Tajikistan's Bureaucratic Management of Exclusion: Responses to the Russian Reentry Ban Database

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Abstract

This article analyzes the consequences of the Russian Federation's introduction of an electronic database that dynamically generates lists of individuals with reentry bans, with a focus on its effect on the Tajik migration management bureaucracy and Tajik migrant workers. Countering standard narratives about the passive citizenry of authoritarian states, it demonstrates how Tajik citizens change the emphasis in the bureaucracy through their everyday encounters with civil servants and bureaucrats. However, this is not a clear case of subversion or subaltern agency, but rather an engagement that remains structured by capitalist needs for expendable, disciplined, and most importantly deportable alien labor.

Keywords

Migration control – deportation – Tajikistan – Central Asia – Russia – bureaucracy – international organizations

On a Friday morning in the fall of 2013, I was walking home from Dushanbe's bazaar, when I overheard three young men talking about how one of them had been forcibly returned to Tajikistan from a Russian airport. The three men

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appeared to be confused about why he had been turned away at the Russian border; they were brandishing the ticket he had used to travel to Russia. I approached the men and asked if I had understood them correctly: one of them had been returned from Russia? All three got excited that someone else was aware of these problems. They right away asked me if I knew of a place where they could purchase a "good ticket." Apparently, they had decided that a "bad ticket" had caused their friend's removal from Russia. I suggested that they call a hotline, operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to learn the reason he was denied entry into Russia, as well as how long his entry ban would be in place. After having a look at the hotline number (it was almost all zeroes) my new acquaintances refused to dial, fearing it was an international call that would incur additional charges. I took out my own phone and called the IOM hotline. I explained the situation to the operator, and she suggested that we go talk to an IOM lawyer who was located right across from the market among a group of airline ticket sellers. I told this to the three men and accompanied them to see the lawyer. The fact that IOM's information center was located at a ticket office calmed the men's fears: they were reassured that now they would definitely be able to purchase a good ticket. Although the three men were focused on their friend's "bad" ticket as the cause of his denial, I knew that matters were probably somewhat different. My suspicions were later confirmed. The young man's name appeared in the Russian database of individuals who were prohibited from entering Russia for a specified period of time, a product of the new Russian "State System for Electronic Migration Registration" (*Gosudarstvennaia informatsionnaia sistema migratsionnogo ucheta*) that had been launched in 2012.

This article represents part of a larger research project on the changing relationship between population mobility and governance by socialist and post-socialist bureaucracies in Tajikistan. It is based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Tajikistan and Russia. Nine months of this period were spent at the IOM office in Dushanbe, where I observed the Tajik migration management enterprise, as well as the relationships between international organizations and the Tajik Migration Service (TMS). In addition, this study draws upon interviews with former and current civil servants, as well as my own observations in Russian's airports. It suggests that by analyzing the micro-encounters of citizens with state and nonstate institutions, we can better understand the processes by which citizens engage with states and other governing institutions. In these processes we see individuals' (migrant workers') capacity to ultimately change the focus of institutions through their daily encounters with bureaucracies. At the same time, however, this study also shows that encounters with the state, even when changed by individuals' demands,

remain structured and limited by the broader context of modern modes of governance. In the case of migration management in Tajikistan, this means the oNGOing establishment of neoliberal forms of government and the state's reduced social commitment to its citizens, as well as the international market's (i.e., Russia's) decreased demand for alien migrant labor. While migrant workers are capable of shifting the focus of programs designed for their benefit, they are unable to affect the broader trends at play in modern Tajikistan, and their actions, as this study shows, come to support the practices of neoliberal government. Workers are caught between developments in the Russian deportation regime and the diffused bureaucratic realities of the Tajik migration infrastructure. As a result, they are functionally restricted in their capacity for change: they can shift the bureaucracy's focus, but not its underlying goal andform.

This article provides a description and analysis of the current Russian deportation regime. The capacities of this regime have been recently expanded by the introduction of a dynamically updated and centralized tracking system, as well as by increases made to the authority of the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS). In Tajikistan the complications of the FMS system were reduced to its most basic relevance to migrant workers: it was simply known as the "blacklisted" database or the *spisok* (list). This article will discuss how the FMS database works and does not work and the reactions its establishment has engendered on the part of both Tajik labor migrants and the local migration management bureaucracy. Using this ethnographic framework, it suggests some initial ways that labor migrants have been able to use tools of migration management for their own purposes, as well as the ways that migrant workers' actions have come to serve both state and nonstate actors. Throughout, the study is focused on the micro-politics of bureaucracy as an illustration of the operation of power in modern Tajikistan. I have built upon Sharma and Gupta's premise of bureaucracy as a process of state making. The mundane bureaucratic practices of the Tajik migration management enterprise are not simply reflections of power; rather, they are very much at the core of its opera- tion.2 Furthermore, everyday encounters with bureaucracy allow us to locate the relationship between the sites of authority and citizens and to analyze the post-socialist nature of such relationship.

2 Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, "Introduction," in Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (eds), *The Anthropology of the State* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 13–16; Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

In Tajikistan we can see an application of Rose and Miller's notion of "government at a distance" or governance through the regulation of citizens' choices.3 Both the TMS and IOM have predicated their responses to the new FMS database on the idea of informing and influencing labor migrants: individuals remained the final instantiation of action through which authority is enact- ed only indirectly. The bureaucracy's job is to deliver information to migrant workers—but the responsibility for the ultimate choice (to stay, to go to Russia, or to find alternative employment elsewhere) remains with individuals, who are held accountable for their own choices. In this way, the Tajik migration management enterprise, encompassing state agencies, donors, and international and local NGOs, represents an increasingly modern form of government in which efficacy is to be achieved through the informed and regulated choices of migrant workers.4

This is in contrast to more traditional analyses of developing nations' "authoritarian" governing practices, which tend to emphasize "failed" attempts to directly engage with citizens or citizens' own failed capacity to make de- mands on authoritarian states.5 Based on Tajik responses to the FMS database, it becomes clear that Tajik governance practices are at once more modern and more successful (at their own goals) than are otherwise recognized. This reading of Tajik bureaucratic practices builds upon Nikolas Rose's analysis of modern forms of government,6 in which he argues that Foucault's government *through* subjects can no longer fully account for the changed relationships be- tween authority and citizens. Today, these relationships are unraveled in the context of neoliberal capitalism, particularly with regards to states' reduced social commitments to citizens. Instead of extending state power through the

3 Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009). This concept is drawn in part from Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands," *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* 6, no. 140 (1986): 1–40.

4 For discussion of this trend on a global scale, see Kenneth W. Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "Why States Act through Formal International Organizations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* 42, no. 1 (1998): 3–32.

5 On Tajikistan, see, among others, the work of John Heathershaw, who has emphasized the "otherness" aspects that underpin Tajikistan's authoritarian state practices. John Heathershaw, "Tajikistan amidst Globalization: State Failure or State Transformation?," in John Heathershaw and Edmund Herzig (eds), *The Transformation of Tajikistan: The Sources of Statehood* (London: Routledge, 2012), 177–198.

6 Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies," in Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (eds), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government* (London: University College of London Press, 1996), 37–64.

bodies of citizens,7 neoliberal states instead act on citizens' individual choices through various indirect sites of authority. This implies a multiplication of sites of authority, as the practices of governing citizens is outsourced to various nonstate organizations and companies, which work to locate responsibility with individual decisions. This indirect governance represents an important aspect of advanced neoliberal rule—and is very much on display in Tajikistan. The Tajik migration management enterprise represents such reformed government of citizens. Acting in coordination or on behalf of the state, private actors accumulate authority through the implementation of routine bureaucratic practices;8 in Tajikistan, IOM and local NGOs become the site of authority through their provision of information and services to labor migrants. The general confusion and chaos that surrounds issues such as the Russian deportation regime, moreover, further shift authority to nonstate actors such as IOM, which can claim globally accumulated expertise to which the state does not have access.

Finally, this article argues that the multiplications of sites of authority does not lead to a more efficient application of resources, but rather thins out the accountability of institutions to individuals. The dispersal of authority through a variety of institutions cannot be separated from the modern practices of "governing at a distance" that underpin the initial need for dispersal. As this article demonstrates, the diffused authority employed by state and nonstate institutions alike presumes that citizens are responsible for their own freedoms, choices, and decisions.9 As a result, the claims that can be made against this authority, and the benefits expected from it, are finite and limited. In addition, all bureaucratic encounters are framed by the larger structuring systems of neoliberal governance.10 As such, the labor of alien workers is part of the

7 A collection of practices that Foucault calls at various times "biopolitics," "security," or "disciplining," but whatever the label has at its core the practices of state modification or directing of individuals' behavior and actions. See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–1978* (New York: Picador, 2009).

8 Jane Caplan and John Torpey, *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

9 Ishan Ashutosh and Alison Mountz, "Migration Management for the Benefit of Whom? Interrogating the Work of the International Organization for Migration," *Citizenship Studies*, 15, no. 1 (2011): 21–38; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind," *Current Anthropology*, 42, no. 1 (2001): 125–138.

10 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

global division of labor, dependent upon the insecurities of the local (in this case, Russian) population,[11] economic growths and downturns, and the internally and politically driven logic of the Russian migration regime. All of these factors act upon Tajik labor migrants and engender their responses to changing conditions of work. As this article will show, for IOM and other actors in the diffused field of migration management, these responses become yet another opportunity for a further dispersal of authority and accountability.

"Total Machine Control"

The migration database of the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS), which was generally referred to in the Tajik migration management bureaucracy as the *spisok* ("list"), became an issue for Tajik migrants in 2012. Its existence, how- ever, was predicated on the 1996 Russian Federal Law No. 114, "On the Rules of Entry and Exit from the Territory of the Russian Federation."12 The initial law outlined the requirements for blacklisting individuals from reentry into Russia, as well as enumerating which Russian state institutions had the right to ban individuals from reentry. By 2014, the law and subsequent amendments stipulated the following provisions that could be used to ban reentry for foreign citizens and persons without citizenship:

- committing two or more administrative violations (*administrativnienarusheniia*)13 over a three-year period (Article 26, Item 4);
- not paying administrative fines (26/6);
- failing to exit Russia 30 days after the official end of a previous temporarystay (26/8);
- deportation or administrative removal during a preceding visit to Russia(27/2);

11 Sara Kalm, "Liberalizing Movements? The Political Rationality of Global Migration Management," in Martin Geiger and Antoine Pecaud (eds), *The Politics of International Migration Management* (London: Palgrave, 2010), 21–44.

12 For a legal analysis of the law, see Agniezska Kubal, "Entry Ban as Surreptitious Deportation? Situating *zapret na vezd* in Russian Immigration Law and Practice in a Comparative Perspective," *Law and Social Inquiry*, (forthcoming).

13 In the Russian legal system, "administrative violations" are essentially low-level misdemeanor crimes: parking tickets, speeding violations, jaywalking, and other small infractions that carry fines from the authorities.

- outstanding or non-expunged conviction for a serious crime or felony committed on the territory of the Russian Federation or elsewhere (27/3);
- the decision, made on any other basis, that the foreign citizen or person without citizenship was undesirable for residency in the Russian Federation (27/7).14

During my fieldwork, the following Russian state institutions had the right to add "undesirable" foreign citizens and persons without citizenship to the entry ban list:

- Ministry of Internal Affairs;
- Federal Security Service;
- Ministry of Defense;
- Russian Financial Monitoring Service;
- External Intelligence Service;
- Ministry of Justice;
- Federal Migration Service;
- Federal Drug Control Service;
- Federal Service for the Surveillance for Consumer Rights Protection and
  Human Well-Being;
- and Federal Medical Agency.

Given the wide variety of state agencies able to place names on the reentry ban list, as well as the general vagueness of the 1996 law's provisions, reentry bans often came to represent a system of penalization, where individuals could be banned for as little as repeat traffic violations or parking tickets.

This system was initially developed to address the perceived risk of illegal migration to Russia. Officials believed that it would limit corrupt practices in the field of migration; it presumably left no space for bribes or human error.15 Implemented under the framework of "efficient" migration regulation, the system was meant to address the consequences of increased mobility in the post-Soviet space. In the process, however, the vagueness of the relevant legal provisions (such as, for instance, the wording of Article 26 of the 1996 law, "*mozhet byt' ne razreshen*"—reentry "may be disallowed"),

14 See "O poriadke vyezda iz Rossiiskoi Federatsii i v"ezda v Rossiiskuiu Federatsiiu." July 18, 1996, http://www.FMS.gov.ru/upload/site1/document_file/_114-.pdf (accessed April 30, 2016).

15 Madeleine Reeves, "The Black List: On Infrastructural Indeterminacy and its Reverberations," in *Infrastructures and Social Complexity* (forthcoming), 5.

human error, bureaucratic discretion, linguistic confusion, and other unforeseen developments complicated the nominally unbiased machine. Although the machine-generated system failed to live up to its expectations, its success was immediately obvious in its creation of a large pool of deportable migrant workers, who were increasing turned back from entering Russia. As has been observed elsewhere in the world, including in regards to Mexican migrant workers in the United States, it is the risk of deportability, rather than actual deportation, that creates the underlying disposability of undocumented migrant labor.16 This was the case in Russia as well; the increased risk of deportation heightened the "removability" of migrant workers, making them more disciplined into the roles within the economic structure.

Over time, this reentry ban system has developed into an effective mechanism to regulate conduct within and outside of the Russian Federation. As of 2015, over 1,300,000 migrant workers have been blacklisted and become unable (at least in theory) to reenter the territory of Russian Federation.17 Initially, however, reentry bans had a relatively modest practical effect on labor mi- grants from across Central Asia. These issues began to be overcome in 2012 with the launch of the FMS's "State System for Electronic Migration Registration" (*Gosudarstvennaia informatsionnaia sistema migratsionnogo ucheta*).18 The new system also paralleled the 2012 legal separation of the reentry ban data- base from the deportation process, thus making reentry bans a legally separate sanction.19 This unified electronic system rested on the many Russian agencies' mandates for collecting and storing information about foreign citizens, as well as providing this information to migration-related accounting authorities (*organy migratsionnogo ucheta*). FMS bureaucrats then collated this information in a quarterly updatable and dynamic database. Operated by the Russian FMS, the State System was intended to provide Russian border guards with se- cure and reliable surveillance through the application of modern technologies. The database allowed the Russian government to store and process a theoretically infinite amount of data on the movements, activities, and registrations

16 Nicolas P. De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31 (2002): 438.

17 "FMS: v"ezd v Rossiiu zakryt dlia 1 mln 309 tys. inostrantsev," tass, April 15, 2015.

18 The law on which the State System for Electronic Migration Registration was based was passed in 2007, but full implementation appears to have only been achieved in 2012. See "Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Rossiskoi Federatsii ot 14 fevralia 2007 g. no. 94 "O gosudarstvennoi informatsionnoi sisteme migratsionnogo ucheta," *Rossiskaia gazeta*, February 21, 2007.

19 Kubal, "Entry Ban as Surreptitious Deportation?"

of not only foreign citizens, but also even Russian citizens.20 For countries that provide labor for the Russian market, such as Tajikistan, the introduction of the State System has meant the increased surveillance of its labor resources on the territory of Russian Federation and consequently increased penalization in the form of reentry bans to Russia. The introduction of the system, moreover, occurred suddenly and without any official announcement from the Russian government. As a result, the Tajik migration management bureaucracy was left to determine on its own the causes and consequences of an increasing number of workers' reentry denials. Finally, the system has also significantly altered the way that civil servants and bureaucrats at international agencies tend to conceptualize the "problem" of migration in Tajikistan.

In Tajikistan, the launch of the computerized system meant the emergence of a new "at risk" category migrant workers who could now be identified and targeted by various government and nonstate institutions. The group of "banned" migrant workers could also be categorized and counted in different ways. For instance, as a representative of the FMS noted during an interview, there were 400,000 Tajik citizens listed in the system as having entered Russia, but who were not properly registered with the migration records system (*migratsionnyi uchet*). As a result, these 400,000 had technically committed an administrative violation and could potentially be banned from reentry:

> When a person leaves [Russia], the database closes entry for him. Although it sees all of them dynamically, it does not [automatically] close entry to all of them, it does so only when a person leaves. The system allows for the tracking of a person, but if he were to be found in Russia the punishment would be different. If article 27 [deportation] would be applied it would mean a reentry ban of up to ten years with deportation or administrative removal. In cases when the machines blocks reentry, one is only forbidden from entering Russia for up to three years. … Right

20 As initially developed in 2007, the State System for Electronic Migration Registration did not include provisions for the tracking of Russian citizens' movements or registrations. While all Russian citizens are also required to register their addresses with the Russian state, this information has been traditionally held in separate databases under the authority of institutions such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). In the past few years, however, and especially from 2015 on, the FMS has appeared to take on further authority over information about Russian citizens. In some cases, its databases now appear to encompass the movements and activities of Russians, although the degree of real overlap is unclear. See, for example, the website of the FMS office in Arkhangel'skaia Oblast, which specifically lists both citizens and non-citizens as part of the System, http://www.29.FMS.gov.ru/about/Informacionnie_sistemi/Gismu (accessed April 30, 2016).

> now people also receive a certain latitude (*poslablenie*): 90 plus 30 days to leave the country.21 The list has about 270,000 [Tajik citizens]. The exact reasons for their blacklisting is not provided [to Tajik state institutions], but when a bilateral agreement will be signed on the exchange of data, then this information will be open."22

In contrast to this FMS representative's statements, however, in practice re- entry bans are frequently issued against foreign citizens who are still inside the Russian Federation. The database has proven far more complicated than initially envisioned by the FMS. What is more salient, however, is the FMS's reliance on the system as a tool to create "deportability," rather actual acts of physical expulsion. Only when attempting to reenter the Russian Federation or when dealing with a FMS office in Russia would migrant workers learn of their banned status. In this way the Russian state was able to step away from the direct practice of deportation, instead shifting accountability onto the migrant workers themselves to determine their own status within the field of"deportability."

The same FMS official agreed that the use of the new electronic system had reduced the number of deportations and administrative removals from Russia. Both, he said, have become rare. In balance, however, the number of those who have been forbidden from entering Russia for a period of time has increased. The FMS official was obviously proud of the "list"; it represented Russia's technological prowess and was a model system of efficient population control:

> There is no other such thing in the world. There have been delegations from Europe coming [to the Russian FMS] to learn about this system. The program can map all of the foreign citizens who have entered Russia, their legal status, their place of residence, and their clustering in particular regions. It is an amazing map, when I first saw it I was so proud for my country.23

21 According to bilateral agreements between Russia and Tajikistan, Tajik citizens can stay for 90 days on Russian territory after arriving without a visa; in order to stay longer, they need to acquire a work permit (*razreshenie na rabotu*), or another legal justification for their oNGOing stay (education, self-employment, et cetera). If they do not acquire the necessary documents, they have to leave within 90 days, but the Russian government has agreed to penalize them only if they overstay those 90 days by an additional 30 days or more.

22 Author's interview with an FMS official, Dushanbe, February 2015.

23 Ibid.

The official used the phrase "total machine control" to describe the system, although he also assured me that it was in accord with international norms. For this FMS official, the use of the computerized database was both a practical exercise and a humanitarian (albeit dubiously so) approach to countries such as Tajikistan and their migrant workers. The practical advantages of the system were apparent: deportation and administrative removals are pricey and time-consuming. The new system meant that undesired foreign citizens could be blocked from reentry or prevented from regularization in Russia in a way that only required their (self-financed) departure from the territory of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, this civil servant believed that migrant workers also benefitted from the new system by avoiding even longer reentry bans. The scope and the growth of the database of blacklisted workers, however, ren- der the FMS official's claims about a "humanitarian approach" toward migrant workers highly questionable. In practice, the database created an "infrastructure of deportability," in which people with infectious diseases or minor traffic violations have also found themselves banned from Russia.24 Moreover, such a system has also allowed for the preservation of a market for migrant labor by placing sanctions against "delinquent" workers and socializing migrant workers into the category of deportable and compliant laborers.25

In addition, although the average length of entry bans may have shortened, the introduction of a continuously updated database has meant sharp increases in the number of migrant workers turned away at entry points into the Russian Federation. In first months of 2013 the majority of migration workers who contacted IOM's hotline for migrant workers or visited migrant support centers operated by NGOs in Tajikistan had only learned of their status at airports or other checkpoints upon their arrival to the Russian Federation. IOM initially treated these cases independently, until the number of hotline calls and visits to migrant information centers increased sharply. By early 2013 NGO and IOM lawyers were overwhelmed by requests to learn the reasons migrants were be turned away from Russia. Dealing with the "list" became an everyday practice at these institutions. Instead of dispensing advice about "how to stay legal in Russia,"26 the sheer number of calls and requests necessitated that the migration management bureaucracy provide information about the new database.

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24 Madeleine Reeves, "The Black List: On Infrastructural Indeterminacy and its Reverberations," in *Infrastructures and Social Complexity* (forthcoming).

25 For more detail, see Malika Bahovadinova, "Ideologies of Labor: The Bureaucratic Management of Migration in Post-Soviet Tajikistan" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2016).

26 Cf. Bahovadinova, "Ideologies of Labor," chapter 6.

Yet no one in Tajikistan could access the database. This obstacle was first partially resolved by the director of an IOM partner NGO in the northern Tajik oblast of Sughd. This director had a close friend in the Tajik Border Service, who gave him a copy of the FMS database.27 However, the director had promised the Tajik Border Service not to distribute any copies; thus the NGO could not share the system with IOM or the TMS. To work around this restriction, when migrant workers called the IOM hotline, they would be asked to provide their dates of birth, names, and passport numbers; IOM employees would then e-mail this information to the NGO to look up the caller's status in the data- base, and answers were sent back by e-mail to IOM.28 IOM employees would then telephone migrant workers with their status. In addition, because the database was dynamically updated but only collated and distributed on a quarterly basis, the closer migrants called to the end of a quarter, the more likely IOM and its NGO partners were to suggest postponing a return to Russia to see if their names might appear in the next quarterly update to the database.

Another way that migrant workers could learn their status was to purchase a ticket to Russia from Ural Airlines, a Russian airline that, having grown tired of transporting banned migrant workers back to Central Asia for free, procured access to the FMS database through personal contacts in Russia. After a person purchased a ticket to Russia, Ural Airlines would run his or her name against the database; if the name were found, they would inform the potential traveler, who could return their tickets for a small cancellation fee. Ural Airlines refused to share its access to the database with anyone in the migration management bureaucracy in order to maintain their competitive advantage for migrant workers purchasing tickets to Russia.

As time passed, migration management bureaucrats grew increasingly anxious to procure consistent access to the ephemeral and changing spisok. With direct access to the spisok, they believed workers' needs for roundabout verifications and ticket purchases would decrease. They also assumed that migrant workers solely needed to know whether or not their names had been identified in the current database or the next quarterly update. Based on

27 Although the Russian FMS refused to provide copies of the database to either IOM or the Tajik Migration Service, the Russian Border Service, to whom copies were provided, was willing to share with the Tajik Border Service. For its part, however, the Tajik Border Ser- vice flatly refused to share information, including the database, with the Tajik MigrationService.

28 In 2014 the FMS launched an electronic request form that could be used by an individual to verify his or her status against the database. Until then, however, migrant workers and the bureaucracy in Tajikistan relied solely on quarterly updated versions of the database.

this information, bureaucrats hypothesized, migrant workers could then make reasonable decisions about traveling to Russia. If they were banned, they could instead spend their temporary exile learning a new profession, thus better preparing themselves for the migrant labor market.

By December 2012, IOM was pressing the TMS to acknowledge the growing problem of reentry bans against Tajik migrant workers. IOM officials argued that the TMS needed to formally request a copy of the database from the Tajik Border Service, the only Tajik institution that "officially" had access to the database, but which refused to share it with the TMS. For its part, the TMS was the only official channel from which IOM could receive the database. At first, however, the TMS ignored the frequent demands of the IOM staff to procure the *spisok* and start providing information to workers. IOM was constantly frustrated with the apparent slowness of TMS to realize there was a problem. Staff suggested that the intransigence was more than just bureaucratic sluggishness: perhaps TMS did not approve of the migrant workers whose names were on the *spisok*. "For them it means that they [the migrant workers] have shamed themselves (*opozorilis*)."29 During a meeting with NGO representatives, for example, one TMS official suggested that migrants themselves were at fault for ending up on the *spisok*. It is "our uncontrolled (*stikhiinaya)* migration that leads to such issues," she argued, and "we have the task of informing the population."30

To help overcome the TMS logjam, IOM employees drafted a letter on behalf of the TMS to the Tajik Border Service, requesting quarterly access to the up- dated database.31 Two months later, the TMS was able to obtain a copy of the database; one senior TMS official happily called the IOM representative with the news. The latter, in turn, warned that the TMS that "just having the *spisok* and telling people if they are on it or not is not enough … You need to work with people, you need to talk to them, ask those questions [about reasons for their bans]. Just telling them yes or no is not sufficient."32

The IOM office could offer its experience on this matter. Although it was just learning how the system actually worked, over the previous four months staff had accumulated considerable experience talking to migrant workers about their experiences in Russia prior to being blacklisted. As noted above, since fall 2012 migrant workers were almost exclusively calling the IOM hotline or visiting its migrant support centers to learn if their names appeared on the

29 Participant observation, March 2013.

30 Participant observation, February 2013.

31 Participant observation, December 2012.

32 Participant observation, February 2013.

spisok.33 This increased pressure from migrant workers had compelled IOM staff to focus on the *spisok* and, over time, allowed them to speak as authoritative experts about the FMS database. By the first quarter of 2013, moreover, IOM had acquired its own copy of the database, which further increased its capacity to speak as experts and provide reentry-ban related services. This shift in focus meant that the NGO network and hotline that had been originally intended to provide legal advice about the laws and regulations of the Russian labor market also changed its orientation. The sharply increased number of inquiries coming from migrant workers about the database turned IOM and TMS information points into what one of the IOM employees later termed "deportation centers"—places where the only topics of conversation were the *spisok* and reentry bans.

Over time, both IOM and the TMS provided various services to banned migrants. Previous attempts to create legal, cultured migrant workers were giving way to efforts to inform as many migrants as possible about their status. This was seen as the only way to avoid forced returns from Russian and their attendant trauma. Some IOM partners found nearly all of their activities shunted aside by *spisok* concerns: one NGO said that in February 2013 alone they had received 2,000 list-related calls to their office, and that a third of those calling were indeed in the database.34 IOM was ultimately also successful in persuading the TMS to start providing migrant workers with information from the database, organizing a number of meetings between blacklisted migrants and TMS civil servants. By the end of 2014, the TMS had very much "recognized" the problem of reentry bans and had agreed to IOM's proposal to host IOM and NGO employees in its offices throughout the country, since these workers were experienced in providing "high quality information" to migrant workers. Ultimately, for both the TMS and IOM, previous practices aimed at decreasing illegality in Russia became secondary to the process of managing migrant workers status relative to the database.35

Throughout this period, the primary goal remained information provision: migrants were checked against the *spisok* and advised whether or not they could travel to Russia. In addition, letters were drafted to the FMS on behalf of workers whose names had been identified in the database in order to clarify the rationale behind their "undesired" status and the exact timeframe for their reentry ban. Beginning in 2014, however, migrants could request information about

33 Participant observation, January 2013.

34 Participant observation, February 2013.

35 Cf. Bahovadinova, "Ideologies of Labor," chapter 4.

their status directly through the FMS website.36 Yet IOM continued to check migrants' names against the database and make requests for information on their behalf. When I asked an IOM representative why they were still involved in providing information to migrant workers when they could now access this data themselves, she explained that this process was more complicated than many migrants could do on their own. "If you type in your name or your passport number incorrectly they will not be able to identify your name in the system. We do it very carefully; I cannot make sure that they [migrant workers] will do it the way we do here." Even with attempts to improve the "regulation" of migration flows through information, however, the database continued to grow rapidly. In December 2012 it contained the names of 37,000 citizens of Tajikistan. At the point of my departure from IOM in the fall of 2013 this figure had grown to 200,000; by early 2016 the number had grown to more than 330,000.37

The new electronic system also altered migrant workers' strategies for maintaining their legal status in Russia. Previously, although Tajik migrant workers could only legally stay in Russia for 90 days without official employment, they could simply cross the nearby border with Ukraine or another Commonwealth of Independent States country, thus renewing his/her legal stay.38 Those who overstayed their 90-day period, moreover, found alternative methods of maintaining legality. For instance, migrant workers would stand for hours in lines outside of Tajik consulates in major Russian cities to obtain certificates verifying that they had "lost" their passports. They could then depart Russia with- out receiving a deportation stamp in their passports.39 If their passports were stamped, migrant workers could then "lose" their passports back in Tajikistan

36 This online system did not provide a great deal of information to migrant workers, but was rather a semi-automated check of migrant workers' data (name and passport number) against the updated database held by the FMS. If a migrant had been banned from reentry, he or she would learn about the ban and the length of time it was active for, but no further information.

37 "Migratsionnyi tsentr Moskvy vvel monopoliiu na medobsledovanie migrantov," *Asia- Plus*, February 16, 2016.

38 cf. Ruhs and Anderson 2009 For similar practices in the UK, which they have termed "semi-compliance," see Martin Ruhs and Bridget Anderson, "Semi-compliance and Illegality in Migrant Labour Markets: An Analysis of Migrants, Employers, and the State in the UK," *Population, Space, and Place,* 16, no. 3 (2009): 195–211.

39 Interestingly, this practice continued for years after the database's introduction, notwithstanding its now limited effect. As of July 2014 migrants continued to stand in long lines outside of the Tajik Consulate General in Moscow, where they paid a fee to receive a certificate attesting to the loss of their passport. No one at the Consulate General or among the gathered migrant workers appeared aware of—or interested in learning—the fact

and obtain a new one without the deportation stamp. The new passport would omit or add an extra letter to their name to confuse the border guards or the database. In 2012, fingerprinting was also introduced to Russian migration regulations, most likely in order to overcome such ruses. The Russian FMS also now requires photos of all the migrant workers who receive *patenty* (individual entrepreneurship permits) to work in Russia.40

These bureaucratic innovations substantially changed migrants' perception of the law and their experience of staying legal in Russia. "Traditional" methods of maintaining legality by losing passports or working for local authorities (who could shield workers from deportation or removal) proved harder to maintain with the introduction of the *spisok*. During a legal training session in Dushanbe delivered by a Russian lawyer for the TMS and local NGOs, for instance, the conversation quickly shifted to a discussion of the database. One of the training participants asked the lawyer about a case in which a man had worked in Moscow for eight months. He had stayed in Russia without the necessary documents, but had been working for a local policeman who protected the worker. The man once had been detained by a different policeman, but his protector quickly freed him from the detention center. Now, however, the man was back in Tajikistan and wondered if he had been inserted into the *spisok*. At the moment, the Russian lawyer said, it would be impossible to verify his status in the database, since he just recently returned from Russia—but most probably his name was on the list.41 Informal practices that previously had shielded workers from slipping into illegality were no longer feasible under the new the system. As the needs of migrant workers shifted from methods of staying legal in Russia to obtaining information about their very ability to enter Russia, a private industry based on verifying blacklisted status also sprang up in Dushanbe. This was a new specialization and moneymaking operation for some of the city's Internet cafés, which had downloaded the list from the FMS. IOM employees denounced this private industry, where migrant workers could verify their status for 5 *somoni* ($1) per passport, since the young men performing the check did not know the intricacies of the *spisok*. As a result, IOM often asked the TMS to investigate this private industry, which was effectively making money off of migrants' misery; it was unclear whether the TMS acted upon its advice.42

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that the database was now making their efforts much less effective (participant observation, July 2014).

40 Participant observation, legislative training, Dushanbe, February 2013.

41 Participant observation, February 2013.

42 The idea that services should be provided to migrant workers for free was sacrosanct for many NGOs and IOM employees. When the director of the northern branch of the NGO that had first acquired a copy of the FMS *spisok*, for example, tried to provide paid

During a later visit to Dushanbe, for instance, I entered an Internet café that was located right next to the Tajik Migration Service's Dushanbe branch. This was a typical cyber café, tailored toward children addicted to online war games, but at that moment there also were a number of middle-aged men standing by the counter. A woman in her 50s, fluent in Russian, and rather unusual in a job that was predominantly performed by young men, was taking passport after passport from these men and checking their names against the FMS database. One of the clients, an older man ahead of me in line, handed her his passport. The woman took the passport, typed what I presume was the passport's data into the computer, and then returned the document, saying that it was clean. The same man then pulled out a second passport and asked the woman to verify if he was clean according to that passport as well. The woman agreed, taking 10 somoni for the service. Even when the FMS made online verification available in 2014, the private sector continued to advise workers about their status on the "list."

Some workers did defy the system, making the choice to travel to Russia despite being on the list. In such cases, bureaucrats in Tajikistan would ask them to call in case they successfully crossed the border. Surprisingly, many were able to cross and called to share their good news with the confused bureaucrats. Many more, however, were turned away at the border. Some airlines made workers with a known reentry ban sign an agreement that they would pay for their return flight to Tajikistan should their attempt fail. The private industry that had grown in Tajikistan to assist workers with the database also became involved in helping workers to remove their names from the database. This service grew quickly after information spread about the first successful cases of appeal. While individual cases of subversion and appeal existed, they were lost amid the hundreds of thousands who still remained on the list and unable to reenter Russia.

One Automated *Spisok* or Many Human *Spisoks*?

As IOM and others focused heightened attention on the *spisok*, it became increasingly clear that the database was more complicated and confusing than

services to migrants related to removing their names from the list (when this was possible, for example, if a mistake had been made) he was excoriated and fired by the NGO's management. The director continued to provide these paid services, but now as a private entrepreneur.

had been initially thought. Rather than one collated database, there were at least three, operated independently by the Russian Border Service, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), and the FMS. Each database, moreover, appeared to contain somewhat different lists of blacklisted individuals. For instance, in early 2013 an elderly man came to IOM's office, and told the story of his son, who had been deported from Russia six years ago. Now that his five- year reentry ban had expired, the son had attempted to return to work in Russia. Before leaving, he checked his name against a copy of the Border Service's database, which indicated that he was "clean." Yet he was turned away at the Russian border because his name had not been removed from the FSB data- base. Even though his name should have been removed from all databases after the expiration of the five-year reentry ban, the databases were not uniform and were not automatically updated. The supposedly automated *spisok* was actually an umbrella concept for multiple *datasets* that were run and updated by multiple agencies.43

Although the FMS continued to insist that there was only one automatically collated database, evidence emerged that multiple institutions were operating independent databases.44 This led to the creation of additional bureaucratic practices in both Tajikistan and Russia. In the spring of 2013, for example, the Dushanbe airport came to an agreement with the Russian FMS to obtain an updated database on a regular basis. For IOM and other migration management actors, however, this was considered "inefficient," as the FMS database was now seen as incomplete, with many believing that only the Russian Border Service had the "final" updated database that compiled names from eleven Russian agencies.45 According to an agreement between the Russian FSB and the Tajik Border Service, the latter was provided with a regularly updated database of blacklisted persons. The Tajik Border Service, however, approached the database as a security-related system and refused to share it with any other state institutions or to even inform migrant workers about their status as they departed the country.

43 Participant observation, February 2013.

44 The claim might be made that the "different databases" described in this section were simply different iterations of the same database—that the system was unified, but up- dated and distributed to different services at different points. Although on a theoretical level this retains the unity of the database, in practice it means that different lists of people were being used at different geographical points at different times. For the purposes of migrant workers and the Tajik migration management system, this would effectively mean the same thing as multiple databases.

45 Participant observation, legal training, Dushanbe, February 2013.

Moreover, basic human error and human discretion (*chelovecheskii faktor*) played an important role in making the database less automated than the FMS had envisioned. At the end of the day, names still had to be physically typed into one or another *spisok*, leading to confusion about whom IOM or NGOs suspected would be on the list and those who actually were. As an IOM worker exclaimed on one occasion: "You can understand this database how- ever you like—I just don't get it!" (*Kak khochesh', tak i ponimai etot spisok*!) She explained that the man whom she had just spoken with had been subject to administrative removal from Russia, and that his name ought to have been in the database, but it was not. There was a court decision with regard to his case, and his passport had also been stamped, and yet his name was not in the sys- tem.46 On a different occasion a migrant worker who called IOM to verify his status in Russia said that, although he had a stamp in his passport specifying his administrative removal from Russia, he had successfully bribed officials in Russia so that they did not enter his name into the database.47 There were also those inexplicable cases in which migrant workers were verified as blacklisted nonetheless managed to make it to Russia. In part, the overlap between human and computer systems may have been at fault: the FMS had complained that letters in the Tajik alphabet that were not in Russian ("ҷ" or "ҳ") were translated into Russian in various ways, leading to inconsistencies in the computer databases. This allowed many who were in the database to enter Russia.48

The FMS vision of a unified database providing "total machine control," in practice, turned out to be much more complicated and prone to error. The process of inserting and removing names was not as simple as FMS officials stated. The expiration period did not always correspond with reentry ban timeframes, and the existence of multiple databases meant that the information provided in Tajikistan to migrant workers was prone to being incomplete. With multiple federal Russian agencies adding names in different ways into databases, more- over, there was always the possibility that information would simply not line up. For instance, the FMS had not taken into account dual citizens, which led to a number of Russian citizens being turned back to Tajikistan when trying

46 Participant observation, February 2013.

47 Participant observation, January 2013.

48 Author's interview with an FMS Official, Dushanbe, February 2015. Part of the solution was seen in new requirements for entry to the Russian Federation: as of January 1, 2015, Tajik citizens, like many others, could now only enter the Russian Federation on the basis of an international passport, in which their names were written in standardized Latin characters. (Prior to 2015 Tajik citizens had been able to enter Russia on "internal" pass- ports, in which their names were denoted in the modified Cyrillic of modern Tajik.)

to enter Russia. One such case, for example, pertained to a woman whom I learned about in 2015, who had dual Russian and Tajik citizenship. She visited Tajikistan from Russia on her internal Russian passport in late 2014, but when the law changed at the end of 2014, she could no longer return to Russia on this passport: now she needed an international passport to travel between the two countries. She did not have the necessary documents with her in Tajikistan to apply for a new Russian international passport, and, as a result, she decided to return to Russia, where she had long lived and worked, on her international Tajik passport. At the entry point to Russia she was returned to Tajikistan, since her Tajik passport number came up on the blacklist. When she had first entered Russia with a Tajik passport years earlier, she already had Russian citizenship and thus had no reason to procure work permission documents. For the machine-generated database, however, she had remained a Tajik citizen and thus had overstayed her visit. The FMS quickly resolved this woman's problems, but it represented many of the mix-ups that arose through the expansion of the automated *spisok* regime. As this case demonstrates, with the introduction of the new database, the particular details of individual cases— the messy business of human life—were made secondary to the need to unifyand standardize.

The introduction of the FMS database and its attempts to standardize the treatment of Tajik and other labor migrants significantly reconfigured the status of those travelling to Russia from visa-free countries such as Tajikistan. Functionally, it came to mean that for Russia all travelers from Tajikistan were flattened into labor migrants. The system did not differentiate between various categories of Tajik citizens because it was configured to work with migrant workers only. The Tajik citizen had become the homogenized face of a migrant labor influx that needed control, surveillance, and discipline.49 As a result of the *spisok* and attempts to automate control, even Tajik students who studied in Russia were now supposed to procure work permits or "patents" to stay le- gally in Russia or risk being flagged by the database, even though they were very much legal as students registered with the local academic institutions.

49 I experienced the flattening aspect of the new entrance regime in March 2015, when I flew from Dushanbe to St. Petersburg. As a Tajik citizen, I was not only forced to be re- checked against a "new" database after passing through passport control, but I was also required to purchase health insurance. Russian law stipulates that health insurance must be purchased by all foreign *workers* in Russia; the idea that I, a Tajik citizen, was entering Russia with any goal but labor migration was incomprehensible to the FMS officials at the border. Thus, in their reading, I had to purchase health insurance in order to enter the country.

The fact that Russian Border Guards were even turning away those dual Tajik-Russian citizens who had happened to return home on their Tajik passports helps to further illustrate the totalizing approach to citizens who provide labor power for the Russian Federation. "Total machine control" may not have been quite so automated as envisioned, but it had at least managed to standardize what it meant to be Tajik.

Reactions and Responses

The introduction of the State System for Electronic Migration Registration in 2012 had a considerable effect on the Tajik migration management bureaucracy. The previously standard practice of pre-departure orientations (PDO), which provided information to migrant workers about how to live and work legally in Russia, had reflected what Russian society desired—well-socialized and culturally versed workers. The PDO was thus designed to meet the needs of the receiving society, not the migrant workers.50 This practice had transformed by the end 2012 into delivering information about the Russian system of data- base-generated reentry bans due to the overwhelming demand from migrant workers. Although in official project documentation IOM's centers and its hotline were supposed to be delivering legal advice about Russian laws, already by the end of 2012 actual practice was almost exclusively focused on the *spisok* and those banned from reentry to Russia. The sheer demand for this sort of information was sufficient to overcome IOM's initial preference for PDOs, as well as the skepticism of TMS officials who were distrustful of a group that had "shamed" the country through their illegality. These objections could no longer be maintained after the group of blacklisted Tajik citizens grew from an initial37,000 to more than 300,000.

At the same time, certain assumptions remained about the migrant workers: in the eyes of the bureaucracy they ultimately bore responsibility for their choices. If banned, migrant workers were expected to make the proper *in- formed* decision to stay in Tajikistan: they ought to wait for the ban to expire. There were no serious discussions in the migration management bureaucracy about the structures that had generated migrant workers' sharply increased deportability. Instead, practices focused on the individual: migrant workers should ascertain their status and make an informed decision. A very typical conversation with a migrant worker would go as follows: "You are not on the list. You could go [to Russia]. But I do not want to tell you to go; I do not want

50 Bahovadinova, "Ideologies of Labor."

this responsibility. Let's write a letter to FMS, and we will wait for their answer. If when we get a new list your name won't be on it, then you should go."51 As these practices demonstrate, information was also still the good that was going to bring the worker up the necessary level of adaptation and conformity. Yet all the same in the case of spisok the Tajik migrant worker turned migration management practice into something that it had not been planned to be. Through the volume of demands made to meet the need of banned workers who had started to experience the workings of the spisok, PDOs were shunted aside. As such, the Tajik migration management enterprise was reacting to the dynamics internal to Russian migration management, as well as the development and expanding role of the FMS in Russian state bureaucracy. Blacklisted workers were also reacting to conditions over which they had little control: they just wanted to go back to work in Russia.

As the case of the *spisok* demonstrates, migration management in countries like Tajikistan is generally a series of responses and adaptations to the policies and laws of countries of destination, as well as the nature of employment of its citizens in those countries and the interplay between those citizens and the legal challenges they face. Accordingly, the actors in the migration management field are guided not only by the limited financial capacity of their institutions, but also by forces outside their control. Legal and bureaucratic changes in Russia, as this article has shown, can lead to overwhelming numbers of deported and confused migrant workers, which can fundamentally change the focus of migrant management activity in a sending country such as Tajikistan.

Even as outside laws and citizen engagement change the particular content of migration management practices, however, their form and role in day-to- day governance remain consistent. Although the growth of the *spisok* could spark discussion in Tajikistan about the state's failure to create an "efficient" migration regime or about Russia's need for expandable, cheap, obedient, and non-integrated Tajik labor, the final role of the migration management regime was never questioned. It continued to practice its governing authority through both state and nonstate actors that have been authorized by the state to pro- vide services. The form of governance practice also remained unquestioned: migrants were advised; they were retrained; they were given information to inform their decisions. By emphasizing the established neoliberal practice of governing through advice, bureaucrats and officials continuously located

51 Participant observation, January 2013.

the fault for illegality and reentry bans with migrant workers. The proper solution to the growing problem would be to provide information to Tajik citizens so that they could make more informed—more regulated—decisions as migrants. It is these practices and programs, launched and implemented by the Tajik migration management regime, that constitute an important part of modern state making, and which situate the *spisok* and its consequences within the broader field of bureaucratic micro-politics in Tajikistan.

Tajik labor migration to Russia has continued to change rapidly on the background of the FMS electronic system of surveillance and control. When I last left Dushanbe, the database(s) contained the names of at least 330,000 Tajik citizens, and the hopes of those listed in the database were levied against the Tajik government to negotiate on their behalf with Russia. These hopes are great, but the micro-politics of the Tajik state's modern mode of governance are too small to accommodate the needs and desires of the blacklisted. Over- whelming demand from migrant workers for a new approach to the *spisok*, as this article has emphasized, has only extenuated trends toward governing at a distance, where nonstate agencies such as IOM and NGOs are able to expand expertise and authority. As further authority is distributed to those nonstate institutions able to provide advice and modern practices of government, mi- grant workers and other Tajik citizens find their needs flattened and frequently unmet. The government response falls short: it no longer can hide behind the individual responsibilities of migrants who are caught in forces greater than themselves. The advice "not to go to Russia" or "assistance in learning for how long the re-entry ban would be in force" is all that has been provided in the bureaucratic encounters between the migration management actors and mi- grant workers. This limited micro-politics, which emphasizes and strengthens the limited role of the state, is part and parcel of broader trends in Tajikistan towards the modernization of rule and the consequent disengagement with its citizens. Bureaucracy provides advice, and it is the responsibility of citizens to fend for themselves. To be fair, this trend is in fact not particular to Tajikistan: throughout the world, neoliberalization governs through advertisement and other forms of dispersed authority enacted by businesses and private agencies.52 As the plight of blacklisted migrants shows, however, how much citizens can reform such government through engagement is an open question. Migrants can change the shape of the migration management bureaucracy, but not its broader role: they are still widgets for export within the broader system of capitalism.

52 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).