CROSSING THE LINE

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Vagrancy, Homelessness and Social Displacement
in Russia

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Note on Transliteration

Throughout the book I have used the Library of Congress system for Cyrillic transliteration except where there is another commonly accepted spelling for the name – for instance in the case of names such as Olga or Tynyanov.

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Introduction

Last winter, visiting a friend who lives in a block of flats in central Moscow, I saw a handwritten note next to the entrance door:

> For the attention of the homeless: it is prohibited to enter this building. We will call the militia [police] without warning.

It was minus fifteen degrees centigrade outside. Homeless people had probably tried to come inside to get some warmth. With just a handful of shelters in the city, and even those, apart from rare exceptions, only accepting people who could prove that they were formerly registered as residents of Moscow, it is hard to think where else homeless people would go. But, of course, that did not concern the residents of this building. Homeless people are a nuisance. They are like stray dogs that need to be removed by special services. But these are the stray dogs who can read… They were once human, went to the same schools, worked together and perhaps were even neighbours.

How does this chasm between the 'settled' and the 'unsettled' come to exist? Why does being without a home put one almost outside the human race? Why are the needs of people who find themselves in utter destitution almost totally neglected in the Russian society? How do people end up in this situation? How do they survive?

Academic writing and research on homelessness in post-communist countries is scarce, while homelessness under state socialism has so far been almost completely neglected. There is only a handful of research publications about street homeless people in Russia today. The Swedish anthropologist Tova Höjdestrand (2003, 2005) conducted extensive participant observation among homeless people in St.Petersburg, while the Russian sociologist Zoya Solovieva (2001) studied the processes of stigmatisation and 'moral careers' of street homeless people.[1] There is, however, no shortage of fictional and media accounts that engage in negative stereotyping of the homeless.

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[1] Some researchers used the databases of homelessness NGOs in Moscow and St.Petersburg as the basis for their analysis of the causes of homelessness and the social and demographic characteristics of homeless people (Sokolov, 1995, Gutov and Nikiforov, 2001, Karlinsky, 2004). The Institute of Socio-Economic Problems of Population of the Russian Academy of Sciences conducted a quantitative survey of homelessness within a larger survey of the 'bottom layer' of the Russian society in 1996 (Rimashevskaia, 2003). However, none of these publications contain a detailed discussion of the methods of data collection and the definition of homelessness that was employed in the study. That is why, while these publications remain the only sources of quantitative data on homelessness so far, it is difficult to use and interpret their findings.

This book develops themes from my earlier work on adult homelessness in Russia (Stephenson, 1996, 1997, 2000a, 2003 and Sidorenko-Stephenson, 1996). It concentrates on one group – the literally homeless, or roofless people, living on the streets or in other places unfit for normal human habitation. Although they may temporarily and episodically use short-stay shelters, such as NGO or state facilities, or live in squats, they can never lay any continuous claim to the housing they occupy. They sleep in the cellars and lofts of apartment blocks, at train stations and airports, live in rubbish dumps or by underground hot water pipes. In winter they may occupy vacated *dachas* [country houses]. In summer they may spend the nights in forests outside the cities.[2]

I use observational data, and data from in-depth interviews conducted in Moscow between 1994 and 2005, to document their routes into homelessness; the strategies they adopt in using the city space for survival and building social bonds; and the barriers which block their escape from the streets. I also analyse the biographic interviews with people who became homeless in the 1970s-1980s, the Soviet vagrants, beggars and 'parasites'.

My purpose is to place these narratives within the framework of theoretical perspectives on socio-spatial exclusion, interaction between space and social identity and the regimes of settlement and social control. This book aims to advance the understanding of homelessness in Russia, as an extreme case of social-territorial displacement, and to set out its causes and its individual consequences within the larger social and political context in which it has developed.

Evasions and Diffusions

Homelessness as a public issue has a relatively short history in the postcommunist Russia. Up until the end of the 1980s, homelessness was never formally acknowledged by the state. When apprehended on the streets, homeless people, or *bomzhi* as they are now universally called [*bomzh* is an abbreviation for *bez opredelennogo mesta zhitelstva* – without fixed abode][3], were arrested, cautioned, incarcerated or deported for violation of passport rules, vagrancy or parasitic way of life. With the coming of Gorbachev and *perestroika*, criminalisation of homelessness began to grind to a

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2   My research concentrated on single homeless people. Although there are no reliable statistics on the proportions of single people among the street homeless population, my research in Moscow and indicative data from NGOs show that they form the majority of the street homeless population. Some homeless parents live on the streets with their children, but this is relatively rare. Underage children tend to be in care or live with grandparents or other relatives.

3   This abbreviation was born in militia records in the 1970s. I use it in the text of this book to refer to a social type of street homeless person. At the same time I share the concern of many Russian human rights defenders and homelessness activists that the word 'bomzh' stigmatises the homeless population and should not be used without qualification in public discourse on homelessness.

halt. Over time *bomzhi* as a social category in its own right has gradually acquired an important place in the system of social classification in post-Soviet society. They are located at one symbolic pole of the social structure, where only negative attributes and meanings are concentrated – those of utter poverty, total moral degradation and complete personal misery. To use Bourdieu's formulation, they 'serve as a foil to every distinction' (1984, p.178).

While it is true that *bomzhi* are outcasts, despised and driven away, it is equally true that the presence of homeless people in the midst of 'settled society' creates anxiety and disorientation. They seem to present a challenge to the very self, turning encounters between the 'housed' and the homeless people into a deeply discomforting experience for the former. There is something wrong with the order of things if people can end up in this abominable state. They are the messengers of an unspoken disaster. Their visible presence among us shows that some deep fault lines exist in our society. These faults are not discussed but always guessed at. The terror of the reality that cannot be explained is resolved in silences and half-truths.[4] 'We are sorry for them, but they brought it upon themselves'. 'I notice them but I do not see them – I try not to look at them'. 'They each had a different life, but they ended up the same way – they stumbled and fell to the very bottom'. These are examples of how some of the Moscow residents I talked to described their thoughts about *bomzhi*. These opinions – almost always phrased as 'yes ... but' – display confusion, unease and a lack of unequivocal knowledge about the reality that confronts them in the guise of *bomzhi*. People find it difficult to make sense of the social forces that have led to this visible catastrophe.

While the public is uncertain as to what brought these people onto the streets, there is no lack of media coverage and expert pronouncements about street homeless people, seeking to cover up the disagreeable reality with a blanket of 'convincing' ideological interpretations.[5] In the Soviet era they were treated as asocial elements, idlers and parasites. In modern Russia, with the exception of the human rights community (which tends to see homeless people as victims of discrimination) and a few academic researchers writing on the subject, the 'expert' literature continues to present them as pathological individuals. They are assigned physical and mental conditions that make them unable to function in society. They cannot be credited with full rationality and their behaviour is often explained through a combination of subconscious urges and psychological pre-dispositions. Alternatively, their actions

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4   On the reality that makes no sense and its concomitant terror see Merleau-Ponty (1964, 1969).

5   Stanley Cohen (1987) argues that scapegoating and ritualised blaming of 'hate figures' can be a reaction to the anxieties and fears brought by rapid social change. Similarly, Howard Feather suggests that when dealing with challenges to the a specific historical project, the dominant regime engages in 'fetishistic displacement' of the problems: 'displacement as an assertion of hegemonic power implies the transfer of problems and anxieties to subaltern or marginalised groups who bear the brunt of the incoherencies and contradictions which crisis embodies' (2003, p.3).

may serve some malicious purpose – to exploit other people; to sponge off the decent public; to undermine the very foundations of society.[6]

Their behaviour may be represented through a variety of codes, some of which may even have been borrowed from previous ideological constructions. As I shall explain, homeless people in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia have often been defined as vagrants, borrowing from a traditional representation of the free roaming population which is wholly at odds with the actual reality of mobility in the rigidly controlled Soviet and post-Soviet territorial space. This borrowing of earlier codes also occurs when homeless people in modern Russia are described as 'avoiding socially useful labour' – a Soviet formulation hardly relevant under the conditions of capitalism. Such ideological detritus is used to cover up questions which may challenge the dominant social order.

The author of the entry on 'Homelessness' in the Russian Social Encyclopaedia writes that:

> The most destitute and hopeless segment of the homeless people…beg, rummage through rubbish, steal, become carriers of infectious diseases and originators of fires and create moral discomfort for the members of the public. (Mirsagatova, 2000, p.34)

This brutally direct representation of the dangers posed by street homeless people is not just a demonstration of the absence of any 'political correctness' in Russia. Here homeless people are portrayed as being truly outside the public body and posing a range of problems for society (rather than as experiencing problems themselves).

Theoretical and Conceptual Approaches

Although excommunication of homeless people in modern day Russia may be extreme (and even that pales in comparison with the Soviet era), homeless people in western societies have also been the objects of exclusionary treatment. In different epochs and countries, unattached vagrants, tramps, hobos, rogues and vagabonds were exiled, put into workhouses, penalised through anti-vagrancy legislation, and segregated in skid rows and shelters. Among the many academic interpretations of homelessness in the West, two particular approaches have been most prominent.

One sees homelessness as predominantly an issue of lack of housing, the other – of the break-up of 'normal' social relations (see Tosi, 1996 for a discussion). It has been also been argued that the concept of social exclusion brings together a variety of factors which bear on vulnerable groups in capitalist societies and thus

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6   Much of the American 'skid row' literature of the 1960s-1970s presented a pathological image of homeless people as isolated and disaffiliated from the society (Bogue, 1963, Wallace, 1965, Bahr, 1973, Bahr and Caplow, 1973). With the rise of homelessness in the 1980s in western societies, a different kind of discourse – that of vulnerability – took hold (Hoch and Slayton, 1989). It is sometimes argued that this discourse, which portrays homeless people as dependent, isolated and different from the rest of the population, denies them social consciousness and humanity (Wagner, 1993, p.6).

can be usefully employed to the study of homelessness. The exclusion of homeless people combines several interrelated dimensions – exclusion from the labour market, from social citizenship rights, ideological and housing exclusion (for example, Sommerville, 1998, Avramov, 1999).

In terms of the social responses to homelessness, much of the literature has centred around the categories of poverty and lack of stable employment. Homeless people have been seen as part of a category of 'undeserving', 'dangerous' (Morris, 1993) or, as the American sociologist David Matza (1966) put it, 'disreputable' poor. Extremes of poverty, unemployment, or involvement in morally and legally proscribed occupations (such as begging or prostitution) lead to social exclusion, stigmatisation and persecution.

While it is true that homeless people may be seen as all these things – unattached, houseless, poor, unemployed, disreputable and excluded – there is one dimension to their condition which seems crucially important. This is the spatial dimension. They are the poor 'displaced'. Their main fault seems to be that they are situated outside territorial communities, and this displacement also almost universally signifies their transgression of moral boundaries.

In this book I suggest that by using the concept of displacement, particularly in a historical perspective, we can better understand the ways in which social systems produce marginality and homelessness. While similar to the concept of social exclusion, displacement places less emphasis on the categories of access and rights to collective goods (cf.:Paugam, 1996), and more on changes in the individual positions in a social-spatial structure.

To be homeless means to be without a place. People without homes do not just lack a roof over their heads – they lack a hold in the whole social topography. As Pierre Bourdieu (1999) pointed out:

> An agent's position in social space is expressed in the site of physical space where the agent is situated (which means, for example, that anyone said to be "without home or hearth" or "homeless" is virtually without social existence) … (p.124)

What happens to the person who is deprived of social existence supported by an attachment to the territory? Instead of a home, his or her social status becomes defined through association with the street ('street child' or 'street bum'), or spaces of transient movement (vagrant or itinerant labourer). In different cultures and times this almost universally meant that this person has strayed away from society and has moved into a delinquent and degraded position.[7]

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7   In many societies, settled life tends to be privileged over mobility, and in their moral lexicon it tends to be associated with belonging and responsibility. Philosophically, the ideas of home as a source of identity have been expressed in the works of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger (1962) equated having a place to "being-in" the world, while mobility was associated with inauthenticity and uprootedness. A similar view – of places where human beings make their homes as centres of meaning, giving worth to human life and binding people with attachments

The phenomenon of people who defy socially constructed boundaries, outcasts, strangers and outsiders has been a subject of many classic texts in philosophy, sociology and anthropology[8]. In *The Stranger*, Georg Simmel [1908 (1971)] discussed how individuals, by crossing the spatial boundary, can be in proximity with others from whom they are also socially distant. Simmel famously characterised the stranger as 'the man who comes today and stays tomorrow' (p.143). Strangers are present in the society and at the same time they oppose it, and thus create an uncomfortable ambivalence.

In *Purity and Danger*, an exploration of separation, classification and cleansing in human societies, anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) suggested that social systems experience constant pressure on their boundaries and margins. Displaced objects and people represent a danger to social order, and this danger is experienced and combated through the ideas and rituals of pollution: 'wherever the lines are precarious we find pollution ideas come to their support. Physical crossing of the social barrier is treated as a dangerous pollution' (p.140). One can argue that homeless people, who do not belong to the spaces into which they move and who question the lines of separation, become, as Douglas would say, 'matter out of place'. We can apply Douglas' description of material dirt or rubbish (which she herself places in the context of a broad analysis of ideas and practices of purity) to the treatment of displaced bodies, and homeless bodies among them. Like physical matter, which is out of place (dirt or waste), they at first keep their half-identity, and create a discomforting ambivalence ('the clarity of the scene in which they obtrude is impaired by their presence'). But in the end, 'all identity is gone… So long as identity is absent, rubbish is not dangerous. It does not even create ambiguous perceptions since it clearly belongs in a defined place, a rubbish heap of one kind or another' (p.161).

Homeless transient populations have been perceived as creating dangerous pollution through most historical periods, although in the traditional cultures they could also be credited with possessing magic powers and associated with the sphere of the sacred (they can also be elevated through certain cultural codes, being thought to be free from society's bonds and prescriptions, etc).

But for the modernity, with its order-building thrust, the unattached populations represent a major threat. They undermine the boundaries between order and disorder, which the modern states strive to uphold. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, together with other groups 'with no abode and no function', they constitute human waste, which threatens to create chaos: 'a condition in which something is *not* in its proper place and *does not* perform its proper function' (2004, p.28). 'Wasted' groups (from 'asocials' to immigrants and refugees) become an object of the public anxiety and the efforts of the state to 're-place' them in the social structure.

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and commitments – is shared by many contemporary geographers (Relph, 1976, Tuan, 1999, Sack, 1997).

8   A comprehensive review of the literature on spatial exclusion of groups with 'damaged' social identities can be found in Sibley, 1995.

Paradoxically perhaps, the waste itself can be viewed as a product of modernity. Modernity demands that the population is mobile and ready to participate in its projects. Not only that, people are expected to conform to the requirements of wide-reaching bureaucratic controls, as well as the disciplines of the workplace. But social and territorial uprooting of population, which is a necessary part of modern projects, creates inevitable problems of social integration. Also, the 'human material' is never as pliable as these projects demand. People may fail, or be unwilling to conform to the dominant economic regime and regime of settlement. Although attempts at their re-socialisation and 're-placement' may be made, individuals can end up being treated as 'outsiders', who fall out of legitimate social categories.

Both 'heavy' modernity (to use Bauman's terminology), centralised and bureaucratic societies of the nation state, and 'liquid', post-bureaucratic modern societies of the globalising age, have been pre-occupied with eradicating waste, although the technologies used to cut off the displaced populations have been different. The extreme, *Konzlager* solutions and penal repression have given way to assignment to 'dumping sites', degraded spaces and places, situated beyond the security fences of the global consumer society (Bauman, 1999, 2001).

Writing about modern refugees, for example, Bauman (2004) argues that assigning them to waste

> puts an end to differences, individualities, idiosyncrasies. People without qualities have been deposited in a territory without denomination, whereas all the roads leading back to meaningful places and to the spots where socially legible meanings can be and are forged daily have been blocked for good (p.78).

There is a possible difficulty with this formulation in that it leaves a blind spot around the efforts of displaced groups to build meaningful existence. However the category of waste is helpful for conceptualising the treatments that these groups experience from the larger society.

Territorial Order, Social Waste and Identity – The Russian Case

Are these perspectives on space, displacement and waste relevant to our enterprise – the analysis of vagrancy and homelessness in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russia? The communist project is taken by many commentators as the epitome of modernity (see the discussion in Outhwaite and Ray, 2005, p.100). The disciplinary and mobilisatory efforts were a crucial part of the Soviet state and thus signify its profoundly modern character (Hoffman, 2000). As Holquist (2000) notes, the Soviet system was associated with a 'particular modern style of politics…that views populations as both the means and ends of some emancipatory project' (p.90-1). While the state was concerned with implementation of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, it employed the modern technologies of policing and surveillance for population management and organisation of the communist construction.

Historically, however, many of the features of the Soviet system of spatial organisation and control predate the Bolshevik revolution. They go back to the specific Russian regime of regulation of residency through passport rules, dating from the beginning of the 18th century and supporting both fiscal and conscription purposes, as well as, until 1861, attachment of the serfs to their masters (Matthews, 1993, Korolev, 1997). Also, an important part of the interface between the state and society was the traditional peasant community *(obshchina)*, which was not only responsible for joint management of communal land and its members' welfare, but also fulfilled basic police (including registration), judicial and fiscal functions (Shanin, 1986, chapter 1).

At the beginning of the 1930s, the Soviet regime re-introduced the system of passport and registration regulations. Furthermore, a specific feature of the Soviet mobilisation efforts was that they took place via the activity of neighbourhood units and work collectives (Kotkin, 1995, Kharkhordin, 1999). The interface between the state and society was via the neighbourhood communities and wokplaces. The policies of the state were translated and implemented not through the disciplines of the market, or the legal apparatus as in the West, but through these key units of the Soviet social system.

There has been little research so far on how people could become disassociated from these units and turn into asocial elements, 'parasites', vagrants and homeless. Recently, however, new books by historians, geographers and sociologists have begun to address the broad range of aspects of displacement, identity and rights. Pavel Polian (2001) wrote on the history and geography of forced migrations in the USSR. Using newly discovered archive materials, Golfo Alexopoulos (2004) investigated how in the interwar period in the Soviet Union individuals were marked as outsiders (*lishentsy*) and deprived of political rights. Nick Baron, Peter Gatrell and their colleagues in the project on 'Population Displacement in the Lands of the Former Russian Empire' have embarked on an extensive programme of research of the nationalist and statist narratives of self and community, and of the nexus of space and power in defining such notions as place, displacement, homeland, nation, territory or state (Baron and Gatrell, 2003, 2004).

The post-Soviet social space, while itself retaining many of the Soviet anchors and borders (especially the registration system), is also a space of mobility, fluidity and transformation of previous identities and affiliations. Erosion of labour collectives, enormous migration and immigration, as well as transformation of the housing sphere, resulted in large-scale social and territorial displacement. The most active research on displacement has so far been conducted within post-Soviet migration studies. Social scientists have conducted extensive studies of Russian returnees, migrants and refugees, the exclusionary treatments that they face and their attempts to build networks and affiliations at their new places of residence (cf.: Pilkington, 1998, Flynn, 2004, Lonkila and Salmi, 2005).

There is a need for a close look at the personal experiences of marginality in the Soviet and post-Soviet space, and in particular, at the interaction between space and identity. Displacement leads to profound changes in social identity, as a person loses

the previous status supported by his or her attachment to neighbourhood community and workplace. In his daily interactions with the 'settled' members of the public and the agents of power, a person can be confirmed as an outsider, a stigmatised other. In *Stigma*, Goffman argued that 'the stigmatized individual in our society acquires identity standards which he applies to himself in spite of failing to conform to them' (1963, p.130). Interviews with people who became vagrants and *bomzhi* confirm this proposition. While it would be wrong to say that people passively accepted their exclusion, they often came to accept the stigma. They may have employed various strategies of self-presentation in order to mask their displacement[9], but ultimately many of them came to internalise the blame for what they commonly referred to as 'crossing the line'.

Another area which deserves attention is how displaced people try to exercise their own 're-placement' strategies – by moving to peripheral spaces of the country, switching on to the informal economic markets and developing their own webs of personal relations and ties.

The dialectical relationship between displacement and re-placement, social disqualification and ground-level interaction and inclusion deserves careful investigation. But what is also obvious is that the properties of spaces where people get transplanted have a serious effect on their social existence. In this book I address the properties of the street as a social space where homeless people have to live. There exists a rich literature on street-based societies - ghetto communities, delinquent street gangs or people involved in a variety of street-based economic activities (c.f. Thrasher, 1927, Katz, 1988, Robins and Cohen, 1978, Vigil, 1988, Anderson, 1999). I am interested in how the possibilities that the streets offer to groups that are not wholly grounded in them (in other words, who have conventional homes) are different from those they offer to street homeless people. When people have to live on the streets for a long time, their opportunities for social interaction become reduced and damaged, and despite mobilisation of all their resources and energies, they may ultimately be defeated and truly excluded from the society.

Homelessness literature in the West has been increasingly addressing the issues of spatial exclusion and identity. Attention has been drawn to the exclusionary strategies employed towards homeless people throughout Europe - and even more so in the USA - which involve actions of territorial control and the expulsion of undesirables (c.f. Marcuse, 1988, Davis, 1990, Wright, 1997, Kawash, 1998). At the same time researchers have studied how homeless people seek to appropriate the city space and develop emotional and territorial attachments to the street topography (Wagner, 1993, Wardough, 1996, Ruddick, 1998, Robinson, 2005).

In this book I suggest extending the notion of displacement to a variety of experiences and conditions in which homeless people find themselves, and to the

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9   Sheila Fitzpatrick (2005) addresses the issue of the re-making of social identities in Russia in the twentieth century. She is concerned with the construction of a new public persona, and considers, among other subjects, the practices of classification and reclassification, masking and unmasking of social enemies and impostors.

processes through which homelessness is produced and 'managed'. I approach homelessness as the result of personal displacement and transplantation into the public space, and as a product of the larger territorial and social organisation of Russian society. I look at the people who became the 'outcasts' of both Soviet and post-Soviet regimes of settlement, and trace the processes through which they have lost their legitimate social memberships.

The Project and its Methods

Research for this book took place between 1993 and 2005. Among my sources were legislative documents, Soviet and post-Soviet publications on vagrancy and homelessness, as well as NGO documents and militia records. The key part of my research was an ethnographic survey of homeless people in Moscow. The project involved one hundred and thirteen recorded interviews. Most of the interviews (ninety-five) were taken in 1993-96. I conducted eighteen additional interviews between 2000 and 2005. Thirty interviews took place in the Moscow militia detention centre for people without fixed abode, fifty-five were conducted in NGOs and in shelters, and twenty-eight interviews were conducted on the streets of Moscow. The majority of those interviewed were street homeless people, but fifteen of the interviewees were precariously housed people, who were at risk of homelessness – refugees and unregistered migrants.[10]

Most of the interviews were based on the life-story method. This method was chosen because it made it possible to obtain biographical information and to get people's own perspectives on their lives. The in-depth interviews gave access to people's own accounts of their feelings, their relationships with the key figures in their lives and their views on the turning points in their destinies. They revealed their aspirations and dreams, described their struggles to preserve human dignity, and talked about the pain inflicted on them by their social disqualification. The life-story method also made it possible to look at individual lives in the context of larger social conditions and constraints. The structures of power and history can be seen through the actions of real people: militiamen and employers, co-workers and neighbours. The interviews revealed how people interpreted the problems and opportunities they faced and how they then acted on these interpretations.

On the whole it proved relatively easy both to contact homeless people and to engage them in conversation. With most of the interviewees it was possible to establish a 'common core' of understanding, and as a result people talked readily about their lives and experiences. But in a minority of cases conducting life-story interviews turned out to be difficult. Some homeless people, particularly those who had served a long time in prison, were unwilling to engage in in-depth discussion and refused to present any substantial narrative. Others had a prepared short narrative, which they had been used to reciting in their communications with militia, charity

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10 There were 65 men and 48 women among the interviewees. 72 were Russian citizens, while 41 were citizens of ex-Soviet republics.

workers and other homeless people, and were reluctant to depart from this script. Still others presented stories which had many contradictions and contained apparent evasions and obviously sanitised versions of self, either through lack of trust or because of the specific 'moral repertoire' that they decided to adopt.[11]

As an alternative or additional way to gain access to the inner world of our interviewees, I used the method of incomplete sentences. This is a common method in social psychology of research into individual values, fears and anxieties, and also in the study of interpersonal communication (Klimova, 1993). Homeless people's answers to a range of questions (described in Chapter 1) were coded and could then be compared to the answers of students, engineers and manual workers in a survey conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. But more than that, these questions invited our interviewees to reflect on some of the key truths of their condition, and they often continued 'thinking out loud', providing further important insights into their experience.

Another useful method was to ask interviewees to give several answers to the question: 'Who am I?' Even those who found the situation of an in-depth interview problematic responded readily to this question. The answers offered invaluable insights into their identities, but also to their reflections on many aspects of their lives. One interviewee, Nikolai, expressed very well the self-blame for social failure found in many other interviews, which can act as a powerful force in preventing the further attempts to leave the streets. Nikolai has been homeless since 1990, when his mother died while he was in prison. On his return he failed to regain his residence permit without her application, and he now lives in a cellar, having abandoned all hope of ever getting his own housing.

> Who am I? I'm unstable, nervous, unreliable. I can let people down. You can't rely on someone like me. In brief, I'm finished! I see no prospects. I don't know what's ahead of me. Generally, I'm a weak person.

Incomplete sentences and the 'Who am I?' question were used at the end of the interviews. Not only did they provide a lot of information, they also proved to be an effective way to "summarise" the preceding narrative. Even those interviewees who were reluctant to communicate freely during the life-story part of the interview would be ready at the end to reflect on their situation and the place accorded to them by society.

In addition to the interviews, I also conducted covert observation on the streets and at train stations in Moscow and participant observation in the militia detention centre and at the Moscow City Centre for Medical and Social Assistance to Persons Without Fixed Abode. In-depth interviews with experts were used to understand the larger context in which homeless people live. I interviewed NGO workers, staff of the militia detention centre, officials from social protection agencies, as well as ordinary members of the public.

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11 See the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of using life-story method in social research in Chamberlayne et al, 2000 and Gardner, 2001.

Overview of the Book

I begin with the people themselves. Rather than starting from a historical perspective, I have chosen to start by setting the scene as it is today on the streets of Moscow – describing and analysing the situation of homeless people in post-communist Russia, and how they experience their displacement. This reflects the way in which my own project developed – starting with an exploration of what it means to be homeless, and leading beyond ethnography to an investigation into the bigger picture of how homelessness is produced and regulated, its historical and social roots and how it evolved in the course of the twentieth century.

In the Part I of the book I examine what it means to be transplanted into public space. When left without a home, people go through highly traumatic experiences. They need to come to terms with losing the centre of their mental world. All the daily routines of life are broken. All previous social connections and ties are lost or undermined. As Bourdieu suggested:

> part of the inertia of the structures of social space results from the fact that they are inscribed in physical space and cannot be modified except by a *work of transplantation*, a moving of things and an uprooting or deporting of people, which itself presupposes extremely difficult and costly social transformations. (1999, p.124)

Once displaced, people need to find new shelter and new means of subsistence. But more than that, they need to re-orient themselves in a new reality and to find friends, companions and employers. In chapter 1, by drawing on my ethnographic data, I examine how people try to put down new roots in the urban space and, in particular, how they use and develop their social capital[12] – relationships, networks, connections and obligations – in order to gain access to resources and support.

In order to understand the complex dynamic of homelessness, I look at the properties of the street as a space where people have to make their home. It offers opportunities for human interaction and companionship, but makes bonds – both with mainstream society and between homeless people themselves – unreliable and untrustworthy. In chapter 2 I address the homeless people's own society. On the streets homeless people are involved in a multitude of interactions, providing emotional and

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12   I use the term 'social capital' here in the sense suggested by Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1993). Bourdieu's analysis centres on the individual agency. His account of 'social capital' offers a way of looking at individuals in various social positions as agents who, through the way they use social networks and connections, are able to sustain their place in the system of social inequality. Bourdieu views social capital as a system of social relationships, networks, connections, obligations and identities, which provide support and access to resources. In order to obtain social capital, individuals have to possess a certain sociability, which is based on social competence and dispositions acquired in the process of upbringing and in the development of habitual practices. Apart from social capital, individuals possess economic capital (which Bourdieu regards as the most important) and cultural capital. All forms of capital interact (and have various configurations for individuals in different class positions), reproducing or transforming the system of inequalities.

material support to each other. But their resources are extremely limited, and their street location makes it hard for them to build a cohesive community. They cannot exercise informal control and have durable expectations of each other's behaviour. As a result they frequently suffer from unregulated interpersonal violence.[13] In chapter 3 I address the temporal process of homelessness as developing, through the changes in personal resources, networks and identities, from displacement from 'settled society', through re-placement in the urban social space and finally to total displacement – or social death.

In Part II I examine people's pathways into homelessness. I explore how the dominant social and political practices create the conditions for personal dislocation, and how individuals, through their biographical circumstances and actions, lost their attachments to territorial collective structures.

Being unattached and transient, homeless people are seen as a threat to the social order, a challenge to the efforts of the state to classify and control populations, and to tie them to administratively defined territories. Both in the Soviet Union and in modern Russia agents of power attempted to objectify displaced people and apply a variety of markers to them. They were defined as vagrants, beggars, irresponsible transient workers, parasites or *bomzhi*. I argue that all these markers essentially indicate one social condition – that of being unattached to territorially based collective structures. I analyse how the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian states attempted to restore the social and spatial order 'violated' by displaced homeless people, through communal reprobation, penal policies, territorial segregation and, in the post-Soviet period, the work of social services and charities.

In chapter 4 I look at the key features of the Soviet social-spatial regime, and how these created a dynamic of dislocation, which the state attempted to manage through various disciplinary devices. Apart from times of revolution and war, homelessness in the Soviet Union can be seen as a product of the specific organisation of social and territorial space. The 'fixing' of the population in territorial communities was inextricably linked to the sanctioning of those who, for various reasons, became 'unfixed' and mobile.[14]

I argue that the Soviet state, although sometimes making half-hearted attempts at rehabilitation of 'asocial elements' through employment, generally treated homeless people, vagrants and parasites, as 'social waste'.[15] The strategies of the agents of power were concerned primarily with labelling them as strangers, as outsiders polluting the public space, and with their subsequent relocation to more 'suitable' places and spaces – to the geographical periphery, reformatories for alcoholics or labour camps. In this way the social order was restored.

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13 See similar conclusions in Roy, 1988, Snow and Anderson, 1993. But see Marquez, 1999, p.9, Gaboriau, 1993, p.15, on the 'common culture' of the streets.

14 On the Bolshevik project of 'fixing' individuals see Holquist, 1997, 2000, Baron and Gatrell, 2003.

15 See also Stephenson, 2000, p. 18 on the homeless as 'waste' for the Soviet system.

In this chapter I analyse the various legal and extra-legal instruments and policies applied to transient homeless people and especially the critical role played by *propiska* regulations. As in other modern countries, the regulatory functions of the Soviet state and its power over space manifested themselves in a variety of policies and classification techniques used to cut out the undesirables (Foucault, 1980). The judiciary and the scientific experts constructed definitions of vagrancy and parasitism, which were then adopted and used at the ground level, in residential units and workplaces.

In chapter 5 I analyse how the two main disciplining structures of the Soviet society – the neighbourhood and the enterprise – acted to exclude the so called asocial elements. Through examining the biographical narratives of some of the Soviet outcasts I trace the processes of expulsion and self-expulsion, and show how, within the interaction between the agents of social control and the vagrants, the social and territorial order was re-produced. I also discuss whether the process of exclusion produced a Soviet equivalent of Marx's *lumpenproletariat*.

In chapter 6 I move on to discuss the causes of post-Soviet homelessness. I examine how, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the decomposition of key Soviet structures and systems (national and ethnic formations, the command economy, the migration regime, etc.) has led to new processes of displacement and brought new homeless people onto the streets. The recent changes to the housing legislation threaten to bring a further expansion of the homeless population.

In chapter 7 I analyse the biographies of people who became homeless in the 1990s – first half of the 2000s. Transition to market capitalism created a powerful dynamic of displacement, which affected wide sections of the Russian population. But there were particular groups that became especially vulnerable to homelessness, among them people with low social and economic capital – or even with what could be called 'negative' capital, or 'stigma' – ex-prisoners, children brought up in institutional care, migrants, workers with irregular employment histories, alcoholics and elderly people.

In chapter 8 I address the regulation of homelessness in post-Soviet Russia. With the end of the Soviet system, and despite democratisation and the development of a new market economy, the persistence of registration rules has meant that displaced groups are still penalised and sanctioned. But the strategies of control have changed, and homeless people are now being excommunicated from society through the denial of jobs, access to social security and any civil and political rights. With the increasing privatisation of urban space in Russia, the cities are tightening the nooses on homeless people. They are denied access to communal and residential spaces, and contained in the degraded facilities of institutional care or through episodic charity.

This book aims to show that homelessness is not just about a lack of housing or a loss of the sources of social support. It is about struggles over space and the banishment of people who are unable to lay any claims to territory. The experiences of homeless people and the circumstances of their displacement can help to broaden our understanding of the key features of Russian society, as they uncover the 'suppressed' reality – of the weaknesses of collectivistic arrangements; of

marginalised populations that have to engage in illicit practices in order to survive; and of constant pressures on social and ideological boundaries.

Having sketched out an agenda for the book, a few words on what this book does not aim to cover. The book does not provide a thorough historical investigation of the evolution of vagrancy in Russia – this must be a subject of further research. Exploration of homeless experiences and public policies in Russia since the end of the Soviet regime mainly relates to Moscow, where the fieldwork took place. Although I also draw on sources relating to the situation in St.Petersburg, there is a dearth of reliable statistical information on homelessness in Russia generally, and on the specific local contexts in which it develops in other parts of the country.

Also, the analysis of homelessness reported in this book is limited to adult homeless people. Between 1996 and 2000 I also studied homeless children, including their paths onto the streets and their involvement in informal urban societies (criminal and prostitution networks and non-criminal youth subcultures). This has been the subject of separate publications (Stephenson, 1998, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b and Sidorenko-Stephenson, 2000).

PART I

THE HOMELESS
EXPERIENCE IN RUSSIA
TODAY

Chapter 1

Homeless People and
Urban Social Space

Anyone walking around Moscow these days will almost inevitably see, here and there, in the metro, in a park or near a train station, an instantly recognisable figure. A man or woman, in dirty rags, limping slowly, looking down, trying to occupy as little space as possible in a world which does not want to register their presence. Sometimes, to the distaste of passers-by, these figures move into centre-stage, either by exposing their misery and need through begging, or by gathering together for a chat or a drinking party on a street corner, thereby moving from the nooks and crannies where untouchables and aliens are expected to hide into spaces 'belonging' to the city residents.

Whatever state homelessness presents itself in, there seems to be no right of way for the displaced bomzhi into the life-world of the settled public.[1] All their attempts to 'cross the line' are seen as illicit, if not illegal (as I later explain, their existence in the Moscow can indeed be illegal, as a result of the residency registration rules). Their reality is blocked, and although they obviously manage to survive somehow, their existence in the city is assumed to take place on some parallel plane to that of the 'normal' people. Any sudden intersection of these planes is viewed, despite the familiar sight of the *bomzh*, as something extraordinary, something almost transgressing natural law. [2]

But a closer look at homeless people's reality shows that their lives are deeply immersed in the world of the city. They are involved in a magnitude of interactions with non-homeless people, particularly with the urban poor and with employers in the informal economy. Having no homes, they construct their relations with 'housed' people through the use of specific locations in the urban space. From these hubs of social life they attempt to spin their webs of contacts and use their available capital

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1   See a similar discussion in relation to street homelessness in the West by Davis, 1990, Deutsche, 1996 and Kawash, 1998.

2   Several Western writers on homelessness see street homeless people as living outside any social categories (time, place, race or gender) and presume that they are excluded from 'normal' human interactions (see, for example, Bahr, 1970, Desjarlais, 1997, Declerck, 2002). Some of the Russian academic commentators also share this view. For example, writing about the bottom layer – *sotsialnoe dno* – of the Russian society, to which she assigns the *bomzhi*, Natalia Rimashevskaia notes that 'The larger society excludes it from its orbit of social relations; connections with it are only sustained by the law and order agencies' (2003, p.141).

to build links based on utilitarian interest, obligation and commitment. Homeless people emerge as resourceful and deeply social agents

In this chapter I analyse homeless people's use of the key urban sites and their transactions with the marginally situated poor and with members of criminal society, as well as their street-level economic activities, in order to expose the complex dynamics of exclusion and inclusion of homeless people in the city space.

Key Urban Sites

Railway stations are key sites where homeless people can tap into the wider social world and create temporary 'anchors' in their own displacement. In Moscow the central hub in the physical and mental geography of homeless people is Komsomolskaia Square, with its three main train stations (*Leningradskii*, *Kazanskii* and *Yaroslavskii*). Many homeless people I met have never set foot anywhere else in the city. This is where they stay during the day, sleep, earn a living, form relationships and encounter the forces of law and order.

Train stations in major cities all over the world have the reputation of being potentially 'dangerous places' precisely because of the anonymity they offer, the rapid mobility of people passing through and the difficulties of control. The transport militia in Moscow makes periodic attempts to gain greater control at the train stations, by reinforcing security measures and denying access to waiting rooms to people without train tickets. Yet despite all these efforts it is difficult to police this complex social world.

Let us look around a station and its environs and get a glimpse of this rich and diverse reality. This is how a 'typical' social landscape, reconstructed on the basis of interviews and observation, might look. Here is a woman in the lobby of one of the stations selling ice cream. She lives nearby and today, after she sells her wares, she will start looking for a new lodger. As she can only rent a part of a room – *ugol* [a corner] as it is called in Russian – in her rundown flat, she may offer it for a small amount of money to this young woman, who has come to Moscow to look for work and now sleeps on a seat at the station, as her passport was stolen and she cannot get a job or register in a hotel without it. But a man in his late twenties also has his eye on the young woman. He lives with his mother in a Moscow suburb. He came here to look for somebody to take home with him – a girlfriend for a night or two, or may be even more depending on how things develop. Women from the train station do not ask for much – just a shower and a bite to eat. She looks relatively clean and is unlikely to have lice or any nasty diseases.

Let us walk a little further and stop at a table in a cafeteria. Several men are standing around drinking beer out of plastic cups. One of them – the one who bought beer for everybody and is now recounting funny stories about his past life as a musician – has been without a roof over his head for several months. He lives in cellar in a block of flats some distance from the station. He came here to look for friends – he hopes that somebody will take an interest in him and offer help. One of the drinkers may indeed help him. This next man lives on his own. He lost his job and is now selling what remains of his possessions to buy food and drink. He comes to the train station to find company and to spend some time with other people. He will probably take the other

guy to his flat. Why not? It is more fun to have someone else around and the musician can bring in some money if he plays his guitar in the metro.

Further away, on the railway tracks, semi-visible to the passengers, a multitude of activities, involving homeless and non-homeless people, is taking place. Two middle-aged women in ragged clothes are walking along the tracks – they are going to wash and clean the carriages, a job that train conductors should do themselves and which they instead ask homeless people to do for a pittance. At the end of the platform a group of dirty and unhealthy-looking men are involved in a heated argument. Some newly homeless people have decided to collect empty bottles at the station (in order to sell them later for recycling), but those who have been there longer are claiming their rights to the territory and threatening to bring their 'leader' who will show the usurpers whose patch this really is.

Not far from them, apparently oblivious to the row, a group of teenage girls is listening attentively to an older woman. The girls came to Moscow several days ago to see if they can start new lives here, but they have barely left the station – they do not know where to go in this huge, noisy and frightening city. The woman, herself a relatively recent arrival, offers to take the girls to a flat she has just rented. She does not attempt to disguise her intentions – she came to the station to look for girls to hire as prostitutes – but paints a picture of the prosperity and complete security they will find with her and the good foundation from which they will be able to build their futures.[3]

Still further away – on the ground beside the railway tracks – people are sitting next to a large fire lit by station workers to burn rubbish. They have spent the first part of the day begging at the station and are now enjoying a deserved rest. They drink cheap fortified wine and wait for potatoes to bake. Small children are playing perilously close to the fire. Other homeless people – some young, some elderly, most walking with difficulty, limping – come to join the makeshift feast. They sit down, eyes lit up with anticipation. People tell stories about their lives and exchange information – where to find charities that give out clothes, how to avoid being beaten by the youths who go around harassing defenceless *bomzhi*. They tell stories about mutual acquaintances – somebody has died and somebody else has found a partner and now lives in a flat.

Although nothing can realistically compare to the railway station in the richness of interactions it provides, there are other important sites in the city that homeless people use. These include underpasses in the metro and areas near metro stations. Here people beg and sell petty merchandise. Clients meet street prostitutes. Ad hoc drinking circles emerge. Under the ground, metro trains carry homeless people around the city. The circle line is particularly popular with street people, as one does not have to leave the carriage at the end of the line. Some huddle in the corner of a seat. Others lie across the whole bench to the dismay of the fellow passengers, who would neither sit close to, nor attempt to disturb, an untouchable *bomzh*, however crowded the carriage is.

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3   See Sidorenko-Stephenson, 2000 on homeless children and youth and organised prostitution networks.

City markets are also important sites for homeless people, mainly as a place of begging (where they compete with 'housed' beggars, pensioners and disabled people). Closely monitored by the trade administration and the militia, the markets are not open just to any homeless beggar. One has to be relatively clean and perceived as needy and deserving. Able-bodied homeless men, like Otto, who migrated into Moscow from Kazakhstan, might fake infirmities or disability. Otto pretends to be an injured army veteran in order to get some food from the stalls – he calls this method a 'soft racket'. Apart from opportunities for begging, markets can offer homeless people the prospect of odd jobs. They may be hired to unload goods for the traders or wash the premises. Some – mostly those who have some form of temporary accommodation – find more steady work in the market, hired to sell goods or even trade on their own.

Yet it is difficult for homeless people to find stable work in the market and get the chance to move away from daily handouts and odd jobs. The market seems to be a deregulated sphere, but regular jobs in the markets are mostly given to people who have a Moscow residence permit or have a personal recommendation from somebody whom the owner knows well (Blekher, 1998).

Several cafes in the centre of the city – such as one at Lubianka square, directly opposite the Federal Security Service (FSB) headquarters – provide a location where homeless people can meet each other and socialise with the lower levels of the city's 'bohemian society' – students, amateur philosophers and poets, other educated people struggling with poverty.

Sergei has been homeless for a year after a long period of travelling around Russia and a succession of temporary jobs and living places. He makes his living selling books in subway passages. He goes to the café at Lubianka, or to the square by the History museum, a hive of social activity where, since the *perestroika* years (and up until recent times), members of radical groups, left and right of the political spectrum, congregate and sell their literature:

> There are always people there. You can discuss problems with them, make some contacts. Normally there are young people. You can make some business contacts, talk a bit about politics, about life, and have a drink sometimes.

Other more down-market canteens and cafeterias (not many are now left in the centre of Moscow) are used by less 'sophisticated' homeless people. But even here, where seemingly you can only sit and stare into your plate and hope that nobody will chase you away, people still manage to make useful contacts. Several interviewees, all women, got to know somebody, a canteen cleaner or kitchen hand, who could cook them a simple meal from the food they brought from the market – for a small fee or for a share of the food.

Churches are another location used extensively by homeless people as a place where they can beg and where some try to make contacts with the priests and members of the congregation. Begging near churches can be quite lucrative, and no recrimination can be expected, except in those cases where other homeless or

housed beggars place conflicting demands on the use of the territory. Members of the congregation sometimes offer help, especially to the old and infirm, and get them medical aid, or even provide makeshift accommodation in a shed or a wagon in the church grounds.

Boris was fifty-two years old when we interviewed him near the church of Koz'ma and Damian on Tverskaia street in Moscow. By then he had already been a regular beggar there for two years and controlled access of other beggars to the church. He was first brought to the church after militiamen beat him so hard that he could not walk. He crawled along the street to a chorus of offensive comments of passers-by ('While I was crawling, I heard so much mocking… "Hey *mujik* [man], get up! How could you get so pissed?"'). Fortunately he was spotted by two members of the Koz'ma and Damian congregation, who carried him to the church. The priest managed to get him into a hospital by contacting the Red Cross. Since then he begged near the church and slept on the stairs in the nearby block of flats. After life on the streets, he joked, it would take a year in the best Kremlin sanatorium to improve his health at all. I later heard that Boris died only months after the interview.

This quick overview of the spaces that homeless people use shows that the urban social landscape presents considerable opportunities for street homeless people to tap into both mainstream and 'alternative' channels of communication. The key sites here are the transport arteries of the city; markets; places of worship and some cafes and squares. The main features of these sites are a relatively low level of official regulation, opportunities to meet people and engage in economic and social interaction and, often, proximity to other people sharing a marginal position in the social structure.

Encounters with the Marginally Situated Poor

My research shows that, while deprived of the territorial attachments, which allow other people to sustain their social networks, street people nevertheless do invest in social relations with the non-homeless.

Homeless people develop mutually beneficial relationships with the group closest to them in the urban social hierarchy – the housed poor with extremely low economic and social resources: unemployed Muscovites, lonely old-age pensioners, housed prostitutes and street vendors. The key difference between these two groups is captured very well by the definitions which our homeless interviewees gave to these social 'cousins' – *domashniaki* ['the housed'] and even *kvartirnye bomzhi* ['homeless people with flats', a slang term used by street people in relation to alcoholics with housing]. These 'housed poor' are members of the urban sub-proletariat, whom the homeless may encounter in their daily lives on the streets, or know from the days where they lived in the same block of flats. While possessing housing – priceless treasure in the eyes of their homeless acquaintances – they are often too poor to buy food or alcohol. By comparison even homeless people can be relatively rich because they can earn some money from their daily activities. *Bomzhi* can trade the

proceeds from their daily labours for a night's sleep, use of a shower, or safekeeping of documents and other valuables.

Encounters between the two groups often happen at a café, a bus stop or a stand near a kiosk. *Bomzhi* may provide money, alcohol or cigarettes in exchange for a chance to have a chat or indeed in the hope of striking up a friendship. This, for example, is how Mikhail, a professional musician who has been leading a transient lifestyle for two years, describes his routine. After leaving his family home following divorce he began to move from town to town in search of work. For the last six months his only income had come from casual work. As a recent arrival in Moscow he has little chance of steady work and no friends who could help:

> A chance encounter at the bus stop can change everything. Contact with people is the main thing. You can't survive without it. Several times I've stayed the night with casual acquaintances. These people were complete strangers. I'd buy them a beer and start a conversation quickly to win their trust. I find a common language with people and they help me.

The role of alcohol is particularly important as a means of initiating and cementing relationships. As with many who have recently become homeless, Mikhail uses the opportunity of drinking with a stranger to make vital contacts. Consumption of alcohol provides an axis around which homeless people can build their own contacts with the world of *domashniaki*. The bottle is often the only symbolic and material resource that enables them to maintain communication with former friends and neighbours. The ability to offer a drink, or to participate in a drinking session by bringing a contribution to the table, is often the only social currency available.

When homeless people encounter *domashniaki* at the place where they sleep (for instance, in cellars or lofts of blocks of flats) or work (such as train stations), the main facilitator of contact is a bottle. Settled 'neighbours' in a block of flats can come to have a drink with homeless people in lofts or cellars. Saleswomen in kiosks at the train stations expect *bomzhi* to share their hard-earned bottles. On such occasions people do not refuse, often hoping that such contacts might be useful to them in future. In urban culture in Russia, alcohol is probably one of the few instruments which make relationships across social levels possible.

Yet the relationships struck between homeless people and the housed poor are risky and volatile. This is because they hinge mostly on utilitarian considerations, depend on the very meagre resources of both parties and rarely involve any strong personal commitment. Mikhail described how he once met an amateur poet at the Lubianka café, a disabled pensioner, who let him live at his place for two and a half months. But then Mikhail had to leave – the pensioner started to ask for more money than they had agreed on, and Mikhail hardly had any money for food for himself.

Viktoria, a forty-year old Muscovite who, like many, lost her flat to conmen six months before the interview, describes her relationship with the 'housed':

Interviewer: Do you have connections with housed people?
Viktoria: I have former neighbours, alcoholics. When I have a bottle, I come to them. Only with a bottle, otherwise they won't let me in. Nobody lets you in for free these days.

Homeless people can rarely rely on unconditional and continuous support from the housed. With the arrival of relatives who want to use the flat and get unhappy about exchanges with *bomzhi*, or sudden differences in calculation of the balance of mutual services, a homeless person can quickly end up back on the street. People with children are in the most difficult position. A single person may find at least temporary accommodation, but almost never if he or she has a child.

Trading Sex

Another way for homeless people to get involved in transactions with members of the wider society is through the trading of sexual services for money, food or just the opportunity to have a place to stay overnight and get washed. Judging from our interviewees' accounts, these transactions very often involve the poorest members of the urban community, the same *domashniaki* – the 'housed' sub-proletariat – discussed above.

According to interviewees, the sexual services of homeless people are very cheap. It is hard for homeless people to look and dress well and their utter destitution forces them to agree to a minimal payment. They tend to work on their own and are of no interest to potential pimps and other intermediaries (although some homeless women reported that they could get money by finding a friend who would agree to have sex with a customer – most such arrangements are made with young women). Involvement in the sex trade tends to be occasional and combined with other earning activities such as begging and trading empty bottles. While there are other ways to earn a living, prostitution is seen to offer the greatest material returns. This is just one way to survive and homeless interviewees expressed no moral condemnation when talking about sex work. On the contrary, a certain amount of envy was present when both male and female interviewees were talking about women who were able to trade their bodies. To give an example, Elena, a forty-four year old woman, lost her home after a series of disastrous transactions and is now living on the streets of Moscow with her son. She tries to look after her appearance very carefully and sometimes men offer to take her home.

Elena: There are women who stand there waiting for men. Men come to me as well from time to time. They say, 'Have you got your own place?' I answer, 'No'. They say, 'Then get a bottle, we'll go to my place'. I tell them, 'I can't. I have my son with me'.
Interviewer: Do you know women who agree to do this?
Elena: Yes, I see them. They are well-fed, clean and tipsy.

As Elena goes on to explain, it is not easy for homeless women to get clients: 'Some of these women [who are taken by men] are *domashniaki*. Homeless women are dirty and bruised. Men don't like that.'

Abbas, a forty-four year old man from Turkmenistan, also living on the streets, speaks with some envy of young homeless women:

> Interviewer: What do young women do to survive?
> Abbas: What do you think? They go with men. Men give them food and drink, give them money. *Bomzhi*, do they have a choice? If a man feeds her, takes her home, washes her, is it because he's just kind? Why is it that nobody says to a man: 'Come with me, get washed, I will feed you?'

As a matter of fact, young homeless men do engage in prostitution, but this is a taboo subject, and people rarely admit that this happens.

Interviewees acknowledged the heavy risks involved in trading sexual services, particularly those of becoming a victim of violence or contracting venereal disease. In a 2002 study of the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among homeless women in militia detention centres in Moscow, it was found that 'among 400 homeless women studied, the HIV rate was still less than 3 per cent, but the number engaging in risky behaviour was high. 45 per cent of the women under 18-years old and 44 per cent of adult women exchange sex for drugs or money. Among the women who exchanged sex, more than 38 per cent tested positive for syphilis and 29 per cent had genital herpes.'[4]

Yet for many homeless women the risks of selling sex are outweighed by the need to get food, money and shelter.[5] Any opportunity to have a shower and spend a night in a bed is highly valued in a world where a person without documents and a residential permit cannot get a place in a hotel or even in a municipal shelter.

Homeless women selling sexual services (with the exception of young girls – see Sidorenko-Stephenson, 2000) are rarely involved in organised prostitution and therefore cannot rely in any way on the system of protection developed by the latter for its workers. Nobody would come and buy the release of a street woman if she was taken to a militia station. No pimp would try to check out potential customers. No doctor would be hired to cure herpes or syphilis. In other words, they have no access to the social capital of organised prostitution networks and have to engage in entirely improvised and risky arrangements.

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4   This research was conducted by the U.S. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and the Russian Association for Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections. It was reported in Johnson's Russia List, 10 July 2002.

5   Interviews showed that homeless people who sell sexual services do not necessarily have a low awareness of the risks of sexually transmitted diseases. This needs to be recognised by NGOs and aid organisations concerned about the spread of these diseases in Eastern Europe, which devise special programmes for testing and provision of information about safe sex among the 'at risk' groups. In conditions when unprotected sex brings more money than protected, a homeless woman might choose to disregard such information and advice, and the longer-term risks, in the interests of survival.

Street-Level Economic Activities

Homeless people develop a variety of survival strategies in the city space. They sell '*Big Issue*' type newspapers and magazines,[6] clean carriages and kiosks, unload trucks, wash cars, and collect empty bottles, metal and paper for sale. Some are hired to do day jobs in construction. In the morning people go to work – for example, to a market where they wait for someone to ask them to unload a truck, or to a train station to see if they are hired to clean the carriages. Although homeless people try to develop longer-term relationships with employers, their work situations are chaotic and unpredictable and they frequently suffer from exploitation, non-payment and abuse.

Those who can more easily rely on charity – old or disabled people, people with small children – attempt to survive by begging. Some *bomzhi* who cannot easily expect to get money from passers-by may try to maximise their earnings by covering their faces, feigning non-existent handicaps, using a variety of religious props and symbols, or leasing a child from other homeless people.[7] Still, for most people this way of earning – *bombit'* [to 'bombard'] in street jargon – is unreliable and often morally unacceptable. It is a much better strategy for them to directly solicit – *s'shibat'* – help in the form of food, drink, cigarettes and, more rarely, money, from passers-by. Approaching particular individuals for help is not considered to be demeaning, as in such a transaction one individual is supposed to help another without making an unfavourable status judgement. This is how one interviewee, Oleg, described his attitude to soliciting money on the streets. Oleg was born in 1954. An engineer with a higher education, he had spent most of his working life at construction sites in Siberia and the Far East. After a family crisis, followed by the bankruptcy of his small business, Oleg lost his home and started to live on the streets of Moscow.

> Interviewer: Do you have to beg?
> Oleg: I have to s'shibat', but I haven't sunk as low as to beg.
> Interviewer: What do you mean by s'shibat'?
> Oleg: 'Hey, mate, I haven't got enough money to buy a bottle', or 'Have you got a cigarette?'
> Interviewer: Do you find it unpleasant to beg?
> Oleg: Yes, it's totally unbearable. It's humiliating. But everybody does s'shibat'. This is – so to speak – a way of survival by any means, by overlooking some moral considerations. But it's easier for me to say 'lend me a hundred roubles' than 'give me money'. I would rather starve than beg.

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6   See the discussion in Solovieva, 2001.
7   See Kudriavtseva, 2001 on the strategies of self-presentation among the beggars in St. Petersburg.

Interactions with Members of Criminal Society

Although a *bomzh* may encounter members of criminal groups as part of his everyday activity – begging in the underground and subways, doing odd jobs at train stations – the potential for any close relationship between homeless people and members of the criminal world is generally very low. While they are often perceived as being dangerous and are frequently portrayed by city authorities and the mass media as a criminal class (indeed, the Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov once announced that they are responsible for about a half of all crime committed in the city[8]), their association with criminal society is much more sporadic than their connection to the mainstream world. According to representatives of Moscow militia, crimes committed by homeless people tend to be spontaneous, carried out without preparation and therefore entail great risk. Hunger and alcohol addiction are the main motives for such crimes (i.e. Kotsyrev, 1999). As forty-year old Viacheslav explained,

> When you wake up, you have to eat, you have to scavenge. You go out and people are sitting and eating. They don't think about you and your needs. So you take whatever you can steal. Here and there, maybe from someone's table or a stall. That's life. We live like stray dogs.

The world of organised crime does have its attraction for people who have no prospect of getting secure housing or jobs in the formal economy. Some young homeless people admit in interviews that they want to find ways to join the criminal community. They perceive many benefits from such membership, such as protection by other members and financial security. However, this community has its own career structure, and one has to possess specific social capital, connections, reputations and knowledge in order to be accepted. Street people lack this capital and have no chance to accumulate it.[9]

Homeless people's chances of building reputations in the world of organised crime are undermined from the start by the fact that *bomzhi* are viewed with contempt by members of the criminal community. Valerii Abramkin, head of the Society for Reform of the Penitentiary System, and a well-known writer on prison subculture in Russia (Abramkin and Chesnokova, 1993), told me that according to his observations while he was in prison in the 1980s for dissident activities, incarcerated vagrants were among the most despised sections of the inmates. On entering detention, those who had been convicted for violation of passport rules and vagrancy would immediately join the lowest levels in the hierarchy of prison society. Russian professional criminals, who place great value on such qualities as

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8   Izvestiia, 1995. However, the Deputy Head of the Moscow Department of Internal Affairs V.N.Karasev told me that no more than 7 per cent of all the crime in Moscow is committed by homeless people. In fact, in Russia there are no statistics on crime committed by homeless people since 1990.

9   See, for example, Varese, 2001 and Volkov, 2002 on the structures of Russian organised crime.

the willingness to take risks, resourcefulness and strict control of self-presentation – with a strong emphasis on cleanliness and neatness – generally despise homeless people, who they see as unreliable, dirty and unable to exercise any control over their lives.

When interviewed, several members of Moscow criminal groups expressed this attitude. While ready to support street children and even to consider some of them as future members of criminal groups, they are unwilling to have anything to do with *bomzhi*. For example, Bronia, who gives a tenth of his criminal income to a charity that helps children, says that he would never give any money to an organisation that supports adult homeless people:

> I can give a *bomzh* ten roubles, but that will be it. I have a clear gradation…I want to help the children but *bomzhi*… I can see that they are needy. But unfortunately, apart from God, there are also the results of people's own actions. And if you ended up there, on the street, this is partly your own fault. You didn't want to change your situation. Everybody gets his chance. I do not want to judge. But to help them – that's in God's hands alone.

People who have become homeless following release from prison, and who were not members of organised crime prior to incarceration, lack access to the support provided by criminal associations to their own members. The illegal activities of homeless people take place at the periphery of the criminal world. Criminals can take advantage of their specific location on the streets, including the fact that they can stay for hours at train stations or markets, as well as their contacts with housed poor. They may ask *bomzhi* to investigate, for example, who owns a certain commercial kiosk, or whether the kiosk owners have already got a *krysha* [a roof – i.e. criminal 'protection']. Or they may pay some money or buy a drink for those homeless people who are in touch with housed alcoholics and ask them to investigate whether the latter are planning to sell their housing (or just to get their addresses in order to try to cheat or force the alcoholics out of their flats). Sometimes *bomzhi* procure other people's passports for the criminals – or sell their own.

But members of the criminal community do not seem to engage in continuous relations with homeless people. The latter do not have a fixed address and this means that it is difficult to control them. For the *bomzhi*, on the other hand, their contacts with the criminal world do not yield much. If they do not occupy a certain position in the criminal group, they can expect neither significant remuneration, nor any lasting obligations. We see here what Robert Merton (1957) called 'a double failure' – a situation in which a homeless person can use neither legitimate, nor illegitimate means to achieve his/her goals.

Dmitrii from Khabarovsk is twenty-three years old. He spent most of his life in children's homes. After that he never worked and has never had a passport or housing – apart from staying for a few months in a workers' hostel. Now he lives on the Moscow streets and earns his income through a combination of odd jobs, occasional theft and muggings of passers-by. His dream is to become a *bandit* [a

member of organised crime]. However, he is never given the chance to do more than odd jobs for the criminal groups.

> Interviewer: Would you like to work with the *bandits*?
> Dmitrii: No. Either you are a *bandit*, or you are not. To hang around them isn't worth the risk. They can cheat you at any time. If you're not a *bandit* yourself, they'll betray you without a second thought.
> Interviewer: Would you like to be a *bandit* yourself?
> Dmitrii: Yes, but how would I get there?

While homeless people often spoke about the moral unacceptability of begging, stealing was unacceptable to many for other reasons: 'I don't have good enough health to survive prison', 'it is a big risk', 'I don't know how to steal'.

Criminals may become involved with people who regularly beg in subways and in the underground. The latter may have to pay a percentage of their incomes to petty racketeers. However, those homeless people who do not have a stable place of earning do not pay.

Vladimir is a fifty-six year old Muscovite. He served a small term in prison for stealing some instruments from his factory. He returned to Moscow, but his daughter, a student, refused to apply for him to get a residence permit in his former flat (where she now lives on her own). He occupies a cellar in a Moscow building and earns his living by collecting bottles and cleaning kiosks. This is how he describes his encounters with racketeers:

> I was working in one district. They came to me twice. They said that I should pay them a fraction of my income. I said: 'Why?' They said: 'We could help you in the future.' I said: 'How could you help me? There's nothing you can do to help me.' And that was that. They left me alone.

Such simple attempts at extortion might happen once or twice, but any sustained relationship presumes some service in return – even if it is just a promise to fend away other extortionists. Criminals cannot offer their services to homeless people and the latter cannot be made continuously dependent upon them because they lack territorial affiliation – they can always move to another area.

Use of Social and Cultural Capital

Analysis of ground-level social interactions involving homeless people shows that, despite the virtual absence of institutional support, they are not socially isolated individuals, scavenging on the city's leftovers. Many people need their services, their income and indeed their company. Being unattached, mobile, always available, ready to sell and exchange their services for a minimal reward, they can find themselves in demand.

However, as I will explain later, the specific dynamics of street homelessness – the gradual depletion of resources, including health (particularly if this is associated

with alcohol or drug addiction), limitation of mobility and progressive inability to maintain an appearance necessary even for the most limited interactions with 'settled' citizens – often mean that the longer people stay on the street, the less attachment they tend to have to urban society and the less chance they have of keeping and developing social capital so painstakingly gained. These two almost simultaneous processes of accumulation and depletion of social capital turn the condition of homelessness into something of a leaking vessel.

But where they can, many homeless people use all their available resources to develop interactions with other social groups. Non-Russian ethnicity can be an advantage. Revaz is a fifty-one year old man born in Georgia. He sometimes works in a large city market helping the traders. They give him money, food and clothes: 'You see, I'm not that homeless. They are from Georgia. I speak Georgian with them.'

The story of his acquaintance with his benefactors is like a film script – from a panning shot where people are indistinguishable in a crowd, the camera zooms in until there is a close-up shot of a human face.

> How did I get this job? I met these people. People are standing at the tables, eating. This guy didn't like something he ate. He threw it on the ground. Here is a *bomzh* getting it. This is me. I am grabbing a piece of ham. And he tells me, this Georgian: 'Hey you! Get out of here.' I was dirty, badly dressed then. And he started swearing at me in Georgian. And I answered him in Georgian. He was so stunned: 'So you are from Georgia?' I say: 'Yes.' 'Who are you?' I say: 'Don't you see? I am a *bomzh*.' 'What has happened to you?' I tell him. He says: 'Come here tomorrow. I'll get you a change of clothes.' So he brought me the clothes. Another man came to meet me. They gave me food and money to buy drink. And in two or three days he says: 'One of the guys who works for me is leaving soon. Come to me. I will give you a job.' And so they started to support me.

Cultural capital can also be useful for developing contacts with the 'settled', and people may try to forge such links by using their knowledge of mainstream cultural practices and symbols.

Sergei, the book-vendor with a university education, who meets people at the square near the History museum in the centre of Moscow, benefits from his acquaintance with amateur poets and philosophers. He is in a better position than other people who are not so well educated and presentable:

> Interviewer: And what about other homeless people? Do they come to the square?
> Sergei: Yes, they come, they listen to us, even try to say something, but as a rule these people have sunk, have degraded so much, they are just not interesting.

Despite their increasing isolation, many homeless people try to sustain at least a symbolic cultural connection to mainstream society. Many read newspapers and buy books at the stalls. Some manage to gain membership of a library or visit cinemas and theatres.

Sergei, for example, reads profusely (he particularly likes philosophy and sociology). In his scheme of society he is at the very bottom. But relatively good income and his continuing self education help to some degree to elevate his status.

> In some ways the reading helps me to live. I feel myself to be all right. I feel socially rehabilitated. Even if in some aspects I am deprived – for example when it comes to housing – in the material sense and in the sense of knowledge, even if it is superficial knowledge gained through the popular press, I feel better… There is already some compensation and although I do not feel a totally normal person, to some degree I overcome the deficiencies of my existence.

Similarly, investment in social capital is an ever-present necessity. Even in the largely anonymous setting of a street market, people remember the need to build some semblance of a reputation and develop future contacts. Otto describes the process:

> Interviewer: Are you ever chased away?
> Otto: Certainly. People can swear at you a lot. But if you meet them again, they'll give you something, because you didn't answer back. I study people's psychology…
> Interviewer: Do you do this in one area of Moscow?
> Otto: No, I work the whole city. If I work just in one area, they'll tell me – can't you find another place? They will simply turn away.

Sergei also tries to build and keep contacts, although this is proving difficult:

> I try to sustain contacts with people who have long adapted in Moscow, who have a solid base. Although everybody at the square knows that I am a *bomzh*, I do not hide it. They are absolutely fine about it because I am always dressed cleanly and I am always washed. If I do not shave, I wear a tidy beard and trim my moustache. And people see that every day I have money in my pocket. I buy a pack of cigarettes – 'Marlboro', 'Winston' or 'Camel' – buy food, drink, get the guys 150 grams [of vodka] each. They watch me do this every day. That's why their attitude to me is fine, and mine to them as well. But still they do not invite me home with them because a *bomzh* is a *bomzh*. What if he steals something from you? You are a man from the train station. It is dangerous to take you home and so they find some pretext … [to avoid inviting you].

The difficulties homeless people, particularly those who have been on the streets for a long time, face in establishing lasting relations with 'settled society' were summarised well by fifty-five year old Stepan, who had spent three years on the streets.

> Interviewer: What is the most difficult thing for you in relations with other people?
> Stepan: That depends on the people. What kind of people they are. Of course, if they have something and I have nothing, that's a problem. I can only ask for help. What have I to offer them? These people will not take me with them. And I can't work. That is all.

Communicative Dispositions and Strategies

The almost total lack of public provision for homeless people in Russia today (I discuss this in chapter 8), means that they can only leave homelessness, or at least lead more or less stable lives, through personal relations with other, non-homeless people. To build these relations, homeless people develop particular communication strategies. Their dispositions towards wider society often show a desire to demonstrate adherence to the social norms of the 'settled' public, by presenting themselves as docile and inoffensive.

While our in-depth interviews contain rich material on how homeless people build their relationships with the outside world, an additional source of information was developed to make it possible to examine their communication strategies more closely. At the end of most interviews, the interviewee was asked to complete a series of open-ended statements. These statements had been used earlier in a 1992–93 survey of a sample of 182 Moscow residents by the Russian sociologist Svetlana Klimova and her colleagues (the results were partly published in Klimova, 1993). I used Klimova's sample as a control group to see how the dispositions of homeless interviewees differed from those of a sample of non-homeless Muscovites. Only indicative conclusions can be made from the comparison of these answers. Our sample was small – open-ended questions were only used in 70 interviews with homeless people. That is why I do not refer here to percentages, but rather to the general trends in the homeless people's answers. Nevertheless, the results seem to point at quite substantial differences between the attitudes of the homeless people and 'settled' individuals.

Our interviewees were asked to complete the following phrases: 'To be liked by others it is necessary to …', 'People are kind to me as long as …' and 'I try not to spoil my relationship with …'

When completing the sentence: 'To be liked by others it is necessary to…', homeless people tended to emphasise self-control. Typical answers were 'to be polite, not to allow yourself excesses in conversations and actions'; 'to look like a human being, to be neat, to have an acceptable appearance'; and 'to behave normally and not to drink'. Among the 'settled' Muscovites only a small minority of answers fell into this category. The 'settled' people much more often than the homeless people believed that having good interpersonal skills, 'being open to communication' or 'being a good person' made other people like them.

In completing the sentence, 'People are kind to me as long as …', most of our homeless interviewees emphasised personal moral responsibility: 'as long as I do them no wrong'; 'as long as I do not behave like a swine towards them'; 'people are kind if you behave like a human being, do not go mad'. This contrasted with the opinions of housed Muscovites, the majority of whom said that people were kind to them as a result of kindness they had seen from them in the first place or because these people depended on them.

Most homeless people stressed conformity – rather than assertiveness – as the key quality that they had to demonstrate in interactions with others.[10] Completing the sentence, 'I try not to spoil my relationship with…' people tended to answer that they either tried not to spoil relationships with anybody, or 'with those people who do not spoil relationships with me', 'who did not do me any wrong'. Among the housed Muscovites people most frequently referred to those connected to them by blood ties, spouses or friends and to people whom they liked or on whom they depended.

Reflecting on their experience of urban marginality, interviewees stressed their powerlessness and a desire to avoid conflict. A typical attitude was expressed by Viktoria: 'You see, if the person is unpleasant, I stop being with him, I simply move aside. I try not to show negative emotions when I deal with people.'

The cultural orientations acquired by people in their previous lives – in the working class milieu, children's homes or prisons – lose their relevance in the new situation of life on the streets. Many people, especially men, reflecting upon the changes in their behaviour since they had become homeless, stressed that while in the previous life they had been assertive and rebellious ('I was hot-tempered, harsh', 'I looked for trouble'), after ending up on the streets they have attempted to behave quietly and unobtrusively. The characteristics which may have been important in previous social settings – assertiveness, boisterousness, a perceived need to demonstrate readiness for violence – are commonly recognised as being counterproductive and damaging in homeless life. As Otto says:

> It really gets to me when people are rude. Sometimes a person swears at me ... and I just want to hit him! But what am I? I'm nothing! If I so much as touch him, I get nicked and put to jail. Do I need that? I'd rather restrain myself and just avoid conflict. If I had a passport and lived in a flat, then I wouldn't stand for it.

The realities of displacement (which are particularly harsh in modern-day Russia, where homeless people are denied any serious organised support) create an urgent need for ground-level re-placement strategies through which homeless people can try to re-establish their connections to the social space. People explore specific hubs of sociality in the city, develop a range of mutually beneficial transactions with the urban sub-proletariat and use their cultural and social capital in order to survive and, if possible, leave homelessness. This reality goes very much against the views of the 'settled' majority – and many Russian homelessness commentators – who perceive homeless people either as a collection of passive victims or as pathological individuals who have taken themselves beyond the borders of society.

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10 The relative conformity of homeless people in Moscow, their desire to stay invisible (unless they ask the passers-by for money, which they, as anyone who observed them in Moscow would confirm, almost never do aggressively), contrasts with Duneier's observations in New York's Greenwich village (Duneier, 1999). There is also no visible gender harassment similar to that described by Duneier, when homeless vendors try to engage upper-class white women in sexually-laden conversations.

At the same time the efforts of the homeless people to re-connect to the mainstream society are constantly undermined. As discussed earlier, contacts with *domashniaki* can be suspended at any moment. Employment, which takes place without any contract, is tenuous and risky. The sponsors on whose benevolence they rely might disappear or lose the desire to help. Also, homeless people lack a territorial base from which they can develop their ties to other people. One day they seem settled in a particular site, the next they are chased away, arrested or thrown outside the city borders. The virtual absence of any housing provision for homeless people in Russia – be this social housing, sheltered accommodation or long-term hostels, or other places that they could use on a more or less permanent basis (I discuss this in chapter 8) – creates a profound instability in their lives. This instability acts as a powerful inhibitor in people's efforts to reconstruct their social connections.

Chapter 2

Street Society

The displacement experienced by street homeless people comes to bear upon every aspect of their social existence. The street profoundly affects not just their situation in relation to wider society, but also the relationships they are able to forge with each other.

Street homeless people are often portrayed by the Russian mass media as members of close-knit groups. The media trade in stories of well-disciplined 'underground societies', with leaders who amass enormous wealth and a subordinate rank and file who are made to give away the lion's share of their earnings.[1] Obviously, stories about the secret world of homeless people, with teams of well-organised beggars conspiring to rip off 'decent' folk, appeal to deeply ingrained cultural representations of the street as a place of organised resistance to 'settled society'.

Some academic commentators in the West also emphasise the structured character of the homeless community.[2] These authors seem to follow a more 'progressive' calling and seek to emphasise the 'normality' of homeless people. According to these accounts, homeless people form cohesive collectives on the streets; they get support and 'rehabilitation' through new friendships and co-operation in economic activities, such as, for example, street vending or low-wage labour. People with more experience of street life look after the newly homeless; they educate them in ways to make a decent living. Homeless people are found to form a highly 'moral' order in the face of exclusion and stigmatisation. Such representations have been criticised for sanitising and glamorising the urban poor (Bourgois, 1995, Wacquant, 2002).

In order to move away from a discussion of whether homeless people are intrinsically moral or immoral individuals, we need to look at the properties of the street as a space and see what kind of social organisation it allows for its dwellers. What does it mean to inhabit the 'anti-place' which is the street? Is it possible to sustain relationships, develop commitments and obligations and obtain respect and validation from each other?

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1   An example of such representation is the article with a characteristic title *Blesk i Nishcheta Padali* ('Splendour and Poverty of Carrion'), Rokhlin, 1995.

2   See, for example Màrquez, 1999, Duneier, 1999.

Affiliation and Isolation

Generally, strong ties in communities are maintained through close communication between members. These ties serve to build trust, desire for companionship and support for the partners' needs. They reinforce a sense of mutuality in relationships (Wellman, 1992). Strong ties have been seen as an attribute of small close-knit communities able to enforce sanctions to maintain trust and solidarity (Coleman, 1988, pp.105-8). As Coleman explains, members of communities with strong ties are bound by mutual obligations and expectations; they invest into long-term relationships.

Interviews with homeless people show that the street presents mixed opportunities for creating strong social ties, or building what Putnam (2000) describes as 'bonding social capital'. Street homeless people are simultaneously drawn to each other and repelled from each other. They want to be with other people and they desperately need company and support. Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapter, their street location not only makes it difficult for them to enter sustained relationships with members of mainstream society, but also reduces and damages their potential for interactions with other homeless people.

There are, of course, strong forces pulling homeless people together. While they do not constitute a cohesive society on the streets, they do occupy the same position in the social space. They share what Bourdieu, following Goffman, calls the 'sense of one's place' (Bourdieu, 1994, p.128). Whatever different trajectories have brought individuals onto the streets, and however much they may deny being part of the socially stigmatised group – *bomzhi* – they would still accept that they share the position of outcasts.

This sense of affinity with other homeless people is visible in the fact that homeless people nearly always acknowledge the presence of other *bomzhi* on the streets, and that they recognise that they have particular communicative obligations towards each other. While passers-by either stare at homeless people on the city streets, or do not 'see' them at all, treating them as 'non-persons' (Goffman, 1959, pp.151-3), *bomzhi* give each other at least visual recognition. Some become involved in more focused interaction, in what Goffman calls face engagement or encounter (1963, p.89). 'We see each other'; 'we can tell each other by sight from afar'; 'I have no friends, but I say hello on the streets to half the city'.

Even the newcomers to the streets who tend to avoid the company of other homeless people do not go as far as demonstrating their total rejection. Although trying to distance themselves from other *bomzhi*, their accounts show that they still think of them as human beings and not outsiders.

> My own pride doesn't let me spend time with them. I would not go drinking with them. But otherwise, if I'm just standing there and he asks me for a cigarette, I'd talk to him. It's not that I despise him. It's just unpleasant to be with him. (Olga, twenty-five years old)

Homeless people engage in limited but mutually beneficial interaction. When strangers get together at train stations or soup kitchens they exchange important information – where to get clothes, shoes, medical aid, where to find public showers. Sometimes they just have a drink together on a street corner. During these brief encounters people give each other moral support, exchange stories and reminiscences and fantasise about the future. They help each other in a variety of ways. But their communication reflects the reality of their total marginality and destitution.

On the one hand, there is an obligation to help each other in case of need, to share food, drink or sometimes money. On the other hand, in the material sense, there is just not enough going round for people to offer lasting support to each other:

> Everyone is on his own. That's life here. Everybody has only what he's earned. But generally we share. If I have something to eat now, I will share, because I know that tomorrow I may not have anything. If I refuse him food today, he will do the same to me tomorrow. (Ivan, thirty-eight years old)

Longer-term obligations are difficult to sustain, and while people may try to build lasting relationships with *domashniaki*, charity workers or employers, it makes less sense to invest heavily in building social capital on the street.

Bomzhi cannot lift each other out of homelessness. A recurring theme in the narratives of homeless people is the story of a friend of a friend who got lucky, who was aided by a 'saviour' in finding a way to leave homelessness. Such a saviour is sometimes a mother or an adult son or daughter, but more often a housed friend, who not only helps with housing but takes control of the situation and provides the drive necessary to find a job or stop drinking. *Bomzhi* cannot do this for each other. As Elena says,

> To climb back up, but how? It's difficult, so very difficult. Maybe if I found a kind person to help me, but of course, there's no one like that here, only *bomzhi*.

Some people try to meet friends and partners among the homeless. But most of the people we talked to did not expect to develop close friendships and did not see what rewards friendship with other street homeless people would bring in their situation.

> Interviewer: Do you have friends among homeless people?
> Stepan: No, just acquaintances.
> Interviewer: Is it difficult to be without close friends?
> Stepan: No, why? What can a friend do? Neither he nor I are capable of anything. We can't earn a living. We can't do anything. Everybody is on his own. When I have bread, I will share it. When I have cigarettes, I will share them. What else can there be?

It is important to emphasise that such dispositions are not simply attributable to personal histories and attitudes. They are the product of the environment homeless people inhabit. In more permanent settings (such as hostels or shelters) trust and mutual reliance may be developed much more strongly. For example, Gwendolyn

Dordick demonstrated how homeless people in New York were able to create complex structures of support, which, despite their ad hoc nature, produced what the physical environment could not provide: a safe and secure place to live. Her conclusion was straightforward: 'the homeless I met survived through personal relationships' (1997, p.193). However, the homeless people she studied lived in a shelter, not on the streets.

In the case of Moscow's street homeless people, mutual reciprocity is inevitably limited. A lack of resources, the uncertainty of street existence and a lack of ability to make any projections about the future make it nearly impossible to build expectations about other people's behaviour towards oneself. It appears that this state of affairs is taken for granted and perceived as an inevitable part of homeless life. People do not blame each other for not helping out. As Ivan explained:

> I don't rely on anybody. How can I? The *bomzhi*, with whom I live…Will they feed me, give me drink? Of course not, they'll forget me in a flash if I stop doing them favours. This is how relationships are.

This is not a world where people give constant help and support to each other, but nor is it one of 'every man for himself'. Things change all the time, and one can never be sure what to expect. People's accounts show that, depending upon circumstances, one can easily become either a beneficiary of support or a victim of abuse from other homeless people.

> *Bomzhi* sometimes help each other out. We notice each other. Sometimes you ask: 'Guys, have you got anything to spare?' And they give you something. I had no boots and some *bomzhi* – complete strangers – gave me new ones. Sometimes it's the other way round, like when someone stole my bag. I have no doubt that those were *bomzhi*. (Boris)

This unpredictability at least partly stems from the fact that on the streets people have few ways to control each other's behaviour. While largely unable to turn to the militia when something goes wrong, *bomzhi* cannot develop informal controls either. As Boris put it:

> Suppose we are sitting and eating together. I can take off my boots and leave them there for the night. But if there's a third party, I can't be sure of the safety of my boots.

Not all homeless people live isolated lives and engage in episodic exchange. Small groups of two or more people may settle together in a cellar, on the stairs in the block of flats or at a train station. Teams of *bomzhi* may work together – for example to clean and unload train carriages. Sometimes people attempt to find collective solutions to leaving homelessness. They make plans to go together to *shabashka* (seasonal work) or look for other work. But such plans rarely materialise. The painful experience of unfulfilled expectations and broken promises can lead to disappointment in one's fellows and a decision to stay on one's own in the future.

Fifty-four year old Pavel was a construction team foreman before he became homeless after being robbed of money and documents at a train station. At first he tried to form a team out of homeless people he met on the streets.

> I tried to get people together somehow. I met one young lad. He looked normal. I said, 'Let's team up'. We teamed up for a while, earned a little and then he disappeared. The same thing happened with the second one. The third time, a homeless guy who's an ex-criminal joins me. I earn good money and buy myself a denim jacket. We work together briefly, but I see that he's not keen. He says, 'Give me your jacket. I'll go to a shop'. And he disappears. Then there was Oleg … I told him, 'Let's go, there's work at the station. We can work together.' He said, 'I don't believe in that'. I said, 'Why don't you believe in that? I can earn money like that, I can survive.' He said, 'I don't believe in that, I'll just go and beg. I'm always hungry.' I used to think that you have to try to help people. But now I think that you should just leave them alone. Because you try to help and then everything goes wrong.

Similarly, women, who generally tend to invest more in personal relationships, often complain of a lack of trust in their male partners. This is how Vasilisa, a forty-three year old homeless woman who has been on the streets for two years after escaping from a violent husband, describes her situation:

> Interviewer: Do you have friends among homeless people?
> Vasilisa: I have partners, but I do not trust them. They can lie or steal from you. I'm with this guy now. He is a good man, not some crazy youngster. But when he is drunk, he too starts…he shouts and swears at me. But generally he is a kind fellow. I usually hang out on the Arbat [a street in central Moscow]. Sometimes I stay with one man or another, but this never lasts. Otherwise I'm at the Arbat. I beg for some money, then meet somebody I know. We have a drink together. Then we go our own ways or go together to a cellar to sleep.

Older people are particularly reluctant to look for company, seeing no benefits from being with other homeless people:

> Why would I spend time with other *bomzhi*? I'd just have a row over empty bottles with them. Some time ago I walked by and this man said, 'This is not your territory'. I swore at him a bit…and kept walking. Why would I spend time with them? So I can get lice and bruises? That would be easy. If I was maybe twenty years old, perhaps I would get involved with someone. But at fifty people don't get involved with anyone at all. (Polina, fifty years old)

Degrees of Despair

Homeless people are united by the street but divided by the degree of their despair. Some still hope to leave the streets. Others have already accepted their plight. The former are reluctant to mix with the latter. They do not want to identify with *bomzhi* and also try to evade such identification by others. Misfortune is contagious – both

in the physical sense (as in the ever present danger of getting lice or infections from others) and in the mental and social senses.

People who are newly homeless are often wary of joining other, longer-term homeless people in train stations, cellars and lofts of buildings and fear that there will be a pressure to socialise. As Oleg explained:

> There are no friends at the train station. Everybody is on his own, but don't forget – you're either with us or against us. If you spend the night at the train station, you will lead the way of life that you are told or forced to lead.

Indeed, despite their generally weak ties, people create specific mechanisms of cohesion, especially around the joint consumption of alcohol. Consumption of alcohol can be compulsive. Among other things, it can be seen as a way of social levelling, where people are forced to join in drinking circles so that they do not stand out or accumulate 'extra' resources. Some of our interviewees explained that if a homeless person unexpectedly gains a comparatively large amount of money and others find out about it, he or she is expected to buy drinks for the rest.

When describing alcohol-related practices, homeless men and women often pointed to the strong peer group pressure for them to participate in joint drinking. Those people who refuse to drink in such circles are prone to isolation, at least temporarily. Here is how twenty-eight year old Irina, a woman who has been homeless for two years, describes her inability to mix with others. She met another woman and collected empty bottles with her for some time:

> So this girlfriend, we met her friends and they started drinking together. I don't drink, and when they got drunk they started to attack me. 'You do not drink. You're trying to show that you're better than us.' So here one minute I have a friend, the next I don't. So now I am on my own, I can't make friends, though sometimes I wish I had someone to lean on.

Some people who are reluctant to get involved with other *bomzhi* attempt to avoid immersion into street life because they hope their situation will change soon. As Elena, a woman who has been homeless for six months after being cheated out of her property by conmen, says:

> I have few friends among *bomzhi*, I try to decide what to do next, I have to find a place for myself, or there's no point in living.

Sergei, our homeless book vendor, speaks disparagingly about other homeless people, who can be of no use in his efforts to leave homelessness:

> I know them, but I do not sustain contacts with them. You can get lice from them. They are as a rule dirty, unwashed and dishevelled and you can't do serious business with them or trade with them. They are unreliable people who can disappear or get arrested by the militia at any time.

Tatiana, a homeless woman from Siberia, has lived on Moscow streets for a year. She also does not want to form close relationships with other *bomzhi*, as she does not want to share the same stigma:

> Interviewer: Are you in touch with other homeless people?
> Tatiana: I have got many acquaintances, people whose faces are familiar. Other than that, I don't make friends because they're generally so very dirty. They've been *bomzhi* for several years and sometimes I'm afraid to stand near them. Because everybody looks at them … I am still not part of the crowd. I try to clean myself up whenever I can. I can't be with anybody, though I sometimes want to stick to someone.

People in the most dominated, most powerless social location may try not to invest into close relationships with others in the same position. For those who still hope to leave homelessness, contacts with other *bomzhi* do not make much sense. Apart from episodic utilitarian benefits, joining other homeless people means further deterioration of one's position. By accepting that they are part of one group, they cannot but accept that they share the common fate. Here a progression toward social death – a total lack of sources of social existence and recognition – is all too close to physical death.

This is how Valentina, a fifty-eight year old homeless woman, explains her unwillingness to mix with other homeless people on the streets:

> Interviewer: Do you spend time with other *bomzhi*?
> Valentina: No, I am wary of them. I'm scared of getting lice.
> Interviewer: Do you have any friends?
> Valentina: No, why should I? They're all fallen people. They die like flies. Here today, gone tomorrow.

Unlike the careers of the members of other 'alternative' communities, which are not totally located on the streets – be they based around crime, the drug trade or other informal activities (cf. MacDonald, 1994; Crane, 1997) – homeless people's 'careers' lead to progressive stigmatisation not just by members of mainstream society, but by people who share the same social position. While newcomers are reluctant to mix with people already immersed in the street life, the latter in their turn try to avoid the long-term homeless people, who they think have hit rock bottom:

> There are people who are the lowest of the low; they have lived for years at the train stations. [As other people]…detest *bomzhi*, these are detested by other [homeless people] ... The others wouldn't think of coming close to them. (Valentina)

Other 'centrifugal' forces in the street world include a wide diversity of past experiences. With all its privations and reductions of human existence, the street is unable to homogenise completely those individuals who have had years of prison behind them with those who, in contrast, have been untouched by prison culture. People who did not serve time spoke about how they found it difficult to mix with ex-convicts and tried to avoid them.

Similarly, older people like Stepan were wary of youngsters:

> Interviewer: Do you mix with young people at the train station?
> Stepan: No, I am only with people of my own age. A young person can beat you up. We try not to come close. We say hello, like we're comfortable with each other, but as for drinking and things like that – it just doesn't happen.

Power and Authority

The total displacement experienced by street homeless people in Moscow inhibits sustained forms of social organisation and undermines the possibilities for entering relationships of distinction and command, authority and subordination. Whatever status individuals had in their previous lives, the street progressively strips them of any social advantages and does not let them accumulate new ones. Interviewees said that while newcomers onto the streets – particularly ex-prisoners, with their experience of highly hierarchical Russian prison society[3] – may try to lay claim to a position of authority, they almost invariably fail. Here is how fifty-nine-year-old Leonid described one such failed attempt:

> Interviewer: Are there *avtoritety* [leaders] among those homeless people who work at train stations, like *avtoritety* in prisons?
> Leonid: I came across one such guy, but he got brought down a peg, as they say. He thought he was a 'king' … You see, he wouldn't go and clean a carriage, but he tried to get other people to do it and then give him the money they'd earned. Such people are not accepted in our circle. We're not in prison; here it's every man for himself. What you earn is what you eat. Nobody is going to feed you.

A restricted range of power roles among homeless people goes together with a restricted structure of joint activities. Only in cases of sustained interaction and co-dependency (such as when homeless people get engaged in construction or seasonal work) do closer groups emerge with more complex divisions of labour. Homeless people who live at the huge city rubbish dumps in the Moscow suburbs were reported to form more or less cohesive groups, where leaders would oversee the collection and sale of rejects found in the dumps. Homeless couples may work together selling sexual services – the husband acts as a pimp and the wife as a prostitute. Alternatively, women may earn money by begging, while men protect them from other beggars who try to claim the same piece of turf.

Life on the streets does not allow people to occupy positions of power in their own group. Individuals cannot develop reputations, campaign for respect, accumulate resources or lay claims to the resources of others. There is little opportunity to get involved in lasting systems of obligations, rewards and sanctions. Sometimes homeless people complained of attempts of extortion made by other *bomzhi*:

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3   See Abramkin and Chesnokova, 1993, Oleinik, 2003, Efimova, 2004.

Living here is hard. I collect empty bottles. One guy comes to me and says: 'You owe me a bottle.' I say: 'How can I give you a bottle, I have no money, and I have to feed my son as well'. He said he was a racketeer, but he was homeless too. He stood there staring at me and then he left. (Nazym, thirty-four years old)

Such attempts seem mainly opportunistic and do not lead to systematic control and domination. Social regulation can only emerge in specific territories, where competition for limited opportunities can develop. Here access to resources can be negotiated or refused. Boris, who had been saved from imminent death by the clergy and congregation of the Koz'ma and Damian church in Moscow, explained how he started begging there and was for a while regulating access of other people to begging opportunities:

Interviewer: Is there any competition among the *bomzhi*?
Boris: Yes, there is competition for a place under the sun. Everyone needs one. I know whom to allow to beg near the church and whom to kick out. Otherwise, it wouldn't be a competition. It would just be a big mess.

Our interviewees believed that even minimal self-regulation on the streets was unquestionably good and this was obvious from their descriptions of 'good places', where such regulation did exist:

Generally, Kiev train station is considered to be a good place. People say: 'If you want to earn some money, go and see the *brigadir* [team leader]. He must give you permission and then you'll be able to work.' (Evgenii, thirty-six years old)

Train stations can be seen as privileged locations where some informal organisation and regulation of access can emerge.

Interviewer: Is there any organisation among homeless people, at train stations or any other places?
Leonid: Yes. For example, I'm a carriage cleaner [at the train station]. We have our own circle. Luggage carriers – they have their own. We all know each other. If somebody appears on our territory, we first warn them. If they still don't understand, then we make them understand.

Sometimes, in order to collect empty bottles or clean the carriages, it is necessary to give a bribe to the team leader at the train station. But such leadership is not stable – today the man is there, tomorrow he is gone, moved somewhere else or gone to prison. Often it is enough to have a drink with people who work at the train station or to hang around for some time and establish a familiar presence to get an opportunity to work the territory.

As long as people have not lost their health and are able to work and maintain more or less presentable appearance, they may also command certain – albeit very limited – power over newcomers to the street. As Valentina says:

> They [longer-term homeless people] think they are above us. They know the rules better. They have spent more time here [on the streets]. I think I'm a short-term *bomzh*. For some reason people can come up to me and say: 'Go away, I want to sit here.' They think they have power over me.

Such power is, however, often contested and is in any case short-lived, as people can easily avoid any interaction. The claims made by homeless people on public spaces are as ephemeral as their hold on any other territory.

Victimisation on the Streets

One feature of everyday life for Moscow's homeless people is violence. Homeless people are beaten up by the militia, harassed by local residents and attacked by groups of youngsters.

It is possible to say that in committing these acts, such groups are exercising strategies of territorial control and border maintenance. In their own ways the settled residents and the militia protect their localities and the city public space from the undesirable intruders. Even groups of young people, who are perhaps involved in the most brutal attacks, may act in the belief that they are sanitising the city territory. This was confirmed in my focus groups with young men who were members of the street troublesome groups in one of the Moscow *okrugs* (administrative districts).[4]

Our discussions revealed a variety of motives for such attacks on *bomzhi* – the young men talked about the thrills of violence and about the 'glory' that such attacks conferred on group members. *Bomzhi* were obviously a convenient prey, weak and unable to defend themselves. At the same time the youths justified their attacks by the need to clean the city territory from 'dirt'. *Bomzhi* were 'human excrement', and they deserved to be degraded and thrown out of the places where they tried to find shelter.[5]

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4   The focus groups with sixteen boys aged 12 to 16 took place in the 'Children of the Streets' centre in the Southern Administrative district of Moscow in 2003. This was part of the project, 'Social Inclusion of Young People in Disadvantaged Areas', conducted by the Council of Europe. Some of the results of this project were presented in Hardiman and Lapeyre, 2004.

5   The discourse of protection of borders and the perceived 'duty' to sanitise the territory was also present when they talked about migrants coming from the Caucasus and from abroad (particularly black people), who were also seen as polluting Russia. When asked to specify the nature of this pollution, young people said that they were involved in crime and drugs trade – a subject with which the young people themselves were also familiar! Nevertheless, this apparent contradiction did not prevent them from believing in their mission to clean the city, which they did by attacking these outsiders, particularly when the balance of power was on their side. On violent youth subcultures in Moscow see, for example, Lisovskii, 2000, Tarasov 2000, Likhachev, 2002.

It was particularly striking that perceptions of *bomzhi* as dirt to be removed from the Moscow streets were shared by some of the homeless children. They were also involved in violent attacks against older *bomzhi*. These were teenage boys who lived together in cellars, lofts and on underground water-pipes and survived through a combination of non-criminal and criminal activities (Stephenson, 2001a). Contrary to what one might expect, their group attacks on adult *bomzhi* did not have pecuniary motives. Nor did they take the *bomzhi* to be their competitors in the use of the city space. In their representations, such attacks demonstrated their masculine power and vigor and also served the purpose of cleaning the city.

Homeless teenage boys who were members of such groups categorically refused to admit that there was anything in common between their situation or way of life and that of *bomzhi*. They identified themselves as vagrants, free-roaming individuals who were in control of their destinies. As most were runaways from home or institutions, they saw themselves as active free-spirited individuals who were searching for a better life. Like the non-homeless youths, they claimed to be disgusted by the *bomzhi* who they deemed to be passive, weak, unable to stand for themselves and therefore solely responsible for their own plight. For example, fifteen-year old Miron, a member of such a group of homeless teenagers, said about his attitude to *bomzhi*:

> I do not respect *bomzhi*. If they are in this situation, they have to do something about it – steal, find a way out, not just sit there drinking. *Bomzhi* drink, collect empty bottles, dig in rubbish containers – what's the point of that?

Notwithstanding the fact that, in the eyes of the members of the public, they themselves could be seen as outsiders, these young people shared the dominant representations of *bomzhi* as waste living off waste, and acted on them, 'cleansing' the city territory by the violent means that defined their subculture.

By contrast, those homeless children who lived on their own, or with adult homeless people, and who earned their living by begging and odd jobs in the street economy rather than criminal activities, were more likely to identify with *bomzhi*. For example, fourteen-year old Pasha, whose parents were unemployed alcoholics, sold their flat and became homeless as a result, admitted that he was a *bomzh* himself: 'What else can I be if I live in a cellar?' Olesia, a seventeen-year old sex worker who lived in a flat provided by a madam (*mamochka*), told us of a period when, after running away from her parents, she was a *bomzh*. She thinks that there are good and bad people among the *bomzhi* just as there are among any other class of people:

> *Bomzh* is not a swear word. This is a person without a fixed abode who lives where he can find shelter. There are people among them who would take off their clothes and give them to you if you are cold, and there are those who would steal from you. Believe me, there are all kinds of people.

Conflict and Violence Among *Bomzhi*

In addition to violence from external perpetrators, including ritualistic incursions by groups of street youths, conflict and violence seem to be constant features of homeless life. Interviewees often spoke of the streets as a space of *bespredel* [limitlessness]. This word, coined in Soviet prisons and labour camps, means a lack of any formal or informal norms, particularly those regulating violence. *Bespredel* is perceived as one of the worst aspects of street experience.

When discussing relationships between homeless people, interviewees portrayed a world where conflict could occur at any time and where small confrontations could easily turn into violent outbursts. Nikolai, who before becoming homeless had experience of incarceration, described it as follows:

> Interviewer: Do you get into conflicts with other *bomzhi*?
> Nikolai: Yes. You say something wrong, especially if you are drunk, or for some other reason ... A person, with whom you've been working, who is cross with you for some reason [assaults you]. I never experienced this before, but in homelessness this happens quite often.

Any 'normal' regulations on the use of violence seem to have been lifted here. Homeless interviewees observed that incidents of violence directed from the physically strong to the weak, young to old, men to women were relatively common. Also, homeless people do not usually interfere when they observe theft, assaults and muggings of one homeless person by another. As Boris explains:

> Homeless people do not support each other. I can tell you this with a hundred per cent certainty. They support their own groups of five, six, ten people. But even they can steal from each other. And if he doesn't know me and he sees that I am in trouble and that I'm a *bomzh* too, he will turn and go away.

Newcomers find interpersonal violence on the streets particularly terrifying. They quoted the risk of violence as one of the key reasons to avoid other *bomzhi* despite the need for human companionship.

> Tatiana: They've got their own territories, where they gather bottles and pick up leftovers. If you look, you see them telling each other to go away. I reckon that one of them is not in his territory. I often see them fighting, even drawing blood.
> Interviewer: What for?
> Tatiana: I don't know. It seems to me that they might beat each other up just for an empty bottle. 'You've gone to the wrong place, this isn't your spot.' *Bomzhi* can take each other's clothes or shoes. I've seen it happen several times.
> Interviewer: Whose clothes do they usually take?
> Tatiana: Well, let's say a *bomzh* is walking around drunk. They undress him in plain sight and no one says a word. That tends to happen in the summer. They put the clothes on straight away and walk away. I think it's in the order of things for them. Today I take someone's clothes. Tomorrow someone takes mine. That's how life is nowadays.

Tatiana notes here, and this was confirmed by the interviews with longer-term homeless people, that violence is often taken as a matter-of-fact occurrence. One has to live with it and find ways to avoid it or cope with it. Several women, for example, reported being robbed by 'girlfriends' who took away their money or documents (one was hit over the head with a bottle in the process). Yet later, despite their anger, the victims continued to hang out with their abusers and to count them as friends.

How do we explain the violent practices on the streets? Are homeless people just aggressive individuals – suffering perhaps from personality disorders and a baggage of past disappointments? Are they prone to conflictive behaviour because of the influence of drink, or because of the anger and frustration they suffer from privation on the streets? All these reasons for violent behaviour notwithstanding, it is equally important to analyse violent practices in street homelessness in the context of people's specific social position and the opportunities open to them in their current lives as *bomzhi*.

The forms that violent behaviour takes are highly dependent upon the specific context. The same individuals who have experienced violence on the streets – as victims or perpetrators – reported very different forms of violence encountered in their pre-homeless lives. For example, many of those homeless people with prison experience said that they preferred prison to homelessness. The use of violence in prison was strictly regulated by the norms of the prison culture.[6] Similarly, young people brought up in children's homes tended to describe the use of violence in terms of maintaining a hierarchical system of subordination within their peer groups. The forms that violence took in the army, through which most men went, were also different. Here it was institutionalised in the practice of 'hazing' – violent control exercised by those who have served more time in relation to those who have served less.

The forms that violence takes on the streets differ from those experienced in other settings. Apart from the violent practices involving younger homeless people, who act out the norms of specific violent subcultures, violence among *bomzhi* tends to be highly situational, sporadic and opportunistic. It does not follow any specific 'code', nor does it serve to build reputation or a power base.

Violence takes a prominent place in the homeless culture because of the many deficits of street existence. The displacement that homeless people experience removes them from the institutions of formal social control and deprives them of opportunities to seek justice by turning to the forces of law and order. In cases of conflict of interest or perceived threat they have to react here and now. Economically, they may even be dependent on the use of violence. While access to the opportunities to work the city territory is vital for survival, there may be no other ways to regulate this access other than by violent means. For example, if a person fails to recognise the 'historical' right of another to a piece of territory for begging or collection of bottles, he or she can be assaulted, verbally or physically. Unable to rely on the 'long

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6   On the specific system of prison justice see Abramkin and Chesnokova, 1993, Oleinik, 2001.

justice' of the formal institutions, homeless people must achieve 'immediate justice' by any means available.

The temporary and transitory nature of their attachment to the territory, and the unstable character of their associations, also means that they may find it difficult to have durable expectations of each others' behaviour. Lack of trust creates an atmosphere which is constantly conducive to conflict. And, of course, utter destitution means that the immediate needs of survival can become primary imperatives that overcome any possible moral obligations to other homeless people, especially as the ties between them are already weak.

Our homeless interviewees felt that the extreme conditions of their existence suspended 'ordinary' norms of morality and were ready to understand, if not forgive, each other. As Valentina said about able-bodied men who steal from other *bomzhi*:

> People steal from each other. But what else can they do? These men can't do anything else – they can't get money from begging, so how else can they survive?

Such explanations were offered by men and women alike and the situation of being completely cut off from society was drawn upon to justify their transgressive behaviour. As Viacheslav said, 'The system makes us cross the line. You just have to survive'.

The extent of violence among homeless people may be dependent upon the context of their lives and severity of their conditions. Some authors, who have studied homelessness in the major cities of Europe and North America, point at violence as an ever-present reality (Bogue, 1963, Prolongeau, 1993, Guillou and Mooreau de Bellaing, 1995). Others describe relatively peaceful communities, where violence is rare and where the predominant norms are reciprocity and mutual support (Wiseman, 1970, Rowe and Wolch, 1990, Snow and Anderson, 1993, Duneier, 1999). David Wagner, who found an 'intricate and cohesive alternative community' among homeless people in St. Louis, points out that:

> the social organisation of street people reflects not only common life-styles or values among these primary groups, but broader socioeconomic and historical trends as well. Different degrees of societal hostility toward subgroups of homeless and poor people, and different access to resources among subgroups at once unite and sometimes divide and limit overall social cohesion within the street community. (1993, p.123)

In Russia today, the social cohesion of homeless people is minimal. They are deprived of any opportunities for legitimate existence in society. They lack material resources to help each other and have limited opportunities to create positive identities in their own circle. Their street location means that it is difficult for them to exercise informal control and have durable expectations of each other's behaviour. Displaced from society, they have very few opportunities to get re-placed through developing systems of social support in their own community.

Chapter 3

The Process of Homelessness

Having lost housing, a person may of course be able to leave the streets – either by mobilising all of his or her resources, or by getting help from other people (these have to be almost exclusively personal benefactors, as in modern day Russia there is no serious organised effort to help the homeless leave the streets for good – see chapter 8). Some people stay on the streets for longer periods of time than others. Some (for example residents of old people's homes) may come onto the streets in the warmer seasons and go back under the roof for winter. But for those people who are unable to leave the streets, the key stages in the drama of displacement are already inscribed. While there may be disagreement about the extent to which homeless people are complicit in their own drama, it is acknowledged as a fact – by *bomzhi* and NGO workers alike – that homelessness develops according to its own logic. Homeless people would say that 'we sink deeper and deeper'. Charity workers would complain that homelessness 'sucks people in' and describe homeless people who have *zabomzhevalis'* [have been *bomzhi* for so long it has become their permanent state] and lost all touch with society. In the words of one homeless man, 54-year old Pavel:

> In a time of crisis, if *bomzhi* get help, they can get on their own two feet again. If they're in trouble – anyone can get into trouble – if friends and relatives don't help, they sink lower and lower. Without help, they just keep sinking.

As French sociologist Julien Damon points out, time is the key variable through which one can describe the phenomenon of street homelessness (2002, pp.149-50). One interviewee, Elena, gives a typical description of the process of displacement, with time acting against a homeless person:

> When we lost our flat, we went to stay with one family of friends, then another, then brought all our possessions to the cellar of our building. But the residents were against this and they called the district militia officer. He told us: 'Get out of Moscow, go roam elsewhere.' But I was not just roaming, I was confused. I didn't know what to do, but I was out of time.

In a typical scenario, Elena and her son moved from their own home to stay first with friends and then on to places to which they had no claim – lofts, cellars or train stations. In the process they lost their entitlements to social recognition by the community, as well as their rights as citizens. Agents of social control then confirmed their excommunication by telling them to move out of the city.

Homelessness can be seen as a process of progressive displacement from 'settled society'. Those affected, however, are not just passive victims who accept, as time goes by, their excommunication and give up any attempts to function as social beings. People resist their displacement but eventually, under the influence of specific conditions of life on the street, adapt to their position as outcasts. There is a synergy here between the exclusionary efforts of the dominant society, homeless people's reaction to this exclusion, and the properties of the street as a social space. These factors eventually combine to undermine any opportunities for getting re-installed in any social body.

The Street as a Social Space

The lives of people on the margins of society are heavily influenced by the social sites they have to inhabit. The diktat of places, and their power to define a person's living world, has emerged as a strong theme in interviews with Russian 'outcasts'. Life in workers' hostels – with its instability, powerlessness, lack of privacy, frequent violence and alcoholism; the liminality of *poseleniia* [settlements for people released from labour camps or those inmates who are allowed to live outside the walls of the penitentiary]; and the 'abnormal' nature of living on the streets were subjects of reflection for many interviewees.

Deposited on the streets, homeless people have to build their lives in a defective social space. The street frees, but also enslaves; feeds, but also starves; it offers opportunities for human companionship, but makes bonds unreliable and untrustworthy. The qualities of the street as a social space have vital importance if we are to understand the process of homelessness.

The street as a space has many advantages over 'places'. While a place encircles and fixes people through routine practices, controls and roles, a street is a space of risks and possibilities. As David Sibley notes:

> Crossing boundaries, from a familiar space to an alien one which is under the control of somebody else, can provide anxious moments; in some circumstances it could be fatal, or it might be an exhilarating experience – the thrill of transgression. (1995, p.32)

The lawlessness and dangers of the street are interlinked with promises of freedom and escape from tight social prescriptions. The latter is particularly important for people in dominated social positions. For children and young people, the poor and – in certain contexts – women,[1] the street offers affective and sensual aspects, and opportunities which they may lack at home to prove their worth. Freedom, opposition and resistance; formation of solidarities and alternative social hierarchies, economic possibilities – the street has much to offer, particularly to those who have very few stakes in wider society.

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1   See, for example, Wilson (1991) on the new freedom to move in public spaces for nineteenth century middle-class women.

The attractions of the street for groups lacking recognition and opportunities in mainstream society have been extensively discussed in sociological and criminological literature. For example much attention has been paid to the role the street plays in youth experience. The streets are spaces where proletarian and sub-proletarian youth, street gangs and 'hooligans', can battle with each other and with agents of social control for territorial supremacy. Writing about ghetto youth, the American criminologist Jack Katz notes that for these young people '"street life" and "street people" conjure up an aura of deviance'. This fascination with the street as an alternative world is not limited to deprived youth: 'there is a cross-class adolescent fascination with deviance as a matter of spatial mobility' (1988, pp.156-7). Local public spaces have deep affective meanings for young people, arousing emotional affiliations, forming identities and cementing territorial attachments (Jenkins, 1983, Taylor et al, 1996, Callaghan, 1992, Loader, 1996, Hayward, 2004).

The streets are also spaces where people can become involved in street-level informal activities. Some of these are at the margins of legal regulation and do not, as a rule, require complex social organisation. These include begging, illicit street vending, car washing and similar – sometimes unsolicited – street services, such as busking, pavement art and other forms of street-level entertainment (which may or may not be officially licensed) and the sale of '*Big Issue*' type newspapers and magazines (Dean, 1999, Fitzpatrick and Kennedy, 2000). Other kinds of informal street occupations, such as street drug dealing or street prostitution, street robbery, 'mugging' and other acts involving assault and violence, are normally subject to criminal prosecution and often have significant organisational sophistication (cf.: Bourgois, 1995, Maher and Curtis, 1992, MacCoun and Reuter, 1992). While other economic opportunities may be blocked, the streets provide marginalised, socially excluded individuals with chances to find means of survival with a minimum of social organisation.

It is undeniable that for many homeless people the street also holds considerable attractions. Some interviewees spoke of the joy they had felt from knowing that they could escape from the control of the authorities, or the tyranny of their families – often the case for homeless women, who may come to the streets to escape from violent husbands. The street offers opportunities for survival. People can find temporary jobs or get involved in begging or in more illicit activities. People can find support, if only on an emotional level, from others in a similar position.

And yet there is a profound difference between the experiences of homeless people and other 'street' populations. For, in contrast to all other groups associated with the street but not living there (such as most of the 'street children', sex workers, criminals and street traders), for homeless people the street represents not an alternative, but the dominant environment. All the features of street life described above may still be present, but they are at their minimum and can, for those who have become immersed in the street world, become their opposites.

While interviewees praised the freedom they found on the streets, they also emphasised that something was wrong here, that freedom was, as one person said, 'treacherous'.

In effect, this newly found freedom easily becomes the bondage of daily need, total dependence upon the goodwill of strangers and the ever-present risks of incarceration, illness or death. Mobility turns into profound immobility, solidarity into alienation and violence, appropriation of space into being chased from everywhere, sensual enjoyment of freedom into fear, anxiety and resignation. Seemingly abundant opportunities to work the urban territory are reduced for the *bomzhi* to the most liminal ways of survival. Association with other homeless people makes one vulnerable to violence and to reprobation and repression from 'settled society'. Attempts to build new structures and routines – including those revolving around the consumption of alcohol – lead to further displacement.

The key factor which defines the experience and dynamics of homelessness is that the street cannot become a home. The street does not allow people to have stable sources of validation of their identities. It prevents the building of any permanent structures and practices. It does not allow its dwellers to accumulate resources and capital. It undermines their health. As a social space for homeless people, the street is indeed 'treacherous'. It offers homeless people fragile supports but at the same time draws them towards social non-existence.

Communication of Stigma

When people migrate towards the streets they are very soon made to feel that their previous identities can no longer be supported and that they no longer exist as members of society. It is not just the militia who may attempt to evict or homeless individuals. Their excommunication is revealed to them daily by passers-by. The signs that you have become nothing are easy to read. Passers-by openly violate the norms of everyday communication. This may take place through acts of unprovoked verbal abuse or just through outright staring, unacceptable in routine social interaction in public places (see Goffman, 1966). This can also be demonstrated through non-attention, a lack of eye contact. When people turn away and pretend that they do not see a homeless person rummaging through rubbish, collecting empty bottles or just lying on the pavement, this non-attention amplifies the 'outsider' status of a *bomzh*. Here are some fragments from interviews:

> People look at us as if we were animals. They just stare at us. This hurts. The biggest problem for me is when you are in a public place and people look at you with hatred. This is the hardest part, attitudes like that from people. (Vasilisa)

> People walk past you, look through you as though you don't exist; you are not a human being for them. They try not to notice. Well, not quite – when *bomzhi* beg, people give them money, but no more than that. You are some alien creature to them. They do not see you as a normal human being. When I am clean, it is not so bad. But when I am a bit dirty, it's hard. (Viacheslav)

Here is another, more extended fragment, from an interview with Nazym:

> Interviewer: What is most difficult for you when you deal with other people?
> Nazym: When I am not dressed normally, like a human being. When I am dirty …
> Interviewer: Do people treat you differently?
> Nazym: Yes, of course. Earlier, when I had documents and everything was as it should be, I could wash my things, could dress as everybody else. Now I cannot even shave. What kind of life is this? Some people do not even say hello. Before I used to hear: 'Hi' or 'All right?' when I walked about… Now they do not even say hello. They do not consider us human beings.

The stigma of homelessness, the shame of being 'social waste', is so great, that, especially at the start of their homelessness, people often try to disguise their condition as a *bomzh*. They may invest a lot of effort into keeping up a 'presentable' appearance, changing clothes and finding places to wash. Being clean and neat is a matter of human dignity. At the same time, a proper presentation of the body is also a disguise that people put on to mask their true condition. As Bryan Turner, following Goffman, explains, the body is a 'practice [that] can betray one in public life by giving off information which is not controlled and which is potentially damaging or threatening to the social self' (1996, p.25). People's accounts show that they try to put on the appearance of an 'ordinary' person so that only they would know their real situation:

> Interviewer: Who do other people take you for?
> Tatiana: I think, for an ordinary passenger. They do not avoid me. I travel freely in the metro. It's just that I am a *bomzh* in my soul.

Although any dirty and badly-dressed person is likely to invite reprobation by the public, personal appearance becomes crucial for *bomzhi* because it indicates their displacement.

> Interviewer: How would you continue the sentence, 'People are kind to me as long as …
> Interviewee: Until they realise that I am a *bomzh*. They immediately start looking at me as if I am a wild animal. Once I was travelling on a bus, and this guy sat next to me. He was a bit drunk, we started talking; he turned out to be my namesake. He says: 'Let's go and have a drink to celebrate our acquaintance. Where do you live?' I could have lied, but I said: 'You see, nowhere, I am a vagrant at the moment, trying to get my home back.' A woman in front, she had a bag, she began to fasten the bag as if I would steal from it. If I was like that, I would have stolen from her long before that, and I wouldn't have said that I was a *bomzh*. (Kirill, thirty-one years old)

When people are unable to sustain the disguise, the 'truth' of their situation becomes a material force, removing possibilities of interaction with 'settled' citizens. Not only

are there sanctions – abuse and harassment – from the city dwellers for intruding into the public space; homeless people themselves understand that they do not belong and keep their distance:

> Interviewer: What do other people think of you?
> Elena: It is a bad attitude. I avoid them myself, because I feel unequal to them. They notice that we do not have a 'decent' appearance and they try to avoid us. If we're sitting on a train, they would rather stand than sit together with us.

Eventually, people who have at first resisted being seen as a despised *bomzh* and tried to keep up a 'decent' appearance may give up. As Vasilisa, who has been homeless for two years, explains:

> People walk by. They look at me as if I'm an idiot. And I say: 'I am a Russian *bomzh*, what can I do?'

Self-identities in Homelessness

The tragedy of homelessness is that its victims come to accept a division of society into those who have and those who do not have a place. 'Settled' citizens and the 'unsettled' both subscribe to the same social map of the world. On the streets people cannot formulate new positive identities. People internalise their stigma and this becomes a powerful factor in their separation from society. Although some attempt to find a symbolic link with other people (through tapping into the discourse of vagrancy, as I discuss below), they still accept their position as outsiders.

Newcomers to the streets may continue to think of themselves in terms of their past social affiliations. Some identify themselves as 'homeless', which usually implies a lack of housing as such, without any negative personal connotations. In this they are similar to precariously housed people and those who sleep on friends' floors or stay with relatives but have not [yet] had to move onto the streets, who may also call themselves 'homeless'.

As time goes by people begin to adopt the identity that is accorded them by society. Among the street dwellers, identities as 'homeless' people are very rare. Their identities are those of vagrants and *bomzhi*.

The identity as a vagrant is somewhat more positive. Historically and culturally, the construction of vagrancy has implied mobility and personal choice. Vagrants travel, roam, move. They are active and independent. People who described themselves as vagrants in interviews invoked a 'romantic' tradition in which vagrancy was a lifestyle, chosen in order to break free of society and the bonds that it imposes. That is why, although vagrants are also totally displaced, unlike *bomzhi* they have an alternative source of validation. However ephemeral that source is, one can say that vagrants have a place in the symbolic order of society.

In stark contrast to vagrants, *bomzhi* have a wholly negative status – both in the eyes of vagrants and *bomzhi* themselves. They are sedentary and passive; victims of circumstances or their own flaws. They have no personal agency. Only in some situations, when they symbolically tap into the spiritual tradition of Orthodox Christianity, they may transcend their situation of total displacement. When *bomzhi* beg, particularly near churches, and use special props (clothes, poses, signs) that have referents in the religious symbolic order, their status can get temporary validation. However, in modern-day Russia this tends only to occur in ad hoc situations and does not confer upon the homeless beggar any permanent status (such as that of the so-called 'holy fools' in pre-revolutionary Russia).[2]

In the micro-hierarchy of the streets, vagrants see themselves as being above *bomzhi*. Mikhail explains:

> I see myself more as a vagrant. That's my philosophy. I like to walk about, to travel. I like travelling to other cities, or going to forests … But *bomzhi*, they do not have such philosophical inclinations. Somebody spent all the money from the sale of their housing on drink. Somebody else got divorced and does not have any housing. They sit, collect bottles … They are sedentary, it is impossible to move them. Some, as far as I know, live in the same block of flats where they lived before. They know the door code, come inside and sleep near a hot water pipe in winter.

Another interviewee, Leonid, says:

> They are *bomzhi* and I am a vagrant. A vagrant can take off from this city and go away. *Bomzhi* live here and don't do anything. They just say: 'Give me!' And I myself can earn money and the rest…[in the same interview Leonid admitted that he sometimes steals].

For people who, like Leonid, had spent time in prison, designation as a *bomzh* is particularly unacceptable. As mentioned before, if they are incarcerated, *bomzhi* usually become pariahs in the prison hierarchy, which puts a high premium on dominant masculinity and control. A vagrant, on the other hand, holds a legitimate position in prison. In fact, professional criminals in Russia have traditionally called themselves 'vagrants' (Efimova, 2004, pp.60-3).

This is how Danila, a twenty-five old member of one of the organised crime groups in Moscow, describes what it means to be a vagrant:

> A vagrant is a lad. He is an open soul. He steals or resells things, but he does not value money. Money comes and goes. He is an honest, frank, brave guy. You can rely on him. He will not betray you to the militia.

Bomzhi are considered to have passively accepted their situation, while vagrants are still choosing the direction of their lives:

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2   See Chapter 4 for a discussion of 'holy fools'.

Interviewer: Have you ever been in a situation when you were called a *bomzh*?
Otto: I have.
Interviewer: Do you consider this an insult?
Otto: I can understand when they say 'vagrant', because a vagrant is a traveller, but a *bomzh* … As I understand, a *bomzh* is … he's made some money, he's got drunk and he's lying around. He would lie anywhere – in a puddle, in mud … He couldn't care less. Those are real *bomzhi*. As for the ones who look after themselves, try to get something – a place to live, try to live cleanly, stay civilised, but don't manage it, those aren't *bomzhi*, those are vagrants.

On the other hand, some of those who identified themselves as *bomzhi*, particularly those relatively new on the streets, believed that it was possible for them to reconnect to society. Yes, they were victims, but they still could reverse the situation. Another interviewee, thirty-two year old Rodion, put it this way:

Interviewer: How do you define yourself, as a *bomzh* or as a vagrant?
Rodion: As a *bomzh*. It's almost the same thing, of course. Depends on how your head works. Either way you can gather your strength, pull yourself together. You can get out of being a *bomzh*. Try to keep your documents somewhere [so that they are not stolen]. Make an effort to find a place for yourself. And eventually everything will start to improve. As for the vagrant, he… just likes to roam.
Interviewer: Is it because of his character?
Rodion: I don't know. Maybe he doesn't enjoy it, but just doesn't know what else to do with himself.

But whatever the differences between the definitions, both vagrants and *bomzhi* come to accept their displacement. It becomes the core of their self-identity. They are mentally and physically separated from mainstream society. This separation is not only manifest in the lack of interaction with settled people, it is perceived to be instituted by the agents of power. As Leonid, who had been homeless for fifteen years, graphically expressed it when asked to answer the question 'Who am I?':

I am standing in front of people. There is a militiaman between us. He does not let me come near them.

Similarly to members of 'settled society', homeless people often see this displacement as a personal defect. Most accept the blame for their condition:

I am a lost person.

I have no relation to this life. I do everything in a slipshod fashion. One has to fight for one's life. And me … I get drunk, switch off, and what happens tomorrow doesn't matter anymore.

Or, perhaps most poignantly:

I am a *bomzh* because I have fallen.

Bomzhi and vagrants are cast into a territory where their past affiliations and identities are progressively cancelled. The profound character of the displacement experienced by homeless people in terms of their past identities is manifested in the fact that people may stop any contacts with their previous social circle. At first they hope that they can find a way out of homelessness and do not want to admit their current situation. As homelessness persists, people may make attempts to get help from their friends and family, but even then they try not to admit, if they can, that they live on the streets: 'When I ask my friends for a little money, I say that I have had a drink and cannot go home to sleep'. They avoid disclosing their true condition: 'I have good friends, as long as I do not contact them myself", 'I cannot go to my relatives because I am empty, I cannot give anything to them and they are used to me always bringing them presents'.

Forty-year-old Viacheslav was forced to sell his flat in Moscow to pay off debts. After that he stopped all contact with his friends and relatives.

> Viacheslav: I do not tell them that I sold my flat. Nobody knows about this, even my relatives. I just can't do that. To let them know that I am a *bomzh*…My relatives have always used me as an example to my cousins. That I am such a good boy, such a clever boy. And here's how that good boy turned out.
> Interviewer: But if you were in a desperate situation, would you ask them to let you stay with them?
> Viacheslav: I am already in a desperate situation, but I cannot ask.

The past may remain the only source of positive identity and many of our interviewees are prepared never to approach people from their past life in order to preserve that imaginary source of respect and dignity. While they desperately need help, it may be more important for their feeling of self-worth to remain 'normal', at least in the memory of other people, than to get some episodic support from their former circle. This is especially true in the case of relatives, as people often want to save them from the embarrassment of association with a *bomzh*. They do not want to 'drag down' their brothers or sisters, sons or daughters whose own social status would be diminished by having a relative who has become the lowest of the low. As Vladimir, a homeless man who lives in a cellar of a block of flats while his student daughter has a flat in the city, said: 'I would rather suffer on my own than spoil her life.'

Similarly, relatives and friends may be ready to help as long as they think that a person is only temporarily homeless. If homelessness turns out to be lasting, a person's readiness to 'normalise' the status of a *bomzh* will often evaporate.

Physical and Mental Mobility

In the process of homelessness a person's agency becomes progressively diminished. Mobility is not limited to just physical movement; it is also the willingness to act. Limitation of movement brings with it an increasing tendency not to plan beyond the immediate future.

In the beginning of homelessness, after the initial shock has passed, people may become involved in frantic activity, trying to change their situation. When people lose familiar grounds, they often start to move from one place to another, looking for opportunities to settle. In a situation where they have no legal rights to jobs or accommodation through loss of registration (further explained in chapter 8), their main hope is associated with meeting new people who might help, offer housing or provide vital information about places where one might try one's luck. While their previous social networks have collapsed, and they are ashamed to ask people from their past for help, all their hopes become invested in casual acquaintances: for example people whom they might have met on the train, had a drink with near the metro, or occasional sexual partners (particularly in the case of women). Accounts show how people make acquaintances quickly, 'bond' with strangers – often with the assistance of alcohol – and then make significant decisions. Grasping any opportunities that these contacts seem to provide, people are ready to act immediately. They would, for example, accept an offer to move to a distant village where they were told were prospects of finding a job. They would move in with a new boyfriend they'd just met on the streets. They would go work for gypsies encountered at the train station.

However, they soon find that their condition is not so easy to escape. With rare exceptions, the new acquaintances are themselves poor, with seriously disorganised lives. On both sides, past emotional traumas make it difficult to build new relationships. The boyfriends turn out to be violent. Relatives appear and demand that the newcomers who occupy 'their' housing are evicted. When coming into villages, even if there is work, people find that the only social circle available to them is the society of the local drinkers. The 'reputable' members of the community want nothing to do with them. Time after time interviewees described situations in which, two or three months after settling down, they would lose their jobs and housing and have to move again. In their new social existence commitments are frail and bonds are untrustworthy. Their efforts to find ways into the 'settled' society, having gone through a series of false starts and unsuccessful experiments, may lead to utter disappointment.

Restlessness could become a response to life situations and problems perceived as insoluble. For some this habitual response dated back to their early years. As Alexander, a fifty-four year old homeless man, said:

> I used to run away from home when I was a child. That is when it all started. If something bad happens to me, I just turn around and leave.

Incapable of being re-placed in the new environment, and as a response to the dead end they face, people often choose to get on the move again and again. Some interviewees just could not settle for long in one place and preferred to lead an itinerant lifestyle instead.

Although many people manage to stay on the move for years, the channels of mobility gradually close. One stops grasping at straws. Mobility stops, and with it engagement with the world and with the future. Evidence from interviews consistently

showed that people who had stayed on the street for a long time found it difficult to formulate specific plans of how they would leave the streets. They often had several 'projects' – for example to go to find work at a collective farm, ask old friends for help, get cured of alcohol addiction or win the lottery. But none of these plans had any foothold in reality. These were fantasies rather than firm intentions:

> Interviewer: Do *bomzhi* have life prospects?
> Boris: I can speak for everybody here. You simply hope that something will change tomorrow. And in reality, you see, there is no escape.

The social world of homeless people becomes limited by the need to function on the streets, with mental geography formed by soup kitchens, charities and other places associated with immediate survival. This fact is often lamented by NGO personnel, who, while recognizing serious structural obstacles to leaving homelessness, complain that people who receive regular handouts may stop looking for other solutions to their problems – such as trying to find jobs and housing. Familiar Soviet words such as 'parasitism' are being used again, this time by charity workers rather than law and order professionals. Yet homeless people may be unable to get re-placed – at least without serious outside support – in the world which they have by now stopped understanding and in which they do not know how to act.

Physical and moral dehumanisation, designation to a space where anything can happen, where neglect, violence and death may be routine, undermines one's personhood. Enormous, truly heroic mobilisation of all human facilities is needed to continue to function as one's former self. Opportunities for a meaningful existence become progressively more remote. People become stuck on the streets, losing the remnants of personal power – their facilities of movement – and becoming alienated from all sources of respect and support.

If street homelessness persists, people may eventually become completely sedentary. The French sociologist Robert Desjarlais points out that 'dwelling on the street can mean months of living on the margins of language, communication and sociability. A person's very nature is changed, particularly one's capacity for communication with others … The longer people [he observed in his study] lived on the streets, the less they lived as social beings' (1997, pp.121-2). That is why after a long experience of life on the streets, some found it difficult to return to life 'inside'.

The changes in homeless people's mobility, and the reduction of capacity of long-term street dwellers to act in mainstream society, differ from those experienced by refugees and forced migrants we interviewed in Moscow. The latter (at least ethnic Russians) felt that they were mainly constrained by bureaucratic obstacles, otherwise they were confident in their own power to act in the world around them (see chapter 7).

Alcohol and Displacement

In the experience and dynamics of homelessness, practices around the consumption of alcohol play an extremely important role. While displacement deprives people of the stable structures around which 'settled' populations build their lives, alcohol becomes an axis around which such structures can be temporarily re-created. Daily routines can be built and communication on the streets and interaction with non-street people can be sustained.

Apart from street youth, only a small proportion of homeless people living on the streets take drugs. On the other hand, alcohol abuse is widespread.[3] Biographical interviews with homeless drinkers showed that in many cases their alcohol consumption began long before their homelessness. However, after becoming homeless, not only did their consumption of alcohol increase, it also acquired new meanings. Talking about their lives before homelessness, many people emphasised that at that time alcohol was a necessary element of recreation and social bonding: 'After work I would go to drink with my mates…' Upon their arrival on the streets it acquired a much greater significance.

Many interviewees talked about a change in the role of alcohol in their lives before and after coming onto the streets:

> Interviewer: Did you use to drink before?
> Vladimir: When I was a driver, we were careful when we drank because, even if you had had a drink the night before, a breathalyser could show the traces the following morning. In general, we would restrain ourselves. On Fridays we drank, of course, but now ... vodka means something else altogether. It's not that it makes life easier to live with, but somehow it lets one forget.

Alcohol makes it possible for people who are stuck in an unacceptable reality to escape. For homeless individuals alcohol is a way to symbolically remove the stigma, to leave the hateful social shell and become 'himself' or 'herself' again. As Boris explained, 'A person drinks when he wants to flee from this world – not physically but mentally.' For many, there is no other way to achieve this escape.

But consumption of alcohol not only enables the street homeless to forget their plight temporarily. It also provides them with necessary routines. If the rhythm of life of the majority of the population is determined by their participation in the institutions of work and family, the rhythm of life of many homeless

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3   Although there is no quantitative data on alcohol and drug use among the homeless in Moscow, in a 1994 survey conducted in St. Petersburg, only 13 per cent of homeless people took drugs. At the same time, 88 per cent consumed alcohol. Of them 13 per cent drank regularly – on holidays and particular dates (for example, birthdays). 34 per cent drank every week, and 17 per cent nearly every day. Of those who drank at least once a week, vodka and other spirits were consumed by 36 per cent, fortified drinks by 21 per cent, wine by 19 per cent, beer by 13 per cent. 25 per cent drank 'anything available' (Afanasiev et al., 1995, p.126).

interviewees is almost completely determined by alcohol. To be able to drink later in the daytime or at night, they work in the mornings (for example collecting bottles or unloading trucks).

The role that alcohol plays in the street experience can be explained from many different perspectives, but at the core of it is the temporary re-placement afforded to homeless people by drink. Drinking is one of the few forms of cultural enjoyment accessible to homeless people. In drinking circles and ad hoc parties they are able to forget about their own misery, stop feeling like social failures and reconnect to other people. This reconnection can happen in a physical sense – when *bomzhi* meet together for a drink or when they share a bottle with housed alcoholics – or in a symbolic sense.[4] Also, by following the practices and rituals around the consumption of alcohol, *bomzhi* can experience a symbolic inclusion into mainstream culture and, in particular, into working class culture. Their only transgression, and one that defines their whole existence, is that they are confined to living – and drinking – in a public space and therefore become vulnerable to condemnation and sanctions from the public and the agents of social control.

As Vladimir describes:

> I would get together with someone who is in a similar situation and it would feel better. Here I see a woman who is also depressed, who also suffers. Maybe she too spent time in prison ... She is also homeless. She also washes once a month ... although she suffers, I feel a bit better – I have found a soul mate. We cut an onion in half; lay a newspaper under it; fill a glass each; and we just talk.

The festive role of alcohol consumption described here is very important. It allows people to celebrate life, however hard it is. It also creates a context for interaction between strangers, acting as a form of social glue for street homeless people who may otherwise lead very lonely existences. In this environment, alcohol can become an important factor of social cohesion. It is closely connected with socially accepted rituals of interaction and partly removes, at the moment of consumption, any feelings of inferiority to, or alienation from, other people.

Alcohol brings together homeless people who in their everyday struggle for survival have very few binding ties. Alcohol also facilitates contacts with the urban poor. Sometimes it is enough to bring a bottle to housed alcoholics to get the opportunity to sleep a night under the roof.

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4   The French anthropologist Patric Gaboriau points out that vagrants use alcohol rituals as a way of 'cultural reproduction'. Social drinking is one of the few 'models of behaviour' which are both accepted in wider society and available to homeless people (1993, p.178). Alcohol consumption is a widespread social practice, which has its public functions, and, in a paradoxical way, symbolically 'includes' the homeless in society (though in practice, this society may only comprise those in the same situation). Gaboriau notes that alcohol consumption is an important element of working-class culture. For many homeless people, who come from the working class, it enables them to feel that they are maintaining the same lifestyle as before.

For street homeless people alcohol acts as a kind of prosthetic device, compensating, in a partly illusory and partly real way, for severed means of social communication. However, its constant use gradually brings about the weakening of the remaining 'muscles', i.e. skills and opportunities for wider social interaction. Alcohol involves homeless people in a vicious circle. Practices around it are a necessary condition of participation in a group. At the same time it consumes their already meagre resources, causes physical and mental deterioration and makes them more vulnerable to persecution.

Consumption of alcohol (including the amount of alcohol, frequency of consumption and whether people drink on their own or together with other *bomzhi*) varies depending upon how the person perceives his or her prospects. People might try to limit consumption if they still hope to change their lives. In interviews, those recently homeless, and homeless people who were able to get odd jobs, often pointed out that they drank less regularly, and in less quantity, than the long-term homeless. Sometimes they also emphasised that they drank beer or wine rather than spirits:

> People drink when they are not sure what tomorrow will bring. I too am not sure, but I try not to drink. I think that things will be better. I still have some hope. (Tatiana)

> Why drink a lot? You have to live a real life. You get drunk, you fall over … What good can come of it? (Pavel)

When a person acknowledges that all exits from homelessness are blocked, there is no longer any point in self-discipline. Long-term homeless people usually drink in public places, every day and any alcohol available. While moderate consumption of alcohol allows homeless people to remain at least symbolically part of society, the overindulgent and public consumption of alcohol in groups both signifies social exclusion and accelerates it. Once a person has accepted his or her displacement, attempts to stop drinking become rare. Here are the words of Irina, who was on the streets for nearly two years:

> Where would I go if I got cured [from alcohol addiction]? All right, I would not drink, but where would I live? Where would I belong?

Regardless of how we would view such a position – either as a justification for lack of willpower or as an honest analysis of life's prospects – for a person in this situation, homelessness in a state of inebriation is preferable to homelessness in a state of sobriety.

The Dynamics of Homelessness

Although there is certainly no iron law which dictates that a homeless person must experience certain transformations in his or her identity and practices, it is possible to describe homelessness broadly as a dynamic process. I would suggest that it can be seen as a movement from the stage of displacement from 'settled society', through re-placement in the street space and finally to the stage of total displacement – or social death.[5]

In the first stage – displacement from 'settled society' – while the physical connection to the former home is lost, people still tend to perceive themselves as belonging to mainstream society and reject their new situation. Upon entry on to the streets, they experience the shock of being transplanted into a new terrain outside the normal human habitat. They try to preserve their identity as members of 'settled society' and avoid putting down any roots. They refuse to admit any affinity with the street homeless people they meet. Often, their self-presentation is the same as it was before they became homeless and they may keep the same clothes, try to look after themselves and try – as much as they can – to disguise their new situation. Some manage to continue to work at their previous jobs, hiding what is happening to them, or find other temporary work.

Alexei is twenty-eight years old. After graduating from an agricultural college, he worked in his home village for two years, and then decided to move to the Moscow with one of his friends. He found a job as a construction worker and got married. Initially, he lived with his wife in a hostel, but was then given a room in a communal flat by the construction firm. After being given the room, he left the firm and started work as a plumber for a private company.

However, over the next three years his home life deteriorated and Alexei started to drink. He fought with the new neighbours, to the point where relations became unbearable. The militia became involved. In an attempt to resolve the situation, Alexei decided to go to a hospital (he suffers from a chronic illness) and his wife promised to deal with moving to another place. However, when he left hospital, she told him that he could not return to their old flat, but nor had she done anything about moving. In the beginning, she would meet him and give him food and other necessities, but soon she stopped coming to see him altogether.

Alexei was forced to leave his job – 'How can I work when I don't even know where I'll be sleeping tonight? They'd call me from work and say "tomorrow you're going to such and such a place". And right now? It's unreal.'

Several times Alexei spent the night at his friends' without telling them the truth. 'I just said that I got a bit drunk and needed to sleep over.' The friend on whom he had relied the most sold his flat.

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5   See Anderson, 1961, Vexliard, 1957, Snow and Anderson, 1993 and Damon, 2002, for alternative classifications of the dynamics of homelessness.

As a result, after a month Alexei was forced to start looking for his own shelter. He slept in the waiting rooms at stations ('while I still looked decent'). He ate at charity cafeterias and earned money by collecting and selling empty bottles.

Right now, he can see no way out – his wife doesn't want him back and he is afraid to show up at the communal flat. His pride will not let him turn to his parents either.

Alexei has spent two months in total on the street. 'I spent the first month under the impression that in just a month, two at most, things would sort themselves out.' He hoped for the resolution of his family and housing problems. Then he realised that he would have to build his life anew:

> This month I'm making plans for the day after tomorrow … plans to go somewhere … I need to get out of here.

Although Alexei has no vision for his future, he hopes to sort his life out and start working again.

> Interviewer: Do you feel certain that these two months will end positively for you?
> Alexei: This last month I've had no idea what awaits me. But I'm hopeful.
> Interviewer: How realistic is that hope right now?
> Alexei: I think I need to get away for a little while, just to calm down. There's nothing good about being unemployed any further.

However, it's hard to change things when one has to start from scratch in every way. Alexei has no documents (he has lost his passport), no decent clothes and no money. He is in a state of constant anxiety.

> Alexei: I was told that on Fridays there are recruiters from the Moscow suburbs at the Kursk train station. They take people even without documents, or they get someone with documents to register the rest as his team. He gets the money and then shares it out. But when we try to get together … 'Let's wash, so we can be clean when we go'. We wash, and then it's 'let's get a change of clothes', 'let's get some money together' …
> Interviewer: And in the end?
> Alexei: And in the end nothing happens. That's why I've been like this for two months.

Finding himself on the streets, Alexei initiated contact with other homeless. He is selective about whom he associates with, trying to avoid the most 'fallen'. However, he is also wary of new acquaintances: 'They're the ones with documents, the ones who are all registered somewhere … These days they're the ones I have dealings with. I try to be with people, so as not to be left alone, but I don't trust them.'

Alexei does not associate himself with the street homeless community, nor he does he accept an identity as a *bomzh*, but he does feel like a pariah and feels ashamed. He considers his biography a path inevitably leading to homelessness: 'I've been heading this way for a long time. I got everything too easily in life …'

Alexei believes that people like him need organised public support in order to be able to find a new place in society:

> You don't need to feed me, nothing like that … Well, that's needed too, but … There must be some way … Say, I've come in, talked to someone, got registered somewhere. They might look through some possibilities for me … So that in a month's time I can do things myself, with my own two hands … so I won't feel ashamed. It's good to be fed, of course, and to be clothed, but it's not a solution.

Alexei's story represents the first stage of descent into homelessness, when people still preserve many connections with mainstream society and have not yet made mental re-adjustments to their new state. However, unless homeless people succeed in leaving the streets during this initial stage, they can eventually begin trying to get 're-placed' in their new street environment. For people in 'awkward social positions' (like the street homeless) insecurity and uprootedness, and the inability to build daily routines, can generate profound social suffering.[6] They therefore start to seek new identities, affiliations and routines in the only social space available to them – the street. People join with other homeless people and settle together in cellars, in lofts, and basements or by underground water pipes. They exchange limited material and emotional support. As long as their resources are not totally devastated, they can find companionship and friendship. They establish mutually beneficial contacts with other social groups in the urban space – the marginal poor and employers in the informal economy. They develop new knowledge of how to be homeless, of places where they can get social assistance and tactics to pursue in communication with the agents of control. This knowledge is now greater than the knowledge of how to function in mainstream society. New routines emerge, including those around the individual and collective consumption of alcohol. People put down shallow roots – shaky, vulnerable and capable of being blown away by any gust of wind, but these are still roots that they cannot place in the unaccommodating ground of mainstream society. During this stage they start to accept their new situation and their status as 'outsiders'.

Revaz, a 51-year old Georgian man whom we met earlier, is at this stage of homelessness. Here is his story. After graduating from a medical college he worked in a Moscow clinic for 26 years. He was married and had a daughter who died in a car crash in 1991. After his daughter's death, he began drinking and selling household things to get money for alcohol. His wife left him and went away to live with her parents. Two years before our interview in 1995, he sold the flat under the influence of alcohol well below its market value. When the militia was deregistering him from the flat, 'the authorities suggested I should go and live in a village. So? I became a drunkard, it wouldn't have been right for me. I'm being honest here.'

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6   Bourdieu drew attention to the fact that for people in such positions the inability to 'abandon oneself to the automatisms of practical sense', which he called *habitus*, can lead to disastrous personal consequences (2000, pp.162-3).

After losing his flat, he lived with friends for a while. He then moved into a basement. He earns money by collecting bottles and doing odd jobs at the market. He spends everything he earns on food and alcohol. Sometimes he eats leftovers or steals food from market stalls. When he is broke, he begs. The rhythm of his life is based around the routines of work and drinking.

> Interviewer: Could you describe what you did yesterday?
> Revaz: I came here [the small market by '*Universitet*' metro station], and collected some bottles. I put them together with another [homeless] guy's and we bought vodka with the money we earned selling them.
> Interviewer: And then?
> Revaz: The same again. I went to look for my friends. At around two o'clock I was already drunk and went back to my basement. I didn't walk but rode on a tram until someone woke me up. Then I didn't want to work, so I went back and slept in my basement.
> Interviewer: Did you eat?
> Revaz: There was nothing to eat – a tomato and a piece of bread. I went out again in the evening. The same as the morning. Every day is like this.

He no longer asks old acquaintances for help:

> Interviewer: Do you get help from your old work colleagues?
> Revaz: No. I hide from them.
> Interviewer: What about friends?
> Revaz: Who would want me now? Everyone has their own family, their own difficulties, their own concerns.

For a while, Revaz lived with an old woman for whom he brought food from the market, but he was forced to leave when her daughter came to stay.

He washes rarely, usually in housed alcoholics' flats in exchange for a bottle. He lost his passport long ago and has no intention of regaining it:

> Yeah, I'll go and get my passport back. And where will I live? Anyway it won't have *propiska* [registration stamp] in it. It's just a piece of paper. If I had *propiska*, I could get a job, but where am I supposed to get registered living like this?

Revaz fully identifies both with the position of a *bomzh* and with other homeless people. He is friends with two homeless people:

> Revaz: We're always together. They won't drink without me, I won't drink without them.
> Interviewer: Do you have anything in common other than drink, anything you do together?
> Revaz: No.

Revaz believes that homeless people like him have no hope for a future. He can no longer imagine a different life.

Interviewer: How do you see your life from now on?
Revaz: It'll just carry on like this. I despise this life right now. But I can't find a way out.
Interviewer: Does being a free man appeal to you?
Interviewee: These days? Yes. I've somehow gotten into it.

Revaz has a realistic perspective on his future: 'I'll die on the street and that'll be it, or in my basement.' How others see him is no longer significant:

Revaz: People look at you as if to say 'a *bomzh* is a *bomzh*, he's not human'.
Interviewer: Does this bother you?
Revaz: No, I don't care anymore.

When asked 'how would you reply to the following question: who am I?', Revaz said, 'A *bomzh*, and that's all there is to it.'

So far Revaz has been able to find work and human companionship. However, he may eventually reach the stage of total displacement, when people stop existing as social beings. Physical resources become exhausted and, with them, any opportunities to enter into exchange with other members of urban society. Their social and economic capital is fully spent. Social interaction is reduced to a minimum. Even if the opportunity emerges to live under a roof again, they may now be unable to use this opportunity (at least without very serious support), as they no longer know how to live in a closed space and organise their life in wider society. They become stuck in the immediate street space and incapable of any mobility. Once they have reached this stage, homeless people may stop striving to follow the norms of 'settled society' in terms of self-presentation, and reconcile themselves with looking as 'good' as the street allows. In this condition, they may become outcasts in the eyes of other homeless people as well as those of 'settled society'.

It is important to stress again that no 'objective' law dictates that a person must move from one stage to another. People may stay in a situation of street re-placement for many years, or leave this stage and return to settled life. In some cases it is also possible, with significant outside help, to move from total displacement to street re-placement. However, unless a person can enter a system of stable relations and ultimately leave the streets, in Russia at least, progression through homelessness does tend to follow a recognisable pattern.

This phenomenon of progression through stages is not unique to homelessness. An analytical concept that can be best used here is that of an 'alternative' career. This concept, developed in the sociology of deviance, has also been used to characterise the stages in social exclusion (Hill, 1977, MacDonald, 1994, Crane, 1997). The social behaviour of juvenile delinquents, drug users and long-term unemployed people, has been shown to reflect the changes in structural conditions in which individuals find themselves, and to involve a transformation in their perspectives and adaptations.

The same concept can be applied to *bomzhi* and vagrants. They go through changes and their 'qualities' are not at all given naturally. One cannot speak about particular 'types' of personality, nor, as a rule, explain people's actions with psychiatric diagnoses (such as dromomania or vagabondage – the pathological compulsion to change places that is often invoked in Russian discussion of homeless persons).[7] Their behaviour is a result of what Bourdieu calls:

> the purely social and quasi-magical process of socialisation, which … is prolonged, strengthened and confirmed by social treatments that tend to transform instituted difference into natural distinction, produces quite real effects, durably inscribed in the body and in belief (1992, p.58).

Bomzhi and vagrants are not born with particular qualities which make them different from the rest of society. On the contrary, it is the space that homeless people occupy beyond the boundary of the settled society that decides the differences between the 'placed' and 'displaced'. Being thrown into this space, people may recover, but if they stay there for long, their engagement with mainstream society, and even with each other, is progressively reduced.

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7   There has been no systematic investigation of the incidence of psychiatric illness among homeless people in Russia. However, according to the Moscow office of Médecins sans Frontières, immediately identifiable mental health problems were only evident in between 1 per cent and 3 per cent of their homeless clients (Médecins sans Frontières, 2004, p.39).

PART II

PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS

Chapter 4

Homelessness in the Soviet Union

Throughout Russian history, people who were displaced from territorial communities and had to survive on the margins of the settled society were designated as *bezdomnye* (homeless), *brodiagi* (vagrants) and *nishchie* (paupers and beggars). Homeless people and vagrants could be identified as *nishchie*, but not all of the *nishchie* were homeless.

In this chapter I look briefly at the history of regulation of social space in Russia and the treatment of the homeless, vagrants and beggars before the revolution of 1917, and then move on to describe the evolution of the Soviet mobility and settlement regime. Under this regime the 'fixing' of the population in territorial communities through the passport system was linked to the sanctioning of those who became "unfixed " and mobile through expulsion, incarceration and segregation in specially designated areas. I discuss the construction of 'social waste' in the Soviet legal and criminological discourse, and analyse the specific mechanisms of production of such waste, and the special role played here by the system of housing allocation. The strong dependencies on family and labour units created by this system penalised those workers who lacked firm attachments to either, and thus made them vulnerable to homelessness.

From early on in Russian history, homeless people, vagrants and destitute beggars have been a permanent feature of the social landscape. Medieval sources speak about roaming singers and poets, *lazari* [blind] and *kaliki* [crippled] beggars, who travelled from village to village, performing in return for money, food and shelter, or begging for alms. Some of them led a more settled existence, finding a temporary abode at churches, monasteries, cemeteries, or at the houses of rich people (Pryzhov, 1913). By virtue of their need, they begged or demanded that members of settled communities, the rich and the clergy fulfil their Christian obligations to support the poor.

Lacking their own places in settled communities, these people could nevertheless be elevated to a place in the symbolic order of society. From the fourteenth century onwards, beggars and vagrants in Russia were sometimes seen as 'holy fools', who rejected the material world and its morals and set out to lead an ascetic existence, 'becoming rich in God'. While often provoking feelings of fear and revulsion, they were also thought to possess prophetic gifts. It was believed that existence outside the boundaries of organised society could confer magic powers on a person and open him or her to divine truths inaccessible to ordinary people.[1] Some of these holy

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1   Mary Douglas likewise suggests that through the rituals of wandering and venturing beyond the confines of society, people could be seen to acquire magical powers (1966, p.95).

fools were canonised by the Orthodox church (Fedotov, 1975, Thompson, 1987). After the Church removed its blessing from the holy fools in the eighteenth century, the tradition of linking vagrants and beggars to the sphere of the divine and the supernatural gradually disappeared; although some of the vestiges of this tradition remained until the beginning of the 20th century (Anufriev, 1913). To this day, as we have already seen, there remains an association between begging and the church.

At the same time the state, at least from the time of Ivan the Terrible, made attempts to regulate the social and territorial space by excluding certain categories of displaced people. In 1551 the 'One hundred head' Council ruled that wandering minstrels and clowns should not be invited to weddings, and that roaming by homeless vagrants and beggars (*poproshai*) was to be prohibited (Korolev, 1997). Also, among the key recurring concerns of the Russian state when it came to vagrants was that they could be runaway criminals, who had to be apprehended and punished, or, from the end of the 16th century, escaped serfs who needed to be returned to their owners.[2]

As in the western world, Russian modernity brought with it a new punitive approach towards displaced populations.[3] When the state takes upon itself the task of regulating the regime of social and territorial settlement, transient populations necessarily become an object of its disciplinary efforts. Foucault notes that 'one of the primary objectives of discipline is to fix; [discipline] is anti-nomadic' (1977, p.218). Through a combination of punitive strategies – surveillance, deportation, incarceration and placement into workhouses – the state tried to keep them under control and 're-place' them into the places and territories which were deemed suitable for their presence.

The foundations of the modern system of regulation of residency and movement were established in Russia under Peter the Great. This system has, in its most essential features, survived from the first quarter of the eighteenth century to this day, serving the purposes of tax collection, conscription and control over the composition of the population (Matthews, 1993). Internal passports or, for the peasants, special written permissions from the landowner or from the local authorities were necessary in order to travel within Russian territory, and those who violated the passport rules or were not registered during population censuses (among them itinerant vagrants) were sanctioned through fines, arrests or expulsion to Siberia.

On 30 November 1691 an edict established that all vagrants were to be captured and sent back to their place of previous residence. Those who were caught again were to be whipped and sent away to Siberia. A 1705 order of the *Monastyrskii prikaz* (a government department overseeing church activities and properties) prohibited the giving of alms to vagrants.

By the middle of the 18th century, as a result of the censuses of 1742 and 1762, people who previously did not belong to any class or estate (among them freed peasants and vagrants) became formally registered as serfs. But the system of registration,

    2   Serfdom was established in Russia through a series of laws, introduced between 1581 and 1649; it was abolished in 1861.

    3   See, for example, Vexliard, 1957, Rose, 1988, Garland, 1985, Morris, 1993 and Cresswell, 2001.

aimed at fixing population to territory, itself fed an increase in homelessness and vagrancy. Peasants and craftsmen wanted to escape poll tax; young people tried to evade military conscription. As a result, the key preoccupation of the criminal justice system of the time was the search for runaways (Matthews, 1993).

Further attempts at tightening control over the population included measures to recover escaped serfs and strengthen passport regulations. The edict of July 1809 'On Elimination of Vagrancy (on the Return of Serfs)' ordered the governors of the Russian territories to collect all the vagrants from the villages and towns and return them to landowners' associations. Later, article 582 of the Charter on Passports and Runaways of 1857 defined vagrancy as 'movement without an official authorisation, without a residence permit, and an inability or persistent unwillingness to prove one's civic condition'. Vagrants were to be sent back home or exiled to Siberia. If they ran away, they were fined or arrested for up to three months. Numerous decrees were aimed at augmenting the passport regime. According to the Russian criminologist Mikhail Gernet, in 1829 in different Russian cities, from 8 per cent to 59 per cent of all prisoners were incarcerated for so-called passport crimes – absence of a passport, a lack of propiska, use of somebody else's passport etc. (1951, p.311, quoted in Korolev, 1997).

In the second half of the 19th century, and particularly after the enormous social upheaval caused by the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the beginning of rapid industrialisation of the country and mass migration into the cities, significant sections of the population became uprooted and displaced. According to different calculations, there were between one and three million *nishchie* in 1897 (Anufriev, 1913, p.102). The state tried to counter the threat of mass displacement and impoverishment by a combination of punitive controls and charitable provisions.

Article 163 of the 'Charter on Prevention and Cessation of Crime' of 1878 introduced punishment for begging performed 'not because of a misfortune that brought utter poverty, but because of laziness, habitual idleness or as a trade'. Beggars and vagrants were to be deported to Siberia for two years. There is some evidence, however, that these provisions were not enforced too stringently and in most cases police left vagrants and beggars alone (Trudy, 1910, p.96).

The high speed of social change brought deep anxiety about urban crime and disorder. Newspapers of the time discussed how 'teams' of malicious beggars and vagrants roamed the streets and populated dangerous and uncontrolled spaces in the city, including, for example, the famous Khitrov market in Moscow, which was surrounded by slums inhabited by escaped criminals, thieves, prostitutes and beggars.

At the same time *nishchie* and *brodiagi* became, for the first time, a subject of scientific investigation. Progressive social researchers studying life at the 'bottom of society' tended to emphasise structural reasons for vagrancy and begging – unemployment, poverty, migration and police repression against passport-less people (Dril', 1899, Maksimov, 1910, Trudy, 1910, Anufriev, 1913). But at the same time explanations from the point of view of individual pathology were also proposed. It was argued that the social 'degradation' of the displaced poor was caused by a

variety of psychological and physiological defects: sloth, the desire to get easy money, deviant tendencies and a 'non-serious' attitude to other people's property, 'physical flabbiness' and incapacity to act (Levenstim, 1900). Vagrants and paupers represented a threat to the public, making the streets unsafe and cutting off whole sections of city space from public use. The solutions were seen in strong police measures aimed at their separation and in the compulsory placement of 'recidivists' into workhouses.

Although this repressive approach was heavily criticised at the time (Trudy, 1910), even the liberal authors agreed that that conditions in the areas where homeless people lived contributed to the pathological outcomes. These people could not be rehabilitated and could only be helped by charity. As one social researcher argued after an investigation of the Khitrov market:

> In the lairs and slums with their terrible conditions of life, and also often with the active help of alcohol, gradually an unstable, organically weak and depleted race of people emerges with a certain sad property – a total impotence in all respects. (Dril', 1899, p.23)

In addition to the penal persecution of destitute and displaced people, charity and workfare provisions have also been established over time.[4] The same 'One hundred head' Council of 1551 that prohibited vagrancy also decided that almshouses and hospitals should be opened in towns to care for lepers and elderly homeless people, although whether these were actually implemented is open to doubt (Korolev, 1997). Under Catherine the Great the first workhouse for the homeless and destitute was organised in Moscow in 1775. By 1910, there were 237 workhouses in Russia. There were also many private charities that helped the homeless and destitute. In the same year, forty-one such organisations existed in St. Petersburg and 113 in Moscow. Vagrants and paupers could get cheap flats in special hostels and receive free meals and help with clothes and money (Anufriev, 1913, pp.86-7).

The Soviet Mobility Regime

By 1922, as a result of the October Revolution in 1917, seven years of war (including World War I and the civil war), economic devastation, famine and a high level of population migration, millions of people – adults and children – were homeless.[5] While the new Soviet government developed a network of social assistance institutions to help homeless people, the condition of homelessness itself was largely attributed either to the immediate social and economic crisis, or to the legacy of

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4   This topic is a whole area of study in itself. For an overview of the history of public and private charity see, for example, Firsov 1999.

5   The situation of children caused the greatest concern. In one of the worst years of the crisis, in 1922, there were an estimated 7.5 million 'starving and dying children in Russia', many of whom, having lost one or both parents, had come to the towns in search of food (Goldman 1993, p.60).

capitalism, and was expected to disappear over time with the success of socialist construction. Research into homelessness, conducted by Soviet institutions of social protection and health, represented homeless people mainly as victims of poverty and unemployment (Pavlov, 1986).

During the first few years after the October Revolution the regime of settlement and mobility was significantly liberalised (although, prior to that, some relaxation of the passport regime had followed both the revolutions of 1905 and February 1917). The 'Declaration of the Rights of Working and Exploited People', adopted in January 1918, abolished all limitations on freedoms, including the freedom of movement. Vagrancy was no longer a crime. For the new regime, the poor and the marginal were not 'social waste', but potentially the vanguard of socialist construction.[6]

Relaxation of social controls over the displaced populations in the 1920s can be explained not just by the weakening of the state or re-orientation of the dominant ideology. As the whole social system was undergoing a rapid transformation, its lines and borders were fluid and their transgression was therefore hard to define. It is difficult to be 'out of place' when the whole landscape is changing. Of course, some social groups did stick out due to their specific ascriptive characteristics (members of the nobility, tsarist army corps, bourgeoisie and clergy) and they were persecuted on the basis of their class membership. But punishment for vagrancy was, for a while at least, a thing of the past. Attempts to 'fix' individuals to territories were mainly connected with labour mobilisation. Legislative acts adopted in 1918, 1920 and 1922 aimed to make all people capable of working to fulfil their 'labour duty'.[7]

During the 1920s, the features of a new regime of spatial organisation began to emerge. Surveillance and control over territorial and labour movement were becoming increasingly tight. For example, from 1926, enterprises were obliged to keep registers of their employees. Military conscription was introduced in 1928. According to a 1932 decree, *letuny* [workers who abandoned their places of work] were deprived of coupons for food and industrial goods and the right to use their enterprise–provided flats. In 1934, the 'Exemplary Charter of the Agricultural Co-operative' forbade peasants to leave their places of residence. In 1938, 'labour books' were introduced (in a format that remains to this day). They registered the start and end of employment, the reason for the end of employment and a person's position

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6   The social and criminal policies of the new regime not only involved welfare measures to assist homeless people and vagrants, but also decriminalisation of prostitution (Sidorenko-Stephenson, 2000). Up to the beginning of the 1930s, explanations for deviant behaviour were still largely connected with the defects of the social environment, which would be eliminated in the course of socialist construction. Makarenko's pedagogical experiments with street children (see Kharkhordin, 1999), and the official discourse on labour camps such as Solovki as places of perekovka [re-socialisation] of bad elements were examples of these new technologies applied to delinquency and crime.

7   Decrees 'On Labour Exchanges' of 31 January 1918, 'On Labour Books for Labourers' of 5 October 1918 and 'On the Order of Universal Labour Duty' of 29 January 1920. The first Criminal Code of the RSFSR, enacted from June 1922, introduced responsibility for 'deserters from labour duty'.

and wages. Unorganised mobility was something the regime wanted to prevent, while at the same time ensuring that Soviet enterprises, forever hungry for labour, got their workers. As Stalin pronounced in 1939:

> Unemployed and homeless peasants who strayed away from villages and lived under the threat of starvation have long since vanished in our country ... Now we can only ask the collective farms to respect our request and release at least a million and a half young workers annually for the growing industry. (Stalin, 1952, pp.625–6, quoted in Vishnevskii, 2001, p.300)

While homelessness was not seen as a problem of the Soviet state – shortages of labour meant that enterprises were ready to accept and house anybody, be it in communal flats, barracks or mud huts – unsupervised movement was. In 1940, a series of decrees prohibited the independent resignation of workers and employees from enterprises and organisations or change of jobs without official sanction.[8] Although there is no data on the number of people who received criminal convictions for unauthorised change of jobs, some unofficial calculations give an estimate of between eight and twenty-two million people (Lyubarskii, 1994).

Attempts were made to settle all nomadic peoples (including those in the Far East and North of Russia), with gypsies seen as a particularly important target. A decree issued in 1926 introduced measures 'to assist in transition of travelling gypsies to a working and settled way of life'. Gypsies were later subjected to deportation and enforced settlement. For example, in the summer of 1933, 5,000 gypsies were deported from the Moscow region to a labour colony in the city of Tomsk in Siberia. Further deportations of gypsies took place in 1937-38 (Fitzpatrick, 1999, p.126).

With the introduction of the passport system announced by *Sovnarkom* [the Council ('Soviet') of the People's Commissars – i.e. the government] on 28 December 1932, and the simultaneous start of *propiska* at militia stations, the state had acquired all the instruments necessary for control of the population's mobility and residence. A change of place of residence (even within a single settlement) required the submission of one's passport for *propiska* within twenty-four hours. Employers also required proof of *propiska*. In 1933-41 the Criminal Codes of the Soviet Republics were supplemented by norms introducing sanctions for violation of the rules of *propiska* (such as article 192-a of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, which established a fine for the first offence and then six months' corrective labour for each repeat offence).[9]

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8   Destalinisation relaxed limitations on residence, and from 1956 the right to change jobs at will was reinstated (Matthews, 1993, p.28).

9   Only residents of cities, workers' settlements, new industrial towns and *sovkhozy* (state-owned farms) were given passports. Collective farm workers were not allowed to have passports, and thus were unable to leave their places of residence. Only in 1974 did a decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR 'On the Passport System of the USSR' establish that every Soviet citizen from the age of 16 was entitled to a passport.

***Propiska* and the Social Structure of the Soviet Society**

Propiska had many important functions in Soviet society. It was used as a means of surveillance, an instrument for allocation of welfare (such as local housing stock, schools and health care) and as a way to ensure military conscription. Passport and *propiska* regulations served to tie the population to territorial communities (Holquist, 1997, 2000). On a more general level, it was an intrinsic part of the disciplinary and mobilising efforts of the Russian state in the pursuit of its modernisation project. It was used extensively in the regulation of the labour market and general population management.

The *propiska* system evolved as a result of the historical traditions and day-to-day needs of the Soviet state. Its rules changed over time and periods of liberalisation could be followed by the tightening of controls.[10] Notwithstanding the particular configuration of its rules and practices at any given point, *propiska* remained the core instrument of the Soviet state. As a mechanism it was capable of being fine-tuned and adjusted and it was needed to sustain and regulate the social structure, both 'vertically' and 'horizontally'. It delivered the right individuals to the right places and expelled those whose position in the social space was at odds with the properties of territorial space that they attempted to occupy.[11]

As Bourdieu points out, in any society the structures of social order are manifested in spatial distances (1999, p.124). Soviet society was no exception. The Soviet hierarchy of geographical spaces put Moscow in the most privileged space, with administrative centres of different significance, key industrial sites, provincial towns and villages forming descending layers of the geographical pyramid. This stratified geographical structure also represented a hierarchy of social positions.[12] Residence in an elite location brought with it many opportunities and privileges which did not exist for those dwelling in small provincial towns, workers' settlements or villages. Similarly, one had to possess certain attributes (qualifications, skills, or political capabilities) in order to be invited to move to a privileged location by an enterprise, organisation or the party apparatus.

While in western societies residence and mobility for national citizens are dependent almost solely upon a person's place in the structure of opportunities, and on his or her economic and social capital, in the Soviet Union mobility between spatial positions was regulated and tightly controlled by the state. To become a resident of a privileged location – other than by birth or through marital circumstances – one had to get *propiska*. Similarly, people who did not 'belong' to the location and who were

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10 See Matthews, 1993, Lyubarskii, 1994, Popov, 1995a and 1995b and Kessler, 2001 for a more detailed account of the history of *propiska* regulations.

11 As any social instrument, *propiska* could not be used with complete efficiency, and guarantee a totally managed migration. Individuals found ways to move into desired territories through fictitious marriages, bribery and other legal and semi-legal tactics (see the discussion in Buckley, 1995, pp.905-6, Wegren and Drury, 2001, p.117).

12 See Zaslavsky (1982) on territorial stratification of the Soviet society.

already socially displaced, compromised and damaged in their social status, would be excluded, by denial of *propiska*, in the most direct physical sense.

Political control over spatial stratification included strategies of segregation, expulsion and incarceration of those who did not belong to the social and geographic locus. Peripheral, socially 'redundant' groups were relegated to the geographical margins. For example, special schools for mentally disabled children and care homes for the elderly were often placed on the outskirts of cities.[13] Similarly, individuals who made their living at the margins of the organised labour market – people with criminal records, displaced homeless people and vagrants – could be subject to expulsion to the geographical 'outskirts', to the less significant spaces, or even re-placed through incarceration.

From the end of the 1920s – even before *propiska* was introduced – alcoholics and *tuneiadtsi* ['idlers', the wilfully unemployed], prostitutes, beggars, and itinerant labourers – such as tinkers and travelling tailors – were picked up from the streets, railway stations and places of temporary accommodation and deported from the cities. After the introduction of the passport system at the end of 1932, unattached individuals and groups began to be subjected to systematic repression. People without fixed occupation and registered dwelling were targeted and expelled from cities, especially from Moscow and Leningrad, together with *byvshie* ['the have-beens' – ex-members of the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, clergy, tsarist bureaucracy and police]. 'Parasites' – people involved in shadow and criminal markets, such as professional gamblers, drug dealers and brothel keepers – were also targeted (Fitzpatrick, 1999, p.120, Andrle, 1988, p.215).

These repressions were extra-legal. They were performed on the basis of the decisions of the party and the government following recommendations from OGPU-NKVD (precursors of the KGB). Such measures were never publicly discussed. From the beginning of the 1930s, all scientific research into homelessness and vagrancy stopped.

With the end of the Second World War came a new wave of repressions against displaced persons. This was caused by the newly visible presence of beggars, who, having often lost their families, housing and often health in the war, tried to make a living on the streets of Soviet cities. Some were rural dwellers attempting to escape starvation in their villages, which had been devastated by war and post-war famine (Pushkar' and Charnyi, 2002). Secret decrees and resolutions were issued giving the militia powers to expel vagrants and beggars to distant regions. In June 1948, the Presidium of the Supreme Council passed a decree 'On Deportation to the Distant

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13 The first schools for mentally disabled 'defective' children were opened in 1935. These schools also accommodated children who 'systematically violated school discipline, disorganised educational process and negatively influenced, through their antisocial behaviour, other pupils'. Vladimir Papernyi quotes this new policy as an example of a change in the regime of social and spatial regulation. While early Soviet policies aimed to integrate 'defective' children, under Stalin the regime increasingly tried to isolate them (Papernyi, 1996, p.194).

Regions of Persons Persistently Evading Labour Duty and Leading Antisocial Parasitic Ways of Life', followed by a decree of 23 July 1951 'On Measures to Fight Antisocial Parasitic Elements'. This was followed by resolutions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR in 1952, 1953 and 1954.

Restrictions on Settlement

From the early 1930s onwards, a system of restrictions for settlement of ex-prisoners and other undesirables in specific locations (mostly big cities) began to take shape. Secret Ministry of Interior instructions introduced limitations on settlement for people who were sentenced on the basis of article 58 (anti-Soviet activities) and sometimes the members of their families, as well as for people who committed other serious crimes. Secret codes in passports provided information on whether a person had a criminal record and the nature of his or her crimes.

A system of 'regime' cities was established with heavily controlled residence rules. A decree of 28 April 1933 designated 25 towns, which had regime districts around them, together with 100 kilometre-wide zones along the country's western European frontiers (Matthews, 1993, p.28; see also Conquest, 1968, p.57). Between the 1930s and 1950s the system of 'regime cities' expanded. It included Moscow, Leningrad, the capitals of the Soviet republics and large industrial cities (Kharkov, Sverdlovsk, Odessa and others). More secret instructions prohibited the registration of newly arrived residents in these cities. Only a limited number of enterprises could get a quota for registering new workers. These cities had much tighter administrative controls and implemented restrictions on the settlement of people with 'damaged' social identities (such as ex-prisoners), even if they were ex-residents. 'People avoiding socially useful labour' were also to be identified and expelled from these locations.[14]

Administrative regulations of settlement were becoming progressively more differentiated, with the relaxation of rules for some regions and their hardening for others. For example, in 1974 a decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR 'On Some Rules of *Propiska* of Citizens' allowed *propiska* to people returning from the army or prison and their close relatives. However, an unpublished part of this decree prohibited registration not only of those convicted for a whole number of serious crimes, including political crimes, but also those already convicted for violation of passport rules, 'in cities, districts and places, the list of which is established by the decisions of the USSR government'.[15]

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14 This was, for example, the requirement of the decree of the Moscow City Soviet of June 1958, which required militia to annul the *propiska* of 'idlers'.

15 The list of crimes, precluding *propiska* in Moscow and even prohibiting them to visit Moscow for more than three days, was further expanded in the Decree of the Council of Ministers in 1985. Similar limitations were introduced in more than 70 cities and settlements in the country.

An unpublished supplement to the 1974 passport regulations stated that as far as the registration of ex-convicts was concerned, certain cities, districts and regions 'listed in [unpublished] rulings of the USSR government' were granted their own power of decision. In addition, Moscow and Leningrad were to have their own rules, as before. In February 1975 new passport regulations for Moscow were issued which distinguished twenty-three categories of persons who could be registered for residence. Suspected 'parasites' were allowed three months in which to find work, failing which they were to be expelled (Matthews, 1993, pp.33-4).

People with criminal convictions could lose their rights of residence, and consequently their access to housing in a large number of territories. Even if people did not lose their registration while in prison (for example through a spouse filing for divorce), restrictions on residence for ex-prisoners meant that on release they could be unable to reinstate their housing rights or go back to their old job. Although the State *Prokuratura* [Prosecution Service] was obliged to find employment for ex-convicts, this did not always happen. If a person did manage to find a job, any prior criminal record meant that he or she would carry a social stigma and be closely monitored by the law enforcement bodies. If he or she lost a job and accommodation, prosecution for violation of passport rules, vagrancy or a 'parasitic way of life' would soon follow.

The Soviet Badlands

The territorial stratification of the Soviet space included specific locations where the Soviet outcasts were supposed to live. Although there were no ghettoes as such, large cities had belts around them with concentrations of ex-prisoners, expelled vagrants and 'idlers'. Here was the land of 'behind the 101st (or 105th) kilometre', to which 'social waste' was removed. This is where Venichka, the itinerant hero of the famous novel 'Moscow – Petushki', written by Venedict Yerofeev in 1969, was travelling on a train.[16] As he moved through different stages of inebriation, he travelled from the dangerous Moscow, where in his delirious imagination he was attacked by blood-sucking militiamen, towards the promised happy pastures of Petushki – a settlement over 101 kilometres from Moscow. Similarly, territories near the labour colonies and prisons – especially those in the European North of Russia, in Siberia and the Far East – also had concentrations of undesirables, mainly ex-convicts who settled there after their release, but also homeless migrants who found temporary abodes there.

These people were shunned by 'reputable' local residents, and the only society open to them might be that of local alcoholics. As Anne White (2004) reports from her study of Zubtsov, a small town bordering Moscow region, to this day the local residents still ostracise a group of ex-prisoners who settled there before 1990 because they were prohibited from going back to live in Moscow. They have formed a local

16 The title is translated into English as 'Moscow to the End of the Line' (Yerofeev, 1994).

'underclass' of unemployed people living in deep poverty, whom the residents deeply mistrust and characterise as alcoholics and potato stealers.

Some collective farms also served as 'dumping grounds' for social waste. Fifty-five year old Lina, who we interviewed in 1994, vividly described how she became homeless at the end of the 1980s and was sent by the local Soviet authority to a collective farm in Kostroma oblast.

> After my release from the penitentiary [where she was sent for theft] I went back home to Yaroslavl, where I used to live with my mother. But my mother had died. The house was in ruins and I had nowhere to register. I started to look for work and people said to me, 'Go to a *kolkhoz*' [collective farm]. I said, 'Why would I go to a *kolkhoz*, I am a city person'. They said, 'Have you come from the moon? Where else would they take you?' I went to the *ispolkom* [the executive committee of the local Soviet] and they gave me a referral to the militia in Kostroma oblast. I came to the militia. They said to me, 'It's time to put barbed wire around this *kolkhoz*. Only ex-prisoners work there.' I went there and the chairman took me in without a word. Almost everybody there drinks. You come to work, one woman is not there, she has a drinking spree for two or three days, the other is not there. The manager runs over to me, 'Go milk those cows as well, there is no one else here'. I often ended up doing two or three times more than the norm. I worked well and they even gave me a flat there, but it was in a swamp. I walked there with water up to my knees. When I came to resign, the chairman said to me, 'Are you mad? Where would you live?' But I could not face staying there all my life.

Lina decided to try to find a job in the city but without any luck. She lived for a while with a divorced man looking after his daughter, but then he asked her to leave and she migrated to the Moscow streets.

'And Other Parasitic Ways of Life …'

While Stalin mostly used extra-legal measures to fight those individuals who violated the Soviet social-spatial order, it was Khrushchev who codified the crime of not belonging to territorially fixed collectives. The RSFSR Criminal Code of 1960 included a new article 209, which established the criminal penalty for persistent vagrancy or begging as imprisonment for up to two years or corrective labour from six months to one year. Repeat offenders were punishable with imprisonment for up to four years. Another new provision, in article 198, introduced penalties for 'violation of passport rules'. The militia had the power to evict any unregistered person from the locality twice, giving him or her twenty-four hours to leave on each occasion. If people came back a third time, they were liable to a one-year prison sentence. Similar provisions were introduced to the Criminal Codes of other Soviet republics.

In 1961 the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of RSFSR 'On Intensifying the Struggle Against Persons Who Avoid Socially Useful Work and Lead an Antisocial, Parasitic Way of Life' established that:

Able-bodied, legally adult citizens, who do not wish to perform a principal constitutional duty – to work honestly according to their abilities – and who avoid socially useful work, derive non-labour income from the use of land plots, automobiles or housing, or commit other anti-social acts that enable them to lead a parasitic way of life, shall be subject, upon the order of a district (or city) people's court, to banishment to specially designated localities for a period from two to five years, with confiscation of property acquired by non-labour means, and to mandatory assignment to work at the place of deportation.

A few years later, in 1965, banishment started to be applied only to residents of Moscow, Moscow *oblast* [region] and Leningrad.

In 1970 the Criminal Codes of RSFSR and other Soviet republics were amended again. After the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers 'On Measures of Intensifying the Struggle Against Persons Who Avoid Socially Useful Work and Lead an Antisocial, Parasitic Way of Life', a new article 209-1 was added to the Criminal Code, which established a penalty of up to one year of custodial sentence or corrective labour for 'persistent neglect of the orders on assignment to work and failure to cease parasitic existence'. The local soviets (councils) were obliged to seek out parasites 'systematically and rapidly' and to allocate a full-time official to co-ordinate the work.

However, in 1975 it was decided to repeal article 209-1, instead amending article 209, which now also accounted for 'leading other parasitic ways of life'. Thus, article 209 brought together the protocols for various 'crimes': vagrancy, begging and 'parasitic way of life'. The latter was defined as 'support of oneself as an adult, able-bodied person over an extended period of time by the use of non-labour income with the evasion of socially useful labour, maintained after an official warning'. Several additional decrees were later published with further interpretations of article 209.

The final attempt of the Soviet regime to fight against antisocial elements came with the Mikhail Gorbachev's campaigns against alcoholism and non-labour incomes, which started respectively in May 1985 and May 1986.[17] Aimed broadly at all those who did not comply with the model of a socialist worker, these campaigns inevitably affected vagrants, idlers and parasites. While no official data was published on criminal prosecution for vagrancy, one piece of research conducted in Rostov oblast demonstrates that between 1984 and 1986 the number of such prosecutions has indeed increased from 858 to 993. However, these disciplining efforts were short-lived. In 1987 the number of criminal prosecutions for vagrancy in Rostov oblast came down to 357. Towards the end of the 1980s, repressions against vagrants became much more relaxed, with criminal sanctions replaced by 'revolving doors'

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17 These were based on the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR 'On Intensification of Fight against Alcoholism' of 15 May 1985, and the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 'On the Measures of Intensifying the Struggle against Non-Labour Incomes' of 15 May 1986.

practices, warnings and short-term detention in detention centres. In 1989 in Rostov oblast, 3000 people were detained for vagrancy, but only 4 people were prosecuted, compared to 3749 and 858 respectively in 1984 (Shapovalov, 1990, pp.5, 15).

Constructing and Managing Social Waste

What was the purpose of the anti-vagrancy, anti-parasite legislation? It was aimed at the separation and penal re-placement of those social categories that were 'out of place' in the system: spatially (itinerant labourers), socially (unattached individuals not supported by family and discarded by employers) and, in some instances, ideologically and culturally (dissenters and dissidents).[18] The latter group, however, was the subject of a whole array of different 'technologies of power' (Foucault, 1977), which involved prosecution for 'anti-Soviet activities', or psychiatric repressions through placement into mental hospitals.

Articles 198 and 209 were mainly directed at those marginalised groups of the urban proletariat who had lost their attachment to the organised community, many of whom were homeless as a result. Their crimes were not described in terms of displacement or homelessness. The Soviet law used the old signifiers of redundant population, such as vagrancy and begging, as well as new ideological signifiers (non-labour incomes) to define the transgression. Yet the real object of the prosecution of vagrants was to punish people not for specific criminal acts, but for their social condition, that of displacement. This becomes apparent from publications (some classified at the time) by jurists and criminologists, who suggested interpretations of legislation, analysed legal practice and proposed explanations for antisocial behaviour.

Constructing a crime (and a victimless crime at that) out of a social condition was not an easy task and legal commentaries to article 209 testify to the difficulties facing Soviet jurists. They had to define what constituted the criminal intent and the criminal act in vagrancy and 'parasitic way of life'. While intent to become a vagrant or parasite could be constructed 'a posteriori', the very substance of transgression was unclear. Lawyers and criminologists argued whether this was mobility, sources of income or their 'inadequate' remuneration.

The authors of one of the articles suggested that 'for the presence of vagrancy to be established, it is enough, we believe, to establish two incidences of aimless movement of an individual, one before the issue of an official warning and one after' (Oreshkina and Beliaeva, 1987, p.24). The authors of another article suggested, on the contrary, that vagrancy implied an aim and constancy: 'Vagrancy is a constant change of a place of residency (movement from one place to another) in order to avoid socially useful work and lead a parasitic way of life' (Fokin et al., 1987, p.11).

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18 A prominent human rights defender, Anatolii Marchenko, received a prison sentence for violation of passport regulations in 1969, while the poet Josef Brodsky was exiled to Archangel region for parasitism in 1964.

There were arguments about what constituted unacceptable mobility. Some authors argued that vagrancy was defined not just by movement between settlements or districts within a settlement, but also by movement within the territory of one large settlement from one district to another, or even within one district of a town. However, vagrancy did not include 'change of residence within the borders of a village, rural settlement or settlement or urban type, station, *auls* [villages in the Caucasus] and *kishlaks* [villages in Central Asia]' (Pleshakov et al., 1987, p.11).

Interpreting legislation, these commentators explained that an important 'objective' element of vagrancy was avoidance of socially useful work. Socially useful work was defined as 'permanent employment in enterprises and organisations, work performed for organisations and individuals according to official labour agreements, as well as work on the basis of oral agreements, not forbidden by law'. However, this definition exhausts all forms of employment and, as for explicitly forbidden activities, there were only two such activities defined in Soviet legislation: gambling and speculation (re-selling commodities for profit). This riddle was resolved by a further qualification: jurists explained that non-labour income included income gained from actual work, but where remuneration was not proportionate to the amount and quality of the effort involved. These were shaky foundations and the authors resorted to just naming the manual occupations most prominent in the unregulated economy but not legally prohibited: 'the earnings of craftsmen, of teams of so-called *shabashniki* [seasonal and construction workers in the informal economy], and those from the repair of flats, cars etc.' (p.8).

In one article analysing the practice of courts in cases involving article 209, the commentator quotes the court's definition of non-labour income as including 'means obtained from the collection and sale of mushrooms, berries, glassware (i.e. empty bottles), odd jobs, support from relatives, spouses, co-habitants and acquaintances' (Shubin, 1985, p.23). Again, these were the most typical means of subsistence available to the marginal poor, which the law enforcers aimed to identify and separate. However, the truth was that settled citizens could also engage in such activities (for example, millions of Soviet citizens sold empty bottles from milk or alcoholic beverages back to shops or special collecting centres) and for the poorest sections of the population – pensioners and disabled people – such activities could constitute an important part of their incomes. Law enforcers were concerned that the latter were not prosecuted by overzealous militia and courts.

The legislators gave more qualifications, and a 1984 decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the RSFSR stated that certified invalids, women over 55 and men over 60, pensioners, pregnant women, women with young children and housewives, could not be prosecuted for 'other parasitic ways of life'. It is obvious from analysis of these publications that when a person's connection to the community became tenuous and he or she either detached themselves, or was 'discarded' by those who could in principle accommodate them, the forces of Soviet law and order would be activated and complete the physical separation. The authors of one of the articles cite the conviction of a woman supported by her willing parents. She also

received money from the sale of her possessions. From the description of the case it appears that she was probably disabled or an alcoholic without a permanent place of work. The authors implicitly disagree with the conviction. They stress that the means of subsistence would only be illegal if friends and relatives aided an able-bodied individual 'against their will'.

> Unwillingness to support a parasite may be expressed in repeated suggestions of finding work, complaints of a difficult financial situation, refusal to give money, food etc., appeals to the militia or public organisations with requests for aid in job placement for the individual, or in written claims for prosecution of the latter. (Oreshkina and Beliaeva, 1987, pp.23-4)

It seems fair to suggest that a loss of connection to the 'fixing' structures of work and community was at the root of repressive policies against vagrants, 'parasites' and other 'residual' groups in the Soviet society. The normative notion of the 'undeserving poor' that is sometimes used to explain public attitudes and state policies towards marginal populations in the west (Morris, 1993, Hopper, 1993) does not offer an adequate explanation of the plight of Soviet vagrants and 'parasites'. There were no 'benefit scroungers' in the Soviet state and those who were assigned the status of 'parasites' did earn their living, although in irregular ways, at the margins of the formal economy. Nor can the informal character of their work serve as an explanation for their persecution. Settled individuals supplementing their incomes by doing skilled work such as car repairs or renovation of flats, or people supported by relatives, seemed to be less likely to become objects of penal repression.

Although statistics on vagrants and parasites is scarce, militia researchers who studied people convicted for violating article 209 reported that these were predominantly single middle-aged men.[19] 84 per cent had secondary or incomplete secondary education (Mavrin, 1984).[20] Most were alcoholics without stable employment and often with previous criminal records. Estimates of the percentage of alcoholics range from 60 to 82 per cent (Antonian, 1992, Mavrin, 1984, Orlov, 1986). One study showed that 74.8 per cent of those convicted for vagrancy and parasitism had a previous criminal record (mostly for non-serious crimes); and over 42.6 per cent had convictions for violation of article 209 (Bubentsov, 1972).

It was a specific social group that was subjected to the full might of the Soviet discipline: the poor and unattached, often with the additional stigma of a prison record or alcohol addiction. A whole population of social misfits was being continuously processed by the system. People were warned, fined, incarcerated and released, only

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19 Men comprised about 75 per cent of those convicted for vagrancy and parasitism (Grachev, 1984, p.112). About a half of these men were in their forties. The predominant majority of the offenders – 88 per cent in one of the surveys – were single (Zaripova, 1990).

20 There are no reliable data that would allow us to estimate the numbers of detentions for vagrancy and the number of prosecutions for this crime in Russia, as militia statistics mixed vagrants and 'parasites', homeless and unemployed but settled people.

to be put through the same treadmill over and over again.[21]According to one piece of reported research, almost all repeat convictions for vagrancy – and parasitism – 93.9 per cent – happened within the first three years of release from prison (Bubentsov, 1972). Militia researchers did not try to investigate the social reasons of why people kept committing the same 'crime'. They simply argued that in view of such a high rate of re-offending it was necessary to intensify control and introduce administrative surveillance over people who had been released from custody after serving their time for this offence.

The penal complex did not even pretend to try to reform vagrants and 'parasites'. It was too busy making delinquents out of them in order to manage them more easily. According to Foucault, the state does not necessarily intend to eliminate delinquency, it wants to 'differentiate, accommodate and supervise illegalities'. He pointed out that penal system succeeds 'in producing delinquents in an apparently marginal, but in fact centrally supervised milieu; in producing a delinquent as a pathological subject' (1977, p.277). The Soviet state organised, enclosed and isolated its 'social waste' in a way that allowed it to achieve its supervision and prevent its mixing with 'settled' populations in public places, and particularly in 'privileged spaces', such as the big cities and administrative centres. Available research into the practice of detentions for vagrancy shows that these detentions were mainly performed by the transport militia and the militia in big cities.[22] Sometimes vagrants were not detained but 'asked' to leave by militiamen so that they did not 'pollute' the territory under their supervision. The social and spatial order needed to be restored and unacceptable encounters prevented. As one jurist put it, with a clinical precision more suited to instructions for vermin extermination or garbage disposal: 'One of the factors leading to crime among vagrants is precisely failure to immediately identify and remove them from the streets, train stations, train stops, city and river ports, piers, parks and other public places' (Komakha, 1988, p.6).

As structural causes of poverty and displacement in the Soviet Union could not be acknowledged, people were assumed to have chosen their way of life. Vagrants were credited with pathological rejection of membership of social groups, demonstrated by their reluctance to form family, friendship or work-based networks. Using psychological tests, researchers strived to uncover those personality traits responsible for de-socialisation. These investigations 'proved' that vagrants did indeed display infantilism, a compulsion to lie, a lack of concentration and willpower and a propensity to act spontaneously, often under the influence of alcohol. It was claimed that the lack of positive parental influence, and of bonds of affection in the vagrants' parental families, resulted in negative attitudes to family in general and

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21 For example, in Rostov oblast in 1984 the ratio between the number of detentions for vagrancy and prosecution was 3:1; while the ratio between official warnings and prosecution was 8:1 (calculated on the basis of Shapovalov, 1990, p.5 and p.15).

22 In Saratov oblast, for example, 46 per cent of vagrants were detained by transport militia, 37 per cent by Saratov city militia, and 17 per cent by militia in rural areas and small towns of Saratov oblast (Komakha, 1988, p.8).

to stable work. The evidence of this was seen in the apparent ease with which they changed places of living (Antonian, 1984, Grachev, 1984, Orlov, 1986).

Soviet authors studying vagrancy linked this transient way of life to gradual 'physical, mental and intellectual depletion and moral degradation: vagrancy leads to pathological changes in personality linked to diminished interests and needs, indifference, "mindless" acts' (Shakhmatov, 1979, p.12). (This is similar to the claims of some pre-revolutionary social researchers discussed earlier.) Some authors observed that:

> constant movement … spending the nights at train stations, at boiler-rooms, in lofts and in other places unsuitable for living negatively affects the mental state of the vagrants and as a result they lose the sense of physical and psychological discomfort and lose the desire to stop this way of life. (Grachev, 1984)

While vagrants apprehended by the militia could sometimes get job placements, there were no social workers to look at their particular situations and attempt to help them to resolve their housing or personal problems. A substantial proportion of vagrants, after being given job placements, went on the road again. As one survey among people convicted for vagrancy found, 40.5 per cent of those who had been given an official warning and a job placement left their jobs again soon afterwards (Fokin et al, 1987).

Further from the centre, controls were weaker and opportunities for surviving in the shadow economy greater. Interviews show that *shabashki*, geological expeditions and forestry works could be sanctuaries for people who had been deported from their place of residence either through a court order, or by informal 'advice' from the militia, or who had themselves decided to escape strict social control. At these locations they could be tolerated for greater lengths of time and militiamen would often be reluctant to enforce laws against them.[23]

The treatment of individuals who were not part of organised Soviet society was by no means uniform and depended upon their social status and the status of the space they occupied. Management of Soviet 'social waste' was not limited to penal strategies. It could include further displacement from the centre to the periphery, from urban to rural areas and from the European part of Russia to the North and Far East. People unable or unwilling to conform to the requirements of mainstream society also pursued their 'exit strategies' by migrating to these spaces. Thus marginal spaces would accommodate marginal people.

Housing and Social Relations

The nature of the disciplinary measures applied to displaced persons in the Soviet Union can only be fully understood if one takes into account the absence of other institutions and mechanisms of re-placement. The only social bodies through which

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23 See also Shelley, 1996, p.135.

a person could be integrated were the family and the enterprise-based community. From the second half of the 1920s there were no charities at all in the country. The few so-called 'public organisations' – such as the Disabled People Society and the Society of Blind People – were essentially state-controlled bureaucratic institutions (White, 1999). Nor was there an institution of social work 'with its focus upon organisation, investigation, character and reform' (Garland, 1985, p.115).

The collectivistic social system presupposed people's almost complete dependency on family and work-based units. This was particularly evident in the ways the housing system operated. With very rare exceptions, housing was not a matter for purely economic transactions.[24] The system of housing allocation and registration of residence in the Soviet Union was organised in such a way that it created powerful interpersonal and communal dependencies. It was a person's relations, connections and ties that ensured a hold in the living space. Bonds and conflicts between individuals and collectivistic arrangements at the workplace all affected a person's access to housing.

People could be registered at a dwelling at birth, or later in life by their closest relatives (even that could be refused by the militia, particularly if the relative in question was not deemed to be close enough, like a grandparent). If a person returned to live with his or her family after a period of absence (including imprisonment), or even if he or she married a person with *propiska*, they would not have an automatic right to register and live in a dwelling. The consent of the *otvetstvennyi kvartiros'emshchik* [a 'responsible tenant' in the household] was required for the militia to stamp the *propiska* in the passport of the applicant. Access to housing could therefore depend wholly upon the goodwill of family members and people could become homeless if they were denied such access by their relatives.[25]

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24 With the exception of private housing in the rural areas and a relatively small number of private and co-operative dwellings in the cities, housing was allocated not on a market basis, but according to politically defined criteria. These could include perceived or 'scientifically defined' need (having less than a certain number of square metres per person, or a medical condition requiring greater living space – such as asthma or mental illness); or 'merit', such as a possession of a doctorate or demonstration of outstanding labour achievements. Enterprise housing could also be used to create an economic incentive for good work and to retain valuable specialists. In 1989 the share of privately owned housing and housing co-operatives was 21.4 per cent in the cities and 70 per cent in rural areas (Renaud, 1992, pp. 883-4). Co-operative housing, which was effectively bought, was not owned by families. Although the criteria establishing entitlements for such property were less strict than for housing provided by the local authorities, there were still rules on how many square metres a person was eligible for.

25 Families were involved in long-term strategies designed to maximise housing occupancy, and complex combinations were made to secure housing for children and grandchildren through the so-called 'familial exchange' and other strategies connected with registration of family members. Painful moral dilemmas that people had to resolve in their struggle for square metres were portrayed by Yuri Trifonov in his famous novella '*Obmen*' [The Exchange] (1969), where he described an attempt by a couple to pull off an exchange before the husband's mother dies, which would automatically lead to them losing her flat

Any break of attachment to family and community (through divorce, migration or imprisonment) could easily lead to a loss of housing rights. According to article 60 of the Housing Code of the RSFSR of 1983, if a person did not occupy a dwelling rented from the local authorities or an enterprise for six months or more, he or she could be deprived of residency on the application of the members of the household or the housing authorities. This meant, for example, that if someone was imprisoned for over six months, they could lose their rights to housing if their relatives did not want them to come back, if they were divorced by their spouse while in prison, or if a parent died who had been the sole registered tenant in the dwelling. If a person lived on his or her own, they could find on their return that the local authorities had decided to give their housing to somebody else. This norm was only abolished in July 1995.[26]

The 1960 Criminal Code of the RSFSR contained sentences of more than 6 months' imprisonment for 300 offences (Shapovalov, 1990, p.7). So a significant number of people with criminal convictions could become legally homeless six months after the start of their sentences. Deprivation of housing could result from minor crimes, but the effects of criminal sentences on future lives could be devastating. For example, men who did not pay alimony were liable to criminal punishment and could lose their housing after going to prison to serve a one-year sentence.

Furthermore, article 30 of the 1969 'Code of Marriage and Family of the RSFSR' allowed for a simplified divorce procedure if one of the spouses was sentenced to more than three years of imprisonment. One survey of 800 inmates showed that 7 per cent of them lost their connection to the family after their sentence and, as a consequence, lost their housing rights too (Shapovalov, 1990, p.7).With extremely high rates of incarceration in the Soviet Union, it is no wonder that hundreds of thousands of ex-prisoners were put at risk of homelessness.[27]

Lacking firm housing rights, people could also be evicted from the local authority dwellings for bad behaviour.[28] For example, on the basis of part one of article 38 of the 1981 'Foundations of Housing Law of the USSR and its Republics' it was possible to:

> expel persons from their dwelling without providing them with alternative accommodation if these persons systematically violated the rules of socialist communal living and made it impossible for others to live with them in one flat or house.

(as one could not inherit state property). Securing registration permits could be a significant factor in marital strategies. 'Fictitious marriages' (when a migrant married a locally registered person only to obtain *propiska*) became a cause for public concern and discussion in the Soviet press in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

26 See a detailed discussion of the pre-1995 legislation on eviction in Karlinsky, 2004.

27 Before 1985, the number of prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants in the country was 400-700; for comparison, in Great Britain the figure was 97.4, with 81.1 in France (Gilinskii, 1993, p.71).

28 For the listing of main provisions on eviction see Matthews, 1989, p.142, footnote 10.

Article 62 of the 1961 'Foundations of Civil Law of the USSR and Union Republics' enabled a number of enterprises and organisations in the most important sectors of the national economy to evict from enterprise-based housing those workers who terminated their employment contracts.

The threat of eviction meant that people needed to have good relations with their neighbours, who could otherwise report them to the authorities. In the case of enterprise housing, in order to keep the accommodation (particularly when this was temporary residence in a worker's dormitory), and to be able to improve one's living conditions, a person had to be a member of the labour collective and be in the 'good books' of the enterprise's management. Non-market allocation of housing therefore resulted in tying individuals to collective structures such as the family, neighbourhood and enterprise–based community. The disciplinary outcomes of state regulation of housing were not created in a vacuum but were embedded in social units.

Displacement for a Soviet person was dangerous because people were tightly bound to places and social relations existing around them. Breaks and dislocations were discouraged and penalised. This dependency on everybody and everything was particularly high in the case of the poor and the marginal, who had little chance of securing access to housing. And yet their lives were prone to the greatest unsettlement.

Marginal Proletariat

The Soviet economy, with its low efficiency and over-employment, included a specific labour force of low-skilled manual workers and so-called 'reserve' employees with few, if any, qualifications, who were used in menial jobs and auxiliary work.[29] This substratum of workers created the most problems at Soviet enterprises as they were responsible for high labour turnover, absenteeism, drunkenness and pilfering.[30]

Individual demoralisation was clearly linked to working conditions, and the Soviet industrial sociologists who studied the work collectives from the early 1960s pointed to a high degree of monotony and the general lack of creative stimulus, together with a high level of job dissatisfaction of such workers. They had no motivation to improve their skills or education (see the discussion in Andrle, 1988 and Filtzer, 1992).

While such workers were necessary for the enterprises to function, in each individual case they were dispensable, and persistent violation of labour discipline, drunkenness at work and trouble with the militia could lead to a 'suggestion' to

29 See Zaslavsky, 1982 and Clarke, 1999 on the Soviet low-skilled workers, and the discussion of the reserve labour force in Kozina and Borisov, 1996.

30 According to Zaslavsky (1979, p.12, 1982, p.53), the Soviet regime was complicit in the proliferation of drinking among this category of workers, and used alcohol as a way of 'tranquilising' them and providing them with an 'illusory consumer good' – vodka – in an economy that was unable to produce sufficient quantities of other goods.

resign or to outright dismissal (recorded in the labour book and affecting the person's future employability).

The housing rights of such workers could be extremely weak. When they settled in enterprise hostels, they would be offered (at least initially) only temporary registration, making them particularly vulnerable to eviction for bad behaviour or at the end of their contract. In Moscow, for example, *limitchiki* [migrant workers with temporary resident permits] lived in workers' hostels on a renewable one-year *propiska*. Any misdemeanour (or, for women, pregnancy and the birth of a child) could mean the end of tenancy.

The lack of permanent housing tenure was also a result of the perennially inadequate housing system. Rates of housing construction in the Soviet Union were low. In the 1950s there was on average around 4 square metres per person in the country. After the start of more active housing construction in the 1960s, it had still only reached 15.8 square metres of living space per person by 1989 (Renaud, 1992, pp.883-4). Millions of workers lived for years in work-provided hostels, mud huts or trailers. Although the statistics here are scarce, it is known that as late as in 1989, in urban areas 21 per cent of single people and 29 per cent of those who lived separately from their families lived in hostel accommodation (Shcherbakova, 1994, pp.23-4).

People who were not valuable or long-serving specialists had little chance of getting permanent enterprise housing for themselves and their families. 'Seventy per cent of 175 enterprises questioned in one … sample survey, reported that a worker would have to be employed at a factory for over 10 years before receiving a flat, and an engineer over eight years' (Alexeev, 1987, quoted in Andrusz, 1990, p.239).

After receiving temporary *propiska* and a bed in a hostel, workers could be sentenced to many years of communal living.[31] Writing about communal flats, Yuri Lotman used the words 'a false home' or 'anti-home', the 'centre of an abnormal world' (1990, p.186). Workers' hostels were arguably even more abnormal. Many interviewees described their despair at being stuck in hostels with their lack of privacy, with frequent quarrels and fights, often fuelled by alcohol. Doing unmotivated and badly paid jobs, they felt that these jobs were not worth hanging on to, especially given the lack of clear prospects for improving their housing conditions. However, frequent changes of job or place of residence were frowned upon and could easily result in a deterioration of their position in the labour market, and thereby reduce further their possibilities of getting access to housing. Many of our homeless interviewees first moved from one enterprise dormitory to another, then to a train station (sometimes with rented accommodation or staying on a friends' floor in between these moves) and finally turned into vagrants and *bomzhi*.

Some people – those who failed to conform to the requirements of the workplace or were not happy with reduced existence in dormitories and low-paid unsatisfying jobs – chose an exit option themselves. It was possible to get out on the road and look for opportunities in the unregulated informal economy, where wages were better

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31 See the discussion of disillusionment and frustration among Soviet workers in Dowlah and Elliott, 1997, p.131 and Burawoy, 1985, p.163.

and where interest in the labour book records was much smaller. But this way of life, as we saw earlier, was dangerous as a person could, if apprehended by the forces of law and order, be penalised for the violation of passport regime or for vagrancy, begging and 'parasitism'.

The Soviet modernist project of building a controlled and orderly society had no legitimate place for those whose life courses deviated from affiliations to strictly defined territorial and communal settings. When people strayed away from this social order, they were easily 'written off' as alcoholics, spongers and criminals, and moved on to marginal spaces in the distant corners of the Soviet empire, to specific Soviet ghettoes ('the land behind the 101st kilometre') or accommodated in prisons and labour camps.

Chapter 5

Soviet Outcasts: Displacement, Expulsion and Self-Expulsion

In the words of one popular Soviet song, painting a romantic vision of a country where all the roads were open to enthusiastic 'builders of communism': 'My address is not a building or a street. My address is the Soviet Union.'

However the song's authors probably never spared a thought for one group of people to whom its lyrics could also be said to refer. There were people who in fact really did have no address, including some who, as a direct result of their participation in this heroic construction of a new country, ended up with no claims to be part of the Soviet scene whatsoever. These were *brodiagi, bichi* [both words meaning vagrants] and *bomzhi*.

Although homelessness in the Soviet Union was ideologically 'invisible', large numbers of people led nomadic lives, especially in peripheral areas of the European North, Siberia and the Far East. Teams of vagrants, losing some members and acquiring others along the way, would go in autumn to float timber on northern rivers, or in spring and summer to participate in geological expeditions or to cut down forests in rural areas. Itinerant migrants would participate in harvesting on collective farms, especially in Central Asia and southern Russia. Physically strong men could get well-paid jobs at the *shabashka*, where people could earn three or four times the average industrial wage. In winter vagrants would come to the towns, where they could survive by doing loading work, collecting and selling empty bottles and sometimes begging (although churches were the only places where begging was semi-tolerated). Some built mud-huts at the construction sites in the Northern and Far Eastern territories, waiting in them until an odd job came up. Others lived by underground hot water pipes.

The true extent of homelessness in Soviet times remains unknown, but it has been claimed that there were about six million vagrants in the Soviet Union in 1989 (Starikov, 1991), while studies conducted in the late 1980s place the number of homeless people west of the Urals at two to two and a half million (Alexeeva, 1993). This estimate is based on the number of people detained by the militia for vagrancy and 'parasitic way of life'. As the militia registered the person each time he or she was brought into the militia station, this statistic is very unreliable.[1]

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[1] The International Association for the Study of Homelessness and Unemployment quoted a figure of one and a half million. In the same years the total number of vagrants ran into 'hundreds of thousands', of whom the militia caught and warned 50,000 (quoted in Matthews, 1993, p.46).

In this chapter I analyse individual paths into homelessness in the 1970s–80s. I do this on the basis of the interviews with people who became homeless in that period. In most of these stories, through a variety of dislocating circumstances – such as the absence or loss of a parental or familial home, incarceration or loss of place in a workers' hostel – people were left without housing and then failed to secure a hold on any sort of accommodation. As explained in the previous chapter, the range of opportunities for 'legitimate' resettlement open to displaced persons was very narrow. There were no public or charitable provisions for homeless people. People could either try to find a job, which provided accommodation, or hope to be supported by their family. Even when either of these options was feasible, the issue of *propiska* had to be negotiated with the company and the local authorities. Alternatively, people could enter the world 'behind the looking-glass', an illicit space of seasonal and temporary jobs at collective farms, forestry works, mining sites and geological expeditions. Failing even that, a person could only be re-housed by the state penitentiary system, starting at militia detention centres and ending with labour camps.

Konstantin: Growing Restlessness

Konstantin was born in 1950 in Sakhalin. At the age of four his mother put him in a children's home. Life there was hard. The home was a tough place, 'one had to stand for oneself'. Konstantin explained that while still in his early teens, he started drinking with his mates. After finishing school he went to a local vocational college. But within a year's time he had committed a petty crime:

> I was young. Young people are often troublemakers. I was not a criminal. Some people specialise in theft and robbery. I am not like this. But I can't walk past anything that's not nailed down.

Because he committed theft in a group, Konstantin received a harsh sentence – five years in labour corrective camps.

After his discharge, Konstantin found a job at a construction site back in his hometown. He lived in a workers' hostel. But the forces of law and order were never far behind. As an ex-convict, he had to obey the rules of *nadzor* [surveillance], report to the militia and stay away from trouble. After being detained by the militia for being drunk and disorderly in public on several occasions (he and his roommates from the hostel were fighting with workers from another hostel), he received a new sentence of one year in a camp for violation of the rules of *nadzor*. After his release he moved from one temporary job to the next and never stayed long in any one place. He continued to drink.

His life became progressively more unsettled. He frequently moved from one place to another, changing jobs and homes. Although he talked about that period as a time of 'romantic' wandering, he accepted that his life had become seriously unhinged. He kept moving between places, which were progressively more peripheral, and the contacts he made were increasingly short-lived.

> I have always had a romantic nature. I like to travel, to look at places. Although I must say, this sounds nice, romantic, but in fact … I was restless. I decided to visit my friend from my first prison. But I got drunk and made a scene at his house. So I had to leave. Then I decided to go to the South, no idea why, and bought a ticket to Alma-Ata.

A travel companion helped him to get a job as a shepherd at a collective farm not far from Alma-Ata. He worked there for four months. But this attempt to get settled also failed. An unattached man and a stranger, he soon came to the attention of the forces of law and order:

> Then the local militiaman got to know that I didn't have *propiska* and they made me leave. I went to Tashkent. I spent several days there, but then I was detained [for drunkenness], once, then a second time. And they gave me a one year sentence for 'vagrancy, begging and parasitic way of life'.

After his release Konstantin moved on to a further circle of displacement. Now he did not even attempt to settle. He has not had an official job or a home since. For a time his life consisted of intermittent periods of *shabashka* and spells in prison for vagrancy. Since his most recent imprisonment in 1989, he led an itinerant way of life for three years, migrating between Moscow and Sakhalin (sometimes his trips were paid for by militia detention centres, who gave him the tickets to go to his former place of residence), with the occasional trip to St. Petersburg. He admitted, though, that he did not see much of Moscow and St. Petersburg and on his trips he only saw the environs of the train stations where he stayed. For the two years before our interview in 1994, he stayed in Moscow, begging and collecting empty bottles for sale. 'I had so many plans to get work in Moscow, but I spent all the money I earned on drink.'

Konstantin's story illustrates how social dislocation – in his case precipitated by alcohol addiction and a criminal record – overlaps with spatial unsettlement. His main 'biographical line' (Ogien, 1995) is similar to many other narratives of Soviet and also post-Soviet homelessness. In a typical spiral of displacement, having no home of his own, he begins by living in workers' hostels. Then, after leaving a job because of a conflict at work, he moves to stay with friends and acquaintances. After that he drifts away to the social and territorial periphery, trying to settle among ever stranger people in ever stranger places, until he loses any options of independent settlement altogether and moves beyond the periphery, entering a closely supervised spiral of detention centres and labour camps, before finally being thrown onto the streets. Having identified him as 'out-of-place', the Soviet forces of law and

order accelerate his displacement by extracting him from the territories where he attempts to anchor himself. He moves on again, now speeding towards permanently becoming a *bomzh*.

Lyuba: A Troublemaker

Lyuba was born in Ufa in Bashkiria in 1956. An orphan, she also grew up in a children's home. 'I was very rough when I was young. The home's management even wanted to send me to the children's corrective colony. I was only saved by a local militia captain.'

But her luck in avoiding the penitentiary system did not last long. At the age of sixteen Lyuba was imprisoned for one year for violation of the passport regime. 'I knew a woman in the Moscow *oblast*. She wanted to adopt me, but when I came to stay with her I started drinking and lost my passport.' The woman, who by then had changed her mind about adoption, reported Lyuba to the militia for having no passport and leading an 'asocial way of life'. After her release Lyuba worked at a factory in Ufa, but was soon fired for hooliganism: 'I kept getting into fights and the militia asked me to move out of the city.' She then went to Ivanovo to work at a local textile factory, but was fired again. After that Lyuba lived for three months illegally in a workers' hostel. She continued to get into fights and was then reported to the militia by the hostel management and imprisoned for 'parasitism'. After a year in a labour camp, she went back to Ivanovo where the factory director, who had herself grown up in a children's home, took her back. But she kept having trouble with people in the hostel, quarrelling and fighting with her roommates. People complained to the militia that Lyuba continued being a troublemaker.

'The local militiaman was a good guy. He said, "I'll give you twenty-four hours to leave this town." And I left and went back to Bashkiria.' There Lyuba started working as a painter at a construction site and again got a place in a workers' hostel. But she soon came into conflict with the management:

> I was supposed to have my summer leave in June as had been agreed before, but they didn't let me because there was too much work, and I decided to show my character again, and resigned.

Having lost her job, she had to leave the hostel. So she moved to stay with her childhood friend. But she could not find a new job, had no money and, together with the friend, was soon arrested for burglary. From then on she alternated between spells in prison, staying with occasional boyfriends and doing temporary jobs. In 1992 she decided to go to Moscow to stay with her friend from prison, who had promised to register her in her flat. But the local militia refused to give her even a temporary permit. Since then she has lived at train stations, earning her living by cleaning the carriages and occasional stealing.

Lyuba's story reveals progressive displacement through an increasingly chaotic work and housing situation. Like Konstantin, Lyuba eventually lost all chance of

preserving work-provided accommodation, a chance that was already slim because of her criminal record. Her troublesome behaviour and failure to conform to the norms of collective work and communal living had dramatic consequences because she had no firm housing rights at the hostel or anywhere else. Without those she had no legal rights of settlement. As there were no welfare provisions outside employment and family in Soviet society, and she had neither, she was almost destined to drift into homelessness. She tried to rely on friendship ties, or sympathetic representatives of authority, but these were not enough to achieve her re-placement and reinstate her in society. The forces of law and order reacted to her problems by moving her around or placing her into penitentiaries.

Forces of Destiny or Individual Choices?

The 'main biographical lines' in Konstantin's and Lyuba's stories are similar. Their lives began with the trauma of separation from their parents and being put in children's homes. This scenario was quite common in biographical accounts. Although some interviewees went to institutions because they were orphans or had been abandoned by their parent(s) at birth, many were sent into care later in their childhood, even in their teens. The ease with which some parents abandoned their children to the state was not just the result of personal attitudes and choices. Khlinovskaya Rockhill (2004) described the Soviet state's policy of encouraging or even forcing parents (especially working single mothers from poorer backgrounds) to place their children into care if they were deemed to be incapable of looking after them because of low income. This policy stemmed from the state's objective of achieving the maximum control over children's socialisation, including where necessary taking over family responsibilities, especially when the family was considered unfit to look after children. Provision of institutional care also compensated for a lack of specific social policies directed at low-income parents outside employment-based measures.

Feelings of grief from the early loss of parents; resentment at injustices committed towards them; and especially the traumatic experiences of being transplanted from a parental home to the inhospitable and tough grounds of an institution, were often invoked in the explanations of disadvantages faced in later life. Upbringing in a children's home was also often blamed for later problems in communication with other people and for bad temper or inability to trust others.

Like many other people who became homeless (including those who had families), Konstantin and Lyuba could not rely on their close relatives and were deprived of a safety net to protect them against life's pitfalls and risks. Their social milieu – childhood friends (often poor and unsettled themselves), former prison inmates, occasional acquaintances met in various travels and adventures – could not provide much help. Although many interviewees tried to use such networks to get support in some of the desperate situations in which they found themselves, their meagre resources did not match the greatness of their need. Also, whether because of unresolved personal issues and troubles, the influence of alcohol, or the desire

to assert themselves by 'taking a stand', they often exhausted the patience of those on whom they depended by getting into fights and creating 'scenes' and this cost them dearly.

People on the move wanted to escape and hoped to change their lives for the better. But for this class of migrants – single, low skilled, compromised in one way or another – mobility was fraught with dangers. The problems that a person in almost any culture would face while trying to start a new life in an unfamiliar environment could pale into insignificance when compared to the obstacles to legitimate settlement created by the Soviet regime.

Both Konstantin and Lyuba struggled to overcome the limitations they faced. Like many men in similar circumstances, Konstantin attempted to survive on the margins of society through *shabashka*. Like many women, Lyuba, having exhausted employment solutions, tried to get support from friends or male partners. In the end however, both of them incorporated and internalised the limitations they faced and resigned themselves to living their lives on the margins of society.

There was certainly no predestination for Konstantin or Lyuba, or any other individual to end up on the streets. For every person who became homeless there must have been thousands who in similar circumstances managed to stay on their feet and preserve their hold on some sort of domesticity. This was accepted by many homeless interviewees, who believed that their tragedy stemmed from some flaw in their character, that they showed themselves to be weak, indecisive and incapable of fighting for themselves. Had they behaved differently at some key turning points of their lives, they would not have been out there, without a home. As Konstantin put it:

> Everything depends on the individual. Some [homeless] people complain about our life, but others did manage to live in society … Not everybody lives in such misery. I didn't manage, so now I am out and about begging.

Yet the interviews also show how, after becoming dislocated, the range of possibilities of finding a place in society for these individuals became progressively narrower, and their responses adjusted to their increasingly marginal social position. The choices they made were not irrational in the given circumstances. On the contrary, they reflected the horizon of possibilities open to them. Their own dispositions also changed as a result of changes in their social situation. We are dealing here with the formation of a specific habitus, a set of dispositions that could be defined, according to Bourdieu, as 'social necessity turned into nature' (1992, p.69). For example, moving out and looking for better luck elsewhere could become a habitual response to problems. For some this response could be dated back to their early years. Restlessness, an inability to trust others or to hold on to stable relations, or attempts to search for escape in alcohol, developed alongside physical exclusion and the reduction of possibilities for meaningful existence in society.

Power and Borders

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Soviet system of residential regulation aimed to prevent unorganised mobility. The militia engaged in close surveillance of newcomers to the territories under its control (particularly those with prison records) and in many areas settlement was prohibited. In the absence of any institutions of social work and charity, the role that the militia played in the lives of 'unfixed' people was huge. Sometimes the militia would provide support with job placement. More often, however, its disciplinary practices included persecution and repression.

People's strategies in dealing with officialdom often involved attempting to escape to less regulated and policed spaces. But this did not solve the problem in the long run and a confrontation with the full might of the system was almost inevitable.

Meetings along the way with agents of authority were often highly significant and life-affecting. Many interviewees told stories about 'kind' militiamen, or doctors in reformatories for alcoholics, whose actions saved them at least temporarily from some impending catastrophe. At the same time, even this occasional experience of encounters with kind representatives of authority, who acted out of good will towards the displaced vagrants and *bomzhi*, did not undermine a firm belief that the system was against them.

This explains why so many of the people interviewed made only half-hearted attempts, or no attempt at all, to defend their housing rights or rights of settlement even in situations when the law was seemingly on their side. Many recounted how they abandoned their housing in fear of persecution, or did not even try to claim their rights when this housing was illegally occupied.

It is easy to brush off such behaviour as irrational, as a manifestation of cultural incompetence – and indeed many Russian human rights defenders do just that when they talk about the inability of present day homeless citizens to 'stand up for themselves' in similar situations. Yet such behaviour is the product of a power system that aimed – and, as we shall see, still aims – to produce precisely these behavioural outcomes. While interviewees firmly believed that people like them needed to stay as far as possible from the authorities, this was not because they were ignorant, but because their social experience (which included both their personal experience and the experience of people like them) had shown them that they were not just likely to lose out, but that things might actually turn out for the worse if they began to demand their rights. Here is the story of Nikolai, who was born in Moscow in 1944:

> My father died in the war and my mother re-married in 1953. I was brought up by my stepfather. When I left school in 1959, I went to work. Before joining the army, I worked at a bakery. Then, military service for three and a half years. I got married and continued to work. At thirty, I got a [prison] sentence. I was stealing suitcases at train stations – and I got caught. I spent a year in prison, learned the carpenter's craft. When I came back from prison in 1976, I didn't manage to get registered in Moscow within a [prescribed] month's time, so I decided to go to Kazakhstan for a year. I worked at a state farm. Then I returned and got registered with my mother. Everything was fine until she died in 1990. That's when it all began.

I exchanged the two-room flat in which we had lived for a one-room flat and got a sum of money on top. At that time, I found myself a partner. I moved in with her and lived at her place for half a year. I did not bother registering in my new flat and the money soon ended. Then my mates called me and invited me to a *shabashka*. I locked the door of my flat and just went. On the train, my money and documents were stolen, including my passport and the documents for my flat. There was a new district militiaman and, since I had no documents, he eventually made me leave.

When I arrived in Moscow, I found my flat sealed off. I didn't try to find out who had done it straightaway. What could I have done – break in? One person can kill somebody and walk free and another will walk into his own flat and be put in jail…In the first place, I had nowhere to live, so how could I go around to the militia when I didn't even have a place to sleep? Before that…I was twice in the LTP [*lechebno-trudovoi profilaktorii* – a reformatory centre for alcoholics]. I went back to it. I knew one of the doctors; he was in charge of the ward. I came to him, we talked and he said: 'What am I to do with you? I'll get you admitted, I won't send you away. Spend a year here – who cares?' That's how I spent the whole of 1991 – in a narcological clinic. Now it too is being closed down. They shut down the ward and I had to leave.

I went to my old militia station near my former home. The deputy head of the section was a nice guy. He said: 'What were you thinking? Very well, I'll help you.' He gave me an administrative detention for fifteen days so I had somewhere to stay, but then, while he was absent, they kicked me out after two days. I went to the militia detention centre [for people without fixed abode]. There, they advised me to get a copy of the documents for the flat from the Housing Exchange Bureau. When I got there, the woman at the desk took one look at me and said that if she ever saw me again, she'd call the militia. So I just had to leave. At last, I went to my new district's militia station. Their deputy head offered to put a few unsolved cases on my head as a one-way ticket to prison. All I could do was go back to the detention centre.

One might say that Nikolai lost his housing as a result of his own ill-considered decisions. Instead of coming back to Moscow to prove his residency rights as soon as possible, Nikolai stays at a collective farm for the whole year. Having come back, he sees that the door of his flat is sealed. Perhaps he had a chance to get the flat back, but instead he goes to a narcological hospital for another year. Then he finds himself on the streets and finally does try to confirm his rights, but having encountered illegal refusal, he makes no further attempts. This behaviour might seem strange to educated observers who have never been in serious trouble with the police and who believe that the forces of law and order should defend their legitimate rights. But it is totally logical for a person who understands his position as being powerless; who knows that the odds are stacked against him; and who in the course of his life has learned to avoid any dealings with the authorities.

　　Nikolai's story expresses recognition of a social structure and its constraints. It shows an acceptance of the conditions imposed by authority and power, and conformity to social expectations. While people like Nikolai attempt to resist the system (for example, by trying to move beyond its boundaries and find subsistence in the informal economy), they also help to reinforce this order by accepting their

marginality. Nikolai accepts his displacement and, by his behaviour, contributes to the ongoing reproduction of the existing social order (Bourdieu, 1977, Giddens, 1979, 1984, Sewell, 1992).

Another story provides a further example of how, through a series of confrontations with the forces of law and order, a person can gradually come to accept greater degrees of displacement and eventually resign himself to life as a total outsider. Vasilii was born in 1952 in a village in Bryansk *oblast*. His mother was a teacher of literature in a local school, but she died when he was 16, and he never knew his father. A literate and articulate man, Vasilii did very well at school and has retained his love of books throughout his life.

After finishing school he was sent, with other Komsomol members, to build an automobile plant – 'Rostselmash' – in Rostov. There he also enrolled in an evening course at a university. But then misfortune struck. He got into a fight with men who, he claims, were harassing a woman on the street. One of these men was the son of the Rostov city procurator. Vasilii received a three-year prison sentence. Upon release he decided to go back to work at the plant:

> I went to the director of the workers' hostel. She was a good woman. She said, 'You can have a room here, but you will have to make arrangements about the passport and *propiska* yourself.' I tried, but you know the system we used to have. The militia said: 'You have had a conviction.' I said: 'What's the difference? They gave me housing and work, just get me a passport and *propiska* and I don't need anything else from you.' Well, they did not allow me to get a *propiska* in Rostov.

Vasilii went home to Bryansk to get a passport:

> I was lucky to come across a good militia captain. He promised, 'You will get a passport in three days.' And really, in three days I got my passport.

He then went to a workers' settlement in Smolensk *oblast* to work at a brick factory. By then he had decided to avoid big cities. He got married and lived for seven years with his wife and son in a flat provided by the factory. But eventually problems appeared in their relationship and Vasilii decided to leave. It was 1987. He described how he went to Moscow *oblast* where he knew he could find a job at a brick factory:

> I got de-registered from Smolensk *oblast* and came here to Odintsovo. I went to the personnel department at the factory. They looked in my labour book and said: 'We will give you a job'. This was Friday and I asked them: 'Please let me into a dormitory, so that I do not have to roam the streets'. But they did not want to … All right, I slept one night at the Kiev station [in central Moscow]. The next night I went to the Kursk station. You see, I did not have a *propiska* stamped in my passport and I could not get into a hotel. At the train station where I tried to spend the night, the militia start checking documents. I told them: 'I am getting a job. On Monday I am going to the brick factory.' They checked my documents and they were fine. And you know, all this started to get on my nerves. One man checks my documents, and then another comes in an hour, then another. You just get to sleep and they wake you up again: 'Your documents. Where are you going? What are

you doing here?' You explain to them. Well, I just had enough of this. I got mental. I went to the Kiev station in the morning and took a ticket to Kiev, and from there to Konotop. There was a woman in Smolensk *oblast*; she was from Konotop. She used to go there from time to time. That's why. This is a small town, very nice, very pretty. I went to one motor building plant, but they could not give me housing.

Eventually he lost his passport and was taken to a militia detention centre. While waiting to get his passport there, he met other people who decided to form a team and start working in *shabashki*. With the help of an old friend from the Rostov plant he managed to get *propiska* in a village in Rostov *oblast*. Although he did not live there, because of the *propiska* he could get temporary accommodation in hotels or rent flats during winter, while in summer he lived at the collective farms where he worked.

Vasilii's example shows how not only direct repression, which he did encounter earlier, but the simple awareness of being under constant scrutiny (at the train station in Moscow) can affect and change a person's behaviour. In his case it led to a decision to avoid tightly controlled areas and move to those territories where people like him were more 'in place', before opting out of mainstream society altogether and moving into the informal economy. As a skilled worker without a drinking habit, Vasilii would have been in high demand by Soviet enterprises. And yet he eventually excluded himself from the formal economy and society, accepted his displacement and did not attempt to function in the 'settled' world anymore.

In Vasilii's case, self-expulsion resulted from his perception of being 'out of place', of being illegitimately present in the territories where he wanted to settle. The power system, which can be defined through its 'ability to achieve foreseen and intended effects' in a social interaction (Wrong, 1979), achieved its aims. It set the borders and made those people who did not belong to the territory resign themselves to leading their lives outside these borders.

Community and (Self) Expulsion

The stories of homeless people show that although the militia played an active part in instilling 'a sense of one's place' into social miscreants and in their removal from the territories where they did not belong, their actions often followed a campaign for expulsion – initiated by local residents, hostel dwellers, co-workers or even family members. People could also remove themselves following a 'successful' communal campaign, without waiting for the forces of law and order to descend on them. Such campaigns would aim to construct them as out-of-place, as 'polluting' the territory they inhabited.

This construction could be the result of a physical condition – for example, if he or she had developed a contagious disease. Vadim became a *shabashnik* [transient worker] after he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. A divorced man, he had lived with his mother, but decided to move out after the diagnosis:

And you know, after tuberculosis, my life changed. Even my own mother told me: 'Eat separately from me.' All my friends eventually found out … I weighed my options and set off to roam.

Then his mother died and, because he was absent from home for more than six months while he worked at *shabashka*, he lost his housing.

Vadim's case represents involuntary 'pollution', but in his voluntary displacement he has acknowledged his inherent blame. His physical displacement occurred as a result of a danger he presented to the community. Indeed, as Mary Douglas (1966) points out:

A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone … Pollution can be committed intentionally, but intention is irrelevant to its effect … (p.114)

Often expulsion involves the construction of a 'moral' case against a person, that of an unacceptable moral condition: a parasite, a scrounger or an irredeemable alcoholic. The disciplinary practices of the Soviet community served to impose a stigma on this condition and provided some institutionalised routes towards expulsion and self-expulsion.

Mutual surveillance of people in residential units, and reporting on those whose behaviour was out of order, was actively promoted by the Soviet regime from its early days (Kotkin, 1995, p.196). From the end of the 1950s, with Khrushchev's policies to 'stimulate mass participation in corrective efforts' (Kharkhordin, 1999, p.284), *tovarishcheskie sudy* [comrades' courts] became a key institution of community correction.[2] These courts, which were supposed to be established (at least on paper) in every residential unit, could refer violators of the norms of socialist communal life to the authorities for punishment.

Places of work were the other location where people could be subjected to the rituals of exclusion. According to the 1961 statute on *tovarishcheskie sudy*, comrades' courts also had to be established at every enterprise and organisation employing more than 50 people. These courts could recommend expelling troublemakers from their state apartments upon the request of their neighbours (Juviler, 1976, p.81). There was no obligation on the authorities to re-house the evicted persons.

Eviction required a whole set of tactics aimed at constructing a deviant out of a co-resident in order then to eject him or her from the territory. These tactics of communal and police correction included written complaints from the neighbours to the militia, monitoring by the militia of the offending person, processing by the comrades' courts, or banishment to a reformatory for alcoholics. The potency of communal reprobation and the fear of the forces of law could be so powerful that people could actually pre-empt eviction and abandon their housing.

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2   In one form or another, comrades' courts existed from 1918 (Kharkhordin, 1999, p.284).

Galina was born in Novosibirsk in 1954. She was abandoned by her parents in her early childhood and was brought up by her aunt. At school she did well and was a Young Pioneer and Komsomol activist. She wanted to train as a nurse, but left her studies after failing her exams. Then she decided to become a telephone operator and got a job at the city's central telephone exchange.

In those times, such a position, although not very well paid, was associated with some power of 'favour and exchange' (Ledeneva, 1998). To make an intercity telephone call, one had often to wait for hours and a telephone operator could, if she wanted to, speed the process up:

> I worked there for four years and then ... I worked with people; I would arrange a call for somebody, people would get me chocolate or a bottle. I started to drink. People at work began to notice, to gossip. It was difficult for me to get up in the morning. I was often late for work. Eventually, I was asked to leave.

From then on, her working career went downhill. First she worked as a car dispatcher at a mechanical plant. Galina says that after two and a half years:

> The same thing happened, vodka started to ruin me. I controlled 62 drivers. I was giving them work, disbursing special coupons for petrol… It all started again. They would offer me drink.

Alcohol was an important mediator in Soviet working relations. Foremen, dispatchers, team leaders and junior managers would frequently be bribed with alcohol by workers looking for special favours.

> Galina: My boss started to hint that I should leave. I left, and after that I changed jobs several times, worked as a cleaner, a postal worker, was a labourer at a collective farm. By then I didn't even try to get a good job.
> Interviewer: Why did you leave all these jobs?
> Galina: I could not stay in one place. I didn't like the jobs. I used to feel like a convict going to work. I used to like my job when I was a telephone operator. But nobody would have taken me back. I didn't behave myself properly; I would have been ashamed even to turn up there. And also, it was hard to get such a job at that time. People were holding onto these places. I could not compete with them.

Galina was by then resigned, because of her alcohol habit and unstable work record, to unsatisfying low-paid jobs at the lowest levels of the Soviet work hierarchy. But she carried another stigma. Her situation as an unmarried woman who seemed unable to settle down was also a matter for reprobation. She accepted the blame for this as well. Galina had a small flat, which she inherited from her mother. There she lived with a succession of boyfriends:

> To be honest, I had many men – because I had my own flat. This was not love, I didn't even like them much, but there had to be a man. A woman on her own is a bad person. But then the neighbours started to have it in for me. Really, I did not behave like a decent

person. I had music on till late. I alienated everyone and then this campaign against me started, that I was an alcoholic and a parasite. I was packed off to the reformatory for alcoholics. Before that people felt sorry for me. Our local militiaman would come and say: 'Galina, you are a not bad woman, pull yourself together, find yourself a guy, don't drink, you have a flat, you have everything in your flat, you are a young woman.' But no, I wouldn't listen.

A single woman, known to abuse alcohol, with a disorganised personal life, Galina finally brought the wrath of her neighbours onto herself. One neighbour, with whose son she had started a relationship, began a fierce campaign against her and wrote several letters to the militia reporting her as a persistent alcoholic violating *normy sotsialisticheskogo obshchezhytiia* [the norms of 'socialist communal life']. The militia had to act. Galina was sent to a reformatory for alcoholics for a year and a half. When she came back she did not stay at home for long. Her friends told her that 'if the militia has its eye on you, it is better to leave'. Galina left her flat, 'de-registered' (thereby losing her housing rights) and went to live with a man she had met on the train when she was travelling back from the reformatory.

> Galina: By then I was scared of the militia, I was already frightened of them. I thought they could put me in jail.
> Interviewer: But why?
> Galina: Everybody says: if the militia has hooked on to you, this is just the beginning.
> Interviewer: Who said this?
> Galina: Everybody. My friends told me: 'That's it, Galina. They're on to you – this is only the beginning. You have to move out of here.' That's what I did. I abandoned my flat.

Galina later learned that, after she left, her flat was occupied by a local militia officer (proving that her friends' worries were not unfounded – the militia often had an additional material interest in evicting people). When her new boyfriend suddenly died and she had to leave the house where they lived (as they did not marry and she did not have a *propiska*), she became homeless.

Galina's expulsion from the community was very much associated with her being a single unmarried woman, whose ambiguous status and intrusive behaviour endangered the local social order. The militia tolerated her for a while, as they did not see her initially as 'social waste' that needed to be cleansed from the territory. She had her own flat, no criminal record, a job, and was young and could still get married and thus stabilised. However, in the end, when in reaction to the neighbours' complaints, the militia sent her to a reformatory for alcoholics, they effectively designated her future as that of an outcast. As Mary Douglas (1966) remarked when discussing how people are placed on the margins of society through institutionalisation:

> A man who has spent any time 'inside' is put permanently 'outside' the ordinary social system. With no rite of aggregation, which can definitively assign him to a new position, he remains in the margins, with other people who are similarly credited with unreliability,

unteachability, and all the wrong social attitudes. The same goes for persons who have entered institutions for the treatment of mental disease. So long as they stay at home their peculiar behaviour is accepted. Once they have been formally classified as abnormal, the very same behaviour is counted intolerable' (p.98).

From then on Galina was 'marked' as an outsider and it was the power of local opinion that confirmed what she might have feared herself: that she would not be tolerated anymore, and could now well be relegated to the further circles of the Soviet hell, with prison very probably the next destination. In fear she evicted herself and lost her home. Galina's story shows that she read the 'script' and understood what the future held for her. She made an attempt to escape from her destiny by moving away, but she stood little chance. A single woman, an alcoholic and ex-convict (time spent in a reformatory had the same consequences for one's prospects of employment as a prison record), without *propiska*, and without support from family and friends, she had very limited opportunities to get a job and new housing. She did not have the chances usually available to men in her position – to do hard physical jobs at the *shabashka*, or become a labourer in forestry works or at geological expeditions. Essentially, Galina had to rely on men she met on her travels to give her shelter, and this insecure strategy meant that she ended up alternating between life on the streets, spells with occasional 'boyfriends' and time spent in militia detention centres. By the time we met her in 1994, she had fully accepted her identity as a homeless street woman.

Each homeless interviewee's story was of course unique, and yet the dramas of displacement played out along similar lines, with the agents of Soviet social control, including the forces of local opinion, constantly present on the scene. As the unsettled lives of homeless people represented, using Mary Douglas's expression, 'the challenge of aberrant forms' (1966, p.40) to the Soviet social system, the latter assessed, monitored, labelled as dangerous, separated and excluded, and ultimately succeeded in producing their desired outcomes: turning mobility into immobility, attempts to change one's destiny into docility, and moving 'polluting' individuals beyond the boundaries of organised domesticity.

The Soviet *Lumpenproletariat*?

The story of how people moved towards street homelessness can also be read as a story of progressive social exclusion, or, to use a term sometimes employed by French sociologists, déclassement, the accumulation of social disadvantages, progressive social disqualification. This concept implies the 'treatment of social exclusion as a temporal process, in the sense of the making of superfluousness' (see the discussion in Littlewood and Herkommer, 1999, p.14).

We can see that this process in the Soviet Union combined many of the same individual experiences that characterise déclassement in modern Western societies – the inability to get a job and housing, a loss of support from family and friends, a lack of effective assistance from public welfare institutions, as well as mental

and physical reactions such as alcoholism, depression and apathy (cf.: Littlwood and Herkommer, 1999, Sennett, 1998, Wilson, 1987). While the technologies of power used by the Soviet state in relation to this excluded population were well beyond the reach of modern capitalist states, whose repressive apparatus could not stigmatise, segregate and incarcerate the excluded population with the same ease and efficiency, there were many similarities in the experiences that could lead to exclusion.

It has been argued that progressive social exclusion disproportionately affects people who are already members of disadvantaged groups, with specific work and family circumstances (Paugam, 1996). What we see in the case of the Soviet homeless déclassée, is that a particular substratum of the population – low-skilled workers – were indeed vulnerable to social disqualification, particularly those with tenuous attachments to workplaces, or whose families were either too weak or disorganised to support them in hardship or were even non-existent (as in the case of children placed in children's homes). In such cases critical events, such as a prison sentence, loss of a job or migration, could lead immediately or through a chain of consequent displacements, to homelessness and the inability to re-place themselves in society. Although there is no data that would allow us to examine the incidence of homelessness among the different classes of the Soviet population, the militia research on vagrants and parasites (discussed in the previous chapter) and my own interviews seem to indicate that this was indeed the case. Many had also already been labelled as 'delinquents' by the legal system, or by their neighbours (as in the case of disreputable single women) and many had spells in the reformatories for alcoholics.

Members of other vulnerable groups could become homeless. Elderly people could lose their housing after the deaths of relatives or friends with whom they had stayed without registration. Some left their homes because of abuse by their children and relatives. Others became homeless when they had to vacate workers' hostels on retirement. Although they were legally entitled to places in old people's homes, they either found that such places were limited, or they preferred the streets and train stations to what were often appalling state facilities for residential care.[3] Disabled people without relatives to look after them, or who were thrown out of their homes, could also join the ranks of vagrants and tramps. In his famous documentary, 'Hands', filmed in Kishinev in 1987-92, Arthur Aristakisian showed such disabled people, young and old, surviving in the city slums together with street prostitutes and beggars.

It would be wrong to regard all these people as members of some passive underclass, a homogenous group of socially and culturally isolated individuals.[4] As I have shown, these people had different circumstances and ways of accommodation to their exclusion. Many attempted to re-connect to mainstream society through

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3   Only privileged social categories (such as the old Bolsheviks or old actors) had special retirement homes with better living conditions.

4   On the modern concept of underclass in the Western context see, for example, Murray, 1984, and the critique in Gans, 1995, Hills et al., 2002.

employment or by asking their friends and relatives for assistance. Some managed to move in and out of homelessness (for example, working in *shabashkis* and forest rafting, then finding legitimate employment, then having to survive at train stations, cellars and underground water pipes, then moving back into informal employment and so on).

Judging from my interviews, their values and motivations were not profoundly different from those of the Soviet working classes from whose ranks they tended to come. Their narratives betrayed guilt for not managing to live like other 'normal' people. Many were proud of their success at school and recounted the dreams they used to have about getting interesting and fulfilling jobs – a common aspiration of the Soviet working classes (Yanowitch, 1985). They were out-and-out Soviet people – exemplified perhaps best by Tamara, one of my homeless interviewees, whose fondest memory was of being photographed, as a young girl, for the glossy 'Soviet Union' magazine, together with her family. Her parents had been given a new spacious flat in a building constructed for factory workers, and this photo was used as a piece of Soviet propaganda in the magazine, which was published for the foreign market. Tamara later made the trajectory from being a member of an exemplary Soviet family to the Soviet 'idler and parasite' class when, after moving to another town to work at a factory and settling in a workers' hostel, she was fired from her job for 'numerous violations of the socialist labour discipline' and moved to the space of train stations, homes of occasional partners and detention centres. Nevertheless, she was fully committed to the view that the Soviet state did its best for its people, and only punished those who deserved it.

At the same time, after losing their places in the dominant social-spatial structure, such people were constructed as being outside the social order. We can say that they represented for the Soviet system its *lumpenproletariat*, the excess population. Marx saw such a population as an inescapable feature of capitalist society (see the discussion in Morris, 1993, pp.13–16). State socialism had its own *lumpenproletariat*, which it never named as such, but which was inscribed through many different codes, such as *deklassirovannye elementy* (déclassée elements), 'asocial elements', 'parasites', 'idlers', vagrants and beggars. Similarly to Marx, the Soviet authorities viewed this *lumpenproletariat* as a collection of social degenerates, isolated from the forces of production and incapable of having working-class consciousness. The *lumpenproletariat* was an ever-present problem, and the Soviet state, for all its ideology of assistance, cooperation and social responsibility, was ready to descend on them with all its might. If they crossed the border between the 'inside' and 'outside', between the space of residential permits and labour books and the chaos of unorganised existence beyond it, they were to be reined in.

The life chances of the Soviet *lumpenproletariat*, and their treatment, differed from those of other groups in Soviet society, who were able to explore spaces of escape and even perceived themselves to be 'outside' the system but who, thanks to their class position and effective performance of the rules and rituals of belonging, also managed to stay 'inside'. This latter group included, for example, people from educated intelligentsia backgrounds, who worked in boiler rooms, warehouses,

building maintenance services, looking for refuge from the shackles of official Soviet collectivism. By moving into these marginal positions, they traded economic reward and occupational status for greater freedom. Besides, this was legitimate employment that secured an appropriate record in a labour book and protected one from being labelled a 'parasite'. Alexei Yurchak notes that people who occupied these positions were both outside and inside the Soviet order, carving their living in those spaces of greater autonomy that the system itself provided (2005, p.153).

Another example is Soviet hippies. The hippy movement first appeared in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1960s. The cult of the 'road' was an important part of this subculture and the hippies often led transient lifestyles. As Tatiana Shchepanskaia, a Russian anthropologist who studied hippies and other members of *Sistema* [a conglomerate of youth subcultures] explained, *Sistema* members explored 'the spaces of escape – from the pressure of adults, civilisation, state and other power, lies etc.' (2004, p.62). They would travel the country, making journeys to the Far East or the South of Russia, the Caucasus and Crimea, go into forests, or descend into caves or underground tunnels. They would find temporary abode at train stations or airports. Some groups occupied cellars or lofts in blocks of flats, or settled in dilapidated buildings. They were apprehended by the militia and placed in detention centres, but as they tended to have *propiska* in their passports and a place of work or study they were likely to be sent to their place of permanent residence. The processing system that sucked in homeless alcoholics, ex-prisoners, the assorted poor and unemployable, was not really interested in people who were grounded in their own social milieu back home.

The discourse of exclusion or even homelessness was an important part of this subculture. And yet possession of mainstream cultural capital and the ability to prove one's place in the social system was vital, both for the subsistence strategies of the hippies and other *Sistema* members and for their relationship with the forces of law and order. In their travels, a common way to get food and money was to *askat'* [ask] – to appeal to passers-by for help using specific communicative skills. They were very proud of their ability to talk people into offering help and sometimes invitations to spend a night in their house. By the way they presented themselves, they could avoid persecution by the authorities. Shchepanskaia quotes a story of traveller who, together with his friend, was detained by an armed guard when they attempted to talk to a train driver in Magadan (to persuade him to give them a 'lift' on his train). Their conformist behaviour – 'we willingly complied with his orders' – and effective use of their narrative skills – 'we told him the story of our travels' – led to a dramatic change in the guard's attitude, to the extent that he not only allowed them to travel but also offered them food and drink (2004, p.95). Most probably what influenced the guard was their successful self-representation as cultured, 'normal' people, not 'fallen' tramps and vagrants, who were well known in that part of the country.

Even those people who did not have official employment or place of study could be spared a confrontation with the disciplinary might of the state – provided that they had housing and relatives who were willing to support them. Boris, the fifty-two year old homeless beggar who we interviewed in Moscow in 1995, lost his housing

in 1990. He described how, back in his twenties and thirties, when he lived with his parents, he led a 'merry' life and did not work or study. Despite this blatant violation of 'socialist morality' and anti-parasite legislation, he never had any problems with the Soviet regime, thanks to his mother who had a powerful and lucrative position in the city market:

> My district militia officer – may he live for a hundred years – was a wise and a noble man. He understood me. He understood that as my mother was director of Moskvoretskii market, I did not have to work. Why would I work, bust my gut, while I live in peace and quiet and I don't rob or steal from anybody?

As Boris had, at least at the time, a place in the system (although secured not by his, but by his mother's social position), his misdemeanours were overlooked. The Soviet state reserved its energy mostly for its *lumpenproletariat*, who could not be fixed through their workplaces or families.

Here Soviet society was no different from other societies. Bauman notes that 'the reality of borders' is for most of the time 'a class-stratified phenomenon', and that both in the past and today the elites, the wealthy and the powerful 'made little of the same borders that held fast for lesser folk' (1998, pp.12-3). We can say perhaps that not only state and administrative borders, but also the borders between the permitted and the proscribed, formal and informal, are policed more heavily in the cases of déclassé individuals than in the cases of those people who have a recognised place in the class system. While it was true that people excluded from the formal Soviet labour market could find opportunities in the informal economy, such as work at *shabashka* or other temporary and seasonal labour, there was always a high risk of penalty. Representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia or skilled workers – such as hippies, private teachers, dentists who avoided paying tax, car mechanics (moonlighting on the side of a formal job) – seem to be have been able to manipulate the system and find a scope for freedom more easily than the Soviet *lumpenproletariat*.

Soviet vagrants were not equipped with opportunities to play the system. Lacking official identities, having no well-placed relatives, being taught by their whole life experiences to fear and avoid the authorities, they tried to find less policed spaces in which to survive. But in this way they could only speed up their displacement and bring themselves truly outside the Soviet order.

Chapter 6

Homelessness in Post-Soviet Russia

Since the start of market reforms in the early 1990s, the figure of a *bomzh* – a homeless person in dirty clothes, begging in the metro underpasses, at churches, lying on park benches or scavenging near train stations – has become omnipresent in Russian cities and towns. While previously the existence of homelessness was more or less on the periphery of public view, it has now become an obvious and glaring reality. The *bomzh* as a social type – an 'immobile' street homeless person, condemned to eking out scraps of living in the city space – has become the predominant representative of the homeless population. *Brodiagi* and *bichi* [vagrants] have almost disappeared from everyday social categorisations and from popular mythology, and non-street homeless people (people who stay with friends, relatives or in rented accommodation) remain almost completely invisible.

This new visibility of street homeless people can partly be explained by the end of criminal prosecution for vagrancy and parasitism. From the beginning of the 1990s, persecution of 'vagrants and parasites' stopped and the Law of the Russian Federation 'On Amendments and Additions to the Criminal Code of the RSFSR' of 5 December 1991 abolished articles 209 and 198. Prohibition of settlement in specific territories also ceased to exist.[1] In 1990, a resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR removed all the limitations on *propiska* for ex-prisoners.

Homeless people can now try more openly to make their living in the city economy. Their predominantly urban location has also been a result of the significant reduction in the opportunities for getting work outside the cities. The labour market that sustained mobile homeless migrants in the Soviet period no longer exists. The great communist construction sites are closed. *Shabashnichestvo*, which played an important role in compensating for the inefficiencies of the Soviet planned economy, is not needed under new market conditions. Unemployment in rural areas and the migration to Russia of qualified people from the former Soviet republics – many of whom settle and look for work in the rural areas (Vitkovskaia, 1998) – mean that homeless workers cannot easily find jobs in agriculture. Homeless interviewees described the new conditions of employment in rural areas as follows: employers come to the train stations, choose those people whom they consider fit for work and

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1   As of 2004, there still remain 47 closed towns belonging to the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Nuclear Industry. Their total population is 1.5 million. According to the Federal Law on Closed Territorial Units, the administration of such units can 'limit the rights of entry, settlements, entrepreneurial activities and the use of real estate' (http://www.hro./org/ngo/about/2004/04/21–1.php).

take them to their farms or rural construction sites for several days. For their labour homeless people get food and shelter and – occasionally – small wages. While *bomzhi* may try to occupy empty country houses out of season, they still have to travel into towns to earn their living.

Migration of homeless people in search of seasonal work is becoming a thing of the past. In some regions of Russia (for example the North Caucasus, Kalmyk Republic and Siberia) the search for work in distant villages is becoming dangerous. There have been many reports in the Russian media of people being put into guarded camps and used as slaves. In the south of Russia (for example in the Rostov and Krasnodar regions) homeless people are harassed by Cossacks, who evict them from the territories under their control.

Cities, on the other hand, provide opportunities for survival. In contrast to rural areas and small provincial towns, the major cities offer *bomzhi* anonymity and, despite harassment by the militia, they can 'last' longer on the streets. They can work informally at urban markets, do auxiliary day jobs at construction sites and earn money by begging, busking and scavenging. In the larger cities they can also now access the facilities of charities – non-existent elsewhere.

The exact number of homeless people in Russia today is unknown. According to the Institute of Socio-Economic Problems of Population of the Russian Academy of Sciences, there are now over four million homeless people in Russia.[2] A similar figure is given by the Ministry of Interior, who base it on the (as yet unpublished) survey of homelessness conducted as part of the 2002 population census. However, the census data on homelessness is highly unreliable. Many reports, both by census participants and charities, testified to the less than systematic attempts to identify and interview the homeless population (Karlinsky, 2004).

Nor are there reliable data on the numbers of homeless people in the two cities where the homeless population is the largest, Moscow and St. Petersburg. Different sources provide their own widely differing estimates, which to a large degree depend on who is considered to be homeless (for example street homeless people; people who lack registration in the city; those with insecure accommodation; people who stay with relatives and friends and so on). The Ministry of Health and Social Development suggests that there are thirty thousand homeless people in Moscow. The Ministry of Interior gives a figure of one hundred thousand for Moscow and around fifty thousand in St. Petersburg. These estimates relate to a very broad definition of homelessness – i.e. individuals who have no registration at their place of residence. The Ministry of Interior estimates the number of street homeless people in Moscow as fifteen thousand, with eight thousand in St. Petersburg.[3]

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2   This figure is difficult to interpret as no clear definition of 'homelessness' is offered.

3   NGOs remain the main source of information on homeless people. Médecins sans Frontières' database (1995-2003) contains some data on their clients, predominantly street homeless people in Moscow. St.Peterburg's Nochlezhka has a database of their clients (street and non-street homeless people). In both organisations the clients are not assigned individual

In this chapter I will outline some of the key structural processes that have led to homelessness from the beginning of the 1990s to the first half of the 2000s.

Changes in Enterprise-based Systems

The lives of most Soviet people, from the population of the smallest settlements to the major cities, used to centre around their industrial or agricultural enterprises. Not only professional and work relationships, but everyday routines and neighbour and kin networks were mediated by the enterprise. Housing, kindergartens, vocational colleges, health care and leisure facilities often belonged to the same company. The enterprise thus encompassed the everyday lives of workers and their families.

The enterprise-based community could justifiably be regarded as the key locus of Soviet society and as its most important structure. Market reforms brought the mass collapse and deliberate destruction of this structure as newly privatised enterprises very quickly rid themselves of their earlier social responsibilities. With economic restructuring, most enterprises soon ceased to be sources of stable employment and, especially in the 1990s, even of a living wage.

This disintegration of enterprise-based social systems has seriously affected the fortunes of the industrial and agricultural sub-proletariat, low-skilled and auxiliary workers, who in Soviet times were particularly dependent upon enterprise housing provision, welfare and stable conditions of employment. Although underemployment rather than open unemployment has been a particular feature of the Russian transition (OECD, 2001), some categories of workers were disproportionately affected by lay-offs. The privatisation of state enterprises brought with it a sharp differentiation between the positions of skilled and low-skilled workers, as many welfare provisions, which used to support the low-skilled, were severely cut or abolished entirely. Individually, reserve workers were vulnerable to displacement in the Soviet days as well, but collectively they had a stable and legitimate place in the Soviet system of employment. Under the new market conditions, enterprises obviously first rid themselves of reserve workers. Following the first wave of redundancies this category – so important to the inefficient Soviet planned economy – had almost disappeared (Kozina and Borisov, 1996, Zaslavsky, 2001). Now unemployed and no longer 'fixed' to enterprise-based social systems, these people became vulnerable to homelessness.

The transformation of enterprise–based social systems has also affected low-skilled and marginal workers in another way. With the start of the market reforms, enterprises got rid of their housing stock. In 1990, 42 per cent of total housing in Russia belonged to enterprises. By 1998 enterprise housing comprised only 6 per

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identifications, opening up a possibility of duplication of individual records. The data indicates a relatively high level of educational attainment among the homeless. 12% of Nochlezhka's clients in 2001 had completed, or partially completed, higher education and, according to MSF data, in 2001 7% of homeless persons had higher education.

cent of total housing (TsSR, 2000). Most workers' hostels were closed and the workers who had lived in these hostels with temporary registration were thrown on to the streets.

Workers can no longer rely on the nearly free housing provision linked to their jobs and, in the event of displacement from their place of employment, family and community, the weakness of their economic position makes them vulnerable to homelessness. Among others, this affects people trying to move into cities to escape the impact of the collapse in agricultural employment. The level of unemployment in rural areas is 50 per cent higher than in urban areas and average incomes in the countryside are 30 per cent lower than those of urban workers. Between 1992 and 1996, the real incomes of rural workers decreased by 70 per cent (Yel'chaninov, 2001, p.133). Yet coming into towns, workers can no longer rely on provision of enterprise-based housing, as they could in Soviet times, and their low incomes and financial insecurity makes their housing tenure in the rented sector precarious.

Thirty-year old Raisa, interviewed in 2004, came to Moscow from a village in Vladimir region with her six-year-old son Sergei. The collective farm where she used to work has all but collapsed. Raisa was not paid for over a year. She explained that she came to Moscow to look for a better-paid job with a place in a hostel, but this proved to be impossible. Raisa was eventually hired as a trader in a kiosk, even though she did not have a residential permit in Moscow. She found a room to rent and her son went to school. But then she lost her job and they had to move to live at train stations. Since then Raisa and Sergei have migrated between the train stations, cheap hotels and rented flats, supporting themselves by street trade and occasional jobs in the market. In the last year, Raisa and Sergei lived apart from each other – although they managed to see each other occasionally. Raisa, by now a heavy drinker, would sometimes find a place to stay – with occasional boyfriends and drinking partners, but nobody was willing to take her in with her son. Little Sergei lived with a group of street kids in a cellar in central Moscow.

The Migration Flux

The collapse of the Soviet system resulted in a large-scale population displacement. Social and economic instability, the rise of nationalism in the former Soviet republics, ethnic conflict and war all put large masses of people on the move.

The flows of internal migration within Russia have been significant. While there is no exact data on its extent, the 2002 population census has established that, since 1989, 10.2 million people have moved between the seven federal *okrugs* [administrative regions] in Russia (this data does not cover migration within the *okrugs*). As a prosperous city with almost no unemployment, Moscow in particular has been a magnet for migrants. The 2002 census showed that the city population grew by 117 per cent compared to 1989, reaching 10.4 million people.[4] This new

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4   The 2002 census data is published on www.gks.ru. This figure relates to everybody who declared that they were resident in Moscow to the census workers (including Russian and

internal migration was largely disorganised, as opposed to the Soviet *limit* and labour mobilisation. Only in a few cases – environmental disasters, the movement of population from the European North, Eastern Siberia and Far East and closing down of some non-profitable coalmines – were special public programmes of resettlement set up.

Large-scale processes of displacement have also followed from the break-up of the Soviet Union. Millions of Russophones fled from discrimination and economic collapse in the newly independent republics. Several waves of migration resulted from conflict and war in the Caucasus and Central Asia. These processes coincided with the return of previously deported peoples and labour migration to Russia from – in particular – Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan. At the same time Russia has become a part of the global migration system and turned into the final, or transit, destination for hundreds of thousands of migrants from the 'far abroad', including refugees, undocumented migrants and temporary economic migrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East and, in particular, such countries as Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Vietnam (Flynn, 2004). Altogether, according to the data of the 2002 census, about eleven million people arrived in Russia between 1989 and 2002 – 7.6 per cent of the current Russian population.

Russia is a country which, as Moya Flynn puts it, prioritises 'the protection of the borders of the nation/state and individual regions over the rights and securities of the individual migrant' (2004, p.155). The rules of registration remain the key instrument for regulation of migration. Strict registration rules apply to all migrants, Russian and non-Russian citizens. Currently all new arrivals from within the Russian Federation have to register at their place of temporary abode within three months (non-Russian citizens have three days). Failing that, they have no right to legal employment, benefits, pensions or access to non-emergency public health care.

Registration is not an easy problem to resolve. Unless people have relatives or friends who agree to register them (or they have money to buy their own housing), they need to find a landlord who would agree to register them temporarily. This can prove very hard, as potential landlords fear that it would be more difficult to get rid of the registered tenants if they wanted to. In a survey of migrants conducted in Omsk in 2002, every fifth person reported that they did not have housing where they could register (Zaionchkovskaia, 2003, p.551). Lacking registration at their places of residence, millions of Russian citizens live like illegal immigrants in their own country and, particularly where it coincides with losing their means of subsistence and support from their immediate circle, this makes them vulnerable to street homelessness.

Displaced persons from Chechnya suffer from especially acute discrimination in many areas, including access to housing. The militia routinely refuse to register ex-residents of Chechnya at their place of stay and conduct illegal checks, detentions, entries into apartments, arrests and evictions (Memorial, 2002).

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non-Russian citizens).

Zara left Chechnya in 1999 with her three children. At first she found a place to stay with a friend from Chechnya who managed to settle in Moscow. The local militia refused her registration at the place where they stayed (using the pretext that there were too many people living in the property – at the time this violated the Moscow city rules of registration). The husband of the woman who took Zara and the children in demanded that they move out. With the help of Caritas [a Catholic charity], Zara has managed to send her two children to distant relatives in Ingushetia [an autonomous republic in the Caucasus neighbouring Chechnya]. But the relatives did not want to accept Zara and her new baby as well. With a small baby, Zara was unable to work, even illegally. Because of her lack of registration she could not receive child benefit or any other benefits. In spring 2000, she and her baby moved to the train station, surviving on petty handouts and help from charities.

For people who do not have Russian citizenship, migration into Russia creates even greater vulnerability, particularly when these migrants are single and do not have a support network in the territories where they try to find work and housing. Russian legislation on refugees and forced migrants has changed throughout the 1990s, with increasing restrictions on settlement (see Flynn, 2004). The 2002 federal law 'On Citizenship of the Russian Federation' deprived former citizens of the Soviet Union of automatic entitlement to Russian citizenship. Migrants are now only eligible to apply for citizenship if they had lived in Russia for more than five years. Even those ex-Soviet citizens who had been Russian residents in the past can have problems in acquiring Russian citizenship. According to the 2002 law, individuals need to prove that they had *propiska* on the territory of Russia on 6 February 1992. For many people who had left their homes and migrated to other territories, finding such documents has become an insurmountable obstacle. People who for one reason or another de-registered from their dwelling before 1992 and have not been able to find a place to register since; migrants from the territories that have since become zones of war and conflict (such as Chechnya); and ex-prisoners who were in detention at the beginning of 1990s, may all find themselves with no access to the documents required to confirm their entitlement to citizenship.

Even when migrants and refugees have the legal right to public assistance, they may be denied them by the local authorities. Moscow has an extremely harsh registration regime. People with the status of forced migrants and refugees, having moved to Moscow, are often denied registration by the city Migration Service. Those placed in hotels on arrival in Moscow are frequently evicted afterwards. Having lost their residence, they are then denied re-registration by the Moscow Migration service and consequently they lose their legal status of 'forced migrants' and all entitlements to public support (Titov, 2004).

Illegal immigrant workers – often called *gastarbaitery* [guest workers] – are among the most vulnerable categories of migrants. From 2002, according to the federal law 'On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation', every immigrant needs to have a migration card and a work permit in order to get employment. Employers who hire foreign workers have to apply for special permission from the authorities. In practice, though, most foreign workers (from 70

per cent to 90 per cent, according to different estimates) are employed illegally. They tend to work in construction and the service sector, where employees are often paid cash at the end of the working day. *Gastarbaitery*, who are employed without official contracts, are prone to extreme exploitation and abuse. Employers may refuse to pay, sometimes justifying this by citing unsatisfactory work, sometimes without any justification. They may also take away their passports.

Having lost their jobs, *gastarbaitery* can become unable (due to the loss of money and documents) to go back home. Even if they have some savings, they may be ashamed to go back and so stay on, hoping to earn money somewhere else. Without a place to live, often without documents, and without any rights to accommodation in shelters for homeless people (which only accept Russian citizens), they move on to cellars, lofts and train stations. According to representatives of agencies working with homeless people, this fate often affects Uzbek, Tajik and Azerbaijani and, more rarely, Georgian and Ukrainian workers.

Twenty-two year old Sharif from Uzbekistan came to Moscow in the summer of 2004 to look for work. He found a job at a construction site and his employers, who took him on without an official contract, also gave him a place in a hostel on the outskirts of Moscow. He worked just for food and shelter. Money was promised at the end of the job. Two weeks before I met him in the spring of 2005 – in the Moscow City Centre for Medical and Social Assistance to Persons Without Fixed Abode – he was violently beaten up by skinheads on the street. He could not continue to work. By then, people from his village who had come with him to Moscow for work had already left for home. He had no one to turn to. His Russian was very poor. Since he lost his job, he has been spending nights with other street homeless people in cellars and lofts of buildings. While he was on the streets his passport was stolen. He hoped to be admitted to a hospital and stay there until he was better and could work again. But he was refused a referral to a hospital by doctors in the centre, who judged him not to be sufficiently ill (hospitals do not want to accept homeless patients and the centre's workers try to minimise the number of referrals). The social worker at the centre told him that the only way for him to get to a hospital was to fall down on the street pretending to be unconscious and hope that passers-by would call an ambulance.

The prospect of deportation – which illegal immigrants generally try to avoid at all costs – may be the last solution for people who have lost all chances of finding a means of subsistence. But this solution too may be closed to undocumented migrants. If people do not have their passports, then the courts cannot process their deportation cases and militia centres for deportations, where the illegal immigrants with passports are detained before being sent home, would not accept them. People may attempt to obtain a travel document from their country's consular department, but even this would require some means of identification, which many of them do not have. Illegal immigrants from the 'far abroad' (countries outside the former Soviet Union) are usually referred to their embassies for repatriation. But if their passport was lost or stolen, people cannot even be deported. Also, some embassies do not have sufficient funds to cover the repatriation costs of their citizens. This can

have disastrous consequences. For example, the staff of the Moscow City Centre for Medical and Social Assistance to Persons Without Fixed Abode told me about several homeless people from Nigeria who once came there for help. They lived in forests outside of Moscow in summer and in cellars and lofts of the city in winter. Although they wanted to go back to their country, they could not get their embassy to send them back home.

Migrants constitute the majority of homeless people in Moscow. As Médecins sans Frontières' data suggests, in 2001 of all the people who came to its Moscow office for medical and other help, 47 per cent had migrated to the capital from other Russian regions, 17 per cent were from Moscow, 20 per cent were from Moscow region and 16 per cent arrived from other CIS states, mainly Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Kazakhstan (Gutov and Nikiforov, 2001, p.120).[5]

Imprisonment

Although criminal punishment for vagrancy and parasitism and violation of the passport rules is now a thing of the past, imprisonment continues to be one of the key factors leading to homelessness. The rate of incarceration in Russia remains very high, currently comprising 0.6 per cent of the country's population and, along with that of the US, is the highest in the world (Andrienko, 2004). Incarceration, especially with lengthy sentences, creates a powerful dynamic of uprooting. Prisoners may lose their housing while in detention or be unable to get their housing rights back on release, faced with administrative obstacles or the unwillingness of their relatives and current or former spouses to register them. Furthermore, their attempts to find places to live, to get jobs and simply to move about without fear of militia persecution may be undermined by their lack of documents. Legally, ex-convicts are entitled to a set of documents upon release, including a passport and a labour book (or, if incapable of work, a disabled person's book or a pension book). However, this is rarely implemented and people tend to leave prison with only a certificate of their release from the penitentiary (Karlinsky, 2004).

This leaves them, along with the need to build a new life after their release from a penal institution, having to negotiate the issue of new documents with the Kafkaesque Russian bureaucracy. In the meantime they also have to find the means of survival, all without their passports and registration records – a virtually impossible task, even with jobs available in the informal economic sector. Some cities (such as Moscow and St. Petersburg) have provisions allowing the local authorities to give housing to those ex-prisoners who have lost their accommodation in these cities as a result of

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5   Unlike Moscow, homeless people in St. Petersburg are predominantly former local residents. According the data from *Nochlezhka* ['*Shelter*', a major NGO that provides assistance to homeless people] 83 per cent of its clients have lived in the city for more than 10 years, and 63 per cent were born in the city. 95 per cent were ethnic Russians (Karlinsky, 2002).

incarceration. But to get such housing again requires them to go through complex bureaucratic procedures, with the outcome uncertain.[6]

While previously the State *Prokuratura* had administrative levers to make enterprises give jobs to ex-prisoners, under market conditions companies simply refuse to employ people with a criminal record. Public programmes of social adaptation for people released from imprisonment, which could provide support for their employment and professional education and training, are in practice closed to unregistered ex-prisoners, as registration at a place of residence or at a place of stay is a prerequisite for inclusion in such programmes (Karlinsky, 2004).

In the community, ex-prisoners encounter routine repression from the militia – a practice that carries on from the Soviet era. Militia officers often destroy their documents in order to make them leave the territory.

> Interviewer: Did you ever come into contact with the militia?
> Interviewee: Yes, I was cleaning the carriages [at the train station], I was wearing an old coat and I got picked up. The militiaman called me up and said: 'Where are your documents?' And I said that I had a letter of release from the prison. So he told me that a letter's not a document, that I could have found it somewhere. Then he tore it up and told me to get out of his sight. (Slava, twenty-five years old)

Even the State *Prokuratura*, although still technically obliged to assist ex-prisoners in finding employment, can seek to avoid or export the issue:

> I got my passport in the militia detention centre last year [the interview took place in 1996 when the militia detention centre still existed]. I took a train ticket to Kursk. I wanted to find a job in a village somewhere. But people like me get chased away from everywhere. I asked in one place, in another place … Then I went to the district Prokuratura and said that I had been trying to get a job for eight or ten days in Kursk oblast. And the official tells me: 'I will be frank with you – get out of here.' I asked: 'Why?' He said: 'All right, we will get you a job, but you would get such treatment from the militia, especially as you have a prison record, that you would end up leaving of your own accord.' (Maxim, fifty years old)

According to my contacts in NGOs working with homeless people, it is common practice for the militia to 'frame' homeless ex-prisoners by planting drugs or weapons on them in order to close cases where the real culprit has not been found.

Grigorii was born in 1962. His mother and father were deprived of their parental rights, but together with his two brothers he was entitled to their family flat. In 1993, Grigorii was imprisoned for three years for causing grievous bodily harm. After release in 1996 he went back home, but the local militia officer started to put pressure on him, demanding that he becomes an undercover agent. He refused and, as a result, could not get back his passport and *propiska*. He worked for several months on a farm in Kaluga region, but then the militia discovered that he did not have documents and forced him to go away. He later lost his leg in a road accident.

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6   In Omsk and St. Petersburg homeless ex-prisoners can stay in specials hostels.

Now he lives in a shelter in Moscow and earns his living by begging. He does not want to go back to live with his brothers as both are married and he does not want to be a burden.

The proportion of ex-prisoners in the homeless population remains high, fluctuating with mass amnesties. Between 1995 and 2003, from 19 to 30 per cent of homeless people who were clients of Médecins sans Frontières in Moscow were ex-prisoners (Médecins sans Frontières, 2004, p.37). In St. Petersburg 50 per cent of the clients of *Nochlezhka* in 2001 were ex-prisoners (*Na Dne*, 2002).

Breakdown of Family Ties

As in many countries, in Russia the breakdown of families – through family conflict, divorce and separation, eviction by relatives or family violence – is a common cause of homelessness. In our interviews, a lack of access to the family home was a contributing cause of homelessness in the majority of cases. If a person loses housing and cannot rely on lasting support from other relatives or friends, or has no money for rented accommodation, he or she risks ending up on the streets. Young people who do not have a family home – care leavers – also face a high risk of homelessness, despite their legal entitlement to free municipal housing.

Stanislav, a thirty year old man from a village in Voronezh region, married a Muscovite and moved in with her. Three months before our interview – on a city street – he had left his home after he and his wife had decided to split up. For a short while he stayed with his friends and then migrated to the train station. The flat belonged to his wife; he only had a temporary registration in it. He is ashamed to go back to his parents in the village and just hopes that things will change.

Zinaida, a fifty-year old woman, was evicted from her Moscow flat by the other family members who used to live with her: her mother, her son and daughter-in-law. She admits that she is a heavy drinker and that her relatives have finally had enough. She now lives in a cellar at the Moscow University, where she used to work as a store-woman. Her former colleagues took pity of her and let her stay there. She earns her living by begging.

Polina, a fifty-year old woman who lived all her life in a village in Kursk region, lost her house after it was burned down by her brothers (who were unhappy that she inherited it after their mother's death). Her only son is now in prison. Since then she has lived for three years at Moscow train stations, begging and selling empty bottles.

Sometimes people have families but are physically unable to get support from them. Combined with a lack of savings and with no access to banking, this inability to obtain resources that could help in the event of an unexpected misfortune may have disastrous consequences. People can be knocked off their feet by seemingly banal circumstances and become unable to get the necessary means to go back home. Several our interviewees described how, on the way home via Moscow, they were robbed of their money and documents (this often happens at train stations). Even when

the victims have relatives and friends back at home, the huge travelling distances in Russia can mean that the sources of support at home become inaccessible. People try to survive, regain their documents and earn enough money to buy tickets, but may ultimately be defeated. With worsening health, depression, an inability to sustain a 'presentable' appearance and increasing immersion in day-to-day survival strategies, a person may soon enter into the process of homelessness, with ever-diminishing chances to leave the streets.

In a situation of acute crisis, and lacking access to social networks, people cannot rely on any substantial public assistance either. Before 2002, militia detention centres helped Russian and CIS citizens to get new documents and buy tickets back home (even though this required people to be locked up in these prison-type centres while their identity was checked). After 2002, the centres were turned into special centres for deportation of illegal immigrants. Now only the militia passport and visa services can issue the new documents, but this requires a lengthy process of searches and militia officers can be reluctant to deal with homeless applicants. No state organisation provides assistance to homeless people with their travel costs back home anymore. The only hope is support from charities. Some people get such help, for example from the Commission on Ecclesiastical and Social Activities at the Moscow Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Commission, however, only helps homeless Russian citizens.

Reform of the Housing Sphere

With the start of housing privatisation, it soon became apparent that transactions in the new and poorly regulated housing market were fraught with danger. After 1992, when the federal law 'On Housing Privatisation' was passed by the State Duma, housing was open to privatisation by residents. Housing in Russia was privatised on a free basis and no legislation allowing restitution of housing to any pre-revolutionary owners has been passed. The change in property rights has been rapid and radical. In June 1990, state housing comprised 67 per cent of all the housing in Russia, 79 per cent of urban housing and from 80 to 90 per cent in big cities such as Moscow, St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk (Starodubrovskaia, 1998). By 1999, 59 per cent of all housing had become private (TsSR, 2000). A housing market was therefore established and people could buy and sell housing without the need to engage in the complex *obmen* [exchange] transactions of the Soviet era. Housing became an asset that people were free to realise and, in conditions where legislative protection was weak and the space for deceit, fraud and crime huge, the first victims of housing privatisation soon appeared on the streets.

Some of these newly homeless people were alcoholics who, needing money to feed their habit, lost their housing without any external 'push'. They either sold it and immediately became homeless, or lost housing in a number of stages, such as first buying a smaller flat, then selling it and moving to a house in a village. In a typical scenario, unable to find any work and finding their new home derelict or

occupied by others, they would leave the village and return to the city in search of subsistence and start living on the streets.

Transactions involving housing, particularly in the first few years of privatisation, were a risky business for anybody. Alcoholic or not, a person could sell the housing and then be left without a home, either because the money was stolen or the bank where he kept it went bankrupt (this was particularly common with the financial default of 1998), or because he had simply spent the money and could not afford to buy a new property.

In some cases people were 'assisted' in their transition to the streets by criminal groups. Criminals sought information (often from the local militia or other residents of the building), about who in the building would be likely to be 'persuaded' to sell their flats. The most obvious candidates were elderly people who lived alone, people with no close relatives in the area, or residents who were known to have an alcohol or drug habit. Having made the acquaintance of such people, members of organised criminal groups would offer them a 'good deal' for selling their housing. After the papers were signed, the buyers would either disappear without meeting their part of the deal (money, or new housing), or give the victims significantly less money than had been agreed, or move them into an uninhabitable property. People could also be forced to sign deals under the threat of violence.

People were also forced to give away their housing in lieu of debts or other unfulfilled obligations. In the 1990s this especially affected small businessmen who got into trouble with their business partners or criminal groups. From 1999, the rules on housing transactions were tightened, so that people who were de-registering from their place of residence had to register somewhere else at the same time. This protected some people against being left without housing altogether. According to the Moscow militia and homelessness agencies, new cases of people who become homeless as a result of criminal fraud are now relatively rare.

Thirty-eight year old Feodor has lived all his life in Moscow. He finished a construction college and became a qualified builder and decorator. In 1997, after the death of his mother, he, his father and his stepmother decided to sell the flat and share the money. However, they became victims of fraudsters, who appropriated the flat, de-registered Feodor and his parents from that address and paid them only a tiny part of the promised money. Since then Feodor has worked at construction jobs without a residence permit. He normally lived at the construction site or stayed with friends in-between jobs. But since the winter of 2004, after damaging his arm at work, he has been unable to do any hard physical labour. Because of his lack of Moscow registration, he could not get other legal jobs. At the time of my interview with him at the Moscow City Centre of Medical and Social Assistance for Persons Without Fixed Abode in May 2005, he was seeking a referral to a shelter – just to stay there until his arm got better and he could start looking for work again. He has now exhausted the good will of his Muscovite friends: 'I understood that I do not have true friends. A true friend is a friend no matter what.' At least as an ex-Muscovite who could prove his past residence in the city, he was allowed into a shelter.

Displacement has also resulted from the post-1992 elimination or reduction of institutional housing: mental hospitals, state orphanages, reformatories for alcoholics. This has also led to homelessness, particularly as the occupants of these institutions were the most poor and vulnerable groups.

The 2005 Housing Code: Opening the Gates to 'The New Homelessness'?

While privatisation of housing was the first major step in liberal housing reform, the new Housing Code, which came into effect in March 2005, meant a sea change in housing sphere. The Code put an end to the socialist era entitlements to housing rights at the place of registration and the wide free provision of state housing. Inevitably, new mechanisms of production of homelessness have been launched. The 2005 Housing Code has expanded the number of categories of residents who can be evicted from their dwellings. Residents in social housing who do not pay rent for six months are now liable to eviction on the basis of a court decision (they would be provided with alternative, hostel-type accommodation). Also, if a resident of social housing or a member of his family 'uses the living space inappropriately, or violates systematically the rights and legal interests of the neighbours, or does not keep it in a proper state', they could be liable to eviction through a court decision without being provided with alternative housing. Parents deprived of parental rights can be evicted without being provided with new housing if the court decides that they cannot continue living with their children. People who introduce structural changes to the layout of their housing without official permission and fail to rectify the damage are now also liable to eviction.

While the Soviet housing regime linked registration and the rights of occupancy, housing rights can now only be established through private property or lease. This inevitably leads to vulnerability of those members of households who do not have legal rights to the dwelling – particularly children and spouses who had not been included in property deeds or a lease and who can lose, through divorce for example, their rights to occupy a dwelling. People who take on a mortgage but cannot keep up their payments are liable to eviction, as are members of housing co-operatives who do not pay for their share of the housing stock on time.

All these changes follow the logic of the market reforms and will bring the housing system in Russia closer to those in western capitalist societies. However, the radical changes in housing relations need to be matched by strong welfare provisions for the poorest and most vulnerable. It remains to be seen whether this will be the case. According to the new Housing Code, only people living in derelict buildings, orphans and care leavers and people with certain chronic illnesses will be entitled to be put on the top of the housing lists. No priority is given to already homeless people to receive public housing.

The new Housing Code effectively abolishes the universal right to free housing stipulated in the previous 1983 Code and limits free provision to *maloimushchie* [the poor], who are also entitled to housing subsidies. According to report by *The*

*Moscow Times (*MacGregor, 2004), 4.4 million families were on the waiting list for free public housing in the summer of 2004. Around 40 per cent of them will no longer be eligible under the new definitions of housing need.

Another radical reform, that of the system of housing maintenance, has entailed the abolition of Soviet-era state subsidies for running the housing stock and introduced full payment for maintenance and utilities by occupants. In the Soviet Union rent was extremely cheap and received up to 80-90 per cent subsidy from the state. During the 1990s rent and utilities payments increased very gradually. According to some experts this was part of a deliberate strategy to ease social tensions and prevent social protest (i.e. Starodubrovskaia, 1998). From 1 January 2005, regional governments and local authorities have started to move to a system of payment in full by residents for housing services. This has led to an increase in rent of 15–35 per cent in most regions (Gontmakher, 2005). It seems reasonable to expect that, unless housing subsidies are well-targeted and easily accessible to poor people, we will see a serious increase in new homelessness – with those unable to pay their housing costs eventually being evicted onto the streets.

Chapter 7

Displacement and Paths into Homelessness

In this chapter I look at some individual paths into homelessness in post-Soviet Russia. The cases that I analyse, while unique, represent the key factors which lead people to losing their attachment to places: migration, imprisonment, family break-up, being brought up in care or becoming a victim of housing fraud. The interviews show how, having lost their homes, people try, with varying success, to anchor themselves socially. At the same time, despite their struggle, their position in the social space and the treatment they receive from the agents of power create a powerful dynamic of marginalisation. The in-depth interviews make it possible to see the transformation of the displaced persons' social identities and the complex processes of resistance and adaptation to the status of a disqualified other. Although they are no longer stigmatised as asocial parasites, homeless people are denied social membership because of their lack of residential rights.

When analysing the pathways into homelessness, it is hard to say conclusively where the social ends and the personal begins. I do not endeavour to resolve here the complex issues of structure and agency, nor to present a comprehensive exploration of the causality of individual homelessness. Of greatest interest to me in this chapter are the constraints within which people had to act, and how they understood the causes of their displacement and saw their future prospects. I try to show how people struggled to hold on to their place in society and what the processes through which they lost this place were. I have decided to include in this chapter the stories of people who, at the time of the interviews, still had roofs over their heads, but faced a serious risk of losing their homes, as well as the accounts of those who had already moved onto the streets. In a way, these stories represent a continuum of situations of displacement.

Anton: Unregistered Student

When interviewed in 2001, thirty-year old Anton was a student at the Moscow State University. He came to Moscow from a small town on the Volga and was allocated a room at the university's hostel, where he was also registered. However, he lost his registration when he took time off his studies to go back home after his mother's death. In order to be re-registered in the hostel on his return, he needed to bring a

letter from the military station proving his registration for conscription. At this point, he found himself in an administrative quagmire: he had lost his military registration in Moscow after going back home, but did not get registered in the hometown either because he was planning to return to the university. Now, without military registration, he could not renew his registration in the hostel.

Anton is now forced to rent a room in his old hostel illegally, after his friends helped him to make contact with a 'sympathetic' hostel manager, who agreed to give him a room in exchange for a small gift. Only because of his friends' connections and the goodwill of the hostel manager (coupled with a certain material interest) was he able to find a place to live. Anton feels that he is hanging by a thread:

> [By finding a place in the hostel] I have halfway escaped homelessness. Still, you are nobody without a piece of paper in this life.

His academic supervisor helped him initially by giving him some paid work. Anton also earns money by doing various odd jobs, but his income is insufficient for him to afford private accommodation. Consequently, he lives in constant fear of being discovered as a *nelegal* [an 'illegal'] and losing his room in the hostel. He is afraid to go out onto the streets: 'At any moment I can get stopped by the militia'. In the jobs he does he is paid less than other workers who have registration. As he is not registered in Moscow and does not have obligatory medical insurance, he cannot get medical help. He treats himself when he is ill: 'vodka is the best medicine'.

The lack of secure access to housing and the lack of legal rights instil a profound sense of insecurity in Anton. He understands that his social position is not that far from that of a street homeless person: 'I do not think I am a *bomzh*, but I am homeless. I could be expelled from the hostel at any moment. Even if this does not happen, I will have nowhere to live after I graduate from the university.' Thanks to this perceived kinship, Anthon feels a keen interest in *bomzhi*:

> I know one good *bomzh* at this metro station [Universitet]. He has such bright blue eyes. And he is relatively well dressed. I'm sorry for him – he has not lost his flat because of drink, this was because of the problems with his wife. He is an intellectual person. When I come here, if I see him, we will sit together, have a chat, I'll give him a cigarette. But there are other *bomzhi*; they have hit rock bottom. I think many of them sold their flats to get money for alcohol. And most have already squandered this money on drink.

While alienated from 'settled' Muscovites, Anton feels that *bomzhi* understand his situation:

> You see, people who are busy shopping, mothers running past with heavy bags, even men who are coming home from work, I don't want to try and start a conversation with them. They have their own problems; I understand that they have a lot of concerns. *Bomzhi* have no problems anymore, they can listen. I can talk to them, share my worries, we can chat and have a cigarette together.

At the same time Anton resists his identification with the homeless people. He grounds his identity in the non-street world. His self-esteem and aspirations for the future hinge on his continuing study at the university:

> I have incomplete higher education, this means something and I will find a place for myself in Moscow. But most probably because of a lack of *propiska* my wages will be significantly less. There is discrimination here: I am a *gastarbaiter*… I think that in the end everything will be resolved but at a high cost, both mental and material.

Unlike many street homeless people, he does not internalise the blame for his situation:

> Anton: With a high degree of probability this can happen to anybody. I know many people with the same problem.
> Interviewer: And what is your problem?
> Anton: I have to deal with bureaucrats who push me from one organisation to the other.

In his struggle for life and dignity, Anton felt that he could only rely on himself. A theme which was consistently present in the interviews with Anton and other non-registered migrants was the need for constant personal mobilisation, a realisation that one had to be strong and not to allow oneself to lose ground. For those still holding on to some sort of housing, street homelessness was experienced as a near and frightening reality, which could only be avoided by drawing on all of one's resources. Anton was vividly aware of the threat he faced. He felt that he had to try very hard not to become a *bomzh*. In his account, and in the accounts of other people who risked becoming roofless at any moment, the street emerged as treacherous ground, a swamp where people could easily become submerged. Only by resisting as much as possible could a person avoid losing himself. People felt that they had to keep earning, hold on to their temporary accommodation and fight what, to them, was the blind and irrational power of the Russian bureaucracy. Although they tried to get help from anybody who could offer it, they ultimately realised that theirs was a lonely struggle. Help from friends and relatives could cease. Instead of offering a safety net, the state was always ready to accelerate one's displacement.

For Anton, an educated and articulate young man, it was easier to preserve his attachment to a place in 'settled society' than for the many unskilled migrant workers we interviewed. Despite all the administrative obstacles, his chances of getting jobs in the informal market were relatively good. He still had a place at the university and was included in network of friendship ties. His academic advisor was able to give him valuable support. And yet his position was highly vulnerable. He lacked any support from his family. At any moment he could be evicted from his hostel. As he did not have a legitimate attachment to a place of residence, his whole social existence was threatened.

Anton realised that displacement had undermined his social worth, but he hoped that by accumulating economic resources he would be able to overcome his

disadvantages. He wanted to be able eventually to organise his own firm and start earning good money – then the problems of residential permit and housing would be resolved – 'it is possible to buy everything these days'.

Pyotr: A Refugee

Forty-four year old Pyotr, interviewed in 1995 in an NGO ('Citizen's Assistance'), was born in Uzbekistan. He was an ethnic Russian and a university graduate. His only document was an old Soviet passport. Although he did not take Uzbek citizenship, he had no Russian citizenship either.

Before the break-up of the Soviet Union, Pyotr worked for a number of different organisations. In his last job in Uzbekistan he was head of the computing department in one of the ministries. When the market reforms started, Pyotr opened a car repair co-operative. But his business ran into trouble, as the Uzbek economy was very unstable and the demand for services was low. 'Generally, it was hard to work there. There was a very high inflation rate. The bank could not return my money… When we left, the average salary there was two dollars a month.'

While attempts to earn money by setting up a business proved futile, opportunities to get a job in the public sector in newly independent Uzbekistan also became progressively more limited because of ethnic discrimination against non-Uzbeks. As an ethnic Russian, Pyotr could not find a well-paid job. Relations within his family soured. His Uzbek wife started putting a great deal of pressure on him to earn more money.

> I could not provide for her, because the Uzbeks in Tashkent are fairly rich, they hold all the highly paid positions. I couldn't get such a position because I am not an Uzbek. They introduced a condition – knowledge of the language. That is why I decided to start a co-operative. But this did not work out. My wife threw me out of the flat. She also sold my garage. I went to a lawyer, but he said he could not do anything against the Uzbeks. I decided to leave, because I understood that there were no prospects for me there. I understood that I could not own any property there; I could not have a house or build anything for myself. They only gave plots of land to Uzbeks. And those Russians who already had *dachas* were being robbed by their Uzbek neighbours who claimed that this was Uzbek soil and the produce from that soil belonged to them. There was a mass exodus. I saw that people I knew kept disappearing one by one. I decided to leave to save what I had. By that time I only had my car. I had to abandon all my [car repair] equipment. I put all I could into the car, clothes, food, and went to Moscow together with a Russian female friend. This woman – she had relatives in Moscow, they gave us some assistance at first. I also found the refugee committee. They gave me legal advice how to get a refugee status. I tried to act on this advice, but failed.

For over a year Pyotr and his girlfriend lived in a Moscow suburb. He managed to find a job, but it was way below his qualification.

Interviewer: How did the Muscovites treat you?

Pyotr: Muscovites always try to cheat you, make money out of you.

Interviewer: Did you receive any special treatment because you were a refugee?

Pyotr: But nobody knew I was a refugee, I told everybody I was a Muscovite.

Interviewer: And what about those who knew?

Pyotr: Mostly, these were problems with work. I tried to get a job straight away, but nobody wanted to take me: 'Ah, you are a refugee, no, we don't need refugees. We need people with registration.' I say: 'All right, you take someone with registration; he will get drunk like a pig and just sleep through work all day. I am a refugee, I never drink, you can see that I'm an educated person; I am able and willing to work.' Furthermore, I always insisted that the refugees, the people that consciously chose to leave, aren't just roaming alcoholics but valuable people who want to do something meaningful. They are people with initiative who can make a positive contribution. But they prefer to take people who have *propiska* rather than a conscience. They accept ordinary thieves. And then when these people steal from work, or blow all their money on drink, the employers say: 'Well, these things happen.' But they won't accept refugees because they say that if they can't track you, they can't trust you. You're already seen as a potential criminal. I feel like I've just been released from prison.

After arriving in Moscow, Pyotr and his girlfriend slept in the car. They then found a woman who let them live at her *dacha* – a derelict house with a sunken roof – for a very low rent. He considers himself lucky, as the *dacha* might have saved them from having to sleep on the streets:

If we'd rented a flat, we would have to pay huge sums of money. I don't know if I could bear that. The winter was very hard. The car was set on fire by hooligans. There was no work, no money. My girlfriend still can't find a job.

Not long before our interview, Pyotr found a job as a security guard for a construction company. He got that job because he was still able to project certain respectability during the interview:

My boss took me on immediately as a shift leader. We talked and he understood from my conversation that I was a qualified person. He called other specialists; they also listened to me and said that he should hire me. They don't take just anybody.

But he was later demoted due to his lack of residency rights:

I could have worked there as an accountant … But I was demoted even from a head of shift. Their head of personnel came and said: 'I will demote you. You don't have a registration. You will be an ordinary guard.' He decided to play safe. So they demoted me. If not for the lack of *propiska*, I would have had a good job by now.

Pyotr's only hope to obtain registration is to buy the house where he lives. Now that he has a job, he could save the money to do it. But he is worried because even if he does buy the property, he will not be able to get registered in a derelict building:

'Lots of people were ruined through this, they paid the money and then it turned out to be in vain.'

His other dream is to emigrate, but he cannot get a passport for foreign travel without a *propiska* (although there is no legislation prohibiting the issue of passports to people without registration, the bureaucratic hurdles here are virtually insurmountable).

Pyotr doesn't use the services of homelessness charities. He regards it as beneath his dignity. At the same time he has a keen interest in the situation of other refugees and migrants (he talked about his other refugee friends who were in a similar position and about his contacts with Azerbaijani and Armenian migrants). Like Anton, he is also interested in street homeless people, although he explains how he was rebuked by a homeless man who thought that he was a competitor for a bowl of soup:

> I saw the Salvation Army handing out food to the *bomzhi*. I walked up to them to have a look. When the man serving out food turned around he had a black eye. I realised that he was a *bomzh* himself. So he said to me in plain Russian: 'You needn't have come here. You're too well-dressed.'

Pyotr, whose own livelihood hangs by a thread, says it is very important to him to be able to help other people:

> I am well-off enough. I could be helping them [the street homeless]. That's why I also do voluntary work in the refugee committee – they gave me moral support, so I'm helping them out with car repairs and computer work.

While work is an area of exploitation and discrimination, his personal relations with people, friends and neighbours have become the key area where his exclusion can be overcome. He believes that the greatest contradiction in his situation is that he is deprived of a legal existence and he lacks any rights as a citizen. At the same time he is capable of participating in society not just through work, but through helping other people.

> Now I am reassessing my values. Now the top priority isn't financial success, but relations with other people. I help people. I feel that I can help them. Although it would seem that I'm the one who should be asking for help. I'm helping other refugees. I saw how single women where I live suffer with bad plumbing and the like. I always help people and I don't ask for money. My neighbours, mostly old women, come to me and I help them, and they also help me in any way they can, mostly with advice.

However, the social ties which are created in the immediate milieu, and the human worth achieved through helping those who are in some respects worse-off, are not enough to compensate for the lack of an official identity and outright persecution by the state. No state agency would give Pyotr any assistance. Migration services do not accept that they have any responsibility for people like him:

They refused to talk to me. They said: 'We have an instruction not to talk to foreigners. Let them write to us or do whatever they want, we do not respond. We only talk to citizens of Russia.'

The militia can stop or detain him at any moment:

Because I work in security, our local force does not touch me. If I did not work, they would put me in a detention centre and then deport me. I see them stopping people on the streets and making arrests or demanding a fine.

Loss of his job, or deportation following a routine militia check on the streets, could result in Pyotr's world going to pieces:

My position these days is the same as that of a prisoner, as if I got out from the *zona* [a slang term for the Russian prison system]. I have practically no rights. I would not be able to achieve anything. I've realised that it is the same here as in Uzbekistan.

Like all illegal migrants who struggle to make ends meet and cannot afford private medicine, Pyotr and his girlfriend worry about getting ill. They use folk remedies and in winter they drench themselves with cold water outdoors in order to strengthen their immune systems. But Pyotr still feels very vulnerable:

I cut my finger and it got infected. I went to a polyclinic and they said: 'Bring us your passport with a registration permit.' I said: 'Please give me some disinfectant. I will pay you.' They said: 'Bring us your passport first.' My girlfriend and me then cured my finger ourselves, by putting a plantain leaf on the wound. But what if I have a serious illness, like appendicitis? I could well die. But some people say, if something serious happens, they would not let me die. Perhaps they would take me into a hospital?

Pyotr feels betrayed by society. His attempts to build a 'decent' life by being an honest, hardworking and responsible citizen have been undermined, first by nationalistic policies and economic collapse in Uzbekistan and then by administrative regulations in Russia. He cannot understand what he did wrong, how he earned his place as an outcast:

I tried to live by their laws. I did not break the law, did not steal, did not kill. I was an A-grade pupil at school. I graduated from university with distinction. I worked, I made a career. And then it turned out that I should have done the exact opposite … This is what kills me – when I experience problems that are outside my control. I plan my life carefully and then everything goes to hell because of some bureaucrat's decisions, like it is with *propiska*. People say: 'You are not registered here. You are an idiot. Go away.'

But Pyotr does not give up. He believes in his capacity to overcome the odds that are stacked against him. He feels that he is competent and intelligent enough to be needed by society. He says that his main strategy now is: 'to increase intellectual and economic capital'. If he managed to get property in Moscow or in the Moscow suburbs, then he would be protected.

Pyotr has so far evaded street homelessness. He does not drink. His health has been relatively good. He possesses personal skills, education and qualifications that make him culturally acceptable to those agents in 'settled society', who have control over resources and power. He has been able to enter into lasting relationships with landlords and employers and has so far avoided persecution from the militia. At the NGO where he does voluntary work he is treated not as a drop-out who can only be given charitable help, but as an equal. He may be able to rely on the social network that he has managed to build during his life in Moscow in case of trouble. At the same time his life also hangs by a thread. If he falls ill and is unable to work, he may well end up on the streets.

Anton and Pyotr are not roofless, and have both managed to get by economically, yet both also experienced a profound change in their social identities because of displacement. Their position in social space was devalued by their lack of territorial rights. They faced discrimination from employers and insecurity of housing tenure. They lived in fear of the militia and employed various strategies of disguise to avoid persecution. The spectre of street homelessness presents itself as a constant, near and almost tangible reality.

Ludmila: An Illegal Worker

Ludmila, a thirty-seven year old woman from Tver', had been expelled from a women workers' hostel in Moscow after she gave birth to a child. Her partner retained his place in a men's hostel, but they were not allowed to live together. We interviewed her in 1995. She earned her living by selling flowers in the metro underpass and struggled to keep up her payments for the privately rented room where she lived together with her little daughter. While her partner helped out at first, he eventually distanced himself. Her landlady, a lonely old woman, took pity of her and helped look after her daughter while Ludmila was working. Fortunately for Ludmila, the militia were generally sympathetic to her plight:

> The guys from the militia who work in the metro, they knew that I am without registration, without housing, even that I work without documents. They did not bother me. They said to me: 'Well done, you're holding on, you haven't fallen to *their* level. Just a friendly piece of advice: don't tell anyone … You don't look like a *bomzh* at first sigh t…' They said, 'you are not to blame for anything, and yet you are technically a *bomzh*. So keep quiet.'

Ludmila did not blame the authorities for her situation, having to survive by the skin of her teeth and constantly fearing exposure as a non-registered migrant and a further slide onto the streets: 'I cut ties [with society] myself. I should have fought the hostel administration more vigorously when it began to expel me.'

We interviewed Ludmila in a detention centre, where she came voluntarily in order to get a passport (her previous one was lost by her former employers from the market). She had to spend several days in the cell with other homeless women, as she

waited for militia to conduct all the identity checks. She developed some sympathy towards the women, but resolved never to have anything to do with them when she left, as she could become an object of militia repression by association:

> These girls, while I feel sorry for them – they are normal women, just down on their luck – if I meet one of them somewhere I won't stop. I'll just walk past as if I don't know her. What if a militiaman comes to her … Maybe she's done something ... And because I am standing talking to her, he might think that maybe she hid something at my place…He can just take me away, and while they investigate I will be detained.

We interviewed many such unregistered migrants, people with extremely diverse circumstances but not (yet) street homeless – such as Sonia, a young woman with a small baby who came to Moscow from Kazakhstan to stay with her relatives, but was rejected by them and ended up living at somebody's summer dacha in exchange for looking after it, or a group of Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan stuck for many years in a Moscow hotel (later, I heard, they were evicted from it by the Moscow city authorities). All were very poor. All had periodic problems with militia and lived in a constant fear of getting ill and being unable to afford health care. And for most of them questions about the street homeless people, the *bomzhi*, seemed to hit a raw nerve. They did admit that they shared much in common, having no housing or registration, as well as insufficient income. But the possibility of ending up sleeping at a train station was vehemently resisted by these people. Moving from somebody else's house to a train station meant crossing a crucial border, and they felt had to do everything to avoid this. 'People who have crossed the line' was an expression many of our informants used when speaking about the 'true' homeless.

Similarly, begging was also seen as crossing the line between what was acceptable and unacceptable.

> Interviewer: Does it take a lot of effort not to become homeless?
> Sonia: Yes, not to fall down, I am very much afraid of that.
> Interviewer: Do you think it might be possible that you will beg?
> Sonia: No. Not yet. I hope something will change. I thought about it yesterday. I looked around and thought: shall I find a place and start begging? But I can't, just can't stand there and beg for money. I can't stand the sight of them, those *bomzhi*.

Pavel: Victim of Robbery

While Anton, Pyotr and Ludmila have managed to preserve their access to housing, another migrant, fifty-four year old Pavel, had to 'cross the line' and lived on the streets. We interviewed him in 1994.

Pavel was born and lived most of his life in a big city in Ukraine. A university graduate, he worked for many years as an engineer in various construction companies. He had a flat where he lived with his wife and two daughters. But his relationship with his wife deteriorated and he decided to leave home 'to make things easier'. He assembled a construction team and went to Moscow.

Before Pavel left, he wrote a letter to the housing authority asking them to look after his room in the flat and promising to pay for it regularly on his trips back from Moscow. 'I did this to safeguard myself from any trouble with the authorities over housing. Of course, I forgot that there can be other dangers than the obvious ones.'

Pavel got a contract with a construction company and worked in Moscow for several months. Then, just when he wanted to go back to his own town to recruit more workers for his team, he was mugged in the street. The muggers took his suitcase, money, documents and even his clothes. Pavel went to the militia, but the officers there did not even register the crime. They found him some old clothes and Pavel went to his friends from work to ask for help. They gave him money and clothes and Pavel started working again.

But soon the company terminated his official contract – the Moscow city government had just introduced sanctions for hiring foreign workers without official permission. Pavel moved on to casual employment at various construction sites. He spent most nights at work, but between jobs he sometimes had to sleep at train stations. Having worked like this for a couple of months he decided to go to his brother in Ukraine, who looked after some of his possessions and his money. But misfortune struck again. Near the Kursk train station he was robbed again and lost all his remaining clothes, money and documents. People in companies where he had worked before helped him out again with some old clothes.

At the time of his interview, Pavel was earning money by cleaning the territory of the local market. He wanted to buy himself some decent clothes. But he faced an uphill struggle in his efforts to make himself presentable. He acquired lice while sleeping at the train station. It was hard to him to change his clothes. He was ashamed to go to his friends again to ask for help: 'They would say: "What is up with you? You keep getting into trouble".'

Now Pavel wants to earn enough money to 'look like a decent person and not to smell of the gutter'. Then he hopes to find work, even without documents:

> At my former job I was respected as a good specialist. People who remember me would gladly welcome me back now…But circumstances are such that I cannot let them see me. They remember me as a respectable person, but ever since things went wrong in Moscow…

Asked how he coped with his current situation, Pavel replied:

> Well, the situation is very bizarre, but I can't say that I've experienced a great shock because I've worked through a lot of literature. I sat down, had a cigarette, tried to think things through, to analyse them…through literature I was ready for everything. Jack London, Yaroslav Hasek…That is why I face the future with optimism. Now I have to work to pull myself out and then we'll see.

At the train station he met three men from Ukraine:

They came to look for work and suffered the same fate. Either they were robbed on the way, or here in Moscow. Many people who got into trouble don't know what to do, where to go. Many are confused, many feel lost. Some try to look for work, they run around and don't find anything. But my own problem is to get decent clothes as soon as possible, to look like a normal human being. I see no other problems.

He doesn't want to seek the help of his relatives:

I used to have such a responsible position and social status, that I just do not want this [his current state] to influence the future. I will tell them when I am…a normal person, so to speak.

His priority is to be able to 'disguise' his displacement. Looking dirty and dishevelled, he is incapable of finding work and he also risks being expelled from train stations, where he sometimes sleeps. He attempts to exercise maximum possible control over his appearance. Through using particular signifiers in terms of the presentation of his body, he hopes to be able to return to the recognised forms of social existence. He disapproves of those homeless people who do not make this effort:

The militia beat people. But … I feel awkward when I come into the train station. I try not to show my dirty hands … And if a guy walks into the waiting room dirty, where decent people, foreigners are sitting ... People warn him: 'Don't go there.' And those who go in despite everything – they are beaten of course.

Despite his education and skills, and his network of friends and colleagues in Moscow, Pavel has found himself sleeping on the streets. Like Pyotr, he feels that he is not fully in control of his life. He painfully realises that in Russian society today people lack any protection, and that being a good worker does not safeguard a person from extreme poverty and homelessness. Pavel compares the present-day Moscow with how the city was at the end of the 1970s:

When I worked here before, life was marvellous for a working man. There was enough of everything and there was no violence around, whereas now it's all over the place. Three things shocked me here. Prices, of course, but also street muggings and the enormous number of these *bomzhi*! It was never like this before. Come to the Kursk train station. How many weeping, crying people you'll see there in the morning…

Although Pavel seems to have hit 'rock bottom', he believes that the right attitudes and persistence will allow him to return to the society of 'decent' people.

Nazym: Unregistered Migrant

While Pavel is a relative newcomer to the streets, Nazym has led this life for three years. Nazym was thirty-four years old in 1994 when we interviewed him at the Médecins sans Frontières clinic. He was born in Turkmenistan, but settled in Russia

after serving in the army. He married a Russian woman and went to live with her in a small town in the Saratov oblast. They had a son, but their marriage ended in divorce. Nazym got care of his son (a very rare case in Russia, where the courts almost always give the children to the mother – he explains this by his good character and by the neglect of his wife of her parental responsibilities) and then went on a series of temporary jobs. He worked as a carpenter, a painter and a driver in different towns and villages in the Saratov oblast. His son lived with him in workers' hostels and caravans. By the age of ten, he had only had one year of schooling.

In 1991 Nazym decided to try to get a job at the ZIL automobile plant in Moscow, where he was told it was possible to get a room in a hostel. After having been promised a job and a room, as well as help with a place at a boarding school for his son, Nazym had to spend the weekend at the train station before getting to finalise the arrangements on Monday. But at the train station he was robbed and lost all his money and documents. The militia gave Nazym a document confirming that his passport was stolen at the train station, but he was also told that he had to get a new passport at his place of previous residence. When he came to the town where he used to live, he was told that – as he had lost his registration – he could not be issued with the new documents.

Without documents he could not get a legal job and he was unable to get a room in a hotel or hostel for homeless people. Without a passport, he was unable to get a proper job despite his qualifications. In winter Nazym and his son survive by collecting empty bottles and doing unloading work and other odd jobs. They sleep at train stations and eat at charity canteens. In summer they look for seasonal work: onion harvesting or construction back in the Saratov oblast.

Like Anton, Pyotr and Pavel, Nazym tries very hard to stay on his feet and to keep earning. He does not drink. He looks after his son and he has not abandoned his hope to return to 'settled society'. But he does not have a realistic plan to achieve this. In his opinion, his only hope is to meet a woman with her own housing, who would want a family and would agree to care for his son.

Maria: Fraudulent Housing Sale

Maria, fifty-eight years old woman with a 20-year-old mentally disabled son, was born in Moscow and had worked at a factory as a foreman assistant. We interviewed her in the Médecins sans Frontières' clinic in 1996. She is now retired and widowed – her husband died two years earlier. Soon after his death she agreed to exchange her flat for a room in a communal flat and a lump sum of money (which was never paid). Having moved into the new dwelling, Maria started to get calls from the same people who had organised the exchange, threatening to kill her and her son unless they moved out. They left the communal flat and stayed with friends for some time, before moving out to live in cellars and lofts. Their room in the communal flat is now occupied by somebody else. As in many similar cases, the criminal gang probably targeted her because she was a vulnerable pensioner unlikely to put up a serious fight. She had no family apart from her disabled son.

When Maria became homeless, she went to the militia to ask for help, but they only made half-hearted attempts to investigate. After her neighbours in the communal flat did not open the door to the district militia officer, he made no attempt to take the matter further. Her friends then advised her not to pursue the case. They believed that the militia must have been connected to the criminal gang who robbed her of her property and that, if she pressed on, Maria risked being killed. She and her son now live on the streets. They beg and scavenge for food in rubbish containers: 'the dumpsters are all ours'. As she has a passport and a residence permit (but no housing), she receives a pension and is able to get medical help and periodic access to shelters.

In Maria's case housing fraud led to a rapid descent on to the streets. She could not rely on any serious support from her neighbours and friends. The criminal justice system did not protect her. She was afraid and lacked the confidence and competence to demand her rights. In a scenario similar to that faced by many Soviet victims of displacement, she preferred to accept her homelessness rather than to risk dealing with the militia.

Yuri: Ex-prisoner

Forty-eight year old Yuri was born in Moscow. The interview took place at the Médecins sans Frontières' clinic in 1995. He lost his residential permit and housing back in 1982, when his mother died while he was in prison. After that he had alternated between casual work and further spells in prison. After his latest release (a year before the interview), he returned to Moscow, where he learned that – as a former Moscow resident – he now had the right to a room in a communal flat. He managed to overcome all the bureaucratic hurdles and got the room. But very soon he sold it to his drinking partners, who promised to give him spending money and register him in another flat. However, he received only a small part of the money and was left homeless. He admits that even while he had his room, he spent very little time in it, preferring to hang around with his mates in drinking dens, at train stations, or on the street.

Interviewer: Do you now consider yourself homeless?
Yuri: You see, I'm used to this. I have been like this for a long time. Even if I now had a flat … You see, I would like to go back to prison sometimes, however strange this may seem. Somebody said – a French writer, maybe it was Sartre – that perhaps a person's most vivid memories come from when he experienced hardship or lived in extreme conditions. This was my time…in prison. But also, the penitentiary system, it completely spoils people. It deprives them of the ability to think independently. People who are used to life in a [labour] camp, they cannot adapt to normal life, because they expect to be taken by the hand, led someplace, given work. And if they don't like it, they should be taken somewhere else. Or to a place where everybody knows each other, where people look after each other. But that's not the case here. Here I have to find out about work myself, but I don't know where to start … I would now like to go to work in a forestry company, or with geologists. It would be good to meet a person who would tell me where to go.

Yuri survives by doing odd jobs and by petty stealing – both from passers-by and from street vendors – on his own or together with his mates. Although he has some idea of what he wants to do – become an itinerant labourer – he does not know how to achieve this. In any case his plans are almost certainly doomed to failure, as the labour market which he wants to join has all but ceased to exist.

Although alcohol addiction was obviously an important precipitating factor in Yuri's homelessness, it was arguably the history of imprisonment which drew him to total displacement. His account clearly demonstrates how his lengthy incarceration took him away from stabilising systems of relationships – apart from those available to him in the penitentiary. Even when he got a flat from the local authorities, he was unable to 'restructure' his life and adjust to the requirements and disciplines of 'settled society'.

Despite being an articulate and cultured man, he could not cope with being transplanted into an unfamiliar reality after a long experience of institutionalisation. With the absence of any support to help him to break with his drinking habit and to enable him to function in the new environment, he soon moved on to the more familiar territory of the streets and the company of people who understood him. Re-placing himself into the company of street alcoholics, he has found opportunities for limited social existence and recreated some structures of everyday life, based around the routines of working, drinking and socialising with his mates.

Arsenii: Care Leaver

Nineteen-year old Arsenii was born in Ukraine and was taken into care at the age of four. We interviewed him in a militia detention centre in 1996. His memories of the children's homes where he lived were very painful. He talked about bullying and of how doctors at the home used to inject the children with psychotropic drugs when they misbehaved. He ran away many times, only to be brought back. At the age of fifteen he went to a vocational college, but he kept running away from the hostel where he lived, because he could not cope with bullying from his room-mates. Having eventually graduated, he found a job in a coalmine, but left after two months (he says that they were not paid wages but instead were given rotten meat and some old millet). He then decided to travel again. He borrowed some money from people who shared a room in a hostel with him and went to the town in Russia, where he knew his grandparents used to live. But on arrival he learned that they were dead. For a month he lived with a gypsy family who he had met on his travels (several homeless interviewees, mainly young people and women, reported episodes when they lived with gypsies and were used by them as house help). But when that family got into trouble with the militia, he decided to leave and went to Moscow, dodging fares and changing trains several times on the way. Somewhere he lost all his documents. He says that he wanted to go to Moscow because he dreamt of seeing Red Square. Having finally seen the place, Arsenii went to sleep at train stations. Sometimes people gave him money or food. After spending a month on the streets,

Arsenii was stopped in the metro and asked for his documents. Unable to produce them, he was taken to the militia detention centre.

Since his childhood Arsenii had lived in violent environments and was frequently the victim of abuse. His habitual answer to such situations was to run away and go wandering. He was frequently arrested and detained by the militia for a lack of a permanent abode and, according to him, the militia in the Ukraine was much crueller than that in Russia (a view expressed to us by several homeless people from Ukraine). He wanted to stay in Moscow. Arsenii had nobody he could rely on, but he was very religious. He often prayed and prayer helped him to cope with his anguish and physical pain (from a stomach ulcer).

Arsenii hoped to be able to get a job and a place in a workers' hostel. But his greatest desire was to go to Africa:

> … to build a house and live there, to fish and to domesticate animals and feed them. When I saw the first black person in my life at Kursk train station, I could not believe my eyes: did he really come from Africa?!

As far as he remembers, Arsenii has never had a home. The places where he lived were always someone else's. He did not have familial support at critical moments in his life. By leaving his employment, he had lost his last connection to settled society. Although he temporarily joined other itinerants – the gypsies – this did not enable him to put down any durable social roots.

Like many care leavers, Arsenii lacked not only a home, but also the personal skills and resources needed in order to successfully adjust to independent life.[1] Still very infantile, despite all the hardships he had suffered, Arsenii escaped from reality into the world of fantasy.

Lydia: Break-up of Family Ties

Twenty-three year old Lydia was interviewed in the militia detention centre in 1995. She was born in a provincial Russian town. She finished a special school for mentally retarded children. After that she worked as a painter and then a cleaner in a nursery. For the last two years that she lived at her family home she was unemployed. Her mother died when she was fifteen. Her father remarried, but her stepmother soon began to mistreat her, beat her and eventually forced her to leave home. The father did not interfere. Lydia had a brother, but the brother's wife did not want her to live with them. She also had a sister, but she lived in a workers' hostel with her husband and children.

After being thrown out of her home by her stepmother, Lydia went to Moscow, where she immediately began living at a train station. 'I had money at first. I thought, it did not matter where to live, at home or at a train station. I was so hurt by my

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1   See Aristova, 1992 and Harwin, 1996 on the problems faced by young people in Russian care institutions.

father and stepmother'. About two months after she arrived, she met a man at a train station, who took her to his home in a Moscow suburb. For four months she lived with him and his mother, but then quarrels started and once, when her boyfriend was drunk, he threatened her with a knife and threw her out of the house. She then decided to go back home, but her father would not accept her, so she went back to Moscow. Lydia wanted to get a job, but her passport was stolen at a train station. She stayed at the train station for two more months, earning money by begging and also getting some help from the mother of her ex-boyfriend. She was then picked up by the militia and brought to a detention centre:

> Now I have a plan – to leave the detention centre and to find a good man. I have met one such man here. We talk when we wash the dishes in the canteen. He is from Ukraine. He wants to take me back home when I leave here. He said to me: 'If you want, I can take you with me. You seem to be a good woman'. I said: 'All right, let's go.'

Eviction from the family home was the key factor in Lydia's homelessness. Lacking any familial support or the ability to negotiate her access to the employment market, she relied on personal relations with men, seeing them as the most effective strategy for leaving the streets. Despite her horrific experience with her former boyfriend, she was optimistic about her future with the new partner. So far she has distanced herself from other homeless people, hoping to leave the streets soon. She did not make any friends while she was living at the train station and she was not interested in other *bomzhi*: 'Everybody has their own destiny. I must think about mine. At the moment I think everything will turn out well with this guy.'

Voluntarily Homeless?

It is obvious from the analysis of these interviews that, where certain 'triggers' of displacement occurred, such as divorce and separation, loss of work or migration, individuals became at risk of homelessness or actually homeless. In all these cases, for Russian and even more for non-Russian citizens, the rules of territorial registration and a lack of access to organised welfare meant a harsh struggle for survival and a constant danger of further exclusion and repression.

In explaining the causes of homelessness, Russian experts, academics and even charity workers often argue that at least some of the people who migrate onto the streets have been complicit in their own fate. Their current condition is seen as the product of free choice and, whatever the consequences suffered as a result of such 'voluntary homelessness', they 'brought this upon themselves' (Yulikova and Skliarov, 1994, Nikiforov, 1998, Alexeeva, 2003, Osinskii et al., 2004). It is also argued that there are categories of street people who would not want to leave homelessness regardless of any support offered, as they explicitly choose to live itinerant lives, outside the 'normal' bounds of family and employment,. For example, the entry on 'Homelessness' in the Russian Social Encyclopaedia suggests that one of the main groups among homeless people are:

people who became vagrants, but are of working age and do not want to work because of laziness, principled unwillingness to work, a habit of idleness, minimal material and spiritual needs (representatives of this group are prone to drunkenness, alcoholism, mental illness). (Mirsagatova, 2000, p.35)

My interviews, however, provided little evidence of such voluntary homelessness. People migrated towards the streets after their connections with any places of domesticity had been already broken. For example, many of the people interviewed went to live at a train station as they lacked any other immediate accommodation (such as in the case of Lydia). Others began to lead an itinerant life as a result of unbearable situations in places where they previously lived (like Arsenii). Others, such as Yuri, led a street way of life because, after many years in detention, they found it difficult to adapt to life indoors and working in regular jobs.

In none of these cases were the streets anticipated, or sought, as the final destination. Nobody chose to be a despised *bomzh*. Nobody wanted the real prospect of death from the cold, or from disease, on the streets. Only those people who had spent a long time on the streets and accepted their plight had started to view the street as the only environment available to them.[2]

Also, contrary to all the negative stereotypes, there is no profound cultural difference between 'settled' and 'unsettled' people. As I've discussed before, homeless people are not some culturally isolated underclass. When talking about their past lives, many interviewees expressed pride in their achievements at school or university. Many reminisced about their Young Pioneer and Komsomol days, and the hopes and aspirations they had then for the future. They used to read the same literature and watch the same films as everyone else. Even now, despite their hardships, many still buy books or go to the cinema if they can. They have strong opinions about Russian politicians. They buy newspapers and follow the lives of Russian celebrities, reacting with great concern, for example, to the twists and turns in the relationship between the popular singers Alla Pugacheva and Filip Kirkorov. Even those migrant workers who came to Russia from the former Soviet republics were still products of the wider Soviet culture, and it pained them to realise that they could not rely on any assistance from the Russian authorities or from individual Muscovites.

Although some of the commentators believe that those who are voluntarily homeless represent a very small part of the homeless population (Nikiforov, 1998 puts it at about 5%), for others the thesis on voluntary homelessness and the cultural 'gap' between the 'settled' and the 'unsettled' can be a product of an 'objectification' of the position of a homeless person as an outcast. The individual's position in

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2   In quantitative surveys conducted by Médecins sans Frontières (2004), from 3 to 24 per cent of homeless people answered that their homelessness was a result of personal choice (p.37). However, the usefulness of such broad categories in explaining pathways to homelessness is highly questionable. For example, another category of the causes of homelessness employed the questionnaire is 'loss of housing', which would be very difficult to interpret.

the social space becomes essentialised and attributed to his or her own nature, dispositions, character and actions. Transgression of spatial boundaries (fixed by administrative arrangements) turns into transgression of moral boundaries – a transgression so profound that even membership of the human race may be denied to street homeless people. They are supposed to be satisfied by an existence that the 'settled' people consider inhuman. As a result, in the eyes of society they become despised *Untermensh*, an unrecognisable subhuman species. As we shall see in the next chapter, their construction as a 'special', abnormal and alien social category in Russia justifies their exclusionary treatment.

Chapter 8

Homelessness and Regulation of Social Space

At the end of a newspaper interview with the militia captain in charge of Moscow's detention centre for people without fixed abode (the article was entitled 'The doctors of human destinies' – the journalist's characterisation of the militia staff of the centre), the correspondent asked the officer for advice for the newspaper's readers:

> It is now winter and many Muscovites are starting again, despite the sophisticated locks and intercoms of their buildings, to encounter persons sleeping in the lofts and on the stairs of their blocks of flats. What should the residents do in such a situation?

The militia officer answers:

> They should of course immediately inform their local militia force. Because these people are a source of danger; they spread infection and dirt, and they thieve. They might even start a fire. (Milovidova, 2001)

Should not the residents rather be advised to direct homeless people to a shelter, or to call the social services or charities? Yet the sort of answer that a western reader might perhaps expect from a public official would be hard to imagine in the Russian context. Residents are not supposed to assist homeless people. They have no obligations towards these people, apart from the obligation to call the police to remove them.

Street homeless people in Russia not only occupy the lowest position in the social hierarchy and have no claims to private space, they are also, as a result of their homelessness, excluded completely from systems of distribution of public rights and goods, which in Russia are based upon administratively organised territorial affiliations. So a lack of place also means a lack of any social recognition, employment rights or recourse to public welfare. Their treatment is not so much discrimination as excommunication. The main agency dealing with homeless people – through segregation and expulsion – is therefore the militia, with whom social services essentially join forces by acting to contain and control marginality.

Registration

By becoming displaced, homeless people violate the dominant social-spatial order, as instituted by the *propiska* system. Even after the abolition of criminal punishment for vagrancy and violation of passport rules in 1991, the residential registration retained its grip over people's life chances and destinies.[1] In the preceding chapters I mostly discussed the significance of registration rules in the production of homelessness. Here I will look further at its role in the lives of people who have already become homeless.

In Russia a person can be created by the administrative stroke of a pen – as occurred in the case of the fictitious hero of a famous story by Yuri Tynyanov *Lieutenant Kizhe*, written in 1927, where a non-existent army officer first comes to life through the error of a clerk in bureaucratic correspondence, and is consequently promoted, receives awards and decorations, and is even buried with a state funeral – all on paper (Tynyanov, 1992). Equally, a real person can be excluded, erased from the living by an administrative procedure, just by virtue of having nowhere to register.

Even now, when Russia has become a market society, place-based administrative affiliations remain highly important. They are still supported by the administrative system of registration at the place of residence. The extent to which rules of registration are enforced in different regions varies. Enforcement is particularly strict in areas which attract high migration (such as Moscow, Rostov-on-Don and Krasnodar), while in other areas these regulations are applied more loosely. Although some manage to overcome these restrictions on residence by bribery, the regime still works effectively to exclude the poorest migrants and the homeless from territorial communities. An absence of roots in a particular place becomes doubly debilitating when it also means a lack of legitimate administrative identity (cf. Humphrey, 1996/97).

Certification of birth, marriage and death, military conscription, rights to employment, pensions, health care and education, in other words all the actions of human beings that involve the state and its agencies, are premised in Russia on their residential status. Despite the fact that the Russian Constitution proclaims freedom of movement, a number of legislative acts, in direct contradiction to the Constitution, tie rights and freedoms to registration.[2] The law of 25 June 1993 'On the Right of Citizens of the Russian Federation to Freedom of Movement, Choice of the Place of Stay and Residence within the Russian Federation' made it a responsibility of the citizen to register at their permanent (and any temporary) place of residence.

Article 19.15 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation of 30 December 2001 contains the sanction for non-registration 'at the place of residence or stay' as an official caution or a fine equivalent to one month's minimum wage.

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1   Although this system is now officially called 'registration', it is still commonly referred to by Russians as the '*propiska*'.

2   Several rulings of the Constitutional Court have declared the illegality of *propiska* and administrative obstacles to settlement and mobility (the last such ruling was in February 1998), but this has had no effect on local and central policies and regulations.

Unregistered people are cut off from legal employment. According to Article 65 of the Labour Code of the Russian Federation, to get a job people need to produce a number of documents, including, for example, a state pension insurance certificate, issued by the territorial agency of the Pension Fund on the basis of a person's registration. Employers ask for the personal taxation identification number, which can only be obtained at the place of registration.

Unregistered people find it nearly impossible to get pensions or other social benefits.[3] The pension rules stipulate that: 'citizens of the Russian Federation who have no place of residence or stay confirmed by registration must apply for determination of pension to the territorial agency of the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation that provides services at the place of their actual residence'. However, the notion of 'place of actual residence' is not legally defined and this leaves unregistered people hostages to the decisions of individual officials on whether to allocate pensions or not. The absence of legal employment rights also makes it impossible for homeless people to save money on the accumulated part of their pension accounts.

Homeless people cannot be put on housing lists (with the exception of ex-residents who used to have permanent registration in the territory and who may be able, at the discretion of the local authorities, to get on the list for allocation of housing). They cannot access public health care (except in an emergency), as they do not possess obligatory medical insurance policies, which are issued at the registered place of residence. Since 1996, Moscow polyclinics have officially been required to provide medical help to homeless people, but they rarely do this in practice. Three Moscow hospitals now have special wards where homeless people are treated separately from all other patients. Only in 2003, after prolonged pressure from Médecins Sans Frontières, did the Moscow city government open the Moscow City Centre for Medical and Social Assistance to Persons without Fixed Abode that provides polyclinic health care for people without fixed abode and refers them to hospitals.

Unregistered women cannot use maternity clinics. When they give birth, they are only accepted into a limited number of hospitals. According to a report by *Novaia Gazeta*, they are often badly treated by staff and may come under pressure to leave their children in hospitals for placement into care or adoption (Goncharova, 2005).

Unregistered people are deprived of electoral rights. The federal law of June 2002 'On the Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referenda of the Citizens of the Russian Federation' grants the vote only to those citizens who have their place of residence in the territory of the appropriate electoral district. Registration is the key to citizenship and those who do not have it turn effectively into non-citizens.

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3   Before 2002 there were no legal mechanisms for paying old age or disability pensions to homeless people. The federal laws of 15 December 2001 ('On State Provision of Pensions in the Russian Federation') and 17 December 2001 ('On Labour Pensions in the Russian Federation'), and the 'Rules on Pension Application, Assignment, Recalculation and Transfer from One Pension to Another' all provide for the pension rights of 'citizens of the Russian Federation who have no permanent place of residence in the territory of the Russian Federation'.

The dominance of the residential-administrative regime in Russia is illustrated by the fact that, while criticising the state for violating both the human rights of homeless people and the country's own Constitution, the voluntary sector sometimes uses similar registration techniques itself. In the Russian context, NGOs campaigning on behalf of homeless people seem to achieve the best results not when they expose violations of their human rights, but when they draw attention to the fact that as a group they are omitted from registration.

Nochlezhka, a leading homelessness charity in St. Petersburg, for many years lobbied the St. Petersburg Duma to establish a policy of city-wide registration of homeless people, and as a result the municipal Centre for Registration of the Homeless was opened in 1998. But even before that, and later in parallel with the municipal centre, Nochlezhka has conducted its own registration of the homeless. The organisation sees registration as having several functions. Firstly, homeless persons acquire some quasi- documents (as many lack passports or any other means of identification), even if it is just a letter confirming their homeless status. Secondly, by being construed as a registered social category, they can be represented as a group before the municipal and federal authorities. And thirdly, possession of information on the state of homelessness makes it possible for Nochlezhka to lobby for city laws and programmes of assistance to homeless people. The register of more than 5,000 homeless people assembled by Nochlezhka is in great demand from state bodies, such as hospitals and the militia, which encounter homeless people and want to identify them. However, Nochlezhka rarely opens its registry to the militia, fearing that this would have adverse consequences for homeless people (Solovieva, 2001).

Although it has shaky legal status (the federal law 'On the Right of Citizens of the Russian Federation to Freedom of Movement' only allows registration 'at the place of residence' or 'at the place of stay'), the system of registration of homeless people in St.Petersburg is used very efficiently by Nochlezhka to help ex-residents of St. Petersburg to gain access to pensions, health care and employment rights. Through this registration, homeless people suddenly become visible to the authorities. The documents issued by the City Centre of Registration of the Homeless and by Nochlezhka itself can help a homeless person to get a meal in a charity soup kitchen or even use the transport system for free. Thus, despite the stark difference in the attitudes towards homeless people of NGOs and state bodies, there is a certain homology between their actions. Both can only operate with displaced populations by 'fixing' them through registration to the city territory and organisations that operate on it.

There are no comparable attempts by charities in Moscow to establish their own system of quasi-registration, but the above mentioned Moscow City Centre for Medical and Social Assistance provides their clients with a document that states:

> This citizen is receiving medical and sanitary assistance at the centre. Please do not neglect the basic human rights of this person. We also ask you not to prevent him from using public transport due to lack of money.

Although it has no legal basis this document 'places' the homeless person in the context of the city's administrative provisions and thus creates some rights (however ephemeral).

There are other noteworthy illustrations of the key role of the residential-administrative regime in the production of homelessness and 'exit' from it. With the help of 'Lepta' [a local NGO], a group of twenty-five homeless people restored a dilapidated and forgotten young pioneer camp in a village near Moscow. Some of the group now work at a local farm. Others breed poultry or work in construction. They have appealed to the local authorities to register the former camp as a workers' hostel. If successful in this application, they will become 'normal citizens' and will be able to restore their passports and acquire all other rights and entitlements.

Another example comes from *Izvestiia* newspaper. In November 2002 it published an article entitled 'The Best Chairman Turned out to be a *Bomzh*'. According to the article, the chairman of an agricultural co-operative in the Moscow region, who in ten years in his post had worked diligently for his local community – building fencing and a road, installing electricity, organising removal of rubbish and helping the poor – suddenly died. Sorting through his documents, members of the co-operative board were astonished to discover that the chairman had no passport or *propiska*. Nor did he appear to have any living relatives. Before becoming a co-operative manager, he had spent many years in a mental hospital (Izvestiia, 2002). He was a *bomzh*, who managed to disguise himself for many years!

It would be difficult to imagine a similar piece of news finding space in the western national press. A successful manager (despite previous mental problems), who obviously had a place of abode – the newspaper says that he 'spent days and nights in the co-operative' – would hardly be construed as a stigmatised homeless person! In Russia, however, having no documents and residence permit can be profoundly damaging to a person's reputation and status in society despite the fact that he or she may have work and a roof over their heads.

Degraded People and Places

Despite the end of criminalisation of homelessness since the end of the 1980s, the pathologising discourse has remained strong in post-Soviet Russia. In the dominant interpretations of liminality, there is a direct association between displaced individuals and spaces they have to inhabit.

We can see three recurrent themes here. Firstly, people are thought to have moved to these spaces because of some defect in their personality: they are lazy and lack self-discipline; they do not value material comforts; they have reduced needs or they are alcoholics. Secondly, the sites occupied by homeless people are often thought to be influencing their very nature, bringing further pathology. Life in rubbish dumps, cellars and lofts cripples people, they become unable to perform 'normal' social roles and cannot go back to live in mainstream society. Thirdly, the very presence of homeless people in places inhabited or used by 'normal' citizens brings degradation of these sites, making them unsuitable for public use. All these themes were in fact

present in the discourses on vagrancy in pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union, as discussed in chapter 4.

In modern-day Russia it is widely believed that *bomzhi* cannot be trusted to display the rationality and responsibility expected from 'normal people'. The militia captain we met at the start of this chapter calls *bomzhi* 'a special category of human drones' (Milovidova, 2001). In newspapers and official reports homeless people are treated as members of 'flocks' or 'tribes'; they 'die like flies'. Only when detained in institutions do they 'get washed, get cleaned, and provided with medical care'. They are denied basic human needs. They like sleeping in the cellars, they are happy not to belong to society.

Their behaviour is seen as governed only by biological and 'subconscious' urges. Indeed, as Mary Douglas showed,

> It seems that if a person has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being, all precaution against danger must come from others. He cannot help his abnormal situation. (1966, p.98)

The authors of a Ministry of Labour and Social Development report claim that *bomzhi*:

> are a cause of fires and increase of crime … Private charity and humanitarian aid does more harm than good … *Bomzhi* who we interviewed in a hospital, in a detention centre and at a rubbish dump do not want to change their way of life, they are happy with their existence and openly laugh at people who work and despise them. (Yulikova et al., 1997, p.2, p. 18)

Inactivity of the settled people leads to the members of this tribe multiplying uncontrollably. As the authors of the report predict:

> If the state further continues to refrain from action to fight this social evil, we will come across an army of people who do not know productive labour and live from leftovers, being happy with such a way of life. (ibid., pp.32-3)[4]

Occupation of defective spaces leads to further moral deterioration. A group of Buryat sociologists claimed that homeless people living in a city dump for three years 'became badly degraded' to the point when they did not want any contact with outsiders and did not even try to understand the questions that were put to them (Osinskii et al., 2004, p.60).

When street homeless people occupy empty housing, they find themselves quickly evicted by the militia and building management. Nobody – even members of middle-class squatter communities - seems willing to tolerate them. In a study of squatting conducted by the St. Petersburg sociologist Tatiana Golova, the 'decent' squatters expressed considerable animosity towards 'true' homeless people,

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4   For similar accounts in academic publications see also Yulikova and Skliarov, 1994, Osinskii et al., 2004.

who were perceived to be associated with crime and attracted the attention of the authorities towards themselves and their neighbours (2001). It is thought that when the street homeless occupy a space, they denigrate it, bring it down and turn it into a *bomzhatnik* (a '*bomzh*-nest'). This is how places where *bomzhi* stay – cellars, lofts or flats in unoccupied buildings – are now commonly called, in contrast to the *skvoty* [squats] or *vpiski* [dens] inhabited by middle-class young people. *Bomzhatniki* symbolically degrade the area and threaten to degrade its inhabitants by association. That is why squatters join members of mainstream society in their desire to expel the street homeless from their territory.

In contrast to *bomzhi*, in the case of squatters a lack of registration might be tolerated. Squatters often occupy uninhabited buildings on the basis of informal agreements with the building management, promising to be quiet and paying some unofficial rent. According to Golova, it is sometimes possible for squatters to get by even without giving bribes. She describes how during one raid on a squat a journalist friend managed to defend the squatters. He produced his journalist's identity card and persuaded militia personnel that the squatters were:

> good people, they are doing something interesting. You can see that they even have pictures on the walls. They have a good reputation … and they are under the protection of our newspaper.

She writes further that if people 'have an occupation', if they are artists, musicians etc., then the militia and neighbours are more tolerant of them.

The fact that people have pictures on the walls does not make their occupation of housing more legitimate. Yet factors such as specific cultural capital recognised by mainstream society, or 'sponsorship' by reputable citizens and organisations, can facilitate occupation of housing and help, at least temporarily, to avert persecution and expulsion.

Street Homeless People as Vagrants

Falling outside place-based social categorisations and lacking 'sponsorship' by the members of the mainstream society, street homeless people's positions in Russia are redefined through the use of traditional codes. In the official discourse, these codes are primarily associated with the category of 'vagrants'. In Western Europe and North America 'vagrancy' was the predominant designation of the unattached poor until the 1960s. Only in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Poor Law traditions gave way to welfarism, and the central state (as opposed to local parishes) assumed the duty of accommodating those who could not support themselves, did construction of homelessness emerge as a welfare issue – and then as a housing need (Daly, 1996, Sommerville, 1994, 1998).

It is even argued that in the UK, for example, 'the current working definition of homelessness has become increasingly narrow and restricted and, as a result, it has been moving towards its equation with 'rooflessness' (Jacobs et al., 1999).

This significant discursive shift from vagrancy as a social status to homelessness as housing need has not happened in Russia, despite the efforts of the human rights community. As all rights of citizenship are connected to territory-based claims, the status of an unattached person cannot be regularised through the workings of the welfare state.

Vagrancy has historically implied that a person has no attachment to a place – based on family and kin, occupation or property. To be a vagrant means to lack, or to have relinquished, all connections and ties, capital and resources (that is why vagrants are poor, not just in the economic sense) and to have become totally displaced. This social construction is indeed inscribed in official documents and the internal communications of law enforcement and social protection bodies.

As vagrancy no longer constitutes an offence in Russia, the militia has to construct its own ad hoc social definition. Working with the files of *bomzhi* in the archives of the Moscow detention centre, I discovered how militia documents catalogued the 'signs' to be read in order to designate somebody as a 'vagrant'. At the time, a person could be placed in a detention centre with a warrant from the district *Prokuratura*. The following formula was typical for the *Prokuratura*'s warrant for detention 'on suspicion of vagrancy' (note that vagrancy ceased being a crime in the end of 1991):

> So and so, being in Moscow without fixed abode, not involved in socially useful labour, without identification documents and without relatives and kin in Moscow, has been detained for identification and documentation.

A standard report on detention (these were written by militia personnel who brought homeless persons to a militia station or detention centre) read:

> So and so does not have documents, does not have any registration, does not have means of subsistence, spends nights at train stations, lofts and entrances of residential buildings, has an unkempt appearance and does not have relatives and kin in Moscow. It is not possible to verify his identity.

These formulations are revealing. Their purpose is not to establish that particular behaviour constitutes a criminal act, but to construct a social status – that of a vagrant – using a number of signifiers. These signifiers are defined not by the presence of a deed or characteristic, but by the lack or absence –the lack of access to private place; lack of documents and registration; lack of money; absence of social affiliation (no relatives or kin); and the absence of other marks of respectable citizens, such as clean body and clothes. The category of a vagrant is constructed essentially as an embodiment of total displacement. The references to 'non-involvement in socially useful labour', which may also be a part of this construction, belong to the Soviet past and are increasingly absent from public discourse.

The draft law 'On Social Rehabilitation of Persons Engaged in Vagrancy', prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development in 2000, defined vagrancy as 'the movement of a citizen of the Russian Federation on the territory of

the Russian Federation without registration in the place of residence or the place of stay and occupation, in order to acquire means of subsistence'. This construction – which lacks any legal sense and is in direct contradiction to the Russian Constitution – contains the same constituent elements of the status of vagrant that we saw in the militia documents described earlier.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Development report mentioned earlier provides a good representation of the expert discourse. Homeless people are constructed here as 'the other', an apparent subhuman and contagious species, who must be approached with caution by specially trained staff. According to the report:

> *Bomzhi* are a specific group, for which there needs to be a special office for reception, special transport and ambulance services, special wards in hospitals, special rooms in polyclinics, special jobcentres, special jobs etc., in order to prevent their contact with members of the public and employees of social protection agencies up to the moment of their rehabilitation. In one Russian region we observed an appalling scene: *bomzhi* straight from the street come into the administrative office, talk to members of staff and the public and solve their problems without any medical control. This is like the heroism of doctors during an epidemic, when they forget about their own safety. Nobody has the right to threaten the unprepared administrative staff in such a way. (Yulikova et al., 1997, pp.42-3)

Bomzhi are presented here as transgressing spatial and moral boundaries, whereas their real 'crime' is the lack of their own space and their attempts to survive in a society which does not recognise their existence. Constructing them as a 'special', abnormal and alien social category, deprived of citizenship rights, enables the state to deal with them through special institutions – separate branches of police and social services.

Social Services

In the Soviet period displaced vagrants were subject to radical strategies of replacement through confinement to spatially isolated institutions, such as prisons and reformatories for alcoholics. With the end of the Soviet regime these policies also ended and new policies of containment of the marginal population through limited social provisions, police control and charity have emerged.

The beginning of the 1990s saw the de-institutionalisation of former vagrants. Prisons and reformatories for alcoholics stopped serving as part of a management system for the marginal population. But unlike de-institutionalisation experiments in the west in the 1960s to 1980s, which were guided by ideas of 'spatial integration, engagement in community activities and interaction with the non-dependent population in the course of everyday life' (Dear and Wolch, 1987, p.62), Russian de-institutionalisation did not have a 'positive' programme. There was no wide discussion of the therapeutic value of community integration, nor of the need to establish specific community services such as shelters, hostels, transitional housing,

social housing and centres for treatment of substance dependency.[5] In other words, the discourse of normalisation of vagrants through their reintegration into the community has never properly started. Life on the margins of society is serviced mainly by special institutions. These have included militia detention centres (until 2002) and separate social services and medical institutions.

Since 1993, a number of legislative acts have been passed establishing provisions (for example day and night shelters, social hotels) for social assistance to 'people without fixed abode and occupation'. In reality this assistance has been confined to temporary hostel accommodation, without any programmes of social work or serious attempts to resolve the longer-term needs of homeless people. The 1993 presidential decree 'On Measures of Prevention of Vagrancy and Begging' made the social services responsible for payment of pensions and benefits without fixed abode and their placement into social protection institutions, while the Federal Employment Service was to be responsible for their employment or payment of unemployment benefits. Medical authorities were to be responsible for medical examination and provision of treatment.

The law of 15 November 1995 on 'The Foundations of Social Services for the Population in the Russian Federation' laid the basis for the creation of temporary shelters for a variety of vulnerable groups, including people without fixed abode. According to this law, people without fixed abode, together with other groups in a 'difficult life situation' are entitled to support from social protection bodies (such as placement in temporary shelters, residential homes and material assistance).[6] A network of institutions has been created. While homeless people stay in these institutions, they get temporary registration stamps in their passports and can receive legal and medical help, as well as (at least in theory) help with job placement. At the same time, according to the regulations of these establishments, the militia is to be constantly present on the premises.

In the whole of Russia there are about seventy special social assistance institutions for people without fixed abode, with 8,000 places. The city of Moscow now has nine night shelters with a total of 1,500 places. Apart from the obvious insufficiency of these facilities, they are also grim and unwelcoming places. Although some of the shelters have sympathetic management, most of them, according to our homeless interviewees, have harsh regimes, with the residents suffering from

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5   The de-institutionalisation programmes in Western Europe and North America have largely been considered failures; the lack of provision discredited the idea of 'care in the community', brought calls for more repressive solutions and created vast numbers of casualties, from young homeless vagrants to elderly 'bag ladies' (Taylor, 1998, Wolch and DeVerteuil, 2001).

6   A Government Resolution of 5 November 1995 'On Measures for the Development of a Network of Institutions of Social Assistance for People in Extreme Conditions Without Fixed Abode and Occupation' made the regions of the Russian Federation responsible for the establishment of hostels, night shelters and centres for social adaptation. It is possible to stay up to 10 days a year in a hostel, up to 30 days in a night shelter and up to 6 months in a centre for social adaptation.

humiliating treatment by staff (people complained, for example, of being woken during the night and checked to see if they were keeping drugs or weapons on their bodies). Anyone found drunk on the premises is immediately expelled. Although not part of the Ministry of Interior system, the shelters' administrations are responsible for checking whether their residents are on the run from the law. Access is restricted by the requirement to pass medical check-ups and be disinfected. Apart from that, the shelters do not admit people, who cannot prove that they used to have permanent Moscow registration. Although from 2002 the Moscow Committee on Social Protection decided that migrants without registration should get access to shelters and social hotels in situations 'threatening their life and health', in reality these institutions very rarely admit migrants (except in extremely severe weather conditions).

If homeless people are of pension age or certified as disabled (the latter status is almost impossible to achieve as it is necessary to pass many bureaucratic hurdles to be granted such certification), they can be sent to old and disabled people's homes. The militia or social services are able to organise this if there are places available at these institutions. Hospitals are also entitled to refer people to these homes. However there is no formal obligation to do this and doctors are often too busy to go through the lengthy referral process.

Even where homeless people are able to overcome such barriers, they are as a rule then sent to special homes for ex-convicts (these have existed since 1990) or placed in special wards in ordinary homes to isolate them from the rest of the residents, as they are considered to be conflict-prone and dangerous. Effectively, services for homeless people are inadequate, both in number and quality, and their overall function is isolation of their 'clients'. To make this isolation even more profound, shelters and social hotels are often placed beyond the city boundaries.

Despite the rhetoric of social rehabilitation there have been few attempts to develop social work with homeless people. The role of social workers within social services is commonly seen as one of control. As one social protection official from Rostov region argued at a 1995 conference of the Ministry of Social Protection at which I was present, 'there is a need to have a position of a social worker and pedagogue in hostels. Their role would be to detect the vagrants' true intentions and establish what we can expect from them tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.'

Federal social protection bodies and municipal authorities are the key engines behind recurrent attempts to re-constitute vagrancy as an offence. In the beginning of 1993 the Moscow government sent a request to the President, Federal Government and Parliament asking them to reintroduce article 209 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('systematic vagrancy and begging' and 'long-term parasitic way of life') 'at least for Moscow'.[7] This appeal was not successful, but in 1994 the Ministry of Social Protection also raised the issue and suggested to the Ministry of

7   Representative of the Committee of Social Protection of the city of Moscow at the meeting in the Ministry of Social Protection in March 1995.

Justice (with the same result) that liability should be re-introduced for vagrancy and begging.[8]

The Ministry's vision on regulation of homelessness is very well presented in the aforementioned draft law 'On Social Rehabilitation of Persons Engaged in Vagrancy', which was prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development as part of the Federal Programme for Intensification of the Fight against Crime. The draft was submitted to the Russian Duma in 2000, but withdrawn after the Ministry of Justice blocked it as violating the Russian Constitution. The draft law defined 'social rehabilitation of persons involved in vagrancy' as a 'system of administrative, social-economic, medical and psychological measures, aimed at restoration of the social status and ability of the said persons to function in the social environment'. 'Social adaptation' was defined as 'the process of *soglasovaniia* [co-ordination] of a person with the world around him, with the social environment, establishment of stable relations with other members of society, fulfilment of the necessary roles and functions in society'. From the legal point of view, these vague and non-juridical definitions are absurd and in many respects violate the Russian Constitution and key legislation (Karlinsky, 2001).

The draft law did not establish any rights for vagrants in terms of access to jobs, housing, pensions and benefits or health care. Rather, it contained enabling provisions for public bodies in terms of 'assistance in social rehabilitation and adaptation'. Organisations would be able to employ vagrants, and local authorities would be allowed to have housing stock for their temporary accommodation. Instead of normalising the position of vagrants in society, the draft law institutionalised their separate status. A homeless person would have the right to 'appeal to acknowledge him as a person involved in vagrancy' to the local authority. This appeal could be rejected! The status of a vagrant would give the right to registration by the local authority. On the condition that they 'choose a place of residence or stay in the locality' (limited to special institutions, such as old and disabled people's homes, social hotels and shelters), vagrants could be put on the local housing list. The draft contained no mention of vulnerable groups (such as single parents, the elderly or disabled people) who would need to be re-housed quickly, in fact no provisions for priority in the housing queue whatsoever. The draft law placed new obligations on vagrants (to get registered, to stay in special institutions) but did not restore their rights as citizens.

Analysis of the draft shows that the key purpose of this legislation was to make it easier for the state to control marginality. This was to be achieved by establishing 'vagrancy' as a legal status and attaching ('fixing') the displaced poor to special institutions through residential and administrative regulations.

So far, attempts by the social protection bodies to help homeless people have had hardly any impact on the latter's lives. The Moscow city government has opened

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8   Vadim Petrukhin, head of the Department of Special Institutions of Social Assistance of the Ministry of Social Protection at the conference on vagrancy in the Ministry in March 1995.

a special department to work with homeless people. However, its staff is mainly involved in inspection of hostels and shelters rather that any proactive programmes for helping homeless people. There are almost no attempts to contact these people on the streets, give them emergency assistance or help with finding employment or housing (Alexeeva, 2003).

Policing Homelessness

The weakness of welfare arrangements in modern Russia co-exist with traditionally strong unitarian police controls. Russian policing historically borrowed much from the continental tradition of policing, especially from Germany and France (Mawby, 1990, Shelley, 1996). Essential features of this tradition include the accountability of the police force to the central government, an emphasis on political and administrative controls and strict residential registration and delegation to the police of a large spectrum of functions. With democratisation and the emergence of welfare states, policing in Germany and France went through profound transformation, with greater accountability and respect for civil liberties and freedoms and delegation of many functions to welfare institutions. But in Russia the authoritarian element of policing was reinforced in the Soviet period and current developments point to a greater expansion of police functions to cover regulation of migration and disciplining of the marginal groups.

Delegation of central state authority to local government and civil society institutions – to allow them to establish a variety of social services for homeless people – goes against strong statist traditions and is developing extremely slowly (White, 1999; Stephenson, 2000c). Moreover, any serious efforts at re-integration would inevitably require the relaxation, if not the abolition, of residential rules. Instead of acknowledging the housing needs of homeless people and developing a serious programme of social work and changing residency regulations, soon after the abolition of penalties for vagrancy the state gave management of the de-institutionalised population back to the militia. As the Ministry of Interior was already in charge of a huge apparatus of law and order institutions dealing with homelessness, police institutions remained favoured among the variety of other possible agencies. Up until 2002, militia detention centres for people without fixed abode (officially renamed into the centres of social rehabilitation in 1993) were the main institution dealing with the homeless.

The Russian Constitution of 1993 prohibited detention without a court order for more than 48 hours. However the practice of arrests and detention of homeless people continued until 2001, when finally, after the adoption of the new Criminal Procedural Code, and under the pressure from human rights organisations, the General *Prokuratura* issued a statement that compulsory placement into militia detention centres was illegal. Thereafter, detention centres were converted into the centres for deportation of illegal migrants.

But to this day the militia remains the key agency mobilised by the authorities in the event of a perceived 'emergency' with homeless people. A 1996 presidential decree 'On Emergency Measures for the Strengthening of Legal Order and Intensification of the Fight against Crime' allowed the militia and the Federal Employment Service to move homeless people outside the boundaries of Moscow and the Moscow region, 'as a rule, to the place of their previous residence for job placement or determination of payment of unemployment benefit'. In the winter of 1998-99 the governor of St. Petersburg ordered the local militia:

> to apprehend beggars and vagrants on the main roads, highways, train stations and airports and to get rid of them. This [the presence of vagrants and beggars] should not exist in any society, in any city, and is to be stopped with an iron hand.

According to Nochlezhka, on the basis of this order militia were deporting homeless people outside the city borders and into the forests, after robbing and beating many of them (Bogdanova, 1999). Similar actions still occur in Moscow and other cities, particularly when special events and celebrations take place (for example May Day, Victory Day). *Bomzhi*, together with other 'polluters' such as sex workers and beggars, are transplanted outside the borders of the territory in order not to compromise the ritual displays of social unity.

A recent report documented how the militia in the city of Vladimir, on the eve of the May Day celebrations, were ordered to collect homeless people from the streets and take them to a huge rubbish dump outside the city's borders. Explaining his decision, the head of the Vladimir city militia said that he tried to help homeless people:

> When they get up in the morning, they start going through rubbish containers. They spread dirt around themselves. And we just took them to one huge city dump. They will be able to find food leftovers, clothes and shoes there. Many people live there for years – they get born and die there. They dig holes in the rubbish and live there. They have chosen this life themselves. (Bobrova, 2005)

In contrast to the Soviet period, spatial management of urban territory now involves mainly apprehension, categorisation and dispersal, rather than incarceration. In Moscow, for example, *bomzhi* may be stopped on the streets, at train stations, or taken from the buildings where they find temporary shelter. Non-Russian citizens may be sent to deportation centres. Russian citizens are fined for the lack of registration and allowed to return to the streets. Those who are suspected of having committed a crime are arrested. Essentially, the militia is left with 'overseeing' homelessness without being able to achieve effective isolation of its victims.[9] A once complex mechanism that used to round up, check, categorise and dispense with homeless people continues to work, but at the final stage, when the 'human material' is ready

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9   Cf. Garland, 1985 on evolution of penal strategies in the West and a formation of a similar regime of overseeing deviance.

to be labelled and packed into boxes, the mechanism abruptly stops and people are dumped back onto the streets. Here they are left to survive on handouts from charity or through involvement in the informal economy.

Repression, Assistance, Charity

The current technologies of social-spatial management involve a combination of repression and limited social assistance to the displaced population, which one might term 'social assistance through repression'. As Vladimir Kotzyrev, the top Moscow militia officer in charge of operations against street homeless people, said in an interview when militia detention centres were still operating:

> These people need help and not prohibitive measures. Naturally, they influence the criminogenic situation, but mostly they affect the sanitary–epidemiological condition of the city. Unkempt sight, specific smell, and of course Muscovites and visitors do not like encountering lice. That is why the militia *osushchestvl'aet iz'iatie* [removes] this category. This removal mainly aims to provide social and medical help in co-operation with other agencies and not to repress. He is not a law-breaker, he is a citizen, but he needs help. (Kotzyrev, 1999)

Removal of homeless people is thus presented as a service to society and simultaneously a route to social assistance. Similar discourse can be found in academic publications. For example, the authors of an article published in *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniia*, the journal of the Russian Sociological Association, suggested that:

> Because of their dirty, ragged clothes and shoes *bomzhi* get expelled from public places, and they have to roam the streets looking for night shelter. This leads to frequent aggression, violation of public order, coming together with other *bomzhi* in cellars, underground water pipes, dug-outs and *dachas*. *Bomzhi* unconsciously develop spontaneous protest against their non-acceptance by society and this leads to muggings, vandalism and more serious deviations. (Zavialov and Spiridonova, 2000, p.69)

Instead of suggesting a serious programme of re-housing and social work, the authors of the above article propose that local authorities create more special institutions for *bomzhi* (night shelters and hostels) and organise distribution of leftovers from canteens, cafes and restaurants, as well as of second-hand clothes. They also suggest that 'it is necessary to be more tolerant to *bomzhi*, not to chase them away as this creates heightened aggression among them'. The authors argue the need for frequent research to 'monitor change in the standard of living and social status of *bomzhi* as one of the least protected strata of the population' (p.69).

Bomzhi are constructed as a tribe, which survives on the fringes of society and should be monitored, placed in special institutions and contained by charity and tolerant treatment. It is no coincidence that the only municipal services in Moscow that took homeless people seriously, and the first to open facilities for them, were the sanitary-epidemiological agencies. There are now four places in the city where

homeless people can get washed and disinfected. Also, while it is practically impossible for *bomzhi* to get medical help in a polyclinic, the doors of tuberculosis and venereal clinics are always open for them.

While some of the government experts and academics see the role of charity as helping to contain *bomzhi* and prevent them from becoming a danger for the society, many non-governmental organisations saw their role differently. Organisations such as Nochlezhka in St. Petersburg, the Committee for Civil Rights, The Citizen's Assistance Committee and the Society for the Reform of the Criminal Justice System in Moscow (together with some international organisations such as Médecins sans Frontières) provide medical, legal and social assistance, lobby to improve the living conditions of homeless people and to introduce new homelessness legislation, and conduct publicity campaigns. In 1994 Nochlezhka began issuing a newspaper – *Na Dne* – sold by homeless people. In 1997 it opened a hostel with 50 places and in 1998 established a legal consultancy. Médecins sans Frontières organised a medical centre in St. Petersburg and in 1999 helped establish a medical centre for homeless persons at the Botkin Hospital.

In Moscow, Médecins sans Frontières opened its programme for the city homeless population in 1992. It began with provision of medical services, but gradually started to provide material assistance, to refer homeless people to state organisations and to lobby local and federal authorities on behalf of its clients.[10]

Western religious charities (among them the German Diakonisches Werk; Caritas, an international Catholic charity; and the Salvation Army are perhaps the most renowned) were the first to develop networks of institutions that provide advice and material help to street homeless people. Over the last few years the Russian Orthodox Church has become more active in organising emergency assistance to homeless people. For example, the Commission on Ecclesiastical and Social Activities at the Moscow Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church has organised a night bus to provide advice and emergency health care to homeless people, including referral to specialised clinics for tuberculosis and infectious diseases and to accidents and emergency departments in hospitals.

At the same time any attempt to assist homeless people in the current situation inevitably comes into conflict with the tenacity of registration system and the lack of possibilities for permanent re-housing. The plans to build special housing for homeless people in Moscow have been rejected both because of the protests of the local residents and the fear of the authorities that as a result Moscow will become a magnet for *bomzhi* from all over Russia. Moreover, with few exceptions – such as that of Nochlezhka, which received premises from the St. Petersburg government to run a hostel – even NGOs find it very difficult to obtain dwellings to house adult

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10 Médecins sans Frontières has now refocused its assistance on programmes specifically designed for street children as it believes that the local and federal authorities should now be in a position to address the issue of homelessness, especially among the adult population (interview with Alexei Nikiforov, the co-ordinator of the MSF homelessness programme, March 2005).

homeless people. In Nochlezhka's hostel, because of the absence of sufficient facilities, the doors are only opened to elderly and disabled people and to the sellers of its magazine, '*The Way Home*' (which came to replace the newspaper *Na Dne*), who are expected eventually to find other means of subsistence and leave the shelter (Solovieva, 2001).[11]

While public support of the homeless population is almost non-existent, the changing nature of the city space leaves *bomzhi* with ever decreasing chances of finding shelter. As in Los Angeles, New York or Paris, there is a visible proliferation of commercially controlled spaces, protected from undesirable elements (Davis, 1990, Sorkin, 1992, Boyer, 1994, Zukin, 1995). All kinds of illicit opportunities for finding a roof over one's head which used to exist in the previously non-commercialised Russian cities, with widely available access to public and communal spaces (doorways, lofts, cellars, train stations, etc.) are now being cut off. Local residents, often with the help of local authorities, install intercom systems and locks in the entrances to blocks of flats. Train stations are heavily policed and guarded. As a result of all the administrative and spatial strategies applied to the homeless population, their excommunication has become almost total. Indeed, truly heroic efforts are required of displaced people to stay alive in Russian society today.

When the British criminologist Jock Young (1998) writes about the dangers of the European dream of solidarity and inclusion turning into a nightmare of surveillance, filtering, segregation and denial of legal rights to 'outgroups', we might say this has already happened in Russia, at least for the displaced population. The insecurity which people feel about unsettled groups in an increasingly fragmented society co-exists in Russia with deep-rooted traditions of authoritarian control. Russia seems to have bypassed the period of the classic welfare states, which offered some protection to marginal populations, and to have gone directly into the post welfare state dystopia.

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11 Selling a newspaper is seen as a way to persuade members of mainstream society of the 'normality' of homeless people; as a means of behavioural 'correction'; and as a practical way towards leaving homelessness. Yet, as Solovieva, who has studied the inhabitants of the 'Nochlezhka' shelter, testifies, newspaper sellers often see this occupation as more rewarding than odd jobs or begging and have no intention of developing any other strategies (2001).

Conclusion

The main question of this book was how, through losing their rights to physical space, Russian homeless lose their very social existence. Although such a question can be asked in relation to the homeless in many societies, it is, I think, particularly pertinent in Russia, whose spatial order has for centuries been based on binding people to land. From serfdom and peasants' *obshchiny* to Soviet enterprise-based systems to the current system of allocation of welfare on the basis of residence, key social institutions have supported and fostered tight territorial affiliations. The state maintained and reinforced this order through the passport and *propiska* regime.

And yet the strength of the roots that hold people in their places, the roots which such a system takes almost for granted, has been consistently questioned and undermined throughout Russia's history. Not only the social catastrophes of wars and revolutions, but a whole series of violent social processes shook the system and produced displacement and uprooting of people. In the twentieth century, for example, the brutal Soviet labour mobilisation, the tumultuous break-up of the Soviet Union and the rapid disintegration of enterprise-based communities in post-perestroika Russia were accompanied by displacement and subsequent movement of people.

Even in times of relative political and economic calm, such as late socialism or, in more recent years, stabilisation under Putin, the social fabric has been shown to be thin and weak. People have been displaced through family conflicts, by losing connections to home through long absence, by falling ill, and through many other private risks and misfortunes. Whatever the reason, by being removed from the familiar context in which they had rights to some positive social qualifications, people could be thrown into territories in which they were strange, alien, out of place. If they remained unattached and homeless, they became 'stains' on the social landscape, something to be erased, wiped out.

A haunting reminder of historical traumas and of the unresolved contradictions in the collective order, homeless people become a reality that has to be suppressed. The possibilities and strategies of suppression have varied over time. For the Soviet regime, unemployable alcoholics, unattached ill-reputed women, and all other awkward individuals unable to 'fit' into the local communal and work structures, presented a major problem. They formed a residue which could not be ignored or wiped away, nor could they be 'normalised' through the (non-existent) charity or state welfare provisions for the outgroups. The Soviet regime used moral branding

– such as parasites, anti-social elements – and then constructed crime out of displacement so that these people, now total outsiders, could then be re-placed in the prison order or relegated to residual spaces, such as those beyond the 101st kilometre from the city borders. Since the start of the 1990s, when Russia abandoned these penal solutions, homeless people have been segregated through non-penal means – in detention centres, shelters and hostels – or simply left to fend for themselves on the streets. Any serious response to the problem of homelessness can only be based on acknowledging their citizenship rights, but this would require a complete reform of the registration system – something that the political regimes in Russia have so far been unwilling to do.

The past and current excommunication of homeless people in Russia can to a large extent be attributed to the traditional Russian preoccupation with borders and their maintenance. The state protected (and expanded) its frontiers and saw to it that internal borders kept each subject in his place. While rewarding belonging to a place, the Russian administrative and political regimes have penalised unorganised mobility and have been particularly harsh towards those people who could not be fixed to the territory through work and family.

Communities and their Borders

It is important to stress that concern about the security and inviolability of borders has not been limited to the state. Local communities also maintained their borders – between 'ours' (*svoi, nashi*) and 'others' (*chuzhie, ne nashi*), with 'ours' being those who belonged to the local networks of family and friends and were immersed in informal personal relations in work-based collectives, and 'others' being those outside these shared places. The members of these communities have pursued their own strategies of excluding people. To use Max Weber's concept, they exercised strategies of social closure, through which members of social collectivities try to restrict access to their resources and opportunities. According to Frank Parkin, strategies of social closure underlie the processes of exclusion in all stratified societies (1979, pp.45-7). In the Soviet case the state and local communities worked together to keep square meters of housing shared among those who 'belonged', and protected the local space from, say, 'fallen' single women or untrustworthy ex-prisoners. To this day, people successfully use their official identities (based on *propiska* regulations) to secure public benefits, while excluding unregistered outsiders – even in situations when the benefit in question is a bowl of charity soup, as Melissa Caldwell (2004) showed in her study of the operation of the Christian Church soup kitchen in Moscow.

Moreover, in the course of my research the issue of 'ours', and the extent to which they can be relied upon in case of trouble, arose again and again. As I attempt to show in this book, while the absence of 'close ones' could be an important factor in a person's descent into homelessness, many of the *bomzhi* in fact had close relatives and friends. These people often even lived in the same city and could be easily accessible. Yet the *bomzhi* either could not ask them for help at all – or stopped

asking after a while. For some, the reason was obvious – their relations with these people were directly implicated in them having to leave home (as in the cases of women escaping from abuse, runaway children or elderly people thrown out of their houses). Others exhausted their families' and friends' willingness to help (cf.: Wiseman, 1970, p.223; Snow and Anderson, 1993, p.260). Some families were too poor and disrupted to support their relatives in times of great need. But equally, the stigma of homelessness was such that *bomzhi* themselves were unwilling to maintain their former associations simply for fear of bringing shame to their loved ones and, in turn, undermining their social standing. For similar reasons, *bomzhi* feared coming into contact with old friends and relatives, in whose faces they would read the confirmation of their fallen status. Some 'close ones' actually expelled their relatives and friends in the first place, while others erected walls between themselves and the now untouchable *bomzhi*.

Homelessness is perhaps an extreme case of the failure of social bonds. But for all its extraordinary properties, it still requires us to question the strength of the informal sphere, and in particular the solidarity, collectivism and mutual support that are often taken as characteristics of Russian communal and work relations (albeit undermined in more recent years by the increase of pragmatic individualism).[1] What happens to trust and social capital when people lose their work, family or territorial affiliations? Can informal networks be relied upon to support people with damaged identities? The fascination with the resilience of Russian people, with their collective coping abilities in the face of first the Soviet state domination and then the economic cataclysms of post-socialist transformation, can leave blind spots around the actual fragility of the social networks and the ease with which people can become a residue, a 'waste', in the eyes of their fellow beings.

Social Waste: Some Important Qualifications

Throughout this book I have used the concept of 'waste' when analysing the place assigned to the *bomzhi* in collective representations and state policies. Their designation as waste arises from their total displacement, from the lack of any grounding in the settled society. But at the same time it is important to point out that the category of 'waste' does not reflect their actual lived experience. The representation of *bomzhi* as a redundant and isolated population, a mass of outcasts deprived of any distinctions and surviving on society's leftovers, is only adequate in the last stages of homelessness, whereas up to that point they are involved in a wide variety of social interactions with the settled community.

Although they still remain in the most powerless dominated position in society, vagrants and *bomzhi*, due to their situation as being unattached, mobile, ready to exchange or sell their services at the lowest cost, are in fact in demand in the city

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1 See the discussion, for example, in Ledeneva, 1998, Ashwin, 1999, Caldwell, 2004, White, 2004. On communal solidarity and generosity as a part of the collective metaphysics of the Russian soul see Pesmen, 2000.

economy, at least at street level. The spheres in which they can find work – street vending, car washing, sex work etc. – form a part of the informal city economy. While some occupations – such as selling newspapers on the streets – seem to be disappearing as this trade is increasingly incorporated into the formal commercial sector, others still remain open to homeless people. Here the processes occurring in the Russian city space can be viewed as part of the global phenomenon of re-emergence of street-level economic activities in the developed world, both in Western and in post-communist economies (Jordan, 1999).[2]

On the streets, homeless people are engaged in a variety of improvised, makeshift activities, which Damon, using Levi-Strauss's term, suggests calling *bricolage*, the practices of 'making and repairing' (2002, p.14). While these activities at the immediate level are motivated by material need, they are ultimately, as I have argued in this book, aimed at finding physical attachments to the city space, positive roles and social connections. In other words, they are aimed at re-placement in social structure. The study of the relations between the displaced and the 'settled' helps us to uncover the hidden reality of social co-operation, including that between homeless people and other sections of the urban sub-proletariat – the marginalised 'housed' people. The bottom layer of society, which is often presented by sociologists as a dumping ground, a sphere of misery and alienation (see, for example, Zaslavskaia, 1998, Rimashevskaia, 2003), emerges as a structured and socially 'fertile' area.

Moreover, the homeless are not a faceless mass of people who have lost all their personal and social distinctions. As I have tried to demonstrate in this book, there are important gender- and class-specific ways of adaptation. Women may try to find partners (hoping to leave homelessness or at least to get a place to sleep, wash and keep their belongings). Some street-level economic activities such as begging or prostitution seem to be more open to women than to men (who, in return, have more chance of finding jobs associated with hard physical labour). People who come from more educated backgrounds strategically use their linguistic and cultural competences in order to project respectability and sustain reputations among the members of the mainstream society, while long-déclassé homeless alcoholics attempt to get by through establishing relationships with the circles of marginalised city dwellers, *kvartirnye bomzhi*. Social stratification does not stop at the level of the 'settled' society, but extends right through the 'bottom layer' as well.

Similarly, the applicability of the concept of social exclusion to homeless people needs to be critically reassessed. Social exclusion is normally used in the broader perspective of social integration and citizenship (Room, 1995). Whether based around the notions of poverty and deprivation, as it is in the British tradition, or around the notions of social integration and solidarity, as it is in the continental tradition (Levitas, 1996, Madanipour, 1998), social exclusion presupposes a collapse of social structures around individuals and households. However, the study of social

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2   Jordan links the re-emergence of street-level economic activities to the surplus of unskilled labour in the developed economies, the reappearance of mass unemployment, and the erosion of welfare entitlements.

interactions of homeless people shows that those who are 'socially excluded' are in fact included in the social structure in a variety of ways, and have a function and a place there, although perhaps not the function and the place that the dominant regimes would be willing to recognise. While homeless people are unquestionably cut off from social, economic and political rights, they are able to tap into the systems of social interaction at ground level – at least until they have depleted all their personal resources.

Prisoners of Collective Narratives

Having made these qualifications, let us return to the initial question: how can homelessness ultimately lead to a loss of any place in society, to social death?

As I have discussed in this book, when people are left to survive on the streets, they can try against all odds to 'hold out'. But for all their efforts they remain the displaced, the transgressors, intruders into territories to which they have no rights, and this has profound consequences for their social and personal identity.

The tragedy of street homeless people is that their identities as *bomzhi* give them a narrative in the collective imagination that denies them any human worth. While they may initially attempt to reject this designation and disguise their status, if they continue living on the streets they are eventually left with no resources to perform unspoiled identities (contrary, say, to the housed poor – see Caldwell, 2004, p.155).

On the streets their 'true' situation is conveyed to the world through their bodies. When homeless people appear in public spaces looking dirty, and often displaying visible signs of abuse (such as bruises or wounds), this provokes public condemnation. But the transgression that homeless people perform is not just limited to their outward appearance, which violates the norms of public self-presentation. Their condition of homelessness itself constitutes a transgression. Their bodies are read as signifiers of this condition. As shown in my analysis of the militia records of detention of homeless people, there are other signifiers – lack of relatives and friends in the area, lack of documents, lack of job and money – that point to total displacement, which is the real crime of the *bomzhi*. Other transgressors, who may also look and behave differently from the 'settled' population (such as, for example, hippies or young squatters from middle-class families), if they can demonstrate that they have a place of residence somewhere else or can be sponsored by reputable citizens, are not subjected to the same treatment as placeless *bomzhi*. Similarly, when *bomzhi* attempt to disguise their condition by putting on clean clothes, washing and grooming themselves to look like 'ordinary' citizens, if it becomes known that they are in fact street homeless, they still meet public reprobation and distrust (as happened, for example, to my homeless interviewee Kirill when he told a man he met on a bus that he was a vagrant). And even if they travel in public spaces unhindered, they remain, as Tatiana, another interviewee, put it, *bomzhi* in their souls.

The identity of a homeless person allows very limited degrees of freedom of interpretation. The certainty of *bomzhi* about their spoiled identity, and their

resentment and acceptance of it, pervaded their discourse and practices. This included their communication with people in the same situation. While homeless people are involved in limited co-operation, they cannot normalise each other's identities. Nor, in the current Russian context, can their identities be validated through the operation of public welfare or charity. While the state denies them citizenship rights and treats them as a 'special', abnormal category, charities tend to approach the homeless as purely passive recipients of aid. Acceptance of the damaged identity, together with limitation of personal mobility and depletion of physical and mental resources on the streets, leads to progressive immersion into the street world and loss of any remaining connection to mainstream society.

Epilogue

When, in spring 2005, I visited the Moscow municipal centre for persons without fixed abode (inherited by the city from Médecins sans Frontières) I felt as if I had travelled into a war zone. Dozens of emaciated, dirty, ill, tired people were trying to get into the centre. They were cut off from the entrance by a metal fence. Those who managed to push their way through the crowd and be let in received quick medical attention and were issued with some clothes, shoes or walking sticks (all supplied to the centre by various charities, not by the city). Some went away with a letter confirming that they were the clients of the centre – a document that they hoped would help them to be let into the metro or get the militia to issue them a new passport. The 'former' Muscovites – those who had been registered in the city – were directed to shelters where they could stay. Those who were evidently very seriously ill got a referral to a hospital. But the centre's employees were powerless to help most of these people in any significant way. As the centre's social worker told me at the end of her working day, 'Many of the people we saw today will probably be dead in six months, and there is nothing we can do'.

Much and little has changed since I started my research. By opening the centre for persons without fixed abode the city has finally accepted responsibility for these people. There is definitely more effort by charities and human rights organisations to address the problem of homelessness. These organisations are lobbying the city and federal authorities to recognise that there is a need for profound legislative and policy change. They are pointing to the unconstitutional nature of the registration rules. They propose programmes of re-adaptation for ex-prisoners and young care-leavers and want the Russian population to have access to more information and education about civil and housing law (Gutov and Nikiforov, 2001, Karlinsky, 2004, Médecins sans Frontières, 2004). They drafted a new law on Prevention of Homelessness and Re-socialisation of Homeless People, but in the present atmosphere of security concerns, its authors expect it to have little chance of being passed by the Duma.

The militia detention centres are now closed, and homeless people are no longer routinely arrested on the streets. But although it is of course an improvement of sorts that homeless people are no longer incarcerated, and are 'just' fined and

deported during periodic *zachistki* [security sweeps], this is not a way to resolve their problems.

As Nikolai, one of my homeless interviewees, said, 'it's good that they don't put people in prisons and detention centres for vagrancy anymore. But you know… indifference also kills.' In a new twist, Nikolai, who had been in prison in the Soviet times, decided that his only option of survival was to go back to prison. He told me that he planned to steal expensive food from a supermarket in order to be arrested and put into confinement.

> There are no human beings here in Moscow. We were taught at school that a man should be like a brother to another man [*chelovek cheloveku brat*]. But here people are like wolves to each other. At least in prison I will get a roof over my head and human company.

It is telling that since the end of the Soviet penal 'solutions' to the problem of homelessness, homeless people now might feel that – in order not to die on the streets – they have to take matters into their own hands and find their way into prison.

Homelessness, which is often seen as a minor, albeit disturbing, detail of the Russian city landscape, points at some important truths about the whole society. It takes only a small shift of focus to see that, in fact, there is another social reality, that of the 'remainder', the damaged, the displaced. By looking in that direction we can also observe the ease with which this reality is collectively repressed. I hope this book will aid the understanding of this hidden world of social suffering, and thus help to open up homelessness for public debate, without constructing biased moral arenas around it.

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