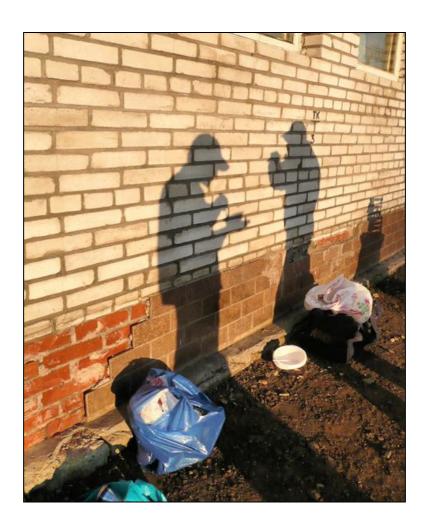# DISPOSABLE AND INDISPENSABLE

Making sense of homelessness
in post-Soviet Russia

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Резюме

Настоящая дипломная работа посвящена изучению явления бездомности в России. Она основана на учебной практике и полевой работе, проведенной в Санкт-Петербурге в 2008 году. В качестве цели полевой работы ставилось понимание того, каким образом бездомные осмысливают свою жизнь и свое положение в пост-советской России. 9 бездомных представили себя мне, рассказав свои жизненные истории и мечты на будущее. Через жизнеописание бездомные выстраивали и передавали значимые социальные идентичности.

Юридическое и духовное положение бездомных в российском обществе отражено в смысле жизненных историй. По этой причине я обсуждаю широкий стуктурный контекст, в который встроено явление бездомности.

Я спорю с точкой зрения, согласно которой бездомность как феномен, а бездомные в частности, были выстраиваемы в рамках высоко идеологического процесса с советских времен. Репрессивный режим передвижения, введенный Сталиным в 1930-х годах, превратил бездомных и безработных в правонарушителей, и их преступления приводились в качестве примеров в образовательном процессе советских граждан. В постсоветской России бездомные занимают настолько же идеологическую позицию, в которой они вынужены являться представителями всего того, что противоречит сегодняшним идеалам. Этот доминирующий дискурс содержит идею, что бездомный обладает определенными характерными чертами: он ленив, опасен и морально девиантен. Он помещен на самую низкую ступень духовного порядка и, таким образом, он играет роль конституирующего другого.

В то же время юридическое положение бездомных сомнительно. Быть бездомным уже не является преступлением, но бездомность не является социальной проблемой в глазах государства. Вместо этого кажется, что бездомные невидимы для властей. У них нет административного статуса, так как они не зарегистрированы по месту

пребывания, что является базовой структурой Российской административной системы. Это приводит к тому, что они игнорируемы и лишены доступа к услугам и гражданским правам. Некоторые НГО рассматривают явление бездомности с основанной на правах точки зрения. Они совершают попытки превратить это в структурную проблему и, таким образом, утверждать ответственность государства. Я спорю с тем, что такой дискурс выстраивает бездомных как группу лишенных и исключенных юридических субъектов.

Сами бездомные находят смысл своей жизни в рамках этих стуктурных ограничений и дискурсов. Значение положения бездомного двойственно. Встречи с не-бездомными являлись центральным звеном в интернализации моральных положений и деградирующих характеристик доминирующего дискурса. Это вызывало такое чувство стыда, что мои информанты решили разорвать связи со своим не-бездомным окружением. Самоосуждение и чувство ненужности кому-либо явилось болезненным последствием положения бездомного.

В то же время потребность дистанцировать себя от деградирующих характеристик доминирующего дискурса занимает ключевое место в определении идентичности бездомных. Последнее им удалось в большой степени за счет переноса этих характеристик на других, таким образом, репродуцируя доминирующий дискурс, который низводил их на нисшую ступень.

Центральным положением данной дипломной работы является утверждение, что те бездомные, которые были проинтервьюированы мной, были озабочены своим духовным положением более, чем юридическим. Как следствие, дискурс НГО имел очень ограниченное значение для них. Более того, идентичность, предлагаемая программой Анонимные Алкоголики, была более более полезна для тех, кто следовал этой программе. Только здесь они были нужны кому-то и считались изобретательными.

Abstract

This thesis is a study of homelessness in Russia. It is based on an internship as well as fieldwork in St. Petersburg in 2008. The aim of the fieldwork was to understand how homeless people make sense of their lives and position in post-Soviet Russia. Nine homeless men presented themselves to me through their life stories and told me about their dreams for the future. Through their life stories, the homeless negotiated and conveyed meaningful social identities.

The legal and moral position of homeless people in Russian society is reflected in the meaning of the life stories. I therefore discuss the larger structural context in which homelessness is embedded.

I argue that homelessness as a phenomenon, and homeless people in particular, have been constructed in a highly ideological process since Soviet times. The repressive mobility regime introduced by Stalin in the 1930s turned the homeless and unemployed into delinquents and made an educative example of their felonies in the education of soviet citizens. In post-soviet Russia, the homeless occupy an equally ideological position - in that they are made to represent all that contradicts today's ideals. This dominating discourse holds that the homeless person possesses certain traits: he is lazy, dangerous and morally deviant. He is placed at the lowest position in the moral order and he thereby plays the role of constituent other.

At the same time, the legal position of the homeless is dubious. It is no longer a crime to be homeless but homelessness has not been transformed into a social problem in the eyes of the state. Instead the homeless seem to be invisible to the authorities. They have no administrative identity because they are not registered at a place of residence - which is the basic structure in the Russian administrative system. This renders them ignorable and effectively excludes them from access to services and civil rights. Some ngos view homelessness from such a rights-based perspective. They attempt to turn it into a structural problem and thereby hold the state responsible. I argue that this discourse constructs the homeless as a group of deprived and excluded legal subjects.

The homeless themselves made sense of their lives within the frame of these structural constraints and discourses. The meaning of being homeless was characterised by ambiguity. Encounters with the non-homeless were central to *internalisation* of the moral position and degrading traits of the dominant discourse. This brought about so much shame that my informants chose to disconnect themselves from their non-homeless network. Self-blame and 'not being needed' by anyone was a painful consequence of being homeless.

At the same time, the need to *distance* themselves from the degrading traits of the dominant discourse was central to the homeless' negotiation of identity. They achieved this largely by deferring these traits to others - thereby reproducing the dominant discourse which so degraded them.

It is a central point in this thesis that the homeless people I interviewed were more preoccupied with their moral position than their legal one. Consequently, the discourse of the ngos had limited significance for them. Rather, those who were enrolled in Alcoholics Anonymous made use of the identity offered to them through this program. Only here were they needed by someone and considered resourceful.

Contents

Notes on transliteration and funding

I have used the Library of Congress Transliteration System, except in cases where another English spelling is commonly accepted, for instance the names Nevsky, Pyotr and Anatoly.

Front page photo by Pierre Jaccard.

INTRODUCTION

When I first came to St. Petersburg in 2003, facades on the buildings on Nevsky Prospekt – the three km long boulevard in the city centre – were in the process of complete renovation. Behind the facades lay empty plots – all the interior had been torn down and brand new buildings were to be attached to them to them from behind. I got the feeling that a tremendous program of replacement and renewal was in progress. In fact, this program did not only concern the physical world - the president himself at that time led a project aimed at redefining the very identity of Russia, with regard to foreign policy as well as national mindset. The Russians should no longer be seen as queuing for the most basic necessities: they should no longer see themselves reflected in the windows of empty shops. Rather, they should see progress and modernisation, seasoned with national culture from pre-revolutionary Russia. Soviet times were long gone.

During any project involving redefining identity and rebuilding a new order, each thing is assigned to its place. The rearranging of things becomes the process, during which the new order is created and maintained. In Russia, it happened in its most tangible form in a gigantic TV show, where Russians appointed the 10 most important Russians in history. The results testified to a divided national identity and a dubious success for the president's project: with almost even counts, the three winners were: the twelve century war hero Alexander Nevsky; the pre-revolutionary prime minister Pyotr Stolypin and – without further introduction – Josef Stalin. The rest of the list comprised a rare mix of poets, writers, tsars and soviet leaders.

The process of *redefining identity* in today's Russia is no less political than the one that took place after the 1917 revolution and brought a whole new socialist order (Humphrey 1996/97:71). Private property rights, entrepreneurship and individuality are common ideological concepts. But for these ideals – and those living them out - to be given pride of place, others needs to occupy the lowest position. To lend glory and admiration to the celebrated, others need to be disgraced and looked down upon. On this matter no voting or TV shows seem necessary, because there is little doubt and disagreement at this point. Those occupying the lowest place are the 'dispossessed' – in the material, political and moral sense.

Obviously, these aspects of dispossession are interconnected. (The more so, the more firmly

a group or person is positioned in the lowest place of the order.) Much of this research is devoted to making connections and mechanisms of dispossession clear, with regard to one defined category of dispossessed people: the Russian homeless, also known as the *bomzh*[1]. The moral dispossession of the homeless is particularly tied to the use and connotations of that word. Their political and material dispossession is however, bound to their lack of administrative – and thereby civil – status, evidenced in their lack of *propiska* (residence registration). The absence of the *propiska* stamp in their domestic passports makes them invisible to the state, because it disqualifies them as citizens.

I became acquainted with these issues during an internship in St. Petersburg in 2008. I worked with an organisation for the homeless, that was particularly preoccupied with the *propiska* system and its violation of homeless people's rights. During the course of my internship and as I got more acquainted with the conditions under which the homeless live, I increasingly wondered how homeless people themselves make sense of their existence. How do they perceive the obvious and formal marginalisation from the side of the state? How do they – or do they - maintain humanness and dignity under the given conditions? What explanations are employed by each homeless person to elucidate the reason and logic or their situation? What aspirations and dreams do they have for themselves – if any?

These questions led me to return to St. Petersburg in the fall of 2008 to conduct a minor fieldwork. During this trip, I interviewed 9 homeless men – some sheltered, some living on the streets. Their life stories make up the centre around which this research evolves. But their self-perception and notions of identity are inseparable from the social structure in which they are embedded (Höjdestrand 2005:127). Their everyday lives and identities are mediated by the position they occupy in the society, on a legal as well as a moral level. Therefore an analysis of the structure that regulates - and the discourses that set the framework for the lives of homeless people, becomes the point of departure of this research. In this way my analysis contextualises the individual stories and fates at a social and political macro level (ibid.:22).

Consequently, I begin with analysing the emergence of the social category of the *bomzh* historically and the legislation that regulated homelessness in the Soviet Union and in post-soviet Russia.
This analysis is *the foundation* for understanding *the legal, social and moral position* of the

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[1] Bomzh is an acronym originally used to define an administrative status, but today it is used in public language about all homeless and has clear negative connotation. Singular form is bomzh and plural form is bomzhi, as will be used in this research.

homeless I interviewed. The research questions guiding <u>chapter one</u> are therefore:

How were the homeless constituted as a distinct social and legal category in the Soviet Union and how was homelessness structurally regulated then and in Russia today?

Following the analysis of these questions, I address the consequences for homeless people of their *legal and social position*. I account for how the legislation in practice both produces homelessness and regulates homeless people's lives from a sociological point of view. In <u>chapter two</u>, I therefore ask

How is homelessness produced and maintained in post-Soviet Russia?

While legislation set the limits for homeless people's everyday options, the *moral position* of the homeless sets the framework for their negotiation of a meaningful existence. I therefore devote <u>chapter three</u> to discourses about homelessness – that of the state, public and some ngos – and ask:

What are the discourses about homelessness in Russia today?

In <u>chapter four</u>, I move to the individual level. In the light of the structural constraints and discourses (*the legal, social and moral position* of the homeless) analysed throughout the three preceding chapters, I ask:

How do homeless people make sense of their lives?

In order to maintain overview and coherence, these research questions and references to them will be highlighted as above (***boldface italics)*** throughout this thesis.

Before I engage myself in analysis to answer the research questions, it is necessary to introduce some theoretical and methodological points. In the following section I therefore look into the field of homelessness as a subject for academic studies, in order to clarify where exactly the present research is placed. I then introduce basic assumptions and some definitions and dimensions of homelessness that will be applied throughout the thesis. This will clarify my theoretical approach. The methods used to analyse and answer my research question are subjects of the subsequent section, which include a discussion of my fieldwork.

The field of homelessness

In the following section, I introduce the field of homelessness, as it is the framework on which this academic research is built.

First I look into the issue as a subject of research in the Soviet Union and in contemporary Russia. I present approaches and perspectives in the - quite few - published studies, in order to account for where and how I have been inspired, as well as where and how this research differs. It serves to provide an overview over the field and to contextualise this research.

Studying homelessness

Homelessness has been the subject of substantial research and development of theory in western academia within the last half a century. Especially during the 1980s when there was a boom in homeless people appearing on the streets of Europe and USA, the number of studies and researches increased dramatically (Toro 2007:461). A great number of studies and surveys are continuously being produced, focusing on various aspects of homelessness as a phenomenon; its nature; its extent; its causes and solutions as well as the characteristics and life of homeless people.

While an overcrowded research field in the Anglo-Saxon world, homelessness is somewhat 'understudied' in a Russian context. Pre-revolutionary studies were not focused on homelessness as such but represented it as an element in other areas such as poverty, crime, deviance, marginalisation (Osipov et al. 2007:3). Research on homelessness in the Soviet period was more or less non-existant. First of all, being 'without a fixed place of residence' was illegal in the Soviet Union and punishable with prison and/or working camp sentences. This made research into the subject extremely difficult and the only information on the matter is comprised of poor statistical data on perpetrators of the offences connected to homelessness. Secondly, because homelessness was turned into a prosecutable offence, it did not exist as a social category for research but was subsumed under 'crime'.

When the criminal codes on 'vagrancy' were abolished, the field slowly opened up – both in terms of research and social work. Academics and newborn ngos attempted to do local quantitative surveys and authorities hesitantly provided unclear statistics on the extent and scope of the problem in their area. However, despite the extent of homelessness as a

phenomenon, the field has attracted little interest in Russia and relatively few studies have been published on the matter. Existing research falls into three overall categories: academic, NGO-related and official - that is, research and other documents published by the authorities. I will deal with the last two in chapter three where I present the view of the state and the view of ngos on the issue of homelessness.

Most of the Russian academic studies approach homelessness from a sociological point of departure and try to account for the phenomenon by focusing on the sociological characteristics of the homeless: age and sex, educational level, previous work experience etc. Published research[2] is also preoccupied with defining the causes of homelessness, such as family problems, loss of job, prison sentences, evictions, registration, choice of lifestyle as well as income strategies. Studies are often based on surveys among the homeless and vary in quality and scope : the field is extremely politically charged. This also influences publications, especially those published by academics who collaborate with - or are funded by - ngos or state structures.

Ethnographic studies are very few. Only three comprehensive studies have been published, that of Tova Höjdestrand (2005); Svetlana Stephenson (2006) and Melissa Caldwell (2004), the latter not focusing exclusively on homeless people, but more broadly on users of a Moscow soup kitchen. Caldwell is particularly interested in the interaction and relationship between users of the service, the staff and the volunteers working there. Further, a minor ethnographic study was published by Solovieva (2001) focused on the homeless vendors of the Russian newspaper for the homeless '*Put' Domoi.*'

Svelana Stephenson was the first to conduct extensive ethnographic research on homeless people in post-soviet Russia. Her work is primarily based on a large number of in-depth life-story oriented interviews conducted in the 1990s in Moscow and published in the book "*Crossing the Line. Vagrancy, Homelessness and Social Displacement in Russia*". She focuses on both the structural factors mediating homelessness during the Russian transition period and on showing how these are integrated into the personal life story of her informants. The key concept in her work is 'displacement' - in all aspects of the term, which she argues unites most other terms that fit the homeless, unattached, unemployed, houseless etc. Further, she continuously draws lines back to the soviet era, its social conditions and regulations governing movement and vagrants – shedding light on the sometimes hidden but strong legacy of 'the totalitarian state'.

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[2] Such as Alekseeva 2005; Gutov & Nikiforov 2004; Osinskii et al. 2004; Beigulenko 1999; Osipov et al. 2007: Karlinsky 2004; Yulikova & Sklyarov 1994; Zav'ialov 2000 and Sokolov 1994.

I owe much to Stephenson in terms of inspiration. Like Stephenson I chose to conduct life-story oriented interviews. I have also been inspired by several of the concepts and themes applied by her in her work, not the least of which was her analysis of relations between homeless.

Another extensive contribution to the field is Tova Höjdestrand's doctoral dissertation *"Needed by nobody – Homelessness, Humiliation and Humanness in Post-Soviet Russia"*. In contrast to Stephenson, all of Höjdestrand's data consist of observations and informal interviews conducted at street level, at charities and at the Moscow Train Station in St. Petersburg in 1999. Though different in methods, this work is of particular interest to the present research since it provides a unique image of homelessness in St. Petersburg at that specific time. Here, almost 10 years later, much has changed in terms of 'hang-outs' and access to services and charities, but her observations and themes are certainly present in the lives of my informants and relevant to my analysis.

The present research is not ethnographic in terms of ethnography's traditional long term fieldwork of participant observation. However, I take inspiration primarily from the above ethnographic studies, because these researchers, as I, attempt to show *"how the macro emerges and is reflected at the individual level"* (Höjdestrand 2005:23). Further – and according to my basic motivation - my primary focus is on how the individual makes sense of his life in light of the conditions under which he lives and according to the discourses and institutions in which he is located. I have thus constructed my research subjects as agents, who act, talk and negotiate meaning according to structural constraints and available discourses.

Stephenson argues, that life on the streets limits the social worlds of the homeless, that physical and moral dehumanisation and designation to spaces where anything and everything can happen, makes opportunities for meaningful existence more and more remote (Stephenson 2006:61). While I agree with the basic assumption, that street life can have devastating effects on the self that was once known, I have found, that presentation of the self, through articulation of one's life story offers vast opportunities for creating meaning and negotiating identity. New meaning is prescribed to initially meaningless experiences, which can then be used in re-definition of this self. I thus admit to an interactionist approach that is not to be found explicitly in the work of either Stephenson or Höjdestrand.

Perspectives and concepts relating to homelessness

Approaches to homelessness in Russia from the side of the state, the public and ngos are fundamentally contrasting. Basically placed at each end of a continuum, they advocate contrasting explanations and therefore also different understandings of who is responsible for taking action. In this process, the homeless are constructed as more or less deserving of assistance – a duality the homeless people I interviewed continuously balanced in their self-representation.

In the following section, I therefore introduce <u>the central debate</u> at the heart of these contrasting approaches. I also discuss their political implications, and why definitions of homelessness are so contested.

Three dimensions of homelessness have proven to be of use in this research. Although they are all interconnected, each of them illuminates particularly relevant aspects of homelessness in Russia, which I deal with.

I use them both independently and concurrently throughout this research as underlying perspectives. The dimensions also help provide better overview because they each address different aspects of the very complicated issue of homelessness in Russia. I introduce them briefly in the following section.

Following the three dimensions, I conclude by accounting for the basic theoretical perspectives that shape the overall approach of this research. I briefly discuss the key assumptions that I employ, because they permeate the discussions I take up throughout the thesis.

Explaining homelessness

When studying the field of homelessness - in Russia or in any other place - one enters an area of politics. Most research in this field has political implications as actors in the field can and will use the results to benefit their cause. At the same time, few studies do not implicitly admit to – or at least incline towards – one of the two basic explanations for homelessness: the structural or the individual. Thus, the field of homelessness is as much part of this ever lasting dichotomy in social science as any other areas of research.

On the structural side, homelessness is explained with factors beyond the homeless individual and the cause is attributed to wider economic and/or social factors (Neale

1997:49). Lack of (affordable) housing, extensive unemployment and restructuring (of public services) as well as insufficient or contrasting legislation, are all examples of particular relevance to the Russian context. Simply speaking, these explanations largely exempt the individual from responsibility and they are therefore viewed as 'deserving' of assistance. This view prevails in the discourse of some prominent Russian ngos, who attempt to place the responsibility on the state and on state structures.

On the agent side, the cause of homelessness is to be found at the individual level. Homelessness is seen as a result of personal problems, such as drug or substance abuse, desire to 'live a free life', moral breakdown or lack of personal ability to adjust and manage life within the established society as such. Contrary to the structural view, the individual approach often places the responsibility with the homeless person, leaving him at the 'undeserving' end of the scale – this is typical of the views that favour substance abuse or the romanticised vagrant lifestyle as explanations for an individual's homelessness. This view was particularly dominant in the Soviet era as well as in the current discourse about homelessness from the Russian state and the general public.

Defining the causes of homelessness inevitably leads to defining solutions to the issue, and this is what makes the field so politically charged. As I have outlined above, states and authorities – in general and in Russia in particular - tend to focus on individual factors when explaining homelessness, as it exempts them from duty to take action. Ngo's on the contrary tend to advocate the structural explanation in order to put pressure on states to change policy. Responses to homelessness are therefore also directly linked to whatever discourse about causes predominates in the organisation, institution or public opinion.

Most serious researchers however, acknowledge that causes of homelessness are complex and explanations that focus on only one of the above levels are too simplistic and of little use. Still, it is possible to trace overall political trends in research. For example, it has been a general tendency that European research focuses more on broader social, cultural and policy levels, whereas Americans look to the individual level (Toro 2007:468f,476). Also as a consequence of political trends, there has been a shift in recent years (from late 1990s) towards focusing on mental illness and substance abuse whereas earlier studies were more concerned with social disaffiliation and welfare (Höjdestrand 2005:21). Most western research and studies on the subject of homelessness agree however that homeless individuals differ substantially in terms of background, paths into homelessness etc. (Neale 1997:49) which is why it is neither fair nor useful to classify the homeless as belonging to a homogeneous group.

The aim of this research is not to explain homelessness as such, nor is it preoccupied with placing blame and finding solutions to homelessness in Russia. Rather I want to analyse the legal and discursive position of homeless people in order to better understand the meaning of being homeless, as expressed by the people I interviewed. Thereby I emphasize how structural constraints mediate homeless people's lives on a practical as well as on a moral level. Following this, my approach to the issue is more in favour of the structural argument than the individual. However, the homeless people I interviewed were actively engaged agents who balanced each argument in their representation of themselves.

Definitions of homelessness

While most actors in the field agree that homelessness is first and foremost an extreme social situation (Ravenhill 2008:xvii), defining the term more closely is very complicated. Definitions are as political as explanations of homelessness because definitions also tend to relate to structural and/or individual factors and thereby place blame and responsibility. Further, a clear definition is the foundation for any attempt to measure the extent of homelessness, that is, the number of homeless individuals. Therefore definitions directly impact on the perceived size of the problem which in turn influences policies and funds flowing to this area of work (ibid.:8).

Another problem related to defining homelessness internationally is that definitions that make sense to people are always closely linked to the way homelessness manifests itself in a given country or context. Manifestations are dependant on a range of factors, such as the country's macro-economic status, its social policies and the work and influence of involved ngos (ibid.:8). While it makes sense in a Russian context to define homelessness in terms of lack of ownership rights to a dwelling, such a definition will be without clear meaning in e.g. Denmark.

Thirdly, serious definitions of homelessness will have to rest upon a definition of the concept of home - a concept is deeply embedded in cultural meaning, ideologies and individual associations.

Due to these many factors, ngos, states, authorities and researchers operate with their own definitions on the base of relevant manifestations of homelessness, political agendas and research focus. In a Russian context as we shall see, homeless and homelessness is defined very differently, depending on the eyes and interest of the defining part.

For this reason, the present research does not operate with a definition of homelessness as such. Rather I am preoccupied with the way relevant actors in Russia define the issue and the consequences this has for their approach and for the homeless themselves. In the following, I will instead account for three useful dimension of homelessness, which I will employ.

Dimensions of homelessness

According to the research questions guiding my analysis, I have found it of use to employ three dimensions of homelessness: i) a residential dimension, ii) a network dimension and iii) a moral dimension, as introduced by Snow and Anderson who pioneered the field[3] . Below I introduce them and their use and relevance for this research.

In *the residential dimension*, homelessness is understood as the lack of suitable and affordable accommodation (Ravenhill 2008:7), ranging from sleeping rough (on the streets) at one end to unsatisfactory housing (such as sharing little space) or insecure housing (e.g. lack of rights to the dwelling) at the other (Neale 1997:48, Toro 2007:463). This view has been widely present in public discourse about homelessness (Glasser 1994:9,11; Ravenhill 2008:11) and is primarily focused on structural factors.

The residential dimension offers some useful concepts. It distinguishes between the *roofless* (without any kind of shelter, sleeping outside) the *houseless* (with a temporary place to sleep e.g. an institution/shelter), those with *insecure housing* (under threat from insecure tenancies, eviction or domestic violence) and finally those in *inadequate housing* (caravans, unfit dwellings or extreme overcrowding)[4]. While homelessness in Russia might be seen as encompassing all of these levels, I will primarily use the first two when I distinguish between those of my informants who lived on the streets and those who were sheltered.

The residential dimension is useful in central parts of this research, particularly in chapter one and chapter two, where I discuss the emergence of homelessness and the consequences of the legislation. The issue at stake here - and for the homeless in Russia - is not only housing in itself, as much as rights to housing and registration in housing.

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[3] Snow and Anderson call these three dimensions i) the residential dimension, ii) the familial-support dimension iii) the role-based dignity and moral-worth dimension (Snow & Anderson 1993:7).
[4] From the ETHOS definitions by the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless. www.feantsa.org.

Of equal relevance to this research is <u>*the network dimension*</u> which focuses on social bonds and linkages between individuals as well as to the larger society (Snow & Anderson 1993:7-8). In this dimension, homelessness is seen as a condition or process of disaffiliation: "*a condition of detachment from society characterized by the absence of attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures* (Bahr et al. 1968 in Glasser 1994:3).

Disaffiliation from one's network plays an enormous role for the homeless in Russia and in this research. Loss of ties to family and old friends seems to be not only a vehicle in the process of becoming homeless, it also defines the everyday life of the homeless. Finally their lack of network diminishes their chances of leaving homelessness. This is of particular relevance in chapter four, where I discuss the meaning of being homeless. Network in terms of bonds with larger societal structures is however of relevance in chapter two, where I discuss the legal position of homeless.

<u>*The moral dimension*</u> is a link to the centre around which this research evolves. It is focused on homelessness as a social category, role or status. It is preoccupied with the dignity and moral worth ascribed to homeless people's status both by themselves and by others (Snow and Anderson 1993:9). One particularly relevant dichotomy in this respect is that of deserving-undeserving, that is, whether the homeless individual is perceived and treated as responsible for his situation or not. I will draw on this dimension in discussions throughout this research. It relates particularly to the construction of *the bomzh* in Soviet times, the discourses about homelessness today (chapter three) and of course the meaning of being homeless (chapter four).

The approach of this research

I see the definition of homeless people in the Soviet Period and in Russia today as a part of a larger 'ordering of things'. Placement in the moral order, ascription of status and the punishment of transgressors have the main function of building order in a world of disorder (Douglas 1966:5; Bauman 2004:5). The homeless are and have been the object of condemnation because they confuse and contradict the comforting clarity of order (Bauman 2004:19; Douglas 1966:45). At the same time they have played - and still play – an indispensable part in the process of order-building – because they are recognized as the anomaly that define the normal. This was the case in the Soviet period, where homeless occupied the unquestionable and secure place of criminals and it is the case in Russia today, where they have been transformed into *redundant human waste* (Bauman 2004:9-13) - *redundant waste* according to their legal status and actual options, but still *indispensable waste* in the re-

ordering of the world, that constitute what is sovereign and what is not (Agamben 1998:15).

In the process of ordering, the homeless seem to become objects of stigmatization. Stigma reduces people to a few discrediting characteristics and deprives them of a place in the category of humans (Goffman 1963:5). This happens in processes at several levels: First, the homeless' position in the moral order of the world has been continuously reproduced on a legislative and discursive level. Second, encounters and social interaction between the homeless and state structures, institutions, members of the public (and researchers) remain the central scene, where the homeless internalise their place in this moral order (and define their 'self'). Finally, representations of the self via life stories provide a platform for defining and negotiating the moral 'self'; a process in which categorization plays a central role. Both the latter contribute to reproducing and maintaining the moral order and to a specific discourse about homeless.

These concepts and perspectives are part of the overall analytical framework in this research. They guide my analytical approach to all of the four research questions and are applied as relevant throughout this thesis.

Research methods

As outlined above, I approach homelessness as a phenomenon, whose meaning is defined in a social process. Therefore social processes - on all levels – become the object for this research. This implies analysis on a structural as well as individual level. On the structural level, I focus on both the discursive and legislative processes that have led to the emergence of homelessness as such and the social category of homeless. In the individual, I look into how discourses inform and are negotiated in symbolic interaction on the micro level.

To that end, I primarily use two methods: In the structural part, I primarily – but not exclusively - use text analysis (chapters one, two and three) and in the individual part I use qualitative interviews (chapter four). Secondary research methods include participant observation and unstructured interviews. They have been used as a supplement, primarily in chapter three and four.

Apart from this, the research as a whole is set within the framework of my experiences and observations from my preceding internship and fieldwork in Russia in 2008. During my

internship, I worked with a Russian ngo for the homeless (Nochlezhka) where I gained insight into the homeless people's living conditions, interaction with each other and with the public, appearance, health conditions etc. Equally important I was acquainted with <u>the legal and moral position of the homeless</u>. This generalised knowledge forms the background for the analysis as a whole, in all 4 chapters of this thesis. Below I account in detail for the approach, methods and materials chosen to analyse and answer each research question.

Analysis of structural level

<u>In chapter one</u>, I first examine the context and historical processes that have led to the emergence and definition of the category of *bomzhi* the Soviet Union. The analysis addresses my first research question: ***How were the homeless constituted as a distinct social and legal category in the Soviet Union and how was homelessness structurally regulated then and in Russia today?***
Insight into this is crucial on two levels: - to outline the foundation for today's legislative system that mediates the options of homeless people; - to understand today's *dominant discourse about the bomzh*, which plays such a pivotal role in the narratives of the homeless. Therefore the analysis is focused on the structural processes that marginalise the homeless and on the production of meaning embedded in this process.

In the first part, which deals with the historical and time-bound aspects, I use *text analysis.* I use written sources that are based on historical documents, decrees and legislation, because they provide insight into the structural processes that have affected the production of homelessness as a category and phenomenon at that specific time. The second part of the chapter is preoccupied with post-soviet legislative reforms, which is why I use legislative documents as primary sources. In the following discussion of the practical implementation of this legislation – that so pivotally affects the homeless – I draw on a variety of sources: my own knowledge from my internship and fieldwork, analysis from articles and books and examples from a user-driven forum from a website dealing with the issue of registration. From this I have gained a broad understanding of the issue.

In general, I approach my written sources from an interactionist perspective. By this I mean, that the meaning formed by the authors - as well as the meaning derived from them by me - is attached to the social context, processes and institutions (Mik-Meyer 2005:194,197) in which they are embedded. In these written sources, problems are categorised, legitimated and defined (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer 2005:21). In the same way I categorise, legitimate and define them to suit and inform the issue at hand. For instance, I use various types of

documents with the purpose of establishing that the mobility regime in the Soviet Union was repressive and had consequences for the definition of homeless as a category *per se*. I thereby derive meaning from the documents that inform an analysis of their consequences for homelessness.

In chapter two, I approach homelessness from a sociological point of view and answer the second research question: **How is homelessness produced and maintained in post-Soviet Russia?** Here I focus on how structural constraints i) produce homelessness and ii) mediate the everyday lives and options of the homeless. In particular, I look into the consequences for homeless people of today's legislation - and its Soviet legacy - in terms of access to services and implementing rights

I use both text analysis and data from my fieldwork and interviews to answer my research question in this chapter. Text analysis is useful to form a broad and representative basis and the examples from my informants illustratively highlight personal aspects.

My focus on rights and structural constraints here coincide with the approach of some Russian ngos. Therefore I have found some of their publications – often joint academic/ngo studies – particularly useful to inform this analysis. These sources come with an agenda, namely that of investigating and exposing the influence of discriminating structures and legislation that inhibit the rights of homeless. I use the data with the same aim in this part of the research but I remain critical towards their explanatory potential and agenda[5]. I postpone a critical and discursive approach to these ngos to the subsequent chapter and research question.

Discourses about homelessness

Homelessness - and the category in which homeless people are placed - is continuously constituted on a discursive level. Discourses about homelessness serve not only to build order, they also define approaches to the issue, from the side of the state, the public and some ngos[6]. My informants constantly related to and negotiated the discourses about

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[5] For instance, statistics on causes of homelessness have been produced in studies with pre-determined categories, some of which are highly questionable in terms of validity. Gutov & Nikiforov, for example, use statistics from the Moscow department of MSF (Doctors Without Borders), where more than 22 000 homeless filled out a questionnaire with the following choice between causes of homelessness: Former convict, loss of home, family problems, loss of job, personal choice, refugee, psychological problems and other. Some of these categories obviously overlap, while others are missing altogether (Gutov & Nikiforov 2004:69).

[6] I understand discourses as making up "culturally specific way of adding significance to the world, or aspects of the world, which renders other representations of the world less plausible and natural, if not entirely excluding them.." (Phillips & Schrøder 2005:277) (my translation).

homelessness. It therefore becomes highly relevant to answer the third research question: **What are the discourses about homelessness in Russia today?** I do this in <u>chapter three.</u>

Linguistics and terminology play a pivotal role in the constitution of the homeless as a separate social category (Phillips & Schröder 2005:286). Therefore I use analysis of publications from the relevant actors as the primary method to analyse the discourses about homelessness in chapter three. General experiences from my internship and fieldwork, including participant observation and unstructured interviews, provided me with unique insight into the competing discourses in this field. I have been confronted with the public discourse and witnessed the struggle of ngos to turn this around. These experiences therefore serve as the base from which I analyse discourses about homelessness.

My analysis of the state's discourse about homelessness and homeless people has been influenced by the lack of a federal program addressing homelessness. While this hints at the government's prioritising of the issue, I have taken in a variety of other sources to inform my analysis: publications from the ministry and their officials and a definition from an official encyclopaedia. As the state's discourse influences official policies, I also discuss the attitude of influential officials surveyed in St. Petersburg. But the state's discourse also sets the frame for the general public understanding of this issue. To elaborate on the *dominant discourse about the bomzh*, I look at definitions in various public sources, such as the media. I also use various studies and surveys of public opinion on the matter, published by academic institutions as well as ngos.

A competing discourse about homelessness is that of some ngos, who constitute their clients in a different way and attempt to influence public opinion and lobby politicians. Because of my internship with one such organisation - Nochlezhka - I am particularly familiar with the discourse of this organisation and their constitution of homelessness as a social problem. As Nochlezhka is the oldest and most experienced organisation working with the homeless in Russia, their discourse has influenced other ngos, not least in a newly established network in which they participate. Of particular importance to some of my informants was Nochlezhka's implementation of Anonymous Alcoholics (AA) – a 12 step program to rehabilitate homeless alcoholics. Therefore I give a short introduction to AA principles and philosophy.

Making sense of being homeless

In chapter four I move to the individual level, to explore how discourses materialise in subjects, set the framework for the agent's options and restrict and enable the formation of new meanings (Mik-Meyer & Järvinen 2005:14). Here I address the fourth research question ***How do homeless people make sense of their lives?*** To do this I conducted fieldwork in St. Petersburg in October and November 2008. Before I account for the course of this fieldwork, I will briefly clarify my basic methodological approach to it:

By embarking on a study of homeless people in St. Petersburg, I join the long history of studying the poor and marginalised. This opens up a range of pitfalls, such as producing romanticised or excessively sympathetic accounts of freedom and solidarity as well as displaying sensationalistic accounts of misery (Höjdestrand 2005:23). It might be tempting to convey the idea, that I, through this research, 'give voice to the poor' by accessing their lifeworld. This is not the case, however, and it can not become the case, as I do not have access to my informants' experiences – only their representations of it (Hollway & Jefferson 2000:3f). On the contrary, I view the stories told to me by my homeless informants as attempts to negotiate the most meaningful social identity in the context of the interview (Järvinen 2005:30). Informants can thus be seen as performers, who try to convey a particular social identity through 'accounts', that is, statements that bridge the gap between <u>actions</u> and <u>expectations</u> in situations subjected to <u>valuative inquiry</u> (Scott & Lyman 1968:46). While Scott and Lyman apply the term 'accounts' on a linguistic level to excuse or justify untoward actions, I view the concept as part of a larger 'identity work'[7] on which my analysis rests. In the present context, <u>actions</u> might be defined as the life experiences, present and future options of the homeless persons I interviewed and <u>expectations</u> might be defined as discourses about homelessness and (as opposed to) characteristics of normality and humanness. Finally, the interview might be defined as a <u>valuative inquiry</u>, where these discourses are in play.

Following this, 'accounts' are *"manifestations of the underlying negotiation of identities"* (Scott & Lyman 1968:59) and they are negotiated according to the conditions under which they exist, that is, active and available discourses. I find it useful here to distinguish between two levels although they are not strictly separable. First there is that of the overall discourses associated with the position and category of homeless and homelessness in Russia, which I will establish in the first part of this research (chapter one and chapter three). These discourses set the frame for the creation of meaning and the negotiation of identities and

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[7] The term 'identity work' was used by Snow and Anderson to cover *"the meaning attributed to self by the actor during the course of interaction with others"* (Snow & Anderson 1993:43).

they are therefore also at the heart of my analysis of the interviews. Moreover, it becomes relevant to look at how these discourses are manifest in the situation of the interview. This is the second level. Because accounts – creation of meaning and negotiation of identity – always occur between persons in roles and the particular identities (and statuses) of the interactants will therefore be negotiated as part of the encounter (ibid.:58). In this way, placement of the other in one or more specific categories is not (necessarily) evidence of mistaken prejudices, but a necessary part of ordering the social world. An obvious example illustrating this point is my approach to the informants as homeless. Had I approached them as unemployed, alcoholics or something else, a different social identity might have been presented. But I approached them as homeless, a term and concept firmly placed at the lowest level in the moral order. This leaves me with the task of presenting my interest and my prior understanding of the issue of homelessness in Russia in general and the homeless persons I interviewed in particular.

Approach to the homeless – pre-understanding

I first became acquainted with the issue of homelessness in Russia, when I – as preparation for a 6 months internship in St. Petersburg – read a report published by some Russian ngos on the matter. It presented an interregional study, a joint venture between academics and ngos and it was in favour of a structural explanation of homelessness, namely the Russian institution of the *propiska* – the residence permit and registration. I found it hard to believe that millions of people were left at the mercy of fate because of an old registration system. I still admit to this position, albeit it is now more informed and nuanced and less one-sided. It has influenced the approach of the present research in that I have chosen the structural constraints (the *propiska* system and its consequences) as my point of departure.

During my internship with the organisation Nochlezhka, I became more acquainted with the far-reaching effects of the *propiska* system and I met the homeless people whom it affected. When I decided on this issue as the subject for the present master's thesis and went back to St. Petersburg to conduct fieldwork, I approached the homeless informants more or less as arbitrary victims of a vicious system – as losers in the hyper-capitalist race that has dominated Russia since the beginning of the 1990s. It meant that I approached my informants with openness and compassion and without blame (something many of them were not exactly used to). I believe this gave them more room to manoeuvre and made them less defended.

In accordance with my approach, I felt righteous indignation on their part and I imagined, that they would be deeply suspicious and angry with the system in which they were trapped.

As we shall see in chapter four, this was not exactly the case, and resistance to the system and dominant discourse about homelessness took place on a much more subtle level.

Life stories and analysis

Choice of life story method

Before my fieldwork, I decided that the interviews were to be conducted primarily as life story interviews. In the following, I will account for my choice of this method, the opportunities it offers and how I made use of its potential in my analysis.

Life stories offer advantages on two levels both of which I make use of:
On one level, the life stories allowed me to gain insight into <u>concrete events and specific themes</u> in the lives of my informants. Each story gave information on how, who and what had played a role in the individual's pathway into homelessness. How were the choices made by the person confined by larger societal constraints and which events had led to the persons present situation? What role do economical, political and social conditions play in the everyday lives of homeless? I provide concrete examples from the life stories in chapter two and partly in chapter three, and thereby show how these structural constraints affect the homeless in form of tangible everyday dilemmas.

However, my choice of life stories as the primary method in the interviews relate to another and more important level in this research: telling one's life story is an opportunity to organise experiences into temporally meaningful episodes, a way of making sense of one's life and one's choices in the light of external conditions.
On <u>the level of meaning</u>, which is the most important for this research, the life story of a person as told by himself, offers insight in his strategies for self-representation (Mik-Meyer & Järvinen 2005:17). By this I mean his social identity as presented in the light of dominant discourses in play. I made my intentions quite clear: that my interests concerned their life in general and their life as homeless (and paths into homelessness) in particular. They therefore took responsibility of making *"the relevance of the story clear"* (Hollway & Jefferson 2000: 31) and their stories can thus be seen as *"an extended story about a significant aspect of one's life"* (Chase 2005:652), in which a particular meaningful identity is negotiated.

Analysis of life stories

Life stories offer great potential for narrative analysis of <u>the individual story</u> as a whole. In such analysis, the researcher looks at the story as a play, centred around a plot, and organised around the following structure: a beginning characterised by a stable situation, a

crisis causing imbalance in the life of the storyteller who then mobilises power to bring back that balance at the end of the story - the presence (Järvinen 2005:36).

At the same time, I wanted to take up specific <u>cross-cutting themes</u>. This had been my idea from the beginning, and I had developed my interview guide (annex I) according to this: The first section contained questions that were meant to help the informant tell his life story and they were followed by questions relating to specific themes that I wanted to explore (such as contact with family and old friends; encounters with the public etc.). New themes emerged across the life stories, creating the basis for an analysis built around these themes. But I was reluctant to let go of the narrative analysis of the life stories as a whole as the meaning ascribed to a certain theme by someone was related to the meaning ascribed to his existence in general. However, an analysis made up solely by nine individual narratives also didn't make sense.

The solution to this dilemma emerged along the way as I followed both strategies for a relatively long time. While analysing each story from a narrative perspective, I also coded the interviews according to themes. Through this strategy, I found, that narratives were confined not only to the story as a whole, but also turned up <u>within themes</u> – at the same time, similar themes emerged when I compared the narrative analysis of each interview. The final presentation of analysis is therefore organised around two levels i) some of the predefined themes and the meaning ascribed to them in the small as well as overall narratives of my informants and ii) cross-cutting themes of a more conceptual character that seemed to define the lives of my informants on an existentialist level[8].

As such, the life story narratives did not become the final object for the analysis. Rather they were used as a means to make clear the meaning ascribed to the chosen themes and to move to another analytical level that contributed to an increased understanding of how life <u>was made to make sense</u> for the homeless I interviewed.

Fieldwork

When I arrived in St. Petersburg in October 2008 to conduct fieldwork for the present research, I did not start from scratch. As mentioned earlier, I had been working with the organisation Nochlezhka earlier the same year. Prior to my fieldwork I had obtained permission from them to recruit informants at the shelter connected to the organisation. While I was there I also obtained permission to recruit at Caritas′ lunch canteen for

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[8] An introduction of each informant and a summary of their life stories can be found in Annex II (classified).

homeless.

In the following section I will account for the course of the fieldwork informing this research. I introduce field sites, my use of assistant and the interview settings, because they have all had an important influence on the generation of data and the subsequent analysis. I conclude with some comments about ethics in practice.

Field sites

Nochlezhka, 112B Ulitsa Borovaia

Nochlezhka is an organisation working with and for homeless people in St. Petersburg. It was founded in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as a response to an urgent crisis in food supply to St. Petersburg. As all food was rationed; only those with registration in the city could receive vouchers for food. This left the homeless starving and Nochlezhka set up a <u>registration system</u> for the homeless, which allowed them to receive food vouchers from the city authorities. During the years, activities expanded and today Nochlezhka runs several programmes: Homemade registration of the homeless, legal and social counselling, distribution of second hand clothes, food and a newspaper for the homeless to sell. The organisation also runs a shelter and rehabilitation programmes for the residents providing heated army tents for the *roofless* during the winter and delivering food from two buses in the suburbs on a daily basis. Finally, cooperation with the authorities, lobby work and networking with other ngos take place. All this is unified in one building in the southern part of St. Petersburg.

Nochlezhka's place offered some obvious practical advantages for my purpose; naturally I could find homeless people there, both residents and others, coming there for the organisation's outgoing services. Further, it was a 'homeless-friendly environment' which meant that my initial contact with potential informants was relaxed and on their grounds, so to speak. This was important, because it gave both me and my informants a chance to get an impression of each other before committing to an interview. This also allowed me to select informants according to a few simple criteria: They should want to talk to me, they should be homeless (in this case I defined that as without *propiska* in St. Petersburg), they should not be under immediate influence of alcohol or other stimulating substances neither show signs of severe mental illness.

This being said, Nochlezhka was also a place of power, discipline and social control – an

institution that produces its clients. While not a 'total institution[9]' in the strict sense, it possesses certain features of such one: Most aspects of the residents' existence take place inside the shelter and most of their daily activities are conducted in the presence of a large number of people, under a specific set of rules (Goffman 1967:13). For example, intake of alcohol was banned for the residents, who also had to sign a contract when moving in – the content and length of which was individual. Those who did not live in the shelter were also under some degree of control. The issuance of registrations also constituted the homeless as a particular category and can be seen as a procedure of enrolment that contributed to the process of 'coding' the homeless as objects for the institutions (ibid.:20). All this contributed to establishing a relationship and hierarchy of power. It meant that those recruited there <u>to some degree</u> defined themselves as homeless, or at least as in the target group for the services of a homeless organisation. By coming there they took part in the power relationship. This was formed not only in interaction with the organisation, but also by the fact that – according to the dominant discourse about the homeless - anyone turning to a homeless shelter/charity is considered to occupy the lowest place in the moral order. This was definitely manifested in the interviews, where my informants continuously related to this discourse.

Caritas' Canteen for the homeless, 179 A Obvodnyi Kanal.
My second field site was a lunch canteen for homeless people, run by the catholic aid organisation Caritas, in the southern part of St. Petersburg, near the Baltic railway station. The canteen had a pleasant atmosphere and the staff was friendly. Just inside the entrance door was a small hatch where the female administrator registers all the appr. 170 guests pr. day during working hours[10] (Noon to 3 pm). Eating there was conditioned on presentation of some kind of registration (most had homeless registrations from Nochlezhka) *every time*, upon which the administrator ticked off each person on a list. Although not to be compared with the 'total institution' this practise testified to some degree of control, authority and 'coding': it can be seen as depriving the guests of any other identity than that of being homeless – as confirmed by their registration card. Therefore, those people I interviewed here, to varying degrees also identified themselves as homeless and related to this identity during the interviews

The canteen provided some of the advantages for me that were also present at Nochlezhka. It was possible to join the guest at the tables, observe and start preliminary talks before

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[9] I would not define the shelter as a 'total institution' in the strict sense, as it is does not in itself inhibit social interaction with the surrounding community via physical separation such as locked doors or barbed wire (Goffman 1967:12).

[10] Interview with administrator in Caritas' Canteen, 179 A Obvodnyi Kanal. St. Petersburg. November 2008.

asking for interviews. Likewise, the guests had a chance to consider us and our business before agreeing to anything.

Working with assistant

Upon my arrival to St. Petersburg, I hired an assistant student to translate during the interviews and transcribe them afterwards[11]. In the following section I will present her and discuss her role because she had a quite strong influence on the interaction in the interview setting and therefore on the generation of data.
Sasha was a 19 year old student of Danish and English at the St. Petersburg State University. She had never occupied herself with the issue of homelessness before or talked to a homeless person. In her own words, she had some preliminary and rather prejudiced views on the homeless - a view mainly shaped by the stereotyping public discourse. I gave her a thorough introduction to the ideas behind my research - especially the fact that I expected her not to initiate discussions with the informants and not to promote her own ideas to them.

Already during the first interview, it became clear to me, that life story-oriented interviews were highly unsuitable for immediate interpretation. One of the main points and assets of life story interviews is to achieve a good flow in the story and immediate interpreting completely inhibited this by cutting up the story and course of events. It meant that Sasha had to interrupt the informant, ask him to wait while she translated to me and then ask him to continue. This did not only obstruct the flow in the story, but also seemed somewhat disrespectful. This reality caused me to train Sasha to a level that made her fit for conducting the interviews with me on the side[12]. She thus became a central figure in the collection and construction of the interview data.

This had consequences for the generation of data. First of all, as she was Russian and a native speaker, she acted as what I would call a kind of 'cultural filter'. By this I mean she was sensitive to the situation and the informants and was able to opt out on questions that would be highly inappropriate to ask in the given situation. But on the other hand, she also omitted potential sensitive issues because of mere politeness and shyness to the older and

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[11] All interviews were transcribed by Sasha on the basis of my instructions. We have been in continuous dialogue about details in transcription. Transcripts have been checked by me, in the sense that I listened to interviews while following the text. This approach allowed me to identify passages that needed elaboration and/or clarification from Sasha.
[12] My Russian skills were sufficient to understand the outline and main features of the stories, and ask a few clarifying questions during and in the end of the interviews.

male informants. Further, they might have reacted to her in a similar way. Secondly I lost some flexibility in the interviews. Sasha asked the informants to elaborate on several occasions but I was myself unable to follow up on unexpected themes that surfaced during the interviews. It meant that I afterwards noticed - when looking at the transcripts - some themes that I would have liked to go deeper into. Consequently my analyses of these themes have been inhibited.

While I might have been looked upon as someone related to the institution, a naïve outsider or something else, Sasha represented the Russian public as such. It is reasonable to assume that she was perceived to understand the issue of homelessness as many other Russians do and thus she represented the dominant discourse about the homeless. It meant, that this discourse - and the traits and stereotypes it carries about homeless people - played <u>a direct (as opposed to underlying) role</u> in the interaction of the interview. Her perceived discourse became of influence because the social identities and the meaning in the life stories were produced against the backdrop of the discourses in play in the situation.

Sasha quickly developed a quite nuanced view on the homeless people we interviewed and she was as fascinated by the stories of the informants as I was. In this respect she also became a source of information to me about the perception of homeless and homelessness from the point of view of a young student from the middleclass. From looking somewhat terrified when I informed her that we were going to talk to *bomzhi*, she gradually developed a more nuanced view and came to care for our informants.

Recruitment, observation and interviews

Caritas' Canteen

Informants where recruited at the tables in the canteen. In most cases we started by asking someone if he came there regularly and, if he showed any interest in conversations, we went on to introduce ourselves and the research. After talking some time and determining initial facts according to my selection criteria, we asked if they had time and interest in giving a formal and taped interview.

In the canteen I also had the opportunity to observe. For instance, I noticed that most people came and went by them selves and that very little interaction occurred between the homeless. Further, small discussions evolved around the tables a few times. Here I learned that not all guests were *roofless* and that many live off old or excess food they get from friendly shop owners or restaurants. I have used both my observations and the unstructured and informal interviews in my analysis.

I preferred not to do interviews with many people listening, because I suspected it would inhibit the informants' inclination to go into detail, in particular with emotional subjects. But there was no private place there to conduct the interviews. My suspicion was partly confirmed during my interview with Oleg, whom we met at Caritas. We had to do it in a nearby café, in which he really stood out because of his worn out looks and all his baggage – both confirming the real stereotypical image of the *bomzh*. The pressure of this context might have contributed to his need to defend himself, which he did by talking almost exclusively about the part of his life that did <u>not</u> relate to homelessness in any way.

Nochlezhka

Residents were recruited on a small bench in the staircase, where most of them came out to smoke. Sasha and I simply joined them by doing the same as they did; smoke and drink tea. After a few days most residents knew us and our business there. This made it relatively simple to recruit for formal interviews as I had already talked to most of them several times. The bench was also an excellent place for informal talks and observations of daily life at the shelter. Also here I noticed that the residents seemed to have little interaction, despite the fact that they lived together on very little space (more than 10 in each dormitory). Again I have used this to inform my analysis, together with the unstructured interviews made there.

Recruiting outside the shelter posed more challenges. First of all, approaching people who were eating or just hanging out seemed less natural than inside the shelter. In order not to confuse people outside, I had to introduce myself and the project immediately. This meant less time for both parties to assess one another and many declined my request. They were busy – they had odd jobs to carry out, bottles and metal to collect in order to earn their living. Others were simply too drunk to interview. Nevertheless I succeeded in recruiting three informants outside the shelter.

Despite my efforts I did not manage to recruit any female informants. First of all, statistics confirm that there are many more homeless men than women (Osipov et al. 2007:15; Alekseeva 2005:13; Gutov & Nikiforov 2004:72; Yulikova & Sklyarov 1994:137). It has been suggested that women are better adapted to life and can more easily find a place to stay (Zav'ialov & Spiridonova 2000:64, Interview with Caritas' administrator). Secondly, homelessness is more stigmatising for women and invokes more inherent shame than it does in men as women are traditionally considered responsible for sustaining a home (Höjdestrand 2005:200, Zav'ialov & Spiridonova 2000:64). Maybe this was why women repeatedly denied my attempts to talk with them and I never succeeded in getting an

interview with a homeless woman. This research is therefore exclusively about homeless men. For research on homeless women see e.g. Beigulenko 1999.

The entrance to Caritas' Canteen. The text on the door says *Meal Station for Homeless. From 12 to 15 hours,* and was the only sign indicating the existence of the place. *Photo by Maj Kastanje*

The staircase bench at Nochlezhka, where residents sat smoking. I spent many hours here, talking and observing. Several informants were recruited for interviews here. *Photo by Pierre Jaccard.*

Comments on ethics in practice

Interviewing homeless people requires serious and careful ethical consideration. Sensitive situations can develop from asking marginalised, vulnerable and potentially traumatised individuals to tell their life story. This I experienced during the second interview (with Vadim) where we were interrupted by a visiting social worker from the city authorities. We had no other place to go and therefore continued on her request. When she heard Vadim tell how he had lost his apartment, she started interrogating him with blunt questions about this situation. This, as well as the fact that his own daughter had betrayed him and thrown him out of the apartment, caused him to break into tears. Soon after this, he broke off the

interview and left. This incident made me realise how just how vulnerable the informants could be. I also understood that I needed to be in a setting where Sasha and I controlled the situation and let the informant tell his story at his own pace. We subsequently got access to a small office on the 3rd floor in Nochlezhka's building where we were not disturbed.

Taking life stories and searching for narratives has its roots in psychotherapy. The ethical aspect of using this method is of particular relevance in studies of marginalised or traumatised individuals. It might bring up highly emotional events (as was the case for Vadim) and some might experience the interview as part of a therapeutic process. This was the case for the interviewed shelter residents in therapy with Anonymous Alcoholics (AA), for whom telling their life story was seen as a therapeutic necessity and a moral duty (Steffen 1997:103). Although the therapeutic aspect can be considered a positive thing, it also calls into question the responsibility of the researcher who encourages the informant to tell his life story. I had no aspirations or qualifications to take on the role of a therapist towards informants. Therefore I did not discuss or challenge their stories with them, and neither did Sasha. This was also in accordance with my analytical interest which focuses on meaning and immediate self-representation in the life stories.

* * *

In this introduction I have presented the research questions guiding this thesis. I have also introduced the field of homelessness and established the approach and method of this research:
I have accounted for the central political 'structure – agent debate' because it plays an important role in the way homelessness is perceived in the Russian context and also influences definitions and statistics on homelessness. *The residential* -, *the network* - and *the moral dimension* of homelessness were introduced as they relate to different aspects and levels relevant in this thesis.
Perspectives on the constitution of the homeless as part of building social order, the resulting stigmatisation, *internalisation* and reproduction of discourse were presented as the basic theoretical approach of this research. Finally I have discussed the chosen methods that I employ to answer the research questions, in particular text analysis and qualitative life story interviews. Special attention has been paid to the course of my fieldwork and the role of field sites and my assistant in the generation of data.

Chapter one
HOMELESSNESS IN THE SOVIET UNION AND IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

The issue of homelessness in Russia today cannot be understood without looking back at the mobility and settlement regime introduced in Soviet times. This regime regulated not only the population's mobility but also their social and civil rights as well as serving a range of other purposes for the Soviet establishment; it was a tool for controlling urbanisation, organising production, punishing political 'misfits' and distributing welfare to Soviet citizens. While the legacy and continuous enforcement of central elements of this system contribute to the production and maintenance of homelessness in Russia today (chapter two), the ideological and rhetorical discourse of this era formed - and continues to influence – official definitions and public opinion on the matter. This is a discourse that homeless people confront, live with and relate to in their everyday lives and one that they partly subscribed to when they represented themselves to me through their life stories.

In the following chapter I therefore address my first research question: ***How were the homeless constituted as a distinct social and legal category in the Soviet Union and how was homelessness structurally regulated then and in Russia today?***

The legislation and its enforcement was - and is - complex to a degree that not even native Russians, who live in it and with it, understand in full. I will explain the most important features of the system and its purposes, focusing on its role in creating and maintaining urban homelessness in Soviet times and today. Moreover, I will focus on the central ideological discourse about homelessness created via this system.

Mobility and crime in the Soviet Union

The restrictive mobility regime in the Soviet Union

The restrictive regulation of the population's mobility had already begun in pre-revolutionary Russia. The tsars had passed laws permitting serfdom and internal passports and residence registrations had been introduced. Immediately after the Russian revolution in 1917 the passport system was however abolished, as a part of removing all practices

considered 'tsarist repressive' by the Bolsheviks.

However, this did not last for long. World War One, the revolution and the ensuing migration had left millions of people displaced and homeless (an estimated 7.5 million homeless children were roaming the streets by 1922 (Stephenson 2006: 76)) and the new Soviet state struggled to develop social assistance programs for the displaced. Further, during the late 1920s, it became increasingly difficult to build and organise the new Soviet society without some form of identification and locational control with the masses and with individuals. Persecution of class enemies, enlisting of conscripts, rationing schemes due to food shortages and allocation of labour to the right places, were areas of particular importance and urgency; these were dependant on a more comprehensive and efficient identification system (Matthews 1993:15). The famine at the beginning of the 1930s also brought about an influx of starving peasants to the cities (Lewin 1985:220).

This led the then General Secretary of the Central Committee, Joseph Stalin, to introduce a new system of internal passport and residence registration (*propiska*). With this, the basic tools for controlling the movement and settlement of the population as well as intensifying social, economic and political control were in place (Matthews 1993:27).

Introducing passport and *propiska*

Internal passports were not introduced all over the Soviet Union. Those living in rural areas (the majority of the population) were generally not entitled to an internal passport while people living in more developed areas such as district centres, frontier areas, large cities and within a radius of 100 km around them became obliged to have passports (Matthews 1993:27). Entries included name, date and place of birth, place of permanent residence and employment and social status (worker, employee etc.) (ibid.:39f). The passport became the only valid identification document.

From 1933, those not entitled to passports (peasants) were prohibited from leaving their place of residence without official permission from the *kolkhoz*[13] political leadership (Lewin 1985:230). In this way the passport started to fulfil one on its most important purposes: to prevent urbanisation (Höjdestrand 2005:38).

However, an even more powerful tool in this respect was the introduction of the residence permit and residence registration *propiska*[14]. Physically, the *propiska* was a stamp in the

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[13] The Russian term for a collective farm

[14] The term *propiska* comes from the verb *propisat'* that means 'to write into' (books). I will use the singular *propiska* and the plural *propiski* throughout this research.

internal passport[15], that permitted people to reside at a specific address and correspondingly gave them registration in and certain rights to that dwelling.

The *propiska* became one of the core instruments of the Soviet state, because it controlled people through the allocation of resources and social benefits and as such served as *"an incentive to remain inside the panopticon"* (Höjdestrand 2005:35). Having *propiska* in a certain dwelling in a certain area was a precondition for formal employment, access to housing (waiting lists), education, unemployment benefits, medical insurance, rationing cards, pensions and disability benefits (ibid.:37; Stephenson 2006:77). None of these things were obtainable without the *propiska* – and most of them still aren't today. Each oblast or metropolis was responsible for those registered with them and allocation of funding and resources was done on this basis. In this way, the *propiska* came to define the hospital where an individual would be born, the kindergarten and school he would attend, the clinic he could approach and where he could work - central aspects of the life of the Soviet person (Osipov et al. 2007:9). The *propiska* was and is a technique of bureaucratization that succeeded because its qualifying nature secures the continuous endorsement and active participation of the citizens (Caldwell 2004:133f).

Urbanisation and production

The *propiska* effectively prevented urbanisation by banning registration (*propiska*) of new arrivals in 24 cities from 1933 (Stephenson 2006:81). Access for outsiders to life in the restricted cities was regulated by access to employment and chances for employment depended on an individual's profession or skills. Enterprises in need of more workers were given quotas for a limited number of *propiski* for a limited amount of time which they could use to import workers from outside. Other ways for outsiders to informally obtain a *propiska* in restricted cities was through marriage with a *propiska* holder, through bribes or connections.

The link between workplace, residence and *propiska* was the cornerstone of the system (Matthews 1993:27-28). Workers who left their job were deprived of their *propiska*, which included loss of housing as well as coupons for food and goods (Stephenson 2006:77). In 1940, workers simply lost the right to change job without formal permission from the management[16] (Matthews 1993:28) and the mobility of Soviet workers was fully controlled

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[15] Those living outside passport areas were listed by the rural Soviets (Matthews 1993:29). In non-restricted areas, the *propiska* was not used to prevent people from settling, only as an instrument to allocate resources and benefits.

[16] It is estimated that 8-22 mio individuals were convicted for unsanctioned resignation. The right to change job

by the state. Housing was provided by state enterprises to those who were moved. As mobility evolved around production and growing industry, which was planned centrally, it meant that the movement of the population was effectively under the control of the state - as opposed to the situation other countries, where movement followed opportunities and economic capital (Stephenson 2006:79).

Getting work at an enterprise in a restricted area *outside their limit quota* was dependant on holding a valid *propiska* and residence in the restricted area. This brought into effect the infamous catch 22: 'No *propiska* - no job; No job - no *propiska*', which effectively prevented the flow of people to the restricted cities[17].

Apart from getting housing and the *propiska* through the workplace or very few private and cooperative arrangements, housing (rooms in *kommunalki*[18] or single family flats) was accessible through municipal waiting lists, around which a similar absurd catch evolved: to be put on a municipal waiting list required a valid permanent *propiska* in the area (Morton 1980:239). Since a *propiska* is always tied to a specific dwelling, one needed a permanent residence to get on the waiting list for housing. It meant that housing waiting lists served as a mechanism of up-/downgrading and swapping - not a way of getting housing for newcomers.

Since rent was heavily subsidised (expenses for rent only accounted for approximately 5 percent of a family's monthly income (ibid.:253), ability to pay had no influence on the quality and size of accessible housing. Instead, eligibility was primarily regulated by an institution still in place called the *sanitary norm*. The sanitary norm is the number of square metres calculated as suitable and necessary for one person; during most of the Soviet era it was 9 sqm per adult (ibid.:239; Höjdestrand 2005:40). Allocation of municipal housing and issuing of the *propiski* was, and is done by multiplying the number of registered persons with the sanitary norm[19].

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independently was reinstated in 1956 (Matthews 1993:32).

[17] In 1956, 48 cities employed settlement restrictions (all republic capitals and most cities with more than 500 000 inhabitants (Höjdestrand 2005:26f).

[18] A *kommunalka* is the Russian term for a shared apartment, in which each family occupy one or more rooms and kitchen and bathroom facilities are shared.

[19] Getting on the waiting list in e.g. Leningrad, a restricted city, presupposed that you had less than 4.5 sqm of living space per person, that you lived in housing unfit for human habitation or in a hostel, that you had had permanent *propiska* in Leningrad for several years or that you had worked several years for the district department of housing (Morton 1980:240).

Controlling unwanted elements and damaged identities

The *propiska* acted not only as an instrument for *"delivering the right individuals to the right places"* (Stephenson 2006:79), but was also a powerful tool for *"cleansing the Stalinist system of social and political misfits"* (Höjdestrand 2005:35). It was thus used by the state to control the whereabouts of unwanted elements and 'damaged identities' – ex-convicts charged with 'parasitism', anti-Soviet activities and other serious crimes (ibid.:39). Special regulations prohibited the settlement of such elements (from 1974 including those convicted for previous violation of passport rules (Stephenson 2006:81)) in the restricted cities and within a radius of 100 km around them, regardless of any previous *propiska* in these areas. When convicted, such a *propiska* was cancelled, and after release a stamp with special codes in the passport identified for officials the nature of the individual's crime and where he could and could not settle[20]. In this way the system can be said to divide the population, not into classes, but more in terms of territorial stratification (Zaslavsky in Höjdestrand 2005:38) and distinct groups according to objectives of the authorities: those with 'clean' passports; those with no passports (peasants) and those with certain marked entries (Osipov et al. 2007:8).

These regulations led to what might be termed the 'dumping grounds' - or what Stephenson has called 'The Soviet Badlands' - immediately behind the 100 km zones surrounding the restricted cities (2006:82) – borders that symbolically marked the limit between the civilized and uncivilised world and protected the epicentres of the socialist project from its left-overs. To this day, villages primarily inhabited by people convicted for 'parasitism', vagrancy or anti-Soviet activities exist around Moscow (ibid.). The expression 101 km is now incorporated in the Russian language in the meaning of unsophisticated and uncultured wilderness outside urban centres (Höjdestrand 2005:38).

Criminalising homelessness

What did all this mean in relation to homelessness? Control of the population in fixed territories was regulated via the penalties faced by those unfixed: the homeless. Thus, the problem was easily solved by the Soviet state: because *"in a country of "vanquishing socialism", there should be no homeless people and there "stopped being" homeless people"* (Osipov et al. 2007:9). Being without a *propiska* in a fixed residence, engaging in vagrancy, being unemployed – all things associated with homelessness - were simply turned into criminal offences and therefore only criminals existed. As such the homeless became the unwanted elements and

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[20] Relaxation and tightening of these rules tended to come and go, and from 1974 some oblasts and cities had autonomy to decide on which ex-convicts they wanted to register (Stephenson 82).

damaged identities.

Measures to punish, expel and deport unwanted elements under Stalin's rule were for the most part 'extra-legal' that is, stipulated in secret decrees not available to the public. In these decrees new specific terms were invented to classify 'damaged' identities, which were typically those who did not live up to socialist ideals. An important example of such a term was mentioned in the title of a 1948 secret decree on *"Deportation to the Distant Regions of Persons Persistently Evading Labour Duty and Leading Antisocial Parasitic Way of Life"* (Stephenson 2006:81). Parasitism (*tuneiadstvo*) meant long term unemployment but the term was first elaborated more clearly under Khrushchev in the 1961 public decree *"On intensifying the Struggle Against Persons Who Avoid Socially Useful Work and Lead an Antisocial, Parasitic way of life"*. It personified parasitism in legally adult and able-bodied people *"...who do not wish to perform a principal constitutional duty (...) who avoid socially useful work, derive non-labour income (...) or commit other anti-social acts..."*. The decree subjected these persons to deportations to *"specially designated localities for a period of two to five years"* with mandatory assignment to work (ibid.:84).

While long term unemployment is not directly and necessarily linked to homelessness, the two things were very closely connected in the Soviet Union, as an official home (*propiska*) and employment were each others prerequisite. Losing one's job without being reinstated somewhere else most likely entailed loss of accommodation and equalled 'leading a parasitic way of life' as well as violating passport rules by not having a *propiska*.

However, violation of passport rules was an independent crime that – if repeated - could carry up to 10 years in prison (Beigulenko 1999:224). According to article 198 in the Criminal Code of 1960 concerning passport rules, not having *propiska* at a place of residence was illegal and authorized eviction from the premises within 24 hours. Returning to the premises more than twice after eviction was punishable with one year in prison. Article 209 in the same law completed the state's authority to control those disturbing the Soviet order by criminalizing persistent vagrancy and begging. Such a way of life was punishable by prison for up to two years and, if repeated, up to four years (Stephenson 2006:83)[21][22]

Those engaging in vagrancy and parasitism were given their own impairing name: *BOMZhiZ* – without fixed abode and occupation (*Bez Opredelënnogo Mesta Zhitel'stva i Zaniatii)*. Although

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[21] Statistics on prosecutions are not available, but according to Matthews (1993:47) a provincial literary journal quoted in 1988 a figure of 1 million prosecutions per year for violations of *propiska* regulations.

[22] Several amendments were added along the way, such as penalties for 'persistent neglect of the orders of assignments to work and failure to cease a parasitic way of life'. However these was abolished only 5 years later, when article 209 in 1975 was amended to include penalties for 'parasites' Stephenson 2006:84).

the term was never employed directly in the legislation, only in decrees, legal instructions and police protocols (Likhodei 2003; Beigulenko 1999:221) it nevertheless confirms the strong links between the *propiska* and work. Another term consistently used was that of *brodiaga* (vagrant) - a term that traditionally and culturally implies mobility and personal choice (Stephenson 2006:56).

The vicious circle worked like this: it began when losing one's job, but was accelerated by the individuals' status after loss of accommodation and *propiska*. When a vagrant, beggar, parasite or other in violation of the regulations was apprehended, he was brought to what can be translated as 'detention resettlement centres' which some authors have called *"filtering centres"* (Beigulenko 1999:225, Bodungen 1994 in Beigulenko 1999). At this place his identity was confirmed and he was sent off to the right place, i.e. back to his place of registration, to an orphanage or - in the case of homeless and others - to pre-trial custody (Höjdestrand 2005:37). Those without identification were detained for up to 1 month, while their identities were confirmed (Beigulenko 1999:225). Options after release for convicts charged according to these articles were very few – they were often not allowed to return home if coming from restricted areas; their passport revealed their past to all authorities and future employers and not managing to find work and accommodation within a short period of time drastically increased their chances of being charged with violation of article 198 and/or 209 and thus incurring another round in the penitentiary system.

Bomzhi were the final product of the Soviet system – ideological *human waste* in the Bauman sense, disposed of in work camps, distant regions or literally on the 101 km 'dumping grounds'. But they were continuously processed by the system and they remained under the control of the state. Following Foucault and the employment of his perspectives by Stephenson (2006:88), the state is more interested in keeping its delinquents inside the centrally supervised panopticon than eliminating crime. Equally, the Soviet state had permanent control of its misfits by criminalizing all options available to them. In this way, the state effectively produced and isolated the *bomzhi* in the system. Hence, the *human waste* belonged in fixed places - the penitentiary or in the dumping grounds. Consequently there were places where they should not be - where they were 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966:44). These places were the restricted areas - flagship cities of the Soviet Union. These clean territories and their settled population were not to be 'polluted' by *waste*.

In principle, this meant that homelessness and homeless people did not officially exist – only crime and criminals. In practice however, there were *roofless* people but they were either

hiding from the authorities[23] or found themselves somewhere in the above vicious circle. As today, a great deal of what may be characterized as 'hidden' or 'latent' homelessness also existed. It was not made up by *roofless* people as such but by people living without a *propiska* in the restricted areas, that is, illegally. Those were people who had for example stayed after their temporary *propiska* had expired (including students) or people who had simply moved in and hoped that no authorities would find out (Höjdestrand 2005:39). Naturally it is impossible to judge the extent of this.

The Soviet state had the sole power for defining both social problems and appropriate solutions to such problems. The definition of the long term unemployed as 'parasites' and their 'treatment' in labour camps is an example of this. Another example can be drawn from the Big Soviet Encyclopaedia from 1978. Under the definition of vagrancy it is stated that:

"In the socialistic society, in which there is no exploitation of one man by another and no unemployment, and where material conditions of workers' life systematically improve, vagrancy has been eliminated as a social phenomenon. Cases of vagrancy and its related begging, is a form of evasion of socially useful work by antisocial elements, a parasitic tendency to live on the expense of society, a means of escaping the penal responsibility for committed crimes, eluding payment of alimony, taking care of children (there are many wanted criminals and alimony debtors among vagrants), etc"[24].

While social concepts are generally unstable and vulnerable to change as others try to redefine and modify them (Ravenhill 2008:37), I argue that concepts employed by the Soviet state, such as 'parasitism' have been so firmly rooted in the consciousness of the population, that they still dominate public discourse in relation to homelessness. I will discuss this in chapter three.

This strong legacy is a function not only of the power of the Soviet State to define social problems, but also the state's power to prevent others from identifying and defining social problems. No groups or individuals had the opportunity redefine concepts of the Soviet state and to put homelessness on the agenda. For instance, all media attention and research into homelessness was non-existant from the 1930s onwards (Stephenson 2006:80; Matthews 1993:45; Osipov et al. 2007:3) and no independent charitable or political organisations worked with the homeless from the 1920s to the 1990s (Stephenson 2006:90). All this led to the non-existence of homelessness in the Soviet Union – by this I do not mean that no *roofless* people existed, only that homelessness as a social problem and category

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[23] Some stayed with friends, family or at workers hostels, but as provision of housing or work to someone without *propiska* was both an administrative offence and illegal according to criminal and housing legislation, it was very risky (Osipov et al. 2007:9).

[24] www.bigsoviet.org

did not. Instead the penitentiary system was flooded with members of another defined category: *BOMZhiZ*, that is, criminals, vagrants and parasites. The technique through which this category was defined and justified was that of written documentation – one of the most *"powerful avenues for producing the version of reality"* (Caldwell 2005:134).

Post-Soviet production of homelessness

The non-existence of homelessness as a concept as well as a directly visible phenomenon changed with the social and economic chaos following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

First of all, migration and population mobility increased. Waves of people fleeing from poverty and lack of prospects in the countryside due to the closing of state enterprises arrived in the cities. More than 2 million ethnic Russians returned from other Soviet republics (Beigulenko 1999:220) to a Russia that already struggled with severe housing shortages. It meant that homeless people became very visible in the Russian cities.

Concurrently, the stock of accessible and cheap housing – which was already insufficient - decreased from 1990 when privatisation started. Workers' hostels – previously the most accessible form of housing - were shut down together with the connected enterprises or sold to municipalities or private investors. This left a whole group of people without work and housing. Privatisation policies implied that those having *propiska* in a dwelling could privatise that dwelling for a small fee (approximately 4 Euros (Hammar 2007:5)). But this solution was not attractive to all since much of the housing stock was in a terrible condition and responsibility for maintenance and renovation was transferred to the new owner when privatised (Ibid.) Some people simply could not and can not afford to pay the maintenance and renovation and therefore prefer to continue renting. Most of the monthly rent goes to services and utilities as the actual rent remains extremely low. The deadline for privatising municipal housing has been extended several times – the present closing date is now in 2010 (ibid.:6).

Legal reforms

Acknowledging the existence of homelessness at the level of legislation was more restrained and cautious. With Russia's acceptance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in

1990, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in1991 and the new Russian Constitution in 1993, the Criminal Codes 198 and 209 that criminalized vagrants and parasites were abolished. The *propiska* regulations that employed registration as a mechanism for controlling the movement of the population were formally abolished and in theory replaced by a notification-based registration system aimed at simply recording the distribution of the population in the country.

However, as territorial imbalances in Russia have become even more pronounced than in Soviet times, the need for regulating the mobility of the population is increasingly urgent (Lukin 2008:86). Therefore today's registration system is in practice enforced in a manner so similar to the prior regime, that it is in common language still called *propiska*. For this reason I will also continue to use the term in this research, except when presenting legislation.

In 1992, the 'filtering stations' previously responsible for sending homeless people off to the right places (under the authority of the Ministry of Interior) were turned into local commissions for social services to homeless people, authorized to produce passports[25] for the *propiska*less (Beigulenko 1999:225). At the same time, the term *BOMZhiZ* was reduced to *bomzh* – a person with no fixed abode, formally meaning without *propiska*. At least in theory this implied a shift in state discourse from viewing homelessness as a crime (and as unemployed 'parasites') to viewing it more as a social issue (ibid.).

Explaining which changes have actually occurred is very complicated. At the level of legislation, restrictions on obtaining a *propiska* and the services and rights connected to that have been lifted, but at the practical level things are very blurred. Different enforcement practices and local legislation (most restrictive in metropolitan areas) means that the fate of *propiska*less is often left at the mercy of the legal knowledge and/or kindness of officials. Moreover, the issue is governed by international, federal and local laws which all frequently contradict each other.

In the following, I will first discuss the legal changes regarding registration and then how the system actually works (in large cities in general, in St. Petersburg and Moscow in particular), thereby giving a view of the discrepancy between the theory and practice of today's registration regime. If the reader is confused and has trouble understanding the logic of the systems working, this reflects perfectly the reality of Russians trying to navigate in the system[26].

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[25] I am still referring to internal passports, the main identification document in the Soviet Union and in Russia today.

[26] Many confused citizens discuss the issue in internet fora, e.g. at forum.ozpp.ru or nelegal.ru

The rights of the population to freedom of movement and choice of place of stay and residence are guaranteed in the Russian Constitution from 1993. Registration based on notification – not permission – was introduced in primary legislation, and states that

"In order to provide the necessary conditions for the realisation by a citizen of the Russian Federation of his rights and freedoms, and also for the performance of his duties to other citizens, the State and society, registration of citizens of the Russian Federation shall be introduced according to the place of stay or residence.." [27]

Russian legislation consequently states that citizens are obliged to register at their place of residence, but also that

"Registration or non-registration may not serve as a ground or condition for the implementation of the rights and freedoms of citizens, provided for by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the laws of the Russian Federation, the Constitutions and laws of the Republics within the Russian Federation"[28.] (Emphasis added by me).

This means that people can in principle settle wherever they like <u>providing they register</u> there within 7 days (for permanent *propiska*) or 90 days (for temporary *propiska*) since occupying a place of residence without registration at that place, continue to be an administrative offence punishable by a fine according to the Code of Administrative Offences[29].

Implementation of legislation

So what seems to be the problem? There are several:
The first problem concerns the status of the homeless. Being officially homeless (being without permanent or temporary *propiska*) is no longer a crime in itself, providing the person

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[27] The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 17, 1. www.constitution.ru

[28] Law of The Russian Federation No. 5242-1 of June 25, 1993 *"On the rights of citizens of The Russian Federation the the freedom of Movement, the choice of place of stay and residence within The Russian Federation"* (with the Amendments and Additions of November 2, 2004). www.legislationonline.org

[29] Article 19.15. Residence of a Citizen of the Russian Federation without an Identification Card (Passport) of a Citizen of the Russian Federation or without Registration: 1. Residing at the place of residence or at the place of sojourn of a citizen of the Russian Federation, who is obliged to have a citizen's identification card (passport), without such, or with an invalid identification card (passport), or without registration at the place of stay or at the place of residence - shall entail a warning or the imposition of an administrative fine in the amount of up to one minimum wage. www.russian-offences-code.com

is in fact literally *roofless*[30]. He is thereby not in violation of the registration rules that oblige him to register at a place of residence. In theory this relieves the homeless person of the burden of 'being illegal'. However, legal status continues to be the core concern for homeless people. Despite the legislation cited above, regional by-laws and regulations condition rights and access to services on possession of *propiska* (Lukin 2008:91). This leaves the homeless in a legal vacuum – they are no longer illegal, but at the same time they are not citizens as they cannot access their rights. The consequences of this for homeless people's chances of reintegration will be discussed in the following chapter.

Secondly, providing a person in fact finds a dwelling which he can afford to rent, obtaining a *propiska* at that place can turn out to be very difficult, especially in the cities. It means, that even those homeless who manage to find housing might not be able to register there. They thereby violated registration rules and continue to be cut off from access to civil services – leaving them in a very vulnerable position.

Since housing privatisation began, obtaining a *propiska* at a place of residence no longer requires permission from the municipal authorities, but from the owner of the dwelling.

Upon registration at a permanent place of residence[31], proof of rights to the dwelling in question must be presented (a deed, a certificate confirming the right to inherit the dwelling, a court decision recognising the right to live in the dwelling or other documents) together with valid ID (passport) and application form[32] . The documents required result in the fact that only residents (and their family) who either own the dwelling in which they want to register or have permanent permission to reside there (municipal housing not yet privatised or tied accommodation) can get a permanent *propiska* there.

The market for rented accommodation in Russia is almost completely limited to private lets. Tenants can only obtain a temporary *propiska*[33] as this does not does not require ownership or ownership rights to the dwelling, but only ID, filled out application form and an official lease. In some cities, a document justifying the need to reside in that specific area and dwelling, e.g. an employment contract, is required. The validity of temporary registration varies but it is often valid for one year or less.

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[30] If the person occupies/lives at a place not considered residential premises, he is not obliged to register at all.

[31] When discussing this, it is necessary to distinguish between obtaining permanent *propiska* at place of residence and obtaining temporary *propiska* at place of stay, the latter not entailing loosing *propiska* (striking off the register) at another permanent residence. It is thus possible to have both permanent *propiska* at a place of residence and temporary *propiska* at a place of stay, but not to have two permanent *propiski*.

[32] Registration rules. Approved Government Decision Russian Federation from July 17, 1995 N 713. www.nelegal.ru

[33] Except for those in municipal housing not yet privatized.

These are the regulations that <u>officially</u> govern registration. In reality, several barriers exist especially for getting a temporary *propiska*. From the side of the Federal Migration Service (who issue *propiski*) people often face requirements such as: permission from the district authorities; the consent of all those registered in the dwelling and presence of the owner of the dwelling. According to a Russian website for *propiska*less in Moscow, registrars have – apart from the above - also been seen to require several months of advance payment of utilities; notarised signatures on some or all documents and military records[34].

From the point of view of the owner of the dwelling, several disincentives for allowing registration of tenants exist: primarily, registering a tenant reveals to the tax office that the landlord has an income liable for tax, discouraging registration of tenants. For this reason, only 5 500 landlords pay taxes from their rent income, while an estimated 125 000 dwellings are rented out in Moscow[35]. For the same reason the price for renting a place with the right to registration is often twice as high as renting one without[36]. Equally important is that many owners fear that registered tenants obtain certain rights over their dwelling. The idea is a left-over from Soviet times when a *propiska* equalled occupancy rights and it was practically impossible to evict *propiska* holders from a dwelling (even if the tenant did not pay rent). The Housing Code of 2005 partly ended this, but an appendix to this law prohibits the eviction of tenants with cohabiting under-age children unless they are provided with alternative and suitable housing. This goes for private as well as municipal housing, regardless of rent evasion or other contract violations[37]. This means that a tenant with a child might turn out to be a life-long acquaintance.

For owners who agree to register their tenants anyway, more problems lie ahead since it takes time and money (bribes). Interesting examples of this can be found on the Internet; among these is an account from an owner of his absurd attempt to get his tenant registered in Moscow - which included visiting no less than four offices in which he and his tenant spent three whole days[38].

Following this, implementing the right to free movement and choice of residence as vested in the Constitution, while at the same time complying with the duty to register, can be very difficult for non-owners. This is due to the fact that – contrary to systems of universal

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[34] Accounts from www.nelegal.ru
[35] Moscow loses between 80 million to 2 billion roubles per year on this, estimates say. Article from RIA Novosti, cited from www.nelegal.ru.
[36] www.nelegal.ru
[37] Source: Maria Nedergaard Gostichtheva, DanChurchAid.
[38] www.nelegal.ru

registration based on notification – the *propiska* is in fact still a <u>residence permit</u> (Rubins 1998:550) that effectively limits the mobility of the population by denying those without a *propiska* almost all services and civil rights - among those right to employment.

For a homeless person to register *pro forma* with friends or acquaintances (if he has any) is not a clear cut solution. Apart from the resident's fear of giving away the right to living space, the money and time involved and the risk of having to pay taxes from the rent, living space is still governed by the sanitary norm. It means, that if there is not enough space for registering an extra person (which there rarely is – in St. Petersburg the ordinary sanitary norm is 12 sqm (Gerasimova 2002:211)) only close relatives (spouse, children, grandparents) can register (Höjdestrand 2005:41). This is also the reason why shelters cannot provide a *propiska* for the homeless in large numbers.

The Housing Code of 2005 put a final stop to provision and let of state housing to all others than a few categories of vulnerable citizens (orphans, some with specific chronic illnesses etc. Homeless people are not included). Further, the stock of municipal housing has been ever decreasing since privatisation began as no one returns a dwelling to the administration, but rather privatises it and sells it if they want to move. Housing deficiency and *propiska* regulations also brought about another practices - namely that of registering and maybe even moving in with close relatives in municipal housing in order to inherit the right to the dwelling when they die. This is practically the only way of getting such a cheap dwelling (municipal flat or *kommunalka* room) and only relevant for the 'lucky' few. Housing provided by the place of work is more or less eliminated and today
dorms exist almost only for students.

The only legal option left to get a *propiska* is to buy a dwelling – out of reach for the homeless or even people with normal incomes. Prices in Moscow and St. Petersburg now resemble or exceed those of other European cities.

Not surprisingly, a new market has evolved - namely that of trading *propiski* on the black market.
From 2000, advertisements for this have become visible on the streets and in 2008 it was almost impossible to walk down St. Petersburg's main street without seeing people with signboards and flyers advertising *'propiska* service' among a range of other services (see photos below).

The flyer and billboard advertise the selling of *propiski* (both permanent and temporary from three months to one year). The agency also offers medical insurances; to assist in changing passports (a USSR passport into a Russian one); validation of Russian citizenship; tax identification numbers and certificates qualifying for pensions. For non-nationals they offer work permits; temporary *propiska*; citizenship and residence permit etc. *Photo by Maj Kastanje*

Despite the regulations based on the sanitary norm, agencies operating this black market often register a large number of people in very small flats. Costs vary, depending on whether the *propiska* is completely fake (and only useful to avoid fines and police harassment), or 'genuine' (made by agencies with links to the Federal Migration Service, therefore providing access to services and official employment) or somewhere in between.

Registration today remains a serious concern for everyone who wishes to move, but who has not either bought a dwelling, or has access to student dorms or the few remaining workers hostels. For the homeless, who can rarely afford to buy a registration, the situation seems more or less hopeless, especially in the cities.

* * *

In this chapter I have looked into **how homelessness was structurally regulated in the**

Soviet Union, via the passport and *propiska* system and the criminal codes on vagrancy and parasitism. Access to a *propiska*, jobs and housing (<u>*the residential dimension*</u>) were strongly connected and under the control of the state who regulated the mobility of the population primarily with regard to needs in the production sector. The repressive mobility regime and the administrative and legal approach to 'vagrants' and 'parasites' contributed to **constitute the homeless as a distinct social and legal category**, namely that of *the bomzh*. The *bomzhi* can be seen as the misfits and human *waste* of an ideological system in which they played in indispensable role. Because into the category and term *bomzh* were put all that was inferior and bad (<u>*the moral dimension*</u>). This served to educate Soviet citizens by separating right from wrong. To prevent them from being socially contaminated by the *bomzhi*, these were disposed of in distant regions and work camps. But they remained inside the state panopticon at all times.

Further I have analysed **how homelessness is structurally mediated in Russia today.** The attempts made to dismantle the repressive system and grant freedom of movement to all citizens were part of a transition from a centrally planned economy and production to a market based system. The state thus implemented mechanisms of the capitalist system that stimulated free movement of capital and workers (Osipov et al. 2007:9). Privatisation of state property, including enterprises and housing, as well as the permission to individuals to start businesses are good examples of this. Passport and registration rules have in principle been relaxed compared to Soviet times but the latter has succeeded only in theory. In reality, the free movement of workers so fundamental to market economy is severely inhibited by the continuous enforcement of administrative registration procedures. Fear of terrorism and overwhelming urbanisation due to territorial imbalances (no serious regional development programmes have been implemented to curtail this), and not least fear of losing control over the population keeps *propiska* alive as a <u>residence permit</u>, not a <u>notification based</u> registration.

The homeless have in a way become the symbol of the great Russian dilemma between the totalitarian state (that wishes to control the population) and the capitalist modernisation project that needs a free flow of workers to develop in full. While the legalisation of homelessness as such can be seen as a positive initiative in terms of human rights, the homeless themselves were nevertheless left in a vacuum. They moved from being the objects of the law, that is, <u>having a legal status</u> (albeit that of a criminal) – to becoming invisible in the eyes of the state, because they now have <u>no legal and administrative status</u>. How this affects their lives and options will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter two
MAPPING THE HOMELESS

The legacy of the Soviet administrative system, together with the poverty and chaos following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has left the homeless in a deadlock. Lack of access to housing and *propiska* affects their lives tremendously and renders their situation more or less impossible. In this chapter, I will show <u>how</u> this is the case by addressing the research question: ***How is homelessness produced and maintained in post-Soviet Russia?***

I approach this chapter from a sociological point of view. I map the homeless by showing how structural constraints mediate central aspects of homeless people's lives.
I begin by accounting for the extent of homelessness and the various ways a homeless person might be defined in terms of statistics. This serves not only to get an idea of the magnitude of homelessness, but also to provide insight into the many ways people – not only homeless people - have problems with *propiska*.

Further, I account for what some have defined as the primary causes of homelessness (Karlinsky 2004:17f; Osipov et al. 2007:18ff). I look at how people lost their dwelling and *propiska* in the first place, that is, <u>*the residential dimension*</u> of why they became homeless. Legislation and its enforcement play a central role in this but so do the larger societal and social conditions of Russia's transition period. This is ***how homelessness is produced*** in post-Soviet Russia.

Finally, I look into how the continuous enforcement of the *propiska* system ***maintains homelessness***, by depriving those without *propiska* central rights and services, which are pivotal in the lives and options of the homeless. Examples from my informants and others will be brought in to illustrate this.

Counting and defining the homeless

Counting the number of homeless in Russia is extremely difficult - precisely because they are not registered at any place of residence. Besides, Russia runs no independent registration

of citizens to keep track of the population - which is why general censuses are still carried out from time to time. Therefore none of the estimates are founded on actual registration of the homeless but rather by expert assessments (Egorov 2008:16) as well as records from police stations and medical institutions (Alekseeva 2005:8).

Another issue that complicates the counting of the homeless is the lack of an official definition or a general concept of homelessness. The only widespread definition is *bomzh* (without fixed abode), but the present use and understanding of the word is so far away from its original administrative meaning that it cannot count as a clear definition.

Research and statistics providing estimates rarely state the definitions underlying their data but, generally speaking, estimates in the Russian context are based on *the residential dimension* of homelessness and thus define homelessness in terms of lack of housing and lack of rights to housing. Some estimates must be assumed to relate narrowly to street homeless – that is, the *roofless.* Others focus also on lack of rights to a dwelling – everyone without a *propiska* - a definition that incorporates the *roofless,* the *houseless* and also those in *insecure housing.*

Before moving on to estimates and statistics, I will clarify who might be included in the numbers. For this purpose, I find it useful to roughly divide those with *propiska*-problems into four groups:

The first group consists of *roofless* individuals without any *propiska* and sometimes also without documents to prove their identity, that is, passports or other *spravki* (certificates).

The second group consists of those homeless who live in shelters or treatment facilities, i.e. the *houseless.* They do not have any *propiski* at these institutions but they might have another kind of registration confirming their link to the institution. They have, or are in the process of reinstating, identity documents - most often passports.

All of the homeless people I interviewed were in the above two groups. They were thus *roofless* or *houseless.* While they were in a state of more or less acute homelessness, those in the next two groups can be seen as making up Russia's latent (Osipov et al. 2007:12) or concealed homelessness (Beigulenko 1999:223).

The third group consists of people who rent dwellings more or less temporarily, work or study, but have no *propiska* anywhere. They can be said to be in *insecure housing* as they have no right to the dwelling. Even if they have a contract, they are in a poor position to respond

to violations of this as they are themselves are in violation of registration rules. Several of my friends and acquaintances in St. Petersburg were in this group; they were often students or young people who had not grown up in St. Petersburg. They had either moved to the city to work or had studied there but lost their *propiska* when they left the student dormitory. Many of them bought temporary *propiski* on the black market for short periods for the purpose of signing employment contracts. My friend Natascha bought a *propiska* from an agency and even checked that the address, in the outskirts of the city, really existed. However, she then had to travel to the other end of the city to see a doctor at the polyclinic and to vote; this had the effect of discouraging her from voting. Another friend, Tatiana, managed to get a temporary *propiska* in the apartment of one of her good friends when she wanted to change her job. But these *propiski* are provisional or insecure which is why registration continues to be a source of concern.

The last group consists of those who have a permanent *propiska*, but in a place other than where they actually live. Many have kept their *propiska* in their parent's dwelling and if these live close by, it is not a problem. But those who are registered at the other end of the country have problems. My friend Sergei, a student with very limited financial resources had a *propiska* with his mother near Ekaterinburg. He dreaded falling ill because how was he to manage a 36 hour train ride to get free medical help if he was seriously ill? Apart from this, he was continuously stopped by police officers who wanted to check his documents. Therefore he always carried a train ticket - less than 90 days old – with him. This proved that he was not violating registration regulations - which demand registration within 90 days. In fact, he had been living in St. Petersburg for several years.

Most estimates of the extent of homelessness lie around four-five million adult homeless people in Russia but whether these include *roofless/houseless* or 'just' *propiska*less is unclear. In 2000 the Institute of Socio-economic Problems of the Population estimated 3.3 million homeless adults but since then, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has been quoted as estimating 4,5 million (not stating whether this includes children) (Karlinsky 2004:9). I assume that these figures include the first two and maybe the third of the groups accounted for above. According to the statistics of Nochlezhka, who has provided a service for the *propiska*less in St Petersburg since the beginning of the 1990s, around 40 % of the *propiska*less are in fact *roofless* (the first of the above groups) and the rest have access to some kind of dwelling. Citing figures of between 2 and 4 millions *roofless*, Nochlezhka reckon that there are at least 5 million *propiska*less in Russia (the first 3 of the above groups). (Egorov 2008:16). Including homeless and neglected children, the highest estimate is that of Alekseeva, who rate no less than 10 % of the population of 142 million as *"belonging to the*

very lowest strata of today's society who do not have a place to live" (Alekseeva 2005:8). Who is included in this number is not clear from the literature. Studies based on various surveys confirm a rate of around 75 – 85 % men and 15-25 % women (Osipov et al. 2007:15; Alekseeva 2005:13; Gutov & Nikiforov 2004:72; Yulikova & Sklyarov 1994:137).
Regardless of the accuracy of the estimates provided, the numbers are large enough to make the *propiska* and homelessness a problem on the societal level as much as on the individual.

How the homeless lost their dwelling and *propiska*

While I accounted for the problems related to obtaining a *propiska* in the last chapter, in this section I show how homeless people lost their housing and *propiska* in the first place. Homelessness is in general a result of a range of interconnected conflicts and events that do not necessarily include losing one's *propiska*; neither is it limited to the losing of the *propiska*. None of the categories outlined below are mutually exclusive. In many cases, a combination of several categories contributes to the loss of housing and *propiska*. Fraud and blackmail, sale and family circumstances are examples of often overlapping categories.

Categories are mainly drawn from ngo publications, who - on the basis of surveys of their own clients and statistics from state structures in contact with homeless – have attempted to give an overview of causes of homelessness.

Migration

In the chaos following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was an influx of ethnic Russians returning from the former Soviet republics - where nationalism and conflicts were on the rise. This process was highly disorganised and not all of the returned managed to find jobs and places to register themselves. According to the Russian citizenship law, former USSR citizens were no longer entitled to Russian citizenship and could only obtain this if they could prove that they had a *propiska* on Russian territory on the 6th of February 1992[39]. One group of homeless people derives from the group of people who live in Russia but who were not able to obtain citizenship because of lack of a *propiska* on this date.

Oleg[40], for example, was born in 1938 in what is today Ukraine where he was trained as a mechanic and a chess player. After meeting his wife in the late 1970s, he changed his

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[39] Section 1 of article 13 in the Law of the RF, November 28th 1991. www.legislationonline.org
[40] All names of homeless informants have been changed to secure anonymity.

propiska to her residence in Latvia, also then a Soviet republic. He started some business in St. Petersburg and travelled between Vilnius and there. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, he still had his *propiska* in Latvia. Things had ended with his wife and he had nothing left there. He couldn't exchange his USSR citizenship for a Russian one and was therefore living illegally in Russia. Eventually he was sent to prison and when he finally got out, he was left on the street.

Internal migration is no less a cause of homelessness. Some have travelled to the cities to escape unemployment and make their fortune. A simple theft on the street can end in homelessness when money, mobile phone and documents are lost. It becomes impossible even to travel home as purchase of train tickets requires identity documents. The same goes for transfer of money. The problem is not uncommon for ex-convicts who upon release try to make their way home to the region they came from. Often the disbursed fare from the authorities is not enough and they are simply stuck somewhere (Höjdestrand 2005:51).

Fraud and blackmail

Privatisation of housing was introduced in 1992 by federal law and this started a period of hazardous trading in real estate. Transaction in private property was a new phenomenon for Russians and this together with weak legislative protection (such as lack of mandatory insurance) created an advantageous environment for swindlers (Karlinsky 2004:33). Fraud in relation to transactions of real estate produced a whole new group of homeless during the 1990s - people who were otherwise settled but were often vulnerable in other ways.

Kirill had been the victim of real estate fraud. After his wife had left him, he lived alone in their house in Novgorod. He had already been drinking but the divorce and his father's death had intensified his alcoholism and he had lost both his jobs.

"And in one wonderful moment in the year 2004 the realtor came to my place. It was so-called "black" realtor, who tricks with people. He acted very carefully and gently. He understood that I was drinking permanently and I had nothing to eat, so he brought me both some food and alcohol. He talked with me about selling my dwelling. At first I refused, but then he asked me - why do you need such a house and the little garden where I didn't work at all... So he persuaded me to sell the house and move to a flat. I agreed. So I got a half of the sum of money that we had in the contract and suddenly he disappeared. I had got neither a flat nor my house. I had no home at all - another man already lived in my house. I found myself on the street and began to live with homeless people."

Kirill's case is not uncommon and I have read and heard many similar stories (Höjdestrand

2005:54; Stephenson 2006:124; Na Dne 1999). Swindlers were known to deliberately target vulnerable people, such as recently divorced, long time alcoholics and lonely pensioners. They often gained people's trust by pretending to be much needed friends until they had secured authorisation to sell and de-register (Höjdestrand 2005:54f). Kirill reported the incident, but the swindler and his company were not registered for tax and the police couldn't help him.

In other cases, criminals joined forces with bitter neighbours, corrupt registration administrators, social authorities and/or police officials to get their hands on an apartment or room - which they could then sell or allocate to some of their own friends or relatives (Stephenson 2006:124). This had happened to Anatoly. He had lived in an apartment, but he had many conflicts with his neighbours. His under-aged girlfriend lived here with him, which made him an easy target for blackmail:

"...Once, when we were in bed, some peopled rushed into the flat. They were bad people. They were bandits with the support of the police. They said that I could either go to prison because of my girlfriend or sign some documents. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to loose my flat, but I didn't want to get into prison either. Because then the girl would be alone, because her mother didn't look after her at all. So I signed up the agreement and they took my flat."

Fraud in real estate transactions is on of the main reason for homelessness in various surveys (Osipov 2007:19; Karlinsky 2004:30). But it is decreasing - not least after the introduction of new legislation in 1999 that made mandatory registration at a new place of residence upon de-registration from the former (Höjdestrand 2005:56).

Sale of dwelling

Another group of homeless sold their dwelling and did not manage to buy or rent a new one for a variety of reasons. A popular belief is that homeless people deliberately sold their dwelling to get money for alcohol (Höjdestrand 2005:53). In reality, it was rarely that simple. In the economic chaos of the 1990s, the market value of accommodation was in many cases the only resource available to people. Some people were forced to sell their dwelling - something that particularly affected small businessmen that had got into trouble with partners or criminal groups (Stephenson 2006:124). Dmitri earned his living via semi-legal business with foreigners in the early 1990s when *"there were long queues in shops, lack of products, lacking of alcohol and everything...could be obtained only from acquaintances...everything 'po blatu'"*[41]. To

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[41] A well-known Russian expression, which can be translated as 'through profitable personal connections'.

avoid a prison sentence, he had to pay a large bribe and therefore he exchanged his mother's large flat for two separate rooms, one for her and one for himself. But he soon discovered that his 'connections' also required some money. He sold his room and paid them but when the story repeated itself some time later and he had no longer any assets to convert, he fled to St. Petersburg.

Convictions

As in many other countries, a substantial part of the homeless population in Russia is made up of ex-convicts who lack housing and housing rights at the time of release from custody[42]. This can primarily be attributed to the enforcement of practices from Soviet legislation which was only revoked in a ruling by the Constitutional Court in 1995 (Osipov et al. 2007:20f.) Article 60 (§ 8, part 2) in the housing Code stipulated that absence from a municipal dwelling for more than 6 months permitted eviction and cancellation of the *propiska* so that the dwelling could be assigned to others. It meant that those sentenced to more than 6 months in prison lost the right to their previous dwelling and if their family continued to live there, it was up to them to decide whether the convict should have his *propiska* reinstated upon release. Even if both parties agreed to re-register the ex-convict, another person might have been registered in the flat due to changes in family composition. Therefore, regulations concerning the sanitary norm sometimes prevented re-registration (Ibid.:21). In other cases, remaining family members died while the future homeless served his sentence and the municipal dwelling was passed on to others on the list.

Despite the fact that convicts are no longer automatically deprived of their *propiska* while in prison, prison sentences are still one of the main reasons for homelessness. Documents are of particular importance here. A large number of people are released from prison without passport and other important documents - despite the fact that authorities are entitled to provide all those released with these. In some cases, the reason for this is in fact quite simple. Lack of funding for prisons means that expenses, especially for taking passport photos, can often not be met. This prevents the issuing of passports for those released. According to ngos, improvements in this sphere have taken place in recent years[43].

Some programmes for rehabilitation of ex-convicts (employment support, vocational training) do exist but enrolment in these ironically require ID and a *propiska* (Stephenson

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[42] The problem is further aggravated by the fact that Russia has the world's second largest incarceration rate with 607 per 100 000 population (Hartney 2006:2).
[43] Source: Maria Nedergaard Gostichtcheva, DanChurchAid, St. Petersburg, Russia.

2006:121).

Evictions

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was practically impossible to evict registered tenants from municipal housing until the new Housing Code came into effect in 2005. Today a range of violations permit evictions. This is likely to produce more homeless in the future as many of the housed poor and marginalised hardly have any income (Stephenson 2006:23,125). However, tenants without a *propiska* living with relatives have long been victims of evictions. This has taken place when the *propiska* holder died and the dwelling was transferred to state management (Osipov et al. 2007:22). Finally, some evictions have taken place as a result of court order brought about by lawsuits between resident relatives (ibid.)

However, evictions from workers' hostels and other service accommodation are of equal importance and underline the gap between the Soviet connection between housing and work and today's market liberalisation in both the sphere of housing and employment. Throughout the 1990s, a substantial number of state enterprises went bankrupt or were privatised and redirected to serve other purposes. This resulted not only in large-scale unemployment, but also in homelessness for the former workers of these enterprises as they were evicted according to the law (Karlinsky 2004:37).

A similar situation is in evidence for military personnel leaving the army and students leaving educational institutions. Rotislav, for example, studied in St. Petersburg and lived in the dormitory attached to his institute. After he finished his studies he moved from the dormitory and de-registered but he was unable to register in the flat he rented with two friends. He started selling souvenirs to foreigners and later rented different rooms in the city. After a prison sentence his sister registered him in her room but she eventually grew tired of his consumption of hard drugs and alcohol and threw him out.

Break of family ties

Family circumstances have been stated as a frequent cause of homelessness in several surveys (Osipov et al. 2007; Alekseeva 2005; Gutov & Nikiforov 2004; Yulikova & Sklyarov 1994). The category covers a range of situations - often involving some of the above mentioned categories coupled with divorce or alcohol addiction. The *"scramble for square metres"* as Höjdestrand has termed it (2005:52), seems to be the backdrop of many conflicts

which end with eviction or voluntary departure and de-registration of one of the parties.

For Vadim his attempt to mend relations with his daughter became the beginning of his street life. He did not describe the actual conflict in detail but I pieced it together as follows. When Vadim was in his thirties, he got married to a woman who already had a small child. Unfortunately she died and left him with the child whom he adopted and raised on his own. When Vadim's daughter was 25 years old, a conflict developed between them. *"She had found the document confirming this* [that she was adopted] *and asked me to prove that I really was her father. And I obeyed."* Vadim's daughter wanted him to confirm their familial bond by giving her his flat. Vadim trusted his daughter and complied but immediately after he handed over legal ownership of the flat, his daughter threw him out and de-registered him. At this time, Vadim had already retired from his job at the factory and he ended up on the streets.

Other cases seem less premeditated but equally dramatic. Leonid, for example, led a double life with two separate families. When this was eventually revealed to both families, his wife divorced him and he had to leave their flat and de-register. He managed to live for some time in a *kommunalka* room but couldn't conform to the rules of the shared household. Finally he ended up on the streets and lost his documents. He now has only a homeless registration from Nochlezhka.

Children from orphanages

Finally a group of homeless are former residents of state orphanages, who were not provided with their entitled housing when they left and were de-registered from institutions. In Soviet times, orphans moved on to vocational training where they were provided with enterprise housing and further moved on to municipal housing via their prioritised status on waiting lists (Höjdestrand 2005:48). After the mass closure of workers' hostels and the decrease in municipal housing due to privatisations, former orphanage residents have little chance of being provided with housing from the state.

The legal and social position of homeless

In the above section, I have accounted for and exemplified how a substantial part of the homeless people lost their dwelling and *propiska*. In this section, I will show how the lack of *propiska* creates a barrier to the efforts of homeless people in improving their lives. As the legislation that guarantees the implementation of rights and freedoms regardless of

registration has not caught on in practice, the *propiska* is still the basic administrative structure. Since there is no national and central recording of citizens[44], those who lack a *propiska* lack a legitimate administrative identity (Stephenson 2006:146) and therefore become non-persons in the eyes of the state. As such homeless people in general are deprived of access to all but a few services and rights available to registered Russians.

Things have however begun to loosen up in some districts and cities. While I will not go into details about homeless people's status in each region, the case of St. Petersburg remains of interest to this particular research. In 1998, following intensive lobbying from Nochlezhka, the city administration of St. Petersburg agreed to open a registration centre for one group of homeless, namely <u>those who had had their previous and last registration in the city</u>. A registration from the City Registration Point for citizens of the Russian Federation without fixed abode (GPU)[45] thus serves to confirm that the city administration of St. Petersburg is responsible for providing services for a homeless person, because he had his previous *propiska* in the city. Therefore it also provides the homeless with the right to a place in one of the city's shelters. In 2008 there were 12 such shelters with room for approximately 250 persons[46]. Only those with previous registration in the <u>district</u> where the shelter is located can get a place there. To compare with shelter places, in the same year, GPU had registered more than 14 000 homeless persons since its opening in 1998 (this number excludes all homeless, whose last registration was not in the city of St. Petersburg). Apart from Nochlezhka and Caritas' canteen (introduced in the fieldwork section), there are only four other charities which provide assistance to the homeless in St. Petersburg[47].

While the situation in St. Petersburg is substantially better than many other places - Moscow for example - the homeless' access to state guaranteed services and implementation of rights are most of all arbitrarily determined by the administrators and bureaucrats they encounter. In the following, I will discuss those aspects of particular importance for the daily life of homeless people.

Access to social benefits

Access to social benefits for the homeless is extremely limited because funding of these is

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[44] As in e.g. Denmark or Sweden, where an inalienable 10 digit number is held by each citizen and used to administer and identify each person in the public sector.

[45] In Russian: Городской пункт учета граждан РФ без определенного места жительства (ГПУ).

[46] Interview with Maxim Egorov, Director of Nochlezhka, St. Petersburg. November 2008.

[47] The Maltese Order; Mother Theresa sisters; Salvation Army and an AA rehabilitation centre called "House of the Hope on the Mountain" (in which several of my informants had been in rehabilitation program).

connected to local budgets. A *propiska* in the relevant region or administrative territory is therefore needed to obtain benefits such as disability pensions and assistance, child support, supplement for veterans and *blokadniki[48]*, as well as other benefits and social security. For example, Moscow pensioners who do not have a *propiska* in Moscow can not obtain discount upon purchase of pharmaceuticals and other goods while the pensioners who have Moscow registration are guaranteed this benefit (Naumov & Kolesnichenko 2007:2). The only benefit available for the homeless is the basic state retirement pension (at this time around 3900 roubles pr month, around 90 Euros) because is it deducted from the federal budget and is therefore independent of registration in a specific region. Only a passport confirming Russian citizenship is required. The provision of state pensions for the homeless came into force in 2002 and stipulate that payment of pensions to the homeless should be paid at their actual place of residence - a concept not further defined in the legislation and therefore liable to interpretation (Karlinsky 2004:49f). A registration from St. Petersburg's GPU, however, formally and legally provides the homeless with the right to supplementary pensions (for invalids, veterans, *blokadniki*).

Access to health care

Health is an issue of particular concern for those living on the streets. But access to medical treatment – other than emergency medical assistance - is based upon a compulsory medical insurance policy issued according to place of registration or official work (Osipov et al. 2007:29). Only in a few cities and districts, have special clinics for the homeless been set up, e.g in Moscow in 2003 (Stephenson 2006:147).

Homeless people's lack of *propiska* therefore effectively excludes them from access to health care. Hesitation or refusal to treat and admit those with no *propiska* or *propiska* from elsewhere is not uncommon. In a case that was exposed in the media because the relatives filed a case against the hospital, a man, albeit not homeless, died because he was denied treatment on the grounds that he had registration only in the neighbouring region. During the case, hospital officials maintained that they had acted correctly by sending the patient to another hospital[49].

Several of my informants already knew that they couldn't receive any health care and they did not turn to clinics to try. Secondly. fraud becomes an alternative for those who have connections or can afford it. Pavel, an informant of mine, had been hospitalised for 9

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[48] Those who survived the Siege of Leningrad in WW2.
[49] www.newsru.com

months after a bad encounter with the police. But as he had no medical certificate or documents of any kind, he paid a bribe to the doctors and stayed there under another name – that of a man with a *propiska* in the administrative territory. Third, hospitals tend to discharge the homeless prematurely as they have rights only to emergency care. It is not uncommon that severely ill homeless are dumped outside Nochlezhka's shelter by hospital staff. Dmitri, for example, had been hospitalized and had 4 toes amputated due to gangrene. He was discharged to the streets at the end of February with unhealed wounds - causing infection and maggots. Finally he was picked up by the Salvation Army and brought to a rehabilitation camp outside the city. A registration with St. Petersburg's GPU would have given Dmitri an official compulsory health insurance and therefore access to health care on equal terms with other citizens. He would have been assigned to use a specific clinic in the district where he usually resides. But since Dmitri had his last registration in Murmansk, he could not get at GPU registration. In this way lack of *propiska* leads to bad health for the homeless.

Access to legal defence

Despite the fact that many homeless people have lost their housing and *propiska* due to fraud, they have no access to the courts. According to the civil procedural code (Article 131, section 1, §2), submission of a claim or writ requires specification of the place of residence of the plaintiff. Absence of this information serves as sufficient grounds for rejection of the writ (Osipov et al. 2007:29). This effectively excludes the homeless from the system of justice. It also further complicates the situation for those homeless who did not have a *propiska* on the 6th of February 1992 (necessary to obtain Russian citizenship after the collapse of the Soviet Union). They became illegal in their own country as the lack of *propiska* in their USSR passport prevented them from exchanging it for a Russian one. They have no formal citizenship in any country. Many homeless therefore never had a Russian passport or still only have an old USSR passport (ibid.:31). They have no way of reinstating these documents in court as such a case requires a current *propiska*.

In addition to the above mentioned rights, lack of *propiska* effectively excludes homeless people from taking part in elections (as the procedure for voting is linked to residence registration in the corresponding constituency). As the homeless make up a substantial proportion of Russian voters, one might argue that their lack of ability to vote is followed by an equal lack of interest in this issue from the side of politicians (ibid.:29).

A whole range of other rights and services are unavailable to the *propiska*less: They cannot

travel outside Russia as the issuing of a foreign travel passport[50] requires a *propiska* (Lukin 2008:91); neither can they obtain credit in financial institutions (Naumov & Kolesnichenko 2007:3). They cannot renew their driver's licence[51] or register a vehicle should they have one (ibid.) and so on. But most important for the homeless people I have met is their lack of access to official employment.

Access to official employment

While having a *propiska* in general or in a specific administrative territory is no longer legally and officially required for employment, access to formal jobs continues to be one of the central aspects in homeless people's lives. Apart from the previously mentioned legislation that prohibits the implementation of citizens' rights on the basis of registration or non-registration, article 64 in the Labour Code prohibits the discrimination of applicants on the basis of registration or any other grounds other than professional[52]. However, having a *propiska* is in practice almost always a precondition for employment[53](Lukin 2008:92) as perverse incentives are in effect: Employers are obliged to provide pension for their employees on the base of their registration and an official address remains the only way for an employer to control employees (Höjdestrand 2005:44). Further, and until 2002, there remained a Soviet law defining the hiring of people without a *propiska* as an administrative offence (§ 181 of Code of Administrative Violations) and employers preferred - and still do - to keep good relationships with ignorant law-enforcement agencies and avoid corrupt officials (Lukin 2008:92; Höjdestrand 2005:44f). From the applicants' point of view, it is equally difficult to apply for employment at a place where they do not have a *propiska*. Upon employment, applicants are required to show a number of documents (certificate of state pension insurance, military documents, work books other[54]) which are only issued according to – or obtainable from – the place of registration[55] (Karlinsky 2004:34). In addition, it is not possible for the *propiska*less to be registered as unemployed (Gutov & Nikiforov 2004:71) and access to employment services likewise requires a *propiska* in the particular territory (Alekseeva 2007:11) which further complicates the situation of homeless job seekers.

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[50] Not to be confused with internal passports – in this research referred to simply as passports.

[51] For an example of the consequence, see description of an example see: www.larussophobe.wordpress.com

[52] Labour Code of the Russian Federation, article 46. www.ilo.org

[53] Examples of employers requiring propiska for work can be found at www.nelegal.ru

[54] As stipulated in Article 65 in the RF Labour Code of the Russian Federation. www.ilo.org

[55] GPU in St Petersburg, can assist in the process of reinstatement of documents, that partly allow the homeless person to enter official employment, such as passport, employment pension certificate and tax number (INN which can normally be obtained only on the base of permanent registration) (Dudarevoi 2008:65). Again it is only for those who had their last permanent registration in the city.

The area of access to legal employment clearly shows the complex relationship between the *propiska* and employment and how the lack of a *propiska* can obstruct attempts to mend one's situation and reintegrate. While more and more places acknowledge the law and hire people without a *propiska*, the jobs tend to be insecure and employment relationships casual. A huge black market for work also exists where no documents of any kind are necessary.

For some of my informants, working without a *propiska* had caused problems. After travelling and living with a group of gypsies for a while, Vadim was employed at a rabbit farm for 8 months having neither *propiska* nor passport. The salary that he was supposed to receive after the first three months was never paid. Despite lack of salary, he decided to stay and work there since they provided him with lodging, clothes and cigarettes. No better options seemed to be available to him and he couldn't really make a case against the farm since he had no formal employment contract. The example of Vadim illustrates a common problem for the homeless – they are hired on loose and oral agreements, because they have no documents and very often they are swindled. Leonid, who made his living by building bathhouses and repairing cottages in the summertime, commented on this situation as follows:

"...because I'm not secured by the trade union, by anybody, they can kick me out whenever they want, saying that they won't pay because of my bad work. And I have no money to hire a killer for them (laughing) If I try to solve this problem myself, I will get into prison. The government won't help me."

Leonid's problem was not only the lack of *propiska*, but also the lack of identification documents - namely passport - which a substantial number of homeless people are lacking[56]. Lack of documents severely worsen the homeless' chances of obtaining even the basic state pensions, getting into a state shelter, travelling[57] or getting work - even unofficial work. Obtaining an internal passport remains very difficult for homeless people. Half of the *roofless* in a survey from 2007 had not been able to receive passports despite their efforts although they were entitled to one (because they had a *propiska* in Russia on the 6th of February 1992). Most often, a combination of things prevents the homeless from getting a passport. Anatoly, for example, was reluctant to return to the small town where he had previously lived because of the things he had experienced there (He was the one who lost his housing because of the case with the under-aged girlfriend):

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[56] An interregional survey of 463 *roofless* persons found that 67 % had no Russian internal passport and approximately 33 % had no documents whatsoever confirming their identity (Osipov et al. 2007:31).

[57] ID is required to purchase a train or plane ticket in Russia. The system is installed to prevent speculation (resale) in tickets.

Sasha: Did you try to get new documents?
Anatoly: My documents?
Sasha: Yes.
Anatoly: I don't know. I have to get to Repino. But I don't want to do it. I really don't want. But I need to do it. Within half of a year I can get a new passport according to my previous propiska. But...
Sasha: It's the question of money?
Anatoly: Of course, at first, photos, then pay for passport, a penalty fare, I need money. But without passport I can't get job, so I have no money. It's like a circle. Endlessly.

Anatoly was privileged in the sense that he did not have to present a range of unattainable documents. His recent *propiska* – which was recorded in the city administration – would do, if he was not too late. But he was stuck in the endless dilemma of the homeless: no job – no money for documents, no documents – no job.
Pavel was in a similar situation, and gave this strikingly precise diagnose of his deadlock:

Pavel: Everything comes down to the question of job. It is the circle of problems: There are some laws, that say the government must give me documents. But for some reasons, which I don't know - bureaucratical or some others - it all goes round the circle. I don't know how to break it. Trial... maybe by the means of that. But then I need money for legal aid...I don't know. All comes down to the problem that I can't become an official person, here, a citizen. Because they can't make me documents. They can't and that's all, though they must do it according to the law. They send me from one place to another, then to the third... and so on and so on... But I need to live and survive, so I need something to eat, and to eat something I need to earn... I can't devote all my time to this.

Instead of getting a real job, Pavel had to '*khodit' po instantsiam'* – a wonderfully eloquent Russian expression that means 'to go around between offices' – in an endless circle. He had been made invisible to the state as he is *refused the law* – because he is denied the documents that permit the state to look. They are exempted from the law and acted only upon in the proclamation that they are *not* the concern of the law. In the words of Bauman *"The condition of being excluded consists in the absence of law that applies to it."*(2004:32).

Pavel's deadlock consisted exactly in this: because he was denied the law he was also denied the capacity of *bios* – the political, qualified life. He was left with his bare, biological life – *zoe* (Agamben 1998:1-4). In this sense he can be seen as *homo sacer.* He has been *"excluded from all political life"* and cannot *"perform any juridically valid act"* (ibid.:183):

"What is more, his entire existence is reduced to bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide; he can save himself only in perpetual flight or a foreign land. And yet he is in a continuous relationship with the power that banished him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed to an unconditioned threat of death. He is pure zoe, but his zoe is as such caught in the sovereign ban and must reckon with it at every moment, finding the best way to elude or deceive it. In this sense, no life, as exiles and bandits know well, is more "political" than this". (Agamben 1998:183).

So the life which is threatened is the *zoe* - the *bios* is already dead. Pavel's relationship with the power consisted in his daily struggle to i) keep *zoe* alive (avoid the threat of death) and ii) attempt to regain his *bios* - to politicize his bare life (ibid.:4). As such he had to face the consequences of being 'caught in the sovereign ban' every day and his attempts to deceive this ban (by becoming *bios*) failed for two reasons: he was not recognized as worthy of qualified life and his need to sustain his bare life took up all his time.

Pavel and other homeless people are thus political subjects of the sovereign power of the state today, just as much as the *BOMZhiZ* were in Soviet times. One might say, with the words of Bauman, that instead of *"flexing its muscles in an effort to keep the inmates <u>in</u>, the post-panoptical power of the state develops its skills in keeping <u>out</u> undesirables – outsiders or inmates made outsiders."* (2005:100), in this case, the latter. In this way, the homeless constitute the sovereignty of the state[58] – they are the subjects on which the state has suspended the validity of the law. It is the power of proclaiming a state of exception that constitutes the sovereign (Agamben 1998:15) and <u>those who are proclaimed outside the law, therefore play an indispensable role.</u>

At the same time, but on a whole different level, the homeless occupy the role of *redundant human waste* in Russia. Once disposed of in camps and prisons, subjected to 'therapy' and their labour made use of, the homeless have today been made *useless.* They are *useless* in the modern Russian capitalist project in the sense that they have been turned into 'surplus population' (Bauman 2004:39) in the new market economy: that of producers and consumers. As they are not allowed to work or to produce – and production runs more efficiently and smoothly without them – they are also 'flawed consumers' because they have no means by which to consume (ibid.). This society was constructed in a way that created room for the 'useful' and no room for the '*waste*' (ibid.:25,28) - the boundary between the two governed by documents and stamps.

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[58] Interestingly, the Russian term for state (*gosudarstvo*) derive from *gosudar*, which means 'the sovereign' (Humphrey 1996(97:77).

The attempts of those without abode and function – the homeless - to stride the boundary that separates them from the useful is a threat to the order of society (Bauman 2004:31). They need to be moved to their proper place, that is, 'out of sight'. And they are moved here by the waste collectors: the militia. Kirill had attempted such a border crossing - by accessing the flat of his mother and sister - but they had called the 'waste collectors':

Kirill: I was taken and I thought that they would bring me to the police office. I thought that it was an opportunity to sleep well there. But they didn't bring me there. They brought me to the suburbs, took me out of the car, I fell down and they began to explain me that I shouldn't get to the city again. They said that I had to stop disturbing the police and the citizens. They didn't listen to my answers and explanations. They followed the law.

The boundary between the useful and the *waste* is thus drawn afresh every time *waste* is collected and removed (ibid.:28).

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The structural and legal factors that **produce and maintain homelessness in post-Soviet Russia** have been discussed in this chapter. I have provided a sociological portrait of central aspects of homelessness: how many, who, how and why:

I have provided an overview of the great extent of homelessness in Russia today and discussed the definitions behind the statistics. Defining homelessness as lack of *propiska* creates a category of people in very different life situations. Many of those who lack *propiska* live more or less normal lives despite reoccurring problems caused by their status. The situation of the *roofless* and *houseless* however is quickly aggravated by their lack of *propiska*.

Legal and administrative practices have, as shown, certainly contributed to **the production of homelessness** in Russia - but so has break up of societal structures, economic crisis and the general chaos that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The social and economic conditions of this period are likely to have aggravated family conflicts, which have led to homelessness and disaffiliation from housed network (*the network dimension of homelessness*). It is the connection between these aspects that really increased the number of homeless and makes up the primary cause of homelessness. We have seen examples of how these things interact and I have described how some of my informants lost their dwelling

and *propiska*, that is, <u>*the residential dimension*</u> of their homelessness.

Further I have looked into some aspects of **why they remain homeless**. The homeless' lack of *propiska* means they have no administrative status. This fact regulates their lives, in that it prevents them from participating as citizens in Russia. Lack of access to services and exercising of rights create a cycle which it becomes extremely difficult to break.

This is how structural constraints mediate the lives and options of the homeless in post-Soviet Russia. It is partly on this foundation that the meaning of being homeless is to be understood. But before I get to that, I will discuss an aspect of equal influence on homeless people's lives: the discourses about homelessness.

Chapter three
DISCOURSES ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

In chapter one and two, I have shown how the establishment of the repressive mobility regime, its partial continuation and current practices contribute to the definition, production and maintenance of homelessness in Russia today. While the legislative and administrative practices are certainly of relevance for the everyday lives and options of homeless people, discourses about the homeless and the nomenclature established to describe homeless people and their like, are of equal relevance for the homeless today. In this chapter I therefore ask: **What are the discourses about homelessness in Russia today?**

I argue that the dominant discourse about the homeless – as articulated by <u>the state, the public and the media</u> - holds central degrading and stigmatising ideas about the individual attributes of the homeless person which are rooted in the Soviet discourse about the *bomzh*. Even though the literal meaning of the term refers only to administrative status, it has become a container into which all degrading features of humans are put. I therefore call it *the dominant discourse about the bomzh*. This discourse informs the attitudes of officials and administrators who have such definite power over homeless persons' options. It pervades all encounters between the homeless and the public. It was also in play in the encounter between the homeless informants and Sasha and me. It therefore had a major influence on the informants' attempts to make sense of their lives.

But the homeless people I met and interviewed were also associated with <u>ngos</u> whose discourse about the homeless differs substantially from the one that dominates the state and the public arena. <u>Nochlezhka and their partners</u> in particular work with an approach that constructs the homeless as excluded but deserving, drawing on Human Rights. I describe and discuss this discourse, as it provides an alternative way for the homeless to see themselves. For some of my informants, the approach of <u>AA</u> was also available in their negotiation of identity and I therefore introduce it as well.

The homeless in the eyes of the state and the public

The lack of any federal program or system to deal with the issue of homelessness – as well as the (lacking) legal status of the homeless as such - implies that the issue has low priority from the point of view of the state. Any official understanding and definition of homelessness from the federal government is thus hard to find. But some conclusions can be drawn from the (strikingly few) official publications on the subject. The most noticeable among these publications is a leaflet from the Ministry of Labour and Social Development published in 1997 which provides this rather harsh definition of a homeless person:

"A person without a permanent place of residence or occupation is a person who currently is located on Russian territory, who as a rule lacks documents verifying identity and occupation, who does not have a permanent place of residence on the territory where he is located, who currently lacks permanent employment or occupation and, thereby, also means for his survival, who as a rule displays signs of physical illness (mental, alcoholism, tuberculosis, venereal diseases), lice infection etc., a physical appearance that does not correspond to the physical norm of the human being (dirty clothes, dirty body), signs of degradation of the human being as a personality." (Yulikova et al. 1997:12)[59].

The legacy from the Soviet system - in particular the linking of lack of employment to lack of residence coined in the term *BOMZhiZ* - dominates this definition - where a homeless person is first and foremost defined in terms of his <u>administrative status</u> (Höjdestrand 2005:10) as a person lacking a *propiska,* regular, permanent work and documents (passport and work book[60].) The publication elaborates on the homeless person in <u>medical terms</u> as being visibly ill, both mentally and physically. Emanating from this rather uncompromising definition of the homeless individual, the publication suggests a completely segregated system of social and medical services in order to avoid inappropriate contact with the rest of the population (Yulikova et al. 1997:43). Finally the homeless person's <u>psychological status</u> is defined, in that his personality shows signs of degradation – implying that homelessness is the result of some sort of psychological defect. This is confirmed by the fact that of the four causes for homelessness identified in the publication, one is defined as 'moral' with no further elaboration. It is in line with another article published by the same author a few years earlier where 'subjective reasons' for homelessness are defined as *"...genetic and biological characteristics of some people, their tendencies to vagrancy and unwillingness to work."* (Yulikova &

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[59] Translation taken from Höjdestrand 2005 p. 10.
[60] A work book is a legacy from the Soviet time. In the book all one's previous jobs are listed and verified. If fired, the reason for this is also stated.

Sklyarov 1994:137).

Not surprisingly, the definition is focused on the individual level and neglects to mention any structural causes. It manages to incorporate several dimensions of homelessness – including the *residential dimension* as well as *the moral dimension* - but these dimensions are not then used as points of departure or as tools for analysis: rather, the definition is a sad example of simplistic stereotyping from the authorities who are supposed to protect this very population group.

While these publications can not be taken as giving a full picture of the view of the federal authorities[61], they are nevertheless not without consequences. An example of this is the Russian Social Encyclopaedia from 2000 which define the homeless as

"people who become vagrants 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)." (As quoted in Stephenson 2006:143).

Further - employing strikingly similar phrasing to the leaflet from the ministry – it claims 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". (as quoted in Stephenson 2006:4).

The pathological discourse about homeless remains strong and is reproduced in the public and the mass media. Stigmatisation is primarily manifested in the use of the word *bomzh* which draw explicitly on its Soviet roots and relates to those traits expressed in the definition from the encyclopaedia above. A search on the internet confirms that this word is much more widespread than that of homeless (*bezdomnyi* - a new term to Russia). The latter first of all produces results related to stray animals (dogs, cats) and sometimes homeless children.

Without engaging in any deeper analysis of the role and independence of the Russian media, I restrain myself to saying that the mass media plays a major role in the reproduction and maintenance of *the dominant discourse about the bomzh* and that - for a substantial proportion of

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[61] The first author, Yulikova, was the head of section in The Ministry of Labour and Social Development.

the public - the media is the primary source of information about homelessness (Osipov et al. 2006:147 (table 60)).

There is virtually no coverage in the mainstream media of <u>the issue of homelessness</u>, its causes, solutions etc. Frequent reports on real estate fraud, conditions in prisons, labour migrations etc. are published but they are not related to homelessness or the homeless (Varsopko 2008:58). Rather, *bomzhi* play the leading role in dramatic reports of violence and crime – most often as the perpetrator, occasionally as victim. The connection of *bomzhi* to crimes becomes clear after a simple search on Russian news websites – here, headlines emphasize the link by use of combined words such as *bomzh-paedophile*, *bomzh-murder*[62] etc. in stories where the homeless status of the perpetrator is otherwise irrelevant. Evidence shows however that homeless people are more often victims than perpetrators and the crime rate of the homeless is negligible (EKRO 2004:6; Varsopko 2008:57). Attempts by ngos to get media coverage on stories not linked to such dramatic events are often unsuccessful (Varsopko 2008:57).

Bomzhi are further used as convenient scapegoats in various connections, such as political, economic[63] and when the police need to justify violent behaviour (Karlinsky 2004:69). In this way an image of *bomzhi* as individuals dangerous to society is reproduced.

The perception of the homeless as dangerous is widely present in public opinion as well. My fieldwork was frequently looked upon as somewhat hazardous by native Russians outside the field of ngos and my interest in the subject most often seemed peculiar to them. It was not only related to the perceived danger it entailed. Why would anyone voluntarily spend time with *bomzhi* – the lowest of the lowest, criminal, infectious, lazy and morally dubious creatures? I particularly remember an encounter at a private party with a well educated and perfect English-speaking young woman who had just attended a youth tolerance camp. Her reaction to my subject of interest was one of regret: indeed, how sad it was, that so many people chose such an obscure way of life...My room mate Tatiana confined herself to cautioning me every time I left to meet the homeless.

Anyone walking the streets or taking the metro in St. Petersburg or other big cities in Russia will find it hard to deny the existence of homeless people. Indeed, a substantial proportion of the population acknowledges that homelessness is a major problem that needs to be dealt with (EKRO 2006:12; Osipov et al. 2007:39). However, to a large extent, this standpoint is

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[62] www.newsru.com. For other examples, see: www.dni.ru; www.rus.delfi.lv.

[63] One particular distasteful example is mentioned by Karlinsky: In a campaign for castration of house cats, the following argument was used: lack of castration would cause the cat to stray outside, where it would be "*awaited (...) by hungry bomzhi*". (Karlinsky 2004:59).

not motivated by philanthropic ideas or a human rights perspective. Rather, it is thought that homelessness ought to be dealt with out of consideration for public safety and because homeless people spoil the image of cities (EKRO 2004:16f).

This discourse however is not uncontested. Recent surveys by an independent agency in St. Petersburg reveal that the public becomes more and more polarised on the issue of homelessness (EKRO 2004:12f; EKRO 2006:7). An increasingly large group of the citizens (now around 40%) view homelessness from either a rights perspective (similar to that of the ngos, which I will return to later in this chapter) or from a diaconal perspective (the homeless are lost souls, who should be met with mercy). More than half of the surveyed thought that helping the homeless was a noble cause and two thirds felt pity for them (EKRO 2006:8,12).

The rest remain aggressive, hostile and - a minority - indifferent. Members of this group subscribe explicitly to the *dominant discourse about the bomzh*: he is himself guilty of his life situation, he chose that life and he is satisfied. He constitutes a danger to society, because he is infectious and often commits crimes. He will never be able to return to a normal life, but should be removed from the streets - if not voluntarily, then by force. (ibid.:5). These findings are confirmed by other surveys (regional survey: Osipov et al. 2007; survey in the city of Saratov: Kononenko 2006).

Following this, the homeless are primarily thought to live on criminal activities, begging and scavenging for food and the recyclable materials they can find in rubbish containers (Osipov et al. 2007:36). In the user-driven web-encyclopaedia Wikipedia, it is further stated that one of the *"professions of bomzhi"* is to rob unattended gardens or expose their deformities in public in order to make money. Charity is stated to be of no help as the homeless are chronic alcoholics, delinquents and happy as they are[64]. They don't want to work because they are lazy. Considering this unsympathetic portrait of the homeless, it is no surprise that only a negligible proportion of the public is ready to help homeless people in any way and the majority will remove the homeless physically if they get near their home (Kononenko 2006).

My point in the above is not to prove that this image is based on a false foundation. Those homeless who are *roofless* often <u>are</u> more dirty (because there is no place to wash), they often <u>do</u> have one or more untreated illnesses (because they have no access to the health system)

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[64] The article on *bomzh* has been suggested for deletion from Wikipedia – although more because of its inconsistency and lack of reliable sources, than for its stigmatising content. www.ru.wikipedia.org

and they <u>are</u> – more often than others – formally unemployed (because they are denied access to the labour market). The issue at stake is rather the following: that the discourse i) reduces all homeless to possessing the aforementioned attributes and strips them of any other identity and ii) connects these attributes to the individual moral character of the homeless, thereby making them symptoms of inherent deviance.

First, defective personality - expressed in laziness, crime, alcoholism, lack of material human needs - is linked to the causes of homelessness. But it seems that life on the streets, in particular <u>the space they occupy</u> is also perceived to influence the nature of homeless individuals: they become equal to the dirt and rubbish they rummage and live in and thereby become so severely degraded as humans, that they lose basic material human needs and skills, rendering them unable to return to normal society (Stephenson 2006:149). For instance, in a study of a group of homeless in Ulan-Ude, the authors concluded that after 3 years living in the city dump, the homeless did "*not even try to understand the questions that are put to them*" and that they had "*become badly degraded*" (Osinskii et al. 2004:60).

Thus, the discourse denies them personhood (Höjdestrand 2005:11) and segregates them from the 'normal'. It contributes to a view of the homeless as someone *"not quite human"* to cite Goffman (1963:5). A literal example of this is from the presidential elections in 2004 where – in an article originally about migrants' right to vote – the homeless were compared with monkeys[65]. Hence, *bomzhi* are thought to have more in common with the residents of the zoo than those occupying the rest of Russia – which is why voting rights (a thing for humans in their capacity of *bios* – political life) are naturally out of range. Reduced to his biological life, his *zoe*, he will never be able to live a life of the 'normals'. His status is therefore not that of the temporarily unfortunate (who will at some point be readmitted into the community), it is permanent, making him a pointless candidate for treatment and rehabilitation (Bauman 2005:101).

The dominant discourse about the bomzh leads to stigmatisation of the kind related to *"blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty..."* (Goffman 1963:4). One of the unnatural passions has been specified in the psychiatric diagnosis of 'dromomania' – an uncontrollable urge to wander (Karlinsky 2004:40; Höjdestrand 2000:38). Other academics confine themselves to confirming that *"voluntary and deliberate choice of the homeless way of life"* is among the causes of homelessness

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[65] "*At this moment, in a few advanced regions of the country, voting rights will be granted to bomzhi (...) You could also organize a voting in Russian zoos among the monkeys, as if they were humanoid. After all, many of them are even born in Russia.*" (as quoted in Karlinsky 2004:56)(my translation).

(quote from Alekseeva 2005:10; also expressed in Osinskii et al. 2004; Yulikova and Sklyarov 1994), without wasting words on the fact that choices are always made between alternatives. The very idea that *bomzhi* choose this life because they really like it emphasises the perception of the homeless as someone *not quite human* - because what human being would choose such a life if he had another and better alternative?

In this manner, an order is created and maintained - an order in which the *bomzh* occupies the lowest place in the moral hierarchy and in which he has his own designated place: the waste dump. As long as he stays there, he constitutes the right order of *purity* and *dirt*, human and *not quite human*. Again, it is when he transgresses this order, from his designated position and into the space of the 'normal', (by voting for instance) that he becomes 'out of place' and therefore a cause of anxiety and disorientation. His displacement threatens the order of things and is thus experienced as dangerous. He is dealt with as *pollution*, something that might infect the things in its proximity (in both the literal and symbolic meaning) and therefore needs to be put back in his *right place*, if necessary by force.

The 'homeless transgressors' are perceived as dangerous in the physical sense: <u>assault</u> and <u>infection</u>. What I argue is that those dangers carry a more important symbolic load: that the presence of the homeless <u>assaults</u> the order and ideals of the New Russia because they symbolise the opposite of what this ideal demands: they radiate no personal or material ambition, no progress, no self-reliance, no desire nor potential to consume, no energy and they are a disgrace to the new and modern Russia. Their assault consists in the subverting nature of their mere presence. And that the fear of <u>infection</u> is not bound in the physical, but the social world: that some of the disgrace of the *bomzh* might come off on those in their proximity – which is why the mere presence of a *bomzh* works as a fear-provoking reminder of how sudden and short the fall to the gutter might be.

The homeless in the eyes of the ngos

As I have mentioned, *the dominant discourse about the bomzh* does not stand completely uncontested.
Since the codes criminalising homelessness were abolished after the collapse of the Soviet Union, ngos have done their best to put homelessness on the agenda as a <u>social problem</u>. In this process they have had to define a <u>social category</u> in which the homeless could be included.
In the following, I will show how one central actor – namely Nochlezhka – and its partners

in the field[66] define the issue of homelessness and construct their subjects as members of a particular social category. I do this because their discourse about the homeless and homelessness increasingly offers an alternative for the homeless associated with these organisations. In particular, those that were associated with Nochlezhka had the chance of employing this discourse when making sense of their homelessness. Further Nochlezhka's use of therapy based on AA principles offered yet another set of truths to those in this program.

First of all, in the quest to redefine the position of the homeless in Russia, Nochlezhka has introduced a new concept: *bezdomnyi* that translates literally as *without home*, or *homeless*. Nochlezhka as an organisation is especially insisting on this term and will terminate dealings with journalists or others approaching them if they subsequently use the term *bomzh* in their publications (Solovieva unpublished). Although the term *bezdomnyi* is much less symbolically charged than that of *bomzh*, it is nevertheless a negative definition (because it defines a deficit) that reduces the problem to one dimension – that of <u>residence</u>. Despite the efforts of Nochlezhka to bring this term into the general language, it has primarily caught on in the field of ngos. Most of the people I have talked to who were not engaged in social work simply could not understand what I meant. After trying with *bezdomnyi* a few times, I simply said that I studied *bomzhi* - at which point people confirmed their understanding with a hesitant nod (often followed by the question: But...why?).

Further – and not surprisingly - Nochlezhka and their partners in general look for explanations and solutions of homelessness on a structural level. Homelessness is primarily viewed as a legal and social problem rather than an individual problem. Despite introducing the term *bezdomnyi*, the provision of housing is not the core focus of the organisation. Rather, they are deeply focused on the issue of human rights and the violation of these by the registration system. This is reflected in the definition of homelessness in a study published by Nochlezhka and one of their donors:

Homelessness in Russia is a) the <u>condition</u> (social position) of an individual linked to the lack of rights on the part of that individual to specific living quarters (building, house/apartment), which the individual could use for residence or place of stay, and in which the individual could gain registration for place of residence or place of stay; b) the <u>social phenomenon</u> linked to the lack of people's rights to specific living quarters (building, house/apartment), which they could use for residence or place of stay, and to the lack among these people of registration at place of residence or place of stay (Osipov et al. 2007:11).(emphasis added).

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[66] Among partners are other members of "The interregional network for overcoming social exclusion".

As such homelessness is not defined in terms of lack of housing, but lack of *rights to housing* (*propiska*). Further, homeless people are directly defined in terms of their lack of *propiska*, by the director of Nochlezhka:

A homeless is a person without registration and without private rights to housing, without which he cannot register himself, because our legislation allows for receiving registration only in this way (Egorov 2008:16)(my translation).

In accordance with this focus, Nochlezhka and their partners centre on how the continuous enforcement of the *propiska* system is in violation of the Russian Constitution. They continuously point to the obvious inconsistency between constitutional, federal and local legislation in their lobby-work.

In this way, the homeless are constituted primarily as legal subjects. In their focus on lack of rights, Nochlezhka defines the homeless as underprivileged – deprived of something – of rights, housing, health care, civil rights etc (Solovieva 2000:44). This is confirmed by the definition of a homeless person in the study published by Nochlezhka and their donor:

Russian homeless are individuals who (...) prove to be denied all opportunities of implementing their constitutional rights (including rights to legal employment, and education), are denied access to basic social and medical services, and are in fact forcibly excluded from society and have virtually no chance or re-entering the community. (Osipov et al. 2007:11).

The homeless are constituted as an *outsider-group* (Solovieva unpublished). This can be seen to contribute to the creation of opposition between the homeless and society. They are left outside - which is possible only because others are inside (ibid.). The definition draws explicitly on the concept of *social exclusion* – a European social policy theory rather than a sociological one – that sees the homeless as the epitome of poverty and exclusion (Ravenhill 2008:41). Where others have defined social exclusion as <u>a process</u> of marginalisation and alienation of individuals from the structures within society and society itself, Nochlezhka and their partners look at it as a more or less <u>static condition</u> *per se.*
The study published by Nochlezhka concludes with the use of a medical term: *"homelessness in Russia is a serious social ill"* (Osipov et al. 2007:68) by which they mean that the existence of a category of homeless people is a symptom of an ill system in need of treatment.

Staying with the medical terms, albeit on another level, Nochlezhka also addresses and

responds to another defined problem of the homeless - that of alcoholism. In their *"Halfway House"* – a project of Nochlezhka – therapeutic treatment based on AA principles is carried out by Nochlezhka's employees. Alcoholic residents of the shelter have often started the AA program on a stay of 28 days in the rehabilitation centre *"House of the Hope on the Mountain"* after which they continue the program in Nochlezhka. The AA program consists of 12 steps[67] of which my informants were no further than the fourth.

The principles of the AA program are fundamentally different from Nochlezhka's official approach to homelessness. AA is focused on the individual level. In AA alcoholism is defined as a disease from which one will never recover and therefore total abstinence is the only feasible option to alcoholics (Steffen 1997:100). Members are encouraged to admit that they are powerless and believe in a higher power to give them strength, giving the programme a spiritual touch. The primary focus, however, is on a transformation of drinking behaviour, the individual's identity and his ability to master his own situation. His social conditions are seen as a consequence of the development of this ability (ibid.:101). In this way, the philosophy of AA - which is employed by Nochlezhka in its work with homeless alcoholics - is somewhat in contrast to their approach to homelessness, which focuses on the individual's social conditions as a consequence of larger structural constraints.

For instance, Nochlezhka engage in campaigns that advocate *"changing society's attitude towards the problem"* (stated under 'mission' on their website[68] (my translation)) by emphasising the responsibility of the state in creating and maintaining the problem. Public sympathy is evoked by presenting the homeless as deserving and needy of assistance. Collection of food products from customers outside supermarkets, distribution to the public of flyers with requests for support of homeless people, charity concerts etc. are examples of how their discourse is manifested in practice. As mentioned in the above section, citizens of St. Petersburg increasingly support the rights-based approach to homelessness, which might partly be an effect of the efforts of Nochlezhka.

In accordance with their overall focus, the organisation also composes shadow reports to the UN in connection with the periodic reviews of Russia's implementation of the

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[67] The original 12 steps have been summarized by American Psychological Association to the following: admitting that one cannot control one's addiction or compulsion; recognizing a greater power that can give strength; examining past errors with the help of a sponsor (experienced member); making amends for these errors; learning to live a new life with a new code of behaviour; helping others that suffer from the same addictions or compulsions. www.nationmaster.com

[68] www.homeless.ru

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. This is done in collaboration with other ngos. In these reports the ngos go through each of the relevant articles in the covenant and explain in detail how breaches of this right take place in relation to the homeless in Russia. The approach of Nochlezhka and its partners is thus part of a larger discourse of rights-based development, in that they explicitly link to national and international treaties and conventions based on UN Human Rights. This is reflected in the recommendations of the ngos: - legislative changes that would allow the homeless to implement their rights, such as registration of the homeless (by the authorities) in the territorial areas where they actually stay, regardless of access to housing; - granting of access to all services and rights on the basis of this registration; - issuing of official identity documents without reference to a specific dwelling; - removal of barriers to the official hiring of homeless people; - reforming of the legislation with regard to access to social housing etc.(Nochlezhka et al. 2003:11f). Nochlezhka and its partners in this way define the needs of their clients: inclusion in the administrative system, thereby granting them rights and access to the same things as others and recognition as subjects of the law.

The recommendations made by Nochlezhka and its partners to the UN follow quite closely the organisation's own approach in their social work. As mentioned previously, they have carried out registration of the homeless since the beginning of the 1990s. This includes the issuing of alternative registration documents. A Nochlezhka registration – a piece of paper that states your identity and that you are homeless - does not *legally* give the homeless person any rights. But during the years it has gradually gained validity. It thus gives access to limited health care from specific clinics[69] and it can in some cases compensate for the lack of passport[70]. The registration database also serves as storage of information about the homeless person's other documents - such as passport number. In case of loss of documents, relevant data can be drawn from the database facilitating the restoration of documents.

Certainly a registration from Nochlezhka – although not as good as one from GPU – gives increased access to a range of otherwise denied services. Nochlezhka is well aware of this.

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[69] A regulation introduced in 2006, stipulates that costs related to treatment of any homeless individual in St. Petersburg public clinics may be reimbursed by the territorial fund for compulsory health insurance. The procedure for obtaining this reimbursement is printed on the back of the alternative registration document. Some clinics still deny treatment to homeless, because they have no time, will or knowledge to carry out this procedure. Others send the ill people to registration at Nochlezhka prior to admission (Interview with Maxim Egorov, Director of Nochlezhka, St. Petersburg. November 2008).

[70] For example it is accepted ID to file claims in one jurisdiction in St. Petersburg and to vote in elections. If issued before the 6th of February 1992, it is accepted as sufficient registration on Russian territory, thereby facilitating the procedure of issuance of citizenship and Russian passport (Interview with Maxim Egorov, Director of Nochlezhka, St. Petersburg. November 2008).

The organisation has stated that *"certificate of registration (…) raises the status of the homeless for the state structures"* and staff thinks that the system of registration *"is of significant political importance, because it enables them to present the homeless as a distinct social group to the city and federal authorities"* (Solovieva 2000:44)(my translation).

Registration is indeed a powerful way of producing distinct social categories as demonstrated by the Soviet state. The issuing of registrations that serve as quasi documents in relation to state structures, is an attempt to include the homeless in the public system - what Höjdestrand has called a makeshift *"state personhood"* (Höjdestrand 2005:62). In this way Nochlezhka replicates the inclusion criteria for social service used by Russian welfare agencies (Caldwell 2004:139). The organisation constructs the homeless as a specific social category by employing the same mechanism (fixing via registration) as the system they fight (Stephenson 2006:148).

However, this is still not 'real' state personhood because the documents present the holder as someone without any administrative identity - someone excluded from the system. It formalises and reduces the identity of the holder as member of this particular social group. The homeless people's dependence upon this registration to access services results in their active participation in consolidating the homeless as a social group. The demand to present it at any formal occasion (such as eating in Caritas' canteen) and the compliance with this by the homeless also contributes to their own surveillance (Caldwell 2004:134). As such, the registrations and the actual register placed with Nochlezhka can be seen as a technology of power and control – what Foucault has called biopolitics. It is not rare that Nochlezhka receives calls from the police or hospitals who wish to obtain information about the identity of homeless individuals – who have either been suspected of a crime or brought to the hospital. In the former case, however, the staff has refused to assist (Solovieva 2000:44).

* * *

In this chapter, I have analysed and discussed **the discourses about homelessness** that contribute to shaping the existence of my informants as well as set the framework for their negotiation of identity.

From the point of view of the state and public, homelessness is articulated primarily as a

problem of the individual. Stereotypical and degrading traits – particularly related to the personal morals of the homeless person - are comprised in the term *bomzh*, that predominates in the state, the public and the media point of view. *The dominant discourse about the bomzh* therefore draws primarily on *the individual explanation* and *the moral dimension* of homelessness - rendering the homeless largely undeserving of assistance.

The discourse of Nochlezhka and its partners views homelessness as a structural problem. Housing and rights to housing - in the form of *propiska* – are the foundation for their approach and focus on human rights. Following on from this, they have introduced the word *bezdomnyi* - a more neutral term than *bomzh*. With their focus on lack of rights, they construct the homeless as legal subjects deprived of something they are entitled to. Thereby the homeless become deserving of assistance.

With their focus on lack of the right to housing, the discourse of Nochlezhka and its partners therefore draws primarily on *the structural explanation* and *the residential dimension* of homelessness.

While this discourse sees the social conditions of the homeless as a consequence of structural constraints, Nochlezhka at the same time employs AA therapy that conveys a contrasting view - that the social conditions of homeless alcoholics are the result of each individual's ability to master his own situation.

Although *the dominant discourse about the bomzh* fundamentally contrasts with the discourse of the ngos, they nevertheless both characterise the homeless as someone in lack of something - whether it be administrative identity, rights to housing or morals. Only AA offers an image of the individual as resourceful – at least to some extent.

In the following chapter I will show how my homeless informants make use of these available discourses to make sense of their homelessness.

Chapter four
MAKING SENSE OF BEING HOMELESS

In the previous chapter, I have established what I call *the dominant discourse about the bomzh*. It holds that the homeless person is unwilling to work, is dirty, contagious and morally deviant - and because of this he is *not quite human*. I have also showed how ngos try to challenge this by turning the homeless into legal subjects and how the therapy for homeless alcoholics conveys yet another set of explanations and meaning. In this chapter, I will turn to the homeless themselves and analyse **how homeless people make sense of their lives**. By analysing the life stories of my informants I elaborate on how they represented themselves and their past pre-homeless life, their present life and their future.

Rather than being preoccupied with the role of structural barriers and constraints that have inhibited their access to almost everything, my informants life stories were intensely focussed on the personal choices that had led to their present situation. Some blamed themselves exclusively for what had happened, others were ambivalent but no one exempted themselves from blame. They were ready to sacrifice personal relationships and potential ways out of homelessness in the negotiation of 'not being the *bomzh*'. At the same time, they subscribed indirectly to central features of *the dominant discourse about the bomzh* at critical points in their stories.

Distancing themselves from the notion of the *bomzh* was an ever present problem for my informants - how to present yourself as being 'not a *bomzh*' but a normal human when living conditions constantly undermine your efforts to become one? - how to be a human and a citizen when your lack of documents makes you ignorable to the authorities? - how to prove that you are not lazy and unwilling to work when no one will hire you? - how to show that you are not dangerous and contagious when there is no place to wash and clothes get dirty after one day on the streets - how to maintain that you are a moral human when the only way of surviving the streets entails sorting through other people's waste?

These were the moral challenges facing my informants and other homeless people. The disconnection between what they 'ought to be' and what that 'could be' in reality, forced my informants into finding other arenas and available discourses to exercise being human as opposed to 'being the *bomzh*'. However, meaning ascribed to certain events and the tacit acceptance of the image projected onto them revealed in the life stories show that despite

their efforts, my informants severely doubted their worth as humans.

Consequently, I found that two theoretical perspectives were particularly relevant. The first one is that of *internalisation* - of accepting the norms set by others - or what Goffman has called the split between self and self-demand (Goffman 1963:7). I will apply it directly to shed light on what happens in the interaction between the homeless and the public. However, the homeless' *internalisation* of *the dominant discourse about the bomzh* is central to the analysis as a whole.

The second theoretical perspective is that of *purity/pollution* which I have already applied in previous chapters. It is connected to the problem presented above - the preoccupation amongst the homeless with distancing themselves from 'being the *bomzh*'. Because, while homeless people are classified as dirty and contagious in the ordering of society, they order their own world in a similar way, by projecting the attributes of the *bomzh* on to others and purifying themselves via e.g. their choice of friends. In this way they contribute to reproducing the *dominant discourse about the bomzh.*

Each of the persons I interviewed had a very different story and told this from a different perspective. Perspectives were connected to the daily life of each one, to the institutions they were in contact with and the available discourses in these institutions. Those who lived in Nochlezhka's shelter for example were all enrolled in AA treatment and thus identified themselves primarily as alcoholics. While some of them certainly did not regard the shelter as home, they were nevertheless not *roofless* as were the other informants. Being homeless was a secondary identity to those sheltered and in AA treatment, and also often a <u>former identity</u> that had become easier to relate to now that they were sheltered (although temporarily) and 'saved'. The *roofless* on the other hand, did not have the opportunity to look back on their street life. Their accounts and the logic and meaning established to make sense of their situation were much more fragmented and intangible – and reflected their daily experiences as displaced.

Becoming homeless and being saved

Despite the efforts in surveys and reports, and of state structures and ngos, identifying single causes for homelessness have not been fruitful. In the life stories told to me, homelessness was a situation spurred on by a series of events that had often occurred over the course of several years. However, telling ones life story is a process of creating causal

logic and meaning in life experiences - establishing turning points where events and actions, in review, are seen as having had decisive power over one's future. That was also the case in the life stories told to me. While in chapter two I focused solely on the structures and events leading to the loss of housing (*the residential dimension of homelessness*), this section will take as its point of departure the causes of homelessness identified by my informants in their life stories – which include more dimensions than that of housing. Further, I will elaborate on how my informants think they can move on - drawing on notions of salvation and self-reliance.

Those involved with AA were for the most part excellent and trained storytellers – as attending meetings in AA often involves telling your story and making sense of the causes and dynamics of alcoholism. Some had told their story a great number of times in these settings and therefore they strongly emphasised the alcohol factor - that alcoholism had at some point led to homelessness and was perceived as a part of an inevitable path towards the very bottom.

Rotislav told me that he had started drinking as a child but he was now certain that he had been a potential alcoholic from the day he was born. He said that lack of control from his parents during his upbringing had allowed him to use alcohol to relieve an inherent discomfort. Homelessness had been a pre-determined destiny and the logical consequence of his life as an alcoholic which he saw as an inherent trait in his personality. He was now on the fourth step in AA program, which encouraged him to make *"a searching and fearless moral inventory"* of himself[71]. And so he did, when we were speaking about responsibility:

Rotislav:...It's me. I wanted to live like that. Of course, I didn't want to live like that but I always wanted to drink and take drugs. It was my biggest wish. And I started to enjoy my life without taking responsibility for it.

Sasha: Living on the street was your choice?

Rotislav: Yes, it was the only choice if I wanted to live such life. There were no other ways.

(...)

Rotislav: ...Maybe I was born as alcoholic. I need attention. I was born with discomfort - with inner and physical discomfort.

Sasha: Is it genetic?

Rotislav: I don't know. But I was born like this, now I write and I understand that a bottle or a syringe were symbols (...) - it was the most simple way to solve my problems. So I used all people and women whom I thought I loved. So when I got alcohol and drugs I could feel that I was a human and I could return

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[71] www.aa.org

warmth and communicate normally. And I became alcoholic even before I started to drink. I remember from my childhood that I always felt discomfort in relationships and in my living in this world generally. I always felt sorry for myself, I was touchy and I always wanted to have things my way.

In the light of his substance abuse, there had simply been no feasible options for Rotislav except for the streets. Homelessness was a result of the progression of a number of associated factors, substance abuse being the focal point:

Rotislav: I became homeless, when my 'circle' came to an end: I had found a job, but started to take strong drugs. So I lost my job, then broke myself and found a less payable job. Then I started to go to construction sites, just to survive (...) And also I couldn't work, because I understood that if I came to my working place, I would drink. It was a closed circle. That's it.

Rotislav had only been able to find a way to break the circle when he had become aware of the true connection between his 'discomfort', his need for attention and his craving for substances. But at that point, he had already been drinking, taking hard drugs, acquired hepatitis, been hospitalized in both somatic and mental institutions and served four prison sentences. In accordance with *the dominant discourse about the bomzh*, he perceived the reason for his downfall to be an inherent trait in his personality - a trait that had been spurred on by lack of attention and not least by lack of control.

This idea was shared by Dmitri who had been in AA for some time now following a long career as a street alcoholic. Not long into the interview, when describing his childhood, he said: "*...maybe I have my present problems because I was brought up without a father (...) I grew up without control.*"
According to Dmitri, lack of masculine authority and control in his childhood enabled his alcoholism to develop in full. Further, his mother's illegal connections to foreigners in his childhood had caused him to become a liar as well as given him the know-how needed to start his fatal illegal business with foreigners in the 1990s.
These are external influences but they are presented as having contributed to the shaping of his character – a character that Dmitri blames for much of his troubles. When asked if he would like to have changed anything in his life he thus said: "*I think, yes, it would be my character. My way of doing things, my way of thinking - but again, that's general. My whole life...that I've already told you about.*"
His character is also what led him to becoming *roofless*. In his account of how he first ended up on the streets he - stressing his own agency – said: "*I looked at people - at bomzhi - .....I*

looked at them and decided to drink with them." He had, in a sense, been victim of his own character with which he had later fought a hard and lengthy battle during his rehabilitation.

Vadim - a less experienced storyteller who rarely touched alcohol – presented another and more ambiguous view when speaking of the causes of his present situation as well as the prospect for his future. I met him outside Nochlezhka one morning where he was eating instant soup from a plastic cup – the usual breakfast delivered outside to those not living there. He was standing by himself sheltered by the pent roof and he seemed familiar. As it turned out, he had been living in Nochlezhka's winter tent the previous year during my internship. He now spent some nights with acquaintances but was living mostly on the street – his immediate appearance showing signs of the latter.

During our interview, he tried hard to present himself as a proud man who took control himself and who had hopes and prospects for the future...At the same time, he appeared bitter, without much confidence in life. While saying that "*I want to hope for the best"* and that *"everything is possible"* he broke into tears and openly stated that he felt betrayed and had lost his confidence in other people.

Ambiguity also dominated his statement about who was responsible for what had happened: Although the housing part of his homelessness came down to his daughter having cheated him of his flat, he was reluctant to place the blame on her alone. He said: *"I blame myself. I feel bad, that my daughter betrayed me. She trod on me".* His daughter's betrayal seemed to bring shame on Vadim rather than on her, which in the end confirmed Vadim's analysis of the situation: that *he* was the one that had been a fool: "*So that's how it happened with me...because of my own stupidity"* – the stupid part being trusting his daughter.

One's own character, whether it had caused alcoholism, crime or was imbued with plain stupidity, was largely blamed for what had happened. A general feeling prevailed among my informants that they had simply not been smart enough to pull through – they simply had not had what it takes to make it in the new Russia. And for this they could only hold themselves responsible.

The authorities couldn't be trusted to do anything serious for them anyway and help from this angle was looked upon with surprise more than expected as a matter of course. Rotislav barely allowed himself to hope that his sister's *kommunalka* room could be traded for a flat via a new government programme. When asked whether he thought that the authorities ought to help him, he gave this rather ambiguous answer:

Rotislav: Yes, of course. I think that they always ought to help. But it's a surprise for me that they try to solve the problem with collective flats now.

While he actually meant that the authorities ought to help, he had never expected them to do so, since he had never received any help from them before. Nevertheless he was positive about this new programme.

Others were less optimistic when asked about what role the authorities might play in rehabilitation. Pavel, who gave an account of his vicious circle in chapter two, had more or less given up when it came to receiving help from the authorities. Nevertheless he saw the role of the authorities from a different perspective. He had recently been released from prison without any documents except for release papers[72]. This, coupled with his lack of *propiska* and his criminal past, prevented him from getting work – his biggest problem at the moment. So as opposed to my other informants and my general experiences, he directly addressed the role of the authorities in creating and maintaining homelessness:

Pavel:...I know more than one person who are citizens of Russia and of Saint-Petersburg, and who for some reason got into prison and lost their property. When they became free again they hadn't got it. You see? And it is the government's fault. It doesn't control the situation.

Among others, Pavel was referring to Pyotr, his 'fellow' who was present during the interview. Pyotr had been released the day before the interview but his family had died while he was in prison, the apartment had been sold and he had lost his *propiska*.

While Pavel felt righteous indignation on behalf of Pyotr, he – on the other hand - didn't blame the authorities for *his* life taking a bad turn (this was rather his criminal nature). Rather he was preoccupied with the role they played in his current deadlock with documents and access to work. For this he shared the others' contempt towards the authorities. When we spoke about the assistance from Nochlezhka's legal counselling, he said:

Pavel: ...They gave some papers with which I should go to the state structure. But problems are not being solved there.
Sasha: So even if you get some help here, it doesn't go further..?
Pavel: Yes, the government doesn't want to work. There is a law but it doesn't work... I don't know how to make the others [authorities] act according to this law.

Pavel actually subscribed to a similar discourse as Nochlezhka[73] - meaning the he defined

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[72] Paradoxically, Pavel had been imprisoned because of criminal business in the field of real estate – to which many now homeless Russians have been victim.
[73] Interestingly Pavel, who differed in attitude from the others, had had little experience with Nochlezhka, and was as such not influenced by the organisation's discourse. However, his lack of documents as well as attempts to get

himself and other homeless in terms of lack of rights. Despite the fact that he knew the authorities were obliged to help him reinstate his documents, he had no serious hope that they would.

This kind of defeated attitude, based on bad – if any - experiences, prevailed in this field. The unlikelihood of receiving serious assistance from the authorities and the lack of social ties to family and old friends (to which I will return below) left only one option open - to rely on oneself for salvation.

So what did it take to save oneself? It took willpower. It was mentioned as particularly crucial for those in AA. Kirill, who had been in AA for a few months and now lived at Nochlezhka, said he was afraid that everything was in vain because he doubted that his will was strong enough to get him through. Igor, also a Nochlezhka resident but with very short AA experience, also saw the biggest constraints in his own personality:

Sasha: Who do you think can help you?
Igor: Only me. If I do something, I'll have everything.
Sasha: What is the biggest obstacle?
Igor: Laziness. And a wish not to do anything - to get everything at the same time.

Dmitri agreed: he simply said that the biggest problem in his life was himself. Since he had brought this problem on himself, he should also be the one to solve it by mobilising his willpower and self- control. As described above, similar concepts were underlying in their description of their childhood. So the connection seemed to be that, because they had never learned to control themselves during their upbringing, they had ended up with 'this life' - and curbing their defect by strong will and self-control was the only thing that could help them.

This was particularly evident for those enrolled in AA, who learn that clients will never stop being alcoholics. It is an illness that cannot be cured, a defect of character[74]. The connection between homelessness and alcoholism in some of the stories of my informants suggests that homelessness – as a logical consequence of alcohol abuse - was perceived in the same way. It was something inside you that you would never get rid off, a personal trait, a moral defect – as defined in the notion of the *bomzh*. As such AA provided them with an available

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new ones at state structures had filled his everyday recently, which is one explanation of his strong preoccupation with this.

[74] Step 6 in AA: "*Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*" www.aa.org

discourse for creating meaning from their homeless existence and a discourse where they themselves could act as agents. But at the same time, the discourse of AA might be seen as supporting a central attribute associated with the *bomzh*: that becoming a *bomzh* is a result of an inherent personal and moral flaw. It might be subject to treatment but can nevertheless never be completely cured and disappear.

Others who were not drinking, sheltered or enrolled in AA were more ambivalent about responsibility – but neither did they have the opportunity to look at their street life in review.

In the light of the social structures under which the homeless live, one might get the idea that placing blame externally - on the state, authorities or someone else – would be an obvious and reasonable strategy for coping with one's situation. I myself had such expectations. Considering the stories of my informants, they certainly have good evidence to support such an argument.

Blaming the state would also be a part of a strategy to resist and oppose the dominant notion of the *bomzh* that places blame on the individual. It would help remove the burden of self-blame and the shame that came with it; having a joint enemy would maybe even create a basis for a sense of community among the homeless. However, as can be seen from the above examples, my informants largely blamed themselves and relied only on themselves for help. Some were ambivalent at best, at least when it came to themselves. Why? - Because blaming oneself was also taking responsibility for one's situation - and disclaiming responsibility would put them at the wrong end of the moral continuum. They would thus end up confirming the very notion that the *bomzh* is immoral and irresponsible by nature. The discourse holds that the *bomzh* is to blame because of his moral flaws - including his irresponsibility. Taking the blame and the responsibility for their homelessness served to disassociate them from 'being the *bomzh*' and instead enabled them to gain respect - placing them in the category of moral (and responsible) people. A logical strategy and a simple equation in fact, underlining agency and active participation in disassociating oneself from the notion of the *bomzh*. This became more important than to exempt the self from the burden. Self-blame can thus be seen as both an *internalisation* of the stigmatisation as well as a platform for exercising moral worth. It is thereby a strategy of resistance.

Encounters and failures

As Goffman has pointed out, a stigmatised individual experiences a split. He might in his heart feel that he is "*a "normal person", a human being like anyone else (...) who deserved a fair chance*

and a fair break."(Goffman 1963:7). At the same time, he will have incorporated the dominating discourse from the wider society which will cause him *"to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be. Shame becomes a central possibility..."* (ibid.:7). This becomes particularly evident in the meeting with 'normals'.

The homeless in this research expressed just that - which I will illustrate in the following section. As noted in the previously cited social encyclopaedia (chapter three), the meeting between the public and the homeless was a cause of 'discomfort' for the former. For the latter - my informants - it was more than that: it was the scenario that most bluntly exposed him to his shortcomings and therefore central for his self-perception and *internalisation* of the discourse. It was the scenario that underlined that difference of being human and being *bomzh* and therefore highlighted the split, to use Goffman's term.

Vadim, whose appearance testified to his current *roofless*ness, provided the following statement when we talked about how people reacted to him on the streets:

Vadim:...Some of them react normally, they understand the situation. Young people don't understand. They look at me and if I collect cans, I'm not a human being for them....
Sasha: And what is your reaction?
Vadim: My reaction? I'm ashamed of myself.

While Vadim resented their look and thereby defended his position as a real human, he also agreed that maybe he did not really qualify as one. Anatoly, who also looked somewhat careworn from the last six months on the streets, testified to the same split in the following anecdote:

Anatoly: We have nothing outstanding in our life. But many negative things. For example, I come into a yard, I look into a rubbish bin, a drunk fellow come to me with a brick in his hand. He says: "Let me kill you!" I answer: "You shouldn't". "Why do you want to live such life?" - he asks. I didn't answer. And he went away. And so I thought - indeed, why do I want to live such life? That's our life.

Despite this brutal attack from a stranger, Anatoly saw the attempted murder as an act of mercy. Still, he wanted to live, which is why he had decided to carry a small knife that he showed me. *"It's impossible to kill with it, but I can simply injure someone's leg. This wound would be there for a long time. And that person will remember, that it is bad to touch a bomzh."*

The examples highlight the fact that interaction with the public and representatives of the 'normals' was a battlefield for negotiating identity. The shame inherent in the face to face encounter was a fact but it was still ambiguous – since 'such a life', or the hope for another, made living worthwhile.

However, not all members of the public were potential robbers or killers. Some of those who in Vadim's words 'understood the situation' could turn out to be of value for the homeless. In fact, as Stephenson (2006) and Höjdestrand (2005) have also pointed out, the only way homeless people can move up and out of homelessness is to build relationships with housed individuals[75]. They are therefore invaluable. However, my informants' alliances with the housed were sporadic and unstable. An alliance could consist in permission to sleep in someone's car or entrance. Such things were sometimes offered as a short term charity, but more often, deals had a contractual character. They certainly did not include any personal contact. On the contrary, contact had to be avoided, if the 'agreement' was to be maintained. Oleg found himself in such a situation. I met him in Caritas' canteen where he could hardly make it up the stairs because he had to carry all his belongings with him in five plastic bags and a sports bag. I never found out how or how long he had been homeless because he was reluctant to share this. But about his current situations he said:

Oleg: I sleep in an entrance - it is cold there, so I found a mattress there and a blanket - very good - not dirty, laid there and gave about 3 kg of mushrooms to a cleaner (...) And she cleans that entrance and doesn't touch my place.

But some of those who lived in the building grew tired of his presence and threatened to have the police remove him. According to Oleg, he had already been imprisoned once because of his lack of *propiska*, and he therefore had to comply with the rules of the house:

Oleg: I come there at 2 o'clock in the morning, go to bed at 3 o'clock and wake up at 6 when people begin to go out and I go away around 6 not to disturb anybody. It is in the corner where nobody can see me. That's how I live.

The only option acceptable to the residents in the building was one where they would never have to lay eyes on him or anything that reminded them of his presence. Therefore he also had to carry everything with him during the day. Oleg accepted their discomfort in facing a *bomzh* and he thus accepted that he was one – at least in their eyes. He belonged to the

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[75] The future chances for the few lucky, who were in private rehabilitation/charity centres (Such as the Half Way House in Nochlezhka and others) are unknown to me.

outcast *bomzhi* and in the face-to-face meeting he had no means with which he could prove them wrong. He was dirty, he didn't have a respectable job etc.

As such, the nature and significance of encounters were regulated by appearance and behaviour. For those who <u>looked</u> like a *bomzh* or <u>acted</u> like one in the sense that they occupied <u>public space with their private matters,</u> these encounters were fields for negotiation and shame. This was the case for Vadim, Anatoly and partly Oleg, none of whom could hide their status. Things were easier for Rotislav since he had been able to wash himself and his clothes in his sister's apartment during his relatively short time as *roofless*. When asked how people had reacted to him during this period of time, he said:

Rotislav: I don't know...I didn't communicate with anybody, so they didn't react on me. And I tried hard to be more or less normal...

Like Oleg, Rotislav had acted strategically. By appearing as 'normal' as possible – meaning not looking like a *bomzh* – he had been able to avoid or at least soften the shame of encounters with the public and housed. The split between the self and self-demand (*internalisation* and shame) thus became less manifest in these meetings. Oleg's and Rotislav's examples testify to the fact that homeless people engage actively in strategies to reduce stigma and stay human – by avoiding contact or by trying to appear 'normal'. But in this process they also accept, and thus reproduce the discourse, that the homeless 'cause discomfort' and are not 'normal' and thus, not human.

For those less privileged than Rotislav in terms of access to e.g. washing facilities, interactive encounters however offered few options for distancing from the *bomzh*. But in the quest for convincing others that they were in fact human, telling one's life story offered several options - one of which was distancing of self from being part of the category of *bomzhi* by projection of the attributes of the *bomzh* on others. This I will address below.

Categorisations – deferring the bomzh

Although considered a more or less homogeneous group by the general public and defined as one in both the dominant and ngo discourses, my informants did not represent their present selves as being part of any group - and certainly not the one of *bomzhi*.

The burden of the stigma of homelessness and the trouble they had dismissing the traits of

the *bomzh* led to rather direct projections of these traits onto other homeless. It was particularly common for those now sheltered and former *roofless* to describe other *roofless* – or sometimes their past selves – as living up to the negative stereotype of the *bomzh*. Categorising 'the others' as the *bomzhi* was an arena for exercising their moral worth.

The attributes associated with the *bomzh* turned up in the stories of my informants. Even if they had, through their own story shown that they were in fact not immoral <u>by nature</u>, that they were not someone who didn't want to change their lives, who didn't want to work etc., they still assumed that other *roofless bomzhi*, at least some of them, possessed these attributes. And even if they had convinced me that they had tried or still did the best they could not to be dirty or not to be ill and infectious, they nevertheless described others in these terms.

Near the end of some of the interviews, I deliberately confronted some of my informants with one of the common negative attributes associated with the *bomzh*. In accordance with the truth, I said that some people had said to me that *bomzhi* chose to live on the streets themselves and that they did not want to work or register themselves. I had imagined my informants to be infuriated and dismiss this idea but they didn't. On the contrary many agreed, although distancing themselves and 'their own kind' from it:

Sasha: Maj heard that many people think that homeless people chose such life themselves because they wanted it and they didn't want to work and didn't want to register themselves. What do you think about it?
Igor: Some people are like you described, at that point I agree. But others try to do something, but people pay no attention to them. I know several such people even in our town, who...couldn't do anything. They were betrayed some time ago, they were well-to-do but then some people stole their flats.
Sasha: So they are on the streets and they have no place to live...
Igor: Yes, and they have to live on streets. I know many people, even here, who after Perestroika lost everything. And some others don't want to do anything. They think "Everything is in vain, who will give me a job, I won't do anything to become healthy, some of them, like it, some of them just think that it has no meaning. It's my point of view.

Igor, who expressed the above, placed himself in the category of those who tried to do something but were not paid attention to. 'Some others', on the contrary, had given up and could not mobilise any willpower to sort themselves out. Kirill, who had himself had to live in basements and attics, was also preoccupied with personal ability to mobilise oneself when he provided this image of the *bomzh*:

Kirill: Very bad smell because there is no place to wash yourself. And even if there is such place, a bomzh

doesn't always go there. Someone should lead him so that he can wash himself because he doesn't have... I don't have enough words to describe it. So he is OK without washing. He stinks and it's OK to him. Because in a day there will be the same situation - the same smell.

What Kirill meant was that real *bomzhi* were those who had given up and given in to their destiny. In this way he effectively deferred this image onto someone else. He confirmed this when I asked him my 'provoking' question about other people's perception of *bomzhi*. He answered:

Kirill: It's an interesting question. Yes, I know some bomzhi who don't want to change their lives. They've found themselves. They don't think about the future - what may happen - that they can loose their leg or something else...and they wouldn't be able to move and to ask for money. They don't think about it. They live such life and don't want to change it at all (...) And some of them do want to change their lives....Talking about myself, when I returned from prison I wanted to change my life...(...)

He placed himself in the category of those who *did* want to change their lives and move on. Kirill's description subscribes to the idea that being a *bomzh* is the result of a person's character, a moral flaw which leads them to fulfil their destiny of doing nothing at all. It can also be seen as a reflection of Kirill's status as a <u>former</u> *roofless,* his <u>current</u> preoccupation with his own salvation via AA and the discourse made available to him in this community.

Leonid, on the contrary, was neither in AA nor sheltered. Nevertheless, he more or less agreed with Kirill. We met Leonid at Caritas' Canteen and he agreed to be interviewed. He was exceptionally defended during most of the interview and only in glimpses did he relate seriously to his own situation - for instance when he admitted that he slept in an attic and that the lack of proper rest prevented him from taking on stable work. He made a long speech about the best way to treat *bomzhi*: they should be paid better to do what they already did - sort out other people's waste for recyclables, find bottles and cans and maybe they could even be allowed to stay in a basement somewhere if they cleaned the street. Because, as he put it: "*They should do such work, which is similar to them*". He later elaborated on the character of the *bomzh*: "*A man will become a bomzh... so if a man was born as a bandit, he will be a bandit. He is born with such character - the same with bomzh*".

It seemed that those sheltered were able to defer the attributes of the *bomzh* to those on the street, who in turn could divert them to someone worse off than themselves as for example the *roofless* alcoholics or the *roofless* crippled. Labelling others was a way of cleansing oneself

of the negative attributes imposed on the self – a way of ordering and classifying the world to make sense of it. In the process of classifying oneself and 'one's own kind' as clean, others must be classified as polluting or dangerous because neither exists outside the system of classification (Douglas 2002: xvii). In this way, my informants took an active part in placing themselves in the social order by classifying others as 'real' *bomzhi.*

A particular arena available for making claims to status was that of friends/acquaintances. The choice of people with whom to socialise testified to the fact that the homeless themselves see other homeless as sources of social contamination.

For those engaged with AA, arenas claiming status and exercising their moral worth were ever present - acting in accordance with the program, attending meetings. They were particularly careful with whom they now socialised. Staying away from previous acquaintances who might pollute the new self served as a platform for re-ordering their social world to underpin their new self:

Igor: I threw away my sim-card. I don't want to communicate with them. I don't want. I thought that they were my friends then, but in our program "On the mountain" they said that we needed those friends only to take alcohol and drugs together.

Igor had attended the program for less than two months and tried very hard to comply. Staying sober meant staying 'clean' – clean from the *pollution* of those still drinking. Past friendships were not only disrupted but their entire value as friendships was simply cancelled in and by the program. Rotislav, who had been in AA for several years, exercised his moral worth not only by re-evaluating past social relationships but also in choosing new ones:

Rotislav:...frankly speaking, I've never had true friends. I had only people whom I could use. And I know that my previous close friend is not good for me anymore because he drinks alcohol. I don't try to find him (...) I know some people from Alcoholics Anonymous. I don't know other people and I'm not going to know anyone else.

Contact with other than those in AA was thought to be dangerous and ideas of *pollution* from associating with them were part of an effort to organise experience. By exaggerating the difference between those 'inside' and those 'outside', Rotislav and others attempted to create order in a basically disordered world (Douglas 1966: 2-5). This did not only carry a symbolic load – it was a matter of life and death, not only in the social world but also in the

physical world, as relapse could lead to death.

Relations with other homeless

Claims of status and moral worth via projections and classifications were only one reason why friendships among the homeless were scarce. Apart from fellow alcoholics enrolled in AA, who had formed their own category of brother- and sisterhood, I observed a striking lack of friendships among the homeless. Pavel - who actually sat with Pyotr, whom he had referred to as his 'fellow' - did not try to hide this and directly proclaimed *"I can say, that I have no friends. I have acquaintances, but no friends"*. Others seemed to agree, admitting only to having 'acquaintances' among other homeless. Even Rotislav refused to come closer than saying *"There is a man to whom my relation is, as to a friend"*.

Forming friendships, sticking together in the face of harsh conditions as homeless everyday would seem logical for an outsider like me. But friendships seemingly could not thrive here. From the accounts of their street life, relationships had more of a contractual character, in that they seemed to work only as long as both players could gain from each other. As Anatoly's description of the end of a typical day for him:

Anatoly: At the end of the day I try to have a rest. Just to relax. To sit on a bench and have a smoke, to talk to somebody, to communicate with somebody…If I find a person like me, we usually walk together. It's dangerous to walk alone in the evening…when it's dark.

Relationships served more to solve everyday dilemmas on the street, such as boredom and lack of safety (Höjdestrand 2005:170). However, such relationships did not qualify to being a friendship. Relationships with others on the street were temporary, random and unreliable. Judging from the stories I heard, it was impossible to trust (other) *bomzhi* - confirming that at least one central feature of a friendship, namely that of trust, could not exist on the street. Both Anatoly and Vadim who currently lived on the streets had been robbed several times of the most precious thing they had – their documents. Theft was not only common among *roofless* strangers, but acquaintances also stole from each other. Vadim had been *roofless* on and off for several years and said himself that he had been betrayed so many times that he didn't trust anyone now. He had been robbed of his documents three times and each time he had carefully spent months collecting new ones. After his acquaintance had stolen them the last time, he had more or less given up, logically concluding that regaining them was in vain as long as he was *roofless*. Unfortunately, his lack of documents (that actually made him

eligible for a GPU registration, because he had previous *propiska* in St. Petersburg) inhibited his chances of getting access to work (although unofficial), healthcare and rehabilitation.

Stealing was not the only thing undermining friendships among the *roofless.* Violence was not uncommon between acquaintances. Kirill told me this story about violence. While still living in his house in Novgorod, he had started to drink with some homeless people. Their parties had often taken place in his house but during the periods when Kirill had attempted to stop drinking, he had refused to let them into his house to drink. Later, after he had finally lost his dwelling altogether, he had joined them again on the streets and the following had happened:

Kirill: I slept with bomzhi during the summer. So we were drinking and suddenly we got absolutely drunk and they remembered everything, that I didn't let them in (...) And that had I kicked them out [of his house] *and sometimes taken a stick to kick them when I wasn't drunk....And then I came to them myself to drink with them. That time they beat me very strong. They broke my rib...They nearly plucked out my eye and now it's a little bit pressed. One eye. So it was a blood mix and I couldn't see anything with any of my eyes...And then I heard that they wanted… - I fainted few times and when I regained consciousness, I heard that they didn't want to leave me alive. We had a foundation pit there and they wanted to drown me but one then said that I would die by myself anyway....But I survived.*

Others had similar stories – acquaintances from the streets could transform into enemies in no time. Drinking together at night did not necessarily imply loyalty the following day - something Igor had learned after his acquaintance had stabbed him eight times in a fight over 500 roubles.

While none of my informants told stories where they themselves had beaten or stolen from other homeless, I am certain that also they had had to obey to the order of the street from time to time - because surviving the streets seemed to stand in direct contrast to being a friend. Conditions for the *roofless* create, as put by Höjdestrand, the simple choice of getting by at the expense of others or remaining fellow human (and friend), but perishing. (2005:89). As I was told: *"A friend is a man you don't need something from"* - 'something' meaning something material – and this clarified for me why the homeless could not refer to anyone as a friend - in the conditions under which they live, they always need something from someone and vice versa. As such, the moral order of friendship – implying trust, reliability and 'not needing something' from each other - clashes with the reality of surviving (in) the streets (Höjdestrand 2005:170). Most chose the latter. Moral order was also what was a stake in the relationship between the homeless and their pre-homeless network. I will discuss this in the following section.

Loss of previous network

Contact with family and old friends was very scarce and relationships saturated with shame. First of all, a great number of people in the previous close network of my informants – family and old friends - had died. Therefore many could say that they had no 'close ones'[76] – but those who had some family members left somewhere had little contact with them.

Relations with family and old friends had gradually ended as the process of homelessness had proceeded. Family ties were presented as having been more or less 'worn out' by repeated conflicts and numerous relapses following recovery attempts. This was particularly the case for those of my informants who had a history of drug or alcohol abuse. While contacts with family and old friends were rendered impossible by homeless reality, homelessness itself was a result of lacking ties. Kirill, for example, had been drinking together with his mother and sister but following a fight started by him, they finally had the police remove him on the grounds that he had no *propiska* in their flat. This left him on the street. Similarly, Rotislav tells that he ended up on the streets after his sister, who had otherwise been exceptionally patient and forgiving during his long career as a drug and alcohol abuser, finally gave up and evicted him from her flat.

While family ties do not thrive in the homeless reality (I shall return to this below), the disruption of ties seem to be one of the main factors leading to homelessness in the first place, as outlined above. It is a decisive part in the long process leading to homelessness and as such homelessness can be seen as an 'extreme case of the failure of social bonds' (Stephenson 2006:165). Other events similar to those that led to the immediate loss of housing for my informants (such as fraud and release from prison) have been experienced by many others. But ability to maintain ties with their 'close ones' prevented these people from becoming and remaining homeless. While not as prominent today as in the Soviet period, personal contacts are crucial for accessing jobs (in particular informal jobs for the *propiska*less), good quality medical service and for advancing in general (Höjdestrand 2005:130).

Following this, support from family and housed friends are also pivotal in finding a way out of homelessness as there exists almost no public provision for the homeless in Russian today. (Stephenson 2006:33). However, for the most part this was out of reach for my

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[76] I borrow the term 'close ones' from Höjdestrand, who translated the Russian '*blizkie*' in to this term. As she does, I use it to cover close family and friends.

informants. Vadim who had been married twice and had two sons - one of whom had betrayed him so he lost his flat - had lost contact with all family members and old friends. Past conflicts and present shame over his social downfall were some of the reasons for this.

Vadim: I've been working not far from here...30 years is not a short period. 15 years in regional committee. I'm very ashamed. I can't come to my own sister, for example. We had a conflict because my mother died in my arms. But she [the sister] wouldn't let her in to her flat. We haven't dealt after that. Though she has a degree in philology and my niece has a degree in medical sciences...but she has another family, and I can't come to her in such condition.

Vadim both felt resentment for his sister's behaviour and felt ashamed of himself. Therefore he couldn't face her and display his decay to her and her new family who would otherwise, in terms of their cultural end economic capital, probably be able to help him in his present situation. His family represented the 'normal' whose immediate presence is likely to intensify the *internalisation* and shame of the stigmatised (Goffman 1963, 7,12). This was why Vadim couldn't come to them 'in such a condition'. Later in the interview, his reluctance to deal with them led him to disregard this part of his family altogether:

Sasha: So you don't communicate with your family now?
Vadim: To tell you the truth, I practically don't have any family now. My son hides from the army and I can't find him. He's got all my documents - my passport and all the others.
Sasha: And what about friends?
Vadim: I can't come to them. What can I do if I come? To burden them? I don't want to.

Protecting himself from facing the reflection of his downfall in the eyes of his 'close ones' becomes more important than the potential assistance they could render. As Stephenson has pointed out, homeless peoples' past might be their only source of positive identity. And this identity is so valuable and worthy of protection that the homeless are ready to give up all contact with their past networks in order to at least be preserved as a positive memory in the minds of their past 'close ones' (2006:59).

Rather than focusing on past networks to help him, Vadim is preoccupied with the fact that he is not able 'to do' something for them. This concern is shared by Pavel who had no contact with any relatives, not even his mother:

Pavel:...she [the mother] can understand me, but I have bad relationships with my relatives, because I brought many problems to my family and I can't help them. At all. And I don't ask them to help me.

Pavel and Vadim articulate a central dilemma for my homeless informants: their lack of ability to contribute with either economic or symbolic capital[77] to the network and relationships between 'close ones' prevents them from gaining access to these networks and their capital. Meeting the expectations and obligations of the reciprocity so fundamental in close networks is simply not feasible in the light of the homeless life and reality. Capacities and social advantages in their past lives have been lost on the streets and street life prevents them from accumulating new ones (Stephenson 2006:44). As the capital invested in these networks maintains and defines them, they will fall apart without these investments. And they do, because the network between 'close ones' cannot accommodate the obvious difference in needs (Höjdestrand 2005:141) and difference in ability to contribute. Since the homeless can not contribute in the circle of reciprocity among 'close ones', they are expelled (ibid.:20) and expel themselves from these networks.

Another interesting perspective on support networks was brought up by Caldwell (2004) in her study of social support in a Moscow soup kitchen. She noticed how the beneficiaries of charity express their apprehension about material scarcity in their relations with 'close ones' and how their material shortages were conceptualised as social shortage (Caldwell 2004:6). In Bourdieu's terms, there is a two-way connection between economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1999:195). In the present context, my informants' lack of economic capital (their ability to contribute in their old support networks with material things such as gifts and money) meant that they also lost their symbolic capital. This caused them to withdraw all together. As Höjdestrand has pointed out, money does play an increasing role in the reciprocal circle of support networks in the new capitalised Russia, effectively excluding the homeless from taking part (Höjdestrand 2005:139). In this way the reality in Russia today undermines previous ideas of social support (ibid:19) which were largely based on good connections and peoples ability to make use of these.

There was also another reason why my informants were reluctant to engage in contact with their family and old friends. Apart from the shame they felt themselves, they were also afraid that their status as *bomzh*i would bring shame on their families. This duality was phrased by Leonid, whose family was housed, but who was *roofless* himself:

Sasha: Do you communicate with your family now?

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[77] I use the term symbolic capital as introduced by Bourdieu to mean the unequally distributed and mutually dependant capital of social importance and reasons for living (Bourdieu 2000: 241). Symbolic capital is granted to those who have "sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition" (Bourdieu 1989: 23) and thus denied those who have no opportunities to do so.

Leonid: Seldom. I know that they know something about me. My ex-wife has her own admirers. I can't have any contact with her because I don't need it. My daughter also has her own life.

Internalisation of the *dominant discourse about the bomzh* into the self-perception of my informants is particularly evident on this matter. Not only did Leonid *not need* the contact with his ex-wife, because it would bring shame on him, he also didn't want to contaminate the life of his daughter by associating her with a *bomzh*. Contamination of 'close ones' is not confined to the imagination of Leonid and others because - as Stephenson has also noted - the status of close family would be diminished if they associated themselves with a *bomzh*, especially if it became known that the *bomzh* was a family member (Stephenson 2006:59).

While some ties were worn out and my informants who had been rejected, the homeless themselves rejected these ties even though they needed them more than ever – in the material as well as the social sense. But *the dominant discourse about the bomzh* and the *internalisation* of this discourse into the identity of my informants prevented them from accessing and maintaining these networks. *Internalisation* of stigma thus becomes a powerful factor in the homeless' separation from society (ibid.:56).

Being needed and not needed

The lack of stable social ties in the lives of my informants was probably the most central in the homeless experience. Almost all of the homeless people that I talked to for longer than a few minutes at some point mentioned a variant of the phrase *"nobody needs homeless people"* - either in the accounts of their streets life, in definitions of other homeless or 'typical' *bomzhi* or - as a heart- breaking evidence of what lacked in their present life - in statements about dreams for the future. Such accounts are at the heart of the homeless experience for my informants as well as for other homeless in Russia (Höjdestrand 2005, Stephenson 2006).

Not being needed means not being human. As pointed out by Höjdestrand, *"To be 'needed by nobody' implies more than 'need' in the straight meaning of the word. The idiom conveys feelings of rejection, loneliness, or worthlessness in a more general sense"* (2005:4). These feelings were evident in Dmitri's retrospective account on what had happened when he first ended up as *roofless*:

Dmitri: It was 2002 and I understood that I couldn't go back to Murmansk - and I didn't have anybody here… That's all - it was a deadlock which I suddenly recognized. I felt emptiness. I sat on the Sennaia square here, in Saint-Petersburg and I understood, counting on fingers... - I felt that the game of my life was over that nobody needed me. Nobody let me in, I didn't have a flat here, I had bored everybody so much that

nobody let me in - all relatives said no to me. So I understood...I looked at people - at bomzhi - I looked at them and decided to drink with them. I slept at an entrance for the first time. Then in the basement and, I forgot to mention, that I had started to drink every day. I had no problems, nobody knew me, nobody asked my name, nobody asked about my biography. I had one goal - to find bottles, to find alcohol - I found out where I could get cheap alcohol and - not lying to you - I felt freedom, it was perverted, but freedom. I felt that nobody needed me. Nobody needed me. I didn't owe to anybody. Nobody owed to me. I didn't have to work, to make excuses to my wife, police didn't need me and I felt that it was great. I felt easiness. And I continued to drink.

To be 'needed by nobody' was to hit rock bottom, and this was what Dmitri experienced in his account of being *roofless*. Rejection by family, emptiness and freedom because he had absolutely nothing left to lose – and nothing to give to anyone. Not even the police bothered with him because it is useless to fine those who can never pay – so he was worthless in the deepest sense of the word - to himself and to others. After several hospital stays, amputations and infections, countless rehabilitation attempts from the nuns of Mother Teresa's, Dmitri had finally found his way to an AA centre outside the city. After the initial 4 weeks program he was sent to Nochlezhka where he now lived and continued to attend meetings with AA. For him and for others, AA had solved the problem of not being needed since the brothers and sister there needed each other. Kirill had already started to be needed, he told me. He had managed to help some AA friends simply by giving them advice through the sharing of his own story.

While Dmitri spoke of 'neededness' in his *past*, Pavel was preoccupied with the *present* - not being needed to perform a job. After his release a few months prior to the interview, he had only had occasional odd jobs. This was very stressful for him as he had to pay to be allowed to stay with some acquaintances in their flat. We asked him about the role of documents in his search for a job:

Sasha: So when you don't have a permanent job, is that because you don't have documents or..?
Pavel: At first, because of this. Secondary, because of my bad past. Because every organization has a security service which checks you and...nobody needs a recidivist like me.

Pavel spoke of 'not being needed' in a broader sense; because of his status and criminal past he was designated to perform the most unreliable and bad jobs even though he actually had some skills and experiences in construction. His history as a 'recidivist' could therefore not become past but would always be present because *"I've spoiled my reputation. It doesn't matter what I want and don't want, what I do or don't do...there will always be this precondition."* He thus saw

himself as worthless in his own fight for saving himself.

Finally, not being needed was a label used to describe the 'other' – the *bomzh*. Leonid, when talking about life as a *roofless*, simply said 'he' without any explanations as to who 'he' was. 'He' simply represented the *bomzh* as a term. 'He' who had fallen to the very bottom and *who needed* Leonid's help to survive the streets. When speaking about the need to be mobile to collect certificates from several different offices, he talked about 'he':

Leonid: Where can he go, if he just walks from the basement to the kiosk, from the kiosk to the rubbish bin, from the rubbish bin - here. And that's all. And gradually he is falling. Don't forget that he may be ill. Nobody checks him - if he has tuberculosis, AIDS or something else. Nobody needs him.

So 'he' and the others were *redundant* in Bauman's words. They had been disposed because they were disposable – because others could do without them and might even do better without them (Bauman 2004:12) and they were well aware of it. That is why being needed was also considered worth striving for in the future. I will discuss this in the following section.

Aspirations to become normal and human

Aspirations in the life of the homeless were not ambitious - my informants mostly talked about their near future and the problems that lay ahead of them. The primary concern for Vadim, who was currently living on the street, was re-obtaining his identification documents. Secondly he wanted to cure his bad arm, permitting him to even begin to look for a job with these documents in hand. Others of my informants, who were not sheltered but *roofless*, also saw their future in terms of meeting their immediate needs, like getting in to a rehabilitation centre or simply getting a roof over their heads. Seen in terms of dimensions of homelessness, these needs and aspirations are, at best, related to <u>*the residential dimension*</u> if any. As Pavel, who had recently been released from prison and now lived from day to day, said when asked about dreams for the future:

Pavel: ...A least, not to sit in prison and at least live and not just exist. Not like now. To live not like now.

The difference between simply existing and living is central in understanding the homeless experience. Liebow, in his account on homeless women in a town in USA, found that the struggle for those living on the streets begin at the animal level – in the search for food,

shelter, security etc., meaning that they struggle simply to exist. The struggle for the sheltered began at the level of human rather than animal - that is, the struggle for living a real life (Liebow 1993).

For my sheltered informants, who for the moment had their most immediate needs fulfilled, another level of problems lay ahead and the near future was a cause of anxiety. Kirill, who had been living in the shelter for a few months and was enrolled in AA program, was worried about his near future. He had a standard 3 months contract with the shelter, and even though he was now sober and had found a job, he dreaded leaving the structured life of the shelter and tried not to think about it at all.

Kirill: I simply don't know where to go to. In my working place I can't get a place to live in, and travelling back to my native city...of course, it's possible, but it will be very difficult for me to meet those people I drank with, and lived on the streets with. Of course, I will tell them about the wonderful treatment and they will say that I will return to them in a week. And they will be right.... After the first difficulties I'll come to them, because I don't have any other place to go to.

For Kirill, his direct problems concern finding a dwelling, but underneath this problem, is a lack of confidence that he will manage to stay sober. He strongly connects the lack of shelter/house with alcoholism – the two being mutual requisites. If his life lacks the stability of having a place to live, he will again lose his willpower and begin to drink. He thus connects external conditions with loss of morals.

The temporary status of everything in the lives of the homeless including even a stay at the shelter, worked as a barrier to believing in the future. Making real plans and actively pursuing them was off limits to many because of the lack of predictability in their lives. Bad experiences had created bad expectations of both the system and the personal ability to pull through and the present conditions of life seemed too fragile and uncertain to operate with. Therefore stability was also of high value – and stability was connected to work. Because, while Kirill and a few other sheltered had actually managed to find a job, most others had not and it was high on their list. Work was not seen only as necessary to earning a living, but also as a source of stability and positive identity. It was presented as the ticket to reintegration, a place in the world and - not least - a crucial step to *"rebuilt myself in society" (Kirill)* and gain *"a position in life" (Dmitri).* Working a real job thus had a meaning far beyond the income – it was a symbol of *living* as opposed to just *existing.* As Höjdestrand has noted in her account of the meaning of work for the homeless, a 'real job' is what makes a 'real human', while those who collect bottles are only *bomzhi* (Höjdestrand 2005:79).

The continuum between being human and not being human was directly pointed out to me by Alexander, a resident of Nochlezhka whom I met at the staircase bench. Replying to his question on why we were there on a day off, I said that today *"people were home" (liudi bili doma)* My words upset him and he said I shouldn't refer to those living there as people (*liudi*) but residents. In a bitter and sarcastic tone he explained that the homeless were not regarded as people (*liudi*) but 'monsters' (*neliudi*), which lexically translates as non-people and means people who are not human because they lack human traits.

Those who told me their life story certainly also aspired to getting rid of the non-people label and becoming accepted as people - as humans. So what did it take to become just that? Kirill, looking back at his time as *roofless* and paperless, framed a sharp analysis:

Kirill:...The documents humanize you. People treat you differently. There can be an inscription that say, you have no place to live but still, it's something. I even have a right to get a job with such [homeless] *registration. If you have a piece of paper - it's all right. I was nobody without propiska..*

Drawing on his own experiences, Kirill referred to an old Soviet proverb that goes: *Bez bumazhki ty bukashka, s bumazhkoi ty chelovek*, - 'without papers you are an insect, with papers you are a human being'. But Kirill also drew on the discourse of Nochlezhka which points to the social exclusion of the *propiska*less by using that proverb in their campaigns. At the same time, the organisation replicates the *propiska* institution as an inclusion mechanism via their own registration system. In this way, his registration - even if it said he 'had no place to live'- had saved him from the category of the *not quite human*.

Dmitri, who had lived several years on the streets but had now been saved by AA, had some quite firm ideas about what could qualify him to be accepted as normal and human:

Dmitri: I want to live for someone's sake. And to be needed...to take care of somebody. That's it. I want to have children....[to be] *an ordinary human...*

The attributes that Dmitri and others related to 'normality' are those things that the homeless do not have - documents, a stable job, a place to live, family and friends who need them. To express these in terms of the dimensions of homelessness, they are those of *residential* (and job) and *network*. But voicing a desire to achieve these things served as a proof that they actually deserved a place in the 'real' social world (Höjdestrand 2005:221). It was an attempt to make themselves normal and gain moral worth (*the moral dimension*): at the same time, it served to distance them from the notion of the *bomzh*. This is also what

Goffman identifies as a possible solution for the stigmatised individual when he notes that

"...it will be possible for him to make direct attempts to correct what he sees as the objective basis of his failing, as when a physical deformed person undergoes plastic surgery, a blind person eye treatment..." (Goffman 1963:9).

But 'becoming normal' is at odds with the homeless reality. The gap between the moral order - what they feel they 'ought to be' - and the reality - what they 'can be' - was evident in the accounts of my informants. Although those in rehabilitation might, in the long run, achieve the visible indicators of normality, they view their past as an eternal stigma. Dmitri, for example, was preoccupied with finding a woman with whom to share his future life; however, his previous strategy of being honest and open about his past had not brought him any luck.

Dmitri:...I'm going not to tell about it to other women. Only in short - that there were moments in my life... but there's no woman who will be able to bear such past...I'm a monster (smiling).

Hiding his past was the only way to reach a new life for Dmitri now that he was on the way to moving from being *"the discredited"* to becoming *"the discreditable"* (ibid.:4) – and he was probably right. Following Goffman, repairing the external features needed to become a full fledged human does not mean that the stigmatised will become just that:

"*Where such a repair is possible, what often results is not the acquisition of fully normal status, but a transformation of self from someone with a particular blemish into someone with a record of having corrected a particular blemish"* (Goffman 1963:9).

Dmitri felt that his past life as a homeless alcoholic would always be inside him: he said that his illness could never be cured and that he would never be healthy. While this is one of the central principles in AA, it is also at the heart of the notion of the *bomzh* – where homelessness is seen as a manifestation of an inherent pathological and immoral trait.

The stigma central in the dominant notion of the *bomzh* thus seems to overcome the external normalising factors which implied that my informants had internalised this discourse. In the end, no matter what they had to show and how they might live, it was not possible to be 'normal at heart'.

Alexander, who had scolded me for referring to the residents of the shelter as 'people' also

contested my use of the word 'home'. The shelter could not be considered a home – it was only a place to stay for those who had accepted that they had lost their rights, he said. He understood that as a resident in Nochlezhka he ought to relate to himself as a legal subject in accordance with the organisation's discourse about homelessness. But he opposed this, not by challenging the institution by refusing to cooperate or by converting to their point of view (Goffman 1967:51). Rather he had resigned himself to a certain extent. He knew how they perceived him: he refused to perceive himself in these terms but he had no other place to go. This had left him in a bitter deadlock which he handled by trying to provoke me into discussions about the nature of abstract systems whenever I met him.

Returning to the notion of 'home', the shelter also lacked the most important features of this term: committed and loving social relationships. Igor, who had not experienced a safe and stable home since his early childhood, answered to his definition of home:

Igor: I don't know. Maybe it's warm and good conditions, people who love me and whom I love around me... maybe not love, but respect.

Igor's family had asked him never to return when he left for the rehabilitation centre. After a violent upbringing and four rounds in the zone he, at the age of 24, related better to the concept of respect than that of love.

While home meant much more than just a place to stay, aspirations for the future were primarily vested in becoming normal and becoming human – which meant the opposite of 'being the *bomzh*'. As such, speaking of the future provided an arena for claiming status and moral worth by striving for what was unavailable in the life of the *bomzh* - stable work, housing and a loving network of family and friends. It becomes a way to prove that they in fact do have human material and spiritual needs despite a reality where the things that could provide them with being normal and human are more or less out of reach. In a sense, the future thus was a place and time that had not yet been disproved and therefore a place for making yet uncontested statements about the good life.

But when it came to their future self, they internalised *the moral dimension* of the *dominant discourse about the bomzh* by disclosing their fear that everything might be in vain and that they could never become normal.

* * *

In this chapter, I have analysed **how homeless people make sense of their lives** in the life stories they told me.

The meaning of being homeless as presented in the interviews was characterized by ambiguity: on one level, my informants represented themselves as everything but the *bomzh*, but on another level, they had internalized *the dominant discourse about the bomzh.*

Distancing themselves from 'being the *bomzh*' was a constant challenge for my informants because they had nothing (work, house, money) with which they could prove that they where not *bomzhi*. But this deadlock did not render my informants despondent and passive. Instead they found other ways to make their point:

One way of creating distance was by deferring the degrading traits of the *bomzh* via categorisations. Most often these traits were deferred onto other homeless who were worse off. They were then the real *bomzhi*. In this way they purified themselves. To avoid being socially contaminated by the other *bomzhi*, friends among other homeless had to be selected very carefully. Those in AA particularly struggled to stay clean - both in the sense of substances and in the sense of social *pollution* from the *bomzhi* who threatened their newfound identity as AA members – their new ordering of the world. In this way categorisations and choice of friends became a platform on which my informants exercised their moral worth. This therefore relates to *the moral dimension* of homelessness.

At the same time, my informants' presentation of their past, present and future self testified to a deep *internalisation* of the identity of the *bomzh*. This particularly manifested itself in self-blame and aspiration to become a normal human being, implying that they were not so.

The front line for internalising *the dominant discourse about the bomzh* was encounters with those who held this discourse - the public as well as family and old friends. These encounters emphasised the disconnection between what they 'ought to be' and what they in reality 'could be' – and therefore becoming the *bomzh* seemed inevitable. For those who had any potential network left, the pain and shame of being this led to the sacrifice of contact with their family and old friends. This relates to *the network dimension* of homelessness.

This loss of network was at the heart of the experience of 'not being needed' and internalising the *bomzh*. As Leonid so bluntly put it: "*If a man has an opportunity to exist*

normally, if somebody loves him and respects him just a little, he won't be a bomzh".

While my informants both disassociated themselves from the *bomzh* and at the same time internalised this identity, they did not pay much attention to the *bezdomnyi* – the homeless in Nochlezhka's discourse. Why? Because this discourse had really nothing to offer them. No desirable identity was to be found here: it could not make them needed, normal or empowered. On the contrary, it offered only an image of the homeless as *useless*, excluded and deprived.

Hence, nobody needs the *bomzh* and nobody needs the *bezdomnyi* either. Only the alcoholic is needed by someone - namely his brothers and sisters in AA. Only here does the homeless person become someone resourceful and empowered. In this way, being a homeless alcoholic (in AA) is better than just being homeless.

CONCLUSIONS

Homelessness in Russia has been a <u>formalised</u> matter since Soviet times. It has been formalised in the way that the presence of a stamp in a passport determines who is homeless in the eyes of the state. But at the same time, homelessness is more than anything a <u>moral</u> matter. The position of homeless people in the moral order of the society is as manifest and ideological today as it was in Soviet times.

In the Soviet Union, the restrictive mobility regime managed to transform the homeless into a group of delinquents who had committed crimes of parasitism, were anti-social of nature and had violated passport regulations. In this way, ***the homeless were constituted as a distinct social and legal category, which was structurally regulated by the penal code*** (cf. the first research question). They were made to contradict the moral order and the values of the ideal socialist society and they thereby played the role of the constituent other in the ideological education of socialist citizens. They belonged in penitentiaries and dumping grounds – either way they were under the full control and surveillance of the state.

Upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the abandonment of the penal codes on vagrancy and parasitism, the homeless lost their administrative identity. The lack of a stamp in their passports no longer defined them as something particular in the eyes of the state – it made them invisible. The homeless thereby lost their qualified political life as delinquents and were left in a vacuum between the control of the totalitarian state and the demands of the new capitalist economy. At the same time, the economic and political chaos of the transition period created a highly unregulated space for migration, criminal activities and privatisations, making way for an extensive increase in the number of homeless. These factors combined, set the frame for how ***homelessness is structurally regulated, produced and maintained in post-soviet Russia*** (cf. the first and second research question)

Although the homeless have lost their administrative identity, they certainly have not lost their place in the moral order. No longer governed only by the ideology of the state, the moral position of the homeless has become a matter for the public. The moral position and degrading traits ascribed to the homeless in the *dominant discourse about the bomzh* contradict today's ideals as much as they were made to contradict the ideals of the Soviet society. The governing ideology of private entrepreneurship, personal and material ambition and self-reliance that characterises post-Soviet Russia needs the *bomzh* as a constituent other.

The need to create and maintain moral order by the help of constituent others was of critical importance to the homeless too. This was largely achieved by deferring the degrading traits of the *bomzh* onto others - onto the 'real' *bomzhi*. This was a way of creating meaning and identity for the homeless – but in this process, they reproduced *the dominant discourse about the bomzh*, which brought so much shame on them in contact with others that they were ready to sacrifice remaining ties to their non-homeless network.

Ngos have attempted to move focus from the moral position of the homeless to their formal position by turning the *bomzh* into the *bezdomnyi*. They thereby seek to make homelessness a matter of politics and rights in a broader sense and redefine it as a structural rather than as an individual problem. In the process of rendering the homeless deserving, they construct them as a group of deprived and excluded legal subjects. This alternative discourse about homelessness constitutes – together with *dominant discourse about the bomzh* - **the discourses about homelessness in Russia today** (cf. the third research question) that were available for my informants in their attempts to present me with a meaningful life story.

Ironically, those with the best options for negotiating a positive identity – and thereby a meaningful life - were the alcoholics in AA therapy. While being an alcoholic might not seem the most appealing option for others, this discourse in AA was the best available to the homeless. Here they were neither morally deviant, dangerous for others, excluded, deprived or *useless*. Instead they were offered an identity in which they were considered able to do something and to act in ways that could save them. Secondly it made them needed by someone - by their brothers and sisters in AA - and therefore useful. It rendered them not excluded from society but included in a community.
Deferring the *bomzh* and subscribing to the AA discourse were the main ways **the homeless made sense of their lives** (cf. the fourth research question).

Consequently, it is not surprising that the efforts of ngos to create a basis for activism among the homeless seem to fail. Joining forces around being the excluded and deprived is not particularly attractive for someone trying hard to advance from that category. While it might provide them with their rights in the long run, the issue at stake for my informants was not really *propiska* and residence, but rather moral worth, loneliness and ties to family and the non-homeless network. On the individual level, these matters are hardly solved with the help of rights.

Still, the three outlined dimensions of homelessness (the residential, the network and the moral) were deeply interconnected. A simplified version of their causal relations looks like this: Where <u>*the residential*</u> and <u>*network dimension*</u> worked together to create homelessness in the first place, <u>*the moral dimension*</u> and *internalisation* of stigma highly influenced their options for gaining access to networks of family, friends and support. This indeed was what Rotislav meant when he said: "*I became homeless, when my circle came to an end*". Support from a non-homeless network seemed to be the only chance of leaving homelessness - taking into consideration their exclusion from official employment, social security and so on.

However, the formal exclusion of a large group of the population – inherent in the continuous enforcement of the *propiska* system - is likely to be a temporary phenomenon. It severely inhibits the free flow of workers fundamental to capitalist economy. Labour shortages, particularly in the construction industry, have already necessitated import of workers from former Soviet republics although unemployment is soaring in some of Russia's own regions. Further, several cases about the *propiska* system's violation of both international treaties and the Constitution of the Russian Federations have been won in the courts. Reports from the Russian ombudsman, as well as considerations from the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, have pointed to the problems of registration. At the moment, limited attention is paid to the rulings and critique of the system. Little or nothing has changed behind the desks in the offices of the Federal Migration Service. Some bills regarding the issue of homelessness have been put forward during the last decade but none have been passed. One proposal included a return to Soviet practices of forced alcohol treatment and labour therapy for the homeless. Another advocated provisional registration of the homeless and thereby access to services at any place they might apply. Attempts to introduce personal identity numbers were blocked by the Russian Orthodox Church with reference to the Book of Revelation - in which the Anti-Christ demanded the number of the beast stamped on each human being prior to the apocalypse.

On one level – the formal one – the homeless have been made *useless*, excluded and *redundant*. In the market economy and consumer society of present-day Russia they have no value as producers or consumers. They are worthless in the fragile democracy because they have been excluded from qualified political life and been reduced to mere biology. They are the *waste* from the construction site on which the new Russia is built.

However, in their capacity of excluded *waste*, the homeless become useful and indispensable on the moral level. Not only do they constitute the sovereignty of the state, by being the

object for its segregation of the excluded and the included. They also become the much needed other that constitutes the ideals of the new Russia – an abominable reflection, constantly reminding the others of the proximity of total failure and tragedy.

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ANNEXES

Annex I

Interview guide

Introduction:

<u>Who I am</u> – Danish student of sociology, writing thesis about homelessness/people without propiska. I previously worked as a volunteer with Nochlezhka (in the night bus and giving out clothes) and therefore I became interested in the people who live or come there. Something more about my self…. The purpose of the interview is to get information for my thesis. I have permission from Nochlezhka/Caritas.

Sasha, introduce yourself. Student of Danish language, also interested in this subject, live in SPb, something more…

<u>Interests</u>: I am interested in your life and your experiences. I would like you to tell me about your background (your life up till now). I also have some questions about your present life and your ideas for the future. I have my papers so I don't forget questions...

I respect if there are questions that you do not want to answer/topics you do not want to talk about.

<u>Anonymity</u>: I will change your name and the names of some places, so that it will be very difficult to identify your person in the thesis.

I request permission to <u>tape conversation</u>, in order to be sure that I get what you are telling me, and not only what I remember myself.

Can you approve these conditions?

<u>Turn on recorder!</u>

Past

Lets start in you childhood.

Can you tell me about...

...what is the first thing you remember?

...where and when were you born/grew up. Siblings.

...your parents: Their job, marriage, your home

...for how long did you go to school?

...how did you experience your school time?

...can you tell me about a happy childhood memory?

...were you in the army?

...what happened after you left school?

…do you have any other education?

...what were your dreams for the future at that time?

...when did you leave your parents house?

…where to?

…etc.

(most of the above questions are just to get the informant talking)

Life on the street/without propiska
Did you ever live on the streets? For how long?
Can you describe that life to me? (can you describe a typical day when you lived on the streets?)
How did you make money to live?
Did you ask for money from strangers? (only ask if appropriate)
How did you in general react to people in public? (did you try to hide that you were homeless?)
How did people react towards you? Example...
What was the most difficult for you in relation with other people? Example....

Can you tell be about any experiences with the police?
What happened?
How did you react to this?
What did you think/feel afterwards?

Did you try to get any help from the authorities after you lost your propiska?
(e.g. health care at the polyclinic, place at a state shelter, social benefits etc.?)
How? Please give an example.
What happened?
Were you denied help?
What reason did they give you to deny you help?
How did you react to this? Did you get upset or did you just accept it? Did you find it unfair?
What did you think/feel afterwards?

Present:

...Do you have any income now? From where (pension, job, other..)
...Do you have any contact with family? (housed/non-housed?)
...Why not?
...Do you have any contact with old friends (housed/non-housed?)
...What could improve your everyday life?

If sheltered:
...Can you describe what it is like living here? (if sheltered)
...What is the worst/best thing in about living here?
…Do you have any friends here (who are also homeless?)
…Do you help each other? Examples...
…What do you think about homeless people who live on the street? (reliable, helpful, etc..)

If not sheltered:
...Where do you usually spend the night?
...Alone? With others?
...What is the worst thing about living on the street?
...Are there any good things about it?

Future:

...What are your dreams for the future?
...How can you move on? What does it take?
...Who/what do you think should/can help you?
...Where do you think you will be in 1-2 years?

We also have some themes that we would like you to talk about…

Bomzh
How would you describe a typical bomzh?
I have heard some people saying, that bomzhi chose to live on the streets because they want to, don't want to work and do not wish to register themselves.
What do you think about that?
What would you like to say to those people?

Do you think there is a difference between being a bomzh and being bezdomniy?

Cause of homeless/present situation
What, if anything, do you think could have changed your path (to homelessness)?
Do you think that the state/authorities could have helped you in any way?
Do you think they ought to help you now?
Is there something you would like to have done differently yourself?

Last questions

Try to describe yourself in only a few words or sentences: (This question is very difficult, lets consider in each situation, if it is are appropriate)

Please try to complete the following sentences:
If I could change one thing in my life, I would...
The best thing that ever happened to me was....
The best thing in my life right now is....
The biggest problem in my life right now is...
I hope that…
A home to me is...

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you very much for the interview.

Is it possible that we can get back to you if we have some more questions?

The themes in the above interview guide were developed on the basis of this matrix.

Theme:	Options for probing:	My hypothesis about this:	Analytical questions:	Possible theoretical perspectives:
Cause of current life situation/ homelessness	What, if anything, do you think could have changed your path (to homelessness)? Is there something you would like to have done differently? Who/what is in your opinion responsible for your current situation/homelessness? (your self, the state, your family ??)	They believe the cause of their situation to be individually based. That they themselves have failed and not been able to cope in the system/life.	How do they narrate/make sense of their path to homelessness? What does it say about perceptions of self, entitlement, citizenship?	Is the logic of the system internalized? (and to what extent does it form the narrative?)
Encounters with the system/state/Relation to state as duty-bearer	Can you tell me about any encounters you have had with the authorities (after you lost your *propiska*/became *bomzh*? (e.g. polyclinic, social assistance, voting, state shelters.?) What happened? Why were you rejected? Have you tried it again? How did you react to this? What did you think/feel afterwards? Can you tell me about your <u>first</u> encounter with the authorities after you lost your *propiska*?	That they experience rejection by the system/regulations. They don't claim their rights but resign, because they simply think it is fair since they don't have their papers sorted out. That it is highly humiliating for them, that they feel dehumanized and that they don't pursue contact with the authorities due to this.	How do they represent themselves and representatives from the authorities in the story? What does it say about their perception of rights and citizenship?	Discrimination, state disciplining from the perspectives of citizens? (Is the logic of the system internalized) Rights-based ideas?
Self identification as *bomzh*/group	Can you describe what it is like to live here (if sheltered)	Lack of identification as *bomzh*. Tendency to make	What characterises the relationship with other	in-group identification,

Theme:	Options for probing:	My hypothesis about this:	Analytical questions:	Possible theoretical perspectives:
affiliation	What is the worst/best thing about it? Do you have any friends here (who are also homeless?) Do you have things in common? Do you help each other? Examples... What do you think about the other homeless people? (reliable, helpful, etc..)	projections (us-them). Not possible to make friendships due to lack of reliability.	homeless people in the shelter/streets: see them as bad/worse off or better/better off. In a mercyful or degrading way?	hierachial identities, projections, construction of self.
Relation to public on the street/self-value/discrimination	How do you in general react to people in public? (try hiding status? Attract attention? A Did you ever ask for money from strangers?-if appropriate) How do people on the street/metro react towards you? Example... What is the most difficult for you in relations with other people? Example....	They do not feel part of the society and they are highly discriminated against.	What characterises the relation between homeless and housed people in public space? How does it influence homeless persons' identity and self-esteem?	Internalization of public status into personal identity? Matter out of place – dirt. Discrimination
Stereotyping	How would you describe a typical *bomzh*? I have heard some people saying, that *bomzhi* ...chose to live on the streets because they like it. ...don't want to work. ...do not wish to register themselves. What do you think about that? What would you like to say to those people? ----------------- Is there a difference between being a bomzh and being *bezdomniy*?	Dirty, smelly, unreliable	How do they relate to the category *bomzh*?	Identity theory?

Theme:	Options for probing:	My hypothesis about this:	Analytical questions:	Possible theoretical perspectives:
Relationship with old network (housed)	Are you in contact with any family member or old friends? (*blizkie*) (Why not?) Do they know about you current life situation? What is the most difficult for you in relations with your family/old friends?	It is shameful and homeless avoid contact because they cannot fulfil their role as friends as they could previously. They feel as too much of a burden.	What characterises the relation between homeless and their old network and family and friends? What does it say about their self-perception/value and their options for reintegration?	Reciprocity, the consequences of changing status/equality. Alienation from reference points in life. Reintegration.
Confidence/Future	What are your dreams for the future? How can you move on? What does it take? Who/what do you think should/can help you? Where do you think you will be in 1-2 years? (is it temporary?)	Various	Do they view their situation as temporary? Have they given up? How is their motivation for acting? Who is responsible and what does it say about their sense of justice.	Citizenship, base for motivating them to move on....
Alcoholism/drug use	Do you drink alcohol? When did you start drinking? Would you say that you drink too much? Would you like to stop drinking? Did you ever take any drugs? Did you experience abuse of alcohol or drugs in your childhood?	That alcohol use is considered as a contributing factor to past/current problems. Alcohol use is considered a fair reaction to life trouble. They don't do drugs (too expensive).	What role does alcohol play in for homeless persons? As a cause/effect or solution to problems?	?

Possible themes:				
The Zone	*Were you ever in prison?* *For how long? Why?*			
Nochlezhka and other services Transition in identity	*How did you get in contact with Nochlezhka? From where did you hear about it? Why did you come here in the first place? How would you evaluate their services and staff? Can all homeless benefit from Nochlezhkas services?*	*Difficult to approach Nochlezka the first time. They identify themselves as homeless (to a certain extent) through the use of Nochlezka services. None specific*	*Identification as part of homeless clientele? The process of accepting own vulnerability/ helplessness. Ambivalence towards receiving help.*	*Transition in identity, taking on new roles.*
Encounters with police	*Can you tell be about any experiences with the police? What happened? How did you react to this? What did you think/feel afterwards?*	*That they feel categorized and discriminated against by the police and that it is embedded in their interaction.*	*How do they navigate in these situations?*	*Agency/common agreement with police?*

Life story summaries have been removed from this edition for reasons of confidentiality.