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“Wandering Workers” as a New Force: Russia’s Case

The Russian migrant workers – *otkhodniki* – are a specific group of internal temporary labor migrants who migrate from small towns and rural areas to major cities and industrial centers, mainly in Moscow. Among them, seasonal and agricultural workers are a negligible minority. In my view, these Russian labor migrants differ from both circular (circulatory) cross-border migrants and seasonal agricultural migrants, well familiar in many countries of the world. To highlight these differences, we refer to them as «wandering workers», and this specific activity as «*otkhodnichestvo*». A self-designation for such wandering workers appeared in Russia about three or four centuries ago. People started calling them *otkhodniki* [from the Russian «*otkhod*» – temporary departure], and this is the term they themselves and the Russian scientists still use.

Otkhodniki movements, as a special type of labor migration is currently specific by far not only to Russia. It definitely exists in many post-Soviet republics, as in the past. Some of them, like Turkmenistan or Lithuania, are less affected (especially into Russia), whereas in some of the others, like Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, *otkhodnichestvo* in the form of cross-border migration is as widespread as in Russia today, and even wider. Besides, quite a few other countries demonstrate examples of seasonal interregional circular migration of “labor resources”. Although here it is mostly an issue of cross-border migration of seasonal agricultural workers. *Otkhodnichestvo*, however, initially meant internal labor migration, rather than the cross-border one. Nowadays, the development of transportation and communication, and the easing or lifting of visa requirements facilitate *otkhodnichestvo*.

Otkhodnichestvo originates from the province. The overwhelming majority of contemporary labor migrants, who call themselves, and whom we call *otkhodniki*, reside in small towns and villages. Many small Russian towns are actually rural settlements

¹⁴Bigsten A., 1996, *The circular migration of smallholders in Kenya*, «Journal of African Economics», vol. 5 (1).

¹⁵Dyatlov V.I., 2010, *Cross-Border Migrants in Modern Russia: Dynamics of Forming Stereotypes*, «Politia», no 3-4 (58-59); Zayonchkovskaya Zh.A., 1997, *Forced migrants from the CIS and the Baltics in Russia*, «Mir Rossii», no 4; Zayonchkovskaya Zh.A., Tyuryukanova E.V., Florinskaya Yu.F., 2011, *Labor migration to Russia: How to proceed. A series of special reports*, M., Maks Press.

¹⁶See: Burkert C., Haas A., 2014, *Investing in the future: labor market integration policies for new immigrants in Germany*, Washington, DC and Geneva, Migration Policy Institute and International Labour Office; Collett E., Petrovic M., 2014, *The future of immigrant integration in Europe: mainstreaming approaches for inclusion*, Brussels, Migration Policy Institute Europe; Newland K., Aguinias D.R., and Terrazas A., 2008, *Learning by doing: experiences of circular migration*, Washington D. C.: Migration Policy Institute (MPI). Insight. Program on Migrants, Migration, and Development, September 2008; Van der Ende M., Walsh K., Ziminene N., 2014, *European vacancy and recruitment report 2014*, Brussels, European Commission. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=11897&langId=en>. (access: 17.03.2014).

¹⁷See, e.g., Jentsch B., 2007, *Migrant integration in rural and urban areas of new settlement countries: thematic introduction*, «International Journal on Multicultural Societies», no 9 (1); Harvesting Australia, 2000, National Harvest Trail Working Group, Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, Canberra; Kasimis C., Papadopoulos A.G., 2005, *The multifunctional role of migrants in the Greek countryside: Implications for the rural economy and society*, «Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies», vol. 31 (1); Perloff J.M., Lynch L., Gabbard S.M., 1998, *Migration of seasonal agricultural workers*, «American Journal of Agricultural Economics», vol. 80 (1); Rothenberg D., 1998, *With these hands: the hidden world of migrant farmworkers today*, N.Y., Harcourt Brace & Co; Weber D., 1994, *Dark sweat, white gold: California farm workers, cotton, and the new deal*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

¹⁸See: Cordell D., Gregory J., Piche, V., 1998, *Hoe and Wage: a social history of a circular migration system in West Africa*, Boulder, Westview Press; Jentsch B., 2007, *Migrant integration in rural and urban areas of new settlement countries: thematic introduction*, «International Journal on Multicultural Societies», no 9 (1); Roseman C., 1992, *Cyclical and polygonal migration in a western context*, «Community, Society and Migration», eds. P. Jobes, W. Stinner, and J. Wardwell, Lanham, University Press of America; Rothenberg D., 1998, *With these hands: the hidden world of migrant farmworkers today*, N.Y., Harcourt Brace & Co; *The dynamics of hired farm labour: constraints and community responses*, 2002, eds. J. Findeis, A. Vandeman, J. Larson, and J. Runyan J., N.Y., Cabi Publishing.

¹⁹Bell M., Ward G., 1998, *Patterns of temporary mobility in Australia: Evidence from the 1991 census*, «Australian Geographical Studies», vol. 36 (1); Bell M., 2001, *Understanding Circulation in Australia*, «Journal of Population Research», vol. 18 (1); Cordell D., Gregory J., Piche, V., 1998, *Hoe and Wage: a social history of a circular migration system in West Africa*, Boulder, Westview Press; Hu F., Xu Z., Chen Yu., 2011, *Circular migration or permanent stay? Evidence from China's rural-urban migration*, «China Economic Review», vol. 22 (1); Olwig K., Sorensen N., 2002, *Mobile livelihoods: making a living in the world*, «Work and Migration: Life and Livelihoods in a Globalizing World», L., Routledge; Thomsin L., Tremblay D-G., 2008, *Exploring the diversity of mobile working: a detailed examination on the sequences of workplaces and job satisfaction*, «Journal of eWorking», vol. 2, issue 1.

²⁰See, e.g., Kirillov L.A., 1899, *Regarding temporary non-agricultural external employment of the peasant population*, SPb; Mints L.E., 1926, *Engagement of peasants in external wage earnings in the USSR*, M., Voprosy truda; Nikulin V.N., 2010, *Non-agricultural otkhodnik occupations of peasants of the St. Petersburg Province in the post-reform period*, «Trudy istoricheskogo fakul'teta Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta», no 2; Smurova O.V., 2003, *Temporary non-agricultural employment of peasants in capital cities and its role in transforming cultural traditions in 1861-1914: Based on materials from St. Petersburg and Moscow, and from Kostroma, Tver and Yaroslavl Provinces*, Kostroma, IKGTU.

²¹Chaslavsky V.I., 1875, *Agricultural otkhodnichestvo due to peasant resettlement*, «Sbornik gosudarstvennykh znaniy», vol. 2; Kurtsev A.N., 1982, *Peasant migration in capitalist Russia: Central chernozem (black soil) regions (based on materials from the Kursk Province, Kursk; Varb E., 1898, Wanderings of agricultural workers*, M., B.I.

²²Ponomaryov N.V., 1896, *Concerning the migration of agricultural workers to Russia's southeast areas*, SPb.

²³Boar N., 2010, *Changes in the human migration patterns in the Maramures region (Romania-Ukraine)*, «Journal of Rural Studies», vol. 26, issue 1.

²⁴Kirillova E.K., 1997, *Temporary workforce from the former USSR republics in Russia*, «Mir Rossii», no 4; Zayonchkovskaya Zh.A., 1997, *Forced migrants from the CIS and the Baltics in Russia*, «Mir Rossii», no 4.

²⁵Perloff J.M., Lynch L., Gabbard S.M., 1998, *Migration of seasonal agricultural workers*, «American Journal of Agricultural Economics», vol. 80 (1).

²⁶Boar N., 2010, *Changes in the human migration patterns in the Maramures region (Romania-Ukraine)*, «Journal of Rural Studies», vol. 26, issue 1; Massey D.S., 1990, *Social structure, household strategies, and the cumulative causation of migration*, «Population index», vol. 56 (1).

²⁷Temporary and circular migration: empirical evidence, current policy practice and future options in EU member states produced by European Migration Network, September 2011. EMN Synthesis Report.

²⁸Newland K., 2009, *Circular migration and human development*, «Human development research paper (HDRP) series», 2009/42, UNDP, October 2009, pp. 5-10; *Temporary and circular migration: empirical evidence, current policy practice and future options in EU member states produced by European Migration Network*, September 2011, EMN Synthesis Report, pp. 13-28.

²⁹See: Mints L.E., 1929, *Agrarian overpopulation and the labor market in the USSR*, M.-L., GIZ; Nikulin V.N., 2010, *Non-agricultural otkhodnik occupations of peasants of the St. Petersburg Province in the post-reform period*, «Trudy istoricheskogo fakul'teta Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta», no 2; Vladimirovsky N.N., 1927, *Engagement of peasants from the Kostroma Province in external wage earnings*, Kostroma, Izdanie Kostromskogo gubstatotdela.

³⁰Burds J., 1998, *Peasant dreams and market politics: labor migration and the Russian village, 1861-1905*, Pittsburgh (PA), University of Pittsburgh Press, XIV; Smurova O.V., 2003, *Temporary non-agricultural employment of peasants in capital cities and its role in transforming cultural traditions in 1861-1914: Based on materials from St. Petersburg and Moscow, and from Kostroma, Tver and Yaroslavl Provinces*, Kostroma, IKG TU; Smurova O.V., 2008, *Between city and village: (way of life of a peasant otkhodnik in the second half of the 19th-beginning of the 20th centuries)*, Kostroma, IKG TU; Vesin L., 1886, *Role of otkhodnichestvo in the life of Russian peasants*, «Delo», no 7.

³¹See, e.g., Karyshev N.A., 1896, *Concerning a study of our otkhodnik occupations*, «Russkoe bogatstvo», no 7; Lenin V.I., 1971, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia. The process of the Formation of a Home Market for Large-Scale Industry*, [in:] V.I. Lenin. Complete set of works. Fifth edition, M., Izd-vo politicheskoy literatury, vol. 3, chapter V; Selivanov V.V., 2011, *Year of the Russian peasant: Sketches of rural life. Zarnaisk District (Uyezd), Ryazan Province, M., Knizhnyy dom "Librokom"*; Vorontsov V.P., 1892, *Progressive trends in peasant farming*, SPb; Zhbakov D.N., 1887, *Influence of earnings from otkhodnichestvo on the migration of the population in the Kostroma Province, based on 1866-83 data*, Kostroma, Gub. tip.

³²See, e.g., Alexandrov N.M., 2012, *Impact of outside occupations on the social and demographic development of the post-reform village (based on materials from the Upper Volga Region)*, «Ezhegodnik po agrarnoy istorii Vostochnoy Evropy», no 2; Nikulin V.N., 2010, *Non-agricultural otkhodnik occupations of peasants of the St. Petersburg Province in the post-reform period*, «Trudy istoricheskogo fakul'teta Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta», no 2.

³³Plusnin J.M., 2013, *Insiders and outsiders in a Russian provincial town*, «Mir Rossii», vol. 22, no 3.

³⁴Plusnin J.M., 1999, *Life away from the state*, EKO, no 12; Plusnin J.M., Kordonsky S.G., Skalon V.A., 2009, *Municipal Russia: lifestyle and mentality. Phenomenological study*, M., TsPI MSU; Plusnin J.M., Zusaeva Y.D., Zhidkevich N.N., and Pozanenko A.A., 2013, *Otkhodniki (Seasonal workers)*, M., Novyy Khronograf.

³⁵In comparison: Lenin V.I., 1971, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia. The process of the Formation of a Home Market for Large-Scale Industry*, [in:] V.I. Lenin. Complete set of works, Fifth edition, M., Izd-vo politicheskoy literatury, vol. 3, chapter V; Sukhanov N.N., 1913, *Concerning the description of the Russian proletariat*, «Sovremennik», no 4.

³⁶Plusnin J., Zusaeva Y., Zhidkevich N., Pozanenko A., 2015, *Wandering Workers. Mores, Behavior, Way of Life, and Political Status of Domestic Russian Labor Migrants*, - Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag (Serie "Soviet and Post-Soviet Politic and Society", SPPS, No 141).

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The Russian migrant workers – *otkhodniki* – are a specific group of internal temporary labor migrants who migrate from small towns and rural areas to major cities and industrial centers, mainly in Moscow. Among them, seasonal and agricultural workers are a negligible minority. In my view, these Russian labor migrants differ from both circular (circulatory) cross-border migrants and seasonal agricultural migrants, well familiar in many countries of the world. To highlight these differences, we refer to them as «wandering workers», and this specific activity as «*otkhodnichestvo*». A self-designation for such wandering workers appeared in Russia about three or four centuries ago. People started calling them *otkhodniki* [from the Russian «*otkhod*» – temporary departure], and this is the term they themselves and the Russian scientists still use.

Otkhodniki movements, as a special type of labor migration is currently specific by far not only to Russia. It definitely exists in many post-Soviet republics, as in the past. Some of them, like Turkmenistan or Lithuania, are less affected (especially into Russia), whereas in some of the others, like Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, *otkhodnichestvo* in the form of cross-border migration is as widespread as in Russia today, and even wider. Besides, quite a few other countries demonstrate examples of seasonal interregional circular migration of “labor resources”. Although here it is mostly an issue of cross-border migration of seasonal agricultural workers. *Otkhodnichestvo*, however, initially meant internal labor migration, rather than the cross-border one. Nowadays, the development of transportation and communication, and the easing or lifting of visa requirements facilitate *otkhodnichestvo*.

Otkhodnichestvo originates from the province. The overwhelming majority of contemporary labor migrants, who call themselves, and whom we call *otkhodniki*, reside in small towns and villages. Many small Russian towns are actually rural settlements

with respective household and economic arrangements.¹ Therefore, the families of most of these people are engaged in subsidiary farming; many of them live in private houses with adjacent garden plots. Generally, the income such people receive in their hometowns or villages is insufficient to provide a decent (sometimes even normal) life for the family. They have no highly paid jobs in the public sector, nor do they have sources of income in the private sector, be it manufacturing or services. Frequently, they have even no chance of finding a local job that would be in line with their vocation. Quite a few families live in economically doomed settlements, the so-called "escheated" townships and villages, where there are no jobs whatsoever, on the one hand, and no one to offer self-produced goods to, on the other hand.

The families of contemporary *otkhodniki*, just as they themselves, do not intend to leave their villages and small towns. The reasons for refusing to move differ, but they are everywhere supported by the psychological reluctance to change the environment and to lose the status and opportunities – the privileges of being an "insider" and the preferences granted to the "locals" – that any local community provides to its members. The lack of desire to change residence for the sake of a job is the most important pre-condition for a person to become an *otkhodnik*. That distinguishes him from a guest worker, who has changed his residence for the sake of potential better opportunities for work and life.

For the contemporary *otkhodnik*, independence is also a critical factor in the search for work; the initiative comes from the person himself. He either markets products of his labor (acting as a self-employed worker-entrepreneur, quite similar to the handicraft industry of the past), or takes up various jobs, most of which do not require high skills.

The forced nature of contemporary *otkhodnichestvo* in the province is due to a lack or poor quality of jobs available in the local labor market. However, we constantly note that this forced nature is relative: the well-being of *otkhodnik* families, both contemporary and former, is significantly higher than that of their non-*otkhodnik* neighbors. This is related to the important circumstance that the *otkhodnik* is driven not only by need; he is driven by the desire to raise the living standard of his beloved ones and to ensure that the family is well provided for. This is a very important feature: nowadays, mostly the wish to improve the well-being of the family rather than need trigger labor migration. Nowadays, the majority of *otkhodniki* from small towns can theoretically find employment locally, since jobs are available everywhere. The situation is different for rural *otkhodniki*, whose numbers are growing, but even they can find work as close as the district center. However, few *otkhodniki* accept such terms, as they are used to wages that are three to four times higher; even the psychological strain of constantly traveling back and forth does not deter them. In their mass, the *otkhodniki* are motivated to maintain high living standards for the family, and no one wants to lower the bar.

The mobility of economically active population remains concealed and imperceptible for official economic statistics. *Otkhodniki* are not recorded by government statistics. Neither are they registered in municipal reports. Most *otkhodniki* find jobs through acquaintances rather than through official information channels or public employment agencies. The overwhelming majority of *otkhodniki* offers their services themselves or works unofficially. They pay no taxes. Therefore, for the economy and

for the state they are non-existent. Meanwhile, the results of their activities provide many economic, social, and political effects. The subject of this paper is a brief analysis of these effects.

Methodology and materials

The specific nature of the *otkhodniks'* activity requires customized methodology. Wandering workers have two key features: they are "invisible" to the authorities and they "elude" registration both in places of their permanent residence and there, where they find work. Besides, they are very irregularly distributed across the territory (in neighboring towns the percentage of active population engaged in *otkhodnichestvo* may differ vastly). Due to the above, the research methodology was necessarily based on qualitative analysis; and the principal methods we used to collect field data were direct observations in the regions where *otkhodniks* reside, and interviews with them.

Research procedures primarily include first hand observations in small towns and interviews with *otkhodniks*, their family members and neighbors – local inhabitants who are aware of this type of activity. Our procedure of direct observation is described in detail.²

Interviews focusing on contemporary *otkhodnichestvo* were the second, more detailed source of information on *otkhodniks* and their activities. The interviews were structured along several basic lines of research; and they were taken on the respondent's territory in the form of an open conversation. However, the search for a potential respondent could be exhausting and often unsuccessful, as evidenced by the report fragment quoted above. Moreover, even if a suitable person was found, there was absolutely no guarantee that he or she would be prepared to give an interview. As the *otkhodniks* are often economically active in the "shadow" sector of the economy, many of them are reluctant to discuss these matters even with their neighbors, to say nothing of "suspicious" researchers. Sometimes, a person who was indicated to us as an *otkhodnik* did not admit this fact to us. In those cases no interview could be taken. Although the interviews were conducted in free form, we followed a routine technology.³ We did not show the questionnaire to the respondent. An interview could last from several minutes (10-15) to one or two hours. On average, an interview lasted from 40 minutes to an hour. Total sum of interview is 1399, including 643 deep interviews (see especially: Plusnin *et al.*, 2015⁴). Our field research of *otkhodnichestvo* lasted six full years – from 2010 through 2015. During this period, we carried out 24 separate expeditions in 40 Russian regions, focused on studying contemporary *otkhodnichestvo*. We obtained materials from 77 small towns, settlements and villages, which have the status of district centers.

Russian *otkhodnichestvo* in comparison with the global labor migration

Seasonal domestic circular migration, similar to the Russian one, is not a commonplace phenomenon, and in other countries, such domestic migrants are relatively few in number. Probably, only China "can boast" of a similarly mass rural-urban circular labor migration comparable in scale.⁵ What is the reason? Why do we think

that we are dealing with a specifically Russian phenomenon?

Indeed, in the contemporary world cross-border labor migration is very widespread; much has been and continues to be written about it.⁶ Following rapid global development of a widely spread form of cross-border labor migration, in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s special terminology was coined to reflect its specific nature. As opposed to immigration as such, this labor migration is of a temporary and circular or repeat nature, when workers regularly return home, where their families live.⁷

In the 1990s and the 2000s, the rapid expansion of cross-border labor migration, including circular or repeat migration, generated extensive research, which resulted in the appearance of numerous studies, both empirical and conceptual, devoted to this phenomenon.⁸ We believe that besides easier transportation and communication; the increasing transparency of national borders; social migratory policies in the host countries; and legal protection provided to immigrants, the further global polarization of wealth and poverty throughout the past seventy post-war years has substantially promoted specifically circular labor migration. North America has known repeat cross-border migration for quite some time - migration from Mexico and Central America to the United States and Canada.⁹ However, circular migration appears to have a special status in Europe, where it is much more contrasting than in North America and includes migration to Western Europe from North Africa and in the past 25 years from Eastern Europe and post-Soviet countries.¹⁰ Now, Australia, New Zealand, and some other countries of South-East Asia are experiencing such migration.¹¹ Repeat migration is also widespread in India¹² and China.¹³ Such migration is also specific for most African states. This concerns primarily North Africa and the south of the continent.¹⁴ Similar extensive cross-border migration is also specific for Russia, which acts as a host country for workers not only from the new post-Soviet states, but also from many Asian (primarily Vietnam and China) and African countries.¹⁵

The growing intensity of global cross-border labor migration and the persisting and increasing polarization of certain countries (in terms of positive and negative net migration), on the one hand, and the rising demand for labor in the host countries, on the other hand, have resulted in the recent development and expansion of programs promoting adaptation, education and acculturation of immigrants in the host countries.¹⁶ In a sense, such programs promote further development of cross-border labor migration, but they also facilitate its transformation from temporary to permanent, i.e. to immigration in the full sense of the word.

However, is there any similarity between this globally widespread and well-known phenomenon and the Russian *otkhodnichestvo*? First, cross-border labor migration frequently refers to typical immigration from labor-abundant, resource-deficient or poor states to industrially developed countries in search of means of living and work, involving a permanent change of residence, often by the whole family or a group of relatives. In this case, it cannot be directly associated with *otkhodnichestvo*. Second, cyclical, or circular, seasonal labor migrations most often, or almost exclusively, concern agricultural workers.¹⁷ Thus, circular migration, currently common throughout the world, practically everywhere refers to cross-border agricultural labor migration. We see that the publications devoted to cyclical (or circular) seasonal labor migration address the issue of hired farm help engaged in the agricultural sector.¹⁸ It makes no difference, whether migration is internal or international - agricultural workers ac-

count for the lion's share of such seasonal labor migrants. These temporary circular seasonal movements of labor are predominantly international rather than domestic. There are at least two reasons for this. Agricultural work requires short-term but intensive labor with a maximally extended workday, which does not assume daily return home. Moreover, the territories of most countries are such that any labor migration other than agricultural can be of a commuting nature. However, countries with vast areas, such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia, China, and India can and do experience rural-urban migration similar to the Russian *otkhodnichestvo*.¹⁹

Russian *otkhodnichestvo* is primarily non-agricultural internal labor migration. Russian authors of the past specifically distinguished between these two types of migration. They considered non-agricultural *otkhodnichestvo* to be the core form,²⁰ and the agricultural one its derivative.²¹ All previous researchers considered the agricultural and "non-agricultural" (handicraft and industrial) *otkhodniki* as two entirely independent groups, which differed by nature of employment, types of activity, and seasonality of work. The essential difference between these groups consisted in the fact that the people who went south to work as agricultural day laborers were not needed as workers at home; there they were rather treated as "extra mouths to feed". On the contrary, the "non-agricultural" *otkhodniki* were indispensable workers in the peasant household. For this reason, such labor migration was always seasonal and circular. Therefore, typical Russian *otkhodniki* are primarily wage workers in industrial centers or informal sole proprietors marketing the products of their labor in metropolitan areas (such are the numerous log home builders). The proportion of *otkhodniki* engaged in the service sector, but again in the cities and industrial areas, is rapidly growing. Seasonal agricultural workers are very few among contemporary Russian *otkhodniki* (although in the imperial times they constituted a numerous group, the overall size of which is however unknown, as all estimates were local and covered only individual provinces or areas. Thus, according to several sources, the southern provinces hosted tens and hundreds of thousands of agricultural *otkhodniki*²²).

A comparison of contemporary Russian *otkhodnichestvo* with different types of labor migration in other countries reveals some similarities. First, current cross-border circular labor migration from many former Soviet republics to Russia or other countries is directly related to Russian *otkhodnichestvo*. This is very widespread in contemporary Moldova: it is common knowledge that a significant proportion of the working-age population of this country is working as *otkhodniki* in Russia, Ukraine, and Romania.²³ The same applies to many residents of Ukraine working on a rotation basis in Russia, Poland, and Germany, while their families stay at home. Many men from Belarus work in Russia as long-haul truckers, while women are engaged as nannies, governesses, hairdressers, sales personnel and, of course, market vendors in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Smolensk, Novgorod, and even in such distant cities as Murmansk and Rostov-on-Don. Cross-border labor migration of the *otkhodnik* type is most common for the inhabitants of almost all new post-Soviet states of the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and to a lesser extent Georgia) and Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and much less Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan²⁴). Obviously, all these people are by no means "guest workers", as they are usually referred to in Russia, but real *otkhodniki* of the Soviet era. As before, their families remain at home, and the adult members regularly return from their distant workplaces. Nevertheless,

this is exactly the same labor mobility that was typical for the late Soviet period, specifically for the population of these areas. Therefore, the contemporary circular migration has simply inherited the former pattern of labor migration, and the "new otkhodnichestvo" in countries of the former Soviet Union should indeed be considered in the tradition of the Russian otkhodnichestvo.

The second group of labor migrants, somewhat similar to our otkhodniks, are hired agricultural workers, whose labor is widely used everywhere – from the northern countries, Norway and Scotland, to the southern – China and Australia, Mexico and Brazil.²⁵ These workers seem to follow a lifestyle similar to the one of Russian agricultural otkhodniks.²⁶ They move seasonally from areas where there is a surplus of labor or the labor market is underdeveloped to areas with intensive agriculture to participate in harvesting (from grapes to cotton) or work at livestock farms. In Russia, this type of agricultural labor migration is currently significantly less developed than in the other countries, or than in the past. One can even say that such a labor market is non-existent. The underlying reason is inadequate development of large commercial farms and agricultural enterprises, on the one hand, and numerous rural population in the labor-abundant rural areas, on the other hand. As a result, practically all existing commercial farms and agricultural enterprises use local labor.

In the meantime, neither group of labor migrants is completely similar to our otkhodniks, since our otkhodniks are internal and not cross-border migrants, and they are engaged in industry, transport and the service sector rather than in agro-industry. Moreover, if we consider the established criteria for circular labor migration, we will find some essential differences with those that determine Russian otkhodnichestvo (as set forth above). First, circular migration (as a type, along with seasonal work and temporary migration) is clearly defined as legal and cross-border migration ("Circular Migration. The EMN Glossary defines this as "a repetition of legal migration by the same person between two or more countries", Temporary and circular migration 2011, p. 14)²⁷; this immediately places it outside the scope of Russian otkhodnichestvo. Based on the definitions of temporary and circular migration used by EU member states, as well as in the broader context, it is possible to identify two groups of criteria: external phenomenological features and migration policies in the host country.²⁸

The first group includes (1) the temporary rather than permanent nature of immigration; (2) the return aspect determined by the links retained by the labor migrant to his country of origin; and (3) circulatory, repetitive entries to the host country. (The criteria are overlapping, therefore, formally excessive). All three criteria are absolutely the same as those applicable to Russian otkhodnichestvo. However, the second group of criteria includes: (4) the legal character of migration; (5) control and respect of the migrants' rights; and (6) management and optimization of labor markets for both origin and destination countries. However, these three criteria have nothing to do with Russian otkhodnichestvo. Our otkhodnichestvo is not subject to any internal laws or regulations. In most cases, it is an informal, shadow activity, where the workers register neither with government bodies, nor with the employers. Therefore, Russia has no control whatsoever over internal migration (even control over cross-border labor migration from the former Soviet republics is inadequate, this being evidenced by repeated campaigns concerning migrants). It is therefore impracticable to speak about

any rights of labor migrants in Russia, and the *otkhodniki* themselves realize this perfectly well. Finally, the last of the criteria – state regulation of the labor market – is also irrelevant to the *otkhodniki*. The state does not notice the *otkhodniki* either as economic actors, or as a social group. Due to the above reasons, we have to consider the phenomenon of Russian *otkhodnichestvo* as standing somewhat apart, and distinguish it both from cross-border labor migration and from seasonal agricultural migration.

Negative effects of returnable work migration for the local government

In spite of the fact that the phenomenon of *otkhodnichestvo* remains invisible to the authorities in the political perspective, it has so many social and economical consequences that only completely blind administrative structures can fail to notice it. These consequences are diverse and not always visible to a third party.

Otkhodnichestvo has a dual, even ambivalent, influence on the economic life of municipalities. On the one hand, where *otkhodnichestvo* is well developed, the municipal authorities need not bother about any economic policy; they do not have to think and care about restructuring the economy, raising investments, setting up new production facilities, and all other matters which are needed for a healthy economy but require significant efforts on the part of the authorities. Owing to their self-organizing potential, the *otkhodniki* counter-balance the economic problems facing the municipalities and inject their external earnings into the local economy.

On the other hand, because of *otkhodnichestvo*, local budgets fail to collect a significant amount in taxes (especially personal income tax). In the absence of a clear economic policy, the municipal authorities can only hope for a mechanical growth (or at least no decline) of their own taxes collected from the population. Besides, if the *otkhodniki* were to remain at home, most of them, being active and entrepreneurial people, would definitely engage in some small business, which would also contribute to the local economy.

The first aspect of the problem is more expressive and visible, therefore, it appears to be more obvious (however, in the past, this influence of *otkhodnichestvo* on the local economy was not considered to be positive at all)²⁹.

The second aspect – losses incurred by the municipal economy due to non-collection of the “*otkhodniki*’ share” of local taxes – rarely concerns the municipal authorities. They are generally concerned by the fact that while paying no local taxes, the *otkhodniki* nevertheless use the services of the same municipal institutions and enterprises as the other residents. This poses two (rather than one) problems for the local authorities. As the *otkhodniki* are numerous, the municipal budget falls short of a significant portion of taxes. However, the municipal enterprises and institutions continue providing services to the *otkhodniki* and their families. These services remain virtually unpaid for as quite often such families have only one working adult, and he/she is an *otkhodnik*. The problem with provided but unpaid for municipal services exists and could be resolved by associating the personal income tax with the employee rather than the employer.

We would like to draw the attention to another consequence, which is important for the local community and economy. During the time the *otkhodnik* works away

from home, he does not spend any money within his municipality. This seems to be bad. However, as externally he earns much more than he would have made locally, his family still spends more money at the place of residence. This is especially visible now, when people have started purchasing almost all expensive items locally rather than in big cities.

Many *otkhodniks* (about half of all those we interviewed) are engaged in the informal sector of the economy. As a result, they have inadequate social security coverage, as the employer provides no social package for them. Due to this, the *otkhodniks* often fail to receive any benefits under the government social policy. Informal employment is more pronounced in northern towns, where the people can use forest resources and specialize in log house construction. This is less typical for central and southern areas, where *otkhodniks* undertake jobs as security guards, sales personnel and domestic help, and where their employers formalize their relations. As a general rule, the northern *otkhodniks* do not even register their sole proprietorship and work in teams informally. Such a situation is typical, for example, for the small towns of Vologda and Kostroma Regions, where up to 90% of *otkhodniks* work informally.

As we see, the economic and social implications of *otkhodnichestvo* for the local community, economy, and administration are ambivalent. However, the phenomenon of *otkhodnichestvo* has at least two implications, which must be considered purely negative not only for the local community and local self-government, but also for the state.

The first of these is well known – lack of specialists on the local level. Many skilled workers started practicing *otkhodnichestvo* long ago. Since then, some of them have found jobs in line with their training and have no intention of giving them up for the sake of emerging employment opportunities at home, which generally offer significantly lower compensation. Even allowing for considerable overheads and transport expenses (according to our rough assessment, they can reach from one-tenth to a quarter of an *otkhodnik's* earnings), and the psychological stress associated with *otkhodnichestvo*, the net amount brought home exceeds wages offered locally. Due to the erosion of specialists, it becomes impossible to set up locally a new production facility or even ensure high-quality routine work.

The second implication is not as clearly observable as the first one, but its consequence for the local economy is no less substantial. In small towns and settlements, a significant number of active residents were forced to turn to *otkhodnichestvo*, although they would have preferred engaging in small business locally. Actually, many of them did have their own businesses but were forced to abandon everything and "take to the sea" in order to avoid government charges and meticulous despotic control. Both the local business and the municipal authorities are subject to particular attention on the part of control bodies. Endless inspections and the overwhelming reporting burden coupled with the failure of the authorities to meet their obligations, often become a formidable barrier for a small business, forcing the owners to abandon it in order to minimize any interaction with the state.

Obstacles deliberately created by municipal officials for merchants trying to open new sales outlets can at least be explained by the well-known fact that most municipal executives own similar outlets and simply want to prevent competition on their territory (we find such examples in practically every municipal district). However,

when it comes to production or service facilities, purposeful obstruction or inactivity seem illogical and obviously harmful for the local community. The regional authorities demonstrate a similar attitude.

In view of such developments, where will an active and entrepreneurial person striving to provide a decent life for his or her family go? The only way out is informal employment away from home. However, as entrepreneur, this person will be lost for the local economy. Definitely, the entrepreneurs and usually all local leaders are perfectly well aware how important it is to develop small business, both from the economic and social perspective. Therefore, people in the province are astounded by the shortsighted and incompetent decisions of the federal authorities, which the municipal bodies are forced to obey.

What emerges is a paradox, when local inhabitants find it easier and more efficient to get employed on a rotation basis far away from home, rather than run their own business, provide employment for fellow citizens, and contribute to developing the local economy. Endless inspections, irresponsible and unreasonable government decisions have made small business unprofitable. Otkhodnichestvo becomes an alternative to doing business locally; it ensures higher revenues and allows avoiding unpleasant contacts with government structures that endanger the process of providing for the family. People use the institution of otkhodnichestvo to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the state with its excessive red tape and arbitrary approach.

Thus, the phenomenon of otkhodnichestvo demonstrates the current stage of engagement between the government and the population, which is traditional for Russia – avoid control by fleeing to the outskirts of the empire. Nowadays, it is flight to the shadow niches of the economy, which have escaped the attention of the authorities.

Otkhodnichestvo as a new socio-cultural factor for the local society

The otkhodnichestvo is not simply a type of labor migration; the purposes of such migration make it a particular way of life that has been adopted by a vast number of people. These people work and lodge in one place, but live their real life in a completely different place. That is the place where they have their household, family, friends, and neighbors; where they relax and plant potatoes; educate their children and unwind “out in the bush”. For some otkhodniks, this real life consists of short-term periods, whereas most of their active life they spend working far away from home. However, quite a few otkhodniks manage to split their time evenly between distant jobs and life at home. Not long ago, at the time of the Soviet Union, such a “distributed” lifestyle was the lot of just a few; in the past two decades it has been adopted by a great number of people. This lifestyle is still alien and completely unfamiliar to most residents of large cities and capitals. Although ten or more of millions of men and women throughout Russia have adopted this way of life, metropolitans still believe it to be so rare and unusual.

Just as at the end of the 19th century, despite themselves, the otkhodniks trigger changes in the local society.³⁰ They offer new patterns of consumption and behavior, and new standards of urban “better life”. Today, otkhodniks visibly differ from their neighbors not only by the attributes of well-being – the quality of cars and exterior of houses, the look of fences and flower beds – but even by their appearance and

behavior, and since recently, by the structure of family expenses, where education and leisure are high on the list of priorities. Their neighbors are already adopting the attractive consumer patterns, and we see how quickly the small towns and villages are changing their appearance influenced by the new trends brought by otkhodniks from the City.

Studies devoted to otkhodnichestvo in the period before the revolution and in the 1920s note some definitely positive effects of non-agricultural labor migration. In particular, otkhodnichestvo contributed to raising "the literacy level and consciousness of the population" promoting higher public and political activity of the peasants (including women, who remained at home to manage the household and took over significant public functions specific to men). It introduced new urban fashions and trends and many other aspects, which at that time signified progress.³¹ Today, the purely "Kulturträger" (culture-bearing) function of otkhodniks is not that pronounced.

We believe, that in our days, such a "Kulturträger" role of contemporary otkhodniks is not as significant as in the imperial times, especially after the successful Soviet experience of "leveling differences". Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the role that contemporary otkhodniks play in eroding the joint integrity of many local communities. By a number of formal criteria, the position of the otkhodnik and his family in the local society is marginal. As a result, solidarity with the local community becomes a burden for them, moreover, as members of such a family partially lose the preferences for "us". We believe that in a certain sense, the otkhodniks involuntarily start disintegrating the community's natural self-organization processes. Due to their lifestyle and activities, which proceed outside the local community as the community gradually but yet imperceptibly starts "crowding them out", the otkhodniks and their families increasingly become inhabitants of the City, rather than their native town or village. Unexpectedly, here they find like-minded people in exactly the same status – seasonal residents from the big cities. The small towns of the European part of Russia are all but flooded by "metropolitan" summer residents. In spite of their social passivity and seasonal presence, they "get their share of the cake", if only due to their large numbers (more often, because of a relatively better awareness of their rights and opportunities). Unwittingly uniting their efforts, these two groups – the otkhodnik families, who are becoming alien to the local community, and the summer residents, who are integrating into it – increase their transformational (destructive?) influence on the local community. The provincial local society of today perceptibly differs even from that of the late Soviet period. Close scrutiny gradually reveals that the large groups of "them" (urban summer residents) and pushed aside "us" (otkhodnik families) are increasingly imposing their differing perceptions of what is "right" and "appropriate" on the local community. It is becoming more and more evident that it is easier for the otkhodniks to find common language and interact with the summer residents than with their own neighbors. Thus, the otkhodniks are emerging as a new factor of public life that exists everywhere, but on a local level.

However, there are more profound changes in the minds of the otkhodniks that they are demonstrating in the local community and thus influencing it. One of them is increasing exactingness as to the quality of services and the work of the local administration. According to our observations, the local authorities note that otkhodniks

with the experience of working in major cities become more demanding of local self-government bodies.

Actually, these distinctive features were also common for the former *otkhodniks*. Many authors note that the period from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century is characterized by a significant growth in the *otkhodniks*' political culture; they become much more demanding of the authorities.³²

However, "raising the literacy level" is not the case with contemporary *otkhodnichestvo*. As the most widespread existing job opportunities require unskilled labor, *otkhodnichestvo* currently embraces many people with a low level of vocational training. Moreover, it forces people with higher education to lose their motivation for high-skilled labor and, consequently, their former qualification. This is due to the fact that remuneration for skilled labor in the native town is far inferior even to the wages paid for cushy, "lie-in" jobs with private metropolitan security agencies. As a result, it is highly unlikely that in the future *otkhodnichestvo* will transform into employment in the local economy. We have already mentioned that in those municipalities where *otkhodnichestvo* is widespread, the workforce in the local labor market is displaced; as a result, the economically active population, which is not employed locally, no longer possesses the necessary skills and proficiencies. The disproportions of the local labor market cause the engagement of foreign workforce. This, in turn, creates obstacles for the return of the *otkhodniks* – the cost of labor at local enterprises drops, and native specialists refuse to work for such low wages. There is a second important aspect of the impact *otkhodnichestvo* has on the local environment. Does it cause the deformation of the local community structure or are there other triggers to the changes we are observing? As the youngest and most active part of the population spends most of the time living and working far away from their small towns, it seems natural and even apparent to assume that *otkhodnichestvo* leads to the degradation of the social structure. It is not uncommon for *otkhodniks* to eventually relocate and settle down in the cities where they originally went to work. The active population is eroded from many "otkhodnik" municipalities. Consequently, pensioners and people in need of social support or those who have social problems gradually prevail. Is it, however, possible to discourse on such an impact of *otkhodnichestvo* on the structure of local communities, where a large share of the residents initially represents "nomadic" occupations, such as builders of major facilities, who constantly move from one construction site to another? The same issue remains open for communities, where new occupational groups regularly emerge, with every one of them changing the local social structure.³³ We have no simple and straightforward answer.

Moreover, as *otkhodnichestvo* becomes widespread, it introduces new features into the local social structure, which may serve to make this structure more complex, rather than degrade it. We are referring to the trend when outsiders, often labor migrants from the former Soviet republics, who are alien to the local community, both ethnically and, in a sense, culturally – the Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Moldovans, and even Ukrainians, replace local workers. Labor migrants from South-East Asia are also present.

Our observations show that practically every small town or municipal district in Russia has either small or large groups of such labor migrants – from 10-30 to a hundred and more people (in a certain sense, these cross-border labor migrants are also

otkhodniks). These people work seasonally and live in the community many months and sometimes years. Some of them settle down and start families, just like some otkhodniks from these very towns do in the big cities. A certain "chain" emerges: if Moscow is the center of attraction for security guards from Kineshma and builders from Toropets, Kineshma is the center of attraction for weavers from neighboring Vichuga, and all these towns together – for builders from Uzbekistan and Moldavia, and for factory workers from Vietnam and China. It would be wrong to say that such a situation in the local labor market is brought about exclusively by arbitrary decisions of the local authorities and businesses. It is also the product of the existing labor market structure, where the economically active population not employed in the local economy lacks the required skills and proficiencies. Those who possess the required skills are engaged in otkhodnichestvo. Therefore, the shortage of labor in the local market is addressed by replacing economically active residents that "dropped out" by economically active non-residents (in full compliance with the model proposed by Fernand Braudel). Only those non-residents have a different ethnic and sociocultural background. Thus, several factors contribute to the complexity of the sociocultural environment in provincial towns. Both the native otkhodniks, and the foreigners that replace them introduce something individual or new: the former – metropolitan cultural patterns; the latter – alternate domestic and cultural habits, and a different lifestyle, which affects the members of the local community, even if they reject it. Therefore, it is now difficult to say whether otkhodnichestvo disrupts the structure of the local community promoting its degradation, or whether it is a factor enriching the local community with new elements.

The local social structure is gradually changing. By this, we do not mean the emergence of the "middle class" or progress in "overcoming poverty". We mean the shifting balance between "us and them", between the active and passive members of the society. The consequences are vague, but the outlines of new relations are already starting to appear out of the mist. The foundation has already been laid, now the frame is being erected. And we continue to underestimate this invisible silent giant that is creating a new social reality right before our eyes.

Otkhodnichestvo as a new political factor in Russia

No less important is the role that otkhodniks play in the political life of the country. Here we can only make assumptions based on the fact that for the public authorities the otkhodniks remain "invisible" – both as an economically active category of the population, and, more important, as a social phenomenon. We have considered in detail this complicated and unclear issue.³⁴

Being active by nature, otkhodniks possess quite a high potential for political activity (especially the business people). However, the low socio-political status these people have in the local community is an obstacle to realizing this high potential. In other words, the otkhodniks enjoy recognition and respect as local residents, but they do not participate in social life due to their extended absence from home. Although many otkhodniks declare their high voting activity, we know very few who actually participate in the work of local public bodies, and none among the acting officials, who used to be an otkhodnik, or became one after leaving government or municipal

service. Otkhodniks not only exist apart from the authorities and "apart from the state", the authorities neither need, nor see them. In the meantime, it is well known that a high potential needs discharging; so, a certain "discharge" is only to be expected from such people. At the same time, their economic initiative is limited by the authorities, and the socio-political one is completely suppressed by their way of life. How and in what areas can these people manifest themselves? Can they once again become destructive factors of social life, should that life change? This happened a century ago, when along with the defectors in the cities, the otkhodniks returning to their villages became the "flesh of the revolution" that secured the expected success³⁵ of radical socio-political reforms in Russia.

Although we are currently observing foreboding signs of many unfavorable processes, we still hope that the answer to the above question will be negative. Two facts sharply distinguishing contemporary otkhodniks from their historical predecessors give us reason for hope. A significant part of the otkhodniks still has a high proficiency level; the share of unskilled people without a vocation is still low among them. If in the coming years, otkhodnichestvo does not expand through unskilled workers, we can be certain that the otkhodniks, being potential business people, will realize their capacities in the economy, rather than in politics.

The second positive fact, and we have repeatedly mentioned it, is that otkhodniks are motivated by the desire to raise the family's well-being – it is not need that drives them away from home but the intention to provide a decent life for their families and children. Such people are as unwilling to destroy the foundation, as skilled professionals. In order to maintain the current status of otkhodnichestvo, where many otkhodniks have decent skills and all of them pursue high consumption levels, measures to preserve the situation and real support in realizing the entrepreneurial potential inherent to many otkhodniks would be sufficient. As soon as the state lifts the numerous imposed barriers (primarily, administrative ones), the otkhodniks will immediately manifest their business skills.

The absence of established relations between the authorities and the otkhodniks as a specific category of the population does not mean the irrelevance of otkhodnichestvo as a public and political phenomenon. On the contrary, otkhodnichestvo is rapidly becoming a new and important factor of socio-political life. Underestimating this factor, to say nothing about being completely unaware of the very existence of this phenomenon, as is currently intrinsic to the authorities, may have serious consequences to the institution of the state.

We believe that this significance stems from the unevaluated role of otkhodnichestvo for the functioning of the state. By definition, the state is a total institution, but in recent years it has turned into an institution that supports those who receive income from the public sector, and completely ignores other law-abiding citizens that represent the most active and entrepreneurial part of the population. As a result, otkhodnichestvo remains out of sight of all other public institutions. In the meantime, otkhodnichestvo itself has developed into a new and important public institution that definitely affects the most different aspects of our society. Unfortunately, neither the society, nor the intellectual milieu have yet realized this influence.

The political status of otkhodniks – a numerous and very active part of the Russian population – remains uncertain and, most likely, significantly lower than that

assigned by the authorities to the much more passive (in economic terms) part of the population - public-sector employees, pensioners, and people in need of social support. Should this imbalance be as pronounced as we now believe it to be, formidable domestic political consequences are to be expected in the relatively near future. A high difference of potential always results in a thunderstorm or a strong nerve impulse. The discharge of tension can take different forms, including those that remain underestimated by historians, but which the contemporaries had pointed out.

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Abstract

Contemporary *otkhodnichestvo* ("wandering working") in Russia is a type of labour migration which is distinguished by its temporary and returnable nature. An adult able-bodied family member temporarily leaves home to offer proactively his or her services or seek employment in other regions (areas). Nowadays, *otkhodniks* come mostly from small towns or rural areas to offer their services or seek jobs in major cities – regional centers and capitals, in the industrially developed areas of the country. We applied different methods for assessing the number of Russian *otkhodniks*, and came to the conclusion that they constitute no less than 10-15, or maybe even up to 20 million families.

The mobility of economically active population remains concealed and imperceptible for official economic statistics. *Otkhodniks* are not recorded by government statistics. Neither are they registered in municipal reports. Most *otkhodniks* find jobs through acquaintances rather than through official information channels or public employment agencies. The overwhelming majority of *otkhodniks* offers their services themselves or works unofficially. They pay no taxes. Therefore, for the economy they are non-existent.

The *otkhodniks* work far away from places of their permanent residence (where they are registered) and are often absent from home. They are not registered at places of their temporary residence and usually work informally. As a result, *otkhodniks* drop out of social government programs and are not covered by the mandatory government service package provided to all citizens. *Otkhodniks* practically never resort to free public healthcare, as they can not afford to be sick either at home or when working far

from home. Contemporary otkhodnichestvo has little or nothing to do with another element of the social state – the public system of vocational education.

Otkhodniks do not participate in local social life and are practically non-existent for the local economy. They also escape the attention of municipal authorities. Moreover, they are beyond the scope of their interest. Nowhere and in no way do the municipal authorities engage with the otkhodniks; usually, the authorities are not even aware of them. In their activities, municipal bodies, just as government organizations, target primarily or exclusively people receiving income from the budget, i.e. members of the local community represented by pensioners, public-sector employees and those in need of support and custody. In the meantime, economically this is the least active part of any local community, whereas the otkhodniks and local business people are its most active and entrepreneurial part. However, neither the municipal, nor the government authorities interact with them or consider them as targets for political actions. This category of really active population seems not to exist within the competence of the authorities. In the existing type of relations with the public authorities, the phenomenon of otkhodniks seems to demonstrate the current stage of engagement between the state and its subjects which is traditional for Russia: avoid control by fleeing to the outskirts of the empire. Nowadays, its flight to the shadow niches of the economy which escaped the attention of the authorities.

NOTES

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