

Russian Police and Transition to Democracy: Lessons from One Empirical Study

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Abstract:

The paper discusses public experiences of policing in today's Russia, public attitudes towards police resulting from such experiences and wider social implications of those attitudes. At the basis of the discussion is an empirical study which has been carried out by the author. The study has found abundant evidence of distrust towards – and fear of – police by contemporary Russians. It is argued that the corrupt, brutal and unaccountable police who lack legitimacy in the eyes of citizens trigger public responses that may help to deepen social inequalities, subvert the process of establishing the rule of law and impede the Russian transition to democracy. Moreover, if citizens view the police as illegitimate – indeed, believe that the very state agency designed to protect them actually presents threats to their security – the legitimacy of the entire state structure is at risk.

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Introduction

To various degrees police legitimacy is a problem in every society, however it is particularly acute in societies undergoing change and experiencing rising social tensions (Weitzer 1995, Mishler and Rose 1998, Goldsmith 2005). This paper focuses on the case of Russia as an empirical study and uses narratives derived from in-depth interviews with members of the public who have had encounters with the police in the post-Soviet period to demonstrate the lack of police legitimacy. The paper discusses the failure to create a trusted police force on the ruins of the communist empire and the resulting persistence and growth of the informal sector and informal social relations. It argues that the dysfunctional state of contemporary Russian policing triggers public responses that may help to deepen social inequalities, subvert the process of establishing the rule of law and impede the transition to democracy.

The study upon which this paper is based contributes to the literature which examines public attitudes towards the contemporary Russian police. There is abundant evidence from surveys conducted in post-Soviet Russia that public trust towards the police is very low (Mel'nik 2001, Gryaznova 2005; Gudkov and Dubin 2006; Nevirko *et al* 2006; Obschestvennyi Verdikt 2009, Levada Centre 2011, 2012a, 2012b). Most surveys indicate that only around 10-20% of citizens trust the institution². Opinion polls also show that many members of the public are reluctant to report criminal incidents to the police (Mazaev 1997; Gudkov 2000; Gilinskiy 2005)³. Typically that research stops at asking respondents about their attitudes towards the police and sometimes enquires about their inclinations to report crimes.

This study goes a step further and analyses broader social implications of negative attitudes towards the police. Most scholars studying post-socialist transition tend to focus on reforms of the economy⁴ and the political institutions and processes (such as the parties, presidency, elections)⁵. Those analysing the process of establishment of the rule of law tend to concentrate attention on the reform and functioning of the judicial process and legal institutions, especially in the context of resolution of economic conflicts (Hendley 2009a, 2009b, Kurchiyani 2003, Ledeneva 2006, Rogov 2010). Police reform as an element integral in the process of Russian democratic transition has been understudied. This paper adds to the growing body of literature that analyses Russian transition to

² For example, Shlapentokh (2006) cites evidence that only 10% of Russians fully trust the police. Gudkov and Dubin (2006) report that in a sample of 1600 respondents only 12% fully trust the police and 40% fully distrust the institution, with the rest expressing incomplete trust. Gerber and Mendelson (2008) found that in a survey of 11,202 respondents, only 3% believe that police 'fully' deserve trust, 23% say they 'probably' deserve trust, 36% say 'probably not', and 29% say 'not at all'. By comparison, in Western Europe around 80% of respondents trust the police, according to the World Values Survey. In the United States national opinion polls show that the majority of Americans hold a favourable image of the police and report either a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence in the police, as Gallup polls demonstrate.

³ So, in one study only between 2 and 8% of victims said they reported crimes to police (with the exception of serious crimes, in which case the majority report a crime) (Gudkov 2000). In another study two-thirds of crime victims did not report crimes to police (Gilinskiy 2005).

⁴ For example, Aslund 2002, Gaddy 2002, Gaddy and Ickes 2002, Hellman 2002, Aslund 2010, Hanson 2012, Robinson 2013.

⁵ For example, White 2000, Holmes 2002, Shevtsova 2002, 2008, 2012, Fish 2005, Wilson 2005, Aslund 2007, Remington 2011.

democracy by discussing dangers that flow from the failure to build a democratic and legitimate police force and the resulting public distrust towards the institution.

While this study investigated police practices in Russia, its conclusions may apply outside the Russian context. It may help to shed light on problems that arise in connection with policing in other societies dealing with legacies of authoritarianism. Also, by drawing attention to some of the negative consequences resulting from the loss of police credibility among citizens, the study may act as a warning to citizens in the Western countries about the dangers of democratic erosion in their own societies.

Theoretical context

Russia's transition to democracy

Russia has been frequently described as being 'in transition' following the collapse of the Soviet Union. That transition involved a move away from centrally planned economy towards a free market, and simultaneously a shift from totalitarianism to democracy. In the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, expectations were high that, after decades of totalitarianism, Russia would take a pro-Western course and embark on democratising its political system, embracing the rule of law and granting its citizens civil rights. However, twenty years later it is evident that those aspirations have not been realised. Today experts disagree on the direction the Russian transition has taken. Some believe that Russia is an 'immature' democracy gradually evolving into the full-fledged variety. Others have concluded that Russian transition to democracy had run aground (McFaul *et al* 2004, Krastev 2006, Furman 2008, Shevtsova 2008, Sakwa 2011).

On this later view, Russia presents a hybrid regime combining both democratic and authoritarian features. It is formally committed to constitutional democracy and liberal capitalism, yet in practice many of the regime's actions are authoritarian in spirit. For example, there are elections which are held regularly and which appear to be conducted in accordance with the appropriate normative framework. However, in practice they are unfree and unfair, so the opposition has no prospect of challenging the ruling party. Elections are manipulated and used to legitimise the regime, rather than allowing fair political competition and open outcomes (Shevtsova 2002, 2012, Fish 2005, Wilson 2005, Wood 2012). The coercive agencies of the state are regularly used to suppress actual and potential opponents to the state leadership and to weaken or neutralize threats to the ruling party (Taylor 2011). Although the constitution proclaims the rule of law and its formal provisions are largely compatible with the requirements of a liberal democratic order, the rule of law is regularly abused through administrative practices, and the judicial process is undermined by political interference (Greenberg 2009, Hendley 2009a, 2009b). The state has a federal structure, yet the central government dictates policy to the regions. Technically there is a free market, but state officials constantly interfere with the economy. The constitution gives the President excessive powers which are only weakly constrained; individual and group liberties are poorly protected; legal institutions are corrupt and inefficient; the media is dependent on owners with political motivations; the civil society is weak, passive and apolitical, and governmental policies, aimed at suppression of opposition, cripple it even further (Weigle 2002, Howard 2003, Taylor 2011, Herszenhorn 2012, Mendras 2012, Wood 2012).

Several commentators have described contemporary Russia as a 'Potemkin democracy', or 'imitation democracy' (Wilson 2005, Shevtsova 2008). By proclaiming democratic credentials and retaining the formal democratic institutions, traditional power arrangements are masked, and an illusion of democracy is created. As a result, the country is unable to move towards genuine democracy because of the reality of autocratic tendencies and practices, and at the same time the return towards authoritarianism is inhibited due to the formal commitment to democratic ideals. Russia remains 'lost in transition' (Shevtsova 2008), and is likely to stay in crisis indefinitely, unless steps are taken towards strengthening democratic institutions and practices (Sakwa 2011).

Ideas of the commentations who claim that Russia is in transition to nowhere and presents a case of an 'imitation democracy' will be revisited later in this paper. Of course, obstacles to the Russian transition are multiple, and complex historical, economic and political factors account for the lack of progress (McFaul *et al* 2004). Yet, using findings of my empirical study, this paper will argue that contemporary Russian police that lacks legitimacy and trust of population may do more to hamper Russian transition to democracy than any other institution. It will be further suggested that recent police reform carried out by President Medvedev may result in creating a police force that merely imitates its Western democratic counterparts and complements the Russian political system of 'Potemkin democracy'.

'Predatory' policing

The style, nature and quality of policing are important indicators of the character of government (Marenin 1985, Bayley 2001, 2006). The comparative literature on policing identifies a tension faced by the police. It is the tension between, on the one hand, primarily serving the society, upholding the law and protecting citizens from crime and, on the other hand, primarily serving the state and maintaining the political order (Marenin 1996, Mawby 1999, Das and Marenin 2000). Ronald Weitzer (1995) distinguishes between two main theoretical models of the role of the police. He labels the first model a 'functionalist' model and the second – a 'divided society' model. When the 'functionalist' model is adopted, police serve the society as whole, enforcing the law, providing services to the public and protecting the order and stability of the social system (Weitzer 1995:3). In the 'divided society' model police uphold the interests of the dominant groups and suppress subordinate groups or the political opposition (Weitzer 1995:5). The 'functionalist' model is typical in most developed democracies, while the 'divided society' model can be found in authoritarian societies and societies which are sharply polarized along racial, ethnic or religious lines. Of course, these models are ideal types, and in reality no police system will correspond exactly to one model in its pure form. Yet, determining the dominant model or a mix of models may help to understand the police orientation and role in a given society.

Gerber and Mendelson (2008) have suggested that the model of policing in contemporary Russia does not fall neatly into either the 'functionalist' or the 'divided society' model.

Rather, it presents a third model: a model of ‘predatory’ policing⁶. Predatory policing is primarily oriented towards personal gain and advancing their own interests by police. Police use their position to extract money, goods and services from members of the public. Violence is employed towards two main ends. Firstly, it is used as a means of extracting rents from the population. Secondly, it is used to assist the government in suppression of opposition groups or to create an impression of solving criminal cases in order to secure the access to opportunities for extracting rents (Gerber and Mendelson 2008:5).

Gerber and Mendelson (2008) argue that the model of predatory policing goes hand-in-hand with the ‘divided society’ model identified by Weitzer (1995). So, in their survey of 2,408 Russian respondents, 37 per cent thought that most of all Russian police ‘serve their own material interests’, 28 per cent believed that the Russian police mostly ‘serve the interests of elites’ and 25 per cent thought that the police mostly ‘preserve public order and protect citizens’ (Gerber and Mendelson 2008: 28-29). That is, upholding interests of the dominant groups was viewed as the key function of police by more than a quarter of respondents. Brian Taylor (2011) makes an observation that supports these findings. He argues that while Russian policing gravitates towards the predatory style that advances the material interests of individual officers, Russian law enforcement institutions (including the police) in recent years have also been successful in subduing political opponents. Since President Putin came to power in 2000, the ‘regime of repression’ was rebuilt in Russia that is used to weaken opposition parties and movements, so that the opposition has no prospect of challenging the ruling party. To quote Taylor, ‘Russian law enforcement organs tend to treat their mission as one of repression or predation, not protection’ (2011:33). The dominant predatory and repressive police practices undermine the creation of a civil state rooted in the rule of law (Taylor 2011:305).

This paper supports this view. It offers empirical evidence demonstrating that public perception of police officers primarily as predators and, when required by their powerful patrons, servants of the political regime, results in widespread distrust, and even fear, towards the police. That perception produces behavioural orientations on the part of Russian members of the public which heighten the sense of social inequalities, undermine the development of the rule of law and threaten to destabilise the entire process of democratization.

Public distrust and informal mechanisms

Public institutions, including the police, reflect the nature of the state in which they exist. Gerbert and Mendelson’s idea of predatory policing fits well with the concept of ‘predatory’ states articulated by Peter Evans (1989). In predatory states those who control the state apparatus extract resources from the population and provide very little in the way of ‘collective goods’. They ‘plunder without any more regard for the welfare of the citizenry than a predator has for the welfare of its prey’ (Evans 1989:562). Most Russians would agree that Evan’s concept of predatory states describes accurately post-Soviet Russia: for the majority of them the state institutions are unreliable in providing their

⁶ Russia is not a unique example of predatory policing. Other examples include such countries as Mexico, Argentina, Brasil, Nigeria and European Post-Communist countries (Igbiovvia 1985, Beck and Chystyakova 2002, 2004, Botello and Riviera 2000, Uildricks and Van Reenen 2003, Hinton 2005, 2009, Asiwaju and Marenin 2009, Davis 2009).

services, and state officials are corrupt and serve their own interests, rather than those of the citizenry as a whole (Rose 1999, Mendras 2011:chapter 6; Kostikov 2012).

Russia's rankings in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index are consistently very poor⁷. The public perception of corruption is especially high with respect to law enforcement institutions and the police in particular, as has been consistently demonstrated through public surveys (Mazaev 1997, Varygin 2002, Levada 2005, Gudkov *et al* 2004, Gryaznova 2005). That is, Russian citizens believe that the very bodies tasked with upholding the law are its most persistent violators. Of course, the real extent of corruption is impossible to know⁸. Yet, whatever the real scale of corruption is, its perception by citizens is important as it damages public trust towards law enforcement and governmental institutions in general.

It needs to be pointed out that while it is generally believed that post-socialism is characterised by significant rise in corruption, during communism corruption in Russia (and Eastern Europe as a whole) was pervasive too, with bribery and use of personal connections, known as *blat*, being part of daily existence. *Blat* enabled everyday survival in the conditions of permanent economic shortages (Ledeneva 1998). Although *blat* was a classic example of misuse of public office for private gain, it was considered socially acceptable⁹. *Blat* disappeared with the end of the economy of shortages in the post-Soviet era. It was replaced by bribe, as social relationships were monetised. This transition has widened the gap between those who do and do not have money to pay bribes, and those who do and do not have power to extort them. That in turn has contributed to the growing sense of social inequalities in the post-socialist societies and augmented accusations that governmental institutions are totally corrupt (Krastev 2004).

Opinion polls conducted in the post-Soviet Russia consistently reveal high levels of popular distrust of almost all public institutions (Rose-Ackerman 2001). With the exception of the President, during the post-Soviet era no one public institution has gathered more than 40 or 50 per cent of nation's trust and most attain confidence level of only 10 to 30 per cent¹⁰ (Shlapentokh 2006, Mendras 2012). Analysing the relationship between the Russian state and its citizens, Richard Rose (1995) has described Russia as an 'hour-glass' society. At the base of such society there is a rich social life, which consists

⁷ However, there have been some recent improvements with Russia moving upwards from the 154th place (out of 178 countries) in 2010 to 143rd place (out of 182 countries) in 2011 to 133rd place (out of 176 countries) in 2012.

⁸ Internal Security Service charged with the internal control of the Russian police has reported that in 2012 they uncovered 1518 incidents of corruption, out of which 303 were cases of bribery (Falaleev 2012), however this figure is likely to reflect only the tip of the iceberg.

⁹ One reason for its social acceptability may be that *blat* took a non-monetary form and involved an exchange of favours. Another reason may be that *blat* transactions were mis-recognised as 'help' and disguised in the rhetoric of friendship (Krastev 2004).

¹⁰ For example, findings of the survey conducted by Levada Center (2011) show that in 2009 only 7 per cent trusted the political parties, 20 per cent trusted the Parliament, 30 per cent trusted the government, 22 per cent trusted the courts and 19 per cent trusted the police. President, the church and the army were most trusted institutions, gaining 66 per cent, 50 per cent and 38 per cent of trust respectively. In October 2012, 51 per cent trusted the President, 50 per cent - the church, 39 per cent - the army, 13 per cent - political parties, 20 per cent - the Parliament, 29 per cent - the government, 23 per cent - the courts and 20 per cent - the police (Levada Centre 2012a).

of strong informal networks that rely on trust between individuals. At the top there is also a rich political and social life, with elites competing for wealth, power and prestige. Yet the links between the top and the bottom are very limited. Citizens in an 'hour-glass' society do not expect to influence the state activities through democratic channels. They distrust the state and try to minimise their contact with it (Rose 1995:35, Rose, Mishler, Haerpfer 1997:3). They do not look to the state for protection, and much of everyday life is organised to insulate people from the negative effects of the state which is not regarded as 'citizen friendly'.

While trust in public institutions in post-Soviet Russia is chronically low, levels of inter-personal trust are not, so, when in trouble, people turn for help to their immediate social networks (Rose 1995:36-8, Rose-Ackerman 2001:426-7). Confronted with the situation where public institutions are widely distrusted and considered unreliable, post-Soviet citizens have been challenged to develop ways of compensating for the failure by the state to perform many of its functions. They had to learn self-sufficiency and independence from the state institutions, and in the process a variety of coping techniques and informal methods based on inter-personal relations evolved, many of which have been described by researchers of everyday strategies of adaptation utilized by citizens of post-socialist countries (Rose 1999, 2001, Burawoy *et al* 2000, Humphrey 2002, Polese 2006, 2009, Shevchenko 2009, Stenning, *et al* 2010). While some of these strategies involved building upon pre-existing informal networks, such as *blat* mentioned above, others were new. Reliance on such informal solutions enables people to survive in the midst of the post-soviet turmoil (Rose 1999).

Important in this context are public attitudes towards legal institutions in post-Soviet Russia. They are regarded as corrupt and arbitrary, and the idea that law could be utilised by ordinary people to protect themselves from abuse of power by the state officials is generally considered unrealistic (Hendley 1999, Kurkchiyan 2003). Scepticism of ordinary Russians towards the law's ability to protect them is deep-rooted: it long pre-dates the socialist revolution, and then both communist rulers and their post-Soviet successors have reinforced that scepticism by open lawless behaviour and manipulation of law when it suited them (Newcity 1997, Hendley 2009a). So, rather than turning to law, Russians prefer to employ entrenched informal mechanisms and solve problems by using personal connections, cutting corners and making side payments (Hendley 2009a, 2009b, Ledeneva 2006, Rogov 2010).

Using my empirical findings, this paper will argue that the popular distrust of the police and law in general makes the prospects of Russian transition to a democratic society based on the rule of law bleak. The police force lacking legitimacy in the eyes of citizens contributes to persistence and growth of informal methods and social relations that compensate for dysfunctional policing. Some of the prevailing informal methods may present threats to human rights and challenge the rule of law. Also, the unwillingness to turn to law in an attempt to hold to account police abusing their power may help to perpetuate the unwanted social conditions.

Russian police: background

From militsiya to politsiya

During the 74 years of the Soviet rule the Russian police (until recently known as the militsiya, but on the 1st of March 2011 renamed into the politsiya) operated to weaken or neutralize threats to the existing order (Shelley 1996, 1999; Pustintsev 2000; Uildriks and Reenen 2003). It functioned as a tool of the Communist party which managed the organisation both from within and above. It had a highly centralised militaristic structure, and there was a well-established system of subordination and control. Militsiya had very wide powers to intrude in many aspects of people's lives, and played an important role of maintaining social control by sustaining close watch on everyday activities of Soviet citizens (Shelley 1996:chapter 7). The militsiya was subordinate to the Communist party, and its was not accountable to citizens. It functioned in an authoritarian environment where legal protection against abuses of power by its officers was virtually non-existent. The consequence was a general public distrust towards militsia and a tendency on the part of citizens to avoid encounters with it whenever possible.

As Russia began its transit away from socialism, the militsiya found itself in a weakened and unstable state (Gilinskiy 2000; Safronov 2003; Gudkov *et al* 2004; Beck and Robertson 2009a, 2009b; Galeotti 2010a; Favarel-Garrigues 2011: chapter 9). A large-scale staff turnover took place within the institution since the late 1980s¹¹. Many officers were fired from their jobs as part of campaigns against corruption and criminality within the institution. Others left voluntarily. Among the main reasons for leaving was the low pay, poor working conditions and the fact that the profession of a militsiya officer was one of the least prestigious. Because of the high personnel turn-over, combined with insufficient training, militsiya officers could not develop a high level of professionalism and acquire a clear concept of relevant legal and ethical standards. This led to widespread violations of legal and ethical standards by militsia (Gilinskiy 2004, Pustintsev 2000, Safronov 2003).

The situation was aggravated by a lack of controls over the militsiya. The strict control exercised by the Communist party was gone, and new forms of accountability were ineffective (Uildriks and Van Reenen 2003, Beck and Robertson 2005). The internal control over the militsiya was conducted by the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Internal Security Service. The external control was carried out by the President and the Prokuratura. The *Prokuratura* was charged with both, investigating and prosecuting a defendant, *and* protection of the rights of suspects and defendants. This created a conflict of interests, with the consequence that numerous – and often very serious – violations of rights of suspects and defendants were tolerated. The informal oversight was accomplished through the media and human rights groups. However, it was (and still is) weak because of the restrictions placed on the media and NGOs as part of the governmental repression of its critics: such informal oversight is viewed by government more as a threat to state power than a valuable asset (Beck and Robertson 2009a:62, Taylor 2011:4). The overreliance on internal monitoring and weak outside controls over the militsiya has resulted in conditions conducive to abuses of power by its officers on a massive scale.

¹¹ It is estimated that in 1991-96 up to 200,000 were leaving the militsiya each year (Volkov 2002a:132).
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At the time when the first and the second waves of my empirical research were carried out, the legislative framework within which the militsiya operated was provided in the Law 'On the Militsiya', passed in 1991 (on the 1st of March 2011 it was replaced by the Law 'On the Politsiya'). The Law 'On the Militsiya' defined the status, organisation and powers of the militsiya. The institution was divided into the Criminal militsiya and the Civil Safety militsiya. The entire force was under direction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Although on paper the system appeared decentralised, in practice it was highly centralised and organised on the basis of hierarchy. This created a situation where centrally determined targets were prioritised and local needs were met poorly (Galeotti 2003). The Law 'On the Militsiya' gave the institution a wide range of powers. For example, the militsiya issued passports, residence permits, visas, automobile registrations, various certificates ranging from drivers' licences to work permits. Such extensive regulatory powers provided many opportunities for abuse and corruption by militsiya.

The Law 'On the Militsiya' articulated the principles and values guiding actions of its officers. Article 3 of the Law declared that activities of militsiya must be conducted in accordance with the principles of respect for human rights and freedoms, lawfulness, humanism and transparency. Article 5 prohibited militsiya using torture, violence and other cruel or degrading treatment. Unfortunately, the principles of respect for human rights and freedoms, lawfulness and humanism declared to guide the conduct of militsiya have not been followed to the letter. There is abundant evidence of militsiya violations of human rights, corruption and involvement in crime, including organised crime (Glikin 1998; Human Rights Watch 1999; Amnesty International 2002, 2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008; Pustintsev 2000; Khinstein 2005). Militsiya corruption, extortion, brutality and criminality have been a daily recurring theme in the media in post-Soviet Russia, and many citizens experienced them first-hand. Obtaining reliable statistics on the extent of unlawful behaviour by militsiya is virtually impossible since this information is not disclosed to the public and wrongdoings are regularly covered up. Yet, available research into public experiences of policing demonstrates that abuses of power by militsiya happen on a massive scale (Gudkov *et al* 2004; Gerber and Mendelson 2008). Some evidence derived from self-reports leads to similar conclusions¹².

In the post-Soviet period multiple attempts have been made at reforming the militsiya and resolving the crisis within the institution, however they were patchy and superficial. They were limited to numerous confusing reorganisations and failed to revitalise the force and bring it closer to its counterparts found in democratic societies. The militaristic structure and appearance of the militsiya were retained, and many Soviet trends and traditions continued. For instance, the performance of the militsiya continued to be measured by the ability to meet quotas of solved crimes. As such quotas were typically unrealistic, it encouraged the use of torture to obtain 'confessions' (Human Rights Watch 1999). Although the institution of militsiya is declared politically-neutral, it has been repeatedly used for political ends and repression against state opponents (Shelley 1999, Galeotti 2003, Taylor 2007, 2011). There have been multiple incidents of militsiya harassment of civil society activists and opposition parties, groups and leaders, as well as violent suppression of anti-governmental rallies and protests (BBC 2012, Carbonnel and Tsvetkova 2012, CBC news 2012, Eshechenko *et al* 2012, KM.RU 2012, Malover'yan 2012, Potalev 2012).

¹² 40% of militsiyamen-respondents in one study admitted that they engaged in criminal activities. Moreover, it was found that criminal activities take place mostly during official working hours of militsiya, precisely when they are supposed to fight crime (Kolennikova 2006).

Thus, the the Soviet trend of using the militsiya to prop up the political regime has been preserved.

Most recent reforms of the militsiya were launched in December 2009 by President Medvedev. On the 1st of March 2011 the new Law ‘On the Politsiya’ came into force. It renamed the militsiya into the politsiya, returning its original, tsarist, name. This was done in an attempt to remove the institution further from its Soviet past. Among the reforms was an anti-corruption programme, measures aimed at improving personnel selection (one of them was the requirement of recertification), raising the level of professionalism, stripping the militsiya of unnecessary functions, cutting the number of officers by 20 per cent¹³, centralisation of financing, pay rise for militsiya officers by 30 per cent and organizational restructuring.

Medvedev’s reforms attracted many criticisms which ranged from arguments that the reforms were purely cosmetic and essentially retained the same system to accusations that the innovations would further widen powers of the militsiya’s successor, the politsiya, strengthen the grip of the central executive at the local level, do nothing to make the institution more accountable and help Russia slide further towards authoritarianism¹⁴. In one opinion poll only 19 per cent of respondents believed that a radical reform of the militsiya would be implemented¹⁵, and data from surveys measuring public trust in the institution before and after the reforms do not indicate significant improvements (Levada Centre 2012a, 2012b)¹⁶. The main achievements of the reforms appear to be limited to changing the name of the force, dressing its officers in new uniforms¹⁷, increasing their salaries on average 1,5 times and cutting the personnel by 22 per cent. Importantly, most of the personnel cuts were made in the ranks of politsiya on the ground, while the administrative personnel were practically untouched. The consequence is a heavier workload for the remaining officers patrolling streets and the increase in street crime¹⁸ (Guzheeva 2012, Khinsein 2012b, Milyukova 2012, RBC 2012). With regard to the process of recertification to which politsiya personnel was subjected with the aim of improving the quality of personnel, anecdotal evidence suggests that senior officers got rid of the undesirable subordinates and retained mostly the ones displaying subservient attitudes (Fomenko 2012), and in the process demanded payments from their subordinates to clear them for reappointments and then passed a share of the bribes up to their own

¹³ While most countries employ on average 3 police officers per 1000 inhabitants, by some estimates Russia employed 6 militsiya per 1000 inhabitants (Taylor 2011: 48) and by other estimates - 10 (Alexandrov 2012).

¹⁴ See, for example, Galeotti 2010b, Kosals 2012, de Vogel 2012, Mishina 2012.

¹⁵ In the same poll when asked why they did not believe in success of the reforms, 53% thought that the reforms were merely measures designed to let off steam and reduce the dissatisfaction of the population with the present militsiya, 29% thought that an agency that was not under public control could not be trusted to reform itself, and 11% believed that actually the government wanted to have the militsiya just the way it was at present (Levada Centre 2010).

¹⁶ So, in November 2009 in a sample of 1516, 19 per cent trusted the militsiya, 39 per cent expressed partial trust and 32 – complete distrust. The respective figures in October 2012 were 20 per cent, 44 per cent and 29 per cent (Levada Centre 2012a).

¹⁷ Incidentally, a corruption scandal was uncovered in the process of replacing the uniform (Khinsein 2012a).

¹⁸ It needs to be noted that available crime data is conflicting: while the official statistics provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicate steady reduction in crime, scholars challenge the official statistics and claim that crime rate has been growing at 2.4 per cent a year (Odynova 2011, Galeotti 2012).

superiors to purchase their own protection (Galeotti 2011). In the post-reform period there have been numerous media reports of corruption, torture, killings and other wrongdoings by the *politsiya*¹⁹, prompting conclusions that the reforms have failed to improve the situation (Alexandrov 2012, Carbonnel 2012, Fomenko 2012)²⁰. In May 2012 the new Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokol'tsev came to power and expressed dissatisfaction with the substance and the success of the reforms implemented over the three preceding years. At the time of writing, a working party under his direction is developing a plan of the new reforms²¹, the focus of which will be on boosting the competence of *politsiya* and improving public trust towards them.

To sum up, in the post-Soviet period the *militsiya* has found itself in the state of crisis. A number of factors (such as underfunding, lack of accountability, high staff turnover, poor training) have combined to produce conditions that facilitated systemic abuse of power by its officers. Attempts to reform the institution have been patchy and limited and failed to create a democratic police force. Many Soviet trends were retained, and the role of the *militsiya* to prop up the political regime has been preserved. Historically the *militsiya* has had very little popular legitimacy, and in the last twenty years public trust in the institution has hit rock bottom. Narratives derived from my empirical study, which will be outlined below, will prove these conclusions.

'Violent entrepreneurship'

The post-Soviet crisis in the *militsiya* occurred against the background of weakening of other governmental institutions. The society accustomed to the state acting in a paternalistic fashion during the Soviet era was confronted by a major failure by the state to secure basic needs of its citizens. They were left exposed to widespread unemployment, mass impoverishment, sharp social inequalities, escalating crime rates, flourishing organised crime, pervasive corruption and lawlessness (Gilinskiy 1998, Rose 1999, 2001, Mendras 2012). Post-soviet citizens had to develop ways of neutralising the failures of state institutions (Shevchenko 2009). So, in response to the inability by the state to provide order and security, a new industry has emerged and expanded rapidly to make up for the failures of the state law enforcement. That industry has formed an integral part of the post-socialist society. Vadim Volkov (2002a) has labeled it 'violent entrepreneurship'. 'Violent entrepreneurs' included organized criminal groups, private security companies and law enforcement officers. They managed the same resource – organized violence – and converted it into money.

The early 'violent entrepreneurs' were criminal gangs. From the late 1980s they rushed in to serve as a substitute for the declining state-provided protection and enforcement (Rawlinson 1998, Varese 2001, Shvartz 2003). At that time Russian economy was undergoing rapid privatization, and physical and economic risks of conducting business were very high. This created a high demand for protection and enforcement services,

¹⁹ For example, Alexandrov 2012, auto.mail.ru 2012, Brailovskaya 2012, Corrupcia.net 2012, newsru.com 2012, Poterya 2012.

²⁰ For a slightly more optimistic assessment of the reforms see Galeotti 2012.

²¹ Some of the new measures which Kolokol'tsev has already announced would signify the reversal of Medvedev's reforms, such as the increase in the number of *politsiya* officers on the ground (Petrov 2012, Rodin 2012, Samokhina 2012).

which criminal groups readily provided. Some of them offered protection against genuine threats of other criminals or business competitors. Others were parasitic in nature and offered 'protection' against the treats they presented themselves (Volkov 2002:42-3, Taylor 2011:168-9).

In 1992 the law on private security was adopted, which legalized non-state provision of security and rule enforcement. Private security firms emerged, proliferated at fast speed and assumed major responsibilities for providing protection²² (Volkov 2000, 2002a). Many private security agencies were set up by – and absorbed a large number of – former militsiya officers and other former employees of the law enforcement bodies, who had left their pervious employment. Militsiya became one of the official providers in the emerging complex security market. Since 1992 units within militsiya are allowed to offer 'extradepartmental protection' to businesses if the businesses enter into contracts for the provision of security services with Extra-Departmental Protection Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Such provision of protection is legal, carried out by the commercial police in state uniforms.

It is also not uncommon for militsiya to provide protection to businesses unofficially, illegally, acting on their own time. Militsiya may offer a 'roof', which involves providing protection to clients to minimise their business risks on a for-hire basis. This may include such activities as acquisition of information about potential business partners, supervision of business transactions, engaging in informal negotiations with businesses in cases of commercial disputes or failures to repay debts. In such situations militsiya act as private entrepreneurs, receiving pay-offs from their clients. In addition to offering protection in pursuit of supplements to their salaries militsiya became engaged actively in various other illegal commercial activities²³, effectively turning themselves into a business entity which is concerned primarily with making money (Wilson, *et al* 2008, Kosals 2010, Favarel-Garrigues 2011:255-6). Commercial activities of militsiya range from a beat officer making extra cash from people who do not have a residence permit or small street traders, to shakedown practices²⁴, to militisya opening or closing of criminal cases and releasing criminals in exchange for payments, to selling valuable resources controlled by militsiya²⁵, to collaborating with organised criminal groups (Taylor 2011:chapter 5). It is estimated that militsiya receive more economic gain from supplemental economic activities than they do from the state budget, generating income totalling approximately US \$ 1-3 billion annually (Wilson, *et al* 2008:74).

As have been already mentioned, criminal gangs were first 'violent entrepreneurs' at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, by the late 1990s their dominance was weakened. To a large degree criminal gangs were pushed aside by private security

²² The official registration of private security firms started in early 1993, and by the end of that year there were over 4,000 private security agencies in the country. In 1996 the growth rate levelled. By that time the number of such agencies was nearly 8,000, and by the end of 1999 it reached 11,652 (Volkov 2002a:137). By 2004 Russian private security became a \$2 billion industry (Galeotti 2007:274).

²³ Gudkov and Dubin (2006) found that over 80% of militsiya in a sample of 634 have some additional income.

²⁴ Typically a shakedown involves accusing a citizen or a business of some real or alleged violation and extracting 'fines' from them. In such cases usually people pay militsiya to get themselves out of situation.

²⁵ Such as information, documents, positions and ranks within militsiya.

companies²⁶ and state law enforcement officers, including militsiya, offering protection and enforcement. Clients found these latter providers of protection more beneficial economically and more reliable than criminal groups. This development, however, did not lead to a desirable situation where state law enforcement bodies protect the society acting in a legal capacity. As has been explained above, many of militsiya's actions are arbitrary and illegal. Using words of one commentator, 'first step in reconstructing the state has been made: the bandit has gone; the state employee has taken his place. The second step – making him act as a state employee rather than a bandit – is still a problem' (Volkov 2002b, 1). These developments will be revisited later in this paper. Narratives provided by my respondents will be used to illustrate the phenomenon of 'violent entrepreneurship' and highlight some of its social consequences.

The empirical study

My study aimed at investigating public experiences of policing in today's Russia, public attitudes towards the militsiya resulting from those experiences and wider social implications of those attitudes. I carried out the study in three waves. The first two waves took place in the summers of 2007 and 2009 in Moscow and Oryol (a city in central Russia), and in 2012 I revisited my respondents. Unlike most research into public attitudes towards the militsiya which uses quantitative methods, designed to produce surveys across the population (for example, Gudkov 2000, Gryaznova 2005, Obschestvennyi Verdict 2009, Levada Centre 2012a, 2012b), this study adopted a qualitative approach, so as to offer rich insights into people's views and opinions that cannot be discovered through quantitative studies. In-depth qualitative interviews were employed as the primary research method. Fifty-four members of the public who had encounters with militsiya as crime suspects, victims or witnesses were interviewed. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling (Burns 2000:465, Davies 2007:57-8, Gray 2009:152-3). The key criterion for selection was the requirement that the respondents had had direct encounters with the police in the post-Soviet period as crime suspects, victims or witnesses. The sample consisted of 22 men and 32 women; 39 interviewees were employed (8 out of whom self-employed), 9 retired and 6 unemployed. 14 respondents were between ages of 18 and 30; 20 respondents – between 31 and 50; 20 were above 51. Additionally, 10 militsiyamen were interviewed. Six of them were senior officers and four were from the lower ranks. I experienced serious difficulties getting access to militsiya officers who could be interviewed. After several attempts to get an official permission to interview militsiya officers had failed, I had to rely on informal connections at first. Then the snowballing technique (Sturgis 2008:179, Gray 2009:153, David and Sutton 2011:232) was employed: the militsiya interviewees introduced me to their militsiya friends and colleagues either in casual settings or by arranging more formal meetings.

All respondents gave informed consent. Questions for both members of the public and militsiya were open-ended, designed to enable respondents to express views in their own words. Interviews with members of the public carried out in 2007 and 2009 were organised around three main themes: experiences of policing, attitudes towards militsiya and impact of those attitudes on everyday behaviour. When the respondents were revisited in 2012, they were invited to share their post-Medvedev's reforms experiences of policing and discuss the changes – if any – in the public image of politsiya that had been produced

²⁶ Many of them had criminal origins. After the law on private security had come into force, many criminal groups refashioned themselves as private security firms and legalised their protection services.

by the recent police reforms. Militsiyamen were asked to comment in interviews on the state of the contemporary militsiya and the relationship between militsiya and members of the public which has emerged in the post-Soviet era. All interviews were modelled after a conversation between two trusting people, rather than as formal question-and-answer session between a researcher and a subject. Discussions were flexible and it was not uncommon for respondents to choose the direction of interviews. Quite frequently it resulted in interviewees beginning their stories with descriptions of their experiences of policing and then proceeding to make broader observations on political, economic and social events in contemporary Russia. Often Russian history and working of a Russian psyche were discussed at length to illustrate some of the points interviewees were making. While narratives of this type did not strictly relate to the topic of policing, they were rather informative and provided a wider context for the issues studied. Some of that data has been included in the analysis of findings.

An approach similar to grounded theory was used (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; 1998a, 1998b). Instead of beginning the research with the aim of testing a set of preconceived theories, the aspiration was to generate theory from data. The data collected in this study were analysed for patterns in the way the respondents interpreted their experiences. So, when analysing the data, I marked the key points with codes on the margins of interview transcripts or field notes (for example, 'bribe-taking by militsiya', 'militsiya brutality', 'thefts by militsiya'). Then the codes which related to common themes were grouped into similar concepts (for example, 'abuse of power by militsiya', 'distrust of militsiya'). Common concepts were then grouped into categories that served as the basis for the creation of a theory (for example, 'predatory policing', 'obstacles to transition to democracy').

This study was small and limited geographically, therefore it makes no statistically significant claims. Nevertheless, it may help to understand some of the general trends in attitudes of Russian citizens towards the militsiya (and possibly some other state institutions) and their behavioural orientations resulting from such attitudes.

Findings

Stories of victimisation and distrust

When members of the public were asked about their encounters with militsiya, they shared essentially the same story – the story of victimisation. Victimisation experienced by people was partly related to militsiya's inability and unwillingness to help them. Numerous examples were provided of militsiya refusing to intervene at the request of citizens and defend them when they were harassed, attacked, or robbed. Also, examples demonstrating incompetence of militsiya investigating crimes were offered – an incompetence resulting in unsolved crimes or false convictions. Typically interviewees concluded that the militsiya cannot be relied upon to fulfil its functions and offers no protection to people.

While militsiya's ineptitude and unwillingness to protect citizens was presented as one source of victimisation, another most frequently mentioned source was militsiya's

venality²⁷. Forty-four out of fifty-four respondents admitted that they or their family members gave bribes to militsiya, and every respondent in the sample knew somebody who had bribed a militsiya officer. Most examples concerned traffic militsiya who have the reputation of being most corrupt²⁸. Other frequent examples involved bribing militsiya to escape arrests and detentions, secure a release from militsiya custody, avoid an offence being registered and obtain various documents which militsiya issues.

Interviewees offered multiple stories of militsiya subjecting citizens to extortions. Extortion situations differed from those involving bribes: citizens had committed no violations of law, nor did they get any benefits in exchange for the payments (other than avoiding harassment by militsiya). Sometimes this practice is called *dan*. It serves as a 'tribute' or an acknowledgement of who rules the street (Humphrey 2002:143-4). The most common victims of extortions listed by respondents were car drivers²⁹, migrant workers from former Soviet republics³⁰ and market traders³¹, although anybody may become a victim. So, many examples were given when people were stopped by militsiya in the street without a clear explanation, taken into a police station and released only following the extortion of a payment. In extortion situations payments did not have to be monetary and could take form of anything that had value in the eyes of militsiya, for example, petrol, or in one case even a sack of apples. Sometimes demands for provision of services were made. So, an owner of a limousine company complained in the interview that local militsiya wanted to be driven around the town in limousines for free. Several other interviewees provided stories of the militsiya demanding free services of prostitutes.

The next cause of victimisation by militsiya resided in its disrespect towards rights of citizens. Many examples of unlawful stops, searches, arrests and detentions were reported by respondents. Thirty-four interviewees provided examples of militsiya brutality against themselves, or their relatives, or people they knew. Militsiya brutality was perceived as widespread and systemic³². To quote a respondent: 'the militsiya beat people up badly, they beat up everybody, almost everybody'. There was also a common perception that the injuries inflicted through militsiya beatings can be very serious. In interviewees' words, 'people are dragged out of militsiya stations half-dead'; 'militsiya beat people up senseless, they trample people down, almost making them invalids.' In three cases acquaintances of interviewees died after militsiya beatings.

²⁷ The perception of respondents in this study that militsiya corruption is very high is consistent with findings of numerous other studies, for example, Mazaev (1997), Varygin (2002), Gryaznova (2005), Levada (2005).

²⁸ Some evidence suggests that 98% of Russian car drivers have bribed traffic militsiya at least once (Varygin 2002:125).

²⁹ Interviewed drivers confided colourful stories of being stopped and demanded payments by militsiya. Typically, militsiya did not accuse them of any violations and simply asked for money, telling the drivers that they needed money to buy food for their children, or a dinner and vodka for themselves.

³⁰ See Human Rights Watch report (2009) for details of abuses of migrant workers in Russia.

³¹ Several interviewees claimed that collecting *dan* from market-traders was a practice very common in the 1990s, but now declining.

³² In a survey of 11,202 respondents half of them answered that they fear being physically abused by militsiya 'at least somewhat' (Gerber and Mendelson 2008). Another study found that while in the overall population 32% are afraid of physical violence and torture by the militsiya, among young people 35% expressed that fear in a sample of 1600 (Gryaznova 2005:51).

It emerges from interviews that citizens frequently become victims of property-related crime carried out by militsiya. Examples were encountered where militsiya were charged with guarding factories and used their position to steal from them. Numerous instances of petty thefts by militsiya were also reported, where militsiya stopped people and stole their money while searching them or checking their documents. Additionally, fourteen interviewees described situations where militsiya found stolen property, but never returned it to its owners. Time and again interviewees concluded their stories of property-related crime by militsiya, equating behaviour of militsiya to that of thieves, robbers and burglars.

When I informed respondents about the topic of my research, a number of them advised against carrying out the study: in their view research into the militsiya was 'dangerous'. When asked to explain why they thought such research could be unsafe, findings emerged pointing to a general fear of militsiya on the part of citizens³³. To substantiate their fears interviewees gave examples involving militsiya planting drugs or weapons to incriminate people, stories of unlawful detentions for many months in inhumane conditions, descriptions of militsiya brutality, stories of militsiamen carrying out rapes, random shootings and collaborating with criminals. Simply seeing the militsiya patrolling the streets appeared to have an intimidating effect on members of the public. As one respondent explained, 'you see them [the militsiya] walking with their truncheons, and you don't feel yourself, it's frightening'. Some interviewees confessed a desire to cross the street when they see militsiya walking towards them. Young women reported incidents of sexual harassment by militsiya, following which they felt particularly insecure³⁴. Interviewees emphasised that coming into any contact with militsiya may lead to negative consequences. One respondent summed up this attitude: 'it is best not to look for adventures and not to have anything to do with the militsiya'.

Frequently interviewees compared militsiya with bandits. To use some quotes: 'Who goes to work in the militsiya? The lowest, downright bandits and hooligans'; 'During the terrible 1990s we have formed a fear of both – the bandits and the militsiya'; 'Bandits and militsiya are related professions. They engage in robbery'. Militsiya respondents validated the public perception of militsiya as criminals and admitted that such attitudes were not unfounded. To quote one of them:

Many people view militsiya in the same way they view criminals. This is because they see a militsiyaman in a street who is not performing his duties, but instead stops people to get bribes, harasses people. Old women selling things near underground stations – they bribe the militsiya in order to be left alone. People see such things. They see scoundrels among the militsiya, and, unfortunately, there are many scoundrels.

Having begun with a story about personal victimisation by – and distrust towards and fear of – militsiya, respondents often transitioned to decrying victimisation of the powerless by powerful people and lamenting broader social conditions in contemporary Russia. Detailed narratives of injustices, oppressions, suffering and poverty experienced by

³³ In one study the fear of the militsiya was expressed by 26 per cent of respondents (in a sample of 1600) and was nearly as high as the fear of criminals (33 per cent) (Gudkov and Dubin 2006). More recently, Levada Centre (2012b) asked 1601 respondents about their feelings towards politsiya. Fear scored the highest number of votes (22 per cent reported it), closely followed by antipathy (19 per cent).

³⁴ For example, a young woman described in the interview how she and her girlfriends, when they were 13 or 14, were approached by a militsiya officer, while they were sunbathing on a beach. The officer invited them to go and have sex with him. She concluded her story: 'since then I treat militsiya with caution'.

ordinary people, and greed, selfishness, crimes and impunity of those in power were provided. In the process the speaker frequently switched from the first person singular to the first person plural, identifying themselves with a kind of moral community of victimised ordinary Russians.

Sometimes respondents were willing to include militsiya in that moral community. To quote some of them: 'Militsiya are hungry. They are paid very little, but have to work a lot'; '[Militsiya] don't want to be the way they are, but they are very poor. If he doesn't take a bribe, he simply won't survive on his tiny salary... They are kept in poverty, they are victims themselves.' Militsiya officers in their interviews firmly embraced identities of victims. They repeatedly emphasised how bad their working conditions, how low their salaries and how hard their jobs were, how little they were valued and how much they were disrespected by members of the public, how the state cheated them. The state was described as an 'unscrupulous partner' in the relationship with the militsiya which 'abandoned' its officers and failed to guarantee them a decent existence.

When my respondents were re-visited in 2012, the situation with respect to the last issue has improved: salaries of politsiya had been raised as part of Medvedev's police reforms. However, commenting on other achievements of Medvedev's reforms, the vast majority of respondents reported that they did not notice any significant changes and told stories of their recent experiences of policing supporting that conclusion. Only five interviewees felt that the situation had improved. They observed that during their post-reform encounters with politsiya, officers seemed more polite, behaved more 'correctly', arrived to scenes of crime or *khuliganstvo*³⁵ following phone calls by members of public³⁶ and recorded reported crimes (something, which, according to these respondents, militsiya failed to do in the past). Interestingly, when these five interviewees provided more detailed accounts of their encounters with post-reform politsiya, they were strikingly similar to those preceding the reforms. Once again, evidence of politsiya incompetence, corruption and extortions emerged, with some respondents suggesting that post-reform politsiya has become even more ingenious in extorting bribes³⁷. Also, suspicions were expressed of collaborations between politsiya and criminal groups³⁸.

Stories of degradation and fatalism

Often in interviews the Soviet past was praised for higher ethical standards in the society as a whole, and a common argument was that today's Russia is characterised by a moral and spiritual demise. People became selfish, disrespectful, indifferent to suffering of others and obsessed with money. Both militsiya and members of the public emphasised in

³⁵ '*Khuliganstvo*' is a Russian expression roughly corresponding to what is now called 'anti-social behaviour' in the UK.

³⁶ This finding was contested by other respondents who claimed that it took politsiya hours to arrive to a scene of crime. Also, politsiya respondents admitted in interviews that following recent personnel cuts, due to insufficient numbers of officers patrolling streets it is often impossible to respond to calls from member of the public promptly.

³⁷ For example, a respondent making such observation described how politsiya made her pay a 1500 ruble fine for violation of the traffic code, but the receipt they gave her stated that the amount of the fine was 100 rubles. The difference between the actual and the recorded fine was pocketed by them.

³⁸ So, a respondent informed me that his car had been stolen the previous night. Since then he received two anonymous phone calls, offering the return of the car in exchange for a substantial payment. The respondent concluded that the car thieves had access to the politsiya-held database and obtained his phone number with the help of politsiya.

interviews that militsiya are a part of the society and thus reflect qualities of the society they police, so it was a popular view that the moral erosion of militsiya is part of the general moral decline in post-Soviet Russia³⁹. An interesting paradox was observed in the stories of degradation. While the respondents seemed to be convinced that the situation in the militsiya deteriorated considerably after the collapse of the communism (militsiya became corrupt, disrespectful towards the law, incompetent and unaccountable), their stories also provided evidence that incompetence, corruption, extortions, brutality, harassment, including sexual harassment, and disrespectful behaviour towards citizens by militsiya was not uncommon in the socialist past.

Closely related to both the stories of degradation and victimisation were narratives of despair. When asked what could be done to resolve the crisis in the militsiya and improve its public image, respondents typically expressed very pessimistic views and declared the situation to be hopeless. The following quote from an interview with a militsiyaman summarises these sentiments: 'I wish there were prospects of a better future, but so far we keep sliding down and down. The situation is getting worse and worse. There is no hope'. Even when possible solutions were suggested (such as raising salaries or better personnel selection), they were quickly dismissed, with interviewees pointing out that resolving the crisis in the militsiya would require fundamental changes at various levels of the Russian society, and to expect such radical social transformations is unrealistic.

At this point in interviews respondents typically proceeded to mourn the tragedies of Russian existence above and beyond the crisis in the militsiya. Painful examples from Russian history were used to illustrate misfortunes, suffering, abuse and loss experienced by Russian people. The historical examples were mixed with laments of the present upheavals and presentations of apocalyptic visions of the future. The current situation was described as a complete degradation and ruin of the society, and, while bemoaning the decay of today's Russian society, interviewees repeatedly emphasised that things would get even worse due to materialism, nihilism and lack of morality and spirituality on the part of younger generations. In the process of such laments, Russia was presented as the most unlucky and backward nation, and it was often argued that no other civilised nation would tolerate the sort of hardships and injustices which Russians put up with. It was claimed that in a Western country the failure of the state to serve the needs of its citizens which is observed in Russia today and the resulting suffering by people would have resulted in mass protests and even a revolution⁴⁰.

³⁹ For a similar argument see Korshunov (2002) and Safronov (2003).

⁴⁰ It is remarkable that the dismal conditions in post-Soviet Russia did not produce mass political activism on the part of members of the public dissatisfied with the inability by the government to handle the crisis. Instead of civic groups organising around common problems and mobilising to achieve systemic change, post-Soviet society adopted a posture of political apathy (Mishler and Rose 1995, Howard 2003, McFaul and Treyger 2004). For most post-socialist citizens dealing with economic hardships became a priority: mere survival became a full-time occupation that left little space for political activism (Stenning 1999; Stenning, *et al* 2010:235, Shevtsova 2012). In 2011-2012 there have been signs of emerging political activism on part of Russian citizens, as illustrated by mass protests against alleged misconduct and fraud during parliamentary elections in December 2011. Although the protests were sparked by the election process that was considered to be flawed, they were fuelled by wider public dissatisfaction. The government responded with measures ranging from organising counter-rallies and media campaigns aimed to implicate opposition leaders in savoury activities and thus discredit them, to initiating criminal

Stories of cynicism

There was a wide perception on the part of both members of the public and militsiya who were interviewed that militsiya are preoccupied not with fighting crime, upholding order and bringing the guilty to justice, but with pursuing their private interests. To quote a militsiyaman:

Most militsiya personnel do not think of fulfilling work-related tasks. They are concerned mostly with resolving personal issues, for example, how to redecorate their flat, or where to get parts for their automobile, or where to get food at a reduced price or for free, and they constantly get involved in questionable associations for such purposes.

When describing the style and nature of contemporary Russian policing, interviewees frequently compared the conduct of militsiya to that of scavengers and predators. It was a common argument made by both militsiya and ordinary citizens that people joining the militsiya do so in order to enrich themselves. As a militsiya officer explained,

People typically do not come to work in the militsiya because they want to fight injustice, uphold law and help crime victims... Many join the militsiya because they are attracted by additional illegal income. They earn a little officially, but have a good quality of life because they adapt and learn ways how to obtain things for free or cheaply. ... They do not have a high ideology, only materialistic calculations.

While respondents asserted an ability to unmask ulterior motivations of militsiya officers, the lack of integrity on the part of militsiya was frequently blamed on the state which fails to reward militsiya for their work, and thus forces them to supplement their income through illegal and unethical means. A militsiya officer, describing the relationship between the state and the militsiya, commented that 'the state pretends that it pays us, and we pretend that we work. Both the state and ourselves imitate conscientious relationships which do not exist in reality'. The loser in this 'let's pretend' game are members of the public who get little or no protection from militsiya.

While respondents viewed militsiya as generally ineffective and unresponsive, they pointed out that a bribe may have a positive effect on the ability of militsiya to resolve criminal cases. To quote an interviewee,

If you don't have acquaintances among militsiya, and if you don't pay them, they will never investigate your case. They will shelve it and that'll be it. You have to pay them in addition, and you have to pay a lot. Then they may start working on your case.

Indeed, some stories shared by interviewees illustrate that militsiya can be rather efficient if a prospect of a bribe arises. Interviewees also believed that there was a correlation between the economic status of a person and the level of their immunity against abuses by militsiya, with the poor being particularly vulnerable. To use some interview quotes: 'Today in Russia only rich people have rights. If you can't pay a bribe, it is useless to

prosecutions of prominent protest activists, to enacting legislation in June 2012 that imposes heavy penalties on protestors engaging in unauthorised demonstrations (Herszebgirb 2012, Pitalev 2012).

complain and try to assert your rights'. Or: 'In Russia a person is valueless, especially if you have no money. If you have money, you may be able to pay the officials and defend yourself.'

Other cynical attitudes concerning the inequality of treatment by militsiya involved examples of militsiya serving and protecting their powerful patrons and doing nothing to help ordinary people. It was argued that the government regularly uses the militsiya to weaken its political opponents⁴¹. The role of politsiya in suppression of recent anti-governmental protests has been highlighted, with respondents stressing that serving the governmental interests is a high priority of politsiya. It was also repeatedly emphasised that recently the government has rewarded its protectors by raising their salaries as part of Medvedev's police reforms.

There was a general belief among my respondents that militsiya are free to violate rights of ordinary people without any negative repercussions for themselves, with forty-four interviewees highlighting their feelings of defencelessness in the face of militsiya abuses⁴². The militsiya was typically presented in interviews as a clan institution which protects its members, regularly covering up their crimes. The issue of lack of control over militsiya came up spontaneously in almost every interview. So, an interviewee who had been subjected to an unlawful detention argued: 'A person has absolutely no rights. That is, militsiya may come in and accuse you of anything they like, and you won't be able to prove your innocence'. Or, as an interviewee whose son had been beaten up by militsiya explained: 'You have no rights when in the hands of militsiya. You can't seek justice there. It's a total lawlessness'. The trust that *Prokuratura* or the judiciary will protect victims of militsiya abuse of power was also very low⁴³. Examples were provided where interviewees felt that *Prokuratura* and the judiciary sided with militsiya and helped them get away with their wrongdoings.

Stories of self-sufficiency

As has been pointed out above, there was a wide perception that militsiya were unreliable and professionally inept. It often led interviewees to conclude that reporting crimes is useless. Some felt that reporting crimes may be dangerous because militsiya may accuse an innocent person and beat a confession out of him or her. Others were reluctant to ask militsiya for help out of fear that militsiya collaborated with criminals, in which case reporting a crime involved the risk of retaliation. So, in the sample of fifty-four

⁴¹ Survey of 1601 respondents carried by by Levada Centre (2012b) found that 33 per cent of Russians believe that politsiya primarily serve the interests of the government; 32 believe that they primarily serve their own interests, and only 23 per cent believe that politsiya primarily serve to protect the public. In the same survey 34 per cent of respondents believed that the government uses law enforcement institutions against its political opponents 'quite often' and 14 per cent thought that that it was a regular practice.

⁴² Similarly, another study has found that 81% of respondents in a sample of 1600 feel defenceless to possible abuse of power by law enforcement officers, and three out of four people see themselves as a potential victim of such abuse (Gryaznova 2005).

⁴³ Gryaznova (2005) reports that only 30 per cent of Russians think they can get protection from the *Prokuratura* or the judiciary if they become victims of abuse of power by the militsiya. Levada Centre (2012b) found in a survey of 1601 respondents that only 5 per cent believed that they would definitely get protection from *Prokuratura* or the judiciary if they become victims of abuse of power by politsiya, 24 per cent believed that probably they would get protection, 40 per cent thought that probably they would not get protection, while 15 thought they definitely would not get protection.

respondents, only fourteen said that they would definitely report crimes. The majority (thirty-four interviewees) argued that contacting militsiya should be avoided *if possible*, and in most cases it *is* possible. Six respondents claimed that they would not employ the services of militsiya under any circumstances.

The unwillingness to cooperate with militsiya has created a situation where citizens have to be self-reliant in protecting themselves against crime. Interviewees offered plentiful evidence indicating attitudes of independence and self-sufficiency, enabling them to survive in circumstances where militsiya cannot be relied upon. To quote a respondent: 'The situation is terrible. Our militsiya does not protect us at all ... so each person acts in his own way. Each does whatever he can to protect himself.' Or, to use words of another respondent:

People don't go to militsiya. They try to resolve problems themselves. Everybody finds their own solutions, their own ways of defending themselves. If it's an ordinary person, he will suffer in silence, but won't go to militsiya – probably 70% won't do it... But if it's a bandit, they will take their own measures. But some look for ways to take revenge.

Interviewees reported becoming more vigilant in the post-Soviet period and doing the best they could to avoid becoming crime victims. Many people installed better locks, stronger doors and bars in the windows to protect their houses. Those living in blocks of apartments put fortified building doors equipped with intercom and sometimes installed a concierge. Various other steps taken by respondents ranged from learning self-defence techniques to acquiring guns.

Three interviewees (all of whom were businessmen) said that they used private security firms to guard their persons and property. One respondent paid militsiya to protect his businesses. The rest of the sample could not afford to purchase protection from militsiya or private security firms, so had to draw on whatever resources they had available. For instance, one respondent described how a group of garage owners who could not afford to pay militsiya or private security companies found cheap guards – students. One of the garage owners knew how to train dogs and used his skills to train a pack of fierce homeless dogs which assisted the students in guarding the garages. The task of providing food for the dogs was shared among garage owners.

Some stories told by interviewees demonstrate that sometimes citizens, confronted with the failure by militsiya to perform their functions, take law enforcement into their own hands. One way of doing it is to employ services of organised criminal groups. Respondents shared examples involving gangsters investigating crimes, settling disputes, recovering debts and administering punishments. It seemed that some interviewees had more confidence in the ability of gangsters than in the potential of the militsiya to resolve problems and provide social and moral order.

Occasionally crime victims or their relatives administer punishments with their own hands. So, one interviewee knew of a case that had happened in her town where the father of a rape victim did so. After militsiya had found insufficient evidence to prosecute the rapist (it was alleged that a bribe from his family was instrumental in militsiya closing the case), the father of the victim shot him. Another case with somewhat similar facts was described by a different respondent: a father planned revenge on a driver who had killed his child through negligent driving, but charges against whom were dropped (allegedly with the help of a bribe).

The self-reliant attitudes and behaviours involving informal solutions on the part of ordinary citizens (who lost hope that the state would protect them) were paralleled by somewhat similar attitudes and behavioural orientations on the part of militsiya (who realised that the state would not compensate them properly for their work). Militsiyamen argued in interviews that the low pay makes it impossible to support their families, so they have to look for ways to top up their salaries. These respondents pointed out that many militsiya officers had second jobs (for example, working as private security guards or transporting valuables), and admitted that there was also a variety of more questionable ways to augment income. Examples provided by militsiyamen in interviews ranged from planting incriminating evidence and then extracting bribes from people who have been falsely accused, to charging citizens for the very services the militsiya are under a duty to perform (such as finding stolen property⁴⁴), to issuing fake documents, selling weapons and secret information to criminals, covering up crimes, falsifying evidence and fabricating criminal cases or closing them for a payment.

One twist in the stories of self-sufficiency shared by interviewees related to coping techniques aimed at preventing victimisation by militsiya. When citizens found themselves in a situation where abuse of power by militsiya is rampant, yet there are no effective formal avenues for complaints, various strategies aimed at self-protection against wrongdoings by militsiya were generated. So, respondents have described numerous tactics they have utilised during stops, searches, arrests and detentions which have helped them to minimise abuse or avoid extortions by militsiya (such as provoking sympathy in militsiya or asserting that one has powerful connections within or outside the militsiya and threatening officers with negative repercussions). An important finding is that when faced with wrongdoings by militsiya, typically citizens either pay *dan* or try informal solutions. I was unable to find any evidence of people attempting to employ formal complaint procedures. Respondents argued that turning to law is pointless for an ordinary person⁴⁵ because law in Russia only protects those with money and power. Using words of an interviewee, 'Ordinary people have no rights. Rights exist, but they are not for us, they are for the rich'. Or, to quote yet another respondent:

What is most unfair and the reason why people do not trust the law is this: a man who has stolen a sack of potatoes or a chicken goes to prison for 3 years, while a man who has stolen milliards of rubles is never punished.

The lack of faith in the power of the law to protect them resulted in the belief that when dealing with militsiya, personal connections, bribes and various other informal methods offer more potent forms of defence.

⁴⁴ To quote from an interview with a militsiyaman: 'Say, bandits stole a car. The militsiya know where the car is and tell the car-owner: 'you pay a certain amount, and tomorrow you will have your car back' The militsiya make money that way'.

⁴⁵ Gudkov (2000) quotes findings of a study which asked citizens to whom they would complain if their rights have been violated by a state official. 41% said it is useless to complain, so they will not do anything. 14% did not know to whom they could complain or could not answer the question.

Discussion

Predatory policing and Russian transition to democracy

Findings from this study present a gloomy picture. They confirm that what Gerber and Mendelson (2008) have labelled as predatory policing practices is practically a norm in today's Russia⁴⁶. When respondents shared their stories of victimisation (such as those involving corruption, extortion and property-related crime committed by militsiya), they described behaviour of militsiya as that of 'scavengers', 'predators', 'thieves', 'robbers', 'burglars' and 'bandits'. The stories of cynicism demonstrated that behaviour of militsiya was interpreted as motivated primarily by self-interest and personal enrichment. Similarly, the stories of self-sufficiency shared by militsiya officers provided ample evidence of militsiya regularly abusing their power for profit.

It is widely assumed that the creation of democratic government necessitates the creation of legitimate, professional and effective police force which respects law, upholds human rights, is accountable to external authority and is responsive to needs of ordinary citizens (Jones, Newburn and Smith, 1996, Capriani and Marenin 2004, Bayley 2006, Hinton and Newburn 2009, Manning 2010). Of course, police practices cannot by themselves bring about democracy, however they contribute to democratic political development (Bayley 2001, Stenning 2007). So, David Bayley (2001:14-15) identifies four norms and argues that by following them police can directly contribute to democratic political development. First, police must give top operational priority to servicing the needs of individual citizens. Second, police must be accountable to the law rather than to the government. Third, police must protect human rights, and, fourth, police should be transparent in their activities. My findings suggest that today's Russian police does not come even close to satisfying Bayley's requirements for bringing about democracy through police practices. This study found that members of the public perceive militsiya officers as above the law and disrespectful towards human rights, and view self-enrichment by officers as their 'top operational priority'.

Another operational priority of officers identified by my respondents related to propping up the political regime. My interviewees complained that while militsiya neglected needs of ordinary citizens and were primarily concerned with self-enrichment, they served well their powerful patrons (for example, through cracking down on political opponents of the ruling elite and suppressing anti-governmental protests). That is, evidence of the 'divided society' model of policing (Weitzer 1995:5) emerges from the narratives provided by my respondents. This finding confirms Brian Taylor's (2011) observation that predation and repression functions dominate over protection in Russian law enforcement, and, 'although the performance of the police in fighting violent crime is quite poor, they are fully capable

⁴⁶ My findings also suggest that the militsiya fits the description of a predatory institution as defined by James Burk's (2001): it has high material presence and low moral integration. Militsiya (and its successor politsiya) has such wide powers that their frequent contact with citizens is likely. So, when the sample was re-visited in 2012, all 54 respondents participating in the first two waves of interviews either had a direct contact with politsiya themselves or their family member had a policing experience in the three-year post-reform period. With respect to the level of moral integration, this study has found that interviewees spoke about moral qualities of militsiya with disdain, describing them as 'having no integrity', 'morally impaired', 'leeches, parasites on the society' and claiming that 'ethics and militsiya are incompatible concepts' (see also Zernova 2012a:225).

of mobilizing enormous shows of force against opposition protests when required by the authorities' (Taylor 2011:107). As has been mentioned earlier, Gerber and Mendelson (2008) argue that predatory police practices are often intertwined with practices of political repression of subordinate groups. Perceptions of my respondents support this argument: predatory and repressive policing practices appear to operate in unison.

Recent police reforms initiated by President Medvedev are important in this context and may be viewed by optimists as laying a foundation for creating a professional and democratic police force and improving its public image. This study uncovered little evidence of the reforms bringing about substantial changes. Perhaps it is too early to assess the impact of the reforms three years after their launch, besides this study was too small and limited geographically to make definite conclusions. Yet, signs of a potential danger may be detected in some of the findings. While the general opinion among my respondents was that no significant changes in policing practices had taken place, some noticed that *politsiya* appear to behave more 'correctly' during encounters with members of the public and seem to be more responsive. However, as pointed out above, when detailed description of encounters with post-reform *politsiya* were provided, there was little indication of *actual* improvement in policing practices and treatment of members of the public by *politsiya*. Commentators whose ideas have been outlined in the subsection 'Russia's transition to democracy' at the beginning of this paper believe that today's Russia is an 'imitation democracy' with imitation democratic institutions (Wilson 2005, Krastev 2006, Furman 2008, Shevtsova 2008). The recent police reforms may be part of that phenomenon. There is a danger of the emergence of a law enforcement institution that may look more professionally and appear to be more responsive, yet appearances may be deceptive, and in reality its officers continue to neglect needs of members of the public, to be above the law and to perpetuate abuses of power with impunity. The police force that is merely an imitation of its counterparts in democratic societies will fit well within – and support – the Russian system of 'Potemkin democracy', as an illusion of democratic policing may reduce public dissatisfaction and thus help the current regime survive by offering it a degree of legitimacy.

Self-help and anti-legalism

The narratives of my respondents support Richard Rose's description of a Russian society as an 'hour-glass' society where citizens generally do not look to the state for protection, try to minimise their contact with it and organise their daily activities so as to insulate themselves from the negative effects of the state (Rose 1995). My findings demonstrate that prevailing predatory police practices resulted in a situation where *militsiya* were distrusted and had little legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. Interviewees felt that the safest tactic for dealings with *militsiya* was to avoid encounters with them whenever possible. Far from reaffirming citizens' belief that they are protected, *militsiya* seemed to be perceived by citizens as presenting a source of danger to their safety. So, respondents in this study expressed a need to practise vigilance in protecting themselves not only from ordinary criminals, but also against the very people who are supposed to guard them against crime. Instead of resorting to *militsiya* for help, citizens often preferred self-help methods, some of which have been outline above, to prevent crime and respond to it once it occurs.

It is likely that the lack of legitimacy of the *militsiya* and public distrust towards its officers has historical roots and can be traced back to the Soviet era (Shelley 1996, 1999,

Uildriks and Van Reenen 2003), however research evidence suggests that post-Soviet experiences of predatory policing have damaging impact on levels of public trust towards the militsiya and legal institutions in general (Gerber and Mendelson 2008, Zernova 2012a). A consequence of the loss of legitimacy by the police is that citizens' everyday compliance with the law is endangered (Tyler 2006, Tyler and Fagan 2008, Tyler and Huo 2002). So, this study has found examples of citizens taking law enforcement into their own hands and resorting to the help of criminal gangs to perform law enforcement functions. Yet, such self-help solutions can often become part of the 'problem' rather than a 'solution' (Goldsmith 2005:450). Such private methods used by citizens to compensate for pathological policing challenge the rule of law and present threats to human rights. It is often said that Russian society is characterised by a culture of anti-legalism, which involves a mass scepticism and disregard for the law (Hendley 1999, Kurkchian 2003, Newcity, 1997). The loss of legitimacy by militsiya triggers social practices which contribute to the already rampant disrespect towards the law, removing Russia even further from the possibility of evolving into a society based on the rule of law.

Some of the practices described by respondents may unintentionally help to reproduce the dysfunctional system of policing. While resenting militsiya venality, a number of interviewees provided examples where they used bribery and informal connections within militsiya if it appeared to be a useful and effective way of resolving problems. Some bribed militsiya to obtain a release from custody or to have criminal charges dropped, others used bribes to obtain fake documents which militsiya issue, such as a driving license, a residence permit, or a vehicle registration certificate. Stories told by respondents confirm that such practices have practically acquired the status of a system of relationships between militsiya and the public. By participating in them, citizens help to preserve the very system which they resent and reinforce a barrier to creating a transparent and lawful system of policing.

Equally problematic is the finding relating to the unwillingness by citizens to turn to law in an attempt to hold militsiya to account for wrongdoings. As has been pointed out above, respondents in this study expressed low trust in the ability of *Prokuratura* and the judiciary to protect them, citing examples of arbitrariness of *Prokuratura* and unfair judicial decisions. It was clear from interviews that when citizens experience abuse by militsiya, normally they do nothing to try and bring wrongdoers to justice. If people take steps to minimise the impact of militsiya abuse (for example, to release a person falsely detained by militsiya), typically their recourse is not to courts which they distrust, but to informal mechanisms. With the help of side payments and informal pressures they may resolve their predicaments in a case at hand. Yet in the process they allow toleration of more abuse of power by militsiya who go unpunished for their wrongdoings. The underlying power relations that have generated abuse in the first place remain unopposed and allowed to perpetuate. Simultaneously, the perception of impunity of police provides a pretext for further deepening of public antipathy, distrust and cynicism towards the police (Goldsmith 2005:453).

An interesting finding is that despite universal expressions of distrust towards militsiya and frequent preferences of informal self-help methods uncovered by this study, stories of respondents suggested that many of them nevertheless contacted militsiya when becoming crime victims. Only six respondents reported a determination not to cooperate with militsiya under any circumstances. The position of the vast majority was to use in a patchwork fashion – often simultaneously – a variety of methods to protect themselves

against crime and respond to it once it occurs in the hope that at least some of the methods, whether formal or informal, may produce positive results. So, informal self-help techniques described by respondents and often perceived by them as more effective did not necessarily completely replace a resort to militsiya for help. Rather, it may be more appropriate to view the informal techniques as a moralistic indictment of the militsiya and a symbolic expression of distrust towards its officers⁴⁷.

Moral critique of the state and the unequal society

The stories of victimisation and fatalism told by respondents in this study typically involved complaints and grievances about the wrongs which they (and other people they knew or heard of) have been subjected to by militsiya. These stories detailed abuse and pain that were experienced, and expressed powerlessness and despair⁴⁸. While at the beginning of these stories militsiya were presented as the agent of victimisations, as the stories evolved, other powerful villains were added and blamed for the suffering of ordinary people. Narratives of individual victimisations caused by militsiya were intertwined with narratives of collective victimisations caused to ordinary Russians by their rulers. Respondents frequently linked discussions of predatory practices by militsiya to arguments that the Russian government itself is predatory: it shamelessly enriches itself at the expense of ordinary people, showing no concern for their poverty, misery and suffering. These narratives supported well Evans's conceptual model of predatory states referred to earlier in this paper – the states that plunder and extract resources from the population with no more concern for the well-being of the people than a predator for its prey (Evans 1989:562). A number of interviewees mentioned the proverb 'fish rots beginning with its head' and blamed the decaying militsiya on the 'rotten' Russian government 'where there are many unhealthy, dark forces' and 'where true criminals sit' (using interviewees' own words). Respondents argued that misdeeds by militsiya reflect similar processes within the state elite, therefore it is unrealistic to expect militsiya to act with integrity when the highest level of the Russian state are completely devoid of integrity. Some interviewees claimed that actually the depraved militsiya suits the government and the oligarchs as it makes it easier for them to loot the country.

Such narratives created a sense of identification and belonging of the speaker to a timeless moral community of the long-suffering ordinary Russians, over centuries robbed, cheated and abused by their rulers. As mentioned above, some respondents even included militsiya in that moral community because the state had 'abandoned' its employees and failed to guarantee them a decent existence, and militsiya themselves repeatedly emphasised in their interviews how dishonest the state was in the relationship with them. These narratives told by both ordinary citizens and militsiya can be interpreted as expressing a moral critique and resentment directed at the state as a whole. Respondents expressed their indignation of abuses of power by state officials and the ruling elite and injustices perpetrated by them with impunity on a grandiose scale, and concluded that the Russian state is morally and politically bankrupt. It cannot be relied upon by citizens to protect them, nor is it capable of dealing with the permanent crisis in which the country is

⁴⁷ Shevchenko (2009) makes a similar observation in the context of using the state medical system by post-Soviet Russians.

⁴⁸ Many passages in these stories were similar to laments observed by Nancy Ries in early *perestroika* years which she calls 'litanies' (Ries 1997). Such laments may be viewed as a Russian cultural mode of speaking, or a ritual that involves a particular way of expressing people's concerns, fears, anxieties and frustrations about irresolvable problems and contradictions of Russian social life.

trapped. Thus, the narratives of victimisation and despair emerging from this study suggest that the loss of legitimacy by the militsiya in the eyes of citizens may help to undermine the legitimacy of the entire state structure in contemporary Russia. Bayley (2001:14) argues that when serving the public is prioritised by the police, the legitimacy of the government is increased by demonstrating daily that the authority of the state is used in the interests of the people. My findings suggest that the same is true of the opposite: when citizens believe that their safety is no longer guaranteed by the state, indeed, is threatened by the very state agency meant to safeguard them, the public support for the government is at serious risk.

Related to the moral critique of the state was the moral critique of persisting and rising economic inequalities. This critique was evident in stories of cynicism, when respondents emphasised that, while militsiya are generally inept and unresponsive, they can be rather effective when dealing with members of the public who can pay for their services. Also, respondents argued that those who can pay are less likely to be subjected to abuses of power by militsiya. In their stories a firm correlation was established between one's economic status and a level of protection that one can get. The moral critique of social inequality also emerged in the stories of self-sufficiency shared by respondents. As discussed above, the mistrust towards militsiya and unwillingness to cooperate with them gave rise to self-sufficient attitudes and behavioural orientations on the part of members of the public, which were designed to compensate for the failure by militsiya to perform their functions. The problem with the reliance on self-help is that it results in the inequality of protection across various sections of the population (Goldsmith 2003:4), with some being unprotected and others being able to hire private security companies or enter into a contract for the provision of security services with the commercial police (as explained in the 'Violent Entrepreneurship' subsection above). Russian society is sharply divided into rich and poor, powerful and powerless, elites and masses, and resources for self-reliance are distributed unequally. Because of different income, status and network connections, some people are in a much better position than others to defend themselves against both crime committed by ordinary criminals and victimisations carried out by militsiya (Zernova 2012b:478).

As mentioned earlier, in the stories of degradation the Soviet past was praised for higher ethical standards in the society as a whole and in the militsiya in particular. The post-Soviet moral erosion of militsiya was interpreted as part of the general moral decline in the society, when corruption, disrespect towards the law and impunity by state officials became the norm. As has been noted above, a paradox was observed in many narratives of respondents who claimed that the degradation of the militsiya was typical of the post-Soviet period, yet then went on to share Soviet-era experiences of militsiya incompetence, corruption and harassment. Somehow those past experiences were not interpreted in the same negative light, nor did they attract the same degree of moral indignation as their more recent, post-Soviet, counterparts. Reliable data on the extent of unlawful and unethical behaviour by militsiya during and after communism is not available, so the claim that militsiya has undergone degradation after the end of communism cannot be verified empirically. There may be good reasons to believe that the frequency and seriousness of wrongdoings by militsiya indeed increased after communism (such as weakening of the controls over militsiya, deterioration in the quality of personnel, insufficient training, low pay). It is also possible that the move from state-controlled media, with its regular cover-ups, to market-driven media and the resulting explosion of reports about militsiya

wrongdoings has been instrumental in shaping post-communist public opinion that judges today's militsiya's conduct as more unlawful and unethical than it was 'yesterday'.

Yet, there may be another explanation for the public perception of degradation of post-Soviet militsiya that links the public sentiments to the rise of social inequalities. That explanation may be deduced from Ivan Krastev's analysis of corruption and anti-corruption sentiments in post-communist societies (Krastev 2004). Krastev suggests that irrespective of whether it is actually true, the popular claim that post-communism is more corrupt than communism is a value statement that includes in itself reflection on the social function of corruption. For Krastev, the key factor explaining the new corruption sensitivity in post-communist Eastern Europe is that one specific type of corruption – *blat* – has been replaced by a radically different form of corruption – bribery (Krastev 2004: 61-67). Commenting on this transition, Krastev argues that, unlike *blat*, bribery cannot be disguised under the rhetoric of friendship and thus makes people feel morally uncomfortable. Unlike *blat* which had an equalizing effect, bribe contributes to social stratification, making it easier for those who have money to get what they want (Krastev 2004:66). If Krastev's hypothesis is correct, it may help to explain the finding of this study that indicates the perception of post-Soviet militsiya's behaviour as more corrupt and predatory, compared to that of its Soviet predecessor, despite the evidence that wrongdoings by that predecessor were not uncommon. There is a moral difference in the eyes of citizens between militsiya releasing an accused from custody as a 'favour' to a friend who is a relative of the accused (a form of *blat*) and militsiya demanding a bribe in exchange for release from custody⁴⁹. There is also a moral difference between a situation where citizens are treated roughly equally when they come into contact with militsiya and a situation where one's economic status and thus the ability to pay determines the level of protection that one obtains. This study has identified a strong public perception that militsiya (and law in general) in today's Russia protects only those with money and power. Irrespective of its validity, this perception is significant in itself, as it undermines legitimacy of militsiya, contributes to disrespect towards the law and strengthens dissatisfaction with the existing order.

Conclusion

This study has found abundant evidence of distrust towards – and fear of – militsiya by contemporary Russians. It has been argued that the corrupt, brutal and unaccountable police force which lacks legitimacy in the eyes of citizens is one of the multiple obstacles to Russia's transition towards democracy. Moreover, if citizens view the police as illegitimate – indeed, believe that the very state agency designed to protect them actually presents threats to their security – the legitimacy of the entire state structure is at risk.

Twenty-two years after the disintegration of the Soviet empire it is obvious that the promised transition to a democratic, pro-Western society is not going to happen in the near future, if at all. Russia remains a society characterized by governmental failure and untrustworthy, inefficient and corrupt state institutions, with the militsiya being only one

⁴⁹ This example is glanced from a story told by an interviewee who had experiences of securing releases from militsiya custody for her sons arrested for drunkenness and anti-social behavior both during the communist past and the capitalist present. This interviewee was very critical of the corrupt post-Soviet militsiya who extorted payments for the release of her sons. In contrast, she commented positively on the work of Soviet militsiya. At her story progressed, it emerged that she used to have high-ranking friends among them who helped to obtain releases from custody as a token of friendship.

example. Militsiya (and now their successor, politsiya) continue to perform the function of propping up the political regime and tend to work for their own interests, instead of serving the interests of the population in a manner that promotes the general welfare. Russia remains a society where the belief that legal rules can protect an average person against abuses of power by state officials seems naive. Many people search for extra-legal ways of shielding themselves from abuses by state officials, as findings of this study illustrate. By doing so they leave authorities to do essentially as they please and hardly bring their country closer to the declared aspirations of becoming a state based on the rule of law. The result is clinging to – instead of transforming – the very social conditions that generate abuses of power in the first place.

Meanwhile, members of the public, disenchanted with the state's ability to protect them against crime and bring the guilty to justice, are likely to continue to rely on self-help measures that evolved in response to the dysfunctional state of contemporary Russian policing, some of which have been described in this paper, in their attempts to compensate for the failure of the state to perform its functions. Such measures enable people to survive in an environment characterised by widespread lawlessness, systemic abuse of power by militsiya and the inability or unwillingness of the state to protect its citizens. Having to resort to self-help strategies adds to the daily hardships experienced by citizens in the country where no public system seems to work the way it is supposed to. The solutions which have been generated by citizens in an ad hoc fashion to remedy institutional failures of militsiya heighten the sense of social inequalities, since one's wealth and social status determines the level of one's security. This in turn strengthens public resentment directed at the state as a whole. And, as some of these self-help measures involve private vengeance and using services of organised criminal groups, they present serious threats to the rule of law and human rights and make Russia's transition to democracy even more difficult.

Recent police reforms initiated by President Medvedev declared aspirations to bring the militsiya closer to its Western counterparts. Further research is needed to assess success of the reforms, yet evidence emerging from this study hints that they have hardly altered policing practices and the image of militsiya's successor, the politsiya. This paper has argued that there may be a danger that Medvedev's reforms result in creating an imitation of democratic policing, or, metaphorically speaking, building a new house in the Russian 'Potemkin village' democracy.

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