalization” of business, making the company attractive to adult children as a “pleasant” side effect. In turn, Chapter 5 illustrates the hybrid business approaches that emerged from the cooperation between young adults who perform portfolio stances and took responsibility to transform the businesses and opportunities created by their FGE-parents, even though the latter prioritize their cultural deservedness over anything else. However, the parents’ lack of desire to be reflexive portfolio managers makes the family-work optimization a difficult experience.

Chapter 4 considers the cases where the FGEs invest in their businesses by investing in themselves. Due to openness to new business knowledge rather than drawing on past achievements, these FGEs made their businesses more “professional” following the formalization, rationalization, and specialization of their companies or neoliberal ideals like the start-up framework. Such strategies might facilitate intergenerational continuity because a clear organization of the businesses makes the transition experiences of adult children smoother and family-work optimization more “positive”. Furthermore, young adults experience a combination of autonomy, security (from parents or bosses who genuinely care about their well-being), and prestige, although this also comes with trade-offs, such as emotional burden and stress.

Chapter 5 addresses cases where adult children come to save the FGEs’ businesses and contribute to their familial upward mobility by expanding them. They present a hybrid model that combines “professional” (formalized, operationally rationalized, specialized) and “old-fashioned” management (based on informal, “irrational” relations between all-rounders as the basis of business organization) to adapt to their unique circumstances and market challenges. This hybridity and highly valued portfolios of the adult children are the key factors of the successful business expansion in these cases. Simultaneously, the adult children indeed have the highest

extent of autonomy because almost all business processes are taken over by them, but low security (it is their parents and families who are secured by them). Furthermore, the expectation of a generational hierarchy and responsibility is contested, which exacerbates burnout from work and regular harsh family tensions, making such family-work optimization “negative”.

Part I – Echoes of the Soviet Stratification: Intelligentsia and Business

Chapter 1. Not Only from Bazaar or Rantier: Who Else Are First-Generation Entrepreneurs and Where Did They Come from in Business?

Introduction

This chapter examines the oral histories of self-defined “intelligentsia” first-generation entrepreneurs to show that even they have heterogeneous origins, which shapes their trajectory toward accumulation and upward mobility. I compare, in particular, the oral histories of middle-aged FGEs who in the 1990s were young adults and, after graduating, searched for new career trajectories during early marketization. Two of them were second-generation urban Soviet-trained specialists who transitioned into entrepreneurship, and other two were the first in their families to access Soviet higher education and subsequently reoriented themselves toward business. The family origin within the Soviet social structure, and internalization of moral hierarchy on education and work, indeed shaped accumulation practices as the first two emphasized their professional degree (*spetsial’nost’*, rus.) in entrepreneurship and the second two drew on a wider range of opportunities in their paths toward business, yet keeping moral hierarchy of intellectual work over trade and manual labor. At the same time, longer interaction with participants and their networks revealed that regardless of the reiterated moral hierarchies, they worked hard and took flexible stance in their entrepreneurial practices when they started and were younger, though they concealed “shameful” practices.

To conceptualize the moral orientation, I introduce the term “cultural deservedness”: the self-defined former intelligentsia's belief in a deservedly elevated status and living standards resulting from once accumulated cultural capital. It is based on the concept of the intelligentsia's sense of entitlement to “Western bourgeois lifestyles” as a normative standard (Bissenova, 2012;

Rivkin-Fish, 2009), yet it emphasizes the research participants' hard work in acquiring knowledge and credentials, as these were not ascribed to them at birth. This cohort did not have a stable labor market trajectories but instead had to improvise during early marketization. Chapter 2 will focus more on how the same FGEs with high cultural capital constructed in the context of Soviet social structure prioritized their cultural deservedness over constant self-improvement and management of one's portfolio with age. While the latter stance became new ideal of subjectivity (Fehér, 2009), this chapter shows how cultural deservedness along with flexibility and hard work could be turned into economic capital accumulation.

This chapter examines how once earned highly-valued cultural capital (knowledge, skills, credentials, erudition, taste) of the Soviet university graduates in second and first generations – might have encouraged certain entrepreneurial practices (talking to power holders, approaching business “fundamentally” using hard skills, exploiting legal loopholes, etc), and also might have discouraged some others deemed “shameful” (manual work, shuttle trading, petty trading at bazaars, etc). However, I illustrate how the persistence in achieving “the deserved” status in the new economic order expanded the boundaries of their actions in practice - even when these included working in sales or practices bordering on criminal. The cultural deservedness might enable proactiveness and the need to adapt to seize the booming opportunities, even though the same moral stance might constrain constant self-improvement later and even the entrepreneurial continuity of the adult children, as I show in this dissertation.

This chapter contributes to the literature on economic “transition” highlighting alternative ways of upward social mobility occurring in the 1990s and 2000s. Existing research has shown how former Communist Party elites retained privileged access to assets and administrative resources (Gerber & Hout, 2004; Gerber, 2018; Sanghera & Satybalieva, 2020), as well as how individuals

from entered emerging markets through small-scale trade and services (Mukhina, 2014; Satova, 2021; Schröder & Schröder, 2017; Schröder, 2020). By contrast, I focus on the heterogeneous “middle strata” neither directly related to the elites nor involved in survival-oriented petty entrepreneurial activities. This chapter tells the story of those who deliberately sought to avoid trade and bazaars considering it as undesirable work, and instead engaged in alternative processes of upward mobility through entrepreneurship. This chapter discusses some of the informal practices of capital accumulation, which were common for the initial years of marketization while presented as based on intellectual work by the FGEs themselves.

Despite their commitment to intelligentsia ideals, these entrepreneurs demonstrated a high degree of practical flexibility. The research participants interacted with various people, some switched between different “languages”, whether between Kazakh and Russian or from high academic language to the one associated with criminal milieus. They also engaged in trade despite their reluctance to recognize it as legitimate work, which rendered such activities morally charged.

The first section of the chapter deals with the stories of the FGEs who came from urban and educated families of Soviet “mass intelligentsia” - skilled and university educated workers like engineers, doctors, and teachers (Stein, 1951). I demonstrate how this origin might influence the business practices, not only by avoiding bazaars as undesired places for making money but also by emphasizing the importance of negotiating their entrepreneurial activities based on their higher degree and prestige of being trained specialists in Soviet universities. The second section shows the significance of trade at the beginning of the business journey and how the FGEs negotiated their involvement in this allegedly shameful activity. The third section addresses the first generation of Soviet graduates - the cultivators of high cultural capital with starting positions from Soviet rural families. I explore their entrepreneurial practices tied to the importance of “mind-

work,” which also often involved informalities and even illegal practices. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how the findings contribute to the whole argument of the dissertation and their significance to our understanding of the multidimensional nature of life strategies and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Cultural Deservedness and the Soviet Educational Legacy

I met Igor Yussupov in his favorite coffee house in the old and prestigious district of Karaganda, a place he chose for the interview because it was next to the stalinka where he owned a modernized two-level apartment. His mother received part of the apartment from the Soviet government for her municipal service as a mid-level manager, while he extended and modernized this legacy of the Soviet intelligentsia. Igor Vladimirovich, dressed to the teeth, hung his winter coat on a hanger by the entrance prudently, ordered a flavored latte “as usual”, and we started as he seemed eager to bypass small talk and dive straight into his story. He was in his early 50s but it was difficult to pinpoint his age, but his facial expression showed exhaustion. He looked more like a man of some European ethnicity but with hints of his Kazakh and Tatar blood. His manner of speaking struck me the most: he did not flaunt machismo or adopt paternalistic tone, but carried himself with an elegant dignity and told his stories in a manner, typical of intellectuals when addressing those of lesser status, though respectfully.

“I came to the conclusion that I should do something where I have a competence,” said Igor Vladimirovich after telling a story about his uncle who was a lawyer and was the first one who gave him important knowledge of how the laws of free market would work. “I had the only competence at that time, I am a biologist, that is, I understood vitamins, feed, and all that stuff...” Instead of just helping to collect rent from the assets his uncle could privatize through his connections and knowledge, young Igor's ideas on the superiority of intellectual work opened up

opportunities to create a production. After attracting the geologists and finding the zeolites deposit at the land rented by his uncle - the group of minerals which is used in farming - Igor worked on setting up a manufacturing of the animal feed additives. “That's how we began, with each step leading to the next” continued Igor Vladimirovich. Indeed, this initial experience became a foundation for his growth, equipping with the further “competencies” that later enabled him to manage and expand two larger ventures: revitalizing a former Soviet plant of construction materials and forging a farm specializing in both livestock and crop production.

While the variety of other day-to-day practices Igor Vladimirovich engaged in to seize the opportunities was also key in facilitating the growth and development of the businesses, the research participants like him often highlighted their high cultural capital and education. Similar to Igor Vladimirovich, a sixty-year-old FGE Kairat Sabitov was an erudite, well-read individual, curious about diverse fields of knowledge like art, history, and politics. Both intelligentsia descendants felt proud of studying in Soviet universities. Yet, both of them did not become scholars and never were straight A-students. Soviet educational institutions did not only foster hard skills and professional knowledge but also a unique kind of subjectivity that was similar to what the middle classes performed around the world. The oral histories like this must be situated within the broader logic of Soviet modernization project, rather than treating them as objective historical facts (Kassymbekova and Chokobaeva, 2021). Along with the egalitarian agenda of the, allegedly, classless Soviet state, the tacit agreement between the ruling Party and skilled professionals and officials allowed the latter ones to perform middle-class values in their lifestyle and unofficial positioning as superiors based on taste, erudition, and moral dignity (Dunham, 1976; Patico, 2008). Such self-image of intellectual workers contrasted with the perceived “backwardness” of the manual ones.

The cultural deservedness tied to education level is still often instrumentalized in various ways. Former Soviet intellectual workers who could reproduce and multiply their advantages during marketization justified their success with their high cultural capital, talents, and high culturedness (Bissenova, 2012; Rivkin-Fish, 2009). At the same time, those who could not turn their cultural capital into wealth or a solid middle-class lifestyle instrumentalized the same set of traits for their critique of capital accumulation condemning it as driven by unfair rather than morally upright methods (Patino, 2008). Without a moral framework, the entrepreneurship in which the research participants were engaged required day-to-day efforts to keep responding to the exigencies and challenges of the market. While many people with Soviet higher education kept reinforcing the ideas of cultural deservedness, the FGEs' initial entrepreneurial practices were distinguished by proactiveness, adaptability, persistence, and risk-taking.

While the FGEs distinguished mind work from manual labor and trade, they - and their networks with whom I interacted - simultaneously uncovered a wide array of practices that intertwined these domains to form the "competencies" that led them to mid-sized businesses. Digging deeper, the research participants' oral histories become all about seizing the opportunities of booming marketization. I documented further accounts about the way the FGEs solved everyday issues, interacted with various people from different origins, overcame shame, and challenged social expectations tied to their origins. Yes, the FGEs coming from intelligentsia families avoided manual work and trade for the most part while focusing on opportunities, allegedly, of a "higher order": networking with powerful people who brought them opportunities for capital accumulation, managing teams who worked for them, negotiating, strategic planning, etc. At the same time, they were proactive in establishing the operational and mundane work: they reached and contacted various people from officials to criminals, learned how to perform document

management and tax records, and were open-minded to various experiences and skills. Returning to young Igor, I was surprised to know that he switched to evening classes in pursuit of higher earnings working in mines. It is hard to imagine him going down into one of the Karaganda mines. Yet he did this, while later in the evening collected money from his peers in university for the support of the victims of the Nagorno-Karabakh war as a trusted leader of a student community.

Later, when his entrepreneurial activities turned into several parallel directions he simultaneously solved issues with banks, power-holders, clients, and perishable commodities like eggs and flour that their company received as payment for their animal feed additives. Still, he did not develop sales direction, admitting that it was inefficient while the profit margins declined progressively with each transaction: he had an overstaffed sales department, the logistics required renting vehicles, and expeditors delivered and sold commodities which the company earned as partial payment for their product. “Trading, it was something alien to me... it [such attitude] has not been eradicated, it is still with me, it still remains” claimed Igor Vladimirovich when recalling how as a young boy he shamed his grandmother who sold tomatoes from their dacha by a road. He associated this feeling with the deeply ingrained Soviet ideology, which condemned private trade as speculation (*spekulyatsiya*, rus.). While such sentiment toward trade still lingered within him, he then remembered a contrasting experience from 1993, the time of his young adulthood as a businessman when I asked how the shame tied to trade manifested itself:

Well, it is somewhere, well, like on a deep level... Well, I still was trading, there was a moment when in ninety-three. [...] we had drugs [veterinary pharmaceuticals] and I easily went in [Research Institute] [...] went through the offices and sold them. And then I could already lead and coordinate [sales]. [...] That is when the question arose that this was necessary, for me it was no longer a problem. At least in 1993 (Igor Yussupov, 51 y.o. first-generation businessman).

While this perspective had not shifted dramatically in later years, and he still had not transformed and prioritized sales much in his current enterprises, the last excerpt demonstrates his decision to sell commodities himself as a pragmatic choice made to acquire experience and skills essential for managing his employees. That decision illustrates a personal journey of adaptation and flexibility of a young man, as well as the demands of the fast-changing economy that required such a stance from entrepreneurs regardless of their views and origins. The next section deals with the trade and sales direction of the businesses in more detail.

The Shame of Trade and Strategic Adaptations

For Kairat Sakenuly, a sixty-year-old Soviet-trained engineer, it was similarly critical to highlight that his business which imports construction equipment from European manufacturers and provides dismantling services “is around engineering.” However, in contrast to Igor Vladimirovich, he did not have relatives who could guide him on where to start. His father was a former state servant who did not turn any advantages into assets or knowledge, and his mother - an ordinary doctor. This absence of mentorship left young Kairat running in circles and, at times, losing hope of ever finding the place he “deserved” to occupy as an urban dweller and Soviet specialist. “Some of my friends were entrepreneurs, but no one helped. I tried and failed, again and again, until I realized that I need to learn how to run business,” he once said sharply.

I have known Kairat Sakenuly since my childhood; he was my friend’s father. Unlike Igor Vladimirovich's poetic way of speaking, I often hardly understood Kairat aga, as he spoke briefly and concisely but also too fast, in both Russian and Kazakh. At the same time, he is an intellectually versatile person whose passion for reading seemed boundless, a habit inherited from his childhood. Like his father, Kairat aga had an ever-growing personal library, but also an ethnological collection, several musical instruments, and a variety of sports equipment as he could

afford hobbies after he accumulated substantial capital and, what was crucial for him, free time as he delegated the management of the business. Freedom is what Kairat aga chased all these years, “I hate obeying, to take a job where there would be a boss above me who would yell at me -- I can't stand that at all”.

While Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 illustrate that the freedom he got with age played havoc with him as the market does not stand those who stop “moving”, in the initial period he would do anything to seize the opportunities. I was surprised to know that his first “business school” was not in a classroom but in the field. His first step in learning how to run a business was to work as a sales manager for a large network of construction material stores. This hands-on experience served the purpose of understanding market dynamics, small but essential details like documentation, tax reports, law application, discovering foreign suppliers, and finding important networks which in the next several years would lead to the first large contracts.

While the existence of stigma related to trade is well-documented in the literature on the initial period of marketization, my findings suggest a further dimension by showing the importance of age expectations in negotiating practices of trading. Literature on entrepreneurship examines how educated specialists manage the stigma (Sahadeo, 2011; Satova, 2021; Schröder, 2020; Yessenova, 2006). The social disdain for trade was based on a complex overlap of Soviet-era propaganda condemning *spekulyatsiya* and sometimes idealized notions of “honest nomads” who, allegedly, avoided commerce (Yessenova, 2006). Trading was not perceived as a rightful occupation, often casting a shadow over business owners, not only their employees. As a coping mechanism, and my findings also support this, many owners emphasized that they delegated the businesses to relatives, for whom this offered opportunities for social and rural-to-urban mobilities. Additionally, even the post-Soviet market itself is perceived as inferior compared to its imagined

Western form by entrepreneurs who emphasize their “cultured-ness”. Tereshina (2019) points out the existence of the moral critique of the market and consumer needs as lacking in quality, taste, and culture dichotomizing it as a “backward bazaar” vs the modern market by the former intelligentsia middle-aged entrepreneur (Tereshina, 2019, p.131). This tension between multifaceted ideas tied to trade and the opportunities of the emerging market economy pushed young FGEs to adapt and find solutions, regardless of internalized shame, though with age it becomes less possible (Chapter 2).

Even though trading was deemed a shameful activity for Kairat Sakenuly, the fast-changing environment of the booming marketization of Astana in the 2000s allowed him to make some exceptions. “I could not trade, my pride wouldn't let, I was still a freaking engineer!” claimed he, yet spent three years as a sales manager in a construction store. This experience allowed him to reach out to the large suppliers who wanted to expand their presence in Astana's construction boom. Kairat again worked with such partners to open their local branch, yet he left because of the conflict with the local superior officers. Then a year of failures and resultless negotiations had to pass before eventually “the meeting happened”. The young man was also ready for it because he “already had all the entrepreneurial skills.” He had experience in selling equipment, and knew people and procedures:

It was at one of the equipment exhibitions, I met a representative of a German company, I had heard about him earlier. He said that such a company exists. I said, “Yes, I know you”, he said, “How do you know?” I explained how I knew. “Let's open an official dealership, and you will sell our equipment,” he said. Well, since then everything moved. (Kairat Sabitov, 60 y.o. first-generation entrepreneur).

As we can see from his history of ups and downs, it is not that “everything moved”, rather he moved a lot to make it happen. While it was not comfortable to talk about some parts of this story, working experience in sales was crucial for seizing a great opportunity for capital accumulation. The FGE's experience in sales, in entrepreneurship mixed with his cultural deservedness, persistence, and ability to learn new things was highly valued by a German manufacturer, and he gave Kairat a five thousand Euro trade credit. Kairat “had not earned a penny yet” but hired a sales manager to his newly formed official dealership company to delegate the “dirty work”. Under his management and strategic planning they managed to repay the credit quickly, while the new sales manager could reach the large construction company owned by a very powerful person, a politician who informally blended business and administrative resources as it was not a rare thing. The construction company worked on a renovation of the old train station in the North Kazakhstan city.

While Kairat aga was not close to such kind of people originally, he had an opportunity to meet him due to his active stance: “I bumped into him at one of the events, when you move, encounters occur.” This was a very fruitful meeting because his sales manager jeopardized the deal for some reason, so Kairat had to take it under his control. He introduced himself nicely as an official dealer of a famous brand and could exchange a couple of words with the wealthy and powerful owner. They found common grounds based on their similar technical educational background and the politician ordered an assistant to solve the issue with the deal. Surprisingly, the deal was indeed facilitated, Kairat finalized it himself and sold the equipment for 150.000 Euros. After that, his German manufacturer allowed him to use the equipment to provide services and his company filled the exclusive and uncontested niche of the Astana construction boom being a subcontractor of the two large development companies.

This provided work and expanding profits to Kairat aga for more than a decade. Since 2006, he worked on establishing a model of organization in which he could delegate the sales and executive functions to the trusted people - the proactive young relative from his wife's side and Kairat aga's son. However, the latter was not interested, not initiative, not demanding, and struggled with unclear responsibilities of controlling the expat workers on a large construction project. Still, everything went smoothly for the FGE enjoying hobbies until the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with the patterns of the economy as well as his proactive young relative “betrayed” him creating his own company and taking away all the clients (Chapter 2).

Both Kairat Sakenuly and Igor Vladimirovich have their family origin in urban educated families of Soviet mass intelligentsia, yet their initial entrepreneurial success depended on adaptability, persistence, and the ability to learn new things and push the boundaries of what feels right, even if this sometimes contradicted their cultural deservedness. Still, as they seized the opportunities for capital accumulation, they considered it to be a time to finally slow down, rather than to constantly move and keep adapting to an ever-advancing market. Both disregarded innovations in sales, fully delegating the direction or relying on old methods of an untapped market, and did not transform the organization of their businesses according to formalization, rationalization, and specialization (Chapter 4). The entrepreneurial practices of both FGEs reveal commonalities shaped by their intelligentsia roots, including negotiation of their educational fields and reliance on adaptive persistence to take the place they believed they deserved to take. However, while these entrepreneurs acted within formalized norms, the different origins of the next two research participants allowed them to be proactive in other senses, mixing formal, informal, and even illegal practices in their business endeavors, despite also accumulating high cultural capital in Soviet universities. These mixed practices, often highly valued in the volatile

institutional settings of the early market economy, reflect a proactive stance in seizing the opportunities of today. I will expand this on the examples of the FGEs who, compared to the heroes of the above sections, are the first graduates in their families while originating from multi-child families in Soviet remote kolkhozes. While they internalized the same cultural deservedness tied to education and “cultured-ness” and the same attitude to trade and bazaars, their entrepreneurial journeys were more “creative” in making excuses, and at times controversial, as it showed the juggling of various institutional forces.

Mixing Formal, Informal, and Illegal

While the FGEs in this chapter share an idea of trade being a shameful activity, in their initial practices they negotiated certain exceptions to allow themselves to adapt and be flexible. One of the exclusion could be if the commodity was special and luxurious like gold and diamonds, especially since it is “a pleasant” business that brings “beauty to the world”. I met Mira Tasbulatova, a very graceful woman and an FGE in her early sixties, in the cafe in a large mall in Astana, where her jewelry boutique was located. I was lucky because today she was visiting it and could find time to meet with me. Mira khanyim was a tough person with dignity, and very intelligent, but her employees regarded her with a bit of fear. Coming from a big family as the youngest daughter she was a strong leader who left no room for compromises since the time of her village school to the university community when she moved to the city in pursuit of higher education. She then got married to a prospective young policeman while working as a university instructor. After some professional gap she devoted to raising children she hesitated to return to university.

In the early 2000s, only some fields of the economy were expanding, and being a professor did not respond to the needs of a young family and Mira's sense of how they deserved to live. Then

one accident changed everything: her husband investigated a case where he met with the management of a large and further expanding business in Karaganda - a bank which became a nearly backbone enterprise in a city. He “asked” them to consider his wife for any job they had. They indeed hired her but in the lowest position - a cashier in the currency exchange office. Originally a biologist, Mira got a degree in economics while working at a university, which was exactly what was needed for this occasion.

Within a few years, Mira khanyim skyrocketed in her career, eventually becoming the head of the production direction. The bank owner was famous for launching ambitious projects and developing new directions for his business: a jewelry production line as one of them. “It was the first enterprise of this kind, well, except for KazakhYuvelir [a successor to Soviet-era Yuvelirtorg],” recalled Mira khanyim's daughter. While Mira started from the first steps of the career ladder and even faced a robbery at the exchange office, she became the head of the department when her reputation as a talented, quick-thinking, and resilient individual soon caught the attention of the bank owner. She dived into the complexities of establishing a completely new area, from hiring and training the first professionals to researching the Russian market to import some of the goods and materials, to managing local production. This work gave her a completely new experience and set of skills, even though after the jewelry production began to flourish, the management replaced her with a more favored insider.

Her departure from the company left her with more than just disappointment and exhaustion; it also planted the seed to apply her knowledge in jewelry, while working on herself. However, it had to be illegal and dangerous at first, as she did not have much capital to approach business formally:

Well, at first it started with pawnshops (lombard), then along the way I found some other suppliers [of second-hand gold]. I traveled around the cities and I had clients to whom I sold jewelry mainly with deferred payment, we worked on trust. My son accompanied me everywhere as much as possible, he was always worried about me, he could even not go to school, but he went with me so that I would not travel alone. Well, I traveled a lot (Mira Tasbulatova, 61 y.o. first-generation entrepreneur).

While such an activity brought money, it was precarious and dangerous. Mira khanyim was not paid once a large amount of money and she could not do anything about it because it was illegal. Moreover, police once stopped her in Almaty bazaar, and made her give a substantial bribe. “They did not want to bring me to justice, but to make money from the entrepreneurs like me,” recollected Mira khanyim with regret. She realized that she could not continue work like this any longer. The woman mixed her managerial experience with jewelry, knowledge of new suppliers, and understanding of the demand and opened her first island shop at the mall near Karaganda bazaar.

Mira khanyim succeeded and started to expand her boutiques. She opened five small ones in different parts of Karaganda. However, this was time and energy-consuming so she closed them and opened the big boutique instead, in the central mall. Similar to other research participants, she focused more on “things of higher order” rather than the transformation of the business organization. She controlled the supply, negotiated with importer partners, and ordered the goods that were in demand as she figured out who her customers were. As her approach to human resources, she chose to hire trusted relatives: her sisters and nieces. Moreover, Mira khanyim responded to several needs - as the most successful person in her family of origin - she supported

her relatives by giving them work and also got trusted employees whose one responsibility was to honestly sell the commodities. However, similar to Kairat Sakenuly who trusted the whole direction of sales and communication with clients to his relative, Mira khanyim's relatives separated from her and opened their own boutique, taking the clients with them. I will discuss the approaches of these FGEs in the further chapter in detail, while continuing on the entrepreneurial activities bordering on the lines of criminal and informality below.

Due to his trajectory in business, Kanat Beksultanov, an owner of a local Astana construction company in his late 50s, did not really monitor the trends in how to sell products or services. For him, it was more important to create a product and create work while selling, he thought, was not a problem. Indeed, Kanat aga relied on the market, which lacked a variety of offerings while the demand was high. Moreover, he did not work on developing and investing in one kind of business in one or two spheres, as three other FGEs did, but instead created and seized various opportunities for rapid profit.

It was an expectedly warm invitation. I spent many months of observation in their office and one winter day Kanat aga had insisted on joining him and his son for lunch outside. “I am not allowing you to stay in this cold office,” said the tall and heavy-set man in a fatherly manner, “Moreover, my old friend will join us, you can interview him”. I already got accustomed to his grand gestures and passionate way of storytelling and knew that it would be a great opportunity to know the family better.

Kanat aga was a prominent leader, born in a kolkhoz family with ten siblings, he had to be creative to stand out and resilient as he was getting hammered. “You'll end up in jail,” said his school teacher to him, as the boy solved the issues with bullies and haters with physical violence. “What saved me was my passion for reading” claimed the businessman, telling how he was almost

the only reader in the local kolkhoz library which had its supplies of communist-approved fiction and popular science from centers like Moscow and Alma-Ata. As a boy, Kanat retreated to his secret place from the household chaos and escaped to the alternative worlds. This was also a playful and entertaining way to socialize with the highly-valued language, and notion of high culture and modernity at that time of the “most reading country”. In ordinary life, he functioned mostly in Kazakh, engaged in the chores specific to the type of kolkhoz production, and constant fights with siblings and other competitors.

As I sat quietly eating, I became a witness to the vivid recollection of the youth of Kanat aga as his friend joined us. The two men, who once came from villages to seize the opportunities of the city, now perceived these times of surviving on the streets as funny memories. Kanat aga's friend turned out to be a sixty-five-year-old boxing coach with athletic physique, a former criminal, and a failed adept of a network business selling dietary supplements. He first met young Kanat as an audacious student of a vocational training institution who as a “real Kazakh batyr” solved the problems with one punch. However, he was expelled from the technical school (*professional'noe uchilische*, rus.) for poor performance and was never been so close to the prediction of his school teacher, taking into account that Kanat's older brother eventually ended up in jail and became a crime lord (*avtoritet*, rus.).

Still, the next time the old friends met was under completely different circumstances. Young Kanat was already a graduate of a prestigious university who seemed to have mastered the art of balance in his soft skills. He could access higher education through the experience of the multicultural environment of the Soviet army where he turned out to serve alongside many active students as well as after the working faculty (*rabfak*, rus.) - the social lift for the young proletariat wanting to get a degree. During the wild 1990s and booming 2000s, his friend described Kanat

aga as a figure of strong resistance. “Everyone wanted something from him,” the former boxer said. “Criminals, police, prosecutors, and other businessmen wanted him to share money with them but nobody could do anything to him because he had done his business “cleanly” and could persuade everyone that he was right.” Navigating multiple codes of behavior, switching between the registers of “high culture” to “criminal slang” and back, along with speaking Kazakh and Russian fluently seemed to be a sign of a supreme skill.

Compared to Igor Vladimirovich, Kanat aga did not have relatives who could give him advice on where and how to start, while his aspirations of making a career along the Party lines collapsed as the Soviet state itself and being a university instructor did not bring the opportunities to provide for a family. Having the skills acquired from university and short-lasting work experience with one of the first brokers in Karaganda in the 1990s, Kanat aga had been figuring out how new neoliberalization laws worked. This defined his further entrepreneurial behavior and how he accumulated his first economic capital: participating in the “redistribution” of former Soviet entities by "mediating" between newly formed owners. Being from a kolkhoz family, he did not have ties with power holders, so he settled for the crumbs that fell from their tables, though others did not receive anything.

Kanat, 57 y.o.: We never get around to producing, to creating, because people were busy with redistribution. This constantly took place with the help of administrative resources, with the help of criminals... in short, at all levels.

Interviewer: Have you been in this redistribution system?

Kanat: Of course, it was simply impossible to be in business and not end up in this system.

[...] No one turned to catch luck down, [...] Redistribution, selling: scrap metal, coal,

whatever. And this is what was happening at the lower and lower middle levels because what was happening at the top was simply unattainable for us.

This is illustrative of how different the FGEs were, even among the narrowed-down group of people who did not engage in the retail of commodities from China and were not former Soviet elites: Igor Vladimirovich due to his uncle who was a lawyer working with cooperatives - first legal businesses in the USSR - jumped to production in the 1990s and Kanat aga who had to figure everything himself and dreamed about establishing own production for decades. Still, creating an opportunity to make a rapid profit was enough to self-define as an entrepreneur, and catch unstable but occasionally high earnings.

These kinds of activities could be labeled “business” and be based on creativity, making them superior to the "dirty work" of other petty entrepreneurs from the perspectives of the FGEs. Kanat's first deal was to become an assignee between an owner of a chicken farm in Northern Kazakhstan (a lender) and an owner of a former kolkhoz (a debtor). The owner of a farm did not have time and could not spend his efforts in making the kolkhoz to repay the debt stemming from the previous offset system. Two former sportsmen who were tied to criminals reached Kanat with an offer to help them as they were asked by the farm owner to deal with the issue. In turn, young businessman came up with an idea of how to solve this legally and make money from this. He made an appointment with the owner of a chicken farm and promised that his company would at least repay the part of the debt, so they signed the assignment agreement which gave the right to claim the debt from the debtor (*dogovor ustupki prav trebovaniya*, rus.) as a part of new civil code. The chicken farm owner agreed to receive at least one wagon of diesel fuel because, in the context of an economic crisis and a lack of cash, it was better than nothing.

At that time they were all in debt, no one was paying anyone. In general, there was no money. The economy was in ruins. Everything was redistributed, some tried to survive, but wheat was sown nonetheless. I talked to him [the lender and owner of the chicken farm]: "Let's do this, if we bring you, - I have already calculated, - a wagon of diesel fuel for that debt, will this be enough for you"? This was a big discount, because, for example, this debt exceeded the cost of this amount of diesel, well, around 3 times. At the same time, they [the kolkhoz-debtor] owed wheat at a certain price. I even remember the numbers, they owed them wheat, which costed \$45 per ton. I promised 26\$ because I just matched the price of the diesel tank and arranged everything according to the law (Kanat Beksultanov, the first-generation entrepreneur, 57 y.o).

To initiate such a negotiations with a previous top-level manager and current wealthy owner required knowledge and confidence in one's cultural capital, but also in alternative approaches to achieving goals. Kanat with his gangster "colleagues" went to the kolkhoz-debtor and with half formal and half criminal approaches received the grain. Even though the debtor also had criminals networks that functioned as patrons, it turned out that they knew the head of a mafia group whom Kanat also knew from his sports experience during university years, so it ended up peacefully and in his favor. The kolkhoz shipped eight hundred tons of grain to Kanat's firm as it officially had the right to claim this debt. By another happy coincidence of circumstances, the price of grain at this period increased significantly (to 100\$ per ton) so Kanat received a vast profit when he exchanged the grain for several apartments, commercial spaces, and cars with flour-milling enterprises (melkombinat) in several cities. Part of the accumulated possessions he quickly exchanged for diesel for the chicken farm, shared with the two criminals accompanying him and

gave one brand new car to the director of the kolkhoz-debtor, with whom they even became friends later.

However, such business trajectory was not a linear story of capital accumulation and investment. Later Kanat exchanged his newly acquired possessions again and again and even became an owner of a plant. However, more powerful people with high status and more serious state and criminal networks took it away from him, so Kanat had to begin anew at the early 2000s. He started to explore the opportunities in the construction business, especially since he had a plan for where to form the brigade of unskilled manual workers and how to motivate them. His younger brother who helped him at that time told me that Kanat aga took young delinquents from their home village who were “under” their criminal-authority brother and provided them with a place to live, food, and “closed eyes” on their “intoxication practices”. The young marginals, as the research participant claimed, “enjoyed” the opportunity to work in Astana and spent evenings “having fun” in the capital of Kazakhstan: stealing smartphones and initiating fights. Kanat aga avoided going deep into the details about the workers, but more focused on the formal, “cultured,” and “clean” parts of the business like negotiating with owners and workers, earning for family:

I came to the construction industry in 2005, but I started from the basics -- well, of course, not straight from the basics -- I didn't have to lay the bricks myself. I created a brigade. With my experience and knowledge, it was easy. I also easily negotiated with construction companies, and they always paid me. [...] Well, this did not allow me to accumulate start-up capital, and that level was not intended for this, you just need to pass it to support the life of, let's say, your own, your family (Kanat Beksultanov, the 57 y.o first-generation entrepreneur).

He entered the market of the construction boom in Astana back then due to blending his formal and informal skills. While he did not have much money at that point, he arranged a subcontractor company "recruiting" handymen who in fact might agree to work because of Kanat and his family's symbolic capital in the village or fear. In any case, without any construction experience and education, Kanat gradually began figuring out how this sphere worked and how profitable it could be. However, the 2007-2008 financial crisis and the following drop in construction postponed his plans to finally accumulate capital:

I started thinking about how to come here [to construction as a developer]. Yes, maybe I would have entered in 2008. But the crisis got in the way. In 2007-8-9, there was a crisis in the construction industry, on a global level. It held me down (Kanat Beksultanov, the 57 y.o first-generation entrepreneur).

After several years of ups and downs, several subcontractor projects, and experience in managing repair brigades, he finally aimed at building his own projects at the beginning of the 2010s. Although he neither had land nor enough economic capital. However, in 2011 he negotiated with a landlord who possessed a small piece of land in the suburbs of Astana. Kanat aga would rent it for building a small apartment block in exchange for a portion of apartments in this to-be-constructed apartment block. Then, he created his loyal team of managers consisting of his younger brother, whom he assigned to control and manage the construction, and another young man skilled in a variety of manual tasks and originating from their village. Kanat aga continued his way of approaching business, but mostly without any illegal moves as I will describe in the next chapters. Yet, these informalities were as significant as his cultural deservedness acquired in university for entering the more “professional” stage of market development without much money and

connections to former elites. However, the same cultural deservedness limits further self-management and the normative pressures for life learning with age.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the overall argument of the dissertation by demonstrating that intergenerational mobility is, generally, structured by a tension between moralized value regimes and the practical conditions of capital accumulation. While the FGEs narrate their trajectories through the lens of Soviet intelligentsia ideals and these indeed shaped their accumulation practices, their entrepreneurial activities included flexibility, informality, and sometimes the engagement with precisely those practices that they later downgraded.

These contradiction and distortion are analytically significant because they shape what is transmitted across generations. Rather than passing on the full repertoire of practices that enabled upward mobility, some FGEs reproduce normative hierarchies that privilege “meaningful”, “professional” work over alternative labor and business approaches. These dynamic lays the ground for the tensions explored in the following chapters, where inherited cultural capital and cultural deservedness can both enable and constrain entrepreneurial continuity.

More broadly, this chapter shows how value regimes could guide the choice of business beyond widely addressed sector of retail of imported Chinese and Turkish goods. However, the values are actively negotiated and applied situationally, even though later the oral histories obscure the heterogeneous and context-dependent practices that led to upward mobility through entrepreneurship. In this sense, this insight is key to the understanding of processes of intergenerational mobility which are full of misalignments: the practices which facilitated initial economic accumulation and sustain economic advancement are perceived as morally inferior.

Chapter 2: Parental Involvement vs Parents' Stagnating Businesses: Cultural
Deservedness Discouraging Entrepreneurial Continuity

*Agriculture is not something that I have ever had a passion for,
everything that concerns plants, vegetables, all of that, [...]
are not very interesting to me
(Karina Yussupova, 26-year-old daughter of FGE).*

*The technical field is super uninteresting to me.
Like working in construction, that was never part of my desires.
(Almas Sabitov, 31-year-old son of FGE).*

At first glance, educated young people who inherited high cultural capital and cultural deservedness (see definition in Chapter 1) from their parents who are first-generation entrepreneurs (FGEs) avoid the “family” businesses for a simple reason. As we can see from the excerpts above, the adult children - daughters and sons - of the FGEs explain their decision by the lack of personal passion in the industry. In a way, this should reflect the ultimate goal for capital accumulation that many FGEs have articulated - giving themselves and their loved ones freedom by ensuring material stability. Freedom from a heavy-handed disciplinary regime of employers, from working out of obligation rather than passion, etc.

However, a closer interaction with research participants reveals a more complex and contradictory reality. This chapter shows how approaching business the way the FGEs did at the beginning of their entrepreneurial career, or even with less involvement than that, might lead to stagnation in the demanding, ever-changing market. As a result, business stagnation becomes an obstacle to intrafamily succession, especially since their adult children inherited cultural

deservedness to reproduce structured, understandable career trajectories - that fit the importance of moral dignity and intellectual-manual work duality - rather than business with unclear formal/informal overlap.

This situation is full of entangled tensions. First, the parents often feel disappointed if their children do not step into their business and do not use their high cultural capital to contribute to the familial welfare. Second, the parents sometimes refuse to provide their adult children with the key aspects of material stability, like housing, or regret doing so “because they [their children] no longer seek achievements” (more on regrets in Chapter 3), meaning the children are not succeeding them. Third, even if the parents provided their young adults with elite housing and brand-new cars, children still do not base their career choices purely on their passions but rather direct their career trajectories following the familial notion of prestige, along with the choosing either pursuit of autonomy or security (Chapter 3 on autonomy/prestige, stability/prestige, etc.). Since securities related to work are increasingly elusive today, I will argue that only the adult children of the FGEs who reinforce lifelong proactiveness or human capital subjectivity might be closer to having the combination of prestige, autonomy, and security. Due to their parents, these young adults might join competitive, prestigious family firms where they are trusted with autonomy in decision-making, and are secured by their bosses-parents, even though the industries are far from being interesting to them too (Part II, Chapter 4).

In contrast, this chapter explores the cases of adult children whose parents' high cultural capital with age facilitated the sense of cultural deservedness to escape the relentless pressure to become portfolio-self, but expect the same elevated living standards. At the same time, their adult children avoid the parents' mid-sized businesses. I argue that the reason for this, along with personal situations within families, might be the gap between the ambitions tied to cultural

deservedness that adult children also inherited and the reality of stagnating businesses that need transformation to respond to the market's needs. In the first part of this chapter, I show how approaching business the way the FGEs did at the beginning of their entrepreneurial career, or even with less involvement than back then, might lead to stagnation in the demanding, ever-changing market. As a result, the second half of the chapter shows that business stagnation becomes an obstacle to intrafamily succession, especially since their adult children inherited cultural deservedness to reproduce structured, understandable career trajectories befitting their beliefs about “intelligenstia” or “middle class” rather than stressful business with unclear formal/informal overlap. Cultural deservedness among the young research participants includes the sentiment that they deserve to avoid activities, environments, and people with alternative work ethics and whom they define as “dirty”, morally corrupt, and others. The stagnation of the business, on the other hand, is related to informality and the “mess” in its organization, which was a key part at the initial steps of the business and market formation, but increasingly becomes viewed as a redundancy.

Chapter 1 introduced the idea of cultural deservedness as the Soviet intelligentsia's belief in deserved elevated status and living standards due to earned knowledge, taste, credentials, etc. At the same time, the chapter highlighted the proactiveness, adaptability, and flexibility of the young FGEs in practice. In turn, this chapter accentuates the importance of cultural deservedness for the FGEs with age as they prioritize it over anything. Moreover, it incorporates a more nuanced perspective on the conceptualization of Western middle-class parenting styles (Gillies, 2005; Lareau, 2011; Streib, 2011) and parental involvement in young adults' career trajectories (Lareau, 2016; van Stee, 2022) as insufficient to ensure business succession and forming a “desire to own and control means of production” (Yanagisako, 2001, p.5).

Parenting Styles and Transmission of Cultural Deservedness

In this section, I will explore the oral histories of parenting styles of the FGEs for whom the Soviet intelligentsia is an important part of their identity. Unlike the middle-class families in some Western societies, where it is parents who actively reinforced reproduction of advantages through the concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2011), the parents-FGEs recalled their socialist childhoods as less structured and managed by their families. Often, nobody managed their leisure time, worked on their development, or fostered their talents, as the above-mentioned parenting style type suggests, except for the Soviet educational system, while their families were busy at work. Concerted cultivation is contrasted with the accomplishment of natural growth, which Lareau (2011) observed in working-class families, yet the intelligentsia-FGEs might have experienced both, suggesting the duality of parenting styles cannot be projected onto the socialist system. As I already discussed in Chapter 1, the FGEs socialized with the values of high cultural capital at school, in university, from educated peers in the army, and from reading books. In turn, when the FGEs participated in the upbringing of their own children, their next generation was much closer to the Western framework: while the parents had already accumulated economic capital, they often invested it in various educational opportunities that the market began to propose. However, there are still some important differences in the parenting styles in the families of the educated FGEs who originated in urban intelligentsia settings and those who started from a Soviet rural background.

Both workers and capitalists are made, not born. This section contributes to the literature on parenting styles by zooming in on the key differences in seemingly similar strategies of concerted cultivation of the FGEs as parents, which adds nuance to the existing understanding of “middle-class” family-school socialization. Researchers emphasize parenting styles that help

middle-class children secure the same privileges later. Such children show confidence in classroom settings and a sense of exceptionality, while their parents focus on their talents and an ability to negotiate their rights (Gillies, 2005; Lareau, 2011; Streib, 2011). My findings also support this, but I add that such concerted cultivation without experience in various settings outside a classroom, especially chaotic settings of unstructured stagnating business might contribute to the formation of a desire to be good employees or freelancers rather than a formation of a “desire to own and control means of production” (Yanagisako, 2002, p.5). As a result, I argue that the FGEs through investing in the future of their children reproduce the privileges in a vague sense of the middle class (skilled workers, self-employed specialists, state servants, see Chapter 3) but might not get an intrafamily successor of the business, which require both navigating in formal and informal settings.

Based on the cases of Igor Yussupov and Kairat Sabitov - the FGEs who were born in a city in intelligentsia families - I show the specifics of their parenting styles as prioritizing not only academic success but also formal discipline and belief in innate talents. This indeed facilitated a sense of exceptionality and confidence in the adult children, but mostly in formal and structured settings where they understood the rules of the game and valued discipline to follow those rules. At the same time, these FGEs could not create opportunities for their children to develop interaction and negotiation skills with diverse individuals, navigate different social “languages,” defend their interests, or engage in problem-solving in real-world contexts—the very challenges the FGEs face daily in business. Igor Yussupov and Kairat Sabitov's parents were already prestigious workers like Soviet engineers, doctors, teachers, and low-level state administrators. In turn, when the two men became successful entrepreneurs, they practiced something similar to concerted cultivation in parenting. As fathers, they paid for and insisted that their children attend

various extracurricular activities. The two businessmen also considered it important to invest in studies abroad, whether it is language courses or higher education programs.

However, what they also shared was the focus on duality in the idea that individuals can have innate talents or not. They treated academic success as something natural for their children, but also prized traits like effortless magnetism and leadership. If the children excelled in classes and extracurriculars, the parents still might have required the traits they associated with the high cultural capital of Soviet-era modernity, like a taste for special literature, music, oratorical style, and the performative posture of a true leader. If the children did not demonstrate strong academic performance in studies or were just normal students, they spat out their disappointment, criticizing the innate “mediocracy” in them.

I know Karina Yussupova from our schooldays, we met in a history tutorship when we prepared for exams. I admired her academic achievements, especially her exceptional level of English, which was unprecedented for me. I also did not understand her warm sense of attachment to her gymnasium and teachers there. It turned out that her grandmother was a distinguished teacher of the Russian language and literature at this school for all her life. Her parents studied there, so Karina and, later, her younger siblings felt at home there too. When we met several years later as adults and I collected my data with their family, it was a surprise for me that for Igor Yussupov, Karina had yet to prove she possessed the natural talent he respected. “Your brother [Timur] always had natural charisma,” said the FGE to his daughter one winter evening when I interviewed them. For a moment, the room was filled with heavy, unspoken tension, and I felt unease from the emotional weight my presence caused to the young woman.

Karina Yussupova: What, didn't I have charisma?

Igor Yussupov: Karina...well, charisma is when you get the crowd going... You know how Timur recites poetry; you can feel the guy wants to be first. He wants and he can.

While Karina benefited from concerted cultivation and inherited value for discipline to study and obedience in educational institutions, her father's words implied a dual standard - one where academic success could never fully compensate for what was seen as a lack of natural talent. Igor Yussupov's children knew English, studied well at school, and had the reputation of being disciplined students and reliable people, and friends. Karina learned Spanish by herself due to strong self-discipline, graduated from STEM programs for her bachelor's and master's degrees as her father insisted, was a responsible assignment-taker, and a versatile person. Still, she did not escape comparisons with others, with her brothers, and particularly with her father himself, as he believed himself to be a charismatic leader as well.

A similar situation happened in the family of Kairat Sabitov - another FGE originating from Soviet intelligentsia. His children, Almas and Laura Sabitovs, experienced concerted cultivation as the FGE could accumulate capital and invest in various extracurricular activities. However, the father had always been harsh in his comparisons between the children - something I've witnessed since childhood, as Laura is an old friend of mine. The father often distinguished between the younger daughter, who "inherited" his intellect and leadership abilities, and the older son, who was "mediocre" and "passive". "He takes after his mother's side" referred the FGE to his wife and her family, with a rural background and not academically trained at the university level. Kairat aga always saw his "theory" supported in Almas's unremarkable academic performance, uncommunicativeness, and lack of interest in anything, whereas Laura "showed leadership skills since pre-school" and was a creative and diligent student. The father was proud of her passion for

reading, and emphasized her sophisticated taste and proactiveness as she always asked parents to fund her extra interests like dance classes or sports.

Not by Cultural Deservedness Alone

While the FGEs above prized innate talents contributing to the social dominance (charisma, oratorical and leadership skills) and cultivated taste as key in their understanding of high cultural capital along with the concerted cultivation in which they invested money, in practice all their children - allegedly talented or not - had relatively limited experience of functioning in real-world situations that went beyond school and extracurriculars. They were already a third generation of educated urban dwellers living in elite districts, attending gymnasiums, and building their social circles with children of similar backgrounds or closer to these - the environments contributing to the cultural deservedness. They might have charisma and leadership or not, but they were also disciplined through family-school institutions, fostering the prism of cultured-ness, while treating people who reinforce alternative subjectivities, stances, and language registers as others. The Yussupovs, Karina and Timur, and the Sabitovs, Almas and Laura, are all responsible assignment takers, rule followers, and polite performers of high cultural capital. They all experienced difficulties defending their interests and only started learning to say “no” to requests in which they were uninterested. Furthermore, they are fluent Russian and English speakers but experience unease in predominantly Kazakh-speaking environments.

Therefore, they preferred to avoid engaging in entrepreneurial practices that were present in their parents’ businesses. In the next section of this chapter, I will show why their parents’ companies are not suitable for the adult children’s cultural deservedness, skills, and experience of formal structures with their informal, vague, and sometimes “shameful” and “dirty work” practices. Simultaneously, their talents and skills achieved through concerted cultivation allowed

them to access prestigious career trajectories outside entrepreneurship (Chapter 3). For now, let us proceed to the similarities and key differences in the upbringing styles of other intelligentsia FGEs educated in Soviet institutions, but who themselves came from rural backgrounds. For example, Kanat Beksultanov is one of the FGEs whose processes of upward mobility I also explored in Chapter 1 in more detail. His son - Bakhtiyar Beksultanov (27 y.o.) stand out for joining his father's business (see Part II, Chapter 5).

In comparison to young Yussupovs and Sabitovs, who experienced concerted cultivation and “inherited” cultural deservedness, Bakhtiyar and Amina additionally “inherited” the ability to solve problems and achieve goals using a variety of methods from their parents. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the FGEs whose trajectories started in Soviet kolkhoz, went through Soviet prestige universities, and ended up in business and ownership utilized way more practices on that path than high cultural capital alone. They used the social capital of their relatives, connections from their village, sports, and army experience, and could have engaged in informal and illegal practices. They could reinforce more subjectivities, stances, and language registers depending on with whom they were negotiating. They “passed this on” to their children. Like young Yussupovs and Sabitovs, their children experienced concerted cultivation and investment of parents' resources into extracurricular activities and then higher education, local or foreign. The parents also held essentialist beliefs about innate talent and intelligence, seeing these qualities as inherent to a select few, too. Especially since they were the most illustrative examples for themselves, being the only few from their birthplaces who “succeeded”. At the same time, they worked hard to make up for the lack of resources in their rural childhood by providing their children with material comforts and also access to private tutors, English classes, and a variety of enriching experiences.

Furthermore, there was a special kind of pressure the FGEs invented for their children, which was not the case in the above-mentioned families and which compensated for the limits of innate talent rhetoric. The parents whose processes of upward mobility were intense and full of transformative moments motivated their children to be the best and complete an inherited mission. The FGEs invented such missions as family myths or supported the myths of their spouses to additionally motivate their children to acquire knowledge and hard skills, along with other soft skills like sports, dance, art, etc. “We have a mission to break the chain of poverty and despair in our family” was a repeated mantra of Kanat Beksultanov to his son Bakhtiyar. While the FGE was indeed the one out of his other ten siblings who received a prestigious education, accumulated substantial capital, and helped his relatives with housing and education, Bakhtiyar neither saw poverty and despair nor had a genuine connection with the father's side. For the young man, the father's framing of the inherited mission formed a strong sense of responsibility for his and his parental family's further upward mobility and “earning security”. Similarly, the husband of Mira Tasbulatova invented the mission for their daughter Amina to “reach Europe”, as the young woman recollected during the interview (December 2022):

And it seems to me that this idea that the Tasbulatovs will be... He always told me, ‘My father reached Berlin, and you will be in Europe.’ Well, I didn't attach any importance to it then. I said, ‘Dad, well, it's not the same” (*laughs*) ‘like how my ata [grandfather] reached Berlin and how can I do it.’ ‘No, it's still our family,’ he replied (Amina Tasbulatova, 35 y.o. daughter of an FGE).

Her mother, Mira Tasbulatova, who is the FGE and research participant, was never against this mission and facilitated her daughter's educational achievements: researched university options, helped with application processes, and prepared her for entrance exams. It turned out that

Amina was the only one on her father's and mother's sides who studied abroad through the “Bolashak” government-funded scholarship program in Kazakhstan, which was a matter of great pride in the family.

Finally, research participants with a background similar to Bakhtiyar and Amina shared a mix of structured and unstructured activities in their childhood. Along with various extracurricular activities and inherited cultural deservedness for affluent and prestigious lifestyles, they spent their childhood “hanging out” with relatives and friends from various backgrounds. This experience resembled the natural growth that the US research shows as the specifics of the working-class upbringing approach (Lareau, 2011): spending spare time with friends and family instead of structured activities orchestrated by parents. For example, concerted cultivation and natural growth follow each other and are inseparable in Amina's recollections of her childhood (December 2022):

It was fun because we were always with cousins, hanging out... I had six cousins, and we were always somewhere. In summer, we were at construction sites and on roofs. I was more of a tomboy as a child. But at the same time, I had dance classes. I really liked that too because there was a lot of intellectual activity in school, and here you come and work with your body. And plus, there were all sorts of trips, we gave concerts. And that also disciplined me (Amina Tasbulatova, 35 y.o. daughter of an FGE).

In addition to childhood in the unstructured fellowship of boys and girls in the neighborhood and family gatherings, as well as structured training and organization of concerts that required the development of time management and self-discipline, Amina and her brother also studied in a Kazakh school until the fifth grade. Then, they moved to a gymnasium with Russian as the primary language of instruction because it was deemed “stronger,” and they needed private

tutoring to adapt and stay on par with their peers. Still, the Kazakh educational program helped Amina in her later career many times.

Bakhtiyar Beksultanov, for example, also went to a prestigious gymnasium, private lessons, and musical school, but never avoided conflicts and bonding practices of constant power struggles and shifting boys' hierarchies. He hung out with friends from the neighborhood, with whom they participated in street duels and underwent the "street school" (see Schröder, 2017). Also, he spent each summer in his mother's village of origin, where his grandparents lived and where he also had a group of friends - all of them from humble backgrounds. These boys' livelihoods were far from Bakhtiyar's, but he enjoyed unstructured and unsupervised teenage socializing like meeting with friends, going to the local river, and experimenting with alcohol and cigarettes. The boys forged friendships, helping each other doing rural chores, engaging in small-scale bootlegging of movies and songs. Once, they even worked as general laborers at the reconstruction of the village's sports stadium, though unofficially because they were minors. They also tested rivalries defending their boundaries within the group and with outsiders.

Such extended experience within the realm of interactions contributed to the self-directedness of adult children like Bakhtiyar, Amina, and others to be proactive and gain working and entrepreneurial experience since young adulthood. Amina was an active participant in the student community while studying abroad. So did Karina Yussupova - a "hereditary" urban dweller - who also had an intense engagement in campus life at her foreign university. However, they had different visions of self-cultivation. Karina hated her STEM program, which was an unfulfilled dream of her father, not her, but she compensated for it with the cultural capital refinement she liked. She spent her free time in student theater rehearsals, working on her oratorical skills in the rhetoric club, and talking about fiction in book circles. She never criticized

her peers who hung out in student parties, did not read books, or included profanity in their vocabulary, but she avoided interactions with them and preferred finding more “disciplined” fellows with the same interests. Amina, on the other hand, was also always in motion, yet it was not only about “culture” and taste but rather social and symbolic forms of capital. During the four years of her undergraduate program, she grew in her leadership role in the International Students Organization while gaining intense experience in problem-solving. She bridged international students and university administrators, negotiated conflicts, secured funding, organized events, and brought people from vastly different backgrounds together. This experience helped her to be confident when she came back to Kazakhstan and got a job at a large university, and when she tried herself as a businesswoman in the educational sphere. Unlike Karina's engagement in structured activities, which she understood and loved, Amina learned and tested herself in bringing structure to complexity and confusion. Both university experiences were about proactiveness, and I never claimed that one is better than the other. Yet they moved in radically different ways as if they extended their childhood experiences.

While Bakhtiyar Beksultanov and Almas Sabitov both studied at local universities with undeveloped student communities, I see important differences in their young adult experiences, which continue their childhood practices. Almas, who had a negative experience with informal boyhood hierarchies in school times, spent his university years at a relaxed pace: playing video games, studying IT, and reading books. His father, Kairat Sabitov, while involved in the admission period as he understood the “rules of the game” in institutional settings (Lareau et al., 2016), did not extend the parental involvement beyond that. He was content that his children had to study and would work later, even though he later expressed confused sentiments about another young man who, during his studies, opened a small stationary food stand serving doner [a wrap with meat,

vegetables, and sauce]. “When he was a student, he ran a *shashlychnaya* [kebab cafe], I thought, wow!” said Kairat Sakenuly with a chuckle (March 2023), which abruptly changed to a serious tone, “That means there was already some potential in him”. The fact that he called a doner food stand *shashlychnaya* implied his disdain for such a small “dirty work” enterprise, but he quickly realized that nowadays, such an experience is praiseworthy for a young man.

Opposite to the disciplined and relaxed Almas, Bakhtiyar Beksultanov - the young son of the FGE who was born in a village - said that he “deliberately started his university life by causing a conflict with the biggest peer in a lecture hall”. At the same time, he was one of the best students in his cohort, but always found time to hang out with friends. At the end of his second year, he decided that his days of student parties were over and that he should create something before he went to the state service, as he planned. His father, Kanat Beksultanov, did not initiate that, yet his parental involvement was significant. Research shows that parental involvement does not cease when children reach adulthood, and varies across class (van Stee, 2022). Bakhtiyar, with a friend, invested effort, time, and resources into the first business experience, yet the young man admitted that without his father's business guidance, support, and assistance, his entry into the business world would have taken significantly longer.

Bakhtiyar thoroughly considered the options for the enterprise that could be launched without significant investments but also would pay off fast. It was important for Bakhtiyar to fulfill his entrepreneurial aspirations separately from his father. However, he could still approach his father whenever he needed consultation or practical help. For example, the first micro business was a little gaming center where he offered several game consoles for rent for an hour, and later organized a little snack and geek shop inside (selling a variety of niche souvenirs, toys, and goods related to comics, fantasy, and gaming).

Bakhtiyar's father would never consider such an earning opportunity seriously for himself. However, he supported his son's first attempts and consulted the son on calculating a prime cost, drawing numbers and schemes on a piece of paper. He also provided the services of his accountant for proper state registration of individual entrepreneurship status and helped with a business plan. At the same time, two of his men from the construction brigade and his right-hand man had done budget refurbishment in a rented commercial space. They even made a loft-like reception desk and couches from construction materials for clients. Bakhtiyar purchased the TV sets and game consoles with his saved money. A bit later, his friend entered this business by investing his economic capital, which basically paid off Bakhtiyar's investments. Therefore, the opportunities and experience of the father allowed the son to save as much as possible. In contrast, those opening the same business from “zero” would spend significantly more money.

At the same time, the young man acquired many skills highly valued for a contemporary entrepreneur during his first business experience, adding them to the existing portfolio of a graduate of a prestigious gymnasium school and later university. First and foremost, he took responsibility for the risk of investing his resources, which he had saved. Reading about entrepreneurship - a topic that dominated the public agenda with a wealth of resources and discussions flourishing in social media and online platforms - he rationally approached his first business. Even though he did not conduct professional market research, he knew the potential customers because he was one of them. He did an informal competitor analysis, calculated investments, and a payback period before action. He practiced negotiations and leadership in real-life situations. The second-generation businessman researched the market of commercial spaces available for rent and negotiated with landlords about the rent abatement period and favorable conditions of communal payment. He learned how to juggle everyday decision-making, problem-

solving, and delegation. While young Beksultanov and his partner did not want to spend money on marketing, they promoted their services through social media by themselves. Bakhtiyar's friend took photos of their game room, guests, and the goods they later offered there. Bakhtiyar wrote posts on Instagram because his extracurriculars in Russian literacy made him the most competent in his network of friends. They also arranged promotional events and videos in partnership with local young videographers. Bakhtiyar also developed his first human resources and management approaches in practice by hiring other young people to the gaming lounge as administrative assistants and sellers. He dealt with workers stealing from a cash box, who slept at work, were lazy, and could not speak appropriately with clients. He tried various approaches to introduce work discipline, but mostly was a “bad cop” for the young unskilled employees, shouting at them and installing the video surveillance system. In contrast, the other partner tried to build trusting relationships with them.

In contrast, the children of Igor Yussupov, Kairat Sabitov, and others who inherited cultural deservedness and experienced concerted cultivation avoided not only joining their parents' companies but also entrepreneurship in general. Even though their parents offered them investments, they feared mistakes, responsibility, and “chaos,” which had to be structured according to the ever-advancing needs of a competitive market. In the next section, I explore the business environment of the 2020s.

Parents' Stagnating Businesses: Cultural Deservedness Discouraging Business Transformation

While contemporary business strategies suggest “reliance on entrepreneurial behavior that purposefully and continuously rejuvenates” (Kreiser et al., 2021, p.739) an enterprise in the context of accelerating market changes, this does not always fit the FGEs' ideas and expectations about

age, generation, and productivity. The changing economic environment requires more effort from business people than in the earlier stages of marketization. The literature provides evidence of notable shifts and transformations in the Central Asian markets. Compared to “accidental traders” (Sahadeo, 2011), Schröder and Schröder (2017) defined Kyrgyz first-generation businessmen as “accidental entrepreneurs” who nobody taught how to run a business. The mode in which they operated was informal instead of a more “professional” one. The latter is becoming more valued today, including accountability, transparency, and efficiency, and requires more competency and education from people.

In a constant rush to stay competitive, entrepreneurs are encouraged to develop, modernize, and constantly self-improve. In Fehér’s (2009) account, human capital is a mode of subject formation produced by neoliberal and financialized value regimes, which pressures individuals to continuously make themselves investable. According to this theory, neoliberal subjects do not have human capital but invest and manage it. All the aspects of life, anything people do - not only in the public realm or at work - might valorize or devalorize one’s “portfolio” in the labor market. This is contrary to a “free laborer” subjectivity specific to liberal capitalism, who more clearly separated the private and public labor realms, production and reproduction, work and care, and rational and irrational (Brown, 2015; Fehér, 2009; Foucault, 2010). My findings demonstrate how some of the FGEs resist the logic of portfolio-self by appealing to their cultural deservedness, leveraging it as a justification to keep overlapping spheres of life separated. It affects business as they feel justified to be themselves now, not portfolios which had to be managed wisely for work purposes.

Chapter 1 showed that first-generation entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan are very heterogeneous people who came to ownership through various “entrepreneurial” activities, not only through

commerce and re-export. This chapter demonstrates that the FGEs with cultural deservedness might avoid adapting to the changes in the market because they do not perceive themselves as portfolios. Even though the FGEs in this study are middle-aged, ranging from their late 40s to early 60s, the sense of cultural deservedness might reduce their perceived need for constant self-improvement, adaptability, and flexibility, especially at this stage of life. Their age expectations, once-earned cultural capital, and proactiveness at the initial stages make them believe they deserve to be free from the constant rush, to focus on themselves and aspects of their lives beyond work and accumulation of economic capital in this life stage, more than anyone else. The paradox is that they did not plan to work all their life because they distinguished between productive and reproductive realms as free laborers, but they fear losing their businesses and the earnings that support their livelihoods.

Most of the research participants perceived entrepreneurship as a coping mechanism for the capitalist system's shortcomings, such as labor exploitation, alienation, disadvantages based on income, and insecurity. Therefore, they did not view their enterprise as a vehicle for continuous corporate growth and global expansion through investment, nor did they see themselves as “enterprises” on their own requiring continuous self-management (Gershon, 2016). I show how approaching business the way the FGEs did at the beginning of their entrepreneurial career, or even with less involvement than that, might lead to stagnation in the demanding, ever-changing market. As a result, business stagnation becomes an obstacle to intrafamily succession, especially since their adult children inherited cultural deservedness to reproduce structured, understandable career trajectories rather than a business with unclear formal/informal overlap. The following subsections describe four cases of the FGEs’ business stagnation; their businesses are different, and therefore, they are affected by different market changes.

Case 1. When Initial Mechanisms Backfire: Neglected Business Professionalization

The first case focuses on the reluctance of Kairat Sabitov to transform the business organization towards its “professionalization”. His business trajectory began from a “shameful” - for a Soviet-trained engineer - sales manager position at a large construction materials shop. Since then, he has become the owner of an official dealership of construction equipment. However, from the beginning of the 2020s, his business began to shrink and nearly collapsed, exacerbated by the slowdown in construction activity but also due to the loss of key contracts and major clients because of the “betrayal” of a key employee. Throughout the dissertation, I highlight two extremes of business organization in the sample of mostly not small but mid-sized enterprises. First, the organization is based on figures of trusted individuals who take responsibility for managing and working on the enterprise. However, it can contain unclear duties, informal relations beyond professional ones, ambiguous accountability structures, and “irrational” logic. Second, the approach aimed at reducing dependence on individuals with formalization, rationalization, and specialization, facilitating the expendability of cadres. In the initial period of capital accumulation, the FGEs used the first approach as businesses were all about them, their proactiveness, flexibility, adaptability, and hard work (Chapter 1). Often, they had their trusted people to whom they delegated operations, but it had drawbacks, which I illustrate through ethnography below.

It is necessary at the outset to specify the definition of formalization, operational rationalization, and specialization of the internal business structure used in this dissertation. Formalization is the response of businesses to the environments that grew more complex and codified, requiring written regulations (Schröder, 2021). I focus on internal formalization as the FGEs sought not only to meet the needs of the market but also to withdraw from daily operations by delegating tasks. Through business education, some FGEs transformed their organizational

structures, making them more formalized (Part II, Chapter 4). The examples in this dissertation include the following and defining clear roles regulated in internal documentation (e.g., Organizational Chart), formally established and adhered-to hierarchical accountability (the owner does not participate in many decisions), formal communication channels (e.g., memos, sluzhebki), and more.

The next “professional” component of internal structure is operational rationalization as optimization of business processes based on efficiency, standardization, and predictability. This includes automation of repetitive tasks through technology (smart technologies to manage production), the importance of guides, accurate digital inventory systems, video surveillance for employees, etc.

Finally, specialization is focused on going deeper into the occupational responsibilities of the employees and the constant development of their expertise. The FGEs who utilize this principle encourage learning, advanced training courses for their employees, and value deeper knowledge to trust and delegate decision-making in the transformed system. They might outsource responsibilities to “professionals” (social media marketing, accounting, for example) and avoid the concentration of key knowledge and directions (e.g., in marketing, production, and finances) in the hands of multifunctional specialists and executives. Still, one is expected to understand many other neighboring things, but after undertaking the depths of their own. I show how the FGEs with cultural deservedness did not take business knowledge seriously and how this influenced the decision of their adult children to avoid business.

Kairat aga did not rely on business education, but rather on his cultural capital, talents, and earned experience. “It always seemed to me like some kind of stupidity,” reacted Kairat aga when we talked about business literature as the source of education, “it is purely about practice”. For

more than a decade, the business indeed functioned well due to Kairat aga's rather informal organization, which allowed him to delegate crucial responsibilities. By hiring Alim - a prospective young relative from his wife's side - the FGE taught a trusted person who took essential operations on himself. Such an organization gave Kairat aga the freedom to focus solely on strategic business direction while avoiding work he disliked and regarded as lacking in intellectual rigor. For example, strategic and wide-ranging responsibilities, involving numerous daily decisions like sales, management, and supervision over subcontractors, fell into this category. Moreover, the FGE could finally enjoy his interests, hobbies, sports, and certain indulgences - all of which he related to the personal realm. In turn, Alim, who was twenty years younger than Kairat aga and about a decade older than Sultan's children, was a proactive, initiative-driven, fast learner. He was also not afraid of “dirty work” in sales, securing large contracts, controlling the quality of work, and driving revenue growth.

Moreover, both took advantage of such a business organization based on formal/informal overlap and disregarded its limitations. Alim worked as a professional and as a trusted relative simultaneously. He did not complain about unclear responsibilities when instructions were not clear, work was assigned arbitrarily, or there was an intense workload that included several positions in one. While he formally grew to the post of Sales Director, and then a Chief Financial Officer (CFO), he took on varied roles and responsibilities ranging from sales and crisis management to supervision of operations in the field and executive functions. He even sometimes replaced Kairat aga in negotiations and strategic planning. In turn, Kairat aga knew that Alim was not fully honest and stole some of the construction materials for personal gain. But he stood away from figuring out the extent of it and did not problematize it in exchange for the young man's contribution, which gave the owner substantial revenues and freedom. In addition, he was his

younger relative, and the businessman did not want to ruin the relationship with *kudalar* [relatives by marriage, not blood in kaz.] over a potential trifle.

At the same time, Kairat aga's older son, Almas, joined the company of his father right after graduation as the former hoped to have a more trusted and reliable person in the firm with prospects of future intrafamily succession. In turn, Almas just did not know where to start with his law degree, which was more of a credential than evidence of legal competence. However, the unclear structure and responsibilities of the father's company did not meet the expectations of the young adult about the labor market as well. After an initial period where Almas did not manifest himself as someone ready to take responsibility for the company's direction. After several conflicts, the disappointed father assigned him a relatively narrow position - as a supervisor for handymen and unskilled workers in the construction field - as he allegedly proved his lack of initiative, proactiveness, and leadership skills. Almas hated “dirty work” and negotiating with manual workers whom he thought were lazy and corrupt. But he also hated dealing with Alim, whose work ethic he did not understand and deemed as corrupt as well. This moral distancing highlighted young intelligentsia descendants' distinction from both the perceived roughness of labor and the opportunism of entrepreneurial subjectivity, which was Alim's strength.

The Sabitovs' relative, while formally dealing with sales, which consisted of various responsibilities, informally was the right-hand man of Kairat aga in finances, production, and networking. He was proactive, flexible, and adaptive in any environment: could defend the interests of the company in front of state officials, industry giants (construction companies), German manufacturers of their official dealership, their subcontractors, and low-level workers. However, the children of Kairat aga treated this as a morally inferior behavior, citing the moments where Alim was flexible to the extent that he used the tense relationships of the father and son to

make himself look more competent, at the expense of Almas. “He was such a rat, always putting Almas on the spot for mistakes that he or they both were responsible for,” recollected Laura, Sultan's younger daughter, who was aware of the whole family-work drama.

Eventually, Alim “betrayed” Saltan aga, taking all the skills, experience, and capital he earned along with the employees and clients to create his new company. Right after the first lockdown in 2020, when work was frozen for two months, Kairat aga took some of the corporate responsibility measures on himself. Alim did not waste time and worked on the creation of his separate firm. It was easy, he had been the face of the company for large clients and manufacturers for recent years anyway. After a conflict escalated when Kairat aga found out about it, Alim convinced the entire office to go with him as well. The middle-aged FGE could do nothing besides severing the ties with kudalar. He did not have instruments as he himself trusted full responsibility for management, finances, production, and sales to Alim as a part of his informal organization. Moreover, he preferred to close his eyes to the episodes of fraud and loss of construction materials under Alim's management because he hoped to use such “irrationality” in business to support his greater freedom. Finally, he did not invest in hiring a separate marketing or financial specialist or did not invest in the special education for Almas or for himself, rather he relied on multifunctional Alim, who then got separated from the company, which was perceived as betrayal and corporate raiding in the family, as Laura Sabitova put it (April 2023):

That parasite [Alim]...he was harsh and rotten. Almas was never interested in doing this, he never had a soul for this, to be this nimble one, who can fit into any door and, like, find a common language with any person. Especially in such a sphere where you need, like, to be able to find an approach to officials, with bribes or not...with the working class,

there are different people there. I don't have these skills either, just like Almas. Dad himself doesn't have such skills! (Laura Sabitova, 28 y.o. daughter of the FGE).

The excerpt above, as well as the Sabitovs' general attitude, which I observed toward the situation, reflected how the Sabitovs assigned different values to different skills, instrumentalizing their cultural deservedness. They distinguished themselves, their set of skills, and their practices from the variety of practices that "entrepreneurial" people like Alim engaged in, even though their business and familial welfare depended on his contribution as well. After his client and employee poaching, they instrumentalized their cultural superiority over his traits, which might have been suitable for business, but were morally corrupt. While Kairat aga himself avoided negotiations that required following, allegedly, morally inferior informal rules of the game with corrupt officials or his son Almas hated "unpleasant" encounters with the "working class" in dusty construction sites, the FGE built organization in a way which met his cultural deservedness to have a rest while a trusted person took a variety of responsibilities on himself. Moreover, the children of Kairat aga demonstrated their cultural deservedness as people who, due to their knowledge and skills, deserved to do what they loved, what they were passionate about, and what interested them. The children of the FGE justified the situation where they could not help their father due to their lack of interest, while they also did not have much experience with "rules" alternative to formal structures. While others like the young Yussupovs also emphasized their deservedness to choose what they were interested in while justifying avoidance of the family business, I show how the young adults with inherited cultural deservedness but also with extended practical experience, never brought the theme of interest while working and applying a "hybrid" practices incorporating formal and informal, rational and irrational, specialized and multifunctional approaches (see Part II, Chapter 5).

Case 2. Earning Rest? Different Businesses but Similar Turbulence

“I used to carry all the projects, but now they have simultaneously entered such phases where, without me, unfortunately, no project would truly hold together”, the weary FGE spoke of the period of turbulence he experienced. This second case, drawing on the two mid-sized businesses of Igor Yussupov, is an illustrative example of the growing complexity of the business environment, but also highlights the specifics of different sectors. On the one hand, besides the reluctance to transform the businesses, the example of the construction materials factory brings attention to increased state regulations, which emphasize the importance of formalization and compliance, challenging informal practices that were previously common. The livestock farm, on the other hand, operated on entirely different terms - based on the importance of local knowledge, and daily hands-on involvement of the owner, which the FGE also could not secure.

Compared to Kairat Sabitov, Igor Yussupov - a trained Soviet biologist - did not rely on relatives to manage his two complex businesses: an agro-pastoral farm in the Akmola region and a construction material factory within the borders of Karaganda city. However, he also did not introduce strict and clear principles of formalization, rationalization, and specialization. Instead, he continued to use the competencies which he acquired “in the nineties” [...] when he “had to be a lawyer and a financier, a manufacturer, and so on” as he put it himself (see Chapter 1). It turned out that the two mid-sized businesses in the ever-changing and precarious economic situation of the 2020s required more than the competencies of one experienced businessman. While the products like potatoes, meat, and construction materials were “in constant demand,” as Karina Yussupova explained, the system that her father built around himself was “a mistake” for which she and her brother “were not responsible”.

As the business environment changed, managing daily operations in the two companies became more challenging for the experienced businessman. It is not even about scaling and reaching new clients, for example, with the help of marketing and digitalization: businesses in construction materials and food production did not need a website and Instagram page desperately. Igor Yussupov's companies even quickly recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. However, his reliance on trusted individuals whom he perceived as such was not balanced with a clearly formalized, rationalized, and specialized business structure. Due to human factors such as exhaustion, workforce fluidity, and personal reasons like maternity leaves and retirements, labor sustainability faced challenges. This led to an escalation of stress among the workforce and Igor Vladimirovich himself because he took additional responsibilities of key figures who left him, or redistributed them among other employees.

Moreover, while the rapidly changing business environment of the 2020s affected all the directions of the FGE, the construction materials factory experienced dramatic state intervention due to community empowerment. The local municipality of expanding Karaganda city decided to suspend the activity of Igor Yussupov's plant because of constant complaints from residents of neighboring newly built districts regarding the ecological situation. Before the tensions with the neighbors and municipality, the CEO of the plant handled the responsibilities in production and managed the financial and law departments. However, the complexity of the legal battle, constant police raids, and the need for public relations expertise overwhelmed him. While Igor Vladimirovich understood the importance of hiring an experienced specialist because he did not want to take the issue himself, he could not find such a person within his network while distrusting external hires. Unlike the Smirnovs family (Part II, Chapter 4), who transformed their business

into a formalized, rationalized, and specialized organization that allowed for smooth delegation, Igor Yussupov remained convinced that no one but himself could handle all aspects of the crisis.

Simultaneously, his agro-pastoral farm, located in a village in the Akmola region, faced organizational and financial challenges. The CFO whom Igor Vladimirovich trusted resigned at the exact time the farm had to shift its direction of vegetable exports. The precarity of the economic and geopolitical situation could have led to the loss of large clients in Russia in 2022 and beyond. Instead, the niche became vacant in Uzbekistan as they shifted from cultivating potatoes to berries for European markets, and it meant the potatoes from the farm could be sold there, but this demanded close financial and organizational oversight. Igor Vladimirovich had to take financial matters on himself while losing production management out of his sight, which led to further complications, revealing the fragile structure underlying the situation.

At the same time, the financial instability affected his horse farm, which he expected to cover deficits in his other businesses, but instead brought the businessman additional financial challenges. While relying on “irrational” trust in deep employees’ “cultural knowledge” of horse breeding, Igor Yussupov, whose knowledge was mostly theoretical, agreed in the December 2022 interview that the “European approach in this business simply cannot exist,” meaning introducing the formalization, rationalization, and specification in the daily lifestyles of aul residents. However, the lack of control resulted in livestock losses, further straining the financial model of the FGE. This is how he described the complex situation regarding the up-to-date business approaches in the specific kinds of enterprises (December 2022):

Well, trust here, probably... I'm saying that this is quite an interesting question, I don't know how many horses I have, I don't know what the acceptable level of negligence [of workers] [...], how many horses you have is quite...an abstract figure, yes. I don't know

their condition and so on. But from the other side, you can approach this as follows - in general, this business exists or this business does not exist. Here, a lot depends on the level of purely human relations because my interdependence on the people with whom I work in this area is colossal (Igor Yussupov, 51 y.o. FGE).

Diminishing the inefficiencies of such management required his direct involvement and constant presence on the farm, yet he neither had the time nor the willingness to live and work there. His children were even more distanced from the farm. Even though the father made them visit the farm with him each summer in their childhood and “dig potatoes” there, they never participated in the life and relations of the aul, did not have relations with the locals, and never understood them. Even if Karina appeared in some documents in the construction materials factory, she avoided joining the everyday work life of the plant de facto by any means. The FGEs’ children did not understand how such environments worked and how the interests of the owner should be defended. Even though Karina Yussupova knew how her father, who was “torn between the responsibilities,” needed help with that, as she described the situation in business (September 2023):

[My father] always complains about how difficult it is to find a manager to whom you can delegate responsibility. I wouldn't have been involved in any case simply because, well, again, my psychology is completely different. I absolutely don't know how to put pressure on people. [...] What my parents didn't teach me was the ability to say “no”, the ability to be more... tougher. [...] Since I know the atmosphere of work from the inside, I would never want to join it, [...] it's a very stressful job that I would like to avoid with all my might. So my father will have absolutely no one to rely on, I won't get involved at all,

I don't feel responsible for his mistakes, he himself created such a system which is closed on him.

Like the Sabitovs, the young Yussupovs distanced themselves from the everyday operations of the business, where organizational challenges complicated delegation and clarity of responsibilities. Igor Yussupov himself could use his competencies and experience and be that one multifunctional person, though not fully in horse breeding, but he did not want to. Moreover, both father and daughter admitted that some of the competencies of the FGE no longer met the needs of the ever-changing business environment, especially in terms of the mid-sized scale of his companies. “I do business in an old-fashioned way (po starinke),” said Igor Yussupov. At the same time, his children were unwilling to take on the burden of transformation, particularly as they were inexperienced in making decisions and solving problems in conditions marked by uncertainty and structural complexity. They did not see any instruments on how to get things done and defend the interests of the owner in the seemingly informal, irrational organization of multitaskers, which they did not understand.

This case demonstrated both the advantages and drawbacks of informality and trust in management, as well as the influence of the local community on state intervention in businesses. On the one hand, relying on managers and employees who day-to-day interacted with the business operations allowed Igor Yussupov to avoid business transformation, requiring new knowledge and a lot of resources. Especially since some of his directions could not be transformed and depended on deep knowledge and practice of the employees. On the other hand, without the introduction of formalization, rationalization, and specialization mechanisms, operational inefficiencies emerged, demanding more from the owner than he could reasonably handle. Influenced by rapid changes in the business environment, geopolitical situation, and state involvement, the Yussupovs

experienced considerable turmoil that could not be addressed by the founder alone, and that discouraged his children from getting involved. While formalization, rationalization, and specialization are not inherently beneficial in all businesses (like horse breeding), this example highlights the risks of “doing business in old old-fashioned way” for the business people and intergenerational entrepreneurial continuity.

Finally, these findings are in contrast with the findings from the FGEs' families, which are not only focused on passing on cultural capital and cultural deservedness. Chapter 5 will show us that this might influence the decisions of the adult children to join the businesses of the parents, even stagnating ones, if the children are equipped with years of real-life experience beyond the classroom. Chapter 5 fully deals with the cases of successful intrafamily succession where the adult children of the FGEs with cultural deservedness but from more diverse origins - like the Beksultanovs - joined and took the transformation of a business organization on themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter explores how the stories about parenting styles can be juxtaposed with the avoidance of adult children to help their parents with stagnating businesses. I showed how the FGEs, while reinforcing proactiveness, flexibility, and adaptability when becoming owners, cultivated in their children cultural deservedness to avoid stress of “unclear” structures, and skills to operate in formalized, rationalized, and specialized environments. It is even evident in comparison of the parental styles stories of the FGEs who were born in the city in Soviet intelligentsia families and the FGEs who were upwardly mobile from Soviet margins, even though both reinforce cultural deservedness and experienced converted cultivation. The children of the former ones are the research participants who, similar to the vague definition of the middle class around the world, feel exceptional and consider themselves in terms of possession of talents, but

as I show, they might also be very disciplined and accustomed to the structured environments while “messiness” paralyzes them. In turn, the children of the latter might have the same experience with cultural deservedness and concerted cultivation, but they also encountered different environments and people, were trained in various kinds of interaction, gained entrepreneurial and leadership skills in real-world settings, and, therefore, might thrive in various environments beyond a classroom and have experience of structuring the “mess” (Chapter 5).

The second section of the chapter deals with the structural fragility and stagnation of the FGEs’ businesses operating in the absence of formalization, rationalization, and specialization, as well as in the absence of close engagement of the owners who think they have already earned freedom. Their cultural deservedness to have a rest from the capitalistic rush due to their high cultural capital made them unmotivated to align with the neoliberal expectations to constantly reinvent and rejuvenate their businesses and themselves. It is important that my critique is not directed at FGEs who do not fit the agenda of lifelong learning and constant self-improving, but rather I illustrate how the economic conditions have a concrete impact on business people who pursued stability but received stagnation, rendering past achievements insufficient. Their trust-based business organization initially ensured smooth management, but ultimately left the companies vulnerable to the human factor, workforce turnover, rapid economic changes, geopolitical situations, and formalized state regulation. Finally, as the whole dissertation argues, this sometimes leads to the emergence of practical “messiness”, opposed to ideal expectations: business people with once higher forms of capital may experience business stagnation, while former disadvantaged ones may equip themselves with up-to-date knowledge and experience growth (Part II, Chapter 4). The next chapter will again address cultural deservedness and tensions between parents and children who avoided family businesses. At the same time, it will argue about

intergenerational continuity in occupational self-directedness beyond the parent-child dyad and, therefore, entrepreneurial continuity.

Chapter 3. Navigating Family Tensions When Entrepreneurial Legacy Fails: From Ideas about Rupture to Continuity in Social Origin

Rupture: Regrets and Shame. Or Something More?

On a cold afternoon of Astana spring of 2023, when winter still lingered, Kairat Sabitov (60 y.o.) and I conversed in his lavish living room, while his wife prepared the family dinner in the spacious kitchen visible through a wide archway. Through the panoramic windows, one of the affluent neighborhoods of the capital city came into view. Kairat aga, an FGE and proud “Soviet engineer,” settled on a regal European-inspired style sofa. I sat facing him, on the carved chair near the massive white table adorned with golden carvings, which was intended for family celebrations. However, the contrast between the affluent living conditions and the businessman's lament over the small state pension he could count on was striking for me. The reason for this, as well as why we did not meet in his office, was that the business, after almost two decades serving as a foundation for the Sabitovs' economic transformation, was in stagnation.

In his vision, this situation was inseparable from his adult children's responsibility. From the beginning of the 2020s, his firm, which specialized in services for construction/demolition, began to shrink, exacerbated by the slowdown in construction activity but primarily due to the “betrayal” of a key employee/the relative from his wife's side (Chapter 2). Kairat aga, avoiding the business transformation and “professionalization” of the organization, entrusted the relative with too much authority and responsibilities. While Kairat aga thought he secured the “freedom” to engage in “higher pursuits” such as reading, drawing, practicing music and other hobbies, the relative broke away, taking the client base and employees to establish his own company. Had Kairat aga's adult children wanted to take part, he never would have trusted so much control to the outsider of his family, he claimed. However, neither his son nor his son-in-law was interested in

or suited for this role. Moreover, the father assumed that his daughter's aptitude for leadership would be beneficial and offered her the opportunity to open a separate business, as his firm was in a male-dominated sphere; however, she was always politely silent in response.

As the sensitive conversation unfolded, the middle-aged man's mood darkened, and he voiced deep disappointment over his relationships with adult children. He did not understand them and could not influence their career and life choices. While he provided “material” support, he could do nothing to change their lifestyles: “I gave them a higher education; each has their own home, their own cars, I paid for their weddings. But what comes for free is never appreciated.” This was his conclusion after recounting the story of his son, who, in addition to the avoidance of the business, resisted expanding his family (Kairat aga wanted to have a grandson, in addition to the granddaughter), and his daughter's family, who chose unstable creative pursuits instead of at least taking up steady office work. This dissatisfaction reflects a broader rupture between generations across transitional societies — from the fears of threats to the intergenerational contract in Asian contexts (Bulloch, 2021) to the lack of intergenerational understanding between still stably employed parents and their children (Kesküla, 2022).

Kairat aga, echoing other parents who were in the focus of this chapter, articulated the reasons for the lack of continuity not only in their “mistake” to provide economic security for the children, but also in the social rupture. The middle-aged man turned to a critique of individualization of society, positioning the younger generation as the focus of new patterns. “Maybe I shouldn't have helped them that much. They think only about themselves,” the man muttered, lowering his voice. “The Soviet Kazakhstani patriarchy model is gradually fading; children and parents are already becoming less connected,” said Kairat aga, shaking his head in disappointment. Indeed, from his perspective, the father, as a “good” patriarch, had provided

economic security for the family through business capital accumulation; however, the children moved away from continuing this pattern, focusing on independent careers and individual interests.

Moreover, the families I focus on in this chapter were unique in that the FGEs emphasized their education and “civilizedness”. For example, Kairat aga, who unpacked “Soviet patriarchy” as “the civilized one”) (see Chapter 1 for the discussion of how it went hand in hand with diverse entrepreneurial practices). While the “civilized” father defined his children as not those who internalized blind obedience “as children from villages [*auyldyn balalary*, kaz.] have”, he often lamented that his children did not adopt a familial orientation: they neither contributed to familial mobility through further capital accumulation nor listened to his normative guidance regarding life.

Still, engaging more deeply with the family’s relationships and getting to know the young adults complicated the parents’ representations. Yes, the business, which the parents, like Kairat aga, created, did not turn into a family enterprise: in their case, it not only stagnated but also ceased to generate new economic capital. However, the children were far from ungrateful individualists. When Kairat aga was “betrayed” and his business took a significant downturn starting from 2020, the whole family was affected by the distress of a challenging period. Recollecting and thinking about it was so difficult for his daughter - the 28-year-old Laura Sabitova - that I was unsure whether to press further. Lowering her eyes, weighed down by shame, she continued:

I feel guilty. When...[my father] placed such responsibility on us, we rejected it... Well, when I remember this, it just becomes so bad... for dad. It's a shame that we, like, couldn't help him.

The sense of shame caused by her deep obligation to her parents was profound. At the same time, as though she had turned it over in her mind countless times, she went on: “But then thinking about it, this is my life, I can't devote it to someone else's business, and especially to something incomprehensible and unpleasant to me”. Without excluding key intergenerational tensions tied to regrets and shame between parents and children, this chapter still draws attention to the importance of both autonomy and obligation to family, which are evident in practice.

Laura Sabitova's strong assertion of personal boundaries, as well as the protection of her flexible lifestyle from her father's criticism (she worked as a freelance digital designer), can be interpreted as evidence of the practical individualization of society. Yet, her experience also invites a closer examination of the overlap between autonomy and reliance that blurs the apparent opposition between the two. Even if she firmly avoided “incomprehensible” family business, she, at the same time, could not imagine her life in a separation from her parents, as longer interaction with the research participants demonstrated. Her aspirations for career and earnings were still inseparable from family and familial obligations. It meant repaying a debt of gratitude to the beloved parents. “I would like my parents to be able to rest already, not worry about earning money at their age. I would like to send them traveling to show how grateful I am for all they’ve done for me. But so far, neither my brother nor I has managed to do that...” said Laura with a weighty heart. The narrative of indebtedness was difficult to separate from the young adults’ longing to make their parents happy and proud, as well as their desire to lighten their parents’ burdens out of affection and love.

Furthermore, while the perspective of entrepreneurial continuity failure highlights the intergenerational rupture, the chapter shifts attention to practical continuity tied to social origin. The same work on a freelance basis, which Kairat aga criticized for the lack of stability, gave

Laura autonomy that she valued, reproducing the career orientation of her father. Laura emphasized Kairat aga's aspiration to turn work into the source of freedom, instead of the capital: “like my father, I don't want to earn all the money in the world but be free”. After an intense and stressful year in the corporate walls, she shifted to self-employment following the urge to create (within the framework of her culturally elevated standards of taste) as well as be autonomous, which resonated with the career orientation of Kairat aga in resisting work under someone else's authority and rigidity. At the same time, Laura's brother, Almas Sabitov, presented by the disappointed father as completely different from him, ended up working in the relatively stable civil service, following the exact footsteps of his grandfather and uncle from the father's side. While short interaction with the interlocutors highlighted the importance of the idea of rupture, family tensions and negative emotions tied to the loss of the business, this chapter demonstrates how extended interaction and observation (e.g., of career self-directedness of the young adults) reveal a more nuanced and fuller picture. There were family tensions and rupture, but also long-term patterns of familial continuity and renegotiation of the situation into a “positive” direction.

Framing the Analysis

The vignette above revealed more than an isolated case of conflictual dynamics between generations. It pointed to a broader paradox that might be the case in the lives of FGEs and their children, where entrepreneurial continuity failed. Chapter 2 analyzed the reasons for undermining the continuation of the business legacy tied to the gap between the emphasis on formal education, so important for the “Soviet intelligentsia,” and the informal/formal business practices in the “field”. This chapter, focusing on social origin, addresses the contradiction between the representation of regrets and shame, shaped by the idea of rupture, and the practices shaped by less evident continuity. To situate the paradox, based on longer observation as one of the research

methods, this chapter distinguishes between the ideas and practices of the research participants and engages with the synthesis of multiple bodies of literature to advance its argument.

First, this chapter draws on the concept of simultaneously intensified pressures of individualism and relational obligation evident among youth in Asian contexts (Bulloch, 2021) because it highlights how such coexistence of seemingly contradicting ideas plays an important role in my data as well. The author, who focused on a young age, “when tensions around intergenerational aspirations seem especially manifest,” conceptualized life scripts as culturally specific ideals of a “normal” life (p. 366). Bulloch (2021) distinguished between “old script,” which is shaped by familial obligation, ideas about “traditional” roles and life transitions, and “new script,” which valorized independent self-mastery. Rather than replacing one another, the study argued that these scripts overlapped, often producing double pressure on young adults. However, the theory conceptualized on the example of South Asian families is far from directly transferable to the Kazakhstani context, particularly to the cases discussed in this chapter.

I demonstrate that while the social origin of the families is inseparable from the idea of ongoing progress and modernization, as well as their relatively secure socio-economic standing, it seems to reduce the relevance of Bulloch's conclusions to the context, yet it aligns with and reinforces its core insights. On the one hand, in the families of the established FGEs, the parents took the pivotal role in familial upward mobility on themselves, rather than relying on and investing in the next generation, as was often the case in the poorer families, which were at the focus of the author's analysis. On the other hand, without treating the expressions of nostalgia for the “Soviet (“civilized”) patriarchy” as a literal account, we still observe the importance of the Soviet modernization project in the research participants’ representations of intergenerational aspirations. Like Kassymbekova and Chokobaeva's (2021) critique highlighted the need to study

Soviet modernization both as a symbolic claim to progress and as a site of uneven practices, I also treat the desire to have the next generation better than the previous one with caution, even though not as an empty sound for the particular people socialized into viewing education as a path to salvation. Indeed, this is a powerful framework that shapes intergenerational aspirations, creating strong regret and shame associated with the rupture myth, yet I also show how the practices and family histories might shape this framework back.

For this, the chapter employs the prism of social mobility to add a further dimension to studies on entrepreneurial legacy (Aldrich & Kim, 2007), complementing ideals and ideas with the career practices of entrepreneurs' adult children, shaped by broader intergenerational patterns. Studying the occupational inheritance of children of entrepreneurs in the US, the authors showed the relevance of social mobility processes, instead of looking for specific skills and training among children of businesspeople. As a result, shifting attention towards the "occupational self-directedness" of young adults helped to focus on predisposition to autonomy in career, which can be found not only in business but in some occupations as well. My data – illustrated by cases similar to the freelancer Laura Sabitova – show that while autonomy indeed can emerge as a key principle of occupational self-directedness, it is also might be simultaneously structured by gendered expectations (for male participants expectation to provide might outweigh the reproduction of the focus on autonomy in work) and by the symbolic value of familial prestige, underscoring how individual trajectories are embedded within broader social origins.

Kesküla (2018) examined the adult children of miners as the remnants of a 'citadel' of stable employment (the term borrowed from Holmström), situated in the broader context of deindustrialization, as insecure, short-term contracts with reduced protections and uncertain career paths have supplanted permanent positions. The children of the studied miners were undergoing

precaritization, as the shrinking citadel of secure mining work can no longer accommodate new entrants. However, the author also identified the orientation for alternative ‘citadels,’ such as the public sector, where stability and protection are still partially maintained, in cases with sufficient social capital.

While Kairat aga, and other FGEs in this chapter were disappointed by the rupture of business legacy and life scripts, they left unspoken the broader continuity in social origin. Returning to an illustrative example of Sabitovs: in the interviews, both generations showed negative sides of intergenerational dynamics; in practice, the daughter reproduced the autonomy and elevated taste of “intelligenstia”; the son reproduced the exact workplace of the males in the family - the citadel of state service in law enforcement. Borrowing the concept of going beyond the parent-child dyad from Nieuwenhuys (2020), who warned researchers from excluding significant others like siblings or extended family in playing a vital role in caregiving, I adapt this for the argument of the importance of the social origin of the family in the processes of intergenerational mobility. My young interlocutors are not only influenced by their parents and their career paths but are also directed toward the work trajectories and opportunities perceived as prestigious by their grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.

In this chapter, I argue that instead of centering on rupture and family tensions produced by unfulfilled expectations of business continuity, careers, and lifestyles, a theoretical perspective of social mobility allows us to shift attention to forms of continuity that mattered for my research participants. The picture is not only one of disappointment but also of mutual help, pride, and the renegotiation of ideals into culturally meaningful practices. Simply stated, not all children of FGEs become entrepreneurs -- wealthier or more “successful” -- as prescribed by the normative teleology of progress, whether rooted in ideals of the Soviet modernization or rapidly developing market.

However, their career choices can instead be understood within competing orientations of autonomy and security, both inseparable from familial notions of prestige.

To develop this argument, the chapter has two main parts. The first part explores how both parents and children grappled with intensified relational obligations and individualisation (Bulloch, 2021). It does not deny strong pressures placed on youth: parents regret the “overprotection”, and children feel shame. However, it also shows more complex picture regarding the realm of family histories and practices. For example, the fact that the parents generation never actually lived by the “old script” they nostalgically invoked, or could actively blend “old” and “new” scripts, leveraging them to optimize their time and energy for the business, helped the young adults to cope with shame, while the parents to enjoy actual help from the adult children in what they are competent. Families navigated expectations in ways that also generated pride and mutual support. This part is built around two family cases and situates them in the broader context of lifestyles, which remain inseparable from career choices.

The second part turns more directly to the career trajectories of adult children. Building on a nuanced reading of occupational self-directedness (Aldrich & Kim, 2007), I also show that the importance of autonomy can emerge as a central orientation for children of businesspeople, especially for females. However, the occupational self-directedness includes other considerations: gender expectations, and familial notion of prestige (for instance, as cultivated educators, creators) played a crucial role. This part also draws on two further family cases.

Rupture in Business and in Expansion of Familial Capital

The parents with “cultural deservedness” of former intelligentsia (Chapter 1 defined this as intelligentsia's belief in a deservedly elevated status and living standards resulting from the accumulation of cultural capital), like Kairat aga and others in Part I, feared “spoiling” their

children; rather, their role was as providers and engines of upward mobility. They did not consume conspicuous luxury brands, prioritizing investment in education, security, and comfort in everyday life. Their support resembled the urge to substitute for the state but also with an emphasis on quality: parents sought to guarantee their children housing in desirable districts, modern refurbishment, reliable cars, high-quality appliances, and access to both foreign and local universities. This provision went beyond basic needs, blending security with comfort, yet their prosperity was rarely visible to outsiders. Similar to Kyrgyz first entrepreneurs (Schröder, 2021), the families maintained a modest public demeanor, and children themselves appreciated these privileges without taking them for granted.

Nevertheless, thinking about the stagnating and disappearing business that the FGEs created, working tirelessly, the parents instrumentalized the criticism of individualization that, allegedly, affected their children. Indeed, it is the parents who contributed not only to the rocketing of individual mobility but also to the familial one, providing their children with starting advantages that many lack, such as higher education and assets. In turn, none of their young adults aimed to multiply the capital and opportunities their parents' business created and to extend the upward trajectory further. While the scenario of a family business with intrafamily succession was perceived as an ideal encountered by the research participants in books or popular culture, this chapter explores how the processes of socioeconomic mobility unfold alternatively. The young adults have distanced themselves from business and entrepreneurship, and Chapter 2 tied some of the reasons for this to their upbringing and inherited cultural deservedness. This chapter goes deeper into the effects of such “rupture” on intergenerational relations and the career trajectories of the young adults. The research participants of two generations presented in this section operated within a complex field of forces, though these not only constrained them but also opened up

opportunities. Having their powers, social origin, and forms of capital, my research participants acted in culturally meaningful ways to cope with constraints and seize opportunities, though it was never easy.

Ideals and Practices of Reciprocity: Rethinking Old and New Scripts

While Kairat Sabitov mourned the “too individualized” life script of the next generation, he was never more connected to his own Soviet “mass intelligentsia” parents or extended family himself. Because Laura Sabitova was my close school friend, our relationship preceded and outlasted the formal fieldwork, shaping the depth and continuity of our interactions. The specifics of their family history, as I observed it and as the family members confirmed, were that they prioritized commitment to personal independence, simultaneously mixing it with relational obligation long before their current younger generation. While the 60-year-old businessman emphasized the fading of the “Soviet Kazakh patriarchal model” because “children and parents are already becoming less connected”, his children and other relatives claimed that he never embraced pure relationism and compliance with the lifestyle advice of his own father. Similar to the disadvantaged families in Bulloch’s (2021) South Asian work, where adult children have been torn between two intensified pressures to develop autonomously and a deep obligation to their parents and relatives, the families here felt similar pressure but could renegotiate it using family history.

Practices that combined the ideals of self-mastery with relational obligations had already developed and taken on distinct forms among the Sabitovs well before the introduction of the values identified with the free market. During the family celebration, the FGEs’ own father, a Soviet-era officer in law enforcement in his 80s, laughed as he told a story about how he pushed Kairat aga to get married after graduation and arranged a Soviet-style wedding celebration where all the relatives from the village of their lineage origin came. At the same time, after all the rituals

were over, he discouraged the son and his young wife from living in parental apartment, prioritizing the autonomy and independence of the young generation and themselves in a well-earned retirement. About twenty years later, Kairat aga reproduced the mix of relational obligations and deep appreciation of independence in his own approach to his children. After the time he spent and while the new apartment he bought for his son, Almas, was still under construction, Kairat aga did not allow newlyweds to live under one roof with him, prioritizing his and their privacy, so the young adults rented an apartment.

While the Sabitovs – the father and the adult children – repeatedly faced difficulties in intergenerational family relations due to the failure of intrafamily business succession when the topic arose, they also managed to apply culturally meaningful practices to move past it each time, using the norms of reciprocity adopted in their family. In the case of Kairat aga, the orientation of care and economic opportunities was toward securing the advantages for the family he created, rather than for the family he was born in. The FGE himself was never raised within the framework of exclusively prioritizing obligations to his parents and extended family, but rather with the ideas of education and self-sufficiency as salvation. Kairat aga never entered state service like his father, although he trained as a Soviet engineer, part of the technical intelligentsia of that time. He never lived with his parents as an adult, yet as a student, he relied on their material support, and they later helped him purchase his first property. This simultaneously did not mean that he had a purely autonomous or family-oriented lifestyle.

Instead, the independence of Kairat aga existed within the broader framework of culturally meaningful practices. The family members were close but would never live together; they helped each other when in need, and participated in all large family gatherings and life cycle celebrations, reinforcing traditional hierarchies and roles, but exercised independent decision-making. When

Kairat aga's parents became less mobile in their later life, he helped them to move closer by contributing financially to exchange their old apartment for one in a better city district and covering the costs of renovation. The businessman and his family could visit their old parents daily, but they did not consider living in an extended family. The young Sabitovs – Almas and Laura – inherited the same mix of prioritizing autonomy and intergenerational support. The following parts illustrate the layered dynamics of individualism and relational obligation between Kairat aga and his children, as well as the importance of their social origin.

While the Sabitovs' young generation did not want to “devote” their lives to their father's business, the adult children represented the ideas of inseparability from their parental families. The young adults might negotiate that they are deeply obligated to their parents and want to support them financially or through gifts in return:

Well, personally, I want to [pay off]. I don't think that everyone should do this. Like, people [who studied] on grants, who were easy children (*laughs*) [...] in my head, they are not obliged to return anything to anyone, because they have already made life easier for their parents (Laura Sabitova, the 28-year-old daughter of FGE).

Being raised in a framework where talent, intellect, and formal education were valued above all else (Chapter 2), Laura was ashamed that she obtained a higher education with the help of her father's money, while the simultaneously intensified ideals of relational obligation and individualization added to the feeling. Living in an apartment and driving a car that her father bought for her, she was grateful she did not have to pay rent and spend money on a taxi, though the fact that she could not afford expensive presents or send her parents on vacation embarrassed her. However, in other contexts, the young woman emphasized that she was proud of providing for herself since her graduation, especially discussing it after the words of her grandfather about

her father being “problematic in youth”. The following scene from the family’s everyday life further complicates the dichotomy between seemingly “traditional” relational obligations and “modern” individualism.

Knowledge-based Skills: Mutual Help and Pride

Laura Sabitova, along with her brother Almas, attempted to care for their parents in various ways, using the knowledge they acquired during their formal education. The only positive contribution the FGE father recognized in his son, Almas, was the period when he served as a specialist communicating in English with foreign workers on a construction field, while an outsider translator “ran away” from the dusty, dirty work site. Regarding work aspects, being fluent in English, Laura also helped her father during some business trips and later with email correspondence with foreign partners, as he tried to recover the ways of capital accumulation he had lost. The children also occasionally helped their father with the effects of digitalization on business, which he feared as threats rather than opportunities. Kairat aga expressed disappointment over problem-solving becoming more difficult in the digital era. Instead of simply calling logistic companies and other partners, explaining the issue, and requiring an assigned person to take responsibility for finding a solution, he was met with “robots” - automated customer service that failed to grasp the nuances of his problem.

A common example of Laura helping her father was the issue with the telecommunications company. For three months, the company requested repayment of outstanding debts, though the FGE always paid on time. I accompanied Laura when she offered to help her father by going with him to the company's office. Kairat aga sat at the customer service desk of the provider, but began to boil with anger rapidly as the young employee did not understand how to solve this problem. Laura entered the exchange with the specialist and calmly asked for a printout of payment details.

While her father, arms crossed, walked back and forth anxiously, two young women scrolled through payment histories, cross-checking every detail. After about thirty minutes, Laura and the employee found the misplaced funds. It turned out that the payments were misallocated for numbers that did not even exist due to a mistake in the completed form and its scanning process. Laura remained composed - as she was a disciplined person avoiding confrontation in life (Chapter 2) - yet determined to resolve the issue that had created difficulties for her father.

While the FGEs might say they regretted the “excessive” investments in children and “returned” lack of motivation compared to some other young adults, instances like these reveal the everyday life layer of their relationship. Later, the proud father remembered the situation when the company admitted the error and reversed the payment for three months due to Laura's help several times. He emphasized the competence of his adult children in tasks he preferred to avoid, such as dealing with digitalization or paperwork, as well as their commitment to helping. In such moments, the regrets and the ideal expectations about intrafamily succession gave way to quiet pride, recognizing that his children have their own strengths highly valued in an evolving market, though different from his own. Furthermore, the adult children kept building on the high cultural capital and opportunities he gave them, and the standards he set for them, even if not in entrepreneurship.

The Sabitovs were a family where two generations had already been born in a city and internalized the importance of independent self-mastery; their way of mixing this with relational obligations was unique. Building on the next case of the Tasbulatovs, who had an extended experience of coming from a Soviet kolkhoz and large family, the next section explores alternative ways to navigate the intensified pressure of new and old scripts. I maintain that the Tasbulatovs also transform external pressures into opportunities.

Navigating Intensified Pressures: Old and New Scripts Overlap

Like Kairat Sabitov, Mira Tasbulatova reflected on the reasons for the failed business succession and “egoistic” lifestyles of her children, blaming her excessive financial support of the children. The sixty-one-year-old businesswoman, raised in a large family, had been a strong and uncompromising leader from her village school days to her university years after moving to the city for higher education. Chapter 1 illustrated her career trajectory from a university faculty to the humble beginnings in the precious metals trade to the ownership of her own luxury jewelry boutique. Encountering so many highly driven young people around, citing the example of proactive youth who migrated to big cities from the “South” or villages and sent monthly support to their families, the businesswoman believed that she made her children “unmotivated” because she was still the caregiver, not the care receiver. “I clipped their wings,” sighed Mira khanyim during the interview at the coffee shop of the mall where her boutique was located. At the same time, after the interview with her daughter, Amina, I was struck by her mother's metaphor, as it did not align with the daughter's remarkable trajectory. The young woman had an impressive academic and career profile and had even ventured into entrepreneurship: after launching and managing an educational center of her own and briefly helping with her mother's business, she decided to step away and to build an independent and flexible self-employment as a counselor.

Unlike cases like Kairat Sabitov, who were born in the Soviet cities, the FGEs, similar to Mira khanyim, were raised in extended families in the peripheries, though they later acquired cultural deservedness as well. Chapter 2 showed how this shaped their parenting styles: such parents not only focused on formal education but also wanted their children to have various experiences in various settings. Mira khanyim and all her siblings achieved urban mobility and established their own families, yet the businesswoman did not have purely autonomous, self-sustained parents, like Kairat aga: since the 1990s, Mira khanyim's mother relocated to live with

and depend on her children as she did not have an adequate pension or privatized housing. Nevertheless, prioritizing pure relational obligation as the “old script” was still not the story of the businesswoman herself, which also relieved the pressure on her children in practice.

Even though the FGE might legitimately feel regret for her “excessive” material support of her children, believing it led to over-prioritization of their individual interests, while the children really feel shame for not contributing to parental welfare, this case is more nuanced than that. The exact practices and expectations rooted in relational obligation helped Mira khanyim and Amina to focus on their individual mobility and careers because other family members covered the needs in the domestic sphere. Yet, on the one hand, the family tensions arose when Amina's business involvement did not last long because of her mother's aversion to “modernization”. Moreover, it was inseparable from the general critique of the lifestyle of the young adults. The businesswoman speculated that if she had encouraged her children to become more self-sufficient, they might have been more motivated to grow the capital she had worked so hard to accumulate, rather than prioritizing elements of the “new script” that lay beyond her understanding of a normal life order. She was concerned about her thirty-five-year-old daughter's lifestyle, which she regarded as somewhat unsuitable for an adult:

I always supported her [the daughter's] art classes. Now I think I should not have done it. She spends her time traveling and visiting museums, but it is time for her to settle down, get married, and prioritize her family instead. She does not even cook for herself.

While her daughter distanced herself from the family business, she also, reportedly, defied gendered norms of being a caring wife and mother, as well as age-related expectations—viewing her thirties not as too late, but as an appropriate time to pursue her childhood passions. Mira khanyim believed this might have been different had she not provided for her so generously. At the

same time, the FGE kept helping her son's family financially, being the main breadwinner for them, which did not align with the normative gender and age expectations or old script, too.

Similar to the Sabitovs and others, the intensification of the two ideal scripts shaped the ideas of the mother and her children, creating regrets and shame. Amina Tasbulatova also expressed frustration due to the limits in her mind produced by a privileged economic status. She and her brother were shielded from financial concerns since the business success of her mother overlapped with their last school years. Especially, it was strong in times of self-comparison to the ambitious peers, who had to be proactive and limitless to achieve capital for themselves as well as their parents in need: providing housing, and ensuring basic needs, while driving aspirations for improved livelihoods.

However, on the other hand, outside the context of such comparisons and discussions, the family navigated the pressure of simultaneously intensified old and new scripts in their ordinary life, as if the magic lost its power once the spell remained unspoken. Still important as an imagination of how things should be, the ethnography revealed that the scripts of being simultaneously autonomous and obligated to one's family were present for two generations, yet not consistently followed. The family histories also helped to manage the “negative feelings” that regularly arose. For example, reflecting on the ideals of a devoted wife, caring mother, and grateful daughter, rather than self-discovery and hobbies, the young woman contextualized her mother's experience, for whom extended family provided opportunities to overlap the two scripts. Mirakhanym was supported by her sisters and mother in the aspects of unpaid caregiving and family labor while she focused on her career and entrepreneurial success. Therefore, the mother's perception of herself as struggling with the effects of individualization on her adult children was

less clear-cut in practice, similar to Kairat aga, who himself was not burdened by the old script's priority for relational obligation.

Amina Tasbulatova recalled that, unlike all her cousins, she was always encouraged to study well by her parents at the expense of household chores. This was also a mirroring of her mother, who contributed as a manager and provider for business and family, while other relatives took on chores and caregiving on themselves:

It was interesting, apa [mother's mother] stayed with my aunt, but she spent most of her time with us because every day since the 6th grade, we would come, have snacks, and in the evening our parents would come home from work and we would go to apa and my aunt to have dinner. [...] We might still have no food at home. These days, when apa has passed away, we go to my aunt. [...] My cousins used to tell me [when they helped with chores and Amina was exempted by her parents]: “When we get married, you'll work hard for us.” I said, “Okay.” And when we grew up, they laughed: “You've gone to your studies, we can manage without you now”. Well, each to their fate (*laughs*).

While there was an intergenerational rupture in terms of business as a career path, the daughter was an educated leader among the cousins, reproducing the path of her mother, who was also considered the most successful among her siblings, which relieved her of unpaid care responsibilities. The young woman might feel shame tied to ideals of deep obligation to her parents and relatives, to whom she was so grateful and would like to meet their expectations regarding two “scripts”. At the same time, she had the space to defend her own path, as her mother herself was not only constrained by the “old script” ideals of relational obligation, but also had leveraged them to create opportunities and succeed on her own terms.

This section has shown how the intensified ideas of two scripts that affected the youth in some Asian societies might shape intergenerational tensions between the research participants. I showed that similar ideal scenarios are part of intergenerational aspirations in the Kazakhstani context, but at the same time, the families in this chapter can navigate the pressure of ideas, renegotiating culturally meaningful practices that took place in their families. The section explored how the failed intrafamily succession of business facilitated the influence of the intensification of seemingly opposite but unclear old and new scripts for parents and adult children. The parents, analyzing the reasons for their children prioritizing personal fulfillment over family expectations, regretted the excessive material provision for their children and the increased individualization of society, rather than their own resistance to transforming business. The children felt shame for not meeting the family expectations on normal life, while deeply feeling their obligations to their parents, but were not ready to take full responsibility for their parents' business.

However, what is more important outside of the framework of the sensitive theme is that their practices did not really oppose the norms tied to the origin of their families. For example, the families viewed reciprocity as not a direct transaction between the two generations, and therefore, it was more important to support the young ones so that they would be able to support their next generations in turn. This did not exclude mutual help between parents and children. The adult children helped their parents in need, applying their high cultural capital and up-to-date knowledge, which were highly valued instances for the family. The next section will explore how the career trajectories of adult children are shaped by continuity in social origin.

Occupational Self-Directedness: Autonomy, Security, and Familial Prestige

Having examined the negative emotions associated with rupture in intergenerational aspirations, we can now turn to career practices to observe how elements of actual continuity also

emerge. Studying the occupational inheritance of children of entrepreneurs in the US, research proved the importance of the theoretical perspective of social mobility as it is used in social sciences (Aldrich & Kim, 2007). Instead of looking for specific skills and training among children of businesspeople, the authors suggested shifting attention towards their “occupational self-directedness”. For example, findings showed that entrepreneurs’ children can direct themselves toward autonomy in work, which can be found not only in business but in some occupations as well. Based on the example of my young research participants who avoided business, this section contributes to expanding the model. I add the importance of prestige related to the occupational direction, inseparable from the social origin. Therefore, there can be rupture within the parent-child dyad, but the young adults still might reproduce prestigious occupations in the context of other relatives. I also show how occupational self-directedness can be structured by gendered expectations (for male participants, the expectation of stable provision may outweigh the emphasis on autonomy in work).

One more case where the FGE expressed regret over investing in their children “too much” was the family of the Yussupovs. The distinctiveness of their case lay in the father’s deliberate withdrawal from providing his children with housing or other material assets to motivate them to pursue their individual achievements. Igor Yussupov, the 51-year-old FGE, funded the higher education for his daughter Karina in Europe and kept paying for the undergraduate program of his son (not eligible for the study and did not participate as he was not a postgraduate). Igor Vladimirovich’s parental involvement also included the choice of the educational direction for Karina, insisting that she had to pursue a career in STEM, while her passion was languages and arts. After she graduated with a master’s degree, she returned to Karaganda to recover after a stressful period of thesis writing and overall challenging years of grasping heavily theoretical

material that did not resonate with her. Karina described her first postgraduate years as a depressing period, made heavier by family tensions: the father, who expected her help in the business, while she felt hurt that his business and mobility plans came at her expense.

Karina was in her hometown but deliberately distanced herself from her father's enterprise (Chapter 2), whereas for Igor Vladimirovich, employing a trustworthy professional with a foreign degree in his company seemed like the most logical turn. This was the time when he made it clear that his material help for his children was over after their graduation: they had to earn a living for housing and other needs by themselves. Compared to the young Sabitovs and Tasbulatovs, such a father's claim made it even easier for Karina Yussupova to be firm about her avoidance of “family” businesses. As Chapter 2 described, in the business organization that depended on the figure of Igor Vladimirovich and was rejected by Karina as “messy”, she considered only one option to help her father: “I can help him with selling the businesses”.

To support her financial independence for making such bold claims, she had to start working almost immediately after her arrival, though she did not want to jump into the field of her studies right away. Keeping it gentle to herself while she was recovering, she started to work as an English tutor, simultaneously learning a new language and preparing for an application to a PhD abroad as a backup plan. While gaining independence from parental involvement and visions for her life trajectories, she was uncertain whether pursuing further studies and an academic career was truly her aspiration, or whether it was simply that learning was what she excelled at. Being an engineering or technology scholar was a prestigious option for upward intergenerational mobility in the understanding of her family, originating from the intelligentsia of school teachers and engineers. However, her stay in Karaganda was unexpectedly prolonged because the pandemic broke out and the uncertainty related to it persisted worldwide. She stayed in Karaganda for three

years in one of the apartments of her father, which was not meant for her to own and sell, just to stay. She described living in a separate apartment, earning her own money doing what she enjoyed, but still in her hometown and under the protection of her family as her “comfort zone”. Even though there were conflicts with her father regarding the unmet business expectations, she still felt deeply obliged to her family and contributed with care for her mother, who experienced temporary health difficulties, and her little sister, who - as Karina thought - needed one more significant adult involved in her upbringing.

Nevertheless, although she earned well by teaching English, and cared for her family in many ways, this was seen as insufficient in terms of familial prestige tied to career. Staying in Karaganda and having a flexible job satisfied Karina individually, but her life and career aspirations were also embedded within family and origin layers. A third-generation urbanite, she comes from a family that has long resided in the prestigious center of Karaganda, a neighborhood historically allocated to party workers, leading specialists, and intelligentsia. Her father was a mid-sized businessman himself and made a further leap in socioeconomic status for the whole family. Given how much he had invested in her STEM education abroad, her stay in her hometown and her job in teaching felt like a temporary option only. Along with the search for autonomy in career trajectories by entrepreneurs’ children, addressing the familial expectations of the prestige of the occupation and its location (e.g. if not contributing to a “family” business, staying in a “peripheral” home city was symbolically inferior for Karina and her family) might have a strong impact on the occupational self-directedness of the adult children. In the case of families with inherited cultural deservedness, occupational prestige is one of the practical steps to navigate the pressures of intensified individualism and familism. This means that even though in the framework of the dyad “businessperson parent - adult child” there are processes of downward mobility, it might be

important for the young research participants to meet high levels of prestige set by other relatives within the extended family.

Autonomy/Prestige

Aldrich and Kim (2007) describe autonomy at work as the independence and self-direction characteristic of self-employment or some occupations, where individuals exercise control over their work organization, pace, and decision-making, in contrast to the constraints of wage labor. At the same time, this very reliance on oneself undermines work security, as responsibility for employment, income, and social or legal protection rests solely with the individual worker. This contrasts with working in citadels of stable employment, which offer institutional backing and a higher extent of predictability in exchange for a worker's contribution, though the autonomy might be very limited due to rigid structures and schedules, bureaucratic and hierarchical constraints. Of course, the occupation of the research participants as well as the gender expectations around them are not stable, fixed categories; I rather show a snapshot of the mobility processes. I will illustrate the case of Karina Yussupova to highlight the importance of familial prestige and the example of following a middle ground between the extremes of autonomy and security. Initially, she pursued autonomous occupation as an English tutor, but later transitioned to employment in the private sector in Astana—offering neither high security nor high autonomy—because it aligned with familial expectations of prestige and moving up. Yet, her direction was to gain work experience and later obtain a position where she could have more autonomy.

Coming back to her hometown from Europe to support her financial independence from her parents, Karina first started working in an education center, and then switched to freelancing. With a passion for languages and a talent for teaching, Karina's first job was at a language center. However, she quickly became disappointed in the exploitative system of wage labor. The young

woman emphasized that her boss did not respect her value, her contribution, her time, and just made use of her discipline and high sense of responsibility in exchange for a locally competitive salary but which fell short of her aspirations and, especially, the level of her father's investments.

Working for a demanding owner of a language school taught Karina to adapt, to set boundaries, and to assert herself. Yet, the systemic constraints of the workplace continued to provoke resistance. After six months, she left the company to pursue self-employment as an online English tutor on an international platform. This opportunity gave Karina everything she wanted: schedule and geographical flexibility, intellectual and decision-making independence, and a globally competitive wage - everything depended on her and the market. Due to her level of English, high cultural capital, erudition, and self-discipline she acquired within her rich learning experience (Chapter 2), this arrangement fit her “ideally” as she was in high demand as a tutor on the international platform. She thrived in such work conditions with high autonomy and where the extent of personal contacts was minimized with the help of the technology-driven features, as opposed to the previous experience :

[before] I worked in a system where you were accountable, where you were checked, where you couldn't choose who to teach, where the client was always right, with several levels [of accountability]: there was a manager, there was a director, there were students, and sometimes their parents, it was always very difficult. [...] [In opposite,] Here the students can choose another tutor and I can choose not to work with some students, that is, there will be no clashes, no pressure (Karina Yussupova, 26-year-old daughter of FGE).

This excerpt connects to the discussion in Chapter 2, where young participants such as Karina Yussupova are shown to hold high cultural capital yet have little exposure to real-life situations involving conflicting interests. The young woman was glad that she could avoid clashes on the online platform that was organized clearly and with minimal informality, so she could focus on intellectual work, while her strong self-discipline, internalized in her educational experience and high cultural capital, gave her advantages and competitiveness. As a result, the young woman could choose the students she wanted to work with and set the rates for tutorship per hour that satisfied her. Nevertheless, this was never considered the “real” work for Karina’s family and environment.

After three years’ “gap” in Karaganda, enjoying autonomous work that brought Karina fulfillment, the opportunity to care for her family, Karina “had to” move on to meet the expectations of familial prestige. She already firmly distanced herself from the “family business” but also postponed the idea of building a career in academia, the option that met the family’s expectations of prestige, as she would be the first doctoral holder in the family. Yet, she was not ready to pursue this path, as it would mean being far from her family again—especially since Karina did not consider local universities. Instead, she returned to wage labor, though in the field that promised potential uplifting in the meaning of familial prestige. She went corporate as a Strategy Consultant in a foreign consulting company based in Astana that provides engineering, tech, and business solutions, even though she did not want this. A one-year contract was her first significant step in leveraging her STEM degree and developing a “real” career. She also moved to the capital city from Karaganda, a move that meant a step up symbolically while keeping her relatively close to her family. At the same time, she lost the advantages that self-employment had offered her, which was a painful experience. The demanding regime, authoritarian bosses

permitted harsh treatment of employees, various levels of accountability, and normalized unpaid overwork in the corporate sphere weighed heavily on her.

Still, Karina Yussupova oriented herself toward the promise of greater autonomy at work in the future, believing that gaining experience in the corporate world and distinguishing herself as a top employee through constant self-improvement would lead her there. Shared humor with friends helped her mitigate the pressures of corporate life. Using her private social media to mock the life in her company, she showed me her private Instagram stories about corporate survival with “overbearing manager” (“*boss samodur*”, rus.), nepotism, and aggression from clients. Yet she persevered, supported by her parents’ belief in her achievements. Once she entered this world, she worked hard and responsibly, played according to its rules, believing that her initial challenging experience and sacrifices would eventually grant her greater control over her work.

While this dissertation was being written, her first-year contract was coming to an end, and she had already secured another job offer—one that advanced her position on the corporate ladder and was more autonomous. Compared to being a consultant accountable to several departments, the new occupation was project managing in a similar company and required her to reinforce high-level planning, delegation, and leadership skills in exchange for a higher extent of autonomy. While her father Igor Yussupov was unhappy about her distancing from the family businesses, Karina engaged in the neoliberal pursuit of proactivity, flexibility, and adaptability, echoing her father’s approach during the early phase of capital accumulation that enabled individual and familial upward mobility (Chapter 1). After one year of challenging corporate life, she had already moved toward the occupation with more autonomy, supporting Aldrich and Kim’s (2007) findings as well as the familial notion of occupational prestige and its location. Further longitudinal studies of similar cases are needed to capture mobility processes more continuously as we can find out

what will influence the decisions of the FGEs' children with similar experiences to Karina Yussupova - concerted cultivation, cultural deservedness, and corporate working experience, including the need for constant self-improvement and adaptability - to eventually transition into entrepreneurship or to stay within the framework of employment.

Security/Prestige

Compared to the freelance digital designer Laura Sabitova, or self-employed educational counselor Amina Tasbulatova, Karina Yussupova's career trajectory steps looked different, and still autonomy was at the center of occupational self-directedness. At the same time, all young women reproduced the prioritization of high cultural capital and elevated taste, which their parents passed on to them. However, it was different for the male research participants, even the siblings of the aforementioned young women. They felt more pressure to earn a stable income as the main breadwinners. In Chapter 2, I explored the case of Almas, Kairat Sabitov's son, who was labeled by the father as lacking leadership talent and who joined the family firm right after graduation because he did not know where to start with his law degree. The unclear organization, confusing responsibilities, and “inappropriate” work ethic of other workers in the father's company did not meet the expectations of the young adult about the labor market, while the “dirty work” of a construction site manager depressed him and caused minor health problems (Chapter 2). So, at the time of working for his father, Almas searched for another job. However, the more job interviews he did and the more he listened to his peers, the deeper his disillusionment with the labor market became as the corporate world demanded a lot without offering security in return. Two years after our interview with Almas, I was surprised to hear from Laura that her brother had become a civil servant, while he had never been interested in such a path before.

The private sector, ranging from small companies to large corporations, demanded extensive experience, an ability to withstand an environment of constant stress and overwork, and regular self-improvement from an applicant, but did not offer minimal work security. Having had his initial work experience shaped by the overlap of family and business, Almas Sabitov found the labor market's lack of job security—reflected in layoffs, insufficiently paid leaves, and inadequate retirement benefits—unsatisfactory. Even though working for his father was difficult (Chapter 2), including his temperamental management style mixed with their difficult interpersonal relations, it had its advantages – a higher level of security. His father-boss took responsibility for and cared about Almas and his family in the short and long run. If the young man struggled, he could count on his father to pay for the days off due to sickness, family issues, or COVID-19 lockdowns.

The FGE - Kairat Sabitov - took responsibility for his son, and employed him officially to pay for health insurance and pension contributions generously. In turn, some of his other employees in the company might have been on short-term contracts or employed unofficially. When his granddaughter was born and his daughter-in-law stopped working, Kairat aga stepped in to support the young family—offering financial help, extra bonuses, and days off when needed. Later, when Almas broke his leg on the construction site, he also covered the costs of his treatment and recovery. The contrast between this and the corporate world only made Almas's occupational self-directedness a more complex issue. At the same time, the young man could no longer keep pace with his former classmates or even younger peers in the legal field—the discipline of his higher education. During the five years he spent performing various, often undefined tasks in his father's firm, his peers with law degrees had already established themselves in corporations or private practice, adapting to the field's increasing specialization and complexity.

Two years after I talked to Almas, I was surprised to hear from Laura that her brother had become a civil servant. He had joined a law enforcement agency, though he did not mention such a direction in his occupational aspirations. In contrast, he emphasized his intolerance of rigid structures, while his family members, with whom I met, affirmed that he lacked military-like discipline and orderliness, and for them, it was also a surprise at first. Yet, in retrospect, Almas's occupational choice made sense. First, there was a clear familial continuity, though not along the parent-child line: Almas's grandfather and uncle—Kairat aga's father and brother—had both spent their entire careers in the same law enforcement agency. Therefore, while the middle-aged businessman would want his children to be “better than me”, the civil service at least did not lower the family prestige standards.

Second, the state service offered what the private sector could not: a higher level of security. It was the citadel of stable employment that, in exchange for the commitment, heavy workloads, minimized work independence, high accountability, rigid hierarchy, and obedience to internal discipline and formal/informal rules, offered more security than the private sector. Instead of pursuing occasional profit in business, self-employment, which meant full self-reliance, or building a career while being on the payroll of a company with precarious job security, he chose to draw upon institutional safety nets. The young man could rely on job security, income security with a stable monthly salary, paid holidays, bonuses, sick leave compensation, as well as long-term social protections and guarantees like pension contributions or priority placement in educational institutions for his children. What had first seemed like an unexpected turn now appeared as the logical choice for stability/prestige in Almas's occupational self-directedness in a precarious labor market.

At the same time, it is also important to highlight the agency of my research participants in navigating the pressures of social and family expectations. While this chapter proposes an extended model of occupational self-directedness, it is important to note that young adults do not necessarily align with it. Choosing alternative paths often comes at a cost, expressed through familial and social pressure, disappointment, and shame. The case of Tasbulatovs - where the mother was an FGE and owns a jewelry business - illustrates that. Although state service can be a citadel of stable employment, Amina Tasbulatova's brother Maksat could not endure its rigid system in the long run. While his sister worked in a large educational institution, shifted to self-employment, tried independent entrepreneurship, and worked with their mother on the transformation of her jewelry business, Maksat's first career choice was prestigious and secure state service. Following in the footsteps of his policeman father and moving from Karaganda to the capital city, he brought honor to the family. However, after several years, he left the system, disillusioned by its corrupt practices and pressure from superiors: Maksat refused to sign documents that would make him accountable for the decision he deemed wrong.

Disillusioned and stressed young man's occupational self-directedness shifted toward autonomy rather than security. During the period of data collection, his family relied on flexible yet unstable forms of self-employment, while largely depending on the financial support of his mother, a businesswoman. At the time of my interaction with the family, the Tasbulatovs avoided discussing his current employment. Later, the mother, with a visible discontent, said that her son had taken up work as a driver on an online carpooling platform, using his own car for city-to-city trips -- a kind of occupation that fell short of the family's expectations. He transported passengers between Astana and Karaganda, earning what remained after covering fuel and other expenses. Although the work was demanding and potentially dangerous, and could offer a decent income

with flexible hours, it lacked prestige in his family's eyes, who continued to uphold ideals of superiority of intellectual labor.

Conclusion

The infiltration of economic rationality into personal domains has blurred boundaries between previously distinct realms of family and work (Brown, 2015; Fehér, 2009; Foucault, 2010; Gershon, 2011). As Feher's (2009) concept of the portfolio manager suggests, the neoliberal pressure for self-valorization unfolds through continuous investment in every sphere of life: irrational desires, moral orientations, affective ties can all be converted into assets for self-enhancement (Lee, 2018). In this context, the involvement of beloved family members and especially adult children in business does not simply serve as a means of mobilizing flexible and cheap family labour (Narotzky & Smith, 2006) but are addressed as a form of care and self-care overlap in this dissertation: care for loved ones and self-care through the circulation of familial capital and familial mobility. Educated children investing their skills in parents' mid-sized firms and parents channeling resources into their children's potential embody the ideal family-work overlap in a long-run.

However, the outcomes often diverge from expectations. When adult children reject entrepreneurship altogether, the resulting disappointment is often framed as a rupture—a failed transmission of both capital and intergenerational contract. In light of the intensifying tension between discourses of individualization and relational obligation observed in Asian contexts (Bulloch, 2021), such ruptures are experienced and narrated by my interlocutors as family tragedies.

Nevertheless, this chapter, drawing on longer observation and interaction with the families and the broader social mobility prism, adds a further dimension to studies of entrepreneurial

legacy. It moves beyond focusing on ideals and aspirations toward an analysis of the career practices of entrepreneurs' adult children, whose pursuit of prestige remains deeply entangled with their social origins. Shifting the analytic focus toward occupational self-directedness (Aldrich & Kim, 2007) among young adults highlights predispositions toward autonomy that manifest not only in entrepreneurship but also in some occupations.

Furthermore, my data show that while autonomy does emerge as a key organizing principle, it is simultaneously shaped by gendered expectations (for young men work stability and security might overweigh autonomy and risk) and by the symbolic value of familial prestige. These patterns underscore how individual trajectories remain deeply embedded within the structure of social origin. Rather than centering on rupture, failed succession, or downward mobility, I therefore propose understanding these intergenerational negotiations through the model of occupational self-directedness within competing orientations of autonomy/prestige and security/prestige.

Part II – “Family Firms”: Optimization of Life Realms in Times of Changes and Challenges

Chapter 4. Partnership of Human Portfolios: Neoliberal Business Education in

Optimization of Family-Work Overlap

This chapter addresses the cases in which processes of intergenerational mobility manifest as orientations toward entrepreneurial continuity. This became possible not despite but because of the pressures of neoliberal human capital subjectivity, in which all life realms become assets, appreciating or depreciating the value of one's portfolio (Fehér, 2009). In contrast to Part I, where families prioritize claims for cultural deservedness (belief in the natural translation of the high cultural capital to middle-class lifestyles (Bissenova, 2012; Rivkin-Fish, 2009)), this chapter focuses on how ideals of constant self-improvement reshape both the businesses and family relations, while facilitating the optimization of overlapping realms. At first glance, these cases might appear as success stories where constant learning is promoted as a salvation: upward trajectories from small-scale bazaar trade toward larger, diversified, “modern” enterprises where family members work side by side. However, this chapter approaches the narratives critically, examining the kinds of subjects, relationships, and moral hierarchies that have been produced.

Drawing on Fehér's (2009) critique of human capital, I treat this not as a neutral mechanism of self-improvement but as a highly valued neoliberal form of subjectification into a portfolio. Entrepreneurial continuity, in these cases, does not emerge as a natural outcome, but as a moral project tied to business transformation, guided by a global hierarchy of knowledge that defines what counts as professional business practice. Moreover, because social responsibility is no longer a matter of public institutions, but private actors (Lessenich, 2011), where care and affective labor also can become an asset in one's portfolio (Lee, 2018), I illustrate these family firm cases as the examples of desired optimization of the family-work overlap, through which adult children became

involved in family businesses, forming a desire to own and control business processes. In contexts in which the boundaries between production and reproduction, family and work, and care and self-care become increasingly blurred, this chapter examines the factors that enable FGE parents and their adult children to optimize individual and familial mobility through business education.

The chapter, therefore, contributes to the main paradox of Part II. On the one hand, the prioritization of neoliberal human capital subjectivity and business transformation can enable continuous intergenerational business, which did not occur in the cases from Part I. In this chapter, it is the first-generation entrepreneurs (FGEs) and parents who, through neoliberal ideas of self-improvement, age-defying learning, and organizational restructuring, create conditions in which adult children become interested in joining the family business and imagine entrepreneurship as a desirable life trajectory. Moreover, this opens the prospects of “optimization” of already overlapping realms of family and work, care and self-care, and individual and familial mobility for both parents and children. On the other hand, as seen especially in Chapter 5, where the expected generational hierarchy is contested because it is adult children who emphasize portfolio thinking as the ideal, this chapter also illustrates the complexities of optimization. Indeed, this is a story of success, but only from the perspective of reinvestment and further familial capital accumulation. This is also a story of intergenerational mobility where subjectivity governance has its own costs.

As an illustration, this chapter compares two families in which parents and children share prioritization of neoliberal ideals, including self-improvement, constant learning, and innovation. First, the Smirnov family, a couple of FGEs who own and manage a meat business in Karaganda, saw changes in their family involvement over time. Their son joined the business in the late 2010s but eventually left as the “messy” organization put immense responsibility on him and led to harsh

family conflicts. Their daughter, however, joined the business during its transformation in 2020 and subsequently became a promoted and trusted manager up to the present. Second, the Akhmetovs, who established a tea production located in the industrial area of Astana, where the FGE is the founder, Turar, with his brother and his brother-in-law, as his main managing partners. The founder's son entered the company as an employee in 2017, expected to be gradually integrated into the business, but became discouraged by its organization and chose to pursue an autonomous career abroad instead. In 2020, he joined the company again, leading the brand diversification this time, which gave him autonomy, security, and the opportunity to distinguish himself from the main company's organization as a separate “start-up”.

I will show how “professionalization” is a moral project based on uneven, gradient business transformation processes, a continuum along which enterprises occupy different positions. Even if I group the cases in this chapter as those who emphasize their “professionalism” in terms of business, these firms still vary in the degree to which responsibility and authority are formalized, procedures are standardized, and labor is differentiated. Rather, these are the dimensions that do not develop synchronically and are still mediated by moral obligations and kinship. The young daughter of the Smirnovs joined the family firm when her parents started to transform business organization in pursuit of expansion; the Akhmetovs already did that a decade ago and instead of another stage of multi-scalar business transformation, the FGE-father invested in “a company within the company” for his son where the latter has a relative autonomy to implement his own “professional” transformation.

The FGEs here originated from Soviet working-class and peripheral places (a village and a small mining town), while their adult children already had access to the best global education. Drawing on ideals of self-improvement and hard work, both generations explicitly distinguish

themselves from what they describe as “old-fashioned,” inefficient, and unmotivated modes of work. The ideas and practices of professionalization facilitated by parents' generation are supported and admired by the adult children, building family alliance against resisting employees (and other parties like local partners, subcontractors), positioning learning and adaptability as moral virtues.

Instead of celebrating constant self-improvement and business expansion, or presenting business transformation as a linear or finished achievement, this chapter addresses business professionalization as an ongoing moral project through which family companies respond to pressures of a rapidly changing business environment and neoliberalism while disciplining not only their employees but also family and emotions. In doing so, the chapter shows how making “capitalists” – understood through the formation of desire to own and control the means of production (Yanagisako, 2002) – is a culturally mediated practice of transformation of portfolio, business, and family.

Professionalization: Business and Moral Project

Business literature suggests that companies have to respond rapidly to discontinuous changes such as crises, technological advancements worldwide, or the pandemic, to avoid stagnation and scale capital accumulation (Kreiser et al., 2021; Mouzas, 2022). Based on ethnography, this dissertation frames practices of business transformation under the etic term “professionalization,” which encompasses the degrees of formalization, specialization, and rationalization of business processes. However, it interprets this not as categories presented by the research participants (“old scheme” vs. “modern approach”; formal vs. informal), but as a set of uneven processes unfolding across multiple dimensions of business practices.

I have identified and focused on gradients of formalization, operational rationalization, and specialization of the internal business practices as the main components of business “professionalization” as strategies presented by the research participants. Formalization is the response of companies to environments that have grown more complex and codified, requiring written regulations (Schröder, 2021). I focus on the extent to which documents, taxation procedures, and internal organization are reported to be formalized. The research participants seek not only to meet market needs but also to withdraw from lower-level daily operations by delegating tasks. While the businesses in Part II have been transforming the dimension of organizational structures, making them more formalized, the contrast with the businesses described in Part I is especially evident. For example, I illustrate the cases with low formalization in Chapter 2: the responsibilities are unclear, accountability is blurred and overloaded, so the majority of decision-making is concentrated in the hands of the owner or one or two trusted people. The examples of formalization in this chapter include the following: defining clear roles and regulations in internal documentation (e.g., Organizational Chart), formally established and adhered-to hierarchical accountability (where the owner does not participate in many decisions), formal communication channels (e.g., memos, *sluzhebki*), and more.

The other perceived professionalization dimension is the degree of operational rationalization: the degree of optimization of business processes based on efficiency, standardization, and predictability. This includes automating repetitive tasks through technology (such as smart technologies and highly automated production), the importance of guides, accurate digital inventory systems, and video surveillance for employees, among other measures. While some research participants introduce rationalization, others do it to a lesser extent or avoid it,

continuing, for example, to make calculations in paper notebooks and tolerating forms of dishonesty by employees, which are justified by an alternative to “market-type” rationality.

Finally, the degree of specialization focuses on the extent to which occupational responsibilities, knowledge, and skills of employees are specific, whereas the deepening of expertise is particularly in focus. The FGEs who utilize this principle respond to new market demands by recruiting the employees trained in newly emerging occupational fields, encouraging learning and advanced training courses for their employees, emphasize trusting decision-making to experts. They might outsource responsibilities to “professionals” (social media marketing, accounting, design, for example) and avoid the concentration of key knowledge and directions (e.g., in marketing, production, and finances) in the hands of multifunctional specialists and executives.

What is notable about professionalization is that this is not a linear process in practice, but it brings moral stratification and binaries. Anthropological scholarship on post-socialist capitalist reforms has argued that novel standards associated with marketization do more than regulate; they also establish new social hierarchies and regimes of power, such as modern and civilized versus backward and morally suspect workers (Dunn, 2004). For example, in the case of an Estonian corporation, the introduction of a new corporate code of ethics by the advanced management of the new market era not only served as a reform but also as a redefinition of symbolic boundaries between “modern” and “backward” ways of work. By implementing globally standardized corporate values, the management implicitly orientalized the existing work ethics of miners as inferior and morally suspect (Kesküla, 2012). I describe a similar dynamic occurring in the smaller private enterprises of the participants; however, this chapter focuses on how the pursuit of

gradients of professionalization led by the FGEs could unite them with their children against the “lazy” employees.

I conceptualize professionalization processes as operating simultaneously at three interconnected levels. First, at the organizational level, it involves clear hierarchies, formal documentation, bureaucratic compliance, specialized roles, and standardized procedures intended to rationalize production, management, and everyday operations. Second, at the moral level, it establishes constant self-improvement, learning, and hard work as normative expectations against which humans are evaluated. Third, at the relational level, professionalization clarifies responsibility and risk. However, while it has become clear that employees who are outsiders to the family are replaceable and can rely on security less, in the event of mistakes, low productivity, or resistance to self-management, the adult children of the owners are still secured and trusted.

Crucially for this chapter, professionalization provides the framework through which the families reorganize the relationship between kin and work. Later, I examine in detail how the research participants represent “learning to separate family and work”, which I argue to be more complex than that; rather, the framework of professionalization creates conditions under which kinship relations are situationally activated and deactivated as a tactic (Deniz, 2022). Even in the parent-child dyad, affective ties are governed for the sake of broader optimization: parents and their children still have conflicts, resentment, misunderstandings, and power asymmetries, but do not invest in developing them to ensure the family-work optimization's effectiveness. This chapter first examines the professionalization of business through knowledge associated with business education in family firms, then traces its moral implications for individual subjectivity and familial reorganization via neoliberal critiques of human capital (Fehér, 2009) and the “subjectivation of the social” (Lessenich, 2011), where care becomes an asset (Lee, 2018).

The choice of cases for the chapter illustrates that professionalization is not a uniform phenomenon. Rather than a dichotomy between “outdated” and “modern” enterprises, the two firms occupy different positions along the continuum of multidimensional business transformation. What they share is not the degree of formalization, specialization, and rationalization, but the moral framework through which how business changes is justified and evaluated. Understanding professionalization in this way enables us to critically examine the modernization discourse and analyze how business transformation generates new forms of subjectivity, contributing to the emergence of new “capitalists” who desire to own and control the means of production.

Different Strategies for “Professionalization” while the Same Neoliberal Orientation

This section introduces the two families and compares their firms in their unique outcomes inspired by “professional” and associated with global business knowledge. Rather than asking whether a firm is professionalized or not, this shows how professionalization practices can be unevenly distributed across organizational domains and how this enables different strategies to involve the adult children in family business. While the comparison highlights different organizational solutions, it centers on shared neoliberal subjectivity, which prioritizes learning, self-improvement, and efficiency.

The research participants in this chapter are the FGEs and their adult children who share the following criteria. The former are the owners and managers who have been developing their companies since the 2000s and earlier, and are in their middle ages. They have already accumulated substantial economic capital and now manage its maintenance and expansion by responding to market needs. The latter are young adults who have socialized in family, educational environments, and other institutions that promoted neoliberal ideals.

The families	Father, his origin, and career trajectories	Mother, her origin, and career trajectories	Adult child working in a family business
The Akhmetovs'	Akhmetov Turar, 53 y.o.: metal worker with rural background (Soviet <i>kolkhoz</i>), no higher education -micro-entrepreneur at a bazaar - a mid-sized family business owner	Did not participate in the study. - from a Soviet rural background, no higher education - helped her husband with business from the start - now a housewife	Akhmetov Damir, 27 y.o.: born in Karaganda, studied in a gymnasium - a local university with foreign faculty - internship in a US university - Chief Development Officer in a family business
The Smirnovs'	Smirnov Valerii, 48 y.o.: Soviet working-class family, no higher education - micro-entrepreneur at a bazaar - a mid-sized family business owner	Smirnova Elena, 48 y.o.: Soviet working-class family - local university in post-Soviet Kazakhstan - micro-entrepreneur at a bazaar	Smirnova Renata, 23 y.o.: local school - high school abroad - foreign university, business program - Chief Human Resources Officer and the Head of Sales Department in a family business

		- a mid-sized family business owner	
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Table 2. The family origin and career trajectories of parent-child dyads that are involved in a family business

In the Smirnovs’ “Delicacy” meat business (encompassing the integrated vertical chain from farming to processing and distribution), professionalization unfolds as a multidimensional and morally charged process led by the parents, and specifically by the mother, Elena, who has studied in the continuous online business transformation program. The program, taught by an internationally recognized business consultant based in the United States, aimed to transform and restructure businesses to facilitate their growth. The Smirnovs repeatedly referred to the starting point as the “old scheme of small business where everyone is responsible for everything”, meaning that there was no “one who is clearly responsible.” The owner family's emphasis on responsibility reframed decision-making not as a burden for businesspeople only, but as an ethical project aimed at teaching other employees to share accountability. Organizational changes included reorganization of internal hierarchy, introduction of documents formalizing the positions and job responsibilities, clear performance metrics, evaluative criteria, etc. Below, I will present in detail how these changes establish a moral boundary between “professional” actors, who are willing to learn and adapt, and workers framed as backward, undisciplined, or resistant to change, with whom the company “part their ways.”

This configuration produces a relatively coherent moral framework within the family. Elena Smirnova started her studies at the time when her daughter, Renata, returned home from London during the COVID-19 pandemic. The young woman assisted her mother with the

incorporation of new managerial knowledge because the former one perceived the changes as valuable ones, as she herself was enrolled in an undergraduate business program at her university. Moreover, Renata considered that this experience would be useful for her as well. Her mother, in turn, was glad to have her daughter by her side as a trusted person who could benefit from learning by practice, also becoming a potential future successor.

In turn, founded by Turar Akhmetov, the “Kazakhstani Tea Company” was already a formalized, well-structured organization employing more than one hundred people, focusing on the production of several tea brands from imported raw materials and their distribution. Instead of entering another turn of business transformation in the 2020s, the FGE responds to the volatile market through diversification, while simultaneously involving his adult son, Damir, in the business. It had been a decade since the company had engaged in its last major transformation when a top manager from a large transnational corporation visited their production facility with a series of workshops in 2013 as a state-funded program for business development. That experience contributed significantly to the transformation of the organizational structure.

However, while formal, specialized structures exist, and the production is equipped with the latest technology (which before relied largely on manual labor), the owner and his son define the company as retaining some of the managerial practices of the “bazaar way”. By this, they mean that sales are managed largely through personal judgment rather than complex analytical tools, communication remains informal, full responsibility is delegated to department heads, and employees are unmotivated and slow. Damir chose to focus on professionalization from the perspective of human resources – specifically, responsibility, motivation, and speed – areas where neoliberal ideals of innovation and self-directed learning were most evident. This was precisely

the reason the young man left the company in 2017 for the first time, pursuing an autonomous trajectory abroad, as he could not influence the “discouraging” situation within the company.

When Damir had to return due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Turar aga's decision made the involvement of his son smoother. The founder's response to the unpredictable market was not further internal reform of the whole enterprise, but the investment in a “company within the company.” By appointing Damir as Chief Development Officer instead of expecting the young son to be responsible for unclear or broad goals (such as contributing to business transformation or expansion), he assigned him the responsibility for developing a new tea brand (targeting upscale price niches) and introducing the new coffee direction. The founder/father reconfigured both organizational and familial relations. This arrangement preserved the existing firm’s stability while carving out a protected space for experimentation, diversification, and accelerated innovation.

For Damir, this configuration resonated with his prior exposure to start-up culture during his studies. Framed explicitly as an experimental start-up, the new unit embodied a professional ethos centered on constant learning, self-improvement, motivation, and speed. Like the Smirnov daughter’s position, this role combined autonomy with security: the son was granted autonomy (valuing his taste, his human relations decisions, and his educational experience), while the financial risks and long-term responsibility remained embedded within the family firm. Damir framed this as a start-up, but the precarity associated with it was minimized by organizational and financial backing of the parent company.

Regardless of how the Smirnovs, the Akhmetovs, or other similar cases label the practices – business reorganization, start-up culture, or any other term – they are united by a shared orientation toward neoliberal ideals that prioritize continuous learning, self-improvement, and efficiency. Through this framework, they succeeded at optimizing family and work relations:

incorporation of children into business activities, or their entry into parental firms, on the desired terms.

The Smirnovs: Intergenerational Cooperation or Partnership Between “Portfolios”

Conditions for the Smoother Entry: Family, Business Education, Transformation

The FGEs who not only invested in the development of their children but also invested their resources in the constant self-improvement and development of their businesses made family firms desirable places where their grown-up children can start their careers, apply ideas from their formal education, and gain valuable and up-to-date practical experience from their parents. In particular, the reorganization modeled on the examples of globally competitive businesses and maintained by the FGEs framed family business as a partnership between “portfolios”, minimizing the disadvantages of being an adult child of an owner, as the research participants viewed this.

The disadvantages that concerned the young participants included the pressure of heavy responsibility for the company, where the parents-owners were the central figures on whom everything depended. When their children entered the business, it might automatically mean the same for them. Moreover, small family businesses often have unclear boundaries of work duties and a great extent of informality within the organization. Regardless of the parental investment in children's education and encouraging belief in their potential, the young adults feared responsibility. This fear stemmed from the disadvantages experienced in their parents' companies and possible intergenerational and family tensions: the pressure of too many and too broad assignments and responsibility for failures of other people on different levels of the company.

A similar negative experience occurred with Renata's older brother, Denis, when he joined the meat business founded by his parents, Elena and Valerii Smirnov. At the beginning of the 2010s, the company was still a smaller family business, and the parents managed it as they had

since the 2000s. Neither the parents nor 17-year-old Denis Smirnov had learned how to optimize work processes as “global corporations do”. Like most FGEs, Elena and Valerii were self-learners and practitioners, and nobody taught them how to run a business. According to his sister, although their parents could afford to send Denis abroad for formal business training, he decided to stay in Karaganda after meeting his future wife. The compromise was to obtain a degree through distance learning, which was less developed at the beginning of the 2010s. As Renata recalled, Denis's strengths lay in bringing innovative ideas, but the challenge was to apply them in the existing, unclear organization.

It was not the case that family members and even other workers had clear responsibilities in the small family business at that time. While Denis did not prioritize enhancing his human capital with formal business education, the structure of their company did not include the opportunity to delegate problem-solving or implementation of ideas to responsible employees. As a result, Denis was often blamed not only for his own failures but also for the failures of other workers, and he received an “unbearable” amount of criticism from his parents. Such work tensions negatively affected family relations, and they ultimately decided to stop working together. They decided that Denis would leave the company and build his career separately from the family business. Otherwise, this distressing experience might have harmed family relations, given that the parents considered his contribution unhelpful for the work processes, and Denis was tired of being the “scapegoat.”

Due to this period in their family business history, in 2020, Renata was hesitant to think about joining the family business and never seriously planned it, even though her educational background differed considerably from her brother's, and the company was about to transform. Elena, Renata's mother, initiated the transformation process by completely restructuring the

organization within their meat production and distribution company upon her daughter's return from London during the pandemic. As a result, Renata claimed that the process of creating a clear structure, along with her mother, helped her to put away fears and to get seriously involved in the family business.

When the young woman returned from London to Karaganda in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, uncertainty was looming in the air. “When could I return to university, and what should I do now?” asked the twenty-year-old woman of herself daily. However, this unexpected homecoming became a decisive turning point in her life: she began her career by gradually becoming involved as her mother's assistant in the transformation process and eventually became a full-time employee. While Renata was remote learning at her university in the UK, she also began studying with her mother in an online business booster by an experienced business consultant.

The first-generation entrepreneurs Elena and Valerii came to view their reliance on their experience only and on “the old scheme of small business” as incompatible with market demands and their aspirations for expansion. The same “old scheme” that became one of the reasons their oldest son left the family business. Another reason was that the parents could not orient him toward formal studies abroad. As for Renata, they sent her abroad starting from high school to catch up on her English. Then, her parents arranged everything for her to receive higher education abroad: they researched information, used the services of educational consultants, and paid for every educational step. As a result, the Smirnovs’ daughter mastered English and other skills that valorized her human capital. In 2020, she gained the opportunity to be particularly helpful to the family enterprise, which was transforming, as she had studied business management with a focus on human resources at university.

The organizational restructuring process was the young woman's first opportunity to apply formal knowledge in practice. Elena asked Renata to help, as she was in Karaganda and was a trusted and aware person for the enterprise. At the same time, rather than needing help, Elena wanted to involve her daughter in the family business to give her work experience. Officially, she started as the HR manager who interviewed people for the job and quickly became assigned the position of Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). Renata coordinated human resources strategies alongside her parents to drive organizational growth, as it was one of the most crucial parts in their business training. Echoing Schröder's (2020) observation of the current generation of entrepreneurs in Guangzhou, Renata's entry to business was also relatively smooth as she was enabled by skills accumulation through formal education and occupational socialization in the frame of secured employment. However, the young woman stressed that all of this depended significantly on her parents' "modern" stance, their decision to learn and transform the business, without which she would have avoided joining the family enterprise.

Professionalizing from Scratch vs Transforming Established Approaches

Renata, step by step, got involved in the transformation processes. Her mother-chief herself took the transformation of financial planning and the introduction of internal documentation, instructions, and advanced analytics. In turn, Renata shared the burden of creating a new company structure with her mother. This phase of the professionalization proved highly challenging; however, the fruits of the "professional" approaches in the cattle farm they built in 2019 motivated the owners.

The family had a complex meat business, which consisted of a meat processing facility, a specialized shop, a farm producing the feed for livestock, a slaughtering facility, and a new cattle farm. The farm, which was constructed according to European standards, was the result of a

systemic profit reinvestment aimed at reducing input costs and creating a unique market offering. As part of the agreement with their Swiss suppliers, the Smirnovs created a fully automated operation, with feeding, cleaning, climate control, and technologically regulated reproductive cycles in the Karaganda region. The farm relies on Swiss cattle genetics, valued by the Smirnovs for faster growth rates and high-quality dietary meat, while feed quality is ensured through the use of locally produced grain and cereals. Adherence to feeding regimes developed in collaboration with European partners further reinforces the farm's orientation toward rationalized production practices.

The farm became the Smirnovs' special matter of pride: advantages for the enterprise, such as minimized costs resulting from operational autonomy (fewer employees, lower salary expenses, and greater managerial control) overlapped with features that were attractive to clients. European modern technology and quality were presented as key competitive advantages and, as research participants noted, were widely approved by customers.



Figure 2. Screenshot from the public social media account of “Delicacy”, showing a virtual tour of the farm offered to followers. This illustrates not only the promotion of transparency, but also moral and professional hierarchy within the company, emphasizing an automated, rational, controllable, and “European” regime as something the research participants chose as exemplary.

Compared to the farm with already optimized processes, it was much more difficult to formalize and reorganize their meat processing facility and the shop, which worked in the “old way” for the last 20 years and consisted of 130 workers, as Renata emphasized.

My job was to build the structure. That is, I was involved in work with personnel in general. First, roughly speaking, we drew on a piece of paper what the Organizational Chart of the company should look like. It includes seven departments, and that’s where everything is: production, administration, personnel, sales, and finance. That is, every duty, every function, every person can

find themselves and their job responsibilities in it. They can understand who to reach if they have a work issue.

Behind the clear image of the reorganization imposed by the owners, there was a messy reality. By calling Renata's entry smooth, I do not mean that everything was easy or that the two generations had ideal professional relationships. Everyday operations and business transformation practices led to regular disagreements and conflicts. Renata describes these as challenges for her as an individual manager and decision-maker. Being the co-owner of the business and CEO, Renata's mother demanded accurate implementation of the ideas she obtained from the business training and was dissatisfied with some results in HR work. Renata, who worked closely with the situation in the labor market, denied her fault but insisted on the need to adapt business education to the real world:

Well, in any case, it [the training] is probably aimed at some developed countries. [...] Here, if a person leaves the job of thermal processing and no longer wants to work at it, then this is minus one professional in the entire city. I remember I couldn't find one for several months. This was problematic, and during the courses, my mother was told that it meant that the job advertisement was submitted incorrectly. We argued with her because I explained that, well, everything is cool, I like these courses, but not everything is possible.

Renata's critique exposes how the narrative of transformation as a salvation masks both structural limits of the market and moral pressure placed on managers to comply with owners' expectations, be it their daughter or an outsider. Later, I will delve deeper into the family aspect of this issue.

Moral Project of Portfolio-Self

Being a 20-year-old woman, Renata joined the company that basically shifted the operational paradigm toward the approaches symbolizing an ever-adapting and efficient Western-like corporation. Her young age disturbed her a lot at first; she self-defined as “green” and “rookie,” implying insignificance and lack of experience (*malyavka*), who had to interview job applicants whose positions she really did not understand.

Renata: Most of all, I was always worried that people would come, look at me, and think, “Why does this little girl decide whether I will work?”

The same was the case when she took the management of the sales department with already experienced staff under her responsibilities:

I was very nervous when I had to make any kind of negotiations or unpleasant conversations with the team, I even tried to avoid it. Meeting with new or potential partners was also a lot of stress, and this really seemed to be due to my age.

Still, the daughter of the FGEs renegotiated this as the experience of self-management. Renata stressed that she did not lose control of herself and turned the situation into a case of overcoming difficulties. The young woman told the story of how she went to her department with a calm, unreadable expression and did what was needed for the company's interests. It was a tough conversation with employees about a problem that had to be strictly warned about. At first, she kept her deep self-doubts hidden. However, with further professional socialization, she understood that it was not a matter of age at all but rather experience and constant “self-improvement and self-development”. Besides work and education experience at first with the HR area and then with the sales, Renata worked hard on her insecurities. Like a project manager, she carved out the best version of herself to enhance the value of her portfolio.

Renata: I was scared to go to meetings; now I do it without problems and very routinely, no matter how high-ranking a person with whom I will have to negotiate is. [...] Do you know what the coolest thing is? During these 3,5 years, I haven't changed much in appearance, but my lack of self-confidence has turned into my peculiarity. Now, I even like to evoke in people this stereotype like "little girl?", and then show how much I'm worth, how much confidence and knowledge I have at my young age.

The young woman represented eradicating the traits she considered detrimental to a "modern" entrepreneur and cultivating highly desirable ones as key to fit the profile of a reliable manager in the parents' company, but also to be generally competitive in the labor market.

Moral Hierarchies and Resistance of Employees

Such narratives of constant self-management are presented as necessary for both personal success and the firm's growth. The emphasis on constant learning and overcoming insecurity functions as a moral distinction that separates those who are capable of aligning themselves with the company's future from those who are not. Employees who hesitate, resist new routines, or fail to perform the self-transformation are described as unfitting for the interests of the firm and the modern world.

Learning played the most important role during the active transformation period. Renata, alongside her mother Elena, learned fast and immediately applied new information in practice. They educated the staff to bring them up to a desired level. The owners invested in training for senior managers, introduced a corporate library with business and management literature, and even imposed the rule that office employees had to devote one working hour to professional development. For three and a half years of working in the family business, Renata has undergone various trainings by top business coaches, has read a bunch of useful business and management

literature, and has attended lectures by entrepreneurs portrayed as role models. These years she has been applying and adapting the knowledge to the current situation of the company and the market.

Even though the reorganizational process was a challenge, Renata and her parents were the ones who benefited from the new formalized hierarchy, where each worker had their place and clearly defined responsibilities. In such a structure, each employee was now viewed as a set of skills contributing to the company's development and was paid exactly for this. Before the transition, a bottleneck in the decision-making took away a lot of Elena and Valerii Smirnov's time and energy and made operational processes more complicated. For example, in terms of funding, before the introduction of financial planning and creating separate accounts, depending on the company's income, the chiefs did not distinguish the company's money from their personal resources. They allocated resources for the needs of the departments by themselves. In the transformed organization, the owners could delegate the decision of whether to allocate money for an initiative or not and could focus on issues of a higher level.

Renata: It used to be different. You came and asked, “Can I take money?” And they gave it to you, or they didn’t give it to you. But a lot of unnecessary information passed through the directors themselves. What then is the point for me to go to the director and ask whether I can pay a blogger or not? For directors to make this decision, they need to ask a lot of questions. Which blogger, what will this give us? Well, this is unnecessary information, so why do they need me, who must make this decision? According to the hierarchy, too many people would take up this issue, taking away their working time, for which they are paid their salaries. Moreover, the salary of the company director is huge, but obviously, these are not the issues they should be solving.

The transformation of the business influenced not only its organization but the owners' mindset about what business was and how to maximize its main goal - capital accumulation - by optimizing the time and responsibilities of the team. However, while this influenced Renata's decision to join the family business, the same transformation made many employees unsatisfied. That is, the introduced operational rationalization, formalization, and specialization of the duties prioritized the need to take responsibility for the decisions and initiatives.

Structural transformation in the meat family business had to resemble the organizational framework of a corporation, where the hierarchy, roles, and responsibilities were clearly defined, and depending on them, the chiefs calculated the salary level. If people were viewed as sets of skills - portfolios - when their value did not fit the company, or were not adapting and improving, they no longer fit the company. For instance, after the structural transformation led by Elena and Renata, an employee had to come up with a written memo (*sluzhebka*) where she/he already offered the decision on an issue to their immediate boss rather than bringing the issue and asking for further guidance as it was before. However, the transition was difficult in practice because most workers did not have previous experience with such management. They encountered challenges even in creating a memo because they had never produced such an analytical paper.

Renata: I will even say that most employees were more comfortable working in the old scheme because it is very convenient when, well, you can always push the responsibility onto someone else when you don't have clearly defined duties for which you are responsible. And when we started changing the structure, well, we said goodbye to some people: some left on their own, and others had to be asked to leave. Someone was completely retrained and changed in position. Well, it was much harder for people to adapt to the transition.

While in the initial period of the transformation, Elena and Renata devoted much attention to teaching personnel, most of the employees experienced difficulties in adaptation. Instead of striving for self-improvement to stay competitive in the market-driven environment along with the owners, some workers even left the company, and some were fired. While Renata emphasized the flexibility of her parents, who made the exceptions for three older employees who could not use a computer but had valuable knowledge and loyalty, the overall position of the Smirnovs was to prioritize the need in employees who responded to changes.

Kin as a Moral Framework, Kin as a Tactic

Another key outcome of business professionalization for the Smirnovs was harmonizing family-work overlap. They represented one of the outcomes of business transformation as an instrument that helped them “separate family and work”. Being a new person in her parents' company, Renata was still familiar with the old management approaches because she was her mother's right hand in getting rid of them. She also witnessed constant conflicts between her parents and her older brother in her childhood due to unclear responsibilities. Alternatively, Renata understood the formally defined scope of responsibilities. She also had formalized autonomy and authority: as a boss, she demanded that her subordinate departments fulfill their duties. Finally, she had formalized work relations with her bosses, mainly her mother (Renata and her father's responsibilities overlapped less). Renata claimed that she could often argue with Elena about work issues, and resent her for being overly harsh, but they could switch to the mother-daughter mode when needed to talk about family issues.

Renata: But it can be difficult to communicate [at the moments of disagreement at work].

And when my mother and I worked even more closely, she and I could often fight at work. Well, for example, when we had different opinions. I remember situations where

we actually quarreled, and we openly disagreed about something. Then the work meeting ends, and I am angry. But I call her on a home issue. So I talked not with the executive, but with my mother, and it was cool that we could switch. Of course, it doesn't always work out, but in most cases, well, it turned out for us that we just had a fight, and then my mother called and like "By the way...", and already talked like a mother.

Although entrepreneurs like the Smirnovs believed that they had mastered the ability to divide the realms of work and home relatively well, this should not be equated with a structural separation of domains, which in fact are overlapping more and more in neoliberalism. Following Deniz (2022), what Renata describes is better framed as situational activation and deactivation of kinship, even in the child-parent dyad. Based on an ethnography of family businesses in Anatolia, Turkey, the author claims that the business owners and relatives who are employees navigate inescapable tensions between accumulation logic and familial loyalty, tactically adjusting affective and moral obligations.

Unlike the separation of realms, this framework emphasizes the embeddedness of family into neoliberalism, where the boundaries separating family and work become more and more blurred. As Feher (2009) critically pointed out, everything might be turned into an investment in human capital, valorizing or devalorizing one's portfolio in neoliberalism. Professionalization of work relations presupposed that both Renata and Elena rationally chose to switch between the modes of boss-employee and mother-daughter when needed, and this capacity to subordinate emotions, reactions, and resentments to broader strategic goals contributes to the accumulation of entrepreneurial portfolios. This works well in terms of their cooperation – the daughter continues to develop her managerial practice in a company which she sees as competitive and modern, the

mother continues having a reliable and self-improving manager. However, it says nothing about the affective side of the issue.

Indeed, even based on the interview data, it was unclear where work ended and home and family started in the case of entrepreneurs like the Smirnovs. For instance, the family believed that the demand from family members who worked for the business was higher than from outsiders. At the same time, they called some employees who have been working for their business for years as a family.

Renata: At first, I said that it was as if there were many family members working, and then I realized that it turns out that there isn't, and I get this feeling because people have been working for many years, they are the family. The people you see throughout...I've known someone since I was 6 years old. Well, that's when the store opened. People saw me as a little girl running around in a white dress at the opening, and they saw me growing up as I came home from school every day. Well, that is, why is this not a family?

Moreover, the territories of work and family often overlapped. Renata and her parents have an intensive work schedule at their office and beyond. Describing her plan on developing a personal brand in her Instagram account, the twenty-three-year-old woman discussed how it would be inseparable from her contribution to their professional development: "Actually, I don't know what to show except work. My life is all about Delicacy." At the same time, she admired her hard-working mother, who daily worked in her home-based office after she came from the "real" one. Renata also used the home for work-related decision-making moments and work for family-related ones when needed. Even though the young research participant stated that they divided work and family relations, she claimed she was very persistent if she thought her opinion on an issue at work was worth standing for. Compared to other employees, Renata could engage in polemics and

defend her argumentation at work and home in front of her bosses-parents. Sometimes, it was successful, and she could convince them to agree with her solution. Otherwise, if Elena and Valerii disagreed, the young woman could be angry, hurt, and demotivated. However, at the end of the day, she rationally switched to the mode “I am just an employee here”. “It is parents' company, and they have the final word,” admitted the young woman and moved on. She understood that their “partnership” was unequal, yet chose it.

One episode stuck in Renata's memory, as she was offended and demotivated when her parents did not support her initiative and shut it down without giving her time to present any outcomes. However, she had to suppress these feelings and shift to the identity of a rational individual, who was a good employee in the formal and rational framework her bosses had set recently, which she supported and helped to implement. Instead of immersing herself in “irrational” feelings and tensions with her parents, she chooses flexibility and further valorization of her human capital at the work conditions the family business gave her. Such instances consistently position the young child of the FGEs as a reflexive portfolio manager within the “professionalizing” business field.

The Akhmetovs: Start-Up as a Neoliberal and Moral Framework

Professionalization on a Solid Foundation

In 2020, twenty-five-year-old Damir returned from the United States, where he secured a scholarship at an IT boot camp in the Silicon Valley ecosystem, to Astana. When the peak of the COVID-19 lockdowns had passed, he decided to join the family business. Before, he had an aim to pursue a career in IT abroad. However, the funding of his program was cut, and the campus based in LA was closed due to the pandemic, and he urgently returned to Kazakhstan. By 2021, he felt it was time to be mature about building his career trajectory from scratch again rather than

remaining in a state of uncertainty. He would be 26 soon, but the pandemic disrupted his previous plan to invest in his skill set on a path to his desired career.

It was not his first time joining the family tea company, but this time, the idea of his father, Turar Akhmetov, to create a “company within the company” for Damir, where he would be responsible for new brand development, attracted the young man. He had already worked there briefly after acquiring his bachelor's degree in 2017, but quickly lost motivation because he had “hit a ceiling” created by the capabilities of other employees. While his father was an FGE who, after marketization in 1991, evolved from a metal worker from a village to an owner of a profitable business, factory, and other forms of highly valued capital, he had not obtained higher formal education. In turn, Damir was already born in a city, went to a public gymnasium, and earned a scholarship at one of the best local universities with an international curriculum. There he practiced analytical thinking, writing skills, and most importantly, socialized into a neoliberal mindset, participating in events such as hackathons and start-up accelerators with the focus on developing skills of quick problem-solving.

However, Damir always admired the stance of his father, whom he described as “modern” and “a constant learner,” as the FGE always sought new perspectives and learned from foreign and local partners. For example, Turar emphasized the role of the business associations where he actively participated and networked with role-model business people. The FGE had also been learning English since he was middle-aged to communicate with international entrepreneurs, and he often brought innovative ideas from his overseas business trips. Interestingly, the fifty-three-year-old businessman refused to pursue an MBA for himself, not because of age stereotypes but because he believed in failing any entrance tests and exams due to his Soviet working-class and

village background, which left him unfamiliar with the dominant, standardized understanding of such assessments.

It had been a decade since the Kazakhstani Tea Company had engaged in its last major business transformation. That was when a top manager from a large transnational company came to their production with a series of workshops in 2013 in the frame of the state-funded program for business development. That experience contributed significantly to the optimization of business processes, the rationalization of the production (Turar invested in cutting-edge packaging machines), formalization and specialization measures in the company, where the key decision-making was in the hands of Turar as the Chief, Turar's brother as regional sales director, and Turar's brother-in-law (Damir's another uncle) as Financial Chief.

The manufacturing company was located in the industrial area of Astana, on the extensive territory of a large Soviet-era complex. Dozens of shipping containers with raw tea of various sorts were stacked on top of each other, waiting to be processed, packaged, and distributed to large grocery chains, local stores, bazaars, and HoReCa clients. Production facility occupied a separate block nearby, while administration was concentrated in a five-floor building with offices. The second and third floors housed the administrative departments of the tea company, signaling the scale and organizational complexity of the enterprise: logistics, accounting, legal services, sales, and security offices. While not having the detailed Organizational Chart or bureaucratic structuring with internal communication tools, except the emails and physical communication between employees, the tea company already had a solid degree of formalization, rationalization, and specialization, or a platzdarm, as young Damir put it.



Figure 3. Photo of the high-speed primary packaging machinery produced by the Italian industrial giant IMA Group. This highly expensive equipment is one of the investments the Akhmetovs take the greatest pride in because it is from the leading supplier of automated packaging technologies. The adult son of the FGE emphasized that “only five companies in Kazakhstan could purchase the equipment of such a level”.

Back in 2017, Damir saw that his father's business was thriving, yet in the 2020s, the market had been endlessly challenging entrepreneurs. Before, their tea brands confidently occupied a niche in the market and brought large profits. Later, with the increasing number of competitors, customers' needs, and global volatility, producers were pushed to make changes and optimize

processes to stay competitive. For example, right before the return of Damir, the company's sales dropped significantly as a result of the scandal related to their competitors' imported, inexpensive tea brands. When regular consumers found out that to look red and rich when brewed tea could have added pigments, whereas it was of poor quality, the trust in any lower-priced brands declined. While the Akhmetovs' manufacturing was a local production having nothing to do with the import of already processed tea, they were not ready for such market turbulence, as all their brands occupied a competitively priced segment.

As Damir had already come back to Kazakhstan, he was a witness and participant of the intense and seemingly endless discussions that took place at the overlapping realms of family and work. The instant measure of the founder, Turar, was to part ways with the recently hired strategy executive (an outsider to the family), who asked for a high salary but did not give the promised outcomes. The long-run anti-crisis move was to stream the investments to diversification, as the adult son long ago conceived the development of the coffee direction. This was the beginning of the smooth optimization of intergenerational family-work relations.

The classic literature on small and medium enterprises interprets family labor as a response to structural precarity, as kinship becomes a reliable source of cheap and flexible labor (Goddard, 1996; Narotzky & Smith, 2006). However, this is only partially true. Evidence from the Central Asian context shows a more nuanced picture: business run through kinship not only takes but is also a part of reciprocity norms. Castañeda Dower et al. (2022) show quantitative evidence that business expansion can become constrained due to moral obligations to support family members. While relatively cheap labor is definitely a part of the complex story, the parent-child dyad of trusting each other's self-reflexive “portfolios”, security, and autonomy from “bazaar way”

ensured by the creation of a separate “company within a company” are important nuances that illustrate it as the neoliberal optimization case.

“Bazaar Way” as a Part of Moral Hierarchy

Damir left the family business once, and this time joined on the appealing conditions of the responsibility for the newly created department. The main reason for his last leave was that although the Akhmetovs' tea company was profitable and a “professional” company, they retained some of the approaches to management in an “old-fashioned, bazaar way,” as the owner, Turar Akhmetov (53 y.o.) himself put it:

Well, we still manage things in an old-fashioned way, maybe in a bazaar way (*po-starinke, po-bazarski*, rus.). I have many friends [entrepreneurs], and they would say the same. In other words, we don't manage the company according to some European methodology.

The FGE created the dichotomy between old-fashioned and European management as something they invented, being the self-taught all-rounder entrepreneurs at local bazaars, versus Western professional business governance. The key characteristic of the bazaar way, along with the lack of formally written regulations on management of human resources, is owner-centered control based on distrust, as Turar Akmetov continues:

For example, when it comes to purchasing tea, should we assign someone from the department to handle procurement? No, I handle procurement myself. Or take packaging: we determine the prices for the packs and packaging materials ourselves, and only after that we pass the information to the production department, where they consolidate everything. [...] I think – well, at least for now – that nobody can do it better than I can.
(*laughs*)

In this sense, the company's degree of professionalization is seen as a process in which formalized, specialized, and rationalized organization and production coexist with the personalized forms of control and highly centralized decision-making inherited from earlier trading practices. In turn, Turar's son emphasizes the perspective of moral hierarchy of competence on the same issue. For example, when Damir joined the family business for the first time in 2017 with his university knowledge base, he worked in the department of an established tea brands with a team of "unmotivated" co-workers and senior managers. Their main aim was at least to engage in the same practices that brought the most profit to the company rather than to experiment and innovate, as the young man put it. Moreover, most employees kept avoiding taking responsibility for their work; they brought issues, rather than decisions, to their bosses and were too slow for the accelerated pace of the rapid market, in Damir's view:

Even now, our colleagues, when they come [and report], "they couldn't make a design" or "they couldn't ship." Okay, you brought the problem, and will you bring the solution, or should I do it for you? Like, why are you needed then? It seems to me that a solution is required all over the world. The university taught me a lot about making decisions and making mental conclusions. "Even if I brought such and such a solution, I think that we now need to do this differently for this and that reason." I strongly expect this from my colleagues, but it's a little tricky so far. Here, only a marketer can understand this a little more or less, and the rest are still... asking for help relieving responsibility.

Notwithstanding the young insider's critique, the tea brands confidently occupied a niche in the market and brought big profits. While he could do nothing about the employees and existing management in the sales department, Damir decided to move on and leave the family business. Damir emphasized that he first gained his entrepreneurial mindset at his university in Almaty when

he participated in various start-up accelerators supported by the state and large country-wide businesses like large banks, shopping malls, and more. Still, his experienced father refrained from transforming hiring and management strategies.

Turar Akhmetov (53): Well, he [Damir] has a different approach to everything; the way he would approach design, the way he would hire people, I do it differently. Well...I think independence should be given (*nado dat' samostoyatel'nost'*, rus.).

Cautious about discouraging “next generation” with open criticism, Turar wanted his son to be socialized in real-life entrepreneurship and to make a valuable contribution due to his education. Hearing Damir's ideas about coffee and start-up framework focused on the accelerated speed of business processes, Turar created a separate department instead of streamlining the resources to transform the whole business, simultaneously addressing the problem of involving a potential successor and the need for business diversification.

Turar Akhmetov invested the company's resources in developing two new products, which were aimed at occupying the market's other niches: new brand of green tea targeting the medium price segment and a coffee brand. Damir became officially the Chief Development Officer, subordinate to his father, who formally occupied the Development Director position but, from my observations, was the company's central founding father and strategy executive. At the same time, other Directors -- the young man's two uncles -- were also crucial in decision-making because they controlled the company's resources. While the Smirnovs built the family alliance against the employees who resisted changes, Damir also emphasized that he shared with his father and two uncles a commitment to neoliberal ideals such as self-improvement, financialized logic, and entrepreneurialism as a capacity to keep pace with a changing world:

Everything should bring in some kind of money. Everything must be done quickly, now, “yesterday” it must have been done, not in an unspecified future. It won’t work out as it was before; the chiefs agree on this. If we [Damir with his department] say that most likely this is how we should do it now, they are like: “Well, yes, we looked it up too, we need to do that”.

In this way, ideas about neoliberal stance became a bridge for Damir and his owner relatives while distinguishing them from “older”, “uninterested”, or insufficiently educated employees. However, the reality was more complex than the polarized ideas.

When the Start-Up Works: Aligning Family-Work Interests, Managerial Ideals and Practices, Autonomy and Responsibility

The “start-up” framework implied both as a experimental strategy that allowed to test innovations without risking the core products and as a moral project through which the FGE's son could smoothly socialize into entrepreneurship. The father and the son acknowledged the risks related to the main tea brands whose target customers would not tolerate the mistakes in an advancing niche full of competitors. Developing his own “company within a company” allowed Damir to escape old management practices without being responsible for drastic failures, and for initiation the whole company's transformation. Damir did not experience much involvement from other departments and bosses, only enjoying their support and investments in his direction.

As a moral project of neoliberalism, Damir's start-up was positioned as a moral virtue of young people who want to self-improve. This approach included hiring university educated young adults who were “hungry” to invest in their portfolios rather than ask for a high salary. The young boss motivated them using a mix of ideology about the belief in the product, and self-improvement opportunities, and monetary bonuses for extra sales indicators. For example, similarly to Delicacy,

Damir encouraged his department to devote an hour of their working day to reading business literature.

However, the ideal moral obligations about the start-up did not always align with the reality. During one conversation in the Brand Development office, a young employee joined Damir and as we were talking and explained how he understood the start-up framework. He said that the key thing was the freedom to pursue projects and tasks that interested them, which in his view, was what made them initiative-driven, compared to the managers of the long existing brands of the company. However, his young boss agreed only partially. Damir emphasized that their practices were ultimately guided by “digits”: “If we don’t see money of bank accounts as a result, what’s the point?” Stressing that he did not have privileges as the founder's son, Damir made clear for me and his subordinate that the “chiefs” demanded the same dry numbers from him as from any other departments, and this is the key aim. Interest, freedom, and initiative were not valued per se but as instruments for capital accumulation for the FGE's son.

Moreover, the moral image of the small team of young performance-oriented professionals obscured the ordinary vulnerabilities of employees. The young entrepreneur's employees could fall ill or move to other jobs, which triggered moments of panic due to the inconsistency between the ideals of high efficiency and reality:

One day you don’t work here, but your competitor does, and to catch up with him you need to work for 5 days harder than him. The two of them [Damir's subordinates] missed a week in total this month, so we get 7 on 5 equals 35, 35 days to catch up. [...] My blood is boiling when something is too slow (Damir Akhmetov, 27-year-old son of the FGE).

In the interviews Damir significantly focused on the accelerated speed of business processes and claimed that this was how he and his team worked, unlike other departments. At

first, he approached this very rationally and quantitatively, but with the experience and time, the young man came to terms with the practical realities of management. When I visited the company in the fall of 2023 for a follow-up the same employee who said that he appreciated being the part of the start-up, left for another company. However, Damir's behavior was already calmer: starting as an idea in 2020 and the first monetary results new tea and coffee brands brought in 2023, his team grew because he divided the tea and coffee brands and hired more people, so his department consisted of five young people.

Finally, young Akhmetovs' framework included focus on "professionalism" and taste. One of Damir's crucial decisions against the grain was to outsource the design of his products rather than rely on the company's in-house designer. However, the chiefs initially disagreed because it was a waste of money in their view. Damir could persuade them, arguing that this was a worthy decision because it would save time and contribute to quality. The company's designer was a woman in her 40s whose tastes, skills, and approach to work, especially the time she needed for a project, did not fit Damir's demands. Also, when Damir finally received the design from the local digital agency, due to his computer skills, he could use it further for various marketing purposes without spending more money on ordering designs of flyers, social media, and more. So through giving some autonomy and supporting some of the initiatives and extra expenditures of his son Turar Akhmetov (53 y.o.) created a smooth entry and socialized him into a motivated, responsible, and trusted executive who valued fast pace and innovations:

Damir (27): Moreover, because I have my own team, this is a huge responsibility: i.e. the guys need salaries each month, and it is impossible to pay salaries out of thin air, we have to do things to earn money and do it faster. Previously, when I worked here for the first time, I was like, "we need to do such kind of promotion," I went to the head of my

department: “Can I do this?”. And now I myself like: “if we do this, we will earn so much, and we will lose that much”.

Eventually, the father and the FGE -- Turar Akhmetov -- gave the son not only a degree of autonomy, but also gained a responsible and reflexive manager, whose learning process did not affect already established brands negatively but, with time, resulted in contributing to these positively. Their “start-up” is not just a business form, but practices of evaluating people, operations, actions, and decisions that appear to work for both generations.

Intergenerational Cooperation as a Compromise of Autonomy and Security

The new reality of goods distribution market also required proactive and fast decisions but what is more important – the intergenerational cooperation of experience and innovation. There was a “war in the distribution”, as Damir put it. Because of the flow of imported tea brands, declined consumer purchasing power, and other reasons the research participants named, a war for customers was new for the Akhmetovs. Turar shared valuable experience and tangible assets with his son: the . In turn, Damir was mobile and applied up-to-date knowledge and practices to the ever-changing field as the company's leading innovator. For example, the department that promoted and distributed the initial tea brands - although a separate one - has already borrowed some of Damir's ideas and contributions related to packaging and entering the sphere of hospitality services (the HoReCa industry).

Once, I accompanied Damir and his employees on their visit to a brand-new coffee shop where they aimed to establish a distribution agreement. While waiting for the cafe owners, we sat comfortably in cozy, shearling chairs next to the large panoramic windows of a new building. Damir said that such places were out of the view of managers under his father and uncle's management, who continued working as they were used to:

We have already started this [entering HoReCa], and they took what we have done. It's just that their manager is a little older, he doesn't understand this. He would hardly go to such places [the coffee shop we were in]. They work in old ways.

While he had an autonomy given by his father at the decision making, he was secured by the main company's resources, formalized, specialized, and rationalized foundation. Akhmetov Damir (27 y.o.) drew on the resources of his father's company but distinguished as a separate brand to target different customers in other price niches. While the tea brands that made money for the company occupied economy segments, Damir designed his brand to mimic the ones that represent a product's premium and up-to-date nature. Even though Damir's tea was unique in composition, the brand used popular formats: along with big packs of leaf and granular tea, it had the format of tea bags, each in an individual package. The design mimicked actively promoted, and recognized brands of medium-high segment presented to regular customers in Kazakhstan as English or Western-like products, though they were made in Russia. The young businessman even had a trademark related to his own name, not the trademark of the tea company, which also pointed to the autonomy enjoyed by him. For instance, the primary production was called Kazakhstani Tea Company, and its brands used Kazakh names. In contrast, Damir's tea brand referred to some exoticized conceptions about the countries they imported tea from and had a trademark of AD BRANDS (meaning Akhmetov Damir Brands). At the same time, the official website of Damir's tea brand used the date of establishment of the main tea factory to build credibility and emphasize the experience and expertise used in creating the products.

Moreover, while Damir emphasized his important contribution and meritocratic basis on which he was hired, he understood that he enjoyed employment security of highest extent.

The Chiefs can still call me out sometimes, like, “What are you doing?!” And they do it even more so with the other colleagues. But they didn’t scold me much, [did not say like:] “You screw this up, we’ll fire you tomorrow”.

Therefore, while emphasizing that he did not have any privileges as a son of the founder because the chiefs demanded dry numbers and good results from him like from others, Damir still could enjoy security, help. Furthermore, while indeed, one of the reasons why the father's decision to invest in the company within the company was optimization of monthly salaries, because the son became relatively cheap and flexible labor, but simulanenously he was trusted:

Damir: Well, there’s also a credit of trust - if I say something like, “This is what we need and most likely it will work out,” and the chiefs are like, “Well, try it.” And if someone from the outside says it, it’s harder in this regard. What if he simply does not know what he is doing? At the same time, you won’t find a person from the outside who would invest as much ideas, time, and so on, [as I do] for a regular salary (*chuckles*).

Along with the fact that Damir was a trusted employee who was not expensive for the company and who was also trying his best to use the company investments efficiently, Turar also started preparing a potential experienced successor from the family who could inherit some directions of their business, or receive valuable managerial experience and become a successful businessman on his own. In addition, Turar's care and affection for his children also manifested in provision of all the basic needs and more. As the market economy created the need to replace the role that was previously played by the Soviet state to individuals, the parents wanted to provide housing, education, health care, and more to their children. In the case of successful businessmen, who travel around the world, they want to provide with things that are valued around the world. For example, Turar bought his son an apartment in a new building and a brand-new car, celebrated

his wedding, and was ready to pay for his further business education “somewhere in the West”. Therefore, rather than being concerned about such needs, Damir was focused on investing in his human capital and contributing to taking the family business to another level.

Conclusion: Care and Self-Care Optimization

Initially, the FGEs’ – the Smirnovs couple and Turar Akhmetov – investments in their children's education, their recruitment, and training were grounded in care, as they did for all their children. However, producing a reliable employee with managerial experience and potential successor in the family firm, which they knew “would quickly disappear” without close engagement and constant self-improvement also became inseparable part of the FGEs’ (socioeconomic) self-care strategies in a rapidly changing market. In the context where the borders between family and work become more and more blurred and in line with the “subjectivation of the social,” which shifted structural burdens on individuals, this chapter focused on the factors which make adult children taking the responsibility for converting parental care into assets in their “portfolio” and familial mobility (Fehér, 2009; Lessenich, 2011).

An important piece of the puzzle is that the FGEs position themselves as constantly self-improving, age-defying neoliberal subjects, who adapt to changing market with “modern” business practices, which I call the degrees of business professionalization. The process of professionalization facilitated smoother entry of the young adults through secure occupational socialization and autonomy where the pressures of being children of the owners are mitigated by clear responsibilities and moral alliance between the owner family members. In case of the meat processing business, Renata participated in formalization, specialization, and rationalization of the company informed by business education, which she perceived as advanced and modern due to her educational experience and developed it further along with her mother. Like Renata, Damir

was formally an employee in the family tea enterprise but with significant autonomy: he entered the business in the neoliberal moral framework of a separate start-up or a “company within a company”. This not only was distinguished as business approach which the young man understood as an advanced and superior valuing innovation and accelerated pace, but also gave him the access to the resources of the main company while being secure.

Compared to any other children in majority of Kazakhstani families who feel the need to reciprocate their parents’ support, Renata and Damir optimized care for their families through practices which simultaneously are self-care oriented toward enhancing their own human capital. Similarly to their parents, they cultivate their employability or business “portfolio” accumulating entrepreneurial skills in a “professional” and competitive businesses, so in the volatile markets they would find a way to reinvest capital with their “brains.”

The frame of business transformation practices, allowed both parents and children dyads to reallocate the focus from “irrational” for their cooperation critique and conflicts toward strategic management. In this sense, the formalized organization or a separate start-up did not imply actual disentanglement of family and work, contrary to the representation of the research participants. Rather, following the expected power dynamics between older and younger generations – which aligned with the hierarchies of experience and knowledge – worked to optimize the overlapping realms. Consistent with Lee's (2018) conceptualization of care as asset that valorizes one's portfolio, still existent conflicts and resentments could not ultimately overshadow the pursuit of the optimization of care and self-care overlap. In Chapter 5, I illustrate a different dynamic where the young adults enter businesses of their FGE parents not following the professionalization practices but carrying the burden of the main facilitators of business transformation. Similarly to this chapter, young neoliberal subjectivity performers also desire optimization of the overlapping

dimensions. However, the transition was fraught because the adult children's focus on portfolio management ideals and pressures of changing market collided with inherited informal regimes, obligations and promises given by their parents, practices perceived as “unprofessional,” and withdrawal of their parents from productive stance due to age expectations. As a result, conflicts and family tensions over “old-fashioned” versus “professional” business methods obscured the importance of actual culturally meaningful practices of business expansion and entrepreneurial continuity.

Chapter 5 Hybrid Business Practices and “Negative” Family-Work Optimization: Emerging Capital Due to Cooperation and Contradictions

Bakhtiyar Beksultanov, 27, spent another day shouting across the office about the careless mistakes of his “unprofessional” staff, which he “inherited” from his father – a fifty-seven-year old first-generation entrepreneur (FGE) Kanat Beksultanov. The young managing director demanded quality work, on-time deliveries, contract compliance, better sales performance, and so on. After a stressful workday of barking orders down the line, he showed me dozens of phone calls saying, “That’s just today. Yesterday was even more”. The amount of conflicts in the construction site or in the office of “Quality Construction”, an emerging property development company in Astana, was unbearable for me, while the range of issues the second-generation young entrepreneur controlled was unimaginable.

Moreover, the relationship between Bakhtiyar and his father grew strained. The young man spoke bitterly after a fierce fight with Kanat Beksultanov (57), fueled by misunderstandings stemming from conflicting business approaches. Moreover, the immense responsibility Bakhtiyar carried further intensified these tensions. “There’s a good chance he’d [father] have gotten into serious legal trouble if I hadn’t joined [the company]!” the young man snapped. He listed the ways he had “professionalized” the company: ensuring the company's proper registration, launching sales, establishing accounting, legal, and HR functions, and eventually overseeing the entire operation and production.

His father, Kanat aga, had come a long way from a series of small, inconsistent entrepreneurial activities to the first steps in the real estate business (Chapter 1 addressed the examples of informal and even illegal early-market entrepreneurship). The all-rounder, self-taught “accidental entrepreneurs” (Schröder & Schröder, 2017) explored entrepreneurship with little

formal guidance, as the very rules of the game were still being shaped. In turn, his son Bakhtiyar assumed responsibility for adapting the business to the demands of an increasingly formalized and competitive market. In the case of Kyrgyz entrepreneurs, in Schröder's (2021) study, they described the evolving business environment through the emic term "professionalization", which the author conceptualized as a shift from a versatile, self-taught entrepreneurship mode toward specialization of business. My research did not mention this particular word but also captured related characteristics of transformation: "more formal and digitalized," "changing," or "more competitive" market.

Still, this dissertation adopts Schröder's (2021) analytical framework of contemporary business-making as "supposed to be knowledge- and skill-based" and "guided by rather global corporate values" (p.228). However, I do not use the term specialization because, while the research participants dichotomize between notions of "old" and "new" business practices, the first- and the second-generation entrepreneurs still often rely on *are still*. While young adults like Bakhtiyar criticize their parents' willingness to continue practices "from the 90s," meaning they are informal, economically irrational, and person-centered, this chapter demonstrates the hybridization of various business approaches. Although young second-generation entrepreneurs (SGEs) outsourced certain tasks to specialists in auditing, legal, and marketing services, their management style falls short of global corporate standards. In practice, young businesspeople operating with limited capital used every available means to accumulate it: they formalized functions where required, specialized when it proved efficient, and rationalized operations where feasible, yet continued to rely heavily on informality and trusted family members and friends to handle informal/formal responsibilities, while centralizing overall operations and strategic management in their own hands.

Chapter 2 introduced the etic umbrella term “professionalization” regarding the internal business organization transformation with a focus on formalization, operational rationalization, and specialization. Here, it also signals contrast with seemingly “old-fashioned” business practices of informal, unclear responsibilities, statuses, and roles in management, economically irrational decisions, and too much person-centered control, still used by young successors in practice.

Having observed Bakhtiyar's strong emotions after he made his employees “clean up”, correcting what he viewed as careless, resultless, and unprofessional work, I noticed that he always returned to a composed and self-soothing demeanor. His entrepreneurial logic won, guiding most of his thinking. When asked why he left a stable and promising career in the public sector, where the hierarchies and responsibilities were clearer, and stayed in the business, where the “mistakes” and human resources decisions of his father weighed so heavily, after a little pause, he answered: “If you’ve got such a chance, you’d be a fool not to grab it”. He criticized young people who, in his view, lacked the strategic foresight to take advantage of the opportunities their parents provided.

The growing infiltration of economic rationality into various aspects of life has blurred the boundaries between production and reproduction, producing what Foucault (2008) called the enterprisation of society. Having an entrepreneurial mind is about treating every aspect of life as something to be optimized and invested in. Family relations are inseparable from this, as the cases like the Beksultanovs or the Ospanovs in this chapter illustrate the strategic involvement of the adult children in family business. While Narotzky and Smith (2006) described how flexible neoliberal economies in Southern Europe compel people to rely on family labour out of necessity under structural precarity, the cases in this chapter address a slightly different configuration. It is important that the involvement of the adult children in their fathers’ businesses was not the

outcome of constraint or lack of alternatives here. Although the children were indeed used as underpaid family labour - an all-round executives - their participation stemmed from deliberate calculation and desire for optimization rather than compulsion or their fathers' caring invitation to join.

In these cases, the fathers needed their children's involvement: they had accumulated business opportunities but lacked investment capital, especially for human resources, and their adult children possessed precisely the kinds of experience and competencies that the contemporary market demanded. The younger generation's stance aligns with the neoliberal form of subjectivity - human capital - as they represent themselves as self-managers who invest all aspects of life in their portfolio to enhance its value (Fehér, 2009). Bakhtiyar, for example, combined a prestigious education, state service, entrepreneurial experience (see Chapter 2 for the discussion of his career trajectory), productivity of youth, and filial loyalty to his father. At the same time, he calculated that his plan to accumulate substantial capital by his 30th birthday could be reached more quickly by leveraging his father's business opportunities rather than career in law enforcement. In this way, his personal trajectory toward success became inseparable from the family's upward movement, as his father's wealth and son's executive achievements were tightly connected. This intentional involvement positioned Bakhtiyar as the main progressive force within the firm, demonstrating how neoliberal flexibility may be appropriated as a project of family-work optimization, not only as a survival strategy.

However, this intergenerational tandem was anything but smooth. The transition of business was difficult because the fathers and the children held conflicting ideals about what counted as right in terms of business practices. Business education literature celebrates "reliance on entrepreneurial behavior that purposefully and continuously *rejuvenates*" enterprises (Kreiser

et al., 2021, p. 739, emphasis added). The FGEs in this chapter, by contrast, instrumentalized the age expectations of being in a less productive life stage, which placed the responsibility for rejuvenation of the business on youth. At the same time, anthropological scholarship on post-socialist reforms has argued that novel Western standards does more than regulation; they also establish new social hierarchies and regimes of power such as modern versus backward, and morally suspect workers (Dunn, 2005; Kesküla, 2012). Whereas Chapter 4 showed how the pursuit of “professionalization” could unite parents and children against “backward” employees, this chapter, in contrast, examines how conflicting understandings of business practice, age, and generation divide the FGEs and their successor SGEs. Yes, they could expand their business and accumulate capital - familial and individual - but the amount of accumulated conflicts and resentment made family cooperation less visible and vulnerable, so both generations envisioned professional paths that would no longer intersect in the future.

The protagonists of this chapter navigated family tensions, everyday difficulties, and self-exploitation in their efforts to transform and expand their businesses. Previous chapters focused on affective ties, which can be converted into assets for self-enhancement (Lee, 2018). Here, in contrast, I show the moments of confrontation, such as defending hard-earned budgets from fathers’ interference or firing “unproductive” relatives were crucial to keeping the optimization project viable. These conflicts damaged the “family” side of the family-work optimization while simultaneously making it possible. Drawing on Feher’s critical account of the portfolio manager ideal, the chapter shows that even challenges to intergenerational hierarchy and family conflicts can become investments for enhancement. The variety of optimization pursued by Bakhtiyar and Dinara produced upward mobility but did so in a way that foregrounded deep tensions: between

“professional” and “old-fashioned” business making, between neoliberal ideals of constant self-management and life-stage expectations, and between care for family and self-care.

This chapter argues that the adult children who emphasize their self-manager side might take over family-work optimization, and successfully revitalize the informal family businesses. However, under the normative pressures of neoliberal ideals about subjectivity and the market, the very conflicts that drive transformation also obscure intergenerational cooperation. Adult children’s strategies of formalization, operational rationalization, and specialization make family enterprises appear modern and “professional,” but closer, longer-term ethnographic engagement reveals their dependence on hybrid practices using “inherited” from the FGE-fathers. These hybrid practices sustain the transformation, yet remain largely hidden behind dichotomies of “modern” versus “backward” work. Conflicting ideals strain family dynamics and traditional intergenerational hierarchy, while actual cooperation, economic care, and everyday culturally meaningful business practices - “professional” and “old-fashioned” ones - remained out of focus.

In sum, this chapter explores how adult children use and enhance their portfolios in expanding their fathers’ businesses in an increasingly complex business environment. They assemble hybrid approaches grounded in “professionalization” while simultaneously adapting and reworking parental practices. I place the term “hybridity” in parentheses to signal its conceptual value, while admitting that all businesses are hybrid because the rigidity contradicts the very idea of successful entrepreneurship in a constantly changing market, which is more about everyday practices and flexibility in problem-solving. Still, what follows is a more detailed examination of how “hybridity” manifests in the two particular cases of the Beksultanovs and the Ospanovs.

Like Father, Like Son? Intergenerational Contrasts in Livelihood Strategies

Bakhtiyar Beksultanov came to his father's business not as an employee in a competitive and transforming company, but I would refer to it as a strategic partner and business reinventor. Instead of holding substantial capital in money or assets, like the enterprises built and managed by the FGEs in other chapters, his father, Kanat aga, had accumulated enormous potential and opportunities for capitalization. However, these alone were not sufficient. While the FGE was a seasoned businessman (Chapter 1), it could not be clearly stated that he had an enterprise in its contemporary understanding; rather, he acquired a land in Astana and spent all his capital to develop a construction project, while not having a “proper” registration, office, and staff.

Kanat Beksultanov's (57) entrepreneurial activities ranged from profit-creating endeavors, such as maneuvering between owners of former Soviet entities, to managing small construction brigades, and occasionally creating and selling construction projects to investors (Chapter 1). He did not plan to become a serious competitor to various construction companies in the economy-class housing market in Astana. The FGE considered making an impressive closing move, a project of rapid money accumulation for his private pension fund, “named after him,” as he joked. His lack of interest in transforming business approaches, restructuring organization, studying marketing, improving customer service, but rather prioritization of rapid profit-making, still resembled the behavior of emerging entrepreneurs in the initial marketization period, characterized by “ad-hoc informality driven by short time-horizons” (Schröder & Schröder, 2017, p. 3).

The “retirement plan” of Kanat aga consisted of the following. After successfully realizing his project as a speculative broker (acquiring land from the municipality and selling it as a ready-made architectural project to an investor who built it), he became the owner of several apartments and commercial spaces in a newly constructed apartment block in Karaganda. Receiving the real estate, the FGE planned to multiply this capital by replicating the same scheme. Yet when he found

a suitable piece of land in 2020, this time in Astana, and purchased the architectural project, he became carried away by the idea of not selling it to an investor but of building it himself. However, he did not have the necessary economic capital for that.

Carrying out this business project required the strategic deployment of his full repertoire of alternative forms of capital: social networks, cultural competencies, entrepreneurial experience (especially the know-how from the early marketization period), as well as individual traits of a charismatic leader. His networks built through his experience in the construction field since the 2000s led him to crucial negotiations that could partially solve the problem of a lack of funds and staff. For example, he met with a fellow businessman who had a contractor company with various construction brigades, with whom they had worked in the past, and they struck a deal. The former agreed to provide construction works with deferred partial payments and in the form of future flats. Kanat aga did the same with the owner of a brick factory in Pavlodar city, and with the owner of the concrete plant in Karaganda region. Even though the FGE did not know the latter personally, he, as others in his circle also noted, remarked with a smile, “I have a talent for persuasion.” The agreements were sealed with handshakes, relying on personal reputation, trust, and potential rapid profit, rather than formal contracts.

Next, in the absence of formally employed professionals and the opportunity to pay fixed salaries, Kanat aga relied on his close circle of loyal and committed people, both within or outside his blood-based kin. In the first real estate development experience, a small two-level apartment building in the suburbs of Astana, where Kanat aga's brother and an outsider young man Amir were responsible for the management and supervision of subcontractor builders, several nephews and a brother-in-law participated as handymen, the kin members turned out even less productive and committed than an outsider. Amir became Kanat aga's right-hand man for a wide range of

tasks beyond ordinary workplace boundaries: various executive, managerial, and “dirty work” issues, ranging from finding partner subcontractors, to bribing officials, to winter tire change on Kanat aga's personal car. The young man in his late 30s did not have a formal education, but originated from Kanat aga's home region, knew his large family, and became a loyal “squire” (*oruzhenosets*, rus., *tolengit*, kaz., as the FGE would jokingly refer to him), captivated by the prospects of upward mobility drawn into the businessman's orbit. Initially, without any formal employment status, and this time becoming the official “director” of the company, Kanat aga planned to put the executive part on him as well. While the FGE believed he had secured the partners, Amir would need to be present at the construction site to supervise the process.

However, a new era of business-making was forming with the coming of the third decade of the 2000s. While Kanat aga had spent most of his remaining money on land and an architectural project, he still needed to sell the apartments in the future residential complex to finance its construction. But in reality, neither he nor Amir knew how to do this. They had never engaged in sales or marketing in the construction industry. In Kanat aga's first real estate development experience, they relied on word-of-mouth networks to find buyers among acquaintances and acquaintances of acquaintances. However, even though they managed to sell several apartments and finish the construction after multiple delays, the small apartment block in the suburbs of Astana was not properly registered within the municipality due to the neglect of official documentation. In his second successful deal within the construction market, Kanat aga was also not involved in the “professionalized” operation because he sold the whole project to an investor who then invested in establishing the sales and production departments, as well as other supporting units.

This time, Kanat aga's son, while still working in state service, watched how things unfolded and considered that this larger project required close engagement with sales strategies

and more, while some of the informal arrangements that his father hoped to put in place fell through. Kanat aga, who prioritized production aspect (“I already knew that building the house was not that unattainable”), ignoring the importance of marketing and “professionalization” of other aspects (“sales is not a problem”; “the location is comfortable”), lost the support of that owner of a general constructor company with whom they agreed to build the part of the block with the deferred payment. The businessman had disappeared, allegedly relocating to another country, leaving his own workers unpaid, even though they had already managed to excavate a pit at the site. In the absence of funds, Kanat aga's reliance on a human factor and networks instantly jeopardized the entire project.

Finally, his enterprise existed largely on paper, consisting formally of only Amir as a director, as well as a lawyer and an accountant, both university friends of Kanat aga, who helped him part-time. Many other functions were handled informally or ignored in practice. In the meantime, the construction market became more formalized, while the clients' preferences had been changing dramatically. Potential clients were deterred by bitter experiences of investing in construction projects that disappeared with their money, so they were wary of trusting their money to unknown, unreliable construction companies, even if they offered attractive prices or location. Second, the uncertainty related to COVID-19 paralyzed not only regular clients but also investors. Hence, Kanat aga spent several months with results trying to find a way to sell the project to larger construction companies or investors.

This was the state of affairs, as both the father and the son described it, before the latter's involvement in the business. The illustrated entrepreneurial practices such as informal deal-making without written agreements, investing in loyal Amir but whose lack of skills and education Bakhtiyar regarded as an irrational economic decision, and the full reliance on the leader's strategic

oversight and Amir's executive role rather than on further specialization were emphasized by the younger generation in the framework of limits rather than being grateful for the foundation for new opportunities. Precisely the interaction with Bakhtiyar Beksultanov, who joined the business, and observation of family-work conflicts highlighted the tension between the “outdated” strategies (barter, deferred payment, easily violated agreements, lack of constant) and the need for “modern” formal structures, professionalization of business and marketing strategies to accumulate budget. The following section focuses on the concrete steps Bakhtiyar took to professionalize the business and his prioritization of neoliberal stance and ideals.

The FGE's Son: Business Manager, Portfolio Manager

By contrast, Bakhtiyar came insisting on proper documentation, professional sales strategy, introduction of video surveillance at the construction site, and human resources reorganization - echoing the demands of a new business environment. My interaction with Bakhtiyar revealed a sense of urgency: joining the business and its professionalization was not just a preference but perceived as a necessity for the family, its social mobility, and the individual trajectories of the father and the son in an ever-accelerating, competitive environment. This chapter interprets the strategies of the young generation through the lens of Fehér's (2009) portfolio manager theory, which acknowledges the pressure on neoliberal subjects to actively invest in multiple areas of life to enhance personal value.

Bakhtiyar was Kanat aga's only child (whose education and career trajectory were detailed in Chapter 2), and he worked in government service for 3 years in Karaganda. As a second-generation university graduate, he viewed this as a secure route to upward mobility and prestige within his extended family (see the discussion on autonomy/prestige and stability/prestige in Chapter 3). Having witnessed the risks and inconsistencies of his father's informal entrepreneurial

ventures, he was determined to pursue stability through education in law and formal employment rather than joining his father's business. However, rather than choosing one path, since the mid of his university journey he decided to assemble a diversified portfolio: he juggled studies, worked part-time as a taxi driver, then transformed his passion for computer games and friendship into a micro entrepreneurship experience by co-founding a gaming center, then secured employment in the law enforcement agency, where invested his time and energy in overtime hours of formal tasks and sometimes informal requests from his bosses (Chapter 2 describes his trajectory in detail). The young man emphasized his effort to make optimized decisions in everyday life and across multiple fronts of life.

However, the potential heights his father opened at the end of the 2010s corrected the young man's plan. Despite early entrepreneurial success in the 1990s, his father's inability to formalize his ventures into a structured business model or effectively circulate his accumulated capital prevented the son from viewing "family business" as a serious vehicle for socioeconomic advancement. Yet, this time Bakhtiyar emphasized that his father eventually acquired and properly documented the land, unlike "in the 1990s when he lost so much property because he secured them through handshakes only". It was the time that Bakhtiyar began to take conversations about his father's business more seriously, but cautiously as well. Kanat aga showed his son the calculations of potential profit if the construction project were realized. This could solve their issues with capital accumulation and help them enter a different league much more quickly than Bakhtiyar had planned with a completely separate project from his father. At the same time, realizing that his father lacked a realistic understanding of contemporary sales and marketing strategies, proper documentation with subcontractors and clients, regular bookkeeping, and "tax optimization", etc., Bakhtiyar admitted he feared his father might take advance payments from clients but fail to

complete the project. That scenario could harm the entire family's reputation and even jeopardize his own career in state service.

This made the son's involvement in his father's business the next step. The son became involved in the business, perceiving the approaches and the team of his father as "outdated" and as something that needed to be modernized. I interpret the modernization project in the framework of the businesses in this dissertation as "professionalization," which aimed at informal, unspecialized, and sometimes economically irrational business operations in the context of business-making in which the research participants were involved. However, I show below that the concrete steps undertaken by Bakhtiyar resist a simple dichotomy between former and "modern" business practices. The following subsection illustrates them as hybrid ones, pragmatically responsive to limits of funds and the changing business environment.

The "Professional" Ideal, The "Hybrid" Reality

After contrasting the father's entrepreneurial legacy with his son's modernizing ambitions and neoliberal ideals, this subsection turns to the illustration of the concrete business transformation steps. In previous chapters, it was easier to distinguish the umbrella term 'professionalization' and more straightforwardly contrast this with the business practices rooted in the early post-Soviet market environment. For instance, Chapter 2 examined FGEs who actively resisted changes, preferring informally-constructed practices of running a business. For example, cases like Kairat Sabitov, whose adult children could not help him because they lacked understanding of how such systems work, also highlighted how a reliance on trust, informality, and sometimes irrational (for market-based logic) family loyalties, rather than organizational reform, led to "betrayal" and ultimately business loss. Conversely, Chapter 5 demonstrated situations where FGEs like the Smirnovs who themselves championed innovation, facilitating

smoother transitions and more comprehensible business roles for the next generation. Or the Akhmetovs, where the father admitted that his enterprise still relied a lot on “bazaar approaches” which he used in the beginning, yet involving his son in the business by funding his initiative of a “company within a company” in the form of a “start-up” which the son understood and considered as a “professional” one.

By contrast, this subsection explores a landscape where inherited practices and professionalization are deeply interwoven. Here, the boundary between informal and formal business approaches is blurred to the point that any single strategy cannot be neatly distinguished. Even in the writing process, the entanglement is apparent: every instance of business transformation draws simultaneously on both legacies and innovations, revealing how pragmatic hybridization is central to some cases where portfolio manager children reanimate business in the conditions of funding constraints. This complexity challenges perceived binary classifications and demands a more nuanced, reflexive analytical framework.

Bakhtiyar started getting involved in the construction by testing “hybridity” in 2021. The young man decided to substitute economic capital with alternative forms he had in his “portfolio”: utilizing his experience in law, proper documentation, and understanding of organizational hierarchy in state service, as well as entrepreneurial experience with a friend, along with the know-how he had inherited from his father. By the time of data collection in 2022, the hybrid approach had yielded results: the formalization of documents, working sales, legal, and accounting offices, utilizing his father’s head-hunting strategies and long-standing trust-based motivation systems, despite Bakhtiyar’s exclusive emphasis on the challenges he faced coming from “outdated” approaches.

Formal Sales and Marketing, Informal Recruiting, Hybrid Management Style

The company's budget constraints would not allow Bakhtiyar to hire professionals to establish sales, marketing campaigns, or professional social media analysis. His father's nominal company did not even have a presentable office: a space suitable for hosting and impressing potential clients. Therefore, the young son adopted a budget-friendly approach that served the family's interests: Bakhtiyar took many responsibilities on himself, while also using his father's head-hunting strategies. First, while still working at the state service, he offered his partner, who had skills in digital design, to help him with content for creating a commercial Instagram account for a future apartment block. As his friend and business partner in their gaming center, the young man trusted Bakhtiyar, so he agreed to participate without receiving any compensation. Before the emergence of AI-assisted design tools, Bakhtiyar, along with a friend, developed a content plan that mimicked the best construction companies' social media accounts. The quality of work satisfied Bakhtiyar, and he decided to offer his friend a longer partnership: a sales director position. However, again, the prospects of the project were still vague and depended on the success of the sales. Almost everything in the role description was broad and ambiguous, while the friend and Bakhtiyar himself had minimal experience in sales. The only specific responsibility was selling apartments to raise capital for the upcoming construction.

Bakhtiyar relied on his overall portfolio and quick learning experience, and needed “hands” to help implement his ideas and the long-term commitment of people. Therefore, he adopted a system of motivation, including “bonuses,” which his father “invented” during his capital-constrained entrepreneurial path. Even though it was called the same with what is associated with a managerial mechanism of performance-based payments in neoliberal and financialized economies, initially the FGE Kanat Beksultanov brought another meaning to his bonuses. It was his strategy, grounded in the overlap between trust, loyalty, and handshake promises of a share

with formal employment, aimed at mobilizing human resources in the context of capital constraints. The Beksultanovs utilized their social capital, leveraging ties with people and their reputation, and promised a share in the to-be-finished project, which would be significantly more than the salaries in the labor market (the official salary was provided as long as the initial funds were accumulated). For example, Amir (Kanat aga's right-hand man) benefited from the share of real estate that Kanat aga received from the previous venture. The loyal young man found this cooperation with his “patron” to be favourable as well. This indeed was possible due to “flexible” informal labor normalized in the conditions of neoliberal precarity (Narotzky & Smith, 2006), and Kanat aga admitted that:

I devised a bonus system, and it turned out to be the most effective. We offer what a person [responsible for an agreed achievement in the project] may never earn in their life as an employee. Would anyone really refuse the opportunity to work hard for a couple of years and provide themselves with a couple of apartments in the end?! Well, Amir made it, bought his mother a fur coat, paid off his debts, and upgraded his car. Otherwise, he could work for 100 thousand [tenge] all his life (Kanat Beksultanov, 57 y.o. FGE, March 2023).

This time, Amir was promised to receive almost a tenth of the share in future-constructed square meters for his formal/informal roles in this project in 2019, when there was no certainty that any outcomes would emerge. In turn, Bakhtiyar offered his potential head of sales a one-room apartment for his involvement in creating and managing the sales department in 2022, when the land was registered, the project was delineated, and all the necessary building permits were acquired. Later, when they accumulated their first capital through pre-sales, the positions were formalized with salaries, while the initial agreement remained undocumented and trust-based.

Although the “bonus system” was represented as straightforward and attractive, the realization of the complex building project in the ever-advancing market required more than loyalty and commitment. Here is where the problems and confusion started. The father and the son had a sharp divide in their understanding of the motivation system. Kanat aga was ready to forgive mistakes, unprofessionalism, the lower level of skills and education, and other flaws in people if they were loyal and tried their best because he realized that this was a trade-off of building a business in his situation. The FGE always tried to compensate for the lack of capital with loyal followers who were willing to undertake numerous unclear responsibilities in exchange for the promised substantial reward and some form of responsibility that Kanat aga took on for them. He could criticize in a fatherly manner, scold, demand, teach, and lecture about life and right values, but because he exercised some kind of patronage for them, he could not fire these people unless they “betrayed” him (involved in fraudulent activity, contested his authority).

However, what Bakhtiyar also needed was “professionalism”: he could not trade quality for loyalty; he needed both. After the young entrepreneur fully joined the business, quitting state service, he assumed de-facto CEO's role. He faced a complex and ever-advancing business environment, and like his father, demanded informal, irrational loyalty, deep commitment to fulfilling responsibilities, but also high professional contribution with quantifiable results from people who agreed to work for them. In practice, the SGE justified his high demands with the future gains of his “partners”: the responsibilities stayed broad, constant overloads, unpredictable working hours, and unethical approaches to make the employees work. I have witnessed many times how Bakhtiyar demanded quality or commitment from workers: he asked several times calmly as a friend, and when he did not see the expected results, he blew up. Bakhtiyar could eliminate all the father's employees who failed to fulfill their responsibilities in a timely,

professional, and committed manner, but not “partners” like Amir, because of the informal promise of a share. He also could not just get rid of his friend (the sales director) in the moments of unfulfilled expectations because of their agreement while the latter also did not leave because the promise of real estate outweighed the disadvantages and the failed friendship with the current boss. Therefore, while the Beksultanovs hired some professionals – like a lawyer and an accountant – the young businessman could not fully let go of the self-centered control approach and found himself shouting everyday, preparing to-do lists for the employees, insisting on higher standards every day, and often finishing tasks by himself.

To everyone's relief, after one month of launching the sales department, building a modern sales department office out of a shipping container, and establishing marketing led by Bakhtiyar's leadership and guidance, their most positive prediction came true. The sales department was able to sell eleven apartments and more than twenty within the next three months. In turn, the technical part did not progress at all. Opposed to funding, the FGE presented the construction itself as not a big deal to his son and promised to take it (by Amir's competence). However, since the general contractor's owner, with whom Kanat aga made a deal about the deferred payment, disappeared, the construction works stopped. A substantial amount of money, collected from new members of the construction cooperative, became the source of Bakhtiyar's burden rather than excitement.

Hybridity in Production

The young adult became anxious, predicting the worst scenario. He imagined his father, who never really worked on such serious projects, would fail to construct the building and would just spend all the funds inefficiently or on his personal needs. While it would mean all the sleepless nights Bakhtiyar spent working on sales would not pay off, in the worst case, his father could end up having legal troubles in front of clients, he thought. Such potential major family troubles did

not align with his plans and would significantly delay his own upward mobility aspirations. The young man decided to fully get involved in the business, leaving the state service and selling his small business, which specialized in game consoles and a shop.

Having analyzed the potential risks and benefits, the son insisted that the father's company should have managed the construction itself, rather than relying on a general contractor company. While Kanat aga was afraid to be involved in such a serious construction and did not believe that Amir would be able to manage it, he trusted in the capability of his son to do it with his traits, portfolio, and experience. The father never explicitly asked his son to leave the state service and join the business, but he quietly hoped for it. For Kanat aga, it would be a perfect scenario - having a trustworthy and loyal team/family member who also had up-to-date competencies.

In terms of Bakhtiyar, after learning the practices in his father's business, he had already become convinced that without him, his portfolio, ability to learn and adapt quickly, and commitment to contributing to familial and individual upward mobility, this project would bring many troubles to their family. On the contrary, it could lead to success in a couple of years with his hard work and devotion. His father never acknowledged the first part, though he emphasized the second one. When the son claimed his decision to fully join the business, they verbally agreed on their respective shares of the future profits. From this time on, they became co-owners of the business, and the potential profits from their first apartment block were verbally divided 50/50. Yet, formally, Bakhtiyar registered himself only as a Chief Financial Officer, who was subordinate to Amir (registered as a director), but began to establish control over everything.

The father and son began developing a concrete strategy and distributing tasks to the team. While this project aimed to earn substantial capital, the father and son planned to optimize “every penny” as much as possible, with no loss in quality; it was only possible under their close control

and the loyal team of multitaskers. First, they assigned Amir the task of finding and managing separate subcontractors, rather than one general contractor, for each stage of construction, such as framing, bricklaying, electrical work, plumbing, roofing, insulation, and cladding, among others. Second, they had to extend their team by hiring several technical specialists who were supposed to be on-site. However, their optimization strategies included reducing expenses on services and staff: while formally Amir was a director and Bakhtiyar never stopped reminding him that it was supposedly him to be in charge of higher-level strategic aspects, he also expected him to plug every on-site hole like wiring the electricity by hand, or becoming a handyman whenever there were not enough workers.

However, the more immersed Bakhtiyar became in the work, the more he became frustrated about the inefficient operation and “unprofessionals” in his father’s business. This seemed like an injustice to him personally, considering the potential shares Amir could receive, along with a decent monthly salary, and the mistakes he made. Within the first nine months of Bakhtiyar's close involvement, because of Amir's failures and misleading assurances, the company had lost dozens of millions of tenge. For example, once he found a brigade of bricklayers from another region and persuaded Kanat Aga that they were reliable, he requested an advanced payment of four million tenge. After the FGE agreed to send money to them, they disappeared. Amir also lied several times to Bakhtiyar, claiming he had conducted the market analysis for the construction material. However, after payment, Bakhtiyar found better offers that cost them millions again.

From the Amir's perspective, the failures occurred due to misunderstandings, unclear requirements, and the pressure of too many formal and informal responsibilities. However, the Beksultanovs did not want to hear any excuses from a person who had been promised a substantial share in the potential profit. Furthermore, Amir could never oppose the orders or respond to

accusations from his senior chief and his son, as dictated by the informal but strict hierarchy. Sometimes, Amir was unable to complete the formal responsibilities assigned by Bakhtiyar because Kanat aga assigned him informal but urgent tasks, such as assisting relatives or repairing cars, which further aggravated the everyday tensions. At the same time, while Kanat aga continuously reprimanded Amir, he protected him in front of his son, who insisted on firing him and removing him from the share because it meant the FGE was no longer a man of his word. While Amir's failures and the system his father once built devastated Bakhtiyar because he perceived it as the reason for distancing him from the desired upward mobility. In reality, it was simultaneously the means towards it, so they continued to work in this manner: in constant tension, shouting, cursing, and scapegoating Amir.

However, Amir was not the only one who stayed. Bakhtiyar fired two of his father's university friends and three of their relatives, weighing market rationality over the relations with extended family. The mistakes of those employees cost the firm money: some repeatedly made mistakes, acted unprofessionally due to a lack of modern portfolio management; others had promised to give up alcohol at the workplace but were caught drunk. Yet Bakhtiyar made exceptions. His older cousin, despite also struggling with addictions and lacking higher education and even basic computer skills, was close to Bakhtiyar and had made a significant contribution during the initial phase of sales. The young SGE was more forgiving towards him than others, partly justifying it through his “lively mind” and “irrational” love for him and respect for his mother. However, this did not work for other relatives, who found the SGE switched to fully rational mode.

By the end of 2022, the Beksultanovs had already realized that the construction would fail to meet the announced deadlines, so Bakhtiyar aimed to compensate by emphasizing the high

quality in at least some aspects of the project to maintain client satisfaction. When the construction of the residential project overcame the first big challenges, the young entrepreneur committed to finding a company that would supply and install high-quality windows. However, his father's involvement in the process became a constraint. The experienced entrepreneur met with his sister, who put a word in for her daughter and her husband's window company. "No problem", assured his sister Kanat aga because he got used to the role of the family's backbone. Hardly a day passed without his niece calling him, inviting him over for a dinner and a chat about their "mutually beneficial deal". The next day, the father announced his decision to the son. The fight that followed was bitter, but there was no reversing it because Kanat aga could not allow his promises to be empty words.

The only thing the young SGE could do, suppressing yet another urge to leave the business on which he staked everything, was to ensure the collaboration was documented correctly with the standard contracts and procedures they employed with any other subcontractors. This formal paperwork and Bakhtiyar's refusal to pay the whole sum in advance helped them when his negative expectations were realized. The relatives' brigade delivered and installed windows, but the quality was inappropriate. The defects appeared in almost every apartment, but the relatives grew unresponsive and considered the insistence on strict standards to be excessive. While Bakhtiyar, at the beginning of the conflict, tried to send Amir (an outsider to the family) to negotiations over the quality to avoid overt confrontation, it later became meaningless when all Kanat aga's extended family started gossiping about Bakhtiyar "taking the throne". Bakhtiyar proved to his father that quality was unacceptable, and after another series of conflicts, they both came to the decision to withhold a portion of the payment to their relatives. While the son's contribution saved them some

money, which was of critical importance to their situation, the business lost time, strained their relationship with clients, and some of the relatives harbored lingering resentment.

It was yet another hard-earned lesson that highlighted the flaws in the existing organizational hierarchy, leading to conflicts between the father and son over crucial decisions, such as HR policy and subcontractor selection. Following the incident with the windows as well as the health issues, Kanat aga progressively withdrew from decision-making. This change considerably increased Bakhtiyar's responsibility for the venture's ultimate success or failure - the burden that weighed heavily and sometimes felt unbearable. Moreover, his perceived key role in the processes of familial upward mobility continued to escalate family scandals due to contested intergenerational hierarchies and unfulfilled expectations (e.g. the son kept being angry with the father, focusing on flaws of the father's approaches and his lack of desire to adapt to the new business environment). At the same time, this helped to carve out only the effective “hybrid” practices that continued to contribute toward the expansion of capital accumulation. For example, Bakhtiyar finally could integrate a more or less dedicated team with the remaining members of Kanat aga's crew and his own trusted professionals, ensuring team compliance without internal sabotage.

The Beksultanovs eventually completed the residential area and started another one to even more multiply the capital, transferring Kanat aga's promises from one project to another. Bakhtiyar continued to be the key all-rounder in the business, blending formal and informal, as well as rational and irrational practices, depending on the context. He planned that one day their family could turn the assets into substantial money, and he would finally hire professionals and establish a clear corporate structure.

Not every adult child of an entrepreneur could or wanted to withstand this. Bakhtiyar Beksultanov has reinforced various experiences and knowledge in his portfolio, making it highly valued for running a business like this, including state service, micro-entrepreneurship, and experience with conflicts (see Chapter 2). In turn, Dinara Ospanova's case is different in terms of her pre-entrepreneurial work experience and the scales of business (a dozen direct employees and about a hundred people involved on the construction site as subcontractors vs the Ospanov's office of the official dealership consisting of five employees and a lesser amount of partner interaction). However, it still illustrates the same combination of a valorized neoliberal condition portfolio and taking on the burden of professionalizing the father's business with limited capital for the sake of individual/familial upward mobility. Below, I will focus on the examples of her “hybrid” strategies on this path.

Young Woman in Men's World: From Informality to “Global Standards”

Similarly to Kanat aga, Erlan aga - Dinara's father - arrived at a place where opportunities for substantial capital accumulation also emerged following a turbulent personal and professional journey. He was one of the middle children of a miner who moved from a small village to one of the satellite cities around Karaganda. While young Erlan drifted mostly aimlessly through the turbulent waters of the free market in the 1990s, his older brother enjoyed some stability working within the “citadel” of the mining industry and later even built a career in the office of one of the mining corporations. In turn, Erlan married an ambitious young woman who studied at a respected Soviet institution in Karaganda and later, he graduated from the university (already in independent Kazakhstan). Then, he could access the customs service, the desired occupation for many, as it opened avenues for informal earnings; however, Erlan aga could not stay in the system for long as the rigidity of the regime frustrated him, though he obtained useful networks there. By the 2010s,

Erlan aga was employed and rapidly promoted in a company that imported machinery from Belarus, largely due to his experience with customs and ability to resolve border issues informally.

In turn, by the mid-2010s, specializing in industrial equipment as well as his older brother's access to some procurement decisions within the mining corporation he worked for led Erlan aga to the idea of organizing the supply of mining equipment himself. Starting from small-scale drilling equipment components, the FGE, with his wife at his side, formed his entrepreneurial endeavors into a promising micro-entrepreneurship. At that time, with the first profit, the family was able to send Dinara, the oldest daughter, to study abroad.

When Dinara came back with a diploma, Erlan aga's company had been changing: the informal channel through which they supplied the equipment had become unavailable, as Erlan aga's brother was no longer in charge. Moreover, the market did not remain still - large players with substantial capital entered the field, absorbed smaller firms, while officials facilitated their own lobbying strategies. At the same time, the tech side advanced too quickly. However, Erlan aga, already seasoned in the field, did not want to leave the promising business and encouraged his daughter to get involved as well.

Compared to Bakhtiyar, who had already worked in the state service and founded his own small business before entering the family business, the official dealership of Dinara's father was the first and only place where she worked. Yet, her academic background made her a natural fit for the role of Head of International Relations, because the official dealership with several foreign brands in its portfolio engaged in extensive international communication. During her studies and independent life as a student in a foreign country, she developed the capacity to take responsibility, quickly learn and navigate new domains, and employ analytical thinking, along with other hard and soft skills. Her fluency in English, as well as her dedication to serving her family and acquiring

work experience, became an essential asset for her father's company, especially since her father could not afford another such versatile specialist at that time from outside the family. At the same time, Dinara's father, who already had a challenging experience with hiring relatives, when his nephew “betrayed” him, obtained a trusted and loyal worker who cared about his success as much as her own (for a similar case of “betrayal” see Chapter 2).

After five years of work and management experience in the company, she became an unspoken partner to her father, not just an employee. Unlike Erlan aga, who had accumulated business-relevant capital through informal approaches, personal charisma, oratorical skill, and a confident presence in client communications and negotiations with local officials, his daughter brought complementary work methods to the table. Her portfolio was grounded in professional knowledge, international experience, and a work ethic focused on productivity and due diligence.

Her key contributions included not only formalizing the internal organization, negotiating with foreign partners, taking daily operational management, logistics, and pricing policy into her own hands, but also expanding the dealership's brands and product range to facilitate strategic business expansion and diversification.

While Erlan aga remained committed to his familiar methods and responsibilities for negotiating with local partners and clients, he also provided his daughter with suggestions that contributed to “hybrid” business practices. The Ospanovs strategically utilized the image of a family business in front of Western partners to enhance trustworthiness, while also leveraging stereotypes about women in STEM, combining them with Dinara's profound technical knowledge to differentiate themselves from other dealers. Dinara sharply felt her increasing authority when, together with her father, they participated in a gathering of global dealers in Australia. Young woman's understanding of the tech side of the product and quick adaptation to the local context

made her a trusted interlocutor with Australian manufacturers - a family business in a third generation who sympathized with, allegedly, “dynastic” character of the Kazakhstani office:

[The main manufacturers] are all family-run. For them, a family business gives more trust. And we play on this. They also like that a girl, a daughter, is doing this (Dinara Ospanova, 30-year-old SGE, September 2023).

Dinara stood as the only young woman at the partner conference meetings, but she was also the most technically informed participant. Wearing elegant formal dresses and skirts, following her father's advice, she raised explicit and important questions, communicated fluently in English, and even built a warm relationship with the company’s founding family members. While her father seemed to tune out as the sessions progressed, Dinara actively engaged with the event organizers:

If before I was like a translator, here I had to absorb all this myself, listen, and watch. Sometimes I asked dad, “Is everything clear?”, he said, “Okay, okay, make sure you're listening” (Dinara Ospanova, 30-year-old SGE, September 2023).

Valorizing her “hybrid” business portfolio with formal and informal, relational and calculative logic, being an all-rounder manager and his father's personal assistant, with being an expert in her international component, logistics, and brand development aspects, she was not afraid to negotiate with the Australian office. She even persuaded the younger brother of the manufacturer company's CEO to send their expert technician to Kazakhstan within the promotional framework. This meant obtaining this option for free, rather than at the formal price listed for additional services. Back home, she accompanied the technician to the field, where they oversaw the installation of a major component onto the mining equipment.

It was her first visit to the dusty and often hostile mining field, which privileged toughness and embodied authority. Before, she avoided the visits because she felt very insecure about communicating with the on-site engineers and workers. Yet this time her participation saved their business's expansion. She was the perfect person to mediate a brewing conflict between the foreign machinery specialist who accompanied her and the local workers who refused to sign the acceptance documents. The Australian specialist pointed out that the problem with the installation of their new equipment lay in the malfunction of the main machinery on which it had to be installed, while the day shift workers perceived it as a personal offence. Dinara spent hours on the field arguing with the workers and negotiating with the officials to call the night shift engineer, who identified the problem. After three days, the young woman returned from the field as a winner: the equipment worked, and clients were satisfied.

However, instead of giving her earned rest, Erlan aga flooded her with day-to-day tasks, which, along with his general lack of former proactiveness and growing reluctance to delve deeper and broader into the specifics of their industry, led to Dinara's disappointment. She was still responsible for logistics, pricing, training new employees, documentation, etc. Moreover, accustomed to such a state of affairs, the father kept creating additional burdens for her:

Dad still thinks that I'm a jack of all trades (*master na vse ruki*, rus.). That I do everything and can do everything. He calls me: "Book a hotel. Take a look. What tickets? What about this? What about that?". [...] To see if there is gasoline? Me. Buy gasoline - also me. Make a request to the field (*zaprosh na mestorozhdenie*, rus.) - me (Dinara Ospanova, 30-year-old SGE, September 2023).

The lack of Kanat aga's interest in understanding the technical specifics in the continuously evolving industry landscape intensified the negative side of their family-work optimization model.

Dinara was convinced that the gaps in her father's portfolio could compromise future deals. Although tension was a regular part of the father-daughter working dynamic, sometimes Dinara could not suppress her anger, blurring the once-clear lines of intergenerational hierarchy. For example, their visit to the headquarters of a major mining corporation was a carefully planned strategic move in a rapidly shifting business landscape. The aim was to persuade one of the lead engineers to consider their product, yet not through offering informal incentives like in the earlier years of Kanat aga's entrepreneurial history, but through a more “professionally” grounded negotiation. As decision-making increasingly shifted toward measurable efficiency and formality of processes, the discussion focused on the strength of their new instrument, designed to enhance the durability of mining excavators. Although expensive, it would become cost-saving in the long term, as it would extend the machine's operational lifespan. However, as the conversation proceeded, it became clear that Dinara should have taken the lead because Erlan aga “missed the point” (*nevpopad*, rus.) and “circled aimlessly” (*melteshil*, rus.), which the corporation's specialist noticed, losing interest in the meeting.

Usually, she instrumentalized her position as a daughter to offload some of the responsibility for the business and the family's future. “If I were a boy, perhaps he would have already retired from business”, said Dinara as a statement of gratitude for her position when we first met in February 2023. However, when we met in September, after the key negotiations had faltered due to her father, the negative side of their mode of family-work optimization became evident. The way the father instrumentalized “being old” for constant learning and self-management in his mid-50s was as unsatisfactory to his daughter as it was incompatible with the neoliberal ideal of “portfolio manager”. Especially, for their particular case of earned opportunities, but not yet funds.

The fact that only Dinara could navigate hybridity while Erlan aga chose to withdraw from portfolio managing made the young woman regret her decision to join the business. At the same time, being an all-rounder but who prioritizes deep knowledge (specialization/multitasking), who bridged communicative and institutional gaps with foreign partners, paired with her strategic use of a youthful, gendered identity (formal/informal), brought the company the long-awaited expansion. However, it was inseparable from intergenerational cooperation and tensions at the same time. The young woman continued working in the same mode, hoping that further expansion and capital accumulation would allow them to hire more specialists and delegate part of her responsibilities, without ever letting the thought of completely leaving the family business, even though her financialized logic won each time.

Conclusion

While the dissertation argues that processes of intergenerational mobility through business can be a project of family-work optimization, this chapter shows how it can unfold in the context of constrained capital and competing ideas about business-making and about subjectivity. Even when such projects succeed, like in the cases of the Beksultanovs and Ospanovs, unequal ideas about what is modern, professional, and ideal in the market can render intergenerational cooperation invisible and make the overall experience focused on tension and conflict.

At the same time, as Feher's (2009) concept of the portfolio manager suggests, the neoliberal pressure for self-valorization unfolds through continuous investment in every sphere of life: irrational desires, moral orientations, affective ties can all be converted into assets for self-enhancement (Lee, 2018). This chapter showed the cases where the context of flexible neoliberal economy the adult children chose to join and "professionalize" the business opportunities of their fathers not out of lack of other options but with the aim of family-work optimization. Here, family

conflicts, self-exploitation, resentment, and contested intergenerational hierarchy also played important role as assets for self-enhancement. Moreover, inequality of ideas around business approaches led to hidden “positive” family aspects like cooperation, and to disappointment in family business, even though the family-work optimization went successful.

Longer interaction and observation of business practices showed “hybridity” in everyday doing business by the SGEs. At the same time, the transition was fraught because the adult children's focus on portfolio management ideals and pressures of changing market collided with inherited informal regimes and practices perceived as “unprofessional” and withdrawal of their parents from productive stance due to age expectations. As a result, conflicts over “old-fashioned” versus “professional” methods obscured the importance of actual culturally meaningful practices of business expansion and upward mobility.

Conclusion: Care and Self-Care, Family and Work, Capitalism and Echoes of the Soviet Past

In essence, this dissertation examines how intergenerational mobility unfolds in capitalism. Marx critically approached liberal ideology as “Eden of the innate rights of man” on its surface, while human relations which are guided only by “selfishness, gain, and private interest” aimed at profit-making remain hidden (Marx et al., 1976, p.280). While this remains a powerful lens for understanding the sphere of exchange in the free market, the familial dynamic, which is at the center of this thesis, seems to stand in sharp contrast to the focus on egoistic intentions only.

At the same time, the classic theory of intergenerational mobility approached it through investments in children's human capital, assuming parental altruism (Becker & Tomes, 1986). This explained the link between mobility and inequality, as high-income families invest more based on their resources. However, reality, especially with the evolution of global economies and societies, is much more complex than that.

Assuming that the contemporary global economy is characterized by constant crisis management rather than stability (Kalb, 2025), while the echoes of the post-Soviet transformation may still influence the decisions and life choices, this dissertation focuses on families of first-generation entrepreneurs (FGEs) and their adult children as an illustration that even in seemingly contradictory environments – between the extremes of egoism and altruism, associated with contemporary capitalism or with consequences of post-socialism – actors are constrained but only enabled.

This dissertation does not examine mobility as an outcome that could be measured, but approaches the processes of intergenerational mobility as shaped by value regimes and enacted through everyday practices. Throughout the dissertation, the chapters aim to show that

intergenerational mobility processes are neither a linear transmission of advantage nor a straightforward failure or success of capital reproduction or entrepreneurial continuity. Instead, it emphasizes these as familial (multigenerational and bidirectional), contradictory, and situational projects in which different forms of capital are transmitted, transformed, and, sometimes, eroded. Part I focuses on failed business continuity. However, it shows that the general reproduction in occupational self-directedness still can take place, structured by normative boundaries of familial prestige, the degree of autonomy, or security. Part II focuses on successful entrepreneurial continuity. Yet, it is guided by the desire to optimize the “Eden”, where altruistic and egoistic intentions would comfortably coexist, which can be costly sometimes.

The core argument of the dissertation is that the opportunities and limitations of intergenerational mobility are structured by the relationship between value regimes and organizational forms of business. In the focus are the value regimes associated with Soviet legacies of modernization and cultural deservedness – as teleological moral hierarchies about education and labor – and with neoliberal human capital subjectivity (not as something one has but what someone is to stay “investable”) (Fehér, 2009). These values shape how practices – in business and family overlap – are interpreted. At the same time, these values do not operate as guides to economic action. Instead, the value regimes often distort the perception of the very practices that sustain intergenerational reproduction. Returning to the opening vignette in the very beginning of this thesis helps to contextualize this claim.

The self-proclaimed “snobs” and intelligentsia, the Sabitov family, lost business as the father downgraded business modernization and business education as “empty”, and his children avoided interacting with morally questionable work environments and employees, and overall, the “meaningless” pursuit of profit. On the contrary, the Smirnov family constantly invested in their

entrepreneurial “brains” and transformation of their business, which they believed, “hardly anyone matches in Karaganda.” They claimed that contemporary knowledge on business let them finally learn how to separate family and work. While the families negotiate the hierarchies of worth between knowledge associated with cultural capital, but often inapplicable in everyday entrepreneurship, and business-specific – but “empty” for some – knowledge, ethnographic material shows that this does not always align with the lived experience. Untransformed business practices are morally devalued by many research participants. In practice, these exact practices facilitated the “inheritance” of so valued culturedness and distinction based on ideals of Soviet modernization through the funding of the “best” education, provision of property, which could secure autonomy, and reproduction of dignified lives, even if the research participants felt failed. In turn, “successful” business is presented as a professional economic activity where practices are rationalized, formalized, and specialized, and the overlap between family and work is controlled. In fact, throughout this dissertation, I showed that everyday practices are heterogeneous, and often include conflicts, negative emotions, resentment, and hybridity of what is referred to as informal and formal practice, or contradicting market rationality.

Finally, as Part II especially shows, illustrating the cases of the families that represent themselves as aspiring neoliberal subjects regardless of their origin, value regimes shape how individuals interpret economic action, but they alone do not reliably predict the business outcomes. Similar social origins can produce both business disengagement and effective transformation, even through family tensions and conflicts. What matters, therefore, is not social origin as such — even though sometimes its moral boundaries shape the life trajectories in real life — but how its associated value regimes are mobilized, contested, or renegotiated.

While Becker et al. (2018) theory of mobility assumes parental skills and education translate into productive intergenerational transmission, reproducing inequality, the focus on FGEs in “transitional” societies complicates the way in which it does or does not. This thesis shows that while parents’ human capital complementarities, indeed, are often passed on to the next generation, they may facilitate business succession and upward mobility prospects in some cases, but in others, constrain business continuity by producing moral distance from the reality of everyday business practices in the rapidly changing business environments. Rather than enhancing investment efficiency, parental human capital in these contexts mediate the formation of capitalist subjects, distorting the heterogeneous and constantly changing reality of doing business in today’s Kazakhstan.

The thesis argues that, in the context of the contemporary market, entrepreneurial continuity increasingly depends on ongoing business transformation. At the same time, broader processes of intergenerational reproduction still take place and should be approached from the perspective of the normative boundaries of the extended family’s social origin. This insight becomes particularly evident in Part I of this dissertation, which focuses on “failed” business continuity in families who enact social origin based on the ideals of Soviet intelligentsia and modernization. Based on oral histories of the FGEs and their networks, Chapter 1 showed that the initial economic capital accumulation was shaped by contradiction. The middle-aged research participants who performed cultural deservedness, articulating formal education, expertise, and intellectual and “cultured” forms of labor as superior in moral hierarchy. In fact, they drew on various business practices, including expertise-based ones, but also informal, opportunistic, and illegal practices. They, indeed, avoided the trade and bazaars as a territory of low morals for the main vehicle for upward mobility, yet it is more precise to claim that they reframed these practices

to suit their ideals. For instance, some could justify working in sales by emphasizing their technical expertise as a “proud” Soviet engineer or biologist, or could engage in the illicit gold trade at the bazaar by focusing on the inherent luxury of the goods.

Chapter 2 demonstrates that the performance of cultural deservedness was inherited by the adult children, which in these cases produced moral distance from the everyday realities of untransformed parents’ businesses. The adult children, socialized into valuing formal education, focus on individual interest in work and the normative image of what should work and business look like, often perceive the family business as informal, “stagnating,” “messy,” or “outdated”. Therefore, business succession was not facilitated because of the misalignment between inherited values and the business organization, contrary to parental expectations and investment.

Chapter 3 extended this direction, showing what family dynamic might unfold in the case of failed business continuity and failed intrafamily economic capital reinvestment. While choices of the adult children in their work and life trajectories can generate family tension (parental regret about provision of material assets, children's shame and guilt for unfulfilled expectations), the mobility projects ultimately are not fixed and could be renegotiated. However, I show the normative boundaries of the renegotiation where the social origin plays an important role. I demonstrate how young adults’ occupational self-directedness toward prestigious careers -- in its familial understanding – contributes to broader intergenerational continuity, even though it extends beyond the parent-child dyad. In search of autonomy in work (like their entrepreneurial parents) or work security (important in a precarious and flexible economy), the young adults might continue careers perceived as “prestigious” in the extended family or follow new occupations tied to the prestige of intellectual work requiring high cultural capital.

Part II shifts focus to intergenerational mobility processes characterized by entrepreneurial continuity, zooming in on the conditions under which it can be possible. Chapter 4 demonstrates how the business transformation practices, initiated by parents, create a moral alliance between parents and adult children who both share the prioritization of neoliberal subjectivity. The degrees of business “professionalization,” including formalization, rationalization, specialization, and other practices dictated by the modern business education, reconfigured family firms, practically and morally. The frame of “professional” business allowed parents and children to reallocate the focus from family tensions, conflicts, and “irrational” emotions toward a strategic opportunity to optimize the overlapping realms of family and work.

On the contrary, Chapter 5 illustrates a different dynamic where the young adults enter businesses of their FGE parents, not following the professionalization practices, but carrying the burden of the main facilitators of business transformation. The young neoliberal subjectivity performers also desired optimization of the overlapping dimensions, yet neoliberal ideas in fact complicated the transition. The adult children's focus on portfolio management, constant self-improvement, and pressures of changing market collided with inherited “unprofessional” regimes, inherited obligations once given by their parents to other people, and the withdrawal of their parents from a productive stance due to age expectations. As a result, conflicts and family tensions over “old-fashioned” versus “professional” business methods obscured the importance of actual culturally meaningful and often “hybrid” formal-informal practices of business expansion and entrepreneurial continuity.

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