



September 2010

Everyday Interactions between Policemen and Labor Migrants in Russia: The Results of the Participant Observation in Kazan, the Republic of Tatarstan

(Paper: „Migration: Knowledge Production/ Policymaking“ in Telč (Czech Republic) – 24-26. June 2010)

Abstract:

This paper is based on the materials of the six-monthly (from February to July 2007) participant observation the professional activities of policemen in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, one of the national regions of Russia. It describes both the institutional context of the migration control of the local and patrol police and the everyday practices of such control. The instrumental racism (as a main way of the recognizing migrants in the streets) and the variety of strategies of police officers' work with this group of control are taken into account.

In the context of increasing migrant flow into Russia in the 2000-s, especially in the receiving regions, an increase in migrant-phobic attitudes can be observed. The main organs that regulate and/or control the migrant flow are the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation and its subsidiaries, such as the Federal Migrant Service. The MIA's goals are first and foremost punitive, focusing on prevention of illegal migration as well as deportation. Under these conditions, ethnically different migrants regardless of legal status are vilified, justifying negative feelings towards these groups. Symbolically, this is increased by the addition of the migrant problem into the discourse of the fight against terrorism.

This paper is based on the results of the research project "The police and ethnic minorities: the interaction practices in Kazan' and Saint-Petersburg", which was conducted in 2006-2008 with the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. In this paper we will present the results of the participant observation of the professional life of the lower ranks of the police force through the examples of local police officers and employees of the patrol-guard service. The observation took place from February until July 2007, by three researchers-sociologists from Kazan' in one of Kazan's residential areas. The researchers are grateful to the police forces who made themselves available for this project. Throughout the study, researchers observed local officers sitting with citizens during walk-in hours, and working with them on call during non-walk-in days. Researchers also rode along with the patrol-guard service, mainly during routine street patrols in vehicles. In order to not artificially focus only on the problem of interacting with migrants, the

research's goal was stated as the description of daily life of an ordinary policeman. This broad topic allowed for the collection of more materials, and understanding the place of migrants in the categorical structure of the population by the lower ranks of the police, as well as their work practices with "potential criminals".

Kazan' is the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, and was specifically chosen because of its large Tartar population, as opposed to Moscow, Saint Petersburg, other large cities in Russia, which are majority Russian. But since there is a large percentage of Russians in the region, both ethnic groups represent a large portion of the population. The majority of working migrants in Tatarstan is made up of migrants from Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The researchers expected that in some cases ethnic migrants would mimic Tatars, in order to avoid being stopped by the police.

The observation took place from February until July 2007, after significant changes in the law led simultaneously to a liberalization of the regulations concerning migrants in the Russian Federation and the limitation of opportunities for working migrants.

The registration of foreigners in Russia was changed from a permissive mode to notification mode, which led to the simplification of the registration procedure for migrants. For example, they could now apply directly to the Federal Migration Service for work permits. Employers also began to control migrants more tightly, because the financial responsibility of employers that hired foreigners without such permits increased. These changes were also reflected in the official statistics, which showed a sharp rise (over 700%) in the number of work permits given in Tatarstan in 2007, compared to 2006, but even that reflected only a fifth of foreigners registered in the republic at the time.

At the same time, limitations were imposed on the migrant employment sector. In 2007, non-Russian citizens were practically prohibited from working in retail. This provided the basis for corruption on behalf of the controlling organs, including the police. So, how were the migrants controlled by the police in 2007?

This control is greatly influenced by the so called "check-off system", which during the researchers' observation in Tatarstan was a system of grading members of the police force. In accordance with this system, various departments of the police were given quantitative requirements for solving a certain number of crimes so the number of solved crimes would exceed that of the same period of the previous year. Additionally, during the observation a system of monetary compensation for solving felony cases was put in place. The compensation varied from 500 to 5000 rubles (\$16 to \$160). Patrol-guard police were required to submit paperwork for 1 disorderly conduct case and 2 administrative offenses during a shift. Normative requirements for local police officers are more varied and require not a daily, but a quarterly report on solved crimes. The minimal plan for a local police officer anticipated two solved criminal cases and a number of resolved administrative offenses of various kinds, dependent on current work, goal campaigns of the police force, and joint projects with other departments of the Ministry or external institutions (ecology police, military, etc).

In regular circumstances, neither authority is primarily concerned with finding illegal migrants or finding housing violations among legal migrants. The majority of our informants saw providing for public order as their primary responsibility. However, since migrant control is provided for in the reward point system of the police, specifically for administrative violations, it is a part of daily report system, although not a required part. At the same time, foreign citizens are seen by the police system as an important control group, though perhaps not the most important one. This is reflected in the specific methods of solving the principal violations, such as organizing internal campaigns ("Immigrant", "Passport"). During these campaigns, quantitative requirements for "solving regulation violations of foreign citizens being on the territory of the Russian Federation" increase and become compulsory (as opposed to during regular working periods). During such campaigns, every member of the police and patrol-guard services must register one such violation per day.

How does the police force find working migrants? The main categorization of the population as "local" and "foreign", and the resulting stigmatization of the foreigners, are based in the ethnic phenotype of the foreigners, as well as their general appearance - the way they walk, carry themselves, or dress. For the police, foreign citizens are first and foremost phenotypically different people from other countries - \Uzbeks, Tajiks, Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Turks, Vietnamese, Koreans, and others.

During observation, researchers noticed that attitudes toward ethnically different foreigners are formed from three main sources. These sources vary based on the life experiences and attitudes of each police officer, but they are: 1) the general level of xenophobia in Russian society, 2) "instrumental racism" - an accepted practice among the police of categorizing locals and foreigners, and 3) personal attitudes toward foreigners and professional experience gained from working with them.

In this paper, we will attempt to discover the core of the instrumental racist approach as the basis of the authorities' principle in working with migrants. The term "racism" here is used to describe the tendency to attribute to people certain moral or social qualities based solely on outward differences, viewing their phenotype as representative of a certain ethnic group or race. This approach is called instrumental because policy considers it to be highly effective. In the opinion of those we talked to, selecting citizens according to phenotype allows them to focus their areas of control to those who have the physical characteristics of foreigners, therefore decreasing search time and efforts. It is necessary to mention here that appearance and one's manner of carrying oneself is the main way that police stigmatize not only of working migrants, but all citizens. Thus, the age and gender of a citizen are stigmatizing factors for checking one's papers: during patrol checks, it was noticed that young men are stopped for checks far more often than young women or older men. This logic, based on visual categorization leads to the stigmatization of citizens based on physical features. This is especially true for patrol-guards, who, as opposed to local police officers, do not have close ties with the populace. Therefore, instrumental racism is actually a large part of the commonly accepted practice of how the police see the populace.

It is important to note that such instrumentalism does not assume harsh, aggressive attitudes. Personal attitudes of police officers, especially local officers, towards working migrants are often

positive and compassionate. But at the same time, this instrumental racism can lead to an aggressively intolerant attitude as well. In reality, this approach is not criticized among the police. Police officers can negatively perceive the intention to exert strict control over migrants or latent economic goals of such control (collecting fines, not the removal of illegal migrants), but the strategy of selection itself and the categorization of citizens according to phenotype are not subject to criticism. Instrumental racism is presented as a professional strategic move, at this point automatic for the majority of police officers, and is used by those who aim for strict control of the migrants, as well as those who avoid such control. This practical skill of distinguishing migrants among the crowds is attained along with professional experience. At the same time, our hypothesis that those coming from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, who are phenotypically like the Tatars, can use their appearance to avoid police control, was not supported. Observation and interviews showed that, first of all, the police develop something like an intuitive sense of determining such people. Secondly, even when there are doubts, the police usually prefer to exert control rather than remain neutral.

The informal nature of this approach is taught as the backdrop of work practices. The official departmental discourse on migrants that forms the overall attitude of the police towards migrants is free from ethnic categories. In laws and other open internal documents, working migrants are called "foreign citizens". The police themselves, officially (in reports, protocols, etc), do not use ethnic categories. Informally, the officially non-ethnic category of "foreign citizen" translates and is interpreted by the lower ranks into ethnic and racial terms. This interpretation is not rooted in any document and is seen only in oral communication, often with the use of derogatory slang such as "hachiki", "churki", and so on.

Observing the two services showed the variations among the tasks that were presented to the various departments of the police force in order to control illegal migration. Working with requests and approximate information, the patrol-guard officers have the right to check the papers of citizens suspected of violating migration laws, but the main type of work here is checking pedestrians in city streets. In this case, when a violation is observed, the patrol car officers do not start a case themselves. Their job is to bring the migrant to the police headquarters, where he passes into the hands of interrogation services.

It was discovered that the intensity of the patrol officers' work was dependent, first of all, on their general strategy. During our research we found ourselves with the most varied groups of patrol officers. They can be divided into two "ideal types" based on their working style. The first type we called "idle" or "non-compliant". While following orders (patrolling a route, responding to calls), such officer teams did not aim to work closely with the populace and demonstrated a passive attitude towards work. They did not work too hard, sometimes "not seeing" a violation, checked papers formally, and overall saw work as a leisurely pastime rather than labor. They tended to "not notice" migrants at public transportation stops and streets, and only checked papers in obvious situations, or when it was required (for instance, if they were reprimanded by their boss at a meeting the day before). The other extreme of patrol teams, which was more prevalent during night shifts, is the opposite - to try to find violations. They often exit the car, checking documents and cell phones of suspicious persons. Those teams stopped migrants on average 3 times during 2-3 hours of constant observation.

During special operations and campaigns control becomes harsher. We have indirect information that during those times people who are already citizens of Russia also get taken in by the police. The cause of this stricter control during special operations is a "plan" to find illegal migrants. Because of this, patrol officers use every opportunity to bring the required number of "potential illegals" into the station - on suspicions such as forged documents and similarity of the migrant to wanted persons. Citizen indignation during apprehension is interpreted as resisting arrest or even insulting a police officer on duty.

Local police officers have more opportunities to interact with working migrants during the course of their work. They see migrants when they come to get formal reference letters, which were necessary for registration before January 15, 2007, but are no longer required and should not be asked for during registration. Aside from that, local police precincts work together with the passport and visa control services of the regional FMS (or when requested by FMS), to make sure that a foreign citizen actually resides where he is registered. Here it should be clarified that the following are important: 1) the registration itself (without which a migrant cannot achieve legal status) and 2) the actual residence of the migrant at the place of registration. However, most of those who lease their apartments to foreigners do not want to officially register them. In this case, migrants often register in one apartment but live in another, thereby violating the regulations of their stay in Russia. If such a violation is discovered - and to document the absence of a migrant from his place of registration a local officer need only visit the apartment late at night - a protocol about an administrative violation is written up against the migrant and the Russian citizen who had registered him at the false address, which is followed by fines. Migrants in this case are not removed. Actual foreigners form a group that contributes greatly to the state budget, which is one of the points of criticism from the local officers who, unlike the patrol officers, generally have a positive attitude towards foreigners. This is usually because a local officer's job is connected to the population. He knows its specifics and, due to the nature of the job, is interested in working together with this population. Because local officers do not see migrants as a criminal group, few advocate harsh migrant control.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, local officers were likely to build mutually cooperative relationships with the migrants. These relationships could be seen in formal communications, or in the exchange of services between the working migrant and the local officer. In the majority of these cases, mutually beneficial collaboration is not seen by the officer as corruption and is interpreted as friendly mutual aid or helping the police. So, how can a migrant be useful to the police?

The obvious answer - bribes. During observation, we were not able to discover a case of direct monetary bribe, due to the specifics of our research methods. However we did witness (or saw evidence of) an exchange of services for certain goods, which can formally be interpreted as corruption. For example, I observed an officer asking a migrant to bring him a pack of paper in exchange for faster execution of his documents.

Potentially corrupting situations arise during discovery of migrants in the streets or finding them during apartment rounds. From informal conversations, we know of a case where an officer found a family of illegal migrants and regularly extorted money from them. It is interesting to note

that the migrants solved this problem not by appealing to the officer's superior with an official complaint, but to his colleague, who they knew was sympathetic to the migrants and had experience moving to Russia from a CIS country. The "protector" had to in turn blackmail his colleague, threatening to publicize the extortion. The issue was resolved unofficially. Such an aggressive strategy of extortion is uncharacteristic of those working in the precincts that we had observed. More often, local officers build long-term collaborative relationships with the migrants, who, on their part, search for kind, if not friendly relationships, as well as protection from the local officers.

The goals of such collaboration are varied. For example, migrants could be used as informants, or as a group that helps a local officer effectively control a particular part of his designated area. For instance, in one area there is a dormitory where there are frequent disturbances. Residents of the building, who were migrants from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, aided the local officer. A visit to that dormitory showed that the officer is on good terms with the migrants - they invite him to the table, ask for his advice, and tell him of their plans. In turn, the officer sees his friendship with the migrants as a guarantee of public peace at this location, and hopes that he will be helped.

Sometimes the migrants are used as informants. For example, during the course of the project we learned about a migrant, an ethnic Armenian, who was buying stolen car stereos at one of the city's markets. When buying the merchandise from someone, this buyer wrote down the information of the seller and shared this information with the police.

Other forms of mutually beneficial collaboration include the use of free services or a "rent" that ethnically different migrant businessmen pay. We only have secondhand data about these cases. Free services or goods appear to be not only "free gifts", but a somewhat incalculable financially but yet substantial material payment, interpreted within the confines of a freewill exchange. Often as a reciprocal favor, the local officer can obtain an agreement to register an offense. One officer told us that on the day of observation, in order to report to his superiors on the scheduled protocols regarding violating parking rules (as in to check off that point on his report), he asked a friend to accept a parking violation and pay a fine (100 rubles, about \$3). The friend was a foreigner from Azerbaijan, who was waiting to receive permanent residence in Russia.

Some local officers specialize in creating such mutually beneficial relationships with migrants, and often act as intermediaries between the migrants and other police departments. Often, these officers are migrants themselves. In one case, the officer had an alien ethnicity. They don't do one-time favors, but continuous patronage. The relationships can be considered client-oriented, where the exchange of services isn't valued materially, but assumes agreements and even certain responsibilities between the parties.

For instance, the relationship can manifest in the following ways:

- the officer finds "landlords" for the migrants, who agree to register them in their residence
- the officer helps migrants fill out registration papers and through professional connections help in getting them filed quickly
- the officer instructs migrants on how to behave with the examining authorities
- in case he is detained, a migrant usually contacts his "patron" on the phone, and if the

latter has the possibility of calling in a professional favor, he uses this for his "client".

•

We do however have a few examples of a failed, from the point of view of the migrant, collaboration. In these cases, the ethnic migrant assumes that in exchange for goods or services he will receive some sort of agreement or special treatment. The police officer, in turn, thinks that those goods or services are a form of "rent", or "payoff", forced upon a person with no rights, who has no ability or desire to complain. Our informants noted that the migrants' readiness to exchange services is risky. On one hand, there is a great possibility to establish a mutually beneficial collaboration as a consequence of this exchange with a police officer. On the other hand, this informal practice of exchanging free services for "special treatment" by the police sometimes leads to a misunderstanding, where both parties have different expectations of the arrangement. In this case, the migrant almost always bears the risk for the possible failure.

Thus, it is possible to distinguish two extreme strategies in building daily interaction between the police and migrants:

1) Mutually beneficial cooperation. For example, mutual help, consulting with migrants, even in providing "cover" for them to protect them from control by other police officers. Controlling or punitive measures are used only in extreme cases.

2) Demonstration of the intent to perform punitive and controlling measures in relation to the weakest members of the ethnic minorities, or extortion of money with the use of threats.

Making a big generalization, it is possible to say that for local police the first strategy is more typical, whereas patrol-guard police favor the second. At the same time, instrumental logic, actualizing ethnicity and the racist approach that separates everyone into "law abiding" and "potential criminals", is used in both strategies, only in one of them the "potential criminals with ethnically different appearance" are tolerated, whereas as in the other they are not.

It is important to note that the above-mentioned strategies are general and flexible reference points, rather than stable behavioral models. A single police officer, in various contexts and in relation to different ethnic minorities demonstrates both the tendency for collaboration and the controlling-punitive strategy.

The research has also shown that the mutually beneficial collaboration strategy is realized on three levels:

- "micro-level", where an agreement is reached between a singular migrant and a police officer.
- "meso-level", where small groups of migrants, united based on origin, friendship markers, or place of employment, build connections through an "intermediary" with a number of police officers (possibly from different departments).
- "macro-level", where a mutually beneficial collaboration is discussed and bargained between police superiors and community leaders. In this case, regular police officers who work in the field are unable to influence a migrant, even if he had committed a crime, and, in the best case scenario, are content to receive financial compensation.

About the author:

Ekaterina Khodzhaeva is an Assistant Professor at the Department of the Sociology, Political studies and Management (Kazan State Technical University), Candidate in sociology (Russian equivalent to PhD). At the moment she finishes her German Chancellor Fellowship at the Research Center for East-European Studies (University of Bremen, Germany). Her main scientific interests are sociology of culture, sociology of religion and sociology of everyday life. She has been conducting empirical researches in Tatarstan since 1998.

E-mail: ekatherina.khodzhaeva@gmail.com.