The Excluded

Begging in the Postwar Soviet Union*

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At first glance, begging would appear to have been a minor aspect of everyday life in the Soviet Union, but close examination of this phenomenon uncovers the nature of relations between individuals and the mechanisms of social engineering. Begging can thus be used as a lens through which to observe everyday life in the Soviet Union, since it provides insight into the perspectives of the lowest margins of society and the situation of individual outcasts. The construction of Soviet society was the result of a state project with a specific goal,[1] over the course of which some individuals managed to integrate into the system of new social relations—which were controlled and supported by the state—while others were excluded and labeled "socially alien." The Soviet political vocabulary associated keywords with

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1. This kind of social engineering project was not exclusive to the Soviet regime. There are a number of comparative studies devoted to inclusion/exclusion practices used by Stalin's regime in the USSR and the Nazi regime in Germany: Sheila Fitzpatrick and Alf Lüdtke, "Energizing the Everyday: On the Breaking and Making of Social Bonds in Nazism and Stalinism," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, eds. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 267-301; Christopher R. Browning and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Frameworks for Social Engineering: Stalinist Schema of the Identification and the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*," in Geyer and Fitzpatrick, *Beyond Totalitarianism*, 231-65; and Peter Fritzsche and Jochen Hellbeck, "The New Man in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany," ibid., 302-44.

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those who were excluded: "enemies of the people," "former people" (*byvshie*), "people without civil rights" (*lishentsy*), "kulaks," etc. The definition of these terms was primarily based on political criteria, the regime using them to combat its opponents—both real and, above all, imaginary. Among them were those who had occupied "privileged positions" during the "Old Regime." On the other hand, members of the poorest levels of the population—including marginal groups—were, in principle, considered allies of the Bolshevik regime. The Bolsheviks won power by brandishing the slogan "he who was nothing will become everything."[2] Over time, however, it became clear that most of those "nothings" stayed that way. Beggars, vagabonds, and prostitutes were part of everyday Soviet life, just as they had been part of everyday life under the Tsar. To what extent was the Soviet state able to control (and prevent) the phenomenon of social exclusion? And to what extent were those who were excluded reintegrated into society? Studying the phenomenon of begging in the USSR makes it possible to answer some of these questions.

Analyzing begging through the perspective of integration and exclusion opens up new methodological perspectives for historical research in this field, even from a comparative perspective at the European level.[3] At the moment, Soviet practices regarding begging are not well integrated into the international context because studies related to this subject in the USSR are only just beginning. The use of the notion of begging in the sense of *nishchenstvo*[4] has a unique history in the official Soviet vocabulary: it was widespread in the 1920s, then practically forbidden in the 1930s, before a change in terminology in legislative documents and public discourse was introduced in the 1940s-1950s. At that time, the term *nishchenstvo* was replaced by begging in the sense of *poproshainichestvo*, for both ideological—avoiding the undesirable allusion that poverty provides the basis for misery—and pragmatic reasons related to stricter definitions of begging in legal terms.[5] The notion of

2. "Kto byl nikem—tot stanet vsem" is a line from the Russian text of the "Internationale," the official anthem of the Soviet Union until 1944.

3. One of the axes of the University of Trier's project "Foreigners and the Poor: Changing Forms of Inclusion and Exclusion from Antiquity to Today" was dedicated to the problem of begging (*nishchenstvo*): see Beate Althammer, ed., *Bettler in der europäischen Stadt der Moderne: Zwischen Barmherzigkeit, Repression und Sozialreform* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007). Two articles on begging in Russia were published in this volume: Hubertus Jahn, "Das St. Petersburger Bettlerkomitee, 1837-1917," 91-112 and Marija Kudrjavceva, "Bettler in St. Petersburg am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts. Einige Porträts," 301-24.

4. [Unlike other languages, in Russian there are two words for "begging": *nishchenstvo* and *poproshainichestvo*. *Poproshainichestvo* comes from the verb "to ask/to beg" (e.g., to ask/to beg for alms). *Nishchentsvo* refers to the reason for this situation—e.g., "extreme poverty/misery" (to ask for alms due to extreme poverty). In English, both words are translated as "begging." When relevant, the Russian is provided here for further context.—Trans.]

5. In the legislative documents of the 1920s, the term *nishchenstvo* was used. On August 26, 1929, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR published a decree "On Ways of Eradicating Misery (*nishchenstvo*) and Orphanages Among Adults." In 1951, the ukase of the presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR "On the Means of Combatting Anti-Social Elements and Parasites," targeted people found begging (*poproshainichestvo*).

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begging refers to particular types of action and stereotypical behavior.[6] It is nonetheless necessary to specify the object of study. In my view, the best definition of the notion of misery/begging is the functional one proposed by Beate Althammer, who writes that begging is "an individual request for charity, in monetary form or in kind, expressed through words, gestures, or bodily symbols and other recognizable signs, addressed to people without kinship ties nor knowledge of the person asking, and which explicitly expresses the need for help."[7] According to this definition, both of the Russian terms *nishchenstvo* and *poproshainichestvo* are quite close in meaning and can be translated as begging.

The contradiction between reality and discursive practices immediately represents a particularity in the Soviet image of the problem of begging. The idea that begging, famine, and unemployment had disappeared in the Soviet Union was spread by propaganda from the 1930s onwards and contributed to building a positive image of the Soviet state and its regime, governed by class justice and then social justice. This propaganda classified "social anomalies" such as begging, homelessness, and prostitution as "vestiges of the past" or "birthmarks of capitalism" (*rodimye piatna kapitalizma*) and thus erased them. "Poverty" and "begging" were only mentioned in the Soviet press and other propaganda texts as the attributes of capitalist society. Studies of poverty were discontinued in the USSR toward the end of the 1920s, and the issue of begging was banished from public discourse in the mid-1930s. The issue was not raised in print again until 1954.[8]

This ideological trap led to a paradoxical situation, where begging both did and did not exist. The beggar was a familiar figure in everyday town life. The police (called the "militia" in Russian) and social services, each within the limits of their jurisdiction, attempted to fight against begging, but with little success. Although ordinary citizens were indignant and sympathetic, in the public discursive sphere—the press, literature, cinema—this phenomenon did not lead to any type of discussion. The absence of official public documents, which might have constituted a source for the history of begging from the end of the 1920s up until the mid-1950s, has influenced historiographical production. The phenomenon of begging

6. The comments on article 209 of the 1960 Penal Code of the RSFSR give a definition of begging (*poproshainichestvo*) that, for the first time, classed it as a criminal activity: "Begging is the act of scrounging money, clothing, food, etc. from citizens or organizations (state, social or, for example, religious groups) by persons avoiding socially useful work and for whom begging is a means of either exclusive or complementary survival or by persons who have revenues from work (who receive retirement pensions or are dependent on their children, their parents, or the state) but who beg because of their penchant for alcohol, to save money, etc." In cases of systematic begging, the law allowed for imprisonment of up to two years or correctional work for a period of six months to one year. See Nikolai Beliaev and Mikhail Shargorodskii, eds., *Kommentarii k Ugolovnomu kodeksu RSFSR 1960 g.* (Leningrad: Izd-vo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1962), 356.

7. Beate Althammer, "Einleitung," in Althammer, *Bettler in der europäischen Stadt*, 3-22, here 9.

8. Ioann Damaskin, "Spekuliatsiia na chutkosti," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, September 23, 1954, p. 2.

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during this period, and beyond, only appeared in historical research in piecemeal fashion. Although there are many studies of begging in prerevolutionary Russia, Soviet practices with regard to mendicancy have not been systematically examined.[9] It is not insignificant that general works on this subject in Russia describe the period between 1945 and 1990 very schematically in the form of a brief historical retrospective.[10]

Hubertus Jahn, the author of a brilliant study on begging in prerevolutionary Russia, wrote that he had to "consciously renounce" his goal of studying Soviet-era archives "because the USSR authorities had neglected the phenomena of poverty and begging up until Perestroika." He noted that the absence of reliable sources, particularly statistics, "makes it practically impossible to systematically study this phenomenon during the Soviet period."[11] This assessment is, in fact, too pessimistic; several issues linked to begging during the postwar period have already been studied. This research has primarily been devoted to categories of the population that were obliged to beg more often than others. Beate Fieseler, Mark Edele, and Robert Dale have, for their part, dealt with begging among disabled war veterans.[12] Analyzing the system of retirement pensions and this category of the population's place in the labor market, Fieseler concludes that the absence of adequate social welfare and strategies of adaptation were the principal reasons that former combatants (*frontoviki*) turned to begging and became marginalized.[13]

9. For an overview of the historiography covering the problem of begging in prerevolutionary Russia, see: Jahn, *Armes Russland*, 13-19; Elena Yu. Zubkova, "S protianutoi rukoi. Nishchie i nishchenstvo v poslevoennom SSSR," *Cahiers du monde russe* 49, no. 2/3 (2008): 442-45.

10. For example, see: Marina L. Butovskaia, Ivan Yu. D'iakonov, and Marina A. Vanchatova, *Bredushchie sredi nas. Nishchie v Rossii i stranakh Evropy, istoriia i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Nauchnyi mir, 2007); Olga A. Likhodei, *Professional'noe nishchenstvo i brodiazhnichestvo kak sotsial'nyi fenomen* (Saint Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburgskij univertsitet vodnykh kommunikatsii, 2004); Jeanine Braithwaite, "The Old and New Poor in Russia," in *Poverty in Russia: Public Policy and Private Responses*, ed. Jeni Klugman (Washington: The World Bank, 1997), 29-64; and Jahn, *Armes Russland*.

11. Jahn, *Armes Russland*, 19 and 140.

12. Beate Fieseler, "Arme Sieger: Die Invaliden des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges," *Osteuropa* 55, no. 4/6 (2005): 207-18; Fieseler, "The Bitter Legacy of the 'Great Patriotic War': Red Army Disabled Soldiers Under Late Stalinism," in *Late Stalinist Russia: Society Between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. Juliane Fürst (New York: Routledge, 2006), 46-61; Fieseler, "'La protection sociale totale.' Les hospices pour grands mutilés de guerre dans l'Union soviétique des années 1940," *Cahiers du monde russe* 49, no. 2/3 (2008): 419-40; Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of World War II: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Robert Dale, "Rats and Resentment: The Demobilization of the Red Army in Postwar Leningrad, 1945-1950," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 1 (2010): 113-33.

13. The most detailed analysis of the system of social welfare and the strategies of adaption adopted by disabled veterans is presented in the book taken from Beate Fieseler's habilitation thesis: Beate Fieseler, *Arme Sieger: Die Invaliden des "Großen Vaterländischen Krieges" der Sowjetunion 1941-1991* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, forthcoming). I would like to thank Beate Fieseler for allowing me to consult her habilitation thesis

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Dale's study, centered on Leningrad, confirms this conclusion, demonstrating how the official rhetoric of support for those crippled by war was disconnected from the reality of their integration back into civilian life. Edele examines the begging practices of veterans as a kind of illegal work constituting a specific subculture and "shadow society."[14] There have also been studies on orphans during and after World War II, referred to as the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union.[15] Authors of these studies reveal the disastrous situation of children who lost their parents and were deprived of social welfare. According to Juliane Fürst, stealing and begging were their only means of survival.[16] At the same time, the concrete practices of infantile begging in the years following the war, and the means employed to prevent them, remain under-examined.[17] Yet, as Veniamin Zima's book has shown, it became widespread in the wake of the 1946-1947 famine.[18] Donald Filtzer has studied the situation of townsfolk, including orphans, but within the more general context of their living conditions and the postwar decline in the standards of living.[19] These works make it possible to reconstruct and describe social practices around the phenomenon of begging. Recent historiography has finally become interested in beggars as the objects of state policy. As research by Vasilii Popov, Nathalie Moine, and David Shearer shows, the passport system was one of the

prior to publication: "Die Invaliden des 'Großen Vaterländischen Krieges' der Sowjetunion. Eine politische Sozialgeschichte, 1941-1991" (Dr. habil. thesis, University of Bochum, 2004).

14. Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 93-94; Edele, *Stalinist Society: 1928-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

15. Maria P. Zezina, "Sotsial'naia zashchita detei-sirot v poslevoennye gody," *Voprosy istorii* 1 (1999): 127-36; Zezina, "Bez sem'i: siroty poslevoennoi pory," *Rodina* 9 (2001): 82-87; Katrin Boeckh, *Stalinismus in der Ukraine: Die Rekonstruktion des sowjetischen Systems nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007): 451-74; Juliane Fürst, "Between Salvation and Liquidation: Homeless and Vagrant Children and the Reconstruction of Soviet Society," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2 (2008): 232-58; Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Postwar Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Rachel F. Green, "'There Will Not Be Orphans Among Us': Soviet Orphanages, Foster Care, and Adoption, 1941-1956 (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2006); Ruth Kibelka, *Wolfskinder: Grenzgänger an der Memel* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1996); and Olga Kucherenko, "Without a Family: Public Order, Social Welfare, and Street Children in the Wartime Soviet Union," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 58, no. 3 (2012): 421-36.

16. Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 37.

17. Ruth Kibelka describes infantile begging practices in *Wolfskinder*, 39-45. On children begging in Leningrad during the blockade, see Sergei V. Iarov, *Blokadnaia etika. Predstavleniia o morali v Leningrade v 1941-1942 gg.* (Saint Petersburg: Nestor-istoriia, 2011), 218-221.

18. Veniamin F. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 godov: proiskhozhdenie i posledstviia* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii, Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, 1996), 205-35.

19. Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Filtzer, *The Hazards of Urban Life in Late Stalinist Russia: Health, Hygiene, and Living Standards, 1943-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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main weapons in the fight against this phenomenon in the Soviet Union.[20] The official discourse associated it with "parasitism" and beggars with a category of people who "led an antisocial, parasitic lifestyle." Sheila Fitzpatrick has devoted an article to the construction of asocial identities during the drafting of legislation against "social parasites" in the USSR.[21]

Various aspects of begging after the war have been discussed by historians but only occupy a secondary, even peripheral, place in their research, since these authors have other objectives. Building on my recent work,[22] I would like to change the approach to begging by placing it at the center of my analysis so that it becomes the converging point of social and political processes, administrative and everyday practices, and symbolic significations, all of which characterize everyday Soviet life. Progress has already been made in this direction. Begging may be placed in one of two categories, according to the motivation, duration, and character of its practice and whether it is occasional or professional—recognizing that occasional begging can become a stable way of life and a professional activity. In this article, begging will be primarily studied as a reaction to extreme poverty, a survival strategy for social groups who found themselves in precarious situations because their living conditions were too low. This explains my focus on need-based begging and not on begging as a professional practice. The chronological framework is that of the years between 1940 and 1960: the war and its immediate aftermath saw an increase in the phenomenon, while the state sought to address the issue through social-welfare measures[23] and new legislation[24] at the turn of the 1950s-1960s.

To show the specificity and the continuity in Communist authorities' attitudes toward begging, this article begins with a brief presentation of the history

20. Vasilii P. Popov, "Pasportnaia sistema v SSSR. 1932-1976," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 8 (1995): 3-14 and 9 (1995): 3-13; Nathalie Moine, "Système des passeports, marginaux et marginalisation en URSS, 1932-1953," *Communisme* 70-71 (2003): 87-108; Moine, "Vnutrisoiuznye granitsy grazhdanstvennosti: territorial'noe vyrazhenie diskriminatsii v Sovetskom Soiuze cherez pasportnuiu sistemu," in *Rezhimnye liudi v SSSR*, eds. T. S. Kondrat'eva and A. K. Sokolov (Moscow: Rosspèn, 2009), 257-76; and David R. Shearer, "Elements Near and Alien: Passportization, Policing, and Identity in the Stalinist State, 1932-1952," *The Journal of Modern History* 76, no. 4 (2004): 835-81.

21. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Social Parasites: How Tramps, Idle Youth, and Busy Entrepreneurs Impeded the Soviet March to Communism," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, no. 1/2 (2006): 377-408.

22. Zubkova, "S protianutoi rukoi"; Elena Yu. Zubkova and Tatiana Yu. Zhukova, eds., *Na "kraiu" sovetskogo obshchestva. Sotsial'nye marginaly kak ob"ekt gosudarstvennoi politiki, 1945-1960-e gg.* (Moscow: Rosspèn, 2010).

23. Among the measures of social protection against poverty, it is worth mentioning the retirement reform of 1956, as well as the increase in the minimum wage and the introduction of reductions for families with so-called "modest revenues" (tax exemptions, free school lunches, preferential enrollment in child daycare centers and kindergartens, etc.).

24. In 1960, an article making begging a penal offense was incorporated into the republican penal code. On May 4, 1961, a law appeared in the RSFSR against so-called "parasites," among whom beggars were classified. Similar laws were enacted between 1957 and 1961 in the other republics of the USSR.

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of the fight against this phenomenon from the 1917 revolution until the mid-1950s. Postwar begging will then be described through the life stories of specific beggars. This depiction is based on a unique group of sources composed of material from the commission responsible for examining the state of the struggle against begging (1954). The final section of the article treats the public discourse on begging in the 1950s and 1960s and presents the points of view of the authorities and society regarding those who were excluded.

Begging in the USSR from the 1920s to the 1950s

While begging was a phenomenon that the Bolshevik authorities inherited from the Russian Empire, a "new" form of begging also emerged, one that resulted from two revolutions and two wars—World War I and the Civil War.[25] Due to budgetary restrictions, the question had to be addressed selectively, with efforts directed toward children as part of the fight against child vagrancy.[26] The propaganda categorized begging, along with other social deviances, as a "vestige of the past." Beggars, prostitutes, and criminals were considered "remnants," and even "victims," of the Old Regime, destined to disappear with the construction of a new society. Since there were no laws regulating the administrative practices in this area, local authorities often took action at their own risk.[27] At the same time, despite the legislative chaos, attempts were made to define these deviant practices and develop ways of fighting against social "anomalies" from the mid-1920s. Discussions around the notion of "social parasitism"[28] led to a distinction between two categories: "socially dangerous" (*sotsial'no opasnye*) and "socially excluded" (*sotsial'no vrednye*) elements.[29] For beggars in the second category, it was considered

25. The most detailed research on begging in the 1920s is the work of the criminologist and legal scholar Alexei Gertsenzon. The 1926 census provided the documentary basis for his research: Alexei A. Gertsenzon, "Nishchenstvo i bor'ba s nim v usloviiakh perekhodnogo perioda," in *Nishchenstvo i besprizornost'*, ed. Evgenii Konstantinovich Krasnushkin (Moscow: Izd-vo Moszdravotdela, 1929), 6-56. On begging in the USSR in the 1920s, see also: Gennadii A. Bordiugov, "Sotsial'nyi parazitizm ili sotsial'nye anomalii? Iz istorii bor'by s alkogolizmom, nishchenstvom, prostitutsiei, brodiazhnichestvom v 20-30-e gody," *Istoriia SSSR* 1 (1989): 60-73; Olga A. Likhodei, *Professional'noe nishchenstvo i brodiazhnichestvo kak social'nyi fenomen rossiiskogo obshchestva* (Saint Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburgskii univertsitet vodnykh kommunikatsii, 2004), 83-100.
26. On children begging in the context of the fight against child vagrancy, see Alan M. Ball, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 44-60; Aleksandr Yu. Rozhkov, "Bor'ba s besprizornost'iu v pervoe sovetskoe desiatiletie," *Voprosy istorii* 1 (2000): 134-39; and Nataliia V. Riabinina, *Detskaia besprizornost' i prestupnost' v 1920-e gg.* (Yaroslavl: Iaroslavskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1999).
27. Bordiugov, "Sotsial'nyi parazitizm," 64.
28. On the history and meaning of the term "social parasitism" and Soviet practices for combatting this phenomenon, see Fitzpatrick, "Social Parasites."
29. Bordiugov, "Sotsial'nyi parazitizm," 64-65.

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unnecessary to employ repressive measures but useful to provide them with social assistance.

At the turn of the 1920s-1930s, prophylactic measures were preferred, illustrating a differentiated approach to social deviance. The fight against social anomalies (begging, prostitution, child vagrancy, alcoholism) was part of a state program integrated into the first five-year plan.[30] In 1929, the ruling by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) and the Council of People's Commissars (SNK)—"On measures for eradicating begging and adult vagrants"—provided a legislative basis to combat begging. This text recommended "choosing reeducation through work for people found begging and vagrant (adults) as the most appropriate measure for eradicating [these activities]."[31] A network of special "educational" establishments, combining a system of sponsorship and forced placement was created to house people found engaging in these practices. Placement agencies, workshops, agricultural colonies, and secure establishments for forced internment were all already present under the imperial regime and in other countries.[32] Most of this was in continuity with policies in place under the Tsar—although without admitting it. One exception concerned private charity, which was now an unacceptable form of assistance to the socially vulnerable. Social "assistance" (*prizrenie*) was relabeled social "welfare" (*obespechenie*) and transferred to the state. The paternalistic principle behind the organization of this help to the needy thus took root and was reflected in the slogan vaunting that "the state takes care of" its citizens. The categorization of individuals according to class was, in reality, founded on political loyalty and social utility. It had the effect of depriving entire social groups of social welfare, beginning with the "former people" (*byvshie*), representatives of the formerly privileged classes and groups in imperial Russia.[33]

Famine has always been one of the main reasons for the spread of begging in Russia, and this was the case after the revolution, with massive famines in 1921-1922 and in 1932-1933. Traditionally, people fled regions heavily affected by famine, and begging became a survival strategy. But during the famine of 1932-1933, the harsh administrative restrictions imposed on populations fleeing the affected regions brought this type of migration to an end.[34] The control and repression of begging were subsequently reinforced, and the system of internal passports, introduced in 1933, became one of the major instruments in this policy.[35] The secret paragraph of the "Instructions concerning the delivery of passports" specified

30. Ibid., 65.

31. *Sobranie uzakonenii RSFSR*, 6, 1929, art. 659.

32. For further details, see Bordiugov, "Sotsial'nyi parazitizm," 66-67.

33. On the discriminatory practices concerning the "former people," see Tatiana M. Smirnova, *"Byvshie liudi" Sovetskoi Rossii. Strategii vyzhivaniia i puti integratsii. 1917-1936 gody* (Moscow: "Mir istorii," 2003).

34. Viktor V. Kondrashin, *Golod 1932-1933 godov: Tragediia rossiiskoj derevni* (Moscow: Rosspèn, 2008), 208-12.

35. On the passport system in the USSR, see Moine, "Système des passeports"; Shearer, "Elements Near and Alien"; and Popov, "Pasportnaia."

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the restrictions that applied to people "who do not have a socially useful occupation."[36] From that moment on and throughout the Soviet period, begging was considered an "attempt to avoid socially useful work." However, this notion was not defined by any specific legislation.[37] The distinctions between the various categories that "avoid socially useful work" (or, in another version, "do not conduct socially useful work") were extremely blurry and fluctuated according to the political situation.[38]

The introduction of the internal passport clearly marked a shift toward a policy of repression against the most impoverished populations. With the adoption of the new Constitution in 1936, it was declared that the foundations of Socialist society had been established, and, as a result, begging and unemployment had been eradicated.[39] The very existence of beggars, vagabonds, and criminals became a blot on this pretty picture: the new society had been built, but the "vestiges of the past" were far from gone. In 1935, a "preventive purge" was organized, the first large-scale measure targeting the "socially excluded," including criminals, professional beggars, vagabonds, and children over twelve who had committed crimes. They could be arrested and sentenced to five years in a correctional work camp by the troikas of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). By the end of 1935, a total of 266,000 "socially excluded" people had been arrested, and 65,000 were forcibly displaced from Moscow and Leningrad alone.[40] For all intents and purposes, the "socially excluded" elements had thus become equivalent to "socially dangerous" elements. A new wave of repression descended on these outsiders during the Great Terror of 1937-1938. According to order no. 00447 of the NKVD, criminals, vagabonds, beggars, and nomadic gypsies were classified as "undesirables" (*neblagonadezhnye*).[41] Along with social groups who were already

36. Popov, "Pasportnaia," 4.

37. The sphere of "socially useful" work can be defined using a textual analysis of later legislative texts. Thus, in the proposed law on the fight against "people living a parasitic lifestyle," the types of activities considered "socially useful" were evoked in this form: "Soviet citizens ... work in factories, on production lines, in mines, in transport, on building sites, kolkhozes, sovkhozes, machine and tractor stations, in offices, or have a socially useful job in their families," *Sovetskaia Rossiia* 197, August 21, 1957.

38. In the 1920s, representatives of formerly privileged groups—nobles, former civil servants, businessmen, and members of the clergy—were classed in this category along with social deviants. In 1948, the kolkhozniks were accused of avoiding socially useful work (i.e., not working productively on collective farms). At the end of the 1950s, entrepreneurs, independent artists, and young people also found themselves in this category.

39. Iosif V. Stalin, "O proekte novoi konstitutsii SSSR. Doklad na Chrezvychainom 8 s''ezde Sovetov, November 25, 1936," in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: "Pisatel" Editions, 1997), 14:126-27.

40. David R. Shearer, "Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s," *Cahiers du monde russe* 42, no. 2/3/4 (2001): 523-24; Paul M. Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 202-9.

41. According to Shearer, however, the official rhetoric was considerably altered in 1937, compared with 1935, along with the repressive practices directed at deviant groups.

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repressed, these individuals were henceforth considered an anti-Soviet reserve, a "fifth column": "antisocial" behavior was relabeled "anti-Soviet," and beggars became "enemies of the people."[42] They were not the main target of the 1937-1938 repressions, however, which, within the "socially marginal" category, were primarily aimed at criminals.[43] After the war, the authorities largely returned to the passport system to combat begging.

While there are no precise statistics on the extent of begging after the war,[44] beggars had undeniably become a striking aspect of everyday life. At the end of the war, they literally invaded the towns and could be seen holding out their hands everywhere: in stations, markets, and streets, on trams and trains, not to mention around traditional places such as churches and cemeteries. The famine of 1946-1947 further amplified this phenomenon. Amongst the beggars, former soldiers (*frontoviki*) were particularly noticeable, wearing their military uniforms and medals, missing limbs, sitting in carts, and wearing homemade prosthetics. At a time when they were still celebrated as heroes and victors by the public and in propaganda, their presence among the beggars was seen as nonsensical, leading to doubt and questions. An inhabitant of Yaroslavl shared the following suspicions:

> *We all know that there are many cripples, mutilated people, and orphans in our country after the Great Patriotic War. But we also know that the Soviet state, the Party, and the government take care of them. For a year, or a year and a half now, many people begging for alms have appeared in the streets of Yaroslavl. Most of the beggars are crippled—limping, legless, armless, blind, deaf-mute, etc. There are many old men and women, school-age and pre-school-age children. How can all this be compatible with the way of life of a Soviet country seeking to establish Communism, with the policy of our Party and our government?*[45]

These changes not only included the enlargement of the contingent of anti-social elements defined as targets for repression, but also the fact that the repression campaign of 1937-1938 took place in the countryside, whereas the displacement of anti-social elements had essentially affected cities in 1935. Shearer, "Social Disorder," 529-32.

42. Ibid.

43. Under decree no. 00447, a total of 767,397 people were arrested, 127,967 of which were criminals. Repression of the criminal world reached a peak in 1937: 111,993 people who had committed crimes under the Penal Code were sentenced; 36,063 of them were sentenced to be shot, and 75,930 were sent to prison camps. See Marc Junge and Rolf Binner, *Kak terror stal* "*Bol'shim. Sekretnyi prikaz nº 00447 i tekhnologiia ego ispolneniia*" (Moscow: Airo-XX, 2003), 217; Rolf Binner et al., "Vertikal' bol'shogo terrora," *Novaia gazeta*, August 5, 2007.

44. This gap can be explained by the fact that the police arrested the beggars, whereas social services were responsible for their fate (either placing them in homes for the disabled or finding them work, allocating them retirement pensions or returning them to the care of their families). Thus social services reduced the number of people requiring social assistance. Police statistics can be considered the most reliable.

45. Glukhov to Malenkov on begging in the town of Yaroslavl, 22 August 1952, State Archive of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, hereafter "GARF"), Moscow, collection 5446 (*fond*, hereafter "f."), inventory 86a (*opis'*, hereafter "op."), file 8052 (*delo*, hereafter "d."), pages 2-3 (*list*, hereafter "l.").

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Even though the police occasionally took action to expel beggars from city streets as part of the supervision of the passport regime, this measure was not very efficient, since the beggars simply returned. The first postwar laws against begging came in July 1951, with an ordinance from the USSR's Council of Ministers and an ukase.[46] Beggars were divided into two categories: those who were fit for work and those who were not. The unfit (the disabled, the elderly, and children) either received social benefits or were dependent on loved ones. Those who were "fit for work" and found begging were henceforth punishable by a five-year exile "in remote regions of the Soviet Union."[47] Both the content of these laws and their implementation attest to the fact that their initiators had a false idea of begging in the country. They viewed it as a phenomenon that violated public order rather than a social problem. Beginning in the summer of 1951, the campaign against begging was thus essentially repressive. Those who remember this period recall that war-veteran beggars disappeared from the streets within a few days. Classified in the "unfit for work" category, they could not be condemned to exile in "remote regions" but were sent to "centers for the crippled" in isolated locations, which was tantamount to banishment. In 1952, 156,817 people were arrested on the basis of the law of that same year; 182,342 were arrested in 1953.[48] Most of them were disabled (70%)—the majority wounded in the war—10% were described as "professional beggars," and the remaining 20% were described as experiencing "temporary difficulties."

46. This was the July 19, 1951 ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the USSR ("Concerning the measures to eradicate begging in Moscow and the region around Moscow and to reinforce the battle against antisocial and parasitic elements,") and the July 23, 1951 ukase of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR, ("Concerning measures for combatting anti-social and parasitic elements"). The text of the ukase is published in Zubkova and Zhukova, *Na "kraiu" sovetskogo obshchestva*, 61.
47. According to Veniamin Zima, the 1951 ukase had a political purpose and was less directed to the town beggars and vagabonds than to those who "did not agree with the regime" (Zima, *Golod v SSSR*, 217). This interpretation does not really hold if we compare it with the practices implemented by the ukase. Indeed, the "nets" set up by the police caught not only beggars and vagrants, but also "occasional" people who did not have documents proving registration at their place of residence (*propiska*) or who were temporarily unemployed. However, such events, which were widespread, were the result of public servants' habitual arbitrariness as well as the legislation's imperfect nature, lacking a clear definition of begging and vagrancy. During the verifications conducted by the State's Attorney (*Prokuratura*), the excessively broad interpretation and application of the ukase and the ruling of 1951 was considered a direct offense. The object of the 1951 legislative acts concerning begging and vagrancy clearly set them apart from the new republican ukases which appeared between 1957 and 1961 and were directed against "parasites." These were, in fact, used to fight against dissenting elements.
48. These figures reflect not so much the true scale of begging as the dynamic of the campaign against it. Many beggars were arrested several times by the militia, some as many as thirty times. All of these arrests were included in the statistics. Moreover, the campaign does not adequately reflect the geography of begging, given that it was essentially practiced in the major towns (Moscow, Leningrad, and the capitals of the federal republics).

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Yet attempts to eradicate begging through "administrative" measures failed, and the authorities decided on a different approach. Following the ruling of the secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) on September 21, 1953, a commission to combat begging, presided by Aleksandr Puzanov, President of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR, was set up to study the phenomenon in the different regions of Russia, as well as in Ukraine and Belarus. This study established that the spread of begging could primarily be explained by poverty among the population, although the vague traditional formulation "insufficient material ease"[49] was employed. This was a completely new explanation within the political discourse on begging. Prior to that, it had only been presented under the rubric of "parasitism," as a lifestyle with no other social or economic motivation than the extortion of money and the prospect of "easy profit." At the same time, a system to record and document beggars was put in place. On August 1, 1954, the police counted 20,500 beggars across the country, with nearly 13,000 of them in the RSFSR alone.[50] Subsequently, the very act of begging was recorded instead of the number of arrests. However, the statistics remain incomplete, since they counted beggars according to their place of residence, leaving those without one unregistered.

These statistics, and the very existence of beggars in the country ten years after the end of the war, left government official Lazar Kaganovich perplexed. Upon his request, the Minister for State Control was asked to "examine the state of the measures taken by the relevant organizations to eradicate and prevent begging"[51] in October 1954. The study essentially covered social welfare institutions, but ministry inspectors also received information from local authorities (Executive Committees), the police, and, most importantly, from those directly concerned through interviews with beggars themselves. This study produced a wealth of documentation, providing the most substantial coverage of begging in the USSR in the mid-1950s.[52]

49. Note by the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on begging in the Republic, August 30, 1954, GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3282, l. 166.

50. By way of comparison, in the Russian Empire in 1877, 293,445 people were registered as practicing beggars. According to the 1926 census, there were 133,118 in the RSFSR, and 162,815 if Ukraine and Belarus are taken into account. See: Avgust A. Levenstim, "Professional'noe nishchenstvo. Ego prichiny i formy (1900 g.)," in *Nishchenstvo. Retrospektiva problemy*, ed. B. P. Milovidov (Saint Petersburg: Kriga, 2004), 18-92, particularly 19; Alexei A. Gertsenzon "Nishchenstvo i bor'ba s nim v usloviiakh perekhodnogo perioda," in *Antologia sotsial'noi raboty*, ed. M. Firsov (Moscow: Svarog), 2: 68-89, here 69.

51. Decree by the Minister for State Control of the USSR no. 3519, "On the organization and verification of the state of the combat against begging and parasitic anti-social elements," September 28, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2a, d. 92, ll. 1-6.

52. Most of the documentation produced during the 1954 verification is composed of reports and notes on the state of begging in different towns and regions of the USSR, as well as preparatory documents: notes on arrests for begging, questionnaires submitted to beggars, reports on individuals practicing begging, notes on the state of "disabled homes" and the attribution of retirement or employment pensions, etc. In addition to the summary data on towns, regions, and republics, the reports contain concrete examples of cases involving begging. While generally brief, the information on these individual cases

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Social Types and Beggars' "Life Stories"

The 1954 study confirmed the information provided by the police: the war and the famine of 1946-1947 had provoked the return of professional begging. Groups of beggars "on tour"[53] traveled around the country. In agricultural regions, such as the Kaluga, it was possible to find villages consisting almost entirely of beggars.[54] It became a way of life, their primary activity, and source of income.[55] The study also showed that begging was the sole means of survival for a large segment of socially vulnerable populations. Among the main factors that led individuals to beg for alms were low or inexistent revenues (received as a meager retirement pension or small salary) old age, sickness or poor health (including alcoholism), lack of relatives, a large family, the inability to find work, solitude, and a criminal background. Lower social status played an important role in this. Former detainees who had been amnestied, for example, found it particularly difficult to return to "normal" life.[56] In other words, once excluded from society, an individual's possibilities for social reintegration were extremely limited. Exclusion even continued to exert its effects after the status of pariah had been lifted, such as after liberation or the granting of amnesty.[57]

Several social types emerge in the documents: the elderly and the disabled (of all ages), children, single mothers, released detainees, former servants, elderly kolkhozniks, and alcoholics. The disabled and the elderly formed the largest group. According to the police, of the 20,509 people registered as beggars, 8,895 (43.2%) were disabled and 7,558 (39%) were elderly.[58]

are complemented by summary data and conclusions by experts, providing a glimpse of the motivations behind begging and what caused it to spread, in addition to sketching the various social types of beggars and their backgrounds.

53. Beggars who are "on tour" are individuals who travel from town to town to beg.

54. Memo on the measures for combatting begging in the Kaluga region, October 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2, d. 1396, ll. 2-6.

55. The 1954 study showed that begging was a profitable activity. According to the beggars, their "takings" could be between 20 and 100 rubles per day depending on the region, the season, and the day of the week. Their profits were better in larger towns, in the summer, and on Sundays. By way of comparison, the minimum retirement pension for city-dwellers until 1956 was 74 rubles per month. Beggars were often arrested with large sums of money, sometimes several thousand rubles. The study also found that a number of people who were systematic beggars had a house, land, livestock, etc.

56. On the problems and difficulties that former detainees faced adapting to "normal" life and social integration, see: Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Marc Élie, "Les politiques à l'égard des libérés du Goulag. Amnistiés et réhabilités dans la région de Novosibirsk, 1953-1960," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, no. 1/2 (2006), 327-47; and Mirjam Sprau, "Leben nach dem GULAG. Petitionen ehemaliger Häftlinge als Quelle," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 60, no. 1 (2012): 93-110.

57. For example, see the report on the results of the investigation into the fight against begging in RSFSR, October 27, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2a, d. 93, ll. 168-87.

58. Statistical data from the Minister of the Interior of the USSR on the number of beggars on August 1, 1954, GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 255, l. 261.

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> *The police in the town of Minsk know the beggar named Malakhov well. He is 65 years old and was born in the Kaluga region, but he has no place of residence (he is "homeless") and neither family nor papers. Between 1951 and 1953, he was arrested eighteen times, and he promised to stop begging thirteen times. Twelve times he was sent before the local department of social welfare and the Minister of the Republic to be placed in a retirement home, but he refused.*
>
> *Malakhov presents himself in the following manner: "At the moment I have no retirement pension because I have no papers. ... I have been brought from the Police Headquarters to the Minister for Social Welfare several times, but they haven't managed to place me anywhere so I go back to begging. I would like to be placed in a retirement home because I can no longer manage to live like this; I sleep here and there—in boiler rooms, on landings in buildings. I have no one who is close to me."*[59]

The lack of a retirement pension and the impossibility of obtaining a room in a retirement home explain why begging constituted Malakhov's only means of survival. From this perspective, his story is rather typical. According to the 1954 statistics, only one-third of beggars received a retirement pension or social assistance. Amongst disabled beggars, only half received a pension, and only 17% had been disabled since birth. Among the elderly, 21% of those who received a pension still begged because the payments did not provide sufficient social welfare.[60] The payment was below subsistence level.[61] Until 1956, retirement pensions were 14 rubles and 90 kopeks for rural populations and 64 rubles and 90 kopeks for city dwellers (by comparison, the pension was raised to 300 rubles in 1956).

59. Report on the results of the verification of the state of the fight against begging in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus, October 27, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2a, d. 92, ll. 144-45.

60. Statistical data from the Minister of the Interior of the USSR on the number of beggars on August 1, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2a, d. 92, l. 261.

61. It is worth noting that the "minimum level of subsistence" (also called the "guaranteed minimum") was a not very precise notion in the Soviet Union, above all because of a lack of reliable data on the revenues and consumption of the population. It was only in the 1960s that experts calculated a minimum subsistence level, but they did not publish this information. The minimum for subsistence was officially set for the first time in 1992. In the 1960s, the Soviet experts evaluated the "minimum for material comfort," a revenue below which the population was unable to reproduce normally. According to Nataliya Rimashevskaya's data, this level was equal to 40 rubles per month in 1965 and 50 rubles in 1975. Depending on the value of the ruble before the 1961 reform when it was divided by ten, this level was somewhere between 400 and 500 rubles. For more details on the evaluation of poverty and the minimum subsistence level in the USSR, see: Alastair McAuley, *Economic Welfare in the Soviet Union: Poverty, Living Standards, and Inequality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979); Pavel Stiller, *Sozialpolitik in der UdSSR 1950-1980: Eine Analyse der quantitativen und qualitativen Zusammenhänge* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1983); Marina Mozhina et al., eds., *Bednost': al'ternativnye podkhody k opredeleniiu i izmereniiu* (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998); Braithwaite, "The Old and New Poor,"; Nataliya Rimashevskaya, "Poverty Trends in Russia: A Russian Perspective," in Klugman, *Poverty in Russia*, 119-32; and Rimashevskaya, "Bednost' i marginalizatsiia naseleniia," *SOTSIS* 4 (2004): 33-43.

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Until the reform in 1956, the Soviet retirement system prevented entire segments of the population from receiving a pension or greatly reduced their chances of ever receiving one. To be eligible, it was necessary to have worked for more than one year, which automatically excluded those who were disabled from birth. This latter group was eligible for a pension for their deceased parents, for example, but not because of their illness or handicap. Following the war, the young disabled *frontoviki* faced discrimination because, having been on the front, they had neither studied nor acquired "experience." The kolkhozniks were also excluded from the system.[62] Begging after the war was therefore the direct result of the way the retirement system worked and its exclusion of the most vulnerable social groups. The results of the 1954 study confirmed this. The problem was openly raised in the summary documents: "The directors of the Ministry of Social Welfare of the RSFSR consider that the inadequacy of retirement pensions is one of the principal causes of begging, especially in rural areas."[63]

The homes for the disabled and retirees presented another weak point of the Soviet social welfare system. Beggars asked for but did not obtain places in them; others managed to be placed and then categorically refused to live in these establishments. Retirement homes, like the homes for the disabled, did not accept people with family, unregistered individuals, kolkhozniks, or people from other towns or regions. Moreover, the elderly and the disabled without papers were also refused, although they composed the majority of beggars. In Rostov-on-Don, one ninety-year-old man was arrested for begging on several occasions. Little about him is known other than the following: "He has no retirement pension, no family, and no fixed place of residence. He began begging in 1933 and has since traveled throughout the country from town to town. He has asked to be placed in a retirement home but has not been accepted anywhere."[64]

Beggars refused to go to these "homes for the disabled" or ran away from them because such establishments were veritable ghettos for the poor, marked by meager rations, overcrowding (between twenty and fifty people per room), lack of clothing and shoes, few doctors and little medicine, and isolation from the outside

62. According to the 1959 census, the kolkhoznik peasants represented one-third (31.4%) of the population of the USSR: see *Narodnoe hoziaistvo SSSR v 1982 godu. Statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1983), 7. Until 1964, the solidarity funds between kolkhozniks (previously social solidarity funds, created in 1921) were the only kind of social assistance for this category of the population. These funds were based on the tradition of solidarity that existed in peasant communities in prerevolutionary Russia. However, because of the very low revenues of the kolkhozniks, these funds were purely abstract in most kolkhozes. State retirement pensions for kolkhozniks were not introduced until 1964. For more details, see Tatiana M. Dimoni, "Sotsial'noe obespechenie kolkhoznikov Evropeiskogo Severa Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XX veka," in *Severnaia derevnia v XX veke: aktual'nye problemy istorii*, 3rd ed. (Vologda: Legiia, 2002), 115-34.

63. Report on the results of the verification of the state of the fight against begging in the RSFSR, October 27, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2a, d. 92, ll. 186-87.

64. Report on the results of the verification of the state of the fight against begging in Rostov-on-Don, October 15, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2, d. 1401, l. 41.

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world.[65] In some cases, the residents still resorted to begging. In Leningrad, for example, seventeen residents of the Karl Marx Home for the Disabled were arrested for this reason.[66] The beggars sometimes asked to be placed in a home in autumn and then left the following spring. Many did not wish to cease begging, since it provided them with a "calm and independent" lifestyle.[67]

Those who were disabled from birth formed one of the most vulnerable groups in the Soviet Union.[68] Their possibilities for social mobility were minimal, and a large number of them were condemned to social exclusion.

> *Georgii Khvatov was crippled as a child; he lost both his legs in an accident. As a child, he already practiced begging and theft. He then married and fathered two children. But his wife left him. At age twenty-three, Khvatov had an established reputation as an "alcoholic and a hooligan." He was employed in an artel for cripples, but he was fired for stealing and chronic alcoholism. Without a pension and without work, he made his living by begging. The employees of the regional department of social welfare met with him and his family (his father and brother) and reached the following conclusion: "He is an incorrigible hooligan. He has no independent means, he does not want to work on the pretext that nowhere will have him... we consider it necessary to isolate him from his family because he has a negative influence not only on his brother who is in 7th [grade] but on his whole entourage."*[69]

Orphans were also at risk. Although child begging—a growing occurrence during the war and immediately after it—decreased at the end of the 1940s, there were still numerous orphans among the beggars.[70] Their stories were similar: after the orphanage they were enrolled in technical school (*remeslennoe uchilishche*), where they learned a manual profession they did not choose and which only offered difficult working conditions. Unsurprisingly, children frequently ran away from these technical schools. At the end of their schooling, sixteen-year-old adolescents were quick to abandon their jobs. Without work or family help, they turned to begging and vagrancy, which for some led to crime.

> *[Orlova] was born in 1929 in Bashkiria and lost her parents the same year for a reason that is not mentioned in the documents. As an orphan, she was placed in an orphanage.*

65. On the condition of "homes for wounded veterans" see Fieseler, "'La protection sociale totale.'"
66. Report on the results of the study on the state of the fight against begging in Leningrad, October 1, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2a, d. 93, l. 142.
67. Report on the results of the study on the state of the fight against begging in Moscow, October 27, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2a, d. 93, l. 158.
68. Those disabled from birth only obtained the right to a pension in 1967.
69. Memo on those who practiced begging and lived in the Moskvoretsky neighborhood of Moscow, October 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2, d. 1399, ll. 46-47.
70. On the situation of orphaned children in the postwar USSR, see Zezina, "Sotsial'naia zashchita"; Zezina, "Bez sem'i: siroty poslevoennoi pory," *Rodina* 9 (2001): 82-87; Boeckh, *Stalinismus in der Ukraine*, 451-74; Fürst, "Between Salvation and Liquidation"; Green, "'There Will Not Be Orphans Among Us'"; Kibelka, *Wolfskinder*.

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At fourteen she was sent to a technical school and after six months of training she became a furnace stoker, not a particularly feminine profession. She worked for three years as a stoker on different ships, but she was condemned to ten years in prison in 1947 for stealing twenty liters of alcohol. In 1953, Orlova was released on amnesty and sent to reside permanently in the Udmurt Autonomous Republic, where she was given a passport. But she didn't manage to find work, no one wanted to employ an ex-prisoner. From that moment on, she began her life as a vagabond; she was arrested in several towns in southern Russia for begging and vagrancy. This activity became a way of life because of her situation.[71]

Another major group of beggars were mothers, often single; for the few who were married, begging was often their family's sole activity. Different reasons pushed them "onto the street." Documents mention criminal records and the loss of employment, lodgings, or identification papers.

Mikhailova, aged 42, began her life as a vagabond when she was ten. She never had her own house or a stable job. In 1945 she was sentenced to five years in prison. Once freed, she went to her sister's house in Leningrad. She told the police: "I was counting on my sister's help, but she sent me away. Without a job or any other means, I was obliged to follow the path of the beggar."
In 1953 Mikhailova, who was unmarried, gave birth to a child and from then on begged with him. "I beg with a small child, I'm always crying, that's why no one has hurt me." Together, mother and child earned 15-20 rubles per day. When asked if she would like to work, Mikhailova replied, "I would like to work and I'm willing to do any job. I need to be employed and, because I'm in good health, I will work like all the citizens of the USSR."[72]

Elderly kolkhozniks with no family could also fall into poverty. They had far fewer opportunities to benefit from social assistance than city dwellers and people who worked for the state. They were dependent on their friends and family, a pension (for the death of a family member who had served in the army), and a subsidy from the kolkhoz or the kolkhoznik retirement house. However, the kolkhozes did not have the means to distribute assistance or finance this kind of home through their solidarity funds. In the RSFSR, where the population was still primarily rural, only seventy kolkhoznik homes for the elderly existed at the beginning of 1954, six times less than the 410 state retirement homes.[73] Poor and elderly kolkhozniks went into town to beg for charity.

71. Note on the report on the results of the study on the state of the fight against poverty in Rostov-on-Don, October 26, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2a, d. 98, l. 132.
72. Extract from the interrogation of persons arrested for begging in the October Railway sector by the Leningrad militia, October 22, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2, f. 1397, l. 46.
73. Note on the results of the study on the state of the fight against begging in the RSFSR October 27, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2, d. 1397, ll. 178 and 180.

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> *In Leningrad, M.E. Ignatieva, a 65-year-old woman, was arrested for begging. She had come from the Pskov region, where she had been working until recently in the "Little Red Plough" kolkhoz. Her husband was a partisan during the war; he was killed in 1942. In the village, this woman had a son, who was crippled during the war, and a daughter. Her youngest son had gone to serve in the army.*
> *She told the police, "The reason I beg is that I am alone, I am too old to work in the kolkhoz and my children refuse to help me. They took my youngest son, who I lived with, to the army, and I have nothing more to live on." This woman's attempts to receive a pension or subsidies failed. She said, "I went to the local department of social assistance about the pension, but they replied that 'your son is in the army and your husband is dead, you were their responsibility. You have to go to the president of your kolkhoz and ask for his help.' I went to the president but he didn't answer me."*[74]

According to police statistics, 12.4% of people found begging in 1954 were disabled during the Great Patriotic War.[75] The number of disabled beggars decreased significantly during the first years following the war, since some had been forced into specialized homes, and others had died of their wounds or illness. Although beggars (*nishchie*) rarely told their stories in writing, I have been able to find one such document: a letter written by a man who lived as a beggar for eight years. Yuri Nikolaichuk, the author, is also unique in that he fought throughout the entire war and was twice awarded the "order of glory" before becoming disabled. In the letter, he describes the course of his life from hero-*frontovik* to vagabond and beggar.

> *In January 1945, I was severely wounded. At the end of that year, I left the hospital and went to the faculty of mechanics and mathematics at the University of Moscow in order to resume my studies, which were interrupted because of the war (I had successfully completed my first year before the war). My health was unstable (I had a bad memory, caused by an injury and an operation under full anesthetic). It was a failure: in the winter session of 1947 I failed two exams. Disabled, I was allowed a deferment. I fell gravely ill with consumption. I was hospitalized. My failed studies and family quarrels weighed so heavily on me that I was certainly not my usual self. I was expelled from university. Without a ration card, I was starving. During the summer, I decided to go to my uncle's place in Derbent. I fell ill on the way. I came to in a clinic in the station at Saratov. My coat pocket was empty, no notebook, no passport, no tickets or attestations. I spent a month in the hospital; I eventually arrived in Derbent, but I couldn't find my uncle. The police told me, "You aren't known here, return to where you are registered, where you were born, etc." I had no shoes; I was starving and in rags. I spent the winter where it*

74. Extract from the interrogation of people arrested for begging in the October Railway sector by the Leningrad militia, October 22, 1954, GARF, f. 8300, op. 2, d. 1397, ll. 49-50.
75. Statistical data from the Minister of the Interior of the USSR pertaining to the number of people found begging on August 1, 1954: see Zubkova and Zhukova, *Na "kraiu" sovetskogo obshchestva*, 261.

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was warmest, in Central Asia. That's how I started my life of vagrancy, without a home or occupation. I became a "professional beggar," as noted in the police reports.[76]

Nikolaichuk eventually succeeded in obtaining new papers, taking up his studies, and finding work, and his family was reunited once again. Many hundreds of disabled war veterans, however, were abandoned and eventually became alcoholics who bothered passersby. Thus did war heroes become "parasites with outstretched palms."

Begging in Public Discourse

On September 23, 1954, the *Literary Gazette* (*Literaturnaia gazeta*) published an elegant text entitled "Speculation on Solicitude," signed by "Captain of the Guard I. Damaskin" in the "Letters to the Editor" section.[77] This was the first time in thirty years that the press had published a text on begging (*nishchenstvo*). This text is noteworthy in two respects: its martial style, and its publication in a national, if secondary, magazine. This suggests the intention to spark public debate on this question as well as an attempt to guide the debate in a specific direction, without showing the hand of the Party, hence its epistolary form. "It is time to understand who is putting their hand out for alms," Damaskin declares. His main subjects are war veterans and the disabled, since they provoked the most public outcry when they were found begging: compassionate reactions, questions, and indignation over the authorities' inertia. Given that Damaskin was himself a veteran, readers were inclined to fully trust his opinions on disabled veterans, which resounded as an unambiguous condemnation: "There are no 'true' disabled veterans or heroes among the beggars. They are either 'false' cripples disguised as former soldiers, people who have experienced war without fighting it, or often just alcoholics who 'prey on Soviet compassion regarding cripples or the memory of the dead.'"[78]

The "real" disabled *frontoviki* were those who "could not imagine living without working," those who "knew how to find their place in society."[79] Damaskin cited the aviator Aleksei Maresiev, the combine-harvester driver Prokofii Nektov, the president of the Byelorussian kolkhoz Kirill Orlovskii, and the teacher Vasilii Donskov, all of whom were severely handicapped. Maresiev and Nektov were lauded as prime examples of disabled veterans who had successfully made their own way. The expression "find their place in society" (and its variant "to be in society") was a key element of the discourse on disability and begging (*nishchenstvo*). It reflected and reinforced existing practices on a symbolic level: efforts were essentially directed toward including disabled people in the workforce rather than

76. Nikolaichuk to Khrushchev, Voroshilov and Zhukov, 8 June 1956, GARF, f. 7523, op. 45, d. 53, ll. 208-9.
77. Damaskin, "Spekuliatsiia na chutkosti".
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.

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providing them with social assistance.[80] This policy was presented by Damaskin as reflecting "the great concern of the Soviet state" regarding those disabled by war and work: "Professional training, provision of wheelchairs, special homes for disabled veterans, preferential access for their children to educational institutions. It is impossible to mention everything. If he wants to work, the cripple will always find a job that he likes suited to his abilities."[81] Nothing in this text mentioned the deplorable state of the homes for the disabled, the lack of space, or the difficulty disabled people faced when it came to finding a job or obtaining a wheelchair. Perhaps the author of the letter did not have this information, especially since it did not fit with the notion of the "state's concern" for the disabled.

Yet Damskin appeared surprisingly—even suspiciously—well informed for a simple observer, telling his readers: "I obtained information about some of them." The information provided by the "Captain of the Guard," which includes beggars' names and surnames, age, and former profession, was for internal use only—not accessible to the public but available only to the police or social services. The publication of such information in the press proves that the text was manipulated. Amongst Damaskin's gallery of anti-heroes, he cited an officer and an ex-commandant who both, in spite of a comfortable pension, turned to begging to pay for drink. He also cited professional beggars (*nishchie*) who arrived in Moscow to "practice their art"; one of them managed to earn enough money to build a house. For them, Damaskin affirmed, begging as a practice (*poproshainichestvo*) had become an "effortless source of revenue"; they even described themselves as "good-for-nothings" (*tuneiadtsy*), an expression that was to become a loaded term in public discourse on begging. The letter contains the main clichés that were to structure the discourse on this phenomenon as well as its conceptual framework: begging is an attribute of capitalist society,[82] it is not socially justified,[83] and it is a remnant of the past, the result of a parasitic existence.[84] It was said that the presence of beggars and the mitigated success in the fight against this phenomenon could only be the result of police negligence ("the police have a degree of responsibility") and the credulity of citizens who had been victimized by drunks and conmen, hence his response to the final question of "what to do?":

> *We have to defeat these good-for-nothings, whatever masks they wear. When beggars cease to be surrounded by compassion, when they see they are despised by the Soviets, and when they understand that only honest work will restore the respect they have lost, then we will*

80. On the policy concerning those wounded in the war after 1945, see Fieseler, "Arme Sieger"; Zubkova and Zhukova, *Na "kraiu" sovetskogo obshchestva*, 363-405.
81. Damaskin, "Spekuliatsiia na chutkosti".
82. "This is a necessity for thousands of people in capitalist countries where unemployment and hunger reign, and deprivation pushes them into the streets, where no one will help them, 'so that they die of exhaustion.'" Ibid.
83. "In our country, where unemployment and exploitation do not exist, there is no justification for begging (*nishchenstvo*)." Ibid.
84. "This is the most destructive residue of the past, which enables lazy people, drunkards, and adventurers to lead an easy life." Ibid.

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> *no longer hear those befuddled voices in the streets saying, "Give to the* frontovik, *little brother, so he might have a drink."*[85]

The fight against begging thus had to become a total war on parasitism. The social causes of begging were not analyzed; they were simply not considered worthy of attention. The publication of Damaskin's letter in the *Literary Gazette* coincided with the end of the Puzanov Commission's work on the struggle against begging. A few days later, the Minister for State Control of the USSR began investigating this very topic. For the most part, the conclusions of the two commissions coincide. The major cause of the spread of begging had little to do with laziness, the search for easy money, or even human vice: the root of this evil lay in poverty itself, the lack of housing for the disabled and the poor state of those homes that did exist, difficulty finding work, and other reasons unrelated to "parasitism."[86] The development of social work extending the system of sponsorship, adoption, benefits, and the placement of employees was recommended. "Administrative" measures were to be aimed exclusively at professional beggars.[87] Although these results were not made public, they clearly influenced the legislative work on vagabonds and beggars, social policy—pension reform, support for the poor (*maloimushchie*), the disabled and single mothers—and the public debate relating to social problems. From this moment on, the question of begging (*nishchenstvo*) was no longer considered in and of itself (as it was in the text published in the *Literary Gazette*), but, instead, was discussed alongside other subjects related to disability, pension reform, and social parasitism.

The fate of the disabled also remained outside public discourse for a long time. In the policy implemented by the state to shape memories of the war, no place was allocated for trauma. Disability as a social, physical, and psychological problem was neither discussed nor visually represented. Postwar posters only portrayed the *frontoviki* as healthy men who were happy to be alive, none of whom were disabled. The figure of Meresiev the aviator personified the population of two million disabled veterans. However, this literary avatar who was the hero of Boris Polevoi's *Story of a Real Man* (published in 1946) only represented those who managed to be reintegrated into society. Before the war, questions relating to handicapped persons were discussed in a dedicated journal called *Social Welfare* (*Sotsial'noe obespechenie*). But publication stopped in 1941, and despite calls for its resumption by the Minister for Social Welfare of the RSFSR, Aleksei Sukhov, in 1944, the journal only reappeared in 1956, when problems relating to social assistance had become a priority under pension reform. The situation of the disabled was one of the main themes it covered.[88]

85. Ibid.
86. Note from the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR concerning the state of begging in the Republic, August 30, 1954, GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3282, l. 166.
87. Ibid., pp. 166-75.
88. In the first edition (1956), the objectives of the new version of the journal were stated as follows: "The journal *Sotsial'noe obespechenie* aims to shed light on general questions

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Between 1954 and 1956, several books were published on the subject of disabled *frontoviki*.[89] Together with *Social Welfare* and its "Improvised Tales" section, full of short life stories, they spread the issue of disability within public discourse. It was once more possible to speak of these people "returning to society" (or "finding their place in life"). The novel dedicated to the combine-harvester driver Nektov was thus entitled *In Society Again*. For the disabled, the return to civilian life was necessarily based on the paternalistic idea of the "concern of the state, the fatherland and the Party." The real life of people considered worthy of esteem was transformed into a collective narrative "of the war-cripples whom the fatherland had helped to recover their health and find their place in society."[90] Viktor Nekrasov's novel *In Their Home Town* (1956), however, does not follow this general pattern. Instead of putting the characters on a pedestal, he shows their difficulties fitting back in and their daily struggles. The book is free of ideological clichés and avoids falling back on notions like "the return to society" or "the concern of the state." The excluded were also present in public discourse, mostly in reference to disabled people who ended up begging, as opposed to those who worked and fully belonged to the Soviet social body.

> *A blind man thus convinced his traveling companions in a local train taking them to the dacha not to bestow their charity on an invalid who had just entered their car, "I too am blind but I do not ask for charity. I work, I make my own living. Is it that rare for men who have lost their sight to continue working? Look, at the combine, there is Trifonov, Barbashkin, Menshik, Andreev, they too used to go around trains and bazaars begging. And then they went to work, and they don't complain, they are very content with their lives."*[91]

One case of begging (*poproshainichestvo*) and speculation was brought before the courts. The defendant, who had only one leg, begged for indulgence by demonstrating his handicap. The judge responded to this gesture with his own: in place of his hands and his feet he was wearing prosthetics.

> *The defendant was defeated; he did not dare look at the room. He felt that the judge had nailed him to the pillory of shame. Indeed, it was stronger than a condemnation: in front of so many people, to look this man in the eyes, a man who, in defense of the fatherland, had lost his hands and his feet and yet not his honor as a soldier and a citizen, and had found in himself the strength to remain in society.*[92]

concerning pensions, workplace medicine, professional training, integration through work and in the daily lives of the disabled."

89. Iakov Zarakhovich, *Orlenok* (Riga: Latgosizdat, 1954); Stepan Kuzmenko, *Snova v stroiu* (Chkalov: Zhblatnoe izd-vo, 1954; 2nd ed. Moscow: Pravda, 1955); and Viktor Nekrasov, *V rodnom gorode* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1956).

90. N. Kuz'min, "Na blago cheloveka," *Sotsial'noe obespechenie* 2 (1956): 7.

91. L. Karabishcher, "Zolotye ruki," *Sotsial'noe obespechenie* 5-6 (1956): 51-52.

92. N. Sokolovskaia, "Nastoiashchii chelovek," *Sotsial'noe obespechenie* 11 (1956): 41-43.

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The *Literary Gazette* also returned to the theme of disability. In April 1955, it published a short note in the form of a response to a book by Reserve Colonel V. Vasiliev,[93] who suggested continuing the discussion Captain Damaskin had begun a few months earlier. The text was again in epistolary form. The author draws attention to the book by Iakov Zarakhovich entitled *The Eaglet* (*Orlenok*). The heroine of this book, Olga Mosina, whose real family name was Musina, was a sanitary instructor in the Latvian infantry and became severely handicapped. After the war she found not only a job, but also happiness through marriage and parenthood. Although her story was exceptional, reviews of the book presented it as an example of reintegration. "Return to Life" was the title of one review in the journal *Social Welfare*, accurately reflecting the official discourse on disability.

> *The author of the review presented the book as a tale of* "humanity in the Soviet regime," *in which a human being, even without hands or feet, can* find a place in life *if he is with the people in his thoughts, soul, and heart... The book shows the highest concern for those who have courageously defended the Socialist fatherland. ... In our Soviet country,* each human is useful and precious. *Well-equipped homes and institutions for the disabled are a form of state assistance. Thanks to them, yesterday's* frontoviki *may* return to a healthy working life. ... Surrounded by concerned medical personnel ... *[Olga Musina] forced herself to fight for life,* to be in society again. ... *Olga's friends also returned to society. ... Others have* found their place in society. *The state demonstrates a* permanent concern *for their health and their return to work.*[94]

The discourse on disability made use of moral motives (personal choice, human faults and weaknesses) to explain why people "fall out of society," such as the disabled *frontoviki* found begging. The authors of these reviews related the heroine's opinion of such beggars by way of an argument:

> *The entire contents of the book by Zarakhovich, Vasiliev affirms, responds to the question of cripples who beg for kopeks ... this response is written in Olga's own words: "We must convince these people that begging [*nishchenstvo*] is shameful, tell them that* in our country not one parasite may sit with his hand out *while honest men are working."*[95]

Begging was thus viewed as an avatar of social parasitism, an anomaly with neither social nor economic roots. The existence of begging seriously compromised the social policy of the Soviet state; it was not considered a consequence of policy, but instead as a phenomenon that existed in spite of it, as the *refusal* of "assistance provided by the state" or the uselessness of social assistance. The reduction of begging to human vice and the characterization of beggars as "parasites" was principally related to

93. V. Vasiliev, "Kniga o muzhestvennykh liudiakh," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, April 12, 1955, p. 2.
94. A. Novikov, "Vozvrashchenie k zhizni," *Sotsial'noe obespechenie* 3 (1956): 58-60 (author's emphasis).
95. Ibid., 60.

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preparations to introduce pension reform in 1956. This reform raised the minimal retirement payment level, as well as that of pensions for the disabled or for families who had lost their father; a system of complementary pensions increased the number of those eligible to receive them.[96] The reform thus represented real progress when it came to improving the material situation of the poorest elements of society, and confirmed the "concern of the state" for ordinary citizens. Moreover, the Soviet press presented the pension bill in these terms.[97] This message found an echo in society. The relationship between citizens and beggars was altered, shifting from compassion to condemnation. In the context of social policy reform, begging was no longer perceived as a necessary activity, and beggars themselves were no longer seen as "victims," instead becoming "good-for-nothings" or "parasites." This was exactly how Shibanov, an inhabitant of Sverdlovsk, entitled his letter to *Pravda*.

> *The new legislation on state-sponsored pensions has improved the lives of those who receive them. But there are still elements that exploit the compassion of workers and feed off of them. Go past any bakery, any food store, on trains or tramways, in the street or near a church and you will see a parasite with his hand out for alms. These are the beggars, blind musicians, singers, fortune tellers, cripples. People in good health who could work and be useful to society.*[98]

This letter shows how the basic message of the official discourse on begging permeated popular representations and common sense: the beggar became a "parasite with his hand out." The "speculation on solicitude" was central to the activity of begging; the beggar-parasite fed off of workers. Out of discussions on social parasitism—and begging as one of its consequences—emerged the notion of "social utility." Beggars were described as "useless," excess people, and excess weight in society. These descriptions attest to the chosen means for combatting begging: removal from the "healthy" part of society, displacement far from towns, re-housing in homes for the disabled, and forced treatment for alcoholics. I.M. Iarysh of Kirghizia wrote to Nikita Khrushchev: "Imagine a cripple without legs sitting on the sidewalk. In the bazaar, they sit on the ground and beg. Frankly, they annoy everyone. ... I think they should be forcibly rounded up. ... What is the use of such theatrics?"[99] V. Shibanov of Sverdlovsk recalled: "In 1935-1936 the police services waged a merciless war on non-working elements, and there wasn't this kind of beggar in the town. I suppose that the Soviet government must pass a law and wage this merciless war on these good-for-nothings. All the non-workers should

96. On the pension reform of 1956, see: Bernice Q. Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968); Grigorii P. Degtiarev, *Pensionnye reformy v Rossii* (Moscow: Izd-vo "Akademiia," 2003); and Galina M. Ivanova, *Na poroge "gosudarstva vseobshchego blagosostoianiia." Sotsial'naia politika v SSSR (seredina 1950-h-nachalo 1970-h godov)* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii Ran, 2011).
97. For example, it was the title of the editorial published in the journal *Trud* on May 9, 1956.
98. Shibanov to *Pravda*, 11 October 1956, GARF, f. 7523, op. 45, d. 201, l. 26.
99. Iarysh to Khrushchev, 1956, GARF, f. 7523, op. 45, d. 55, ll. 151-52.

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be expelled from the towns because they are taking up living space needed for workers."[100]

Such unpublished letters' recommended solution for begging was not limited to isolating beggars. Iarysh divided beggars into two categories. The first were those who were not poor but lived from begging (*poproshainichestvo*) or were alcoholics who should be "rounded up by force" in the towns. The second were the deserving elderly forced into begging out of necessity ("these vagabond beings, destitute but still alive, who are a sorry sight"[101]). Thinking in terms of the "common good," the author reached the following conclusion:

> *I do not know how they worked for the good of the fatherland but I doubt I'm wrong in thinking that they have in any case done their share for the common good, at least by having children, and these old people are in need. Our state would not be poorer if a small retirement pension was accorded to these elderly, and it would be of real assistance to them through old age.*[102]

The reason that this kind of letter could not be published is clear. The mere presence of the poor in a state that declared itself not poor cast a shadow on its social policy and the whole image of the country in general. When Reserve Colonel Vasiliev expressed his thoughts in the pages of the *Literary Gazette* on the subject of the *frontoviki*, devoting himself to the cause of begging and the traffic of these "parasites with their hands out," it was unlikely that he expected a reaction from those he accused. Nikolaichuk, a disabled *frontovik* who had turned to vagrancy and begging for alms, nevertheless replied to Vasiliev and those who shared his opinion.

> *So, it is all the invalids' fault, they are parasites, of course they are dishonest, they don't work. Vasiliev on the other hand is of course an "honest man," and he, of course, works. If this is how we deal with this question then we can be sure that beggars have existed, still exist, and will continue to exist.*[103]

For Nikolaichuk, concern for the fate of the disabled—a number of whom had been condemned to a miserable existence—constituted a question for the state, which is why his letter was addressed to the highest authorities, Khrushchev, Kliment Voroshilov and Georgii Zhukov. In this letter, he asked: "Why are there still many invalids who beg? Why have many of those disabled in the Patriotic War become vagabonds, beggars, and alcoholics, starving, throwing themselves under trains, being run over by cars, or dying of cold? Why do they cast themselves out

100. Shibanov to *Pravda*, 11 October 1956, GARF, f. 7523, op. 45, d. 201, l. 26. The author of the letter recalled the repressive campaign organized in response to NKVD order no. 00192 of May 9, 1935.
101. Iarysh to Khrushchev, 1956, GARF, f. 7523, op. 45, d. 55, l. 151.
102. Ibid.
103. Nikolaichuk to Khrushchev, Voroshilov and Zhukov, 8 June 1956, GARF, f. 7523, op. 45, d. 53, l. 208.

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of life and temporarily turn to a parasitic lifestyle? Why does this 'temporary' situation last so long?"[104] Running against the rhetoric used in propaganda, which lauded the innumerable possibilities for disabled *frontoviki* to "return to society," Nikolaichuk provided his own experiences and observations collected from others:

> *An invalid who finds himself in trouble will very rarely find help returning to normal life. For that he needs superhuman strength, but that is just it: his health is poor. As a result, we speak of his "lack of will." And it is precisely those [social welfare workers], who have the responsibility, more than anyone else, to help the disabled, who not only show indifference to the fate of these human beings, but even mock them.*[105]

Responding to the accusation of parasitism, Nikolaichuk raised the question of "social utility."

> *I was useful to people when I worked each summer at the kolkhoz or in production before the war. I was useful when, in combat, I killed more than one Fascist. And I am also useful now and I will be useful [in the future]. But 80% of invalids who beg today worked more than I and gave more material gains to society than I. How can "Mister" Vasiliev dare to call us "parasites"? How can we still call him "comrade"? Never, it is unthinkable. He may wear a Soviet uniform but, underneath it, he is a tyrant.*[106]

To overcome the poverty faced by disabled *frontoviki*, Nikolaichuk proposed to reform retirement pensions (eliminating the significant differences in the retirement payments between former soldiers) and the creation of a system of work placement adapted to individuals with disabilities. However, the main piece of advice he gave the leaders of the country was the following: "Ask the invalids who beg and you will receive the best responses to this problem."[107] This letter, like others that went unpublished, shows that the popular discourse on begging in the 1950s was more complex and multidimensional than the official discourse. Beggars and other at-risk groups (those with low income) were no longer the subjects of public discourse, but instead one of its objects. The authorities' discourse only partially managed to shape public opinion. The shared representations of the causes of begging rarely contained critical thought and essentially reproduced the clichés transmitted by propaganda. At the same time, indiscriminately putting all beggars in the "good-for-nothings or parasites" category was not self-evident. The life experience and daily practices of the Soviets made them doubt the validity of stigmatizing all beggars. One of the particularities of mass consciousness lay in this dual perception. The presence of needy individuals was not considered a result of state policy or of the lack of a strategy for dealing with poverty because the paternalist myth was also part of everyday life.

104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid., l. 209.

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In August 1960, a new campaign was launched in the Soviet press against the "parasites" under the slogan "he who doesn't work, doesn't eat." On May 4, 1961, the law on the fight against the "good-for-nothings" marked a high point of the campaign.[108] In it, beggars were mentioned along with "parasites," even if the discourse on parasitism had since shifted to other objects, such as private entrepreneurs, the "golden" youth, and independent artists. The rhetoric of misery and begging (*ritorika nishchenstva*), however, was integrated into this new discourse: young people with their lazy lifestyle were described as "poor in spirit," whereas speculators who tried to exchange rare goods with foreign tourists were accused of "begging" (*poproshainichestvo*).

In the 1960s, the problem of begging progressively became less of an issue for two reasons. The introduction of social support programs for the most impoverished categories limited the factors behind begging. New penal legislation seriously restricted the possibility of "professional" begging because the federal republics' Penal Code now included specific articles sanctioning "systematic vagrancy and begging."[109] While begging in the USSR thus ceased to be a social problem tied to poor living conditions, it nonetheless remained an illegal professional activity, a kind of specific occupation.[110] It did not re-emerge as a mass phenomenon in the daily life of Russian society until the beginning of the 1990s.

108. For more details on the development of laws against "parasites," see: Fitzpatrick, "Social Parasites"; Zubkova, "S protianutoi rukoi."

109. The introduction of an article on begging into the new Penal Code in 1960 has a considerable history. Up until then, begging was not considered an act covered by penal law and was subject to administrative measures, such as the violation of the passport regime. In the 1930s, beggars were the object of extra-judicial repression. In 1951, a decree against begging and vagrancy was adopted, which allowed for an extra-judicial procedure to pronounce sentence, via the Special Council of the Ministry for State Security of the USSR. In the context of the political process of "re-establishing legality" in the mid-1950s, the legislative basis was revised. The norms of responsibility for begging were initially discussed as part of the proposed law on "people leading an anti-social lifestyle" (1955-1957). The procedure for the judgment of these people was transferred to the "social tribunal" (*sud obshchestvennosti*): in other words, it was once again excluded from the jurisdiction of the "normal" tribunals. Legal experts were opposed to this way of dealing with begging and vagrancy because it was contradictory to the approach of re-establishing legality. Their principal argument was related to the incompetence of the "social tribunal" because, in reality, the new modalities would have meant the anchorage of the former extra-judicial procedure. The result was that this type of infraction was first reported at the jurisdiction of ordinary tribunals, but then a specific norm appeared in the penal legislation. In compliance with article 209 of the RSFSR Penal Code, systematic vagrancy and begging were punishable by either imprisonment for a maximum period of two years or correctional labor for a period of six months to one year. The notion of "systematic" begging, in fact, only covered professional begging. For more details on the evolution of the legal norms concerning begging, see Zubkova, "S protianutoi rukoi," 454-69.

110. On begging as a specific occupation, see: Hartley Dean and Margaret Melrose, "Easy Pickings or Hard Profession?" in *Begging Questions: Street Level Economic Activity and Social Policy Failure*, ed. Hartley Dean (Bristol: Policy Press, 1999), 83-100, here 84; Marina L. Butovskaia, Ivan Yu. Diakonov, and Marina A. Vanchatova, *Bredushchie sredi*

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The Inertia of Exclusion

Over the course of the twentieth century, begging assumed a new dimension. In the wake of wars and revolutions, the "social question" became a priority for the state and its citizens. In the Soviet Union, the influence of political and ideological factors on the concrete practices against begging was particularly evident. After the revolution, state policy on begging, which oscillated between ideology and pragmatism, developed in several stages. The first stage, which ran from 1917 to the beginning of the 1930s, could—with some reservations—be described as pragmatic. During this period, the prerevolutionary approach, which viewed begging as a serious social problem, remained the same. In Soviet Russia, the sociological and statistical studies of poverty and begging continued to be developed. Special commissions for the fight against begging operated in several major cities. The question was publically discussed in specialist literature and the press.

Official rhetoric considered begging—along with other social deviancies—as a "vestige of the past," destined to disappear with the construction of Socialist society. The idea of "construction" presupposed a concerted fight against these "vestiges." Those who transmitted these values were stigmatized for being "socially excluded elements" or "parasites" who should be "re-educated," either voluntarily or by force. For beggars, forced labor was essentially restricted to workshops or retirement homes. At the same time, programs for social assistance and disease prevention were developed, providing support for the disabled, orphans, and the elderly. The Soviet system of social welfare was nonetheless founded from the very beginning on the principle of exclusion. Entire segments of the population were excluded because of their social origins, political loyalties, or lack of experience. Private philanthropy had been institutionally removed from the sphere of assistance to the disadvantaged, and the entire system was built on the principle of state paternalism. The difficult economic situation during the 1920s and the 1930s, the poor living conditions of the majority of the population, and the state's exclusionary practices increased the poverty levels, rendering them a permanent characteristic of daily life in the Soviet era. Under such conditions, individuals adopted different strategies for survival, and many turned to begging.

The second stage of the policy against begging stretched from the mid-1930s to the beginning of the 1950s. The repressive and administrative practices against members of the social underground were reinforced, and the extent of social assistance was significantly restricted. The policy may best be understood through the principle of isolation. As the last foundations of Socialism were being laid, the reality of begging contradicted official declarations concerning the national eradication of poverty (*nishcheta*). Begging was henceforth considered an avatar of "parasitic" existence, a phenomenon with no social or economic justification in the Soviet

nas. Nishchie v Rossii i stranakh Evropy: istoriia i sovremennost' (Moscow: Nauchnyi mir, 2007), 11; and Farkhad N. Il'iasov and Olga A. Plotnikova, "Nishchie v Moskve letom 1993 goda," *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal* 1 (1994): 150-56, here 150.

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Union, a simple outcome of human vice. This normative discourse transferred beggars from the category of "socially harmful elements" to that of "socially dangerous elements," making them the object of repression; the theme of begging became taboo and disappeared from public discourse. World War II and the famine of 1946-1947 made begging a mass phenomenon, but the political isolation of socially marginal people continued, affecting the "new" beggars: war veterans. The resources provided by public assistance and the possibilities for social adaptation were clearly unable to transcend the policy of exclusion. Beggars found themselves in the general category of those "who lead an anti-social, parasitic life" and were accused of "avoiding socially useful work." In spite of the lack of a strict definition, these notions nonetheless ended up forming the conceptual "framework" of the normative discourse on begging and eventually the public discourse at a time when begging was no longer a taboo.

It is possible to speak of a new stage in the development of state policy regarding begging after the mid-1950s. Compared to the previous period, the social component was more important. The fight against begging was seen in the context of combating poverty and social exclusion, although the words "poverty" and "misery" (*nishcheta*) were not officially employed. This policy, which supported the most vulnerable categories of the population, resulted in the contraction of the "poverty zone" as well as the at-risk group of beggars. For this latter group, begging served less and less a means of survival and persisted simply as a professional activity.

The search for constructive solutions to the problems of poverty (and begging as a reaction to poverty) took into account systemic constraints, not only during this period but throughout Soviet history. The paternalism of the state was one such constraint, which not only substantially decreased the possible solutions but also—no less importantly—formed the mental references and behavioral stereotypes that referred exclusively to the "attention of the state." Ideology was another systemic constraint. Belief in the superiority of Socialism over Capitalism, particularly regarding social benefits and quality of life, prevented an appropriate analysis of reality. These systemic constraints dominated both governmental and social discourse. Social discourse used roughly the same conceptual framework as the normative discourse of the authorities. However, a comparison between the two shows that, despite sharing negative attitudes regarding the phenomenon of begging and beggars as a social category, there were themes that separated them. For ordinary individuals who encountered begging in everyday life, beggars were not an abstract category of "people who live an anti-social lifestyle," but instead the incarnation of a concrete problem that needed to be resolved. Furthermore, "society," more than the "authorities," was favorable to social strategies that could resolve this question and enlarge the zone of citizens' responsibilities.

One point, however, remained outside the discourse of both the authorities and society: the development of means of adaptation and reintegration for those who were excluded. This explains why, despite (probably very sincere) appeals to "return to society" or "return to normal life," the mechanisms that ensured and maintained the processes of integration either did not work or worked poorly. As

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was the case for former detainees, individuals who were excluded from society faced a particularly terrible fate, for the stigma of exclusion determined the course of their whole life. In theory, the strategy of adaptation open to the disabled was limited to professional training and recruitment in businesses designed to accommodate them. While social welfare developed and the network of homes for the disabled increased, spatial isolation—and therefore social isolation—were ongoing features of disabled people's daily lives. Once established, social exclusion affected not only individuals' ability to make decisions, but also their mental health.

Soviet society was based on the principle of exclusion on several levels. When the authorities gave the signal to "exclude" someone, society reacted accordingly, chasing from their midst those "enemies of the people," the "rootless cosmopolitans," the "parasites," and the "good-for-nothings." And although the Soviet Union has disappeared for quite some time now, this mechanism of social exclusion stubbornly persists in contemporary Russia.

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