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Clean fake:

Authenticating documents and persons in migrant Moscow

ABSTRACT

What does it mean for Kyrgyzstani migrant workers in contemporary Russia to be legally legible to the state when informal agencies market fictive residency documents and “clean fake” work permits? Examining the uncertainty around being authentically documented provides insight into a mode of governance in urban Russia that thrives less on rendering subjects legible than on working the space of ambiguity between life and law. This dynamic has significant social consequences for the way certain bodies come to be scrutinized as particularly untrustworthy, particularly liable to fakery, and, thus, particularly legitimate targets for document checks, fines, and threats of deportation. The ambiguity with which migrants are forced to live highlights the need to explore how documentary regimes, structures of feeling, and racializing practices coincide. [*irregular migration, illegalization, documents, suspicion, Kyrgyzstan, Moscow*]

The time is mid-July 2010; the place, a fifth-floor two-room apartment in a Moscow suburb. I have been invited by two Kyrgyz friends, Kairat and Albina, for a farewell party (*provod*) to mark their temporary departure from their adopted city and my own.¹ By the time I arrive, the celebration is well underway. The larger of the two rooms is laid out with a floor-sized plastic tablecloth, around which a ring of mattresses has been pushed against the walls to maximize the space available for food. I squeeze in to take my place among the nine who rent a mattress space in this room from Kairat and Albina. All of the couple's *kvartiranty*—“tenants”—are here except for the two who work night shifts.

This is a harmonious (*yntymaktuu*) apartment, as Kairat and Albina often emphasize.² Fourteen people live here in all, including three who sleep in the smaller second room and two who sleep behind a curtain in the kitchen. The *kvartiranty* share birthdays, new jobs, and leaving parties like the one I am attending today, pooling money on such occasions to buy food, drink, and presents. On this occasion, one of Kairat's cousins has managed to snag a five-liter plastic bottle of cognac from the factory where he loads and unloads trucks; one of the couple's Uzbek tenants has brought some unclaimed salads from the café where she works. All but three of the tenants are related by kinship or marriage; most hail from the same district of rural southwest Kyrgyzstan, Batken, which is characterized by one of the highest rates of out-migration anywhere in Central Asia.³

Kairat is in good spirits. He and Albina are returning to Batken for the first time in two years. He holds up his plastic cup for a toast. “For my passport,” he says, pouring a shot of cognac into the cup and downing it in one. Spotting my curiosity at his choice of words, Kairat elaborates: “You know, my passport is going to give me eight pensions when I retire. I'm just going to sit around doing nothing and wait for the money to roll in.” He lies back against the wall in a pose of moneyed ease, laughing.

Kairat's toast, delivered with characteristic sleight of hand, plays on the ambiguous legalities produced by his situation as a Kyrgyz migrant worker who has put in years of work and developed considerable skill in mobilizing social relations—or as Kairat puts it, *taanysh-bilish* (knowing whom and knowing how)—to exit from his Kyrgyzstani citizenship and acquire citizenship of Russia.⁴ The “eight pensions” refer to eight different

people, several of them in the room with us enjoying this send-off meal, who have managed to obtain work by borrowing Kairat's new Russian passport and pretending to be him, that is, as fictive Russian citizens. The irony, as Kairat's toast implies, is that neither he nor the eight people for whom his passport has secured work are in the kinds of jobs that provide pensions, health care, holidays, or any other benefits.

Most are in the increasingly scarce low-skilled occupations that until a few years earlier had been easily available to citizens of Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states, who together constitute the majority of Russia's estimated 12 million migrant workers.⁵ Obtaining, or at least borrowing, a Russian passport, I was often told, had become a matter of necessity. The introduction of a quota system for migrant workers, and a reduction in the numbers allowed as a result of the financial crisis and a Moscow government under popular pressure to act tough on immigration, had made the differential in opportunities for citizens and noncitizens stark. It is simple, Albina explained on another occasion: "You want to be able to work 10 hours, not 12, 5 days not 7—you've got to do yourself a citizenship." In her own case, obtaining this status had entailed a six-day round-trip to the rapidly depopulating Siberian town where she and Kairat had managed to register as fictive residents, as well as \$2,000 for an assortment of fees.

Sometimes this doing and sharing of citizenship created problems. Jaanat, who once tried to get a job with Albina's passport, had been caught out by having a signature that did not match the one on her borrowed document and was fined for this—though, notably, not fired—by her employer. More often, however, the travels of passports and identities were a source of amusement and of gentle mockery of the kinds of subversions that could occur in a context where few employers could tell Kyrgyz people apart. "Vy vse na odno litso," Kairat said, putting on a singsong Moscow accent: "You've all got the same face." "There's no integration in the system," Kairat explained, when I asked whether there was any risk of employers finding out that "Kairat Toichiev" was officially working eight jobs at once. "Anyway, the employers don't care. They just want somebody with [Russian] citizenship so that they can pay lower taxes.⁶ If he's black, so much the better (*chernyi bolso eng jakshy*).⁷ They know he'll work hard, will agree to anything. It's not just about the passport, you see?"

In this article, I think with the gap Kairat points to here—"it's not just about the passport"—ethnographically and analytically. Ethnographically, I ask what difference documented presence makes in the contemporary Russian nation-state for migrant workers like Kairat, Albina, and their tenants, when the boundary between being legible and illegible to the state is blurred and fraught with social and moral uncertainty. This question concerns the gap that is opened up by the fact that documents are never entirely

knowable and never completely transparent, which creates spaces of possibility of the kind Kairat could exploit but also generates practices of suspicion toward those who are visibly non-Russian. Analytically, I am concerned with how this space of uncertainty might be explored in ways that expand our analysis of the dynamics and consequences of migrant illegalization. In particular, I am interested in exploring how the emergence of a particular documentary regime, with its accompanying practices of routinized suspicion toward the non-Russian migrant, might shed light on dynamics of racialization in Russia. Commentary of the kind Kairat and his kvartiranty regularly engaged in about authentic fakes, "clean" passports that are nonetheless deemed imitations, and the arbitrariness of state officials in deciding which documents are which gesture to recognition of what Nils Bubandt has called "the authentic-fake nature of the state" (2009:579): the recognition, that is, that enacting the state's authority, rather like "doing up a citizenship," depends on certain efficacious enactments, on the productive performance of law.

I suggest that examining the space of uncertainty around being "authentically" documented can provide insight into a mode of governance in urban Russia that thrives less on rendering subjects legible than on working the space of ambiguity between life and law, a dynamic that has significant social consequences for the way certain bodies come to be scrutinized as particularly untrustworthy and liable to fakery—and thus particularly legitimate targets for document checks, fines, and threats of deportation. This dynamic is instructive for the way that we might think about the relationship between documentary regimes, racializing practices, and the lived experience of everyday precariousness for migrant workers. Talal Asad has argued that "suspicion (like doubt) occupies the space between the law and its application" (2004:285). In that sense, all judicial and policing systems of the modern state "presuppose organized suspicion, incorporate margins of uncertainty" (Asad 2004:285). But suspicion can be heightened or muted in particular social and political formations; in a context of proliferating anxieties over documentary authenticity, officials and subjects alike are invited to scrutinize surfaces for the underlying meaning of things. My acquaintances in Moscow, Kyrgyz migrants who had traveled to Russia in search of seasonal work, were experts in telling authentic registration documents and work permits from counterfeit. The color of the stamp, the texture of the paper, the quality of laminate covering could give away a fake. With the proliferation of uncertain documents came expertise in detecting the authenticity of relationships: Which employers could be trusted to turn a blind eye to registering multiple employees with the same passport? Which local policemen could be befriended? As I argue below, for Kyrgyzstani migrants, contemporary Russia is an environment in which selves come to be scrutinized alongside documents: Suspicion echoes

back on the state and its agents, fostering accusations of complicity with, or dependence on, a vast bureaucracy of fictive legalities and counterfeit papers.

My analysis draws on research that I conducted in the Batken region of southern Kyrgyzstan among migrant workers and their families between 2004 and 2010. Kyrgyzstan's second decade of independence has seen a drastic increase in out-migration for work and a shift in its dynamics, from seasonal supplement to locally derived farming incomes to a virtual right-of-passage for male school leavers and a primary source of domestic income (Lushakeva and Makenbaeva 2009; Reeves 2012). During fieldwork in and around Batken in 2004–05, I found that my own initial preoccupation with the everyday workings of new international boundaries between Kyrgyzstan and its Central Asian neighbors often seemed less pertinent to my informants than the business of getting by through getting out, to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital, and beyond to Russia. What difference did it make if you needed a visa to get to Tashkent, the capital of neighboring Uzbekistan, one of my elderly informants asked me pointedly, if it was now prohibitively expensive to travel there? In Batken, seasonal long-distance migration often seemed the very thing that could sustain dynamics of normal, mobile life closer to home (cf. Isabaeva 2011).

Beginning in 2008, I sought to explore this new migration more systematically. I spent four months between 2008 and 2010 living with two families of migrant workers in Batken district, conducting interviews with returned migrant workers and their families, and carrying out a more systematic household survey to understand the moral and economic reasoning that surrounded domestic migration decisions (Reeves 2012). I spent an additional five months in the spring and summer of 2010 living with relatives and covillagers of these informants in Moscow. My immersion in Batken social networks provided a means to access this highly localized and regionally marked migrant community in Moscow. Most Batken people travel specifically to Moscow, since earnings are considerably higher there than in other cities. Most share apartments with other people from their region (*jerdeshter*), and most find work through relatives, neighbors, and friends—with some more lucrative jobs being passed on “hand to hand” for a considerable fee. The near-daily phone contact between migrant workers and family members back home afforded by the recent introduction of low-cost calling cards meant that by the time I arrived for my second phase of fieldwork, I had a small notebook full of names of people to contact and to convey gifts to.

In Moscow, I lived for two months as a kvartirant in two of the so-called rubber apartments (*rezinovye kvartiry*) of the kind rented by Albina and Kairat, participating in the routines and social lives of these temporary homes. I socialized informally with migrant workers between home

and work: in the metro, in queues for documents or to send money, in parks, in several of the small “Uzbek cafes” that have emerged to cater to the Central Asian migrant market, outside mosques, and on occasional trips to the Moscow periphery to celebrate birthdays. I conducted 45 in-depth interviews with Kyrgyz migrant workers and their family members as well as a further ten with individuals involved in the migrant economy as brokers, medical personnel, letting agents, and sellers of work permits. I followed debates around migration in Russia and Kyrgyzstan as they circulated in the national and local press and followed members of civic organizations and cultural groups as they sought to appeal on behalf of migrants who had been unfairly dismissed from work. To protect my informants' confidentiality and safety, I deliberately did not seek to conduct participant-observation in migrants' places of work.

Unsettling migrant “illegality”

If unauthorized migration was for a long time considered little more than an “appendix” to the legal migratory process, “deserving, at most, some residual category or the voicing of humanitarian concern” (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010:214), it has today come to constitute a significant focus of attention for scholars of migration and anthropologists interested in the social constitution of law (Allegro 2010; Chavez 2007; Coutin 2000, 2005; De Genova 2002, 2005; Heyman 2001; Papadopoulos et al. 2008; Reeves 2010; Suarez-Navaz 2004; Willen 2006, 2007). Analyses in this vein have productively highlighted the need to distinguish between forms and sources of irregular presence in the nation-state through illegal entry, overstay, or employment (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010; Ruhs and Anderson 2010). They have critiqued the normalizing languages through which migratory trajectories have been discussed, which identify the migrant as “victim” of trafficking or “villain” intent on undermining the law (Anderson 2008; Sharma 2003). They have revealed the significance of shifting migration policies as a means of sustaining state sovereignty (Kaşlı and Parla 2009), and they have highlighted the ways in which discourses of “illegality” serve to reproduce a sense of political community in countries of in-migration (Calavita and Suarez-Navaz 2003). Perhaps most importantly, such critiques have drawn attention to the political economy of migrant illegalization: the need to situate an analysis of irregular residence and labor in the context of increasing international demand for cheap, tractable, casual—and often potentially deportable—labor (De Genova 2002, 2005; Hartman 2008; Hiemstra 2010; Peutz and De Genova 2011).

Such accounts have often positioned themselves politically in opposition to a popular media and policy discourse that would treat migrant illegality as self-evidently a public threat or as a problem to be “solved” (Anderson

and Ruhs 2010). In an influential review article on “migrant illegality and deportability in everyday life,” Nicholas De Genova (2002) called for greater reflexivity concerning the analytic languages through which undocumented migration is explored. “‘Illegality’ (much like citizenship),” De Genova argues, “is a juridical status that entails a social relation to the state” and is thus a “pre-eminently political identity” (2002:422). Despite growing attention to the administrative conditions that irregularize migrant presence, however, the lived experience of documentary uncertainty for migrant workers—and its particular consequences for the way “authenticity” comes to be sought out, rendered visible, and performed—has yet to receive much treatment. Nor has much ethnographic attention been devoted to the agency of migrant workers in navigating and working diverse webs of administrative regulation in different global settings (Gomberg-Munoz 2010; see also Galemba 2008: 21–22). As Sarah Willen has noted in a subtle phenomenological exploration of undocumented migrant experience in Israel, “It seems that popular media like newspapers and feature films may be richer and more consistent sources of information about the lived, embodied consequences of migrant illegality . . . than the existing ethnographic literature” (2007:10; see also Bloch et al. 2011; Holmes 2007).

My analysis develops two interventions into this growing discussion. Firstly, I show how the kind of uncertainty and present-orientedness that Willen and others describe results not just from the empirical fact of an individual’s being deemed “illegal” and hence deportable. In the context of contemporary Moscow, it also arises from the inherent uncertainty over where that boundary between “legal” and “illegal” presence actually lies. In a situation of highly mediated document production and acute restrictions on what constitutes legally legible accommodation, technologies that are intended to foster certainty (by rendering populations administratively visible and assuring the document bearer that he or she is “legitimate”) in fact come to heighten feelings of anxiety, as the onus moves to individuals to demonstrate that they “match” their documents. I argue further that this empirical reality needs to be situated within a political economy of documentary production and verification in which state and market are thoroughly entangled. In contemporary Moscow, such entanglements are visible in the complex and contradictory interlayering of federal and regional legislation, in the structure of pay and rewards for those charged with policing illegal presence, and in the contradictoriness of a policy of “open borders,” on the one hand, and a crippling restrictive quota system for legal employment, on the other. It is visible above all in the marketization of residence registration and work permits and the proliferation of intermediaries (*posredniki*) simultaneously inside and outside the state, which means that few labor migrants can be sure whether documents they have procured really are authentic.

To begin to think through this space of legal–illegal entanglements, I draw on a kindred analytic field: the political geography of urban informalities (Roy 2004, 2005, 2011; Yiftachel 2009a, 2009b). Such informalities are often glossed as “gray space”—*space* here understood to designate both a geographical relation to the city and the social relations that this place sustains. Oren Yiftachel developed this term through a study of extensive but officially “unrecognized” urban settlements in the Negev desert. He highlights the ambiguous role of these places within the urban imaginary and their resilience in the face of attempts to engineer sociospatial change (Yiftachel 2009a, 2009b). Such sites are formally illegal and are liable to violent destruction. For the most part, however, they are quietly accommodated because state authorities know that to destroy them would only lead to their reemergence elsewhere. Their very temporariness thus becomes a mark of their permanence: their defining feature and identity.

Two insights are worth developing from this formulation for thinking about the blurred boundary between legal and illegal residence in the contemporary Russian metropolis and the enduring precariousness that it serves to normalize. First, the very term *gray space* directs attention from a legal status to a space of relations: from a boundary to a lived place of being “in between.” Rather than focusing on the dividing line between legal and illegal presence and exploring one or the other side of this division, the term *gray space* foregrounds the impossibility of knowing definitively where that line lies in a context of competing administrative orders and the privatization of legal legibility. Such an approach, secondly, highlights the social space that emerges from these entanglements of formal and informal realms. Informality in this reading is not so much a practice that is confined to particular places or people than a logic that connects different realms. As Ananya Roy has argued, informality connects the “slum” and the “suburb” in the same dynamic of accumulation, “a logic through which differential spatial value is produced and managed” (2011:233).

Together, these approaches provide valuable tools for developing a more differentiated account of migrant illegalization. Foregrounding migrant (il)legality as a space of relations rather than an unambiguous line is helpful for thinking beyond the dichotomies through which migrant residence is typically analyzed: legal versus illegal, documented versus undocumented, authorized versus unauthorized, regular versus irregular. In the lived worlds of migrant labor in one of the world’s most expensive cities, it is often difficult for migrants, policemen, employers, and analysts alike to tell whose actions and documentary statuses are “legal” and whose “illegal” according to the classificatory register of the state. Moreover, as social space in which people live, work, love, and struggle to make ends meet, gray space is necessarily “entangled”: The formal and informal

not only meet here but they also become intertwined and interdependent (Heyman and Smart 1999:11). This is visible in the continuum of formal statuses that characterize the kvartiranty who rent mattress space from Albina and Kairat. In the complex web of relations that link the young couple, the network of kin who borrow their documents, and the local policemen who, for a monthly fee of 3,000 rubles, turn a blind eye to their presence, it is precisely formal statuses that enable informal practices to thrive and “official” roles that allow “illicit” practices to continue untroubled. In juridical terms, we could say that this blurring of regular–irregular status keeps migrant workers in a “state of exception” (Agamben 1998, 2005). Yet it is the very normality of this exception, both in its pervasiveness and its experiential inevitability, that deserves ethnographic elaboration (see also Hartman 2008:507). Gray space is analytically suggestive because it foregrounds precisely how mundane that “exception” has become.

There is a further aspect to this argument, however. In the case of the Russian migration regime, such exceptions are not merely incidental to its workings but, as I demonstrate ethnographically, are integral to its mode of governance and crucial to understanding its social effects. The ambiguity of legal statuses and the informal negotiations between migrants and the police limit the space for collective organizing and undermine migrants’ recourse to law in the case of wrongful dismissal. But they also have the less obvious but no less pernicious effect of facilitating a popular elision (one, indeed, often explicitly reproduced in media and official discourse) between the categories “non-Russian” (*nerusskiye*), “of non-Slavic appearance” (*neslavianskoi vneshnosti*), “black” (*chernye*), or “Central Asian” (*sredneaziatskie*) with “guest-worker” (*gastarbaiter*) and “illegal immigrant” (*nelegal*).

This dynamic is significant for understanding contemporary dynamics of racialization in Russia. For, if we understand racialization to refer to the discursive and material processes through which distinctions attributed to “race” come to acquire social salience (see, e.g., De Genova 2005), then we can see that the regime of documentary uncertainty in Russia has fostered a situation in which particular culturally elaborated differences—crucially, those of skin color and linguistic fluency in Russian—come to stand for much more than themselves: They are markers of social status and signs of prospective (il)legality. Indeed, in a context where nelegality are presumed to be both pervasive and socially recognizable (in this context, visibly “non-Slavic”), racially selective document checks can easily come to be seen as the last bastion of an embattled public order (Reeves 2013). Writing for a Russian audience, philosopher Vladimir Malakhov points out how this elision comes to normalize what he calls, in his 2001 book of that title, the “discrete charm of racism” (*skromnoe obaianie rasizma*). Elsewhere, he observes,

Racist thinking penetrates into our consciousness We silently accept the daily humiliation of people in the metro and on the street with the excuse that these are a necessary part of the passport regime—because those who are checked somehow don’t look right. We can’t get our head around the idea that public order is possible without the regime of residence registration (*propiska*). We can’t see how, other than through restrictive measures, we can deal with the threats that migration brings with it. [2002, my translation; see also Malakhov 2001]

This pervasive uncertainty over legal legibility, I suggest, renders practices of racial profiling both routine and socially acceptable (Adjami 2006) and helps explain how vigilante campaigns against illegal immigrants have morphed so easily from activities of the extreme right to tools of the political mainstream (to the degree that in February 2013, Moscow’s Regional Security Department began recruiting volunteer patrols to assist the Federal Migration Service in conducting checks of illegal immigrants [RIA Novosti 2013]). Just as the proliferation of fakes (*poddelki*) invites an intensification of practices aimed at determining authenticity, with everyday moral judgments dependent “on the ability to quickly re-discern substantive value from illusory surfaces” (Lemon 1998:24), so, in a world of counterfeit documents, the physical person becomes scrutinized all the more intensely as the locus of truth (see also Fassin and d’Halluin 2005). Suspicion itself becomes the dominant mode of governing uncertainty. To understand how these dynamics have arisen, it is worth probing a little into the contemporary Russian migration regime and its historical antecedents.

Situating Russia as a migrant destination

For reasons that are tied to the ongoing legacies of the “three-worlds division” of intellectual labor (Chari and Verdery 2009; Pletsch 1981), Russia has figured little in comparative debates about contemporary migration regimes in English-language scholarship.⁸ Most seasonal migration to Russia is from other parts of the former Soviet space and therefore unmarked in analyses that take interregional or global South–North migrations as the starting point for comparison. At the same time, Russia has come to appear so regularly in popular media portrayals as a source of (potentially dangerous) out-migration—as site of brain drain or source of trafficking—that its role as a magnet for labor migrants from other post-Soviet states has been obscured. And yet, by the end of its second decade of independence, Russia was identified by the World Bank (2011:1) as the country with the second-highest net in-migration after the United States; and three post-Soviet states—Tajikistan, Moldova, and Kyrgyzstan—now rank among the five most remittance dependent in the world (Mohapatra et al. 2011). Indeed,

by 2012, remittances between Russia and Kyrgyzstan exceeded those between the United States and both Haiti and El Salvador as a proportion of the recipient state's gross domestic product (*Economist* 2012).

The popularity of Russia as a destination for Central Asian migrant workers is inseparable from the long arc of Soviet sociospatial incorporation, premised on drawing “backward” republics into Soviet modernity through the differential movement of people and expertise. Between the 1950s and 1980s, many young people from the Central Asian and Caucasus republics traveled for work, to trade, and as so-called limit workers (*limitchiki*) on construction sites in Russian cities. Inherited hierarchies of development served to mark these migrants as “other,” even as internationalism grounded in socialist friendship between nationalities (*druzhba narodov*) and the emergence of a supranational “Soviet person” were celebrated in Brezhnev-era discourse (Edgar 2007). The pervasive racial hierarchies to which Kairat pointed when he observed casually that employers know that “blacks will work harder” have a history that predates Soviet collapse in 1991. And yet, as Sahadeo found in his interviewees’ contemporary recollections of Soviet-era migrations—and as my older informants often nostalgically observed—there has been a qualitative shift in the experience of Central Asians in Moscow since the late Soviet period, from that of fellow citizen (albeit socially marked as non-Russian) to that of “guest worker” (*gastarbaiter*, in the recent Russian borrowing) and often simply of “illegal” migrant (*nelegal*). After all, residents of the Kyrgyz SSR traveled freely to Soviet Russia (and, as is often fondly recalled today, to Georgian spas and Black Sea resorts) as fellow citizens of Russian people. As one Batken schoolteacher who regularly traded apricots in Russia during his Soviet school holidays put it nostalgically, following his own deportation from Russia in 2005, “There used to just be one passport (*bir ele passport bolchu*) . . . Now when they call us ‘black’ (*chernyi*), ‘illegal’ (*nelegal*), you know that the Soviet Union really collapsed.”

In part this administrative shift in status reflects formal changes in citizenship following Soviet collapse, which transformed fellow citizens into guest workers and (potentially illegal) aliens. In part it reflects the stark reality of post-Soviet economic differentiation, such that by 2005 a Batken schoolteacher with a double teaching load would still be earning five to six times less than he would as an unskilled laborer on a Moscow building site. More generally, the normalization of *gastarbaiter* as a category of everyday social practice is fueled by the speed of transformation in the labor market since the 1990s, which, in turn, is inseparable from broader global transformations in resource economics. The empirical increase in migration over the last decade is intimately tied to Russia’s oil-fueled building boom, to the degree that fluctuations in remittance transfers from Russia

mirror with eerie precision the tiniest shifts in the global oil price (Mohapatra et al. 2011).

This boom has seen Russia’s urban centers transformed by skyscraper office blocks as oil is converted into the less mutable materials of concrete and steel. It has enabled the emergence of an urban middle class keen to reconstruct homes and make villas of dachas, creating a ready market for informal labor brigades. Russia’s radically declining working-age population, coupled with a global shift toward casual, ununionized labor, means that large sectors of the labor market that used to be filled locally—in agriculture, catering, transport, and cleaning—are now increasingly filled by young, foreign-born workers. Outsourcing has come to dominate in many of the factories and service sectors that would previously have employed their own staff. And a loosening of labor legislation means that employers can demand a volume of working hours (12-hour days, seven days per week is not uncommon) and shift patterns (24 hours on, 24 off) that are impossible to sustain for those with families or any kind of commitments demanding time or emotional work.

The dependence of the contemporary Russian market on cheap, ununionized foreign labor should be situated, then, within global shifts toward the neoliberalization of economic relations, characterized by a simultaneous opening of borders to global market forces and an increasingly virulent policing of national boundaries (Dauvergne 2008; McNevin 2011). In different migrant-receiving states, this tension has been resolved politically through draconian policies that bind rights of temporary residence to migrants’ labor power, by invalidating an individual worker’s visa or work permit should that worker change employer or fail to repay preestablished debts or, in the case of a woman, become pregnant (see, respectively, Gardner 2010 for Bahrain; Gurowitz 2000 for Malaysia; Kemp 2007 for Israel). In the case of post-Soviet migration to Russia, however, where international agencies have as yet had little role in brokering or recruiting labor, it is, rather, the very absence of formal regulatory mechanisms and the resultant normalization of legal uncertainty that serve to keep migrant workers, in the Batken idiom, “quieter than the lamb” (*koidon joosh*).

To understand why, we need to look to a particular conjunction of legal and economic arrangements that have served to facilitate the free movement of migrant workers into Russia even as they have rendered legal residence increasingly difficult for any noncitizen employed in low-paid work. In contrast to many global migration corridors, the one between Kyrgyzstan and Russia can be traversed visa free; the two countries are connected by rail, air, or a grueling five-day coach ride across the Kazakh steppe.⁹ Relatively few Kyrgyz migrants, therefore, enter Russia illegally: The challenge is, rather, to remain documented once you are inside the country. All foreigners entering Russia are obliged



Figure 1. Temporary housing for migrant workers on the grounds of a mosque construction site, Moscow, July 2010. Photo by Madeleine Reeves.

to fill out a “migration card” as they cross the border and to obtain a temporary residence registration (*registratsiia*) within 72 hours of arrival. This registration lasts for three months, at the end of which the noncitizen either has to leave the country and reenter as a “new” migrant or prove that he or she is in possession of work and a work permit (*razreshenie na rabotu*), which allows an additional nine-month stay.

Of these documents, the work permit is considerably harder and more costly to obtain, especially in the aftermath of the 2008–09 financial crisis and the reduction of quotas in the labor market. Indeed, in the summer of 2010, work permits were being sold on the open market for around 17–18,000 rubles, or approximately \$570—the same amount that someone employed in cleaning or catering could expect to earn in a month.¹⁰ The “temporary residence registration” (*vremennaya registratsiia*), a holdover from the Soviet *propiska* system regulating internal movement within the state, is ostensibly much easier to procure. This document, inserted into the passport to confirm that the owner is registered with the regional division of the Federal Migration Service at his or her place of residence, often de facto serves to legalize many newly arrived noncitizens, for the vast majority of Kyrgyz migrant workers—like other temporary residents from the Commonwealth of Independent States—live in housing that is not visible to stately systems of accounting. Among the significant proportion of Kyrgyz migrant men employed in construction, accommodation is typically in a shipping container, rail-

way wagon, or other “temporary place” (*vremianka*) on the grounds of the construction site (see Figure 1). Many others, like the tenants who sublet mattress space from Kairat and Albina, share an apartment with 15, 20, or 25 other people. Such arrangements constitute a classic “public secret”: widely known (indeed, a staple of evening news bulletins with their lurid exposés of “illegals” [nelegaly] living in extreme accommodations) but unacknowledged in state surveys of migrant residence and invisible in national statistics.¹¹

The political economy of such arrangements, given that real estate costs in Moscow are among the highest in the world, is quite stark. Average monthly wages for migrant workers in 2010 were typically between 10 and 20,000 rubles (\$325–\$650). This is substantially lower than average monthly rental costs, which in the same period ranged from 30 to 40,000 rubles for a minimally furnished two- or three-room apartment in a Moscow suburb. There is, therefore, a huge informal market in “mattress space” in which, for 2,500–3,200 rubles per month (\$86–\$110), a migrant worker leases a sleeping space that has the dimensions of a modest, market-bought mattress: 70 by 170 centimeters. The space may be in an apartment or, for a slightly lower fee, in the converted basement of a residential block—typically without fresh air or natural light. As those who do the leasing are acutely aware, such arrangements are formally illegal (hence, Kairat and Albina’s effort to ensure that the neighbors remain unaware how many people live next door), but they are largely unavoidable and socially tolerated. Housing

codes specify strict limits on the number of people who are entitled to reside in any apartment according to the number of square meters and rooms that it contains. Payments for water and electricity (*komunal'nye ushugi*) are generally calculated on this basis too. In practice, the vast majority of migrants are not in a position to obtain a registration at the address where they actually live.

One consequence is the proliferation of small private firms that help migrants to navigate the resultant gray space of residential ambiguity. Such intermediaries, often longer-established migrants or police officers working on the side (*nalevo*), will register a newly arrived migrant at a fictive address for a fee of 2,500–3,000 rubles (\$86–\$105) for three months. Typically, the “registration address” exists somewhere in the city, but the migrant neither lives there nor has any connection with this building or its residents. Many elderly Moscow women supplement their pensions by offering their addresses as temporary (fictive) homes to so-called ghost tenants in need of registration. Sometimes, however, the address itself is nonexistent or identifies a building entirely unsuitable for human habitation. To the extent that such commercially issued registrations index a real address and log a migrant’s presence in the state, they are considered “authentic” or “clean” (*taza* in Kyrgyz, *chistie* in Russian) by migrants—and usually by police officers and migration officials charged with expelling those deemed illegally resident. Often, these registrations are referred to colloquially as “clean fakes” (*chistie fal'shivye*) to distinguish them from both authentic registrations that index the owner’s real address and the obviously counterfeit (*fal'shivye*) registrations that can be bought in railway stations or marketplaces (see Figure 2). With such documents, the migrant is formally registered with the Federal Migration Service. However, the fact that she or he does not live where registered leaves the migrant vulnerable to being found out and fined (or, in extreme cases, deported) for violating residence laws. Crucial to successfully negotiating encounters with the authorities is being able to correctly “perform” residence at one’s fictive address: knowing how to get there, which metro stations are located nearby, how many floors the building has, and on which floor one ostensibly lives. Being “legal,” in short, depends on successfully performing a right to the city and a convincing knowledge of its geography.

Mahabat and Fatima are two women who, in July 2009, dramatically failed that performance. In their midtwenties, the two women had traveled to Russia together in 2008 along with Mahabat’s husband, Adil. For both women, it was their first experience traveling beyond Batken. Neither of them spoke more than a few words of Russian or knew what work they would find once they arrived. Mahabat, a first-time mother, had left behind her one-year-old son in the care of her husband’s parents. Fatima, who had been unable to conceive during her six years of marriage and whose husband had subsequently divorced her, had traveled to



Figure 2. Flyers at a Moscow bus stop advertising dormitory accommodations and “clean fake” documents for foreign migrant workers, July 2010. Photo by Madeleine Reeves.

Russia in part to escape the village gossip that followed her around “like a cloud.” Both women worked in demanding cleaning jobs at a Georgian café during their year in Moscow and shared a stuffy, windowless basement with a large group of extended kin. Soon after arriving, they bought fake registration documents from the Kazan’ railway station, where the Bishkek–Moscow train arrives. Several months later, they were detained in a police raid and deported for having “fake” registration documents and counterfeit work permits.

When I interviewed them in February 2010, in the village I call Toguz-Bulak, a couple of hours beyond Batken town, it was with nostalgia that they recalled their period “in town” (*shaarda*). Their recollections of their experience were mixed: It had been the first opportunity that either woman had had to earn a salary and contribute financially to the family. They shared photos from Red Square and recollections of happy times getting “Moscow haircuts” and buying clothes. They also shared memories of exhaustion, boredom, and fear. Police checks were a regular feature of life in the café where they worked, and they lived under constant threat of a raid by the Federal Migration Service.

Partway through our conversation, we turned to discussing the difficulties of remaining documented. What, I asked, is the difference between a “clean” and a “fake” registration, and what difference did it make to them? Striking in Fatima’s answer—and Mahabat’s occasional interjections—was the sense that the real status of the document was less important than whether one could successfully act like it was clean.

Fatima: The difference is just that the clean one goes through the [police’s] computer, and the fake one doesn’t. It’ll show you that so-and-so lives at such-and-such an address if it’s clean, but it won’t if it’s fake. That way they know [who is here legally or not]. If you want to get a clean registration, you’ve got to pay loads and go through all kinds of tests, get together loads of papers. You’ve got to go to the doctor’s. [pause] It’s hard. I mean, we had no idea where we were supposed to go, which papers we needed, how to do the registration. So we ended up buying fakes from the Kazan’ station. To buy a clean one you’ve got to know your local policeman or one of his friends. For instance, we tried through our local policeman. He told us that he knows someone who works in the passport office (*pasportnyi stoldon*) and that he can ask him. He said that he could do the documents up for us through the passport office but in the end it was going to cost 2,500 rubles whereas the fake is only 500.

Madeleine Reeves: Weren’t you scared with a fake registration that you might get caught by the police?

F: Well, there are loads of migrants going round with fakes. Most of them work fine. And anyway, even if you’ve got a clean registration you’re not going to be able to ... I mean ...

Mahabat: ... prove ...

F: ... *prove* that it’s clean. Even with a clean one you aren’t going to be able to prove that you live at the address where you are registered. For instance, if your landlady is Russian the police can ask you to take them to where you live and show them the apartment. Well, we couldn’t show them because we haven’t got a clue where [that apartment] is located! The information about the address is just written there on your registration, and you have to learn it by heart—the address, the number of the house and the apartment, the name of your landlady. But if they ask you to describe the house to them, well then, you’re stuck! You’re not going to be able to.

Striking here is the blurring between the domains of the “formal” and the “informal” regulation of temporary residence to which Fatima points. Connections here are necessary not to evade the law but, rather, to stay “legal.” Money and papers are necessary but not sufficient to obtain a clean registration, for, as Fatima reasons, you must also know your local policeman “or one of his friends.” Her argumentation

turns on its head the observation, well made in literatures on the informal economy in the post-Soviet space, that informal contacts and bribes are needed to bypass formal regulation (Ledeneva 2006). Here they are needed to stay legal, and it is this as much as the differential in cost between a “clean” and a “fake” registration that leads Fatima and Mahabat to resort to the counterfeit touts in the Kazan’ station.

Inscrutable documents

Fatima’s recollections point to a second respect in which the boundary between legal and illegal residence dissolves. Legal registration, in itself, does not guarantee that you will not be stopped, fined, and deported for (ostensibly) having a fake. Since the production of the document is always mediated, you never really know whether that document is going to be efficacious until you are stopped and your identity checked with the migration service’s database. The essential inscrutability of documents was a recurrent feature of conversations about documents throughout 2010. Several people told me of paying for “clean” registrations that turned out to be counterfeits or of paying a substantial sum for an official work permit only to find out that, in the computer database, the registration number on the permit indexed another person entirely.

When I interviewed him in June 2010, 47-year-old Rahat-aka, a cousin of Kairat’s on his mother’s side, had just applied for a new residence registration from a commercial firm and was preoccupied with this very question. The registration was his first significant expense after arriving back in Russia following a three-month absence. He had returned with debts to repay and was anxious to avoid unwarranted expenses for a document that was not going to “work.” Rahat-aka works for a tourist agency driving a coach between Moscow and resorts on the Black Sea. He was one of the first men from his village to start working in Russia in the early 2000s, and he harbored few illusions about a system he regarded as absurd and unnecessary. To prove his point—and fully aware that I too was a foreigner who had had to navigate my way through the Moscow registration bureaucracy—Rahat-aka abruptly turned the roles of interviewer and interviewee around midway through our two-hour conversation. In a playfully interrogative style, he questioned the authenticity of my own registration (obtained through the Moscow university with which I was affiliated) to prove his point:

Rahat-aka: Ok, look, Mairam [Madeleine], think about it for yourself. Have you got a registration now? A temporary [one]? Have you?

MR: Yep, I do.

R: Really, huh?

MR: Really.

R: A legal one (*zakonnyi*)?

MR: Legal enough (*zakonnyi ele*).

R: How do you know that it's legal? How are you going to prove it?

MR: I'm not sure that I can prove it ...

R: Ha! You see?

MR: ... the only thing that I can be sure is that the institution that invited me issued it ...

R: So? Like the institute's got its own house or something? They write you down in a book?

MR: Well, they've got their own dormitory (*obshchezhitie*).

R: Even if they've got a dormitory, they've still not been paying the taxes, for the water, in the place where you're registered, right? They are supposed to pay by the head, right? How much did you pay for your registration?

MR: I pay 3 rubles for each day that I am here.

R: OK and if you didn't have the institute registering you what would you do?

MR: I don't know. I'd probably use a private company like everyone else.

R: Right! And there you've got no idea how many people they've registered at that address! Maybe there are 50 or 100 people at that address. Just try to prove it! Now, for instance, I've just given my documents for registration—on Monday I've got to collect it. How do I know if it's [going to be] genuine? I don't even know the address! If the police stop you, they'll ask you the address, even if it's a legal [registration] (*khot' zakonnyi bolsun*). Even if it's clean you can't get a registration where you live. For instance: Baumanskaya street 83. If you live in a different administrative district how are you going to know how many floors it's got? And they'll definitely ask you, "Which floor? Which entrance?" Pah! You're screwed (*use, popalsia!*) [They'll ask:] "Who is your landlord?" You see? Am I right? How are you going to prove [you live there]?

Rahat-aka's playful questioning of my own documentary status points to a recognition that getting the document to work depends on efficaciously enacting its identity. That performance is easier for some than for others. As Rahat-aka pointed out—and as I experienced on more than one occasion when my (Kyrgyz) interlocutor was asked for his or her document but I was not—documents tend to be believed much more and scrutinized less when the bearer passes as having a "Slavic appearance" (*Slavianskaia vneshnost'*; cf. Lemon 1998). Moreover, the correlation between being documented and being recognized as documented is not a straightforward one. Fatima noted that many migrants with fake documents "work fine," just as many with "clean" documents are detained on suspicion of being in Russia illegally. In the following extract, 32-year-old Mino-

var described the alarm she felt when the ostensibly "clean" work permit on which she had just spent over a month's wages was deemed, on inspection, to be a fake.

Minovar: When we first fell to the police [i.e., were stopped] we didn't know their ... you know ... requirements.¹² The first time we ended up having to pay a 500 ruble fine to be released.

MR: Why was that?

M: They told us that our work permits were fake. We were shocked when we heard that. They took us away and detained us until my brother, Daniyar, managed to speak with them, did ... you know ... and they let us go (*neme kylsa anan chyky*).

MR: But in reality your work permits weren't fake, right?

M: They weren't fake at all! But they'd already taken our passports so we had to follow the police. They were going, "Your documents are fakes," laughing. They can already tell who has just arrived and who has been here for ages. We ended up having to pay a fine for them to let us go.

MR: Didn't you try to tell them that your documents were really clean?

M: Of course, but they've taken your passport, what are you going to do? Throw your rights around? And any case, we weren't even completely sure whether our documents were clean or not. We don't know how [our permits] had been done, we told them that we'd gone to so-and-so; that we'd gone to the Federal [Migration] Service—they call it the "FMS." But we couldn't prove it (*dokazat' ete albaitabyz da!*) We told them that so-and-so works there. We even gave his surname. But they already know. They can tell those who've been around from those who've just arrived, like us. They are harder on those who are new because of course you don't know the names of all the metro stations by heart, you can't tell them all the places you've been. And then after a year you know everything! We figured out how the policemen work. We even got to know our local policeman (*uchastkovyi*), we could recognize him anywhere. (See Figure 3.)

The "illiterate" police

Here too, it is less the status of the document per se that is important to perceptions of legality than whether the bearer can perform a convincing knowledge of the city. In this account, familiarity with the Moscow metro (a recurrent site for "falling" to the police) comes to index a broader ability to navigate the city and its risks. "They can tell a newby from the knees down," was how Kairat had once explained it to me. "It's not just your shoes, your jeans, it's your walk! You've got to walk like you know where you're going, even if you haven't a clue. A moment's hesitation and they'll pick you up: 'You! Young man! Show us your document!'"



Figure 3. Comparing a “clean” and a “fake” Russian work permit during an interview at a home in Batken region of Kyrgyzstan, January 2010. Photo by Madeleine Reeves.

The other side of this uncertainty, of course, is the proliferation of informal payments to overcome the space of suspicion between physical and documented person: the habitual awareness that irregularities are open to monetary negotiation with state officials. Small, and sometimes quite substantial, payments to police officers, migration officials, and border guards are a staple of migrant life. Often, relationships with one’s local police officer—the *uchastkovyi* responsible for policing a given residential block—were marked by friendly and ongoing exchanges: the sharing of advice, the exchange of gifts and money. As Michele Rivkin-Fish has noted of informal payments to Russian health care workers, such actions inhabit a complex moral register: In a setting where official channels of payment are themselves “viewed as ethically problematic or unjust,” actors often view unofficial payments “as constituting important, *moral* forms of exchange” (2005:49). Just as for Rivkin-Fish’s users of maternity care, among the migrants I knew, flouting the law was both pervasive and potentially morally acceptable: less the “corruption” of some otherwise smoothly functioning system than an inevitable fact of life in a country where “the law” is itself inscrutable.¹³

Indeed, when I traveled to Kyrgyzstan midway through my Moscow fieldwork, one of my Batken acquaintances in the city asked me to bring back a bottle of Kyrgyz cognac precisely to share with Oleg, the policeman responsible for his residential block.¹⁴ Policemen could sometimes become a migrant’s friends or even drinking partners. But the line between such friendly exchanges and the much more aggressive extortion of money was narrow. It was common for my informants to feel fully at ease only in the residential area policed by their *uchastkovyi*, with whom they enjoyed a relationship they usually described as one of mutual support and protection, but to be extremely alert to the visible presence of police officers as soon as they were beyond its bounds. And it was the police, more so than “skinheads” or “rackets” or “the mafia,” who were the most common targets of Batken migrants’ vitriol. As one of my informants quipped when I asked him about protection rackets at the market where he worked, “What protection rackets? Here in Russia the police *are* the protection racket!”

Rahat-aka gave a particularly searing attack on the arbitrary nature of police extortion. In 2004, an altercation with a policeman over the status of his registration grew out of control, and Rahat-aka was eventually deported for allegedly asserting a claim on the apartment of another man where he was fictively registered. His deportation order meant that he would have to leave the country within a week and that he would be prohibited from reentering Russia for five years. At his sentencing, he had been fingerprinted and photographed and his passport stamped to indicate his expulsion from the country and prevent his return. In fact, Rahat-aka recounted with considerable pride his capacity to *vykrutitsia*—to spin his way out: he was to reenter Russia within less than a month. In Batken, he changed his name (taking his father’s name, Abaz, and Russifying it to make his new surname, Abazov); he changed his marriage certificate and driver’s license and, for a \$200 payment, purchased a new Kyrgyzstani passport to certify his new identity. He deliberately crossed by the land border rather than by air, confident that at the ground crossing his personal data would not be checked against the computer database of “illegal aliens.” His gamble paid off: He managed to reenter Russia with his new passport and resume his old job. However, when he left the country the following year to return to Kyrgyzstan, he was not so lucky. His photo gave him away, and the border guard on the Russian–Kazakh border identified him as an “illegal alien.” Rahat-aka was matter of fact about this experience: “I just gave them 200 rubles and crossed straight over,” to which Kairat, listening to our conversation, interjected with vigor, “See? It’s money everywhere (*vez’de den’gi*).”

Striking in this exchange was not just the proliferation of illicit practices that followed Rahat-aka’s (possibly illegal) removal from the country. It is also the way in which our earlier conversation about documents and legal legitimacy

morphed into a tirade against the police and their willingness to ride roughshod over the law. Here, Rahat-aka's earlier, matter-of-fact description of his purchase of a new passport under a different name contrasts with the emotional intensity of his account of police corruption:

On one occasion I fell to the police and they deported me. I couldn't prove that I had done my registration legally, you see? A 22-year-old Russian lad, the same age as my son! He goes to me: "You've [familiar form] not got a registration" and detains me! And how am I going to prove to him? What kind of law can there be (*kandai zakon bolush mümkün*)? ... First of all they held me for 24 hours at Elektrozavodskii most. They kept me in the monkey-cage (*obez'iankada karmady*, i.e., detention cell). They called up: "Andrei, is that you?" "Yes." "Well, it seems that we've got a guy here who is making a claim on your apartment." See, my registration was at that address. So they try to set me up as though I'm trying to bribe the owner. Like I've been wanting to get hold of his property. So they got [the landlord] to write a formal complaint (*aryz*) against me. In a word, they're trying to get money.

Rahat-aka was eventually deported for his alleged "embezzlement" of the apartment where he was registered. For the amount of money that would have been needed to secure his release by this stage (a sum of several hundred dollars), he could go home, see his family, and get some rest in Batken. Rahat-aka was remarkably unfazed by the prospect of the deportation itself. "Why should I be scared?" he asked me. "It's not as though they are sending me to China." He was confident that once he was back home, he would be able to obtain the necessary documents to return to Russia under a new name. And, anyway, he explained, what is going to happen will happen. "You'll see what was written on your forehead (*peshine jazylganyn körösüing*)," he said, invoking a Batken idiom that spoke of the inherent indeterminacy of fate. The focus of Rahat-aka's anger, rather, was the attitude of police sergeants no older than his son who failed to recognize him as a fellow human being and a former Soviet citizen. Like many of his generation of Kyrgyz engineers, Rahat-aka had worked in Russia during the 1980s. Indeed, it was the contacts he had established during this time, as an engineer in Samara region, that had enabled him to find work in Russia when he returned as a labor migrant in 2002. To emphasize his cultural fluency and his right to inhabit a city that had been his capital too, Rahat-aka switched back and forth between Russian and Kyrgyz for dramatic emphasis when I asked him about his experience of his sentencing:

R: Look, to start with, not one of them has got an education! Not the officers, the sergeants, no one there has

got an education! They didn't even know how to fill out the protocol about me! In the court ...

Kairat, interjecting: Illiterate!

R: Illiterate! I probably write better than them, more beautifully, more grammatically than they do! A Russian guy and he can't even write Russian properly! They've come straight out of the army, they've not got any education. And they've seen what the army is like. *Dedovshchina* (military hazing), this and that. Of course in Soviet times it was different. If you were Kyrgyz or Uzbek it didn't make any difference. They've got no idea now about "friendship of the peoples." ... It's all the same to them since they've got nothing to lose. If they are fired from work today they'll still have work tomorrow! There are nowhere near enough people joining the police at the moment. Not enough people want to apply. You go into any metro station: "We invite you to join the police force!" There are adverts everywhere! That's why that kid [*oshol bala*, i.e., the policeman who detained him] doesn't give a damn, I tell you honestly. You ask any of them, stop any of them on the street and try: none of them have got an education! No higher [education] (*Vyshii jok*)! If he had a higher education he'd be an officer, naturally. They don't even know how to behave normally with people. Straight away they go to *ty* [i.e., you, familiar]. "What, you think you know the law so well do you? So fucking clever, are you? Or you've got loads of money? OK, come all let's have a look! Maybe you've got heroin in your car? OK, let's have a check." They can throw [some] in. It's ludicrous (*bespredel*). Ludicrous. Just try to prove it. If they take you to the district police they'll all just support each other. You just try to prove yourself!

At this point, Rahat-aka broke off, remarking afterward that he had switched from his mother tongue, Kyrgyz, into Russian since the intense emotion was "hard to convey in Kyrgyz." Rahat-aka's indignation here at the arbitrariness of his detention points again to the space beyond legal legibility that Kairat also alluded to at his leaving meal. If Kairat's response to this space of legal exception was mockery, Rahat-aka's was indignation toward the state that seems to authorize it: indignation at the ritualized violence (*dedovshchina*) that is normalized as a modality of power; at the fact that the state's signature, in the form of the protocol written to authorize his deportation, is illegible even to the person who writes it; at the sense that police violence is uncontrolled because no police officer can or will be removed, however indiscriminately he acts; and at the younger generation's failure to recognize him as a former Soviet citizen.

Conclusion

Rahat-aka's remarks provide a powerful commentary on the post-Soviet governance of migration: the sense that rule in Russia thrives on the production of ambiguous semilegal statuses and the way that bribes lubricate

everyday relations in this space of administrative ambiguity. There is something distinctively post-Soviet about this story, shaped by a particular history of attempts to regulate movement within the Russian metropolis (Matthews 1993), by particular legacies of racialization dating back to the late Soviet period (Sahadeo 2012), and by the persistence of a chaotic mode of governance that made the privatization of law and order a notorious feature of 1990s Russia (Ries 2002). It is a mode of governance mediated by the fact that violations of the border regime are policed by a class of state personnel, including policemen, border guards, and migration service officers, whose salaries are so low as to render the soliciting of bribes virtually inevitable (Light 2010; Rahmonova-Schwarz 2006). As Kairat remarked when justifying his protection payments of 3,000 rubles per month to his *uchastkovyi*, Oleg, such actions were socially acceptable because Oleg was one of the few people whose official salary is considerably lower than Kairat's own earnings from the shoe warehouse where he works. No self-respecting Muscovite, Kairat insisted, was going to become a policeman.

This is, then, a situated story, and one that points to the need to develop a historically and geographically differentiated analysis of migration regimes and their social effects (Sigona 2012). However, I resist a conclusion that identifies it merely as an illustration of Russian exceptionalism, another example of “how Russia really works” (Ledeneva 2006). For “clean fake” documents show that the distinction between “legal” and “illegal” presence in the nation-state is not only a product of positive law (a fact that has been well exposed in critical studies of migrant illegalization) but is also often indeterminate, experientially and analytically. And this is the case not just in those states where institutions of legal accountability have been eroded. As the suspicious scrutiny that is the *modus operandi* of international airports reminds us, there is always a space “beyond the document,” and this is a space of indeterminacy precisely because documents never stand simply for themselves (cf. Kelly 2006).

Attending to such spaces of uncertainty can help us to develop a more fine-grained analysis of legal-illegal blurrings and their implications, both for migrant experience and for contemporary dynamics of racialization in Russia. In an attempt to avoid the normalizing categories of “legal” versus “illegal” migrants, critical scholars of migration have often sought to deploy different languages of analysis, distinguishing instead between documented versus undocumented migrants, regular versus irregular status, or authorized versus unauthorized presence in the nation-state (Anderson and Ruhs 2010). Such terms are less open to misappropriation in popular discourse troubled by the presence of illegal noncitizens. But they also reproduce the binary logic of the state: One is either authorized or not, documented or not, regular or not, legally “legible” or not.

Empirically, however, these distinctions are often far from clear, as my ethnography has shown. Migrants can move from one status to another in the course of their migration careers, and many migrant workers are not so much undocumented as fictively hyperdocumented, accompanied by an array of papers that bear only a partial relation to the physical person. Moreover, many of those migrants who are administratively “authorized” are authorized by dint of payments, the status of which is ambiguous in relation to formal law. Kairat's and Albina's Russian passports, for instance—which are unambiguously “clean” in the sense of being genuine documents issued by state officials—could only be obtained by mobilizing the couple's social networks (their *taanysh-bilish*) to enable them to register temporarily as residents of a remote Siberian town. It is unclear, in the string of connections that were mobilized for this purpose, where the “authorized” and the “unauthorized” begin and end. Binary languages of migrant (il)legality fail to do descriptive justice to these shades of gray.

My analysis also points to the need to pay greater attention to the role of documents and documentary regimes in heightening insecurity and normalizing suspicion toward certain ethnically marked bodies. Several scholars have identified the proliferation of classificatory practices and documentary techniques as a defining feature of contemporary state practice (Bauman 2000). We live in a world in which biometric borders, like territorial ones, are patrolled more vigorously than ever and “managing migration” has become a defining practice of late modern statecraft (Amoore 2006).¹⁵ But such techniques, enacted in the name of “security” are never complete and always rely on a series of informal judgments about where and on whom such suspicion should fall. This incompleteness, I have suggested, serves to normalize selective scrutiny and, thus, is integral to the routinization of racial discrimination in contemporary Russia. To borrow Malakhov's idiom, the “discrete charm” of racism relies less on its ideological pretensions than on its incorporation within routine bureaucratic practice.

Precisely because documents index something beyond themselves and are open to sometimes sophisticated reproduction, they expand the space of uncertainty and suspicion over whether the legal and the physical person really correspond (Kelly 2006). In this context, the efficacious performance becomes all-important: Being *dokumental'nyi* demands demonstrating that you can make your physical person “fit” a questionable papery representation. This is not (necessarily) a space of abjection, as my informants teach us. The gap between physical and documented self can allow for playful manipulations of the kind in which Kairat, Albina, and their *kvartiranty* engage: lending and borrowing passports because, to employers, they “all have the same face.” But as a space of legal uncertainty, it can also be shot through with fear, humiliation, and anger. For

Rahat-aka and his generation, who remember Moscow as the center of a multiethnic polity and as their capital too, the disjuncture between the real and imagined city can be particularly acute, as their right to the city is questioned and the arbitrariness of “illegality” moves from abstraction to experiential fact.

Notes

Acknowledgments. This research was supported by an RCUK Research Fellowship as well as by fieldwork grants from the Nuffield Foundation and Newnham College, Cambridge. I am very grateful to these institutions for their financial support and to the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences for providing a stimulating intellectual environment in which to discuss some of the early ideas for this article. Sergei Abashin, Toby Kelly, Adi Kuntsman, Alaina Lemon, Volodya Malakhov, Jonathan Spencer, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, Viktor Vakhshstain, and participants in the workshop on “Paperwork and Personhood in and after the Soviet Union” at the University of Cambridge have all provided helpful comments and questions on earlier versions of this article. The close and insightful readings by the *AE* editor and three anonymous reviewers have greatly improved the argument. Sultan Abdiev and Mirgul Karimova discussed many of these ideas in formation and sharpened them with their questions. I am deeply grateful to the many Kyrgyz migrant workers and their families in Moscow and Batken who welcomed me into their homes and shared their experiences of navigating the Russian migration bureaucracy; particular thanks go to the couple identified in the text as Kairat and Albina for their insight, warmth, and friendship.

1. I use pseudonyms for all first names and surnames and for the Batken village referred to in the text.

2. *Yntymak* is a Kyrgyz word designating harmony, coexistence, or material mutual assistance. Throughout the text, I alternate between Russian and Kyrgyz according to the language used by my informants. Although Russian and Kyrgyz belong to different language families, many urban-born Kyrgyz, and a majority of older migrant men who served in the Soviet army, are functionally bilingual and often switch between languages for dramatic emphasis. In Batken, I conducted most of my interviews in Kyrgyz. In Moscow, by contrast, several of my informants preferred to use Russian, whether as an index of cultural fluency or, in public places, from an awareness of the disdainful looks that speaking *na svoem*—“in one’s own” language—could invite from passersby.

3. Household surveys that I conducted in four Batken villages in 2005 and again in early 2010 as part of this research suggest that around four-fifths of rural households rely directly on remittances for their livelihood (Reeves 2012); see also Lushakeva and Makenbaeva 2009.

4. Until 2011, citizens of Kyrgyzstan, along with those of Belarus and Kazakhstan, enjoyed a “simplified procedure” for acquiring Russian citizenship, though in so doing they had to give up their original Kyrgyzstani citizenship. In 2011 alone, nearly 40,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan obtained Russian citizenship, according to the Kyrgyz Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration; 485,000 people (approximately 10 percent of the overall population; Beshov 2012) have exchanged Kyrgyzstani for Russian citizenship in the 20 years since Kyrgyzstan gained independence. Kyrgyzstan and Russia do not offer dual citizenship, despite considerable popular calls for it in Kyrgyzstan.

5. Estimates of the number of migrant workers in Russia vary considerably. Many of those who initially traveled to Russia season-

ally or on three-month visa waivers end up staying for several years. Within these figures, estimates of the number who are “illegally” present in Russia are disputed further still. Some estimates indicate that around half of all migrant workers have a temporary residence (so they are officially registered, even if not at the address where they live). Other estimates suggest that only one in ten migrants is “legal.” In 2012, the Russian Federal Migration Service estimated that 13 percent of the 9.5 million noncitizens with some form of residence registration are in possession of work permits; it estimated the number of those illegally resident at 3.5 million (*Moscow Times* 2012).

6. At the time of research, taxes on the pay of migrant workers were double what they were for Russian citizens (30 percent instead of 15 percent).

7. *Chernyi* is a term widely used in contemporary Russia, and derogatory in connotation, to denote migrant workers from Central Asia or the Caucasus. On the racialization of document checks in contemporary Russia, see Reeves 2013, Adjami 2006, Light 2010, and Malakhov 2013. On the broader use of *chernyi* to designate certain non-Russians, see Lemon 1998, 2000. Jeff Sahadeo (2012:338) explores the habitual use of languages of race in late Soviet Russia, noting that the origin of the term *chernyi* to designate people from the Soviet south, as opposed to those from South Asia or Africa, remains unclear.

8. Within Russia, there is a growing scholarly literature on Russia as a country of in-migration. Although much of it is highly normative, focused on the need for migrant “adaptation and integration,” a number of important empirical studies have been published in recent years that are based on ethnographic research (Abashin 2012; Voronkov 2011).

9. Batken migrants typically borrow money from friends or relatives to reach Russia, either by train through Kazakhstan or, increasingly, by airplane. A one-way ticket from Kyrgyzstan to Russia in 2010 cost approximately \$250 by train or \$400 by plane, although at times of political upheaval in Kyrgyzstan during 2010 air tickets sometimes cost double this amount.

10. On the impact of quotas on the regularization of migrant labor, see Human Rights Watch 2009:24–27. On the consequences of the financial crisis for migrant remittances, see Lukasheva and Makenbaeva 2009 and Marat 2009.

11. Many of the raids conducted by the Federal Migration Service (often in conjunction with youth activist organizations) are filmed and make their way onto YouTube or mainstream television. See, for instance, YouTube.com 2010.

12. In the original Kyrgyz: *birinchi tüşkündö olorodun nemelerin bilbeit ekenbiz da, trebovaniasyn*. Minovar here uses the Russian form, *trebovanie*, conjugated as a Kyrgyz noun, to reference the “requirement.” This use is striking because *trebovanie* usually denotes something official—a requirement or demand that is backed up by law. Here it refers to a bribe, although, as with other commonly used idioms for these payments, such as *rate* (*stavka*) or *cost* (*tsena*), the language is ambiguous as to the formal or informal nature of this payment.

13. Data from the 2005 and 2010 household surveys that I conducted in Batken suggest that migrants budget around 10 percent of their income for unofficial payments to state officials.

14. On the significance of cognac in the economy of informal gift payments, see Patco 2002.

15. In January 2012, as he launched “Operation Illegal Migrant” (*Operatsiia nelegal’nyi migrant*), the head of Russia’s Federal Migration Service, Sergei Romodanovskii, made this connection between managed migration and civilized statehood explicit. The tightening of migration controls, he explained, was a prerequisite for the development of negotiations between

Russia and the European Union on visa-free travel (Migrant. fergana.ru 2012).

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