Street children in Moscow: using and creating social capital

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Abstract

The paper analyses the strategies of homeless street children in Moscow connected with the accumulation of social capital. Based on recent empirical research, it looks at the involvement of children in non-criminal and criminal subcultures as a way to get access to important networks and resources, and shows how young people use their social skills and appropriate subcultural norms and values in order to build alternative careers. It demonstrates that children's social background plays an important role in their trajectories in the urban informal economy and society, and that they should not be viewed, as it is usually suggested in the social exclusion paradigm, as a single dispossessed mass which has fallen through support networks in various risk scenarios. Research data is reviewed to provide evidence that Moscow's homeless children are resourceful and deeply social agents who find surrogate families and ad hoc social memberships.

Introduction

This article explores the informal social and economic networks created and used by street children in Moscow in an effort to build opportunities for survival and invest into prospective social mobility.

The visible presence of unaccommodated children in the streets of Russian cities is a relatively new phenomenon, practically unknown in Russia from the end of the 1930s to the end of the 1980s (on street children in the Soviet Russia see, for example, Stolee, 1988; Goldman, 1993; Ball, 1993). This does not mean that there had been no runaway or neglected children at all in these fifty years. They just were not construed as a social problem. This was both due to their low public visibility – such children would be quickly located by the police in the streets and brought back home or delivered to children's institutions – and also to a certain ideological 'blindness', stemming from a denial of the existence of social problems in Soviet society. The small amount of research conducted on runaway and problem children in the period from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s focused mainly on the explanation of their 'delinquency' through flawed socialisation. Particular blame was placed on single mothers or parental alcohol abuse (Kharchev, 1979, 1983; Selitskii and Taratukhin, 1981; Beliakova, 1983). Some

publications tried to explain the behaviour of runaway children through individual psychopathology (see, for example, Boldirev, 1964; Bochkareva, 1967). The issues of poverty, family violence or child abuse were virtually never discussed.

Although no reliable data exists on the numbers of children living and/or working in the streets in Russia, indirect indicators confirm that since the end of the 1980s these numbers have been growing. For example, in Moscow, where this problem is considered to be among the worst in the country, the number of children brought from the streets to the special *militia* (police) reception centre for juvenile delinquents, doubled between 1988 and 1998, reaching about six thousand in 1998. The growing number of children deprived of parental care led to an expansion in the number of children's homes in Russia. Between 1996 and 1998 the number of large state homes for so-called 'social orphans' doubled, reaching about one thousand, and there are plans to build many more. An in-depth analysis of the causes of this explosion in the number of children needing care is beyond the scope of this paper. Essentially, the rapid growth in numbers has to do with the social processes resulting from the collapse of the Soviet social structure, which was sustained by the comprehensive Soviet welfare system and full employment. These processes are experienced at the individual and family level as the loss of stable employment, deterioration of living standards and increase in social isolation. Their behavioural correlates include family violence, child neglect and abuse. Among the individuals and families most affected are people who had been most dependent on state paternalism, and especially low-skilled manual workers, people with prior problems with the law and/or alcohol addiction.

To understand the context within which the phenomenon of street children currently exists, it is important to recognise that the Russian system of child care is presently in a state of disarray, with attempts at institutional reform coming up against the staunch conservatism of the responsible ministries (see the discussion of the Soviet child care system and attempts to reform it in Harwin, 1996). Children's homes and municipal and charitable shelters cannot accommodate all the children needing care (particularly as the system of foster families is, with the exception of two regions – Samara and Kaliningrad – still in an embryonic state). In the absence of efficient social services and wide-reaching NGO provision, the militia continues to play a major role in dealing with street children. Broadly, the procedures adopted by the militia can be described as follows. Militia officers take the children they consider suspicious from the streets and check where they are from. Local residents are then sent home immediately. Children who are not registered in the locality are brought into special militia reception centres, where they are detained for further checks. Those who are registered elsewhere are then escorted back home. Children who are orphans, or whose parents were deprived of parental rights, are sent to children's homes. As a result of this policy of sending children back to the problems from which they escaped, many children run away again and again from home or from children's institutions. For example, out of 6000 children put into the Moscow militia reception centre in 1998, 1400 had already stayed there

within the same year. A known practice is for a child to get into a children's home for the cold winter period, and then to run away for the summer.

The presence of dirty ragged children, apparently looking for trouble or begging in the streets, has caused a moral panic in Russian society. While there is a deep underlying concern about children as victims of poverty and exploitation, they are also perceived as out of control and a threat to adults. Street children are seen as evidence of the erosion of the very foundations of society. As Jones, writing about youth homelessness in Britain, points out, 'when moral panics emerge, the focus tends to be on the problems a defined group of people appear to pose for society, rather than on the problems society creates for them' (Jones, 1997: 111). Among the explanations for the children's dislocation that have been suggested both by academics and public administrators in Russia, are genetic deficiencies in the children themselves and their other medical pathologies; a growth in deviant behaviour brought on by collapse of social control exercised previously by Soviet institutions such as school, militia and the system of after-school leisure facilities; and a general value crisis influenced, among other factors, by the frequent portrayal of violence in the media and an absence of positive role models.

The reality of children's experience on the streets, which this paper, within the limits of a journal publication, tries to describe and conceptualise, goes very much against these pathologising explanations. While children are indeed among the major casualties of recent economic and social reforms in Russia, I would argue that they are wrongly construed to be alienated and disaffiliated. On the contrary, they are travelling on a path from alienation to affiliation. They are searching for reliable and trustworthy social ties, ties moreover that will directly help their economic survival. In this paper I will attempt to show that they are capable of developing sophisticated social networks, which serve their immediate survival needs and can also relate to longer-term life plans. I suggest that their strategies are centred on accumulation of social capital.

Conceptual and theoretical traditions

Sociological enquiry into children as autonomous social actors has a relatively short history. Children have been seen predominantly as 'incomplete adults' who were either successfully, or unsuccessfully, socialised into adult society (James and Prout, 1990). Problem children were viewed primarily as victims of flawed socialisation (leading to delinquency); and, in more recent years, as the victims of child abuse and neglect. Research concerned with children operating as social and economic actors has been very scarce, and has been mostly concentrated in child labour literature. While many studies have shown a detrimental effect of labour on child development, social scientists increasingly argue that at least some work at an early age may have positive effects on a child's development, and can be seen by children as contributing positively to their future prospects (see the discussion in Alaraudanjoki, 2000: 180).

Studies of youth subcultures (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1978; Hebdige, 1979; Brake, 1985), while presenting young people as independent actors, have concentrated mainly on the ways young people either appropriated and consumed, or subverted, 'adult' cultural products and signs. The issue of youth subversion, or resistance, was a particular focus in the writings of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which viewed subcultures as 'a form of resistance which is symbolically represented in style' (Widdicombe and Woofitt, 1995: 18). Similarly, in the study of delinquent subcultures, delinquency was often seen as a manifestation of the rejection of the institutions of family, school and work (Cohen, 1955). As far as broader social and economic context was concerned, behaviour was considered to be reactive rather than constructive.

A growing literature on children-runaways and homeless youth in the West deals predominantly with the family homes and the factors that push children and young people into the streets (Brennan *et al.*, 1978; Nye, 1980; Garbarino, Wilson and Garbarino, 1986; Nord and Lullof, 1995). Yet some of the studies specifically approached street youth as social agents. For example, in writing about the strategies of young homeless people, Jones pointed out conscious risk-taking behaviour undertaken by young people attempting to change their lives for the better (Jones, 1997), while Ruddick described how young homeless people in Hollywood developed a social identity and confronted their stigma through the strategic use of urban space (Ruddick, 1998).

Research into street children is mainly associated with the developing countries – particularly those in Latin America and South Africa. The concept of street children encompasses both homeless and street working children, with a greater emphasis on family poverty and child labour than the issues of homelessness. The paradigm of disaffiliation is still very strong. 'Most writing about children and young people living on urban streets in developing countries assumes, or even insists, that they live in disorganised, illegal misery. They are described as psychologically and irretrievably damaged, unable to form relationships as the children that they are, and definitely destined for emotional, social and economic failures the adults they will become' (Ennew, 1994b: 409–410). These ideas are being challenged, both from the perspective of children as economic actors, often vital to the survival of their families (Bar-On, 1997), and by looking at the attempts of children to reconstruct the lost families and create self-supportive networks (ie, Aptekar, 1988; Swart, 1990; Lucchini, 1993; Lucchini, 1996b; Ennew, 1994b).

One important recent study, which combined a consideration of pathways by which young people come to the streets with a study of the role of social relationships in the street trajectories, was conducted in Canada by Hagan and McCarthy (1997). Although the authors concentrate on the subject of street youth involvement in crime, they suggest a way to bring together the consideration of economic and sociogenic factors through the application of the concept of social capital. They mainly use the concept of social capital to show the deficiencies of families and communities, which lead the youth into

the streets. But they also demonstrate how individuals become embedded in criminal communities and 'recapitalise' their diminished social capital.

Yet social capital remains an elusive concept, which is currently poorly specified both generally, and in relation to children and youth (Morrow, 1999). Hagan and McCarthy attempt to combine the approaches of two different writers on social capital: Coleman and Bourdieu. Coleman, in his work on students in ten US high schools, mainly looked at social capital as being embedded in families and in relations between families. Social capital is then translated into various outcomes in adulthood and also into the quality of communal life (Coleman, 1994, see criticism in Portes and Landolt, 1996; Morrow, 1999). Bourdieu's analysis centres on the individual agency rather than on families or communities. Bourdieu's account of 'social capital' (1984, 1986, 1993) offers a way of looking at individuals in various social positions as agents who, through the way they use social networks and connections, are able to sustain their place in the system of social inequality. Bourdieu views social capital as a system of social relationships, networks, connections, obligations and identities, which provide support and access to resources. In order to obtain social capital, individuals have to possess a certain sociability, which is based on social competence and dispositions acquired in the process of upbringing and in the development of habitual practices. Apart from social capital, individuals possess economic capital (which Bourdieu regards as the most important) and cultural capital. All forms of capital interact (and have various configurations for individuals in different class positions), reproducing or transforming the system of inequalities. Bourdieu, contrary to Coleman, did not apply his concept of social capital to children and youth. But, as Morrow suggests, in conceptualising the well-being of children and young people 'we can move forward ... by coupling Bourdieu's original formulation of social capital as in relation with other forms of capital and as rooted in the practices of everyday life, with a view of children having agency (albeit constrained); thus linking micro-social and macro-social structural factors' (Morrow, 1999: 757).

Although Bourdieu explicitly discussed the role of social capital in the transmission of privileged positions, his approach can be used in relation to the strategic use of sociability by people with extremely limited economic and cultural resources (including street children and youth). For such people the mobilisation of personal relations, cultivation of relationships with others in strategic positions, creation of obligations and trust can achieve what was initially physically lacking – such as a roof over one's head, security and food, plus an opportunity for social mobility.

The data

This paper is based on the analysis of some of the results of my research project on street children in Moscow, which took place in 1997–2000. The difficulty in defining the concept of a street child has been acknowledged by many

researchers (ie, Glauser, 1990; Ennew and Milne, 1997). Nevertheless, the majority of authors accept UNICEF's distinction between 'children on the streets' as the ones who return to family home at night and 'children of the streets' – those who either live there permanently or have a limited and risky access to housing and spend most of the time on the streets (UNICEF, 1989). This paper focuses on the latter category – the 'children of the streets'.

We used a *triangulation* of various techniques and methods (see also Lucchini, 1996a) to improve the quality of research results and combine the benefits (and limit the disadvantages) of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The project included a questionnaire survey, which was conducted in May–July 1998. The total sample in Moscow comprised 123 street children. We limited the age bracket to 7–17 years (we did not interview children under seven, as they would not have been able to complete the standard questionnaire that we designed). Age distribution was as follows: 7–11 years – 22%, 12–14 years – 41%, 15–17 years – 37%.

The questionnaire included closed questions, but also many open-ended questions. In most cases an interviewer, after the completion of a questionnaire, continued a conversation with the child, trying to engage him or her in a more informal discussion, and wrote down additional information provided by the respondent, either during or after the interview.

Most of the interviews took place in agencies – in the militia receptions centre (67) and charity shelters (24). 32 interviews took place in the streets. For interviews that were conducted in organisations we used age and sex quotas, based on the registration of all the children who passed through the militia reception centre in 1997. In the streets we used a random sample. The majority of the interviewees – 73% were boys.

We also conducted twenty in-depth interviews, each about three hours long. Another element of the research was four focus groups with children selected by sex, age and their status as migrants. One group was conducted with Moscow boys and girls aged 9–13. Three groups were conducted with migrants – one with boys from 9–13 years, one with boys from 14–17 years, and one with girls from 14–17 years. Each group consisted of six to eight people. I refer in this paper only to qualitative data: focus groups and in-depth interviews, and information received during informal conversations with the respondents during the questionnaire survey. We also interviewed a number of experts from the militia, including the workers of the militia reception centre, personnel of shelters, and members of adult criminal groups (the latter was done to get another perspective on street children's criminal subcultures).

The quantitative survey did provide us with important, albeit indicative, background information on the family compositions, parental occupations, and places of residence. The survey also provided some indicators of the behaviour of parents and guardians toward the children including family violence and abuse etc. The need to undertake such a survey was partly based on the fact that no such surveys have been conducted to date (this was the first research of this kind in Russia since the 1920s–1930s). But the survey results

can only be treated as having a limited reliability. We cannot claim that our sample was truly representative (an impossible task with hidden and oppressed populations such as street children). Also, although we interviewed children only after participant observation in the institutions and in the streets and so had established a prior contact with most of them, we could not be sure that this contact was enough to enable them to talk freely to us. We could not be sure that the categories we were imposing on children, when we were asking them about the reasons for their being in the streets or their experiences in the streets, corresponded to their own definitions and perceptions (on the problems of questionnaire surveys with street children see also Ennew, 1994a).

Qualitative methods proved to be much better suited than the survey in trying to answer the specific research task of studying children's experience in the streets. Focus groups were particularly important in getting access to collective representations and norms governing interaction in street communities. In-depth interviews were important for obtaining individual life-stories and representations of personal strategies. It proved to be very easy to talk to children (particularly in focus-groups, when, after some initial hesitation, they gave each other a sanction to discuss the behaviours which could be seen as problematic or illegal). Some of the children told us that we were the first adults they had met in their lives who were prepared to listen to them without making moral judgements. In our qualitative research we did not try to judge whether the children's accounts were true, but rather hoped to understand the meaning of different practices and social structures for the children as social actors (see also Graue and Walsh, 1998: 120).

The 'small bomzhi'

The socio-economic background and family origins of the street children in Moscow are discussed in detail in another article by the author (Stephenson, 2001). In summary, the survey showed that young people were more likely to migrate into Moscow from areas with economic stagnation and a high level of family poverty. About two thirds of the children in our sample were runaways, and running away was associated with incomplete and reconstructed families, family conflict and parental abuse. There seems to be a significant similarity between the reasons for running away in the present-day Russia and those identified in Western countries (cf. Rees, 1993; Stein *et al.*, 1994; Engberink and Kruijt; 1996; Pitts, 1997).

For a substantial part of street children, however, the 'choice' of having to survive in the streets was made, sometimes inadvertently, by their parents. Family migration resulting in homelessness (or migration with already homeless parents) comprised about one-third of all cases. Some of the migrants who come to Moscow with their families start their homeless careers by living in hotels or dormitories and gradually migrating towards railway stations, cellars and lofts. An important factor in determining the life-chances

of such children is that, as their parents do not have a residence permit in Moscow, they have no rights to go to Moscow schools or even of being accepted by municipal or charity shelters (although some of the shelters risk taking such children illegally).

The children of homeless parents are identified by other street children (and also identify themselves) as 'small *bomzhi*' (the 'small homeless') as opposed to 'big (adult) *bomzhi*'. The small *bomzhi* work every day at the street markets, wash cars, clean the kiosks and do other odd jobs. The category of small *bomzhi* also includes those runaway children who have not managed to find alternative sources of living. Although they manage to survive, their odd jobs do not guarantee what they need most of all – stability and protection. Relationships at the markets, where most of them make a living, are purely functional, although the children reported trying to make friends with the traders and to win their sympathy. Incomes from any work at the market are sometimes supplemented by petty thieving – normally also at the market, from the stalls.

The accumulation of social capital through joining networks at street markets is extremely difficult for street children and young people. The market seems to be a deregulated sphere, but, according to the results of a qualitative survey conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Foundation, in a situation of high labour supply regular jobs in the markets are given only to people who have a Moscow residence permit or have a personal recommendation from somebody whom the owner knows well (Blekher, 1998). The rest can only do badly paid odd jobs. Members of ethnic communities (in particular, people from the Caucasus such as Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis) also find it easier to integrate into the market structures, through extensive networks of self-support and mutual reliance in ethnic entrepreneurship (ie, Snisarenko, 1999). Similarly to adults, children who do not belong to non-Russian ethnic groups cannot rely on successful careers in the informal street markets. Adult and small *bomzhi* often spend the nights together in cellars and lofts or on underground hot water pipes. Although, according to militia information, these children's mortality rate is very low, in other respects (ie, hunger, illnesses, danger of violent attacks, lack of long-term plans and prospects) their lives are similar (for an ethnographic study of adult homeless people in Moscow see Stephenson, 2000). In these ad-hoc arrangements the children seem to display more solidarity with each other than the adult homeless people do, but at the same time both adult homeless and children have reported that the children often engage in violence against the older homeless.

Children who want to leave the world of *bomzhi*, try to join other informal urban groups and communities. Some get involved in organised prostitution (see the discussion in Sidorenko-Stephenson, 2000). Others attempt to join youth subcultural groups, both non-criminal and criminal in nature. While prostitution networks, deeply exploitative of children, are organised by adults, subcultural groups are a product of children's own social ingenuity.

The Arbat system

Some of the children manage to use their social skills and their knowledge of cultural symbols to enter a specific youth community – characteristically known as 'the Arbat System' (*Arbatskaia Sistema*).

The Arbat was the first pedestrian precinct in Moscow, designed to imitate similar streets in Western cities. Very soon after the Arbat was remodelled – presumably to look like a 19th century Russian street – it became apparent that the street was not a safe place for promenading, but rather a centre for all sorts of shady and illegal activities. It became a zone of active informal trade (mainly selling souvenirs for tourists), drug dealing and prostitution. As a centre of unregulated activities the Arbat soon became a Mecca for young people where they listen to street musicians, recite poetry, drink and consume drugs.

The Arbat System consists of a conglomerate of subcultural groups: punks, hippies, ravers, Tolkienists, skinheads, Satanists etc. Children migrate between various groups. For many (and for migrants in particular), becoming a member of one particular group is, according to our respondents, often a result of chance. Runaway and homeless children are attracted by the System for many reasons: because of the protection which it gives to its members; a chance to find a temporary shelter – 'vpiska' – places where one can sleep, normally flats of the Moscow members of System; and, for the migrants, because it gives hope of getting to know Muscovites who could help with their long-term plans to settle in the city.

The System has developed a complex social structure of extensive networks with a system of mutual obligations and trust. Mutual support is sustained by a set of quasi-familial relationships. Young people take upon themselves the roles of being 'System' fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands and wives (the latter are 'married' by so called 'Arbat priests' – lay members of the community). These 'relatives' are engaged in a stable exchange of food and money, and provide emotional support to each other. There is also a hierarchy based on time in the community. 'Pioneers' (the newcomers) provide services for 'Oldies' (those who have been in the System for a long time), although these obligations are not always enforced.

The System clearly marks its borders by using a normative code of legitimate and illegitimate ways to earn a living. Young people do not want to associate themselves with the stigmatised world of homeless people. There is, for example, a prohibition on begging, but limited survival opportunities make almost inevitable a 'disguised' practice of begging, which the members call 'askat' (from the English 'to ask'). Approaching particular individuals for help (with food, money or cigarettes) is not considered to be demeaning for members of the System, as in such a transaction one citizen is supposed to help another without making an unfavourable status judgement.

A border is also drawn between members of the System and youngsters involved in crime. There is a taboo on stealing, both from strangers and within

the group: 'A person who steals, he lets down the whole group, brings shame on the System. We can leave food or beer in any place, and they will not be taken. People do not take clothes either, in the morning I left everything I had, and then when I came back in the evening, everything was there' ('Ira', 15 years, focus-group). Apart from crime, the System condemns prostitution as well.

Although members of the System speak proudly about its egalitarianism, there are very obvious divisions between the Muscovites and those migrants who come from middle class families on the one hand, and children who run away from problem homes on the other. Sixteen year-old 'Olya' from a small town in Belarus started running away from home from the age of eight. She was escaping from alcoholic parents, domestic rows and beatings. She lived for some time with a friend from Moscow and then at various temporary sleeping places, earning money by *askat*. She says that 'the children who run away from home, who start very early to smoke, to drink, wear ragged clothes, we are just 'grass'. And those who live at home, study at the universities, get education – they are 'trees'. We are below, they are above'(focus group).

At the same time those who are 'below' in the Arbat System, are an upper caste compared to those who live in the streets, underage beggars and prostitutes – the small *bomzhi*.

'*They are from the Arbat and they have a different opinion about this life, they think differently, not like us, ordinary people*'.
'*They have their own Arbat life*'.
'*They have different notions. First of all, that it is bad to steal*'.
'*I have one father and one mother who gave birth to me, and they have System parents. It is very simple to tell an ordinary woman from a prostitute and a simple girl from an Arbat girl. Just by their appearance*'. (focus group).

The opportunities for upward and downward mobility on the Arbat depend a lot upon regular access to temporary sleeping places. Despite her great desire to stay in the System, 'Olya' could not survive in it for long. For about a year she stayed with a girl from Moscow working as an unpaid domestic help, and then decided to become a prostitute.

'Lena' – also from Belarus – seems to have a stable position in the System. She is fifteen, and managed in the breaks from her travels to finish nine years at school (which is an almost complete secondary education in Belarus). She wants to be a philologist and to study at the Minsk State University. While in Minsk, Lena lives with her mother who works at an academic institute. From the age of ten she started running away from home to stay with her friends in Minsk, and later started coming to Moscow, normally with three or four friends from Minsk. She migrates from one group to another and survives by *askat*, but categorically denies any possibility that she will ever have to engage in prostitution or to steal.

Although our respondents claimed that the Arbat accepts everybody, they also told us about the System's procedures, which can be linked to social

closure mechanisms. In order to be eligible for support, one has to be a member of the group.

> Lena: On the Arbat everybody is a brother or a sister, she will help me, I will help her or somebody else, if I have an opportunity.
> Researcher: And what about those children who live in lofts and cellars?
> Lena: If they are members of the group, then they are helped as well, and if not, nobody cares' (focus group).

Underage vagrants, small *bomzhi* and children involved in prostitution are not welcome on the Arbat (although these children also think of the Arbat as their own!). However, if a young person is well spoken, 'their theme is well developed', then he or she can be more easily accepted by the community. A person can even eat leftovers and sleep in rubbish cans – if he or she is a punk and can demonstrate that this is done because of their convictions, and not because of sinking and losing their dignity.

In the System we are dealing with a complex set of behaviours, which allow marginalised individuals to survive without recourse to criminalised or stigmatised practices. Young people achieve this through creating ingenious ad hoc structures that enable their members to pool their resources and through which they impose normative codes ensuring a minimal conflict with the law. At the same time the pressures on this System from outsiders attempting to use its resources make it develop social closure mechanisms, which enable it to exclude newcomers, especially children with insufficient cultural capital and undeveloped sociability. Children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, who need the System most badly, have the most difficulty entering into it.

The gangs

Some of the children join groups whose members are engaged both in legitimate activities (work at the market) and in various criminal activities: mostly drug trade and stealing from passers-by, the stalls at the markets and shops. The groups normally have loose structures, with weak hierarchical relationships and intra-group sanctions. But other groups can be defined as *gangs*. The gangs normally bring together teenage street children from 12 to about 18. They are called 'little families'. This term, like many of the other notions of the members, again comes from the prison subculture, where it denotes groups of prisoners living together in a cell. The 'little families' develop strict hierarchies, with a leader and his 'deputies'. Gang members have to give an oath that they will be true to the group's 'cause' (apart from criminal activities as such, the members of the groups are bound by nationalistic and purely racist agendas, and participate in harassment of blacks and people from the Caucasus). According to our respondents, children from the gangs mostly

aspire to become members of organised crime when they grow up (although some of the younger children had another alternative – to become militiamen!).

In order to understand the attraction of adult criminal society for street children one has to be aware of its highly structured and organised character and its importance in the current Russian economy, society and culture. Rawlinson compared organised crime in Russia with a chameleon, blending into the legitimate structures and determining their development (Rawlinson, 1998). Criminal folklore and songs have permeated Russian mass culture, and senior politicians regularly use criminal slang in their public pronouncements. It is important also to stress an often overlooked fact that in a situation where other formal social structures have collapsed, and with the erosion of traditional employment and social protection, organised crime in Russia has emerged as one of the strongest forms of social organisation. It can offer both the prospect of employment and career development, and also offers an alternative to state social security for its members. It is no wonder that joining organised crime can be attractive to the marginalised youth (and to adults as well).

The Russian criminal underworld inherited and developed the traditions of the Soviet criminal subculture, born in prisons and labour camps (Chalidze, 1977; Abramkin and Chesnokova, 1993; Gurov, 1995; Radzinkin, 1995). The world of *thieves* has a complex set of norms (*pravilnyie poniatiia* – the right notions), which regulate relationships between the criminals and the outside world. In the recent period another type of criminal organisation has emerged (which has partly appropriated the notions of thieves) – that of *bandits*, who are engaged in the protection racket and also provide informal enforcement services to businesses (Volkov, 1999). Among important notions of the criminal world are notions ensuring mutual support and protection (and this is not just the prohibition of 'grassing'). There is, for example, a notion of 'not eating in one face' (*ne yest' v odno litso*) – an obligation to share the proceeds of crime with other members of the group, and an obligation to 'warm up the zona' (a collective term for prisons and labour camps) – send money, food and cigarettes to inmates in the labour camps. Individual reputations have a vital place in this social system, which is organised in such a way that, despite the vast territory of Russia, everyone who has *a name* (a recognized nickname) can be, if necessary, checked out, even if he is hundreds of thousands of kilometres away from his normal habitat.

Sixteen-year-old Valera – a Russian from Moldova – told us that he helped the 'zona', although he himself has never been in prison. This is not because he was forced to pay through some kind of racket. On the contrary, he was providing for his own future. This is a kind of insurance that he felt he needed to have. 'People there are suffering, and it is necessary to help them. All the vagrants who steal, the next generation, they all pay, they all give. Some buy three kilos of tea, three blocks of cigarettes and send them to the *zona*. [Researcher]: **If you end up in the *zona*, will you be helped?** Of course. **By those**

people who were helped by you? No, by others. I come there, my name will be already known' (in-depth interview).

According to one of our adult experts, 'Dmitry' (28), involved in organised crime, and previously a street kid, in order to obtain an entry into the adult criminal world, the young candidates have to perform certain actions. First of all, they have to acquire a *name* by which they would be known in the criminal world. The name can be *earned* by deeds – ie, criminal acts – which would testify to the person's intelligence and capacity to take risk, and which can lead to their being approached by older criminals to join in a criminal enterprise. Furthermore, providing help to the incarcerated adult 'authoriteti' (recognised members of organised crime) is regarded as proof that one sticks to the right notions. When street children do this, it testifies that they are 'normal lads':

> So through this they are making an advertising campaign for themselves, create a *name* for themselves. And when they hang around once, twice, three times at meetings [of criminals; normally held in cafes and night clubs – S.S.] they will eventually be recognised: 'Aha, these are the lads who help, say, 'Vasily the Cripple' [a hypothetical name], they are normal, correct lads, it is possible to talk to them, they know the notions' (Dmitry, in-depth interview).

According to both young and adult respondents, children and young people who have had experience of being in special schools for underage criminals and in special prisons – and also those who had relatives, friends or neighbours with a criminal experience and thus have had already acquired important competencies and connections – have a better chance of becoming leaders in the gangs and joining the adult criminal groups. Runaways from children homes, who have an important leverage over others in that they had to 'look after themselves' and did not have families to care for them, are also in a privileged position.

The main notions, jargon, and norms of behaviour of these youngsters come from the criminal world, as do ideas about the ideal social organisation. 'Make a thief Russian president, and the Russians will be well looked after! The prices will drop immediately, stealing will drop 80%, and everybody will have enough. Only petty tricksters, who are envious of others, will remain. There will be no militia'. [Researcher]: **Who will be looking after order?** 'You and me, ourselves. The thieves will look after the order. The thieves share all the money to the last rouble. They have a brotherhood' ('Mikhail', 17 years, focus-group).

Much of the behaviour of these children fits very well with similar ethnographic research in the West, which has emphasized economic motivation of crime and crime as a reflection of a perception of a social structure of restricted opportunity (ie Moore, 1978; Johnson *et al.*, 1985; Sullivan, 1989). It also manifests the development of group hierarchical structures, identities and norms, similar to those described in the classical criminological literature on delinquent street societies (Thrasher, 1927; Whyte, 1943; Short and Strodtbeck,

1965; Liebow, 1967). Yet there is one important feature of their criminal behaviour, which I would like to stress, and which may be to do both with the situation of these children (being almost entirely left to their own devices in the streets, without recourse to outside support) and the situation in wider Russian society with its predomination of 'adult' criminal institutions. Crime for these children is not just a means to ensure economic survival, nor is it just a way to create alternative identities and establish support systems within their own groups ('families'). Its core importance lies in the fact that it is instrumental in enabling them to join social structures that have developed their own career ladders and social protection mechanisms – the structures of adult organised crime. Young people use and accumulate specific social capital – previous connections with relatives and neighbours who were in prisons, records of joint criminal activities with their peers and older criminals; investment into the future links with adult criminals and appropriation of the 'right notions' – in order to obtain the reputation and connections which are necessary for them to be accepted by the adult criminal community.

Conclusion

Street children and young people in Moscow can be seen as a part of the larger phenomenon of the new urban poor in postcommunist countries, and, from a wider perspective, as part of the 'new urban poor' in Europe (Room *et al*., 1989; Silver, 1993; Mingione, 1993). This phenomenon has also been linked to the concept of social exclusion, usually used in a broader perspective of social integration and citizenship (Room, 1995; Dean with Melrose, 1999). Whether based around the notions of poverty and deprivation, as it is in the British tradition, or around the notions of social integration and solidarity, as it is in the continental tradition (Room, 1995), social exclusion presupposes a collapse of social structures around individuals and households.

Our research seems to have shown that street children in Moscow are far from being a dispossessed mass of individuals, who have fallen through the system of support in various risk scenarios – a view that would fit into the social exclusion paradigm. There are subtle, but crucially important, class, ethnic and economic differences between groups of children and young people on the street, which define their life chances. The efforts of these children to use their available resources and construct social capital bring a further differentiation in their trajectories. Ennew and Milne, writing about street children in the international context, point out that the labour market in which street children operate, 'is distinguished by divisions of age as well as gender, ethnicity and other, non-economic, social structures. Just as childhoods have histories, so child workers and street children have careers or work histories, although these are seldom studied' (Ennew and Milne, 1997: xi). Our research reported here has to be treated as exploratory – we do not have longitudinal data, and so we could not trace what happened with the particular individuals

in the more long-term perspective. Yet within the life-stories of our interviewees it was possible to see individual children's attempts at social mobility within the street social structures, and the extent to which these attempts were connected with the accumulation of social capital.

Our survey showed that a complex system of social relations emerges on the street, with children finding their own positions alongside other urban actors. This complexity of the street social world and of the children's experience has to be taken into account in intervention programmes designed to take the children off the streets. The need for child welfare programmes to recognise the importance of children's continuing identification with the street, and with street children groups, have been highlighted in a number of works (Glaser, 1990; Ennew, 1994b; Lucchini, 1996a). It seems crucially important in designing programmes of work with street children to realise that they have developed idiosyncratic responses, practices and notions which reflect their participation in various street subcultures and communities. Currently in Moscow the local authorities, under the impression that the causes of the problems of street children are in the lack of children's clubs and Pioneers' Palaces, allocate resources to build substitutes for such institutions – new centres for children for after-school hours. The most needy groups – migrant children and those Moscow kids who run away from family abuse and who have to develop ingenious strategies in order to survive – do not benefit at all from such investments. What they need (apart from the resolution of their care needs), are individually designed programmes of support, which would take into account their past experiences and identifications, and respect their achievements (or failures) in constructing society where it is not supposed to exist.

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