

Marginalized for a lifetime? The everyday experiences of gulag survivors in post-Soviet Madagan.

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After Stalin's death there were, broadly speaking, two types of migrants working in Russia's inhospitable, resource rich, north easterly regions. The first group were those lured to the region, to replace Gulag labor, by promises of adventure and material benefits, they were young, well educated and enthusiastic to build socialism in these 'new' spaces. The second group, whose post-Soviet experiences this chapter concentrates upon, are Gulag survivors denied a return to their homeland upon release from incarceration. Through their labor Magadan Oblast, the site for this research, had become Russia's 'gold store' by the collapse of the Gulag system (see Slavin, 1972). Accepted discourses in the region portray the transition between the use of such labor and willing migrants as clear cut (see, for example, Pilyasov, 1996). However, survivor interviewees confirmed that many were refused permission to leave the region, facilitated through the denial of internal passports and the failure to provide the money needed to return home. Stigmatized by their experiences they were only able to access the most menial jobs, the poorest housing and were not granted the northern benefits afforded to willing migrants. Therefore, they formed a marginalized sector of Soviet society in a region receiving high levels of state subsidies to maintain living standards. Willing migrants received higher wages, paid bi-annual vacations, larger apartments and increased pension rights in return for their service in the north, many talking about this period as a golden time in their lives.

The collapse of the Soviet Union left the Russian government unable to afford the vast subsidies needed to maintain its northern regions. The methods used in its construction had rendered the north's economies highly inefficient and dependent on

its mineral extraction industries. Thus, upon the unleashing of market forces, economic collapse was rapid, as was the inevitable social marginalization of the majority of northern inhabitants. The role of this chapter is to examine how Gulag survivors have reconstructed their lives since this collapse, through their own experiences and via the attempts of state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to alleviate the region's social problems. While the lives of Gulag survivors are an extreme example of the social marginalization experienced throughout the post-Soviet space their responses, and their study, have resonance across the whole of such societies. This is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, in western academic literature there is considerable argument as to whether survival strategies exist, the work of Clark (1999 and 2002) and Rose (1998 and 2000),¹ for example, states that the marginalized adopt a series of ad hoc measures rather than considered responses to austerity. This is problematic as such studies are offered prominence in international organisations assisting in the development of social policy in the post-socialist region. Others, such as Burawoy (1996, 1998 and 2001), Pallot and Moran (2000), Busse (2001) and Round (2003), argue that the lack of widespread starvation, and as Russia's demographic crisis is specific to certain social groups, suggests that new ways of 'coping' must be in operation. Therefore the discussion of small scale, localized, case studies which explore how people have restructured their lives forms a body of work clearly demonstrating the wide variety of mechanisms employed by these groups. The second issue is methodological. Those who deny the existence of survival strategies tend to employ household surveys as their key research tool. In response researchers, such as Burawoy (1998 and 2001) and Kandyoti (1999), have demonstrated how these methods are extremely inflexible when exploring the complexity of everyday life in countries undergoing fundamental social and economic

change. This chapter, drawing on such work, demonstrates how such tools have led to a general misconception about life in Russia's far north east amongst those charged with assisting its marginalized.

Social (re)stratification in Magadan Oblast.

The liberalization of the Russian economy revealed the true cost of living in the north. With true transportation costs now factored into every import, food prices, as detailed in table one, rose rapidly.

Table one. Changes in food prices in Magadan Oblast 1992-1993 (compared to Russian average. Roubles per kilogram/liter)

	December 1992		December 1993	
	Rus. avg	Magadan	Rus. avg	Magadan
Meat	195	355	2239	6790
Fish	130	114	1089	1929
Butter	413	453	2913	5023
Cheese	415	628	2757	7169
Eggs	87	224	827	1597
Tea	1137	5800	4865	11517
Bread	43	28	466	499
Flour	46	64	296	328
Potatoes	35	98	241	856
Vodka	500	1811	4278	11742
Beer	63	75	600	1208

Adapted from: MagGoskomstat (1994:47) and Goskomstat (2000:564).

The dismantling of the command economy saw, in the north, non mineral extraction enterprises closed or slashing production, rapid rises in unemployment, and inflation wiping out savings, rendering many trapped in the region as air travel, the only realistic way out of the region, became prohibitively expensive for the majority.

Incomes could not keep pace with price increases and real wages fell by more than 50 per cent in 1992 and by a further 25 per cent in 1993 (Goskomstat, 2000:32-3). These factors combined to ensure that food consumption dropped rapidly, falling by over 30

per cent between 1991 and 1993 (Pozdniakov and Kurnyshev, 1995:221). The collapse of the economy saw, by 1999, official unemployment rates rise to over 20 per cent of the economically active population, with those in formal employment, as a share of the total population falling from 52 per cent in 1990 to 39 per cent in 1999. Those in employment saw further reductions in real wages, by 1999 45 per cent received a wage lower than the state set subsistence minimum level of 2322 roubles. The situation for the region's senior citizens is even more precarious with average pensions, in 1999, only 48 per cent of the subsistence minimum set for those in retirement (759.8 roubles per month against 1582) (MagGoskomstat, 2000: 106-111).²

It is no surprise that the above noted figures translate into a great human cost. Living in Russia's far north has always been an unhealthy proposition, as Navasardov (1994) notes the north's low yearly average temperatures, high wind speeds, sharp falls in atmospheric pressure and extended periods of extreme cold causes and extenuates respiratory, blood circulation and metabolism problems. The region's rapid marginalization has only exacerbated these problems, for example, in 1999 the Russian average for diagnosed illness per 1000 people was 441 (Goskomstat, 2000:219), while for Magadan the figure is to 782.5 (MagGoskomstat, 2000:33). Kokorev (1997), discusses how the far north east endures the country's highest alcohol consumption rates, while in Magadan Oblast a very high figure of five per cent of the adult population are registered as alcoholics.³

While pensions in the far north include a 'compensation' component for living in such extreme conditions, at an average of 218 roubles a month it is not even enough to buy a piece of fruit per day.⁴ This has led to this sector of society withdrawing from the formal food market, as Anna Maskal' noted,⁵

We [senior citizens] do not go into shops to buy food as it is far too depressing to see what is in them when we know that we will never be able to afford it. To be honest I cannot remember the last time I went into a shop. I only ever go to the kiosk to buy bread and, when I can afford it, oil.

However, even within this extremely marginalized sector of society the lives of Gulag survivors are visibly more difficult. Their apartments are the emptiest of all the senior citizen interviewees met during the course of the research, with what little they possess close to breakdown or collapse. Most revealed that they live in a state of permanent hunger, unable to purchase enough food, and all suffer from ill health, tracing this back to the time spent in the camps. Despite almost half a century passing since their release, interviewees still feel that other members of the community despise them and they remain extremely fearful of the government. They try to live as anonymous a life as possible, interacting little with government structures. One interviewee discussing the impact of the Soviet Union's collapse had upon her life explained,

Times were hard for us during the Soviet period but since then, I have been unable to cope. We receive a lower pension than everyone else and we don't receive any benefits. Everyone hates us still and I know that they [the government] would be angry with me if I go and ask for assistance. I have had to sell everything I own to try to survive and now I have nothing.

By definition this group are not conferred labor, or war, veteran status, so receive lower pensions and have fewer entitlements for assistance on utility payments. To compensate for this the federal government provides financial assistance, to be disbursed by regional government. None of the Gulag survivor interviewees received this additional payment, confirmed by Lyudmila Rozdena, leader of Magadan's Memorial NGO, an organization which tries to assist this group.⁶ Elena Karpenko, Director of Magadan Oblast's Social Service Department, claimed that this group did

receive these benefits,⁷ while a senior international aid agency worker, based in Moscow, noted that such payments are often ‘misaid’ when transferred between federal and regional administrations.⁸ Elena Karpenko suggests that the best way that this group could be helped is to simply to ‘send them back’ to their families, which, considering the conditions under which they were sent to the region seems, at best, unfeasible. Given their extreme financial marginalization the question must be asked as to how this groups survives the everyday?

Thus this chapter will now turn to examine how Gulag survivors survive this extreme marginalization through an exploration of their survival strategies, it will then consider how state and non-state organizations attempt to assist in their everyday life.

Survival strategies amongst Gulag survivors.

Amongst the senior citizens who discussed their survival strategies, including Gulag survivors, two main approaches emerged, the domestic production of food and childcare, allowing other family members to undertake shift work away from the region’s capital, this chapter concentrates on the former. Domestic production in Magadan is culturally specific to the post-Soviet period. As many people holidayed outside of the region, every other year, and with the state ensuring that fresh produce was readily available, there was not the time or the need to produce food for domestic consumption. The collapse in real wages and pensions meant that many people were abruptly denied access to the formal food economy. Many responded by ‘marching’ to a nearby hill and claiming a plot of land on what has become known as ‘dacha hill’. Although temperatures often reach minus forty five during the winter months there is a ten to twelve week ‘summer’ period during which food can be grown. This period is characterized by constant wet weather with temperatures reaching about fifteen

degrees. With its soil extremely unsuitable for the growing of food, and a lack of fertilizers and tools, only potatoes and cabbages, of a very small size, can be grown. The start of the growing season, interviewees recounted, sees great activity on the hill with seeds planted in the shortest time possible. The food is then guarded during the growing period and then, after harvest, is stored in apartments in the hope that there will be enough to last the long winter months. What little money that is left from the monthly pension, after utility bills have been paid and medicines brought, is usually spent on flour, bread and oil.

While this process is extremely interesting, and as an action repeated year on year a demonstrable strategy, it does not fully reveal mechanics of survival in the region. Rather than simply asking dacha users to fill in a questionnaire to quantify the economic benefits of domestic production repeat open-ended interviews were used to reveal that the plot of land was much more than just a site for growing food. With the region devoid of cultural facilities the dacha is also a place to escape from the city and to enjoy the brief respite from the entrapment caused by the extreme temperatures. During the Soviet period the enterprise was the main foci for the development of social relations, providing holiday facilities, cultural entertainment and health care, all of which facilitated the development of strong social bonds between workers (Ashwin, 1999). The post-collapse restructured enterprises were no longer able to fulfil these functions and many of their workers were plunged into unemployment or reached retirement age. Interviewees discussed how the collapse of the Soviet Union shattered their social networks, partly because of the depopulation of the region as many who could afford to leave did so.⁹ Feelings of isolation from the rest of the country increased with the political upheavals in Moscow having little positive impact in the region. Magadan came to be discussed in terms of an 'island' cut off from the

Materik (mainland), both figuratively as the region lost importance to the center and literally as the only way out of the region, by air, became prohibitively expensive for those who remained.¹⁰ Thus ‘dacha hill’ became culturally important both as an escape from the harsh realities of life in the city and as a site for developing new social networks.

This chapter argues that it is the social networks that were developed on dacha hill are of equal importance to the actual produce grown there in the construction and maintenance of survival strategies. They are valuable during the growing period as many interviewees told how they spent time on each others land helping with the planting of food important as the fact that subsistence agriculture in Magadan is a post-Soviet phenomenon exacerbates the difficulties facing those utilizing the land. In other regions of Russia, dacha production was often facilitated, during the Soviet era, by the grower’s enterprise with the firm often providing, officially or unofficially, tools, seeds, fertilizers and knowledge, which did not happen in Magadan. To overcome these problems interviewees discussed how they jointly purchased the necessary inputs and shared their use, furthermore, as Olga Usanova remarked,

What normally happens is that we spend a few days working together on one person’s land and then we move to the next plot. This means that we can all use the tools and it starts the growing process quicker.

But does this not mean that you lose valuable time on your land?

Yes but only a few days and if we all work together then we can get a lot more done than if we work alone. Besides, it is more enjoyable to be working with your friends.

As few plots on dacha hill have living quarters the produce is vulnerable to theft and interviewees discussed this as a major problem. To try and counter this members of

the networks developed on the hill take turns to stay there in an attempt to counter this threat, while others take it in turns to take food and provide companionship to the 'guard'. The harvest season sees a similar pooling of resources to ensure that the produce is collected before its destruction by frost.

It is when winter arrives that these social networks become a key tool for everyday survival. Virtually all interviewees discussed how they became virtual prisoners in their homes upon the arrival of winter as the extremely low temperatures and high winds make it extremely dangerous to venture outside. Thus the telephone becomes a key survival tool. Within the networks members telephone each other on a daily basis to make sure that their friends are not in need of assistance. Interviewees discussed how if one member had lost their food, perhaps stolen from their flat or hallway, the others would try and redistribute their food to ensure the survival of the one in need. It is easy to paint an overly positive view of this domestic production and the networks that result from it but almost all interviewees, especially the Gulag survivors, talked about their feelings of depression and loneliness. Therefore their network, and the availability of the free local telephone calls, provides highly valuable emotional and psychological support. Not one interviewee belonged to a family, which had not been touched by tragic events, such as the death of a younger family member or alcoholism, so the availability of a sympathetic friend, sharing the same experiences, is of vital importance.

The above experiences are visible within both the willing migrant and Gulag survivor sectors of Magadan's society but arguably the social bonds between the latter group are much stronger and are of greater significance to their daily lives. As discussed above they feel, even fifty years after their release, ostracized from other sectors of

society, with interviewees discussing how their networks tended to comprise of only other survivors. This is partly the result of fear of other people but also because they only wish to discuss their experiences with those who have similarly suffered, erecting barriers between willing and non-willing migrants. Interviewing within this group allowed the observation that the bonds between members are much stronger than in other sectors of society. Survivors commonly live together, and every interview was attended by more than one person, often people would arrive during the course of the interview to ‘check up’ on the interviewee. The telephone would constantly ring during meetings as group members contact each other. It is hard to portray the severity of the living conditions many survivors endure. Their flats were noticeably in worse condition than other groups, devoid of non-essential items, many of them lacking adequate heating.¹¹ All of the interviewees talked at length about how difficult it is to maintain their survival. As noted above they all stated that they receive lower pensions than other senior citizens because of their time in the camps and that the compensation provided from the federal government does not reach them. A major problem is access to medicine and medical care. All of the interviewees suffer from ill health, but as a result of their incarceration the Gulag survivors all endure severe diabetes. In theory they should have access to free health care and medicine but in practice this does not occur. As pharmacists often do not receive payment from the state for the free medicine they dispense, they are unwilling to provide this service.¹² Thus a large percentage of pensions goes towards purchasing such essential products.

Another key difference between willing migrants and Gulag survivors is in how they have (re)constructed their post-Soviet identities, another of the blocks upon which their survival strategies are developed. Willing migrants often base their post-Soviet

identity around their pride in their efforts they expended in the construction of the region and their subsequent belief in the 'north' (for further details see Round, 2003). They often describe themselves as 'patriots of the north' drawing on the propaganda used in the post-Stalin development of the region.¹³ They now draw great strength from the belief that their survival ensures the continued existence of the region they helped to build. Gulag survivors, obviously, do not share this same sense of pride, the region a site of fear, marginalization and potentially further reprisal. Many survivor interviewees base their post-Soviet identity around their place of birth. The majority of those interviewed were arrested by Nazi forces in Ukraine, placed in concentration camps in Poland and then upon their release exiled to the Russian far north as 'enemies' of the Soviet Union for working for the Nazi regime. Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union some of the Gulag survivors managed to return to Ukraine to take up their citizenship, they returned to Magadan however, because they had no family or friends in their place of birth and they knew they had access to housing and a plot of land in the region. Most crucially however, as will be discussed further below, they knew they could survive in the region, aided by their social networks. Settling in a place they had not lived previously would entail a completely new start, something they knew they might not be able to manage. For example, in Magadan their plot of land is within walking distance, a stranger to a new town might struggle to find affordable land, which is not a two-hour journey away. Despite their return they still feel connected to their 'homeland', producing their passport or photographs during interviews, with this construction of identity placing them very firmly apart from the north's 'patriots'. This sense of not 'belonging' gives strength to their social networks as they see their continued existence as a victory in the face of perceived

government indifference. Although this might seem pyrrhic to those constructing policy in the west it is a key force for this group in coping with the everyday.

As noted above, translating these strategies into words can make them seem almost romantic in their nature. However, it cannot be overstated how difficult, inhospitable and disheartening everyday life is for this group. As they move into their final life stages the above strategies become increasingly difficult to employ, as ill health begins to make domestic production less feasible as a long-term option. All of the interviewees' fear that a time will come when the state places them in the region's home for senior citizens – perceived as a virtual death sentence. Therefore as their strategies become increasingly problematic the role of the state and NGOs comes increasingly under the spotlight. The disparate nature of the assistance these groups provide is discussed in the following sections.

Institutional responses to social marginalization in the far north east: The regional government.¹⁴

Economic dislocation arrived quickly in the Russian far north east and with the central government unable to maintain Soviet level subsidies the Yeltsin installed regional government could only preside over the collapse of Magadan's enterprises.¹⁵ The message from central government was clear. The north was overpopulated and was to be turned into a shift work center, with the non-essential population to be encouraged to migrate. During the Soviet period social provision was of only minor concern to the regional administration as enterprises provided for most of the population's needs, unemployment was non-existent and the population was young, well educated, and retired to the *Materik*.¹⁶ Thus the regional government had far fewer senior citizens to support than the majority of Soviet regions. Therefore,

against a backdrop of declining tax revenues, as the majority of enterprises collapsed, rapid rises in unemployment, plummeting real wages and the migration of many key workers Magadan's regional government was forced to construct its social support networks almost from scratch.

From this base, and given the level of marginalization in the region, it is perhaps understandable that the regional administration was unable to develop social safety networks able to reach all of the marginalized? Furthermore, the region suffers from crippling political inertia, caused by the local oligarchy branching into every sector of Magadan's political, business and media spheres, endemic corruption and from the reluctance of the federal government to 'bail out' the region, all combining to make the development of an effective social sector almost impossible.¹⁷ The federal government is not pressed into intervening in the region's social problems, as Magadan's society appears very stable, with little public protest over its social problems, and year on year its enterprises produce the required amount of gold. Conversely, during the course of this research, Primorskii Krai's heating crisis, in late 2000, received close Federal attention as people took to the streets in protest. Such actions received national press attention, turning the situation into a political embarrassment for the federal government, culminating in the removal of Governor Nazderenko. At the same time, though admittedly on a smaller scale, Magadan Oblast was experiencing exactly the same problems as Primorskii. Energy supplies are constantly interrupted, and interviews with senior citizens often took place in flats devoid of heat while temperatures outside reached -40°C .¹⁸ With no public protests the situation received scant national press attention and therefore the Federal government was not pressurized into political intervention.

Elena Karpenko, Head of Magadan Oblast Administration's Social Service Department, admitted that as the government can only guarantee help to families with an income of less than 500 roubles a month, senior citizens cannot receive extra financial support, as this figure is below the minimum pension level of 670 roubles a month. Official government data suggests that 2200 people in the region receive an income below this figure, less than 0.9 per cent of the total population of Magadan Oblast, revealing the lack of available government support for its population (MagGoskomstat, 2000a:21). She also suggested that other benefits are available, such as clothing, firewood and limited food supplies, but that people must apply for them. This process, given the frictions between senior citizens and the state, is problematic, as Natalia Dovlatova discussed,

Why should I have to go and beg for what I have worked for all my life? We are made to feel like we are second-class citizens for asking what benefits are available to us. Why should I be made to feel like this for something, which will be of such little benefit to me?

The very geography of the city exacerbates the tensions that exist between the regional government and its senior citizens. For example, the Department for Social Protection building is located on the edge of the city, away from public transport routes, and having no lift, senior citizens must climb three flights of stairs to reach relevant offices. The form of the building actively discourages visitors, as Anna Filipova discussed,

I don't even bother going to that building, we have to stand in the corridor for hours in the freezing cold, they don't even put any chairs out for us. This is made even worse when you know how rude the staff will be once you do get to see them. The whole process is so degrading I would rather go without than have to visit there.

This sentiment was repeated in several interviews and general conversations. Other examples include the state-operated Invalid Society center, with its entrance accessible by two flights of steep stairs and the Veterans' shop which is situated, literally, on the edge of the city.¹⁹ The local government operates a soup kitchen but interviewees told how its inaccessibility in winter renders it impractical to use, as even though food security is at its lowest during this time, the extreme conditions make it unfeasible to walk across town for a meal.

The directors of Magadan Oblast's Social Protection Departments, both stated that in Magadan 138,000 people, over half the population, must survive on incomes below the minimum subsistence level and of that figure, 40,000 are classed as 'at risk' as they are disabled or are families with children. They believe that to support even this lower figure \$28 million is needed annually, which is far beyond the means of the administration.²⁰ With the imposition of foreign development paradigms in the region (see below), the social service departments are now targeting multi-children families for assistance, in order to facilitate an increase in the levels of international aid flowing into the region. This coupled with the fact that senior citizens receive their pensions regularly,²¹ do not hold any political influence in the region, and are 'more secure' than other northern senior citizens, marginalizes them even further from the social provision sphere. Yet, as is the case across the whole of Russia their pensions are seen as central to the survival of the family (see Foley and Klugman, 1997).²² The interviewees who head households all noted, however, that their pension is not sufficient to lift the family out of poverty. Furthermore, given the region's illness rates it is no surprise that amongst interviewees many of them provide support to ill, disabled or alcoholic family members. They note that they receive very little government support in their attempts to keep their families together and healthy.

The NGO sector.

Outside of the north there is little understanding as to how Magadan's marginalized survive. This is typified by the actions of one international NGO which believes that sending boots and fishing lines to the region will help, or another which sends almost a million US dollars to the region only for it to be subsumed, unbeknown to them, into the regional government's budget.²³ Extensive interviewing in this sector in Moscow also revealed the competition which exists between, and within, organizations. The head of the Russian branch of an international NGO elucidated some of the most perceptive views on the far north's problems encountered during the course of this research, but he is completely sidelined by the English director of the international branch. His views are privately treated with contempt and members of the international section refused to travel to a conference on the north's problems, in Kamchatka, despite having little conception of their nature, because 'they should come here'. Overall it is clear that there is little concerted effort in developing a coordinated program aimed at assisting in the north's social development.

The development of Magadan's post-Soviet NGO sector was stimulated by foreigners, mostly from Alaska, as out migration meant that those most likely to instigate such a movement, the young and the educated, had in many case left the region. Some of the first visitors to the formerly 'closed city' of Magadan were religious missionaries from Alaska, leading to its adaptation as a 'sister city' for Anchorage. Over six hundred local NGOs are registered in the region, mainly small scale and centered around a particular interest rather than a sector of society.²⁴ The attitude of the regional government towards the NGO sector is, outwardly, a positive one. Not one NGO interviewee recounted any state harassment or registration

problems. Furthermore in contrast to other far eastern regions Magadan's administration does not interfere with the activities of foreign-controlled religious organizations operating in the region. The most problematical aspect of state-NGO relations is the number of organizations led by people who also work, and in some cases lead, in the states social protection spheres. Leaving aside potential conflicts of interest, and opportunities for corruption, this is problematic as it reinforces the administration's social priorities, and practices, within the NGO sphere.

The main problem that local NGOs face is funding. Given the economic problems that the region is facing it is understandable that the government is unable to provide financial support, though often it provides access to rooms and buildings at a reduced cost. Local businessmen sometimes offer funding but in return they wish to gain publicity and intervene with programs, something which interviewees do not wish to partake in. Therefore for the majority of local NGOs international funding agencies are the only long term source of funding. Because of the region's close relationships with Alaska, Magadan holds an advantage over its neighboring regions in respect to international assistance, including access to USAID funding, as Alaska's governor is seen to possess considerable influence in North American aid agency structures.²⁵

This can be perceived to be problematic, however, as USAID, at the time of the research period, was primarily concerned in the Russia far east with the provision of child support through the building of orphanages. As one interviewee in Moscow stated helping Russia's elderly is not a 'vote winner' in the USA, whereas opening an orphanage 'provides numerous photo opportunities'. This went against Russian Federal government wishes to develop foster care networks and it also ensured that funding was extremely limited if the applicant NGO was not concerned with child welfare. While it is without argument that this sector is extremely important such

prioritization gave rise to a development discourse in the region which was followed by the regional government and other international NGOs. Starved of funding NGOs concerned with other sectors of society have little chance to develop their outreach. Therefore apart from the compliant few, local NGOs tend to be of a very small size with little cooperation between them as funding and prestige are closely guarded.²⁶ As a result the local NGO sector is extremely fragmented and as such is unable to offer sustained levels of support across all sections of society.

Very few senior citizen interviewees stated that they had received assistance from the local NGO sector. As discussed above the region's development discourse, and the lack of a coordinated approach, ensures that there are very few groups concerned with the plight of Magadan's elderly. The one active group in the region which shares their concerns is the Veterans organization, which is well organized and extremely vocal within Magadan. However, senior citizen interviewees, the majority women, felt excluded from this group due to its overtly political stance and the fact that its management was almost exclusively male. Interviews within this organization revealed a desire to return to the communist regime and openly anti-Semitic views. Further ideological barriers to interaction between senior citizens and the NGO sector can be seen in the religious sphere. The majority of religious organizations in Magadan receive foreign funding and are therefore able to offer some social support. While interviewed leaders of these organizations all strenuously denied that support would be withheld from those who did not attend services or meetings, senior citizen interviewees all felt that these groups were exclusionary. These feelings were especially prevalent amongst Gulag survivor interviewees, the majority of whom discussed how their experiences had left them atheist or agnostic. The Memorial organization does have a branch in Magadan, to which many of the Gulag survivor

interviewees belong. However, because of fears of reprisals it operates surreptitiously and acts more as 'network facility' to put survivors in touch with each other and to monitor deaths. On occasion it has been able to secure aid from abroad and many interviewees told of receiving a small payment of money and a bag of flour but that this was a one off occurrence.

The above has shown how senior citizens in Magadan, and especially Gulag survivors, are outside of the reach of social support from the state, despite its acceptance that pensions are well below state set subsistence minimums. The international aid community has little understanding of the problems the region faces and there is a lack of cooperation between groups with an interest in the north. Furthermore Magadan's local NGO sector is constrained by a lack of funding, externally imposed development discourses, competition and its perceived exclusionary nature, all leading to a lack of meaningful support for its elderly population. As a result Gulag survivors, and senior citizens in general, are forced to rely on their own, above described, survival strategies to ensure their day to day existence. There is, however, one final development scheme which this chapter has not yet discussed which will impact on the lives of Gulag survivors, the World Bank's northern resettlement scheme.

Depopulating the Russian north.

Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union the Russian federal government, quite correctly, stated that given the level of economic activity in the far north the region is overpopulated.²⁷ Regional governments do operate schemes to provide people with assistance in leaving the region, they are, however, under funded and thus cannot reach many people.²⁸ On the *Materik* it is assumed that the north's marginalized wish

to leave for more hospitable climates, given credence by a household survey cited by Heleniak (1999:56-58) which implied that the majority of those remaining in the north wish to leave but are trapped by their financial situation.

Unable to fund wide-scale migration schemes the Russian Federal government commissioned the World Bank to develop an Assisted Migration Scheme (AMS). The scheme would provide applicants with a housing certificate for an apartment on the *Materik*, airfares and the transport costs for their possessions. Vorkuta, Norilsk and Susuman (a settlement in Magadan Oblast) were chosen as pilot regions, see the table two for those initially eligible.²⁹ Although those developing the project did visit the regions concerned, only a brief period was spent in each settlement and little further ground level research was conducted, and household surveys were relied upon.³⁰ Participants will be able to choose their new destination, given this freedom on the basis that they will make a 'rational' decision. It is assumed that participants will migrate to regions where they have close relatives or friends, which disregards the fact that many people have lost almost all contact, due to the cost, with those on the *Materik*. Those who chose to remain are now considered 'irrational' for wishing to live in a region where household surveys show that everyday life is extremely problematic. As the table below shows Gulag survivors are targeted in Norilsk and senior citizens in all areas, though interviewees informed that once the scheme is in operation the main recipients will be the elderly.

Table two. Eligible groups for the Assisted Migration Scheme, by settlement.

	Unconditional	Conditional
Vorkuta city	World War Two veterans with 15 years service in the north	Pensioners with at least 35 years service in the north
Norilsk Industrial Area	World War Two veterans, Those repressed under Stalin's regime, Housebound invalids, Families with three or more children.	Pensioners – based on years service in the north
Susuman District	Unemployed budget sector workers in various settlements, Single mothers, Housebound invalids, Families with three or more children.	Multiple children households

Adapted from: World Bank (2000:44).

The scheme, in theory seems, logical. If people are moved to more hospitable regions then their lives will improve and the north become more self-sufficient as it would have less non-economically active people to support. However, as noted above in relation to survival strategies, household surveys can be a problematical tool when exploring human emotions. In Magadan general conversations suggested that there is the belief that the majority wanted to leave the region, substantiated by a survey undertaken during the course of this research.³¹ However, amongst interviewees only one person declared that they themselves wanted to leave.

The reason why Gulag survivors, even if offered assistance, would choose to remain in Magadan is intertwined with the survival mechanisms they employ. The majority of interviewees state that, as their social networks ensure their daily survival, they could never leave, believing that these associations could be not replicated in a new setting. As one interviewee stated,

How could I move anywhere else, I know I can survive here but what chance would I have on the *Materik*? People look after each other here and they don't do that anywhere else. I know that I would die if I left the region.

Interviewees know that in Magadan they have access to their land, which is within walking distance of their homes, that their friends will help them plant, guard and harvest the food. They know that if they move to an unknown place that it is probable that this would not be replicated. The scheme assumes that potential migrants have family and friends on the *Materik* whom they would be able to move near. Many interviewees discussed how relations who have migrated are struggling to survive themselves and they did not want to burden them, furthermore due to the cost and unreliability of postage most people had lost contact with their friends outside the region. Interviewees also wished to remain because family members had jobs in the region, again something which would not be guaranteed on the mainland. They also know that if they leave the region they would never return, and that they would be leaving to die. This proves a barrier as almost all of the interviewees have a husband or child buried in the region and they feel that to leave would be to abandon them. Many interviewees discussed their own death and they feel that if they are in Magadan when they die their friends would ensure a proper burial, this, they genuinely fear, will not be observed if they migrate.

A further important factor behind their attitude is the reason why life in the region is considered so inhospitable by ‘outsiders’, the climate and its under-developed urban areas. All of the interviewees are ill but they believe that the cold climate slows down the development of their illnesses, especially diabetes. For many Gulag survivors the region is all they have known during their adult lives and they feel that they would not be able to ‘cope’ in a ‘big’ city. Those who left the region to reclaim their Ukrainian citizenship all noted that they found it difficult to cope with the crowds and distances they had to travel within the city. Many interviewees know of people who left, only to return, unable to adapt to life outside the north. Furthermore, Heleniak (1999)

quotes a survey of northern migrants which indicates that two-thirds felt their lives were no better in their new location and that 40 per cent would return to the north if they were to migrate again.

Interviewees were asked why they had indicated on the questionnaire that they would partake in a migration scheme but in an interview they said they would not. Many discussed how with their daily lives filled with depression it is easy to think of better places and times, and thus to tick a box on a questionnaire which would offer an escape from the everyday. However, in an interview situation with more time to reflect on the question, the problems and uncertainties it would bring about become far more prominent. There are many reasons why the majority of the region's senior citizens wish to remain, the most important being the desire to maintain their social support networks, but other societal and emotional factors play an important role. It seems that these motives are not taken into consideration when migration schemes are constructed. Counter to the accusations of 'irrationality' from Moscow, it can be argued that it is more 'rational' to remain where one knows that survival can be ensured rather than taking a journey into the unknown.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that everyday survival is concerned with much more than interactions with formal and informal economies. It demonstrates that to even begin to understand the complexities of everyday life in the post-Soviet Russian north one must examine the social and cultural aspects of the mechanisms people employ to ensure their survival. Therefore, it is clear that although the experiences of Gulag survivors in the far north east of Russia are an extreme example of the marginalization experienced across the post-Socialist states their responses to austerity provide some

insight into how others have survived the 'transition'. In Magadan there is a genuine feeling amongst its marginalized that they are excluded from government structures and the 'civic society' created by its NGOs. International NGOs rely far too much on western presumptions as to life in the Russian north when developing policy for the region, and too little time is spent discussing the issues with those experiencing the problems. All of the 'ground level' interviewees interviewed for this research are extremely pragmatic about their situation. They know that within their lifetime Russia's situation, and therefore the north's, is not going to dramatically improve. Therefore they do not expect large increases in pensions or reductions in the prices of essential goods or NGOs to come to their rescue. Their wishes are far more prosaic. State, or NGO, help with the purchase of seeds, the availability of tools to borrow, or a permanent guard to protect their produce from theft, would, interviewees discussed dramatically improve their situation. These are simple measures that even within the financial constraints the region operates under could be realistically achieved.

Russia is, of course, not unique in experiencing social marginalization in its northern regions but the methods employed in developing these areas has made its problems far harder to solve. Compared to other countries the Russian north is overpopulated, employs extremely inefficient production methods and has fragmented and underdeveloped social safety networks. Whereas in other northern countries the state can be relied on to provide at least a basic standard of living this is not applicable in the Russian north. What is comparable are the stresses caused by the uncertainties of living in such inhospitable, and uncertain, conditions, whether it be poverty, isolation, or a lack of opportunities. This is where the importance this chapter places on the social and cultural importance of survival strategies in applicable to their study in

other regions as their reduction to the 'economic' in any northern country denies the complexity of everyday life in such inhospitable regions.

While in the west Magadan's marginalized are constructed as 'irrational' for wishing to remain, deeper understandings of everyday life in the region reveals why many wish to do so. People know that they can survive in the north. Their networks, practices, identities and experiences ensures that they can replicate the everyday.

While their standard of living is extremely low they feel this is preferable to uprooting and trying to reconstruct these strategies in a new location. The Assisted Migration Scheme assumes that there are other locations that are preferable to locate to, and that regions are willing for them to move there. Every senior citizen in Magadan has heard horror stories about migrants to the *Materik* finding that their new apartment block is half-built or that they cannot get land. Such stories further embed the survival strategies of those who remain in the region. It would appear much more 'rational' to stay where you know you can survive than, and considering the age and ill health of the Gulag survivors, migrating and starting afresh. The role of the state and NGOs should be to strengthen and support the survival strategies already in operation rather than trying to dismantle them.

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¹ I have written this chapter while conducting fieldwork in Russia – therefore I am away from most of my notes/literature – this section and the figures below will be expanded upon/updated for the final draft.

² After Chukotka Autonomous Oblast (40.4 per cent) this is the lowest percentage in Russia.

³ Figures from an unpublished MagGoskomstat report.

⁴ Data from unpublished report produced by Magadan Oblast Administration's pension fund.

⁵ Interviews with senior citizens are cited pseudonymously.

⁶ Interview with Lyudmila Rozdena, founder of the Memorial NGO, Magadan, October 2000.

⁷ Interview with Elena Karpenko, Director, Social Service Department, Magadan Oblast Administration, Magadan, November 2000.

⁸ Interview with a senior international aid agency worker, Moscow, December 2000.

⁹ Figures to be inserted here.

¹⁰ Air transport is the only method of reaching the region that is available all year. A road, the 'Kolyma highway' does connect the region to Irkutsk but this is impassable for most of the year. There are no commercial sea passages available.

¹¹ Several interviews had to be curtailed as it was simply too cold in the flat to continue a sustained conversation.

¹² Of course this process is probably far more complex than simply the state refusing to pay chemists but whatever the mechanics the outcome is the same – the limited access to free medicine for those most in need.

¹³ For examples of the propaganda employed see Mitskevich (1958) or Ivanchenko (1962). Potential 'recruits' were targeted at university and through Komsomol meetings. Willing migrant interviewees discussed how their senses of romanticism, adventure and patriotic duty were appealed to.

¹⁴ Although Magadan city has a local administration it is totally subservient to the regional administration and follows the same social development practices.

¹⁵ By 2000 the mining sector, the only sector to receive federal backing, contributed over 70% of the region's output and 60% of its tax revenues (Tsvetkov, 2000:3).

¹⁶ The social role of the enterprise was, of course, important in all regions of the Soviet Union, but, according to geographers who studied the Soviet north, interviewed in Moscow and St. Petersburg, it was far more important in remote, inhospitable, locations.

¹⁷ It is outside this chapter's remit to delve into the corruption evident in the region but it is suffice to say that it pervades every sector of society from gold and fishing enterprises to NGO operations.

¹⁸ These details are from the author's own personal experiences in the region. Interviewees in flats with no heating said that the situation had been the same since the beginning of winter 2000. Many people commented that the heating only worked to the extent that it did due to the regional elections to be held later that year. In one instance a tanker bringing fuel to the region was diverted after the owners of its contents received a 'better deal' elsewhere – thus heating supplies to residential areas were cut for several days as supplies ran out.

¹⁹ This shop provides a small discount on basic foodstuffs for those who receive a veteran's pension. The fact that this shop is realistically inaccessible for the majority of the population is a major issue for many of the senior citizens that I talked with. I visited the shop and it was typical of many in the city with a very small selection of vegetables and fruit, many of which were rotting.

²⁰ Interviews with Elena Karpenko, Director, Social Service Department, Magadan Oblast Administration. Magadan, November 2000 and Lyudmila Myazina, Director, Social Protection Department Magadan Oblast Administration. Magadan, November 2000.

²¹ Pensions are paid on time, and in full, in Magadan Oblast, collaborated by senior citizens interviewees, as revenues from the region's gold mines are consistent.

²² Interview with Valentina Soboleva, Director, Magadan Oblast Administration Pension Fund, Magadan, October 2000.

²³ Although interviewees did not request anonymity given the nature of their comments, and the fact that their views might not represent the institution as a whole the NGOs are not discussed by name.

²⁴ It must be noted, however, that a considerable number of NGOs are little more than a 'front' for corrupt operations.

²⁵ Interview with an international aid agency worker, December 2000, Moscow.

²⁶ In 1999 a survey suggested that in Magadan only 20 per cent of NGOs indicated that they work, or cooperate, with other organizations (*Zapiski s Dalnego Vostoka*, May – June 1999:28-30).

²⁷ Comparison population figures with other northern regions will be inserted here.

²⁸ Interviews with Nadezhda Papp, Deputy Mayor, Magadan City Administration and with Lyudmila Myazina, Director, Social Protection Department, Magadan Oblast Administration, Magadan, November 2000.

²⁹ Details from interviews with Alexander Tretyakov, Manager, economic sector of the Assisted Migration Scheme, World Bank, Moscow Mission, Moscow, July 2000 and unpublished World Bank policy documents. For published details see World Bank, 2000 and 2001.

³⁰ It cannot be stressed strongly enough at this point that this is not a criticism of those involved in developing the project, or indeed the World Bank as it is accepted that the AMS is one of many projects that this group is working on and all interviewees lamented the lack of time that they could spend in the region. The issue is more with the creation of development projects *per se* with the emphasis on speed, accountability and 'end product' rather than in-depth research and analysis. The problem the team also faced was the time involved in reaching these regions, for example Susuman is an eight hour flight followed by a sixteen hour car journey from Moscow.

³¹ Survey respondents were asked, if given a free passage, a new flat and some financial assistance, would they leave the region, to this 64 per cent, of 292 respondents, indicated that they would participate in such a scheme.