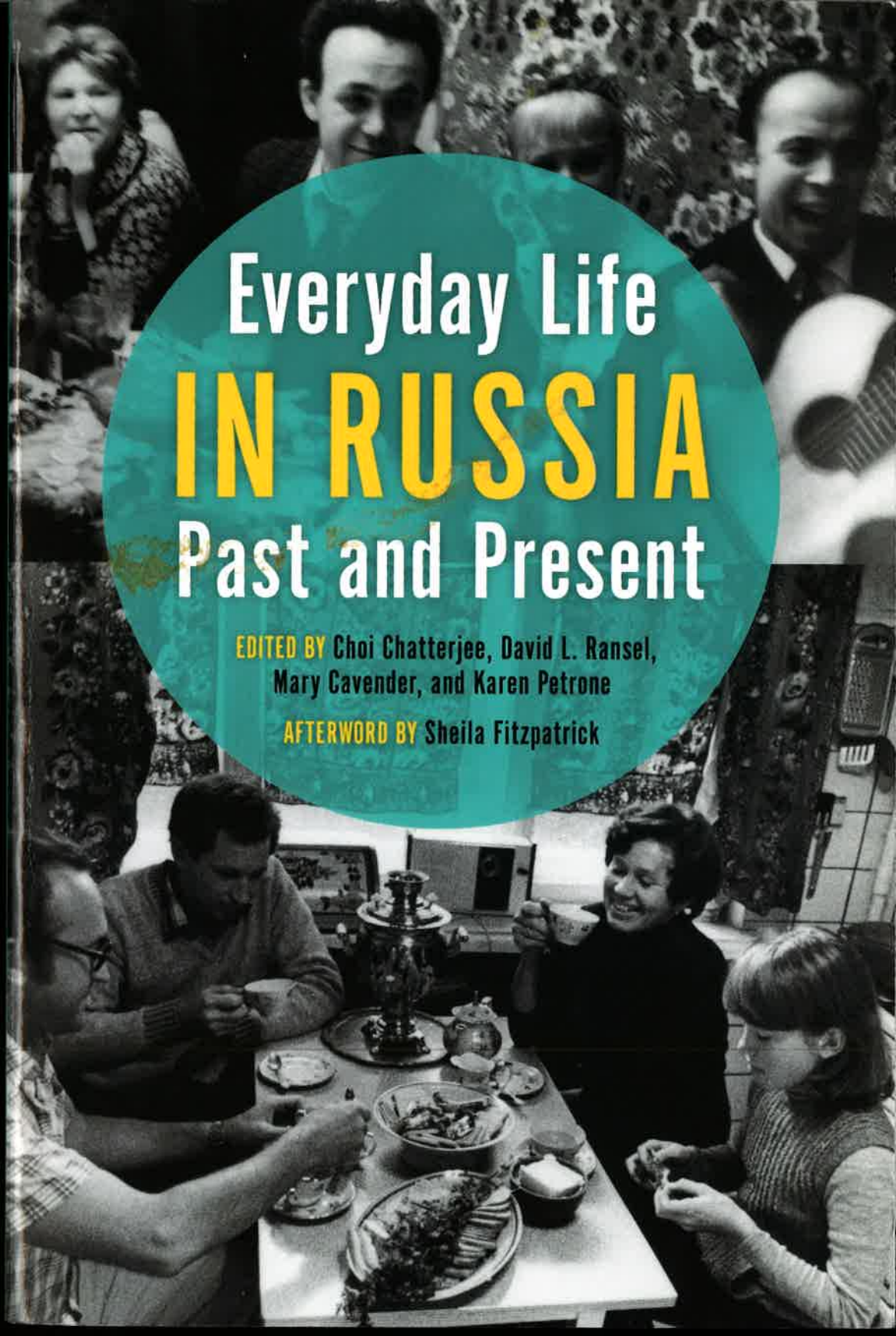

Everyday Life IN RUSSIA Past and Present

EDITED BY Choi Chatterjee, David L. Ransel, Mary Cavender, and Karen Petrone

AFTERWORD BY Sheila Fitzpatrick

EVERYDAY LIFE *in* RUSSIA PAST *and* PRESENT

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Soviet Mass Housing and the Communist Way of Life

STEVEN E. HARRIS

In the 1950s and 1960s Nikita Khrushchev initiated a mass housing program that allowed millions of Soviet citizens to move from the overcrowded communal apartments, barracks, and dormitories of the Stalin era to single-family, separate apartments. Mass housing became Khrushchev's signature reform for taking Soviet society out of its Stalinist past, completing its postwar recovery, and making the final transition to communism. State and society alike viewed the separate apartment (*otdel'naia kvartira*) as a significant improvement over its defective other, the communal apartment (*kommunal'naia kvartira*), in which families occupied their own rooms but shared the kitchen and other common spaces with neighbors. The separate apartment allowed ordinary urban dwellers more privacy in a domestic space that the regime represented as the cutting edge of modern city life and a harmonious social order. It was built with modern industrial methods according to standardized designs and outfitted with the most technologically advanced equipment. In designing mass housing, Soviet architects drew from both domestic and international sources, such as 1920s Soviet constructivism and contemporary mass housing programs in other countries. But unlike the unrealized experiments of the past or mass housing programs in the West, Khrushchev's version would at last fulfill the goals of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and bring about a completely new everyday existence known as the "communist way of life" (*kommunisticheskii byt*).

In this essay, I focus on creating community as one aspect of everyday life that outside observers (and not a few inhabitants) have deemed difficult to achieve in the sterile concrete environments of mass housing.[1] Scholars who have examined mass housing in other contexts have demonstrated how communities came into being despite its standardized designs and inhospitable concrete landscapes.[2] A closer examination of Soviet mass housing reveals a similarly complex picture. I start by exploring the prescriptive discourse on the "communist way of life" that Khrushchev's regime hoped would materialize in mass housing estates and people's everyday lives. I then focus upon the strategies of creating community that Soviet residents deployed in urban spaces that suffered from poor designs and half-built neighborhoods with little infrastructure. While some residents explicitly invoked the term "communist way of life," others more often referenced its underlining values through their words and actions as they confronted the deficiencies of mass housing. Rather than undermine the mass housing campaign and discredit the Soviet regime, I argue, the shortcomings of this grand experiment in urban planning and social engineering opened a space for ordinary people to create community in ways that either presaged or adhered to the discourse on the communist way of life whereby citizens would take over the functions of the state and live with their neighbors in a harmonious social order.

As with the other essays in this volume, my broader aim is to demonstrate the importance of studying everyday life as a window onto Russian and Soviet history. Scholars of the Stalinist and Nazi regimes have turned to the everyday to explore how citizens experienced life and exercised their agency in totalitarian systems that appeared to leave little room for them to shape either.[3] The Khrushchev era created a radically different context for the everyday lives of Soviet citizens in ways that historians are only beginning to delineate. Khrushchev and his reformers curtailed the worst excesses of Stalin's terror state, opened flows of information and exchanges to the West, revived the communist project and cleansed its ideology of past deviations, and invested heavily in raising ordinary people's standard of living. Moreover, Khrushchev's regime did not neglect everyday life but focused on it with a renewed urgency as a critical sphere of Soviet life. In short, it was the Soviet state under Khrushchev—not scholars grappling for a new window onto social and cultural life—

that put everyday life on the map for understanding the lives of its citizens in a time of often bewildering changes. For Stalin's successors, the everyday was the chief site where they would discover whether or not the communist experiment had worked and whether their society's sacrifices under Stalin and in World War II had been worth it all along.

Among the reforms of the Khrushchev era, the mass housing campaign has proven to be especially fertile ground for scholars who wish to better understand how ordinary citizens experienced and shaped the period of intense and unpredictable change following Stalin's death.[4] What a study of the everyday demonstrates further are the concrete and sometimes unintended ways that officially sanctioned discourses became part of ordinary residents' daily interactions with a newly built urban environment, as well as the communal forms of housing they left behind. While the Soviet state defined the broad contours of the "communist way of life," the manner in which ordinary people used its wider meanings was largely in their hands as they attempted to forge local communities in mass housing estates beset with structural and design deficiencies. The study of everyday life thus helps to identify the agency ordinary Soviet citizens exercised in a time of reform while still recognizing the incredible power the Soviet state wielded in delimiting what its citizens could say and do. What emerges is a richer and more complicated account of how this state and its society interacted and sometimes overlapped on a daily basis through the built environment and the words each used to describe it.

THE COMMUNIST WAY OF LIFE

On April 12, 1961, Yuri Gagarin took his historic trip into the cosmos, becoming the first person to venture beyond the Earth's atmosphere. The mass press detailed this Soviet first with articles describing the flight and photographs of a clean-cut, smiling Gagarin.[5] Alongside images of futuristic space travel for the masses were stories of the ongoing mass housing campaign, which buttressed the promises of a technologically modern way of life that Soviet man's space travel represented.[6] The journal *Arkhitektura SSSR* (Architecture of the USSR) idealized well-designed neighborhoods known as microdistricts (*mikroraiony*) with their commercial

and cultural services as modern satellites orbiting around older urban centers. They were clean and full of movement, with rapid public transport and automobiles providing residents with easy access to the entire city or beyond.[7] Khrushchev's regime worked assiduously to represent space exploration and mass housing as Soviet successes paving the way to communism. In 1959 Khrushchev foresaw the "communist way of life" as the eventual outcome of not only giving Soviet citizens their own apartments but showing them how to "properly use public goods, live properly, and observe the rules of the socialist community."[8] The separate apartment would play a critical role in balancing the private and public lives of its citizens that would characterize the future communist society.

Newspapers and other mass media further defined the communist way of life that lay beyond the next street corner.[9] One chronicler of the future, Mikhail Lifanov, began his 1961 essay, *O byte pri kommunizme* (On everyday life under Communism), by melding together images of space-age technology and urban life. "Imagine, reader, that we're walking with you along the streets of the city of the future. Wide thoroughfares filled with light nowhere intersect themselves on one level, and rushing cars, whose form reminds one of rockets, pass by us at great speed." The city of the future, Lifanov explained, would replace the "old city" of the nineteenth century, its dirty courtyards and tiny streets. Fresh air and sunlight would permeate the city, which "freely and deeply breathes with every particle of its great lungs." In announcing the arrival of the "new way of life," Lifanov explained, "there's no need to make a trip to the far-off future, because already today, we now see developed communist construction, which profoundly changes our entire way of life."[10]

Such pronouncements echoed earlier calls in Soviet history to discard the rot of prerevolutionary urban existence in the built environment and everyday social relations.[11] The concept of the microdistrict as a residential area outfitted to meet all commercial and social needs grew out of similar ideas in the 1920s and early 1930s for the socialization of everyday life in the *dom-kommuna* (house commune).[12] As the newspaper *Trud* declared in a 1963 article, "Dom zavtrashnego dnia" (The house of tomorrow), mass housing designs represented the latest "sprouts of the communist way of life." The newspaper invoked the dom-kommuna as a precedent for contemporary projects that inculcated proper collectivist

values over selfish ones. But there were limits to what should be borrowed from the past. The champions of the dom-kommuna had taken the "socialization of a person's personal life" too far, and "instead of apartments, they designed so-called 'sleeping cabins.'"[13] The new mass housing of the Khrushchev period, predicated on the separate apartment, would not risk such excesses. Families would live in their own apartments with modern amenities and share the communal spaces and facilities of their building and neighborhood with other residents.

Trud clarified the meaning of the communist way of life in ways that suggested additional, subtle revisions to the dom-kommuna and its ideology of erasing the division between public and private life. The new housing of the Khrushchev period would ensure that people "lived in one friendly collective according to the principle that a person is a friend, comrade, and brother to another, and not according to the principle—my house is my castle." But the newspaper indicated that bringing this about no longer required the asceticism and collective regulation of everyday life of house communes from the past. All that was needed were well-designed apartment complexes with commercial services, gyms, cafeterias, and cafés so that people enjoyed "the maximum in conveniences and comfort."[14] In this formulation, the communist way of life meant a community whose members got along because the good fences of separate apartments made good neighbors, and everyone enjoyed all the comforts and consumer items of modern urban life. Far from encouraging residents to retreat from public life into their private castles, the separate apartment would engender healthy family relations that expanded outward into harmonious neighborly relations and a collectively shared desire to properly care for housing as Khrushchev himself had advised.

In the book *Dom budushchego* (House of the future, 1962), the Soviet architect Aleksandr Peremyslov similarly explored the emerging communist way of life by taking Soviet readers on a futuristic journey to a couple's separate apartment in a newly built microdistrict sometime in the very near but still indeterminate future, or, as he put it, in "Moscow, the year 196. . . ." The microdistrict Peremyslov visited along with a philosophy professor was a harbinger of the communist way of life where public spaces took pride of place in socializing the new Soviet person. Upon entering the neighborhood, Peremyslov and the philosopher encountered

a multitude of vibrant public facilities, including a stadium, a club, a swimming pool, an open-air theater, and greenhouses. The privileging of public over private spaces followed the two men as they entered the building of the couple whose apartment they had come to visit. A café, the building's maintenance office, a drop-off for laundry, and various vending machines greeted them on the first floor. A quick elevator ride brought them to the eighth floor, where each wing featured a common area bedecked with wild grapes. Peremyslov and the philosopher found the couple, Gennadii and Galina, with one of their two children, Lidochka, in the single-family apartment they had "received" (read: obtained as a public good, not privately owned property) from the Soviet state. Their modest two-room apartment featured space-saving and multiuse furniture that contributed to their home's "good taste and great culture." Even though it was a separate apartment, the family's home remained an organic part of the greater, public whole. "Our apartment," Gennadii explained, "isn't just two rooms, an entrance, and a bathroom, but also Lidochka's place at child care, a regular table in the dining hall of the cafeteria, and so on." As Galina explained, their home comprised their building and the entire microdistrict where their son, Andriushka, lived in a boarding school. In this expansive definition of home, the private and the public were harmoniously intertwined along a continuum of well-designed and complementary spaces. Their microdistrict was even situated next to a virgin forest, thereby signaling that the war the Bolsheviks had launched in the wake of the Russian Revolution between town and country and between nature and the built environment was finally over.[15]

In the transition to mass housing estates and separate apartments, the communal apartments of older parts of town proved to be an ambiguous legacy for writers like Peremyslov seeking to define the communist way of life. Leaving behind communal apartments and their endless squabbles was the order of the day in an era when millions of residents were happily moving into their own private apartments. But according to some media reports, the communal apartment could equally be read as nostalgia for a way of life that was disappearing and as a warning against effusive praise for the separate apartment's privacy and its potential to isolate residents from the socialist whole. As scholars have shown, the privacy and au-

tonomy promised by the separate apartment were checked by the regime's insistence that these features not detract from but rather complement the creation of a socialist community of good citizens and responsible consumers.[16] The communal apartment was the perfect setting familiar to all urban residents where such a lesson could be taught.[17]

In 1961, for example, *Leningradskaia pravda* chronicled the transformation of communal apartments into paragons of the communist way of life. Neighbors had learned to get along: "Noble feelings of comradeship, mutual assistance, and friendship have strengthened; work with children has sharply improved; apartment squabbles have disappeared." The newspaper sang the praises of collectivism and foresaw the erasure of the petty individualism that evoked dysfunctional communal apartments. "Extra mailboxes and doorbells, and 'individual' electric lamps in common spaces are disappearing." Reformed communal apartment neighbors "forgo their personal telephones, add their own personal books to the house libraries, and exhibit for common viewing the collections of rare coins and stamps that they have collected over years and decades."[18]

In the same year, according to the journal *Zhilishchno-kommunal'noe khoziaistvo* (Housing and municipal affairs), a local "competition" in which communal apartment residents engaged in the "struggle for the communist way of life" further illustrated this collectivist spirit and a subtle critique of excessively private lifestyles in separate apartments: "Brigades, construction sites, and entire cities keep the path to communism. *Only everyday life hides as before from public opinion behind a solidly closed door.* And then the idea was born—to draft residents into competing for a new, communist way of life" (my emphasis). Such a claim echoed the heady days of the dom-kommuna, with its ominous threats to tear down the public-private divide allegedly impeding the path to communism. The successful competitors were those who shed the outward signs of a dysfunctional communal apartment and transformed themselves into collectives that thrived on the values of communal identity, equality, and sharing. "Under the doorbell, instead of a long list, hangs a small list: *'For all residents ring once.'* A small table has appeared in the hallway on which there is a new telephone. Previously it had belonged to one person" (emphasis in the original). Even their kitchen had undergone a significant

make-over: "All the tables are covered with the same oilcloths. Matches, salt, soda, household soap, and a small broom have been turned over for common use."[19]

Whereas newspapers invoked the communist way of life to prescribe proper behaviors and warn against excessive privacy, residents drew upon this malleable discourse to serve their own ends when dealing with local housing officials. In 1961, for example, a family living on Tipanova Street in Leningrad's Moscow district seemed only capable of angering neighbors and local housing officials because of water leaking out of their apartment. The Versov family, as they were called, consisted of an elderly couple, their daughter, and their two grandsons. They had moved into their new apartment the year before and had constantly run afoul of the local housing office's chief engineer, Volodarets, and the technician-constructor, Sergeeva. According to an acquaintance, a certain G. Aron, who wrote to the head of the Moscow district soviet (the local municipal government) on the family's behalf, these two officials generally blamed residents for everything: "These workers got it into their heads that things don't break down in new houses; if something happens, it means the residents themselves are guilty, who only go on stubbornly in order to break [things] and maliciously take equipment away from a construction site. For them [Volodarets and Sergeeva] residents are an undifferentiated mass of malefactors and people who break the rules."[20] Aron was not interested in these lower-level officials' point of view and relished the opportunity to represent them as insensitive and incapable of meeting the everyday needs of upstanding citizens. In contrast, the Versov household was full of good people, "neither hooligans, nor drunks–debauched types." Aron himself had been a party member since 1927 and was senior editor in the sciences at the city's branch office of the Academy of Sciences' publishing house. He sanctimoniously informed his readers, "My heart of an old communist is filled with anger, and I raise my voice in defense of an honest Soviet family."[21]

Whoever was to blame, the Versovs' apartment suffered especially from plumbing problems, such as moisture that leaked from their kitchen to the apartment below. The leak required only minor repairs, but Volodarets had evidently been unhelpful. Aron conceded that the bathroom floor became soaked whenever the grandfather tried to bathe in the inconve-

niently small bathtub, but Volodarets accused the Versovs of doing this deliberately, and their downstairs neighbor had launched his own abuse on the family. "The Versov family is literally terrorized," Aron lamented. "Recently the household head from apt. 24, V. P. Koliado, a young, healthy man, stormed into their apartment and threatened the Versovs that he would come with a crowbar and destroy the entire bathroom. Now the Versovs are afraid to use their bathroom."[22] To further emphasize this injustice, Aron insisted that the Versovs adhered to the tenets of the communist way of life, whereas the housing officials did not.[23]

In his defense of the Versovs, Aron emphasized that they were part of their house's "competition for the title of house of the communist way of life" and that, "having signed this contract, they indeed live and work in a communist way." This distinguished the Versov family from the mean-spirited local housing authorities: "Instead of assisting in every way with the introduction of the communist way of life, these gravediggers deprive people of the elementary comforts of life: plumbing, light, water, a bathroom." Aron was using the communist way of life in much the same way that Khrushchev and the mass media employed the term. The Versovs were good people who wanted to enjoy their new separate apartment, keep it in good repair, and enjoy amicable but separate neighborly relations, and they were willing to participate in community affairs. The communist way of life in Aron's letter presupposed "an honest Soviet family" that battled disreputable local officials whose behavior threatened the larger social order. Aron concluded, "An especial keenness and even particular, sincere qualities are required of workers of housing offices, because if they are going to treat people the way Volodarets and Sergeeva do, people's lives will be spoiled."[24]

Residents like the Versovs moved into new neighborhoods that were more a work-in-progress than the product of careful design, as depicted in Peremyslov's house of the future. Next to such glowing reports on what life would be like,[25] Soviet newspapers chronicled the shortcomings residents faced in mass housing.[26] Buildings appeared in areas with little infrastructure and transportation. Open spaces between apartment houses became empty voids, and unlit streets aggravated residents struggling to find their homes among identical buildings. The gap between design and reality made residents' lives difficult and exposed shortcomings in the

mass housing campaign. It also provided residents with the necessary space to shape their communities in ways unforeseen by urban planners but not necessarily at odds with ideal visions of the communist way of life. In the new neighborhoods of the Khrushchev era, "state" and "society" overlapped to constitute the mass housing community in ways that saw residents try to make the architecture, rhetoric, and institutions of the regime function as intended.

CREATING COMMUNITY

To deal with such problems as neighborhood upkeep and drunken behavior, Khrushchev's regime called on citizens to join neighborhood "social organizations" ranging from parents' committees to the more ominous neighborhood foot patrols (*druzhiny*).[27] As both residents of new housing and office-holders in social organizations, urban dwellers operated at the very intersection of "state" and "society" in their local communities. Under Khrushchev, engaged residents wanted the state to be part of their everyday lives. For example, those who complained of noise pollution turned to the state for help and supported a "war on noise" campaign.[28] Others joined druzhiny and comrades' courts to police the neighborhood for public drunkenness, violent behavior, and "antisocial" conduct.[29] While social organizations constrained the behavior of some residents, they provided others with a platform for voicing their complaints and spurring neighbors to action within the bounds of the discourse on the communist way of life.

The archived minutes of Soviet residential meetings provide us with a unique window onto social organizations and residents' strategies for creating community. For example, at a meeting of fifty-two residents from a mass housing estate in Leningrad's Moscow district in the late 1950s, a resident and head of the area's local soviet housing office explained how the community combated hooligans, drunkards, and even simple loafers through parents' committees, house committees, and comrades' courts. In reference to the state's support for such community involvement, a certain Metskevich stressed the "new edicts about responsibility for minor hooliganism and beefing up the struggle against those who shy away

from socially useful work and carry on an antisocial and parasitical way of life, drunkards, and so on." In response, he called on his community to create a druzhina. Metskevich stressed that only "honest and exemplary comrades" from the neighborhood would serve on its patrols.[30] Social organizations thus enabled residents not only to create community but to identify internal divisions between the self-proclaimed best citizens and those they sought to marginalize. Like the discourse on the communist way of life, social organizations afforded urban residents a powerful tool in making these distinctions. As we saw in his letter defending the Versovs, Aron invoked the communist way of life in a similar way to differentiate between "an honest Soviet family" and the "gravediggers" from the local housing office.

A meeting in 1957 of sixty-three residents from 182 Moskovskii prospekt in Leningrad shed light on other ways that residents, courtesy of their social assistance commission, created community. Television, normally an atomizing force, united these residents primarily because they appeared to have only one in a building where most people lived in communal apartments. The resident reporting on the commission's work explained that "the viewing of television programs has been set up for residents and children, and someone is put on duty for this every day." For the past two years, the commission had set up an ice-skating rink and provided for a children's playground. It teamed up with the parents' committee to organize a "contest on the ice," as well as a "performance of figure skaters." It put together three tours around the city for residents and one out-of-town trip for children. A sewing circle had been set up for interested residents, and the parents' committee had established a group called Capable Hands, made up of children referred to as Timurovites (*deti-timurovtsy*), which suggested that its purpose was to lend assistance to elderly residents and war invalids.[31] At 182 Moskovskii prospekt, social organizations existed on a continuum of community organization (not unlike Peremyslov's vision of a microdistrict) that began in these residents' communal apartments and extended outward to their building and the neighborhood.[32]

The harmonious community life of 182 Moskovskii prospekt contrasts sharply with our typical notions of the communal apartment. Residents were eager to exchange its daily squabbles and cramped conditions for the private bliss of a separate apartment. Yet the new mass housing neighbor-

hoods they entered had their own problems, including unfinished apartment buildings, insufficient public transportation, and too few buildings for commercial and cultural uses. Residents' letters of complaint exposed these structural deficiencies but also revealed how such problems drew them together as a community. For example, four residents living on Grazhdanskii prospekt in Leningrad's Vyborg district demonstrated a collective consciousness centered on neighborhood life and its everyday problems in a letter to *Izvestiia* in 1964: "Grazhdanskii prospekt, seven o'clock in the morning. Lights turn on in the windows of houses. Residents of the new quarter get ready for work, and each one, exactly each one, has one thought: Will he succeed today to sit on the bus, leave on time, take the baby to day care or to school, and not be late for work[?]" A single bus route provided this area with access to the Lenin Square metro station. Residents were forced to wait for several full buses to pass before they caught one. "The working day begins with the storming of bus doors, throngs [of people], arguments, a spoilt mood."[33] The residents also complained that only the light coming from people's apartments illuminated the broad expanses separating houses of this microdistrict, which became dark once people turned in for the evening. "It would seem that especially now," the residents continued, "when all around everything isn't set up, construction goes on, foundation plots and trenches have been dug up, asphalted paths begin and break off at the most unexpected places, [that now] good lighting is needed. But no. We get by with the moon."[34]

While such deficiencies brought some residents together, other problems risked dividing the mass housing community along new social lines. Residents who owned automobiles were a particular source of tension. Similar to the separate apartment and its new line of modern furniture and household appliances, automobiles became items of mass consumption in the Khrushchev period and especially under Brezhnev.[35] Those who wanted to park their cars near their apartment buildings faced off against neighbors who found that automobiles unfairly occupied and ruined a neighborhood's public spaces. In a letter to the All-Union Meeting of Constructors in December 1954—a critical moment in the mass housing campaign when Khrushchev blasted architects for not designing cheaper mass housing—a Muscovite by the name of Zhdanov outlined the troubles that "toiling automobile drivers" (*trudiashchiesia-avtomobilisty*) had with

residential parking. He accused city planners of failing to set aside space in new housing districts for single-automobile garages. Pointing to the downtown Kiev district, Zhdanov complained that existing garages were being displaced by new housing projects to areas several kilometers away "to uninhabited and unkempt grounds, where there is neither water, nor electricity, where it's impossible to drive through in all weather, and where it's not entirely safe to return from at night."[36] Zhdanov warned that automobile drivers would only increase in number and called for "large, well-organized public garages" to solve the parking problem. The second best option, according to Zhdanov, would be sufficient space for single-automobile garages within five hundred to a thousand meters of housing.[37]

Zhdanov's letter suggests a strong sense of identity among car owners, reinforced by their sense of being a minority discriminated against by uncaring city planners. He complained that the Moscow city soviet's department of architectural affairs neglected "the interests of toilers, owners of light motorcars." Zhdanov even grafted working-class labels such as "toiling" onto "automobile drivers" to cast their problems as a legitimate plight worthy of immediate action. Yet his examples of fellow car owners betrayed a socially elite bias weighted toward well-educated professionals and members of the artistic intelligentsia: "workers of industry and transport, writers, doctors, artists, composers, performing artists, architects, engineers and technicians, academics."[38]

To their neighbors, car owners, their automobiles, and single-car garages dirtied new housing estates and generally got in the way of people's everyday lives. At a May 1957 residents' meeting of a newly built house on Iakovlevskii Alley in Leningrad's Moscow district, one resident, from 103 in attendance, asked for the removal of garages that had sprung up around their new house. His attempts to secure the district soviet's help in preventing these garages in the first place had been unsuccessful. The situation bothered the resident because the garages "are at the present time not completed and are in an unsanitary state." While Zhdanov identified himself and fellow drivers positively as "toiling automobile drivers," this particular resident used a less flattering moniker when referring to "the garages of independent proprietors [*edinolichniki*]." This term, *edinolichniki,* was used during collectivization in the 1930s to describe peasants who did not join collective farms. They were the only peasants who

could possess horses, thereby signifying an appropriate parallel with the automobile situation on Iakovlevskii Alley. By invoking the term, the resident was making an unambiguous point: through their automobiles and garages, which dirtied the common areas of the neighborhood, car drivers went about their business at the community's expense. The resident's use of edinolichniki also suggested that car drivers used their automobiles and garages to distinguish themselves materially from their less fortunate neighbors.[39]

In the 1950s and 1960s the social meaning of the mass-produced automobile was shaped in new housing estates, and the automobile likewise played an early role in shaping neighborhood life. Along with makeshift garages, the automobile was a disruptive addition to already badly designed and incompletely built neighborhoods, and it created new social divisions within the mass housing community between those who had automobiles and those who did not. The minority who owned automobiles developed a rather strong sense of themselves as a separate, beleaguered group of urban dwellers. As Lewis Siegelbaum points out, car owners were also predominantly men, and the attention they spent on their automobiles structured the spaces of neighborhoods along gendered lines so that "garages, make-shift auto parts bazaars, and the interiors of cars themselves served as refuges from the crowded conditions of apartment dwelling."[40] Today one-car garages and automobiles are standard items in the courtyards (and sidewalks) of Russia's mass housing districts, and the association of men with automobiles has remained strong. According to one long-term resident of Moscow, the courtyard has evolved into a distinctly gendered space, and men long ago established their place in it through their automobiles.[41]

As residents' struggles with automobile drivers suggest, neighbors were not always pleased with one another's ways of creating community in mass housing estates. In a letter published in *Trud* in 1966, a Leningrader named Usanov complained that his five-year-old neighborhood on the outskirts of town had "neither a movie theater, nor a theater, nor a cafe, nor a stadium." Usanov contrasted his neighborhood with what one normally thought of as Leningrad and its "theaters and museums, gardens and parks." The hour-long commute between the older and newer parts of town compounded this spatial and cultural rupture, leaving residents

with two options at the end of the workday: "Either sit at home or go to the 'casino'—this is what they call a table and two benches in our courtyard, dug into the ground right near a children's playground." The "lovers of 'kozel,' card players," became a public nuisance: "It's good, if an evening at the 'casino' ends without drunken singing, without police whistles. More often it's the opposite."[42] A *Trud* reporter expanded upon Usanov's observations that new neighborhoods created empty spaces that led to trouble if they were not channeled into socially useful places of leisure. "Nature, as is well known, does not tolerate emptiness," the reporter mused. "And therefore it is not surprising that in new housing estates the notorious 'casinos' about which comrade Usanov writes grow like poisonous mushrooms after rain."[43] This mass housing estate was not the paragon of the Soviet everyday, but neither did it lack meaningful human interaction. By setting up a casino, people were autonomously creating a community, albeit an illicit one, around a shared activity in spaces they had appropriated. Squatting in empty apartments and land plots constituted yet another way that urban residents appropriated the spaces of the Soviet city to serve their own ends and create community.

SQUATTERS' RIGHTS

As Christine Varga-Harris argues, getting a separate apartment under Khrushchev was a key entitlement in a renegotiated social contract between state and society that had lapsed under Stalin.[44] But moving to a new apartment, I would argue, was also part of a renegotiated social contract between citizens who entered a new civil state when they left communal housing for mass housing. In the ideal scenario, their new communities were not bound together by shortage and adversity, as communal apartment dwellers had been, nor by private property, which kept their counterparts in Western cities in a Hobbesian state of mutual distrust. Enacting the communist way of life, residents were supposed to enter into mass housing in a rational fashion whereby local officials assigned families to apartments in an orderly process. Residents waited their turn on waiting lists until they received the housing permit that bestowed their right to a separate apartment. The community ideally came together knowing

beforehand where each family was supposed to go and that Soviet law protected each family's access to its apartment.

In practice, housing allocation could be a messy affair, and in the mid-1950s the Soviet government identified apartment "squatting" (*samovol'noe zaselenie*) as one of its major problems. Squatters took buildings before they were completed and inspected. Rather than evict squatters or prevent them from taking housing in the first place, local soviets often registered squatters as rightful residents. Government reports projected an image of new neighborhoods as landscapes of incompletely built housing already suffering from construction defects, which local officials rushed to settle, even if that meant condoning squatters.[45] In addition to taking empty apartments, squatters took land to build housing. According to the Ministry of the Communal Economy, "unauthorized builders" (*samovol'nye zastroishchiki*) were hard at work in the mid-1950s, colonizing empty plots in such cities as Kuibyshev, Saratov, Krasnodar, Sochi, and Stalingrad, as well as the Moscow and Kalinin oblasts. Local authorities failed to pursue criminal cases against these scofflaws and did not raze their illegally built homes. Not only did illegal builders "use the absence of control" to construct homes on empty land plots, these builders even asked local people's courts to register the plots as personal property. Local authorities did not contest these petitions and failed to file appeals. Particularly irksome were illegal builders' clever use of unspecified "documents," which they and people they sold their houses to effectively wielded, thereby "creat[ing] the appearance of legality" and providing builders with leverage against threats to have their homes razed.[46] Squatting in empty apartments or on land plots revealed how residents acted when the state seemed asleep at the switch, allowing them to create community on their own terms.

The Ministry of the Communal Economy proposed measures in early 1954 to crack down on squatters who took land, raze their homes, and punish local authorities who failed to stop them.[47] But in 1954 and 1955 the government overruled this ministry and instituted a conciliatory approach, spurred in part by none other than the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), which wanted to register illegal builders as it did all citizens but could not under existing law. The government subsequently declared an amnesty on existing illegally built homes, adopted preventive measures, and, when those failed, simply decided to tax such squatters and let them keep their houses.[48] Adding what illegal builders had con-

structed to the overall housing stock was more important to the state than punishing them.

Anecdotal evidence sheds further light on the defiant nature of squatters and what brought them together as a community. In late 1956 the MVD informed the Central Committee of 131 workers and their families who squatted in a new apartment building in Moscow under cover of night. The workers were employed in housing construction, with some working for a construction firm and others working at a factory producing reinforced concrete. These families had lived together in a dormitory located one street away from the new building. Whether the workers had worked on the new building was unclear, but their close proximity suggested how frustrating it was to live in an overcrowded dormitory—with individual rooms of twenty-eight to thirty-two square meters accommodating three to four families each—while a new building was built next door. As workers in housing construction, their action suggested (rather uncomfortably for Soviet authorities) a Marxist narrative of exploited workers collectively taking back the fruits of their labor. In their dormitory and through their work, these families had already constituted a community that shared the same grievances and trusted one another enough to plan the takeover of a building and face the repercussions together. Their strategy, as far as the MVD account indicated, was to take the building and hold out until local authorities caved in.[49]

In response, the district prosecutor ordered the police to evict the squatters. Whether the police tried to use force was unclear, but whatever they did evidently failed. Local party and soviet officials tried negotiating with the squatters to get them back to their dormitory. The squatters held fast to their demands that local authorities issue them housing permits and turn on the building's water and gas. For three days they had barricaded themselves in the building and created a human barrier at its entrance with pregnant women in front, followed by women and children, and men in back. Their dramatic display of civil disobedience and the powerful symbolism evoked in its gendered organization came through even in the dry MVD report. The community's most vulnerable members held its greatest power, which the squatters were daring the police to transgress through violence. Insofar as avoiding physical removal was concerned, their strategy had thus far worked. Even the MVD wanted nothing to do with them. In response to the Moscow chief of police's request for help,

the MVD explained that local authorities had not exhausted all avenues to achieve the "voluntary departure from the illegally occupied apartments" and referred them to the city procuracy if all else failed. Written during the affair, the MVD report does not tell us what eventually happened. Nonetheless, by the third day, the police had apparently chosen not to use force.[50]

Regardless of the ultimate outcome, these squatters had revealed uncomfortable truths about who had been marginalized and exploited in the quest for a separate apartment and the creation of a Soviet neighborhood. They demonstrated the desperate strategies of the excluded to form their own community through the workplace and where they lived and to put their mutual dependence on the line in unsanctioned collective action and the defense of a building held in common. This was not what Khrushchev later envisioned to be the correct or legal path to living the communist way of life. Yet these squatters' actions presaged the broader meanings of this discourse. They took over the functions of the state in building and distributing housing, creating a local community, and looking after collective property. Their move bolstered what state and society now recognized as the legitimate claim of every Soviet family, a separate apartment, while maintaining that each family had obligations before the community. These ordinary residents' actions showed how the path from the construction of new housing to its settlement and creation of a community was not always smooth and often overlapped. Construction, housing distribution, and community creation were supposed to occur separately in the ideal world of urban planning and Soviet propaganda on Khrushchev's mass housing campaign. In reality, their overlapping opened a space for ordinary residents to shape how the communist way of life—broadly understood as the ideal and harmonious relations between a single household and its community—functioned in practice.

CONCLUSION

Mass housing's glaring deficiencies allowed ordinary residents to take an active role in creating community in often unintended ways. Some joined the lowliest organs of state power, "social organizations," while

others drew upon official rhetoric about the communist way of life in making their grievances heard. Their more desperate neighbors took the extraordinary step of squatting in apartments or on plots of land and then just as defiantly defended their homes and microcommunities through legal appeals and civil disobedience that fell within the official meanings of living the communist way of life. Some residents bonded over the deficiencies of neighborhood infrastructure, while others turned on their car-driving neighbors for cluttering neighborhoods with garages. In contrast to the uniformity in the aesthetics and planning of microdistricts, the mass housing community evolved into a heterogeneous body with new social divisions rooted in the ways residents made use of its public spaces and coped with its problems. Under Khrushchev, mass housing estates were a new social space where residents created community in ways that bolstered the volunteerism inherent in living the communist way of life.

To be sure, the shortcomings ordinary residents faced in Soviet mass housing illustrate the chronic failures of Khrushchev's regime to build it as intended. Examining everyday life in new mass housing estates, as shown in this essay, presents their deficiencies in incredibly vivid detail and suggests the distance that often lay between official propaganda and citizens' lived experience. The same methodology, however, can reveal other, more valuable insights into Soviet social and cultural history, particularly in a period such as Khrushchev's, when state and society underwent incredible changes from the Stalinist past. As this essay illustrates, exploring the everyday can show how officially sanctioned discourses such as the communist way of life mattered for ordinary citizens struggling to adapt to and make sense of the urban spaces they got rather than those they were supposed to have received. This methodology sharpens our understanding of the unintended ways that chronic deficiencies in the urban environment created the everyday context in which such discourses and ordinary people's actions gave meaning to one another.

NOTES

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1. See, for example, Alexander Vysokovskii, "Will Domesticity Return?," in *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History,* ed. William Brumfield and Blair Ruble (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1993), 289.

2. Sudhir Venkatesh, *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

3. Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life,* trans. William Templer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

4. See, for example, Victor Buchli, "Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against *Petit-bourgeois* Consciousness in the Soviet Home," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2 (1997): 161–76; Stephen Bittner, "Remembering the Avant-Garde: Moscow Architects and the 'Rehabilitation' of Constructivism, 1961–1964," *Kritika* 2, no. 3 (2001): 553–76; Susan Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 289–316; Christine Varga-Harris, "Forging Citizenship on the Home Front: Reviving the Socialist Contract and Constructing Soviet Identity during the Thaw," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era,* ed. Polly Jones (London: Routledge, 2006), 101–16; Mark Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

5. "Pervyi polet cheloveka v kosmicheskoe prostranstvo," *Pravda,* April 25, 1961, 1, 3–4.

6. For images of space travel, see I. Semenov, "Vsled za Gagarinym (pervomaiskaia shutka)," *Pravda,* May 1, 1961, 6. I thank Vadim Volkov for suggesting the connection between mass housing and space flight.

7. D. Burdin and Iu. Umanskaia, "Arkhitektura zhilykh kvartalov Leninskogo prospekta," *Arkhitektura SSSR,* no. 2 (1958): 12–14; I. Fomin, "Pervichnye arkhitekturno-planirovochnye kompleksy zhiloi zastroiki," *Arkhitektura SSSR,* no. 7 (1961): 21–27.

8. *Vneocherednoi XXI s"ezd kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza. 27 ianvaria–5 fevralia 1959 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1959), 1:51–52.

9. "Dom za Moskovskoi zastavoi," *Leningradskaia pravda,* December 25, 1960, 2; G. Gradov, "Gorod i byt," *Izvestiia,* January 13, 1960, 2.

10. Mikhail Lifanov, *O byte pri kommunizme* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1961), 3–4. An updated version of Lifanov's pamphlet was published in 1963. See Mikhail Lifanov, ed., *Za kommunisticheskii byt* (Leningrad: Obshchestvo po rasprostraneniiu politicheskikh i nauchnykh znanii RSFSR, Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1963).

11. S. Frederick Starr, "Visionary Town Planning during the Cultural Revolution," in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931,* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 207–40.

12. Gregory Andrusz, *Housing and Urban Development in the USSR* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 127–28.

13. A. Kuz'michev, "Dom zavtrashnego dnia," *Trud,* May 31, 1963, 2.

14. Kuz'michev, "Dom zavtrashnego dnia."

15. Aleksandr Peremyslov, *Dom budushchego (Zametki arkhitektora)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1962), 8–11.

16. Susan Reid, "Women in the Home," in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Melanie Ilič, Susan Reid, and Lynne Attwood (Basingstoke: Palgrave Press, 2004), 149–76; Christine Varga-Harris, "Constructing the Soviet Hearth: Home, Citizenship and Socialism in Russia, 1956–1964" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005), 132–86.

17. On the communal apartment's continued importance in defining communal values under Khrushchev, see Deborah Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 27–37.

18. M. Maksimov, "Zhit' khorosho, druzhno, po-kommunisticheski," *Leningradskaia pravda*, February 17, 1961, 2.

19. Alla Efremova, "Byla obyknovennaia kvartira," *Zhilishchno-kommunal'noe khoziaistvo*, no. 6 (1961): 4, 33.

20. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga (TsGA SPb), fond 103, op. 5, d. 829, l. 90.

21. TsGA SPb, fond 103, op. 5, d. 829, ll. 90, 93.

22. TsGA SPb, fond 103, op. 5, d. 829, ll. 90–92.

23. TsGA SPb, fond 103, op. 5, d. 829, ll. 92–93.

24. TsGA SPb, fond 103, op. 5, d. 829, ll. 92–93.

25. A. Mokhova, "Raionnyi Sovet i voprosy zhilishchnogo stroitel'stva," *Pravda*, December 15, 1956, 2; I. Dmitriev, "Novyi oblik starogo raiona," *Leningradskaia pravda*, November 2, 1960, 3.

26. E. Iashmanov, "Pis'ma v redaktsiiu: Nash schet stroiteliam," *Leningradskaia pravda*, June 12, 1957, 2; M. Sharipov et al., "Zabota o byte liudei—delo bol'shoe, vazhnoe," *Pravda*, April 4, 1961, 2.

27. On social organizations, see Theodore Friedgut, *Political Participation in the USSR* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 235–88.

28. Steven Harris, "'I Know All the Secrets of My Neighbors': The Quest for Privacy in the Era of the Separate Apartment," in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*, ed. Lewis Siegelbaum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 171–89.

29. Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009), 133–55.

30. TsGA SPb, fond 103, op. 5, d. 663, ll. 79, 203.

31. TsGA SPb, fond 103, op. 5, d. 663, l. 62. Inspired by Arkadii Gaidar's 1940 story, "Timur and His Team," Timurovites were patriotic children who helped those affected by the war. On the Timurovites, see their definition in *Bol'shoi tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka* (St. Petersburg: Norint, 2000), 1323.

32. On the continuum of community relations that extended from the communal apartment to broader public spaces and institutions, see Il'ia Utekhin, *Ocherki kommunal'nogo byta* (Moscow: OGI, 2001), chap. 11, "Outside the Apartment."

33. TsGA SPb, fond 7384, op. 42, d. 1002, ll. 7–8, 10.

34. TsGA SPb, fond 7384, op. 42, d. 1002, l. 9.

35. Lewis Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008).

36. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki (RGAE), fond 339, op. 1, d. 1098, ll. 24–26.

37. RGAE, fond 339, op. 1, d. 1098, ll. 24–26.

38. RGAE, fond 339, op. 1, d. 1098, ll. 24–26.

39. TsGA SPb, fond 103, op. 5, d. 495, ll. 48–49. On independent peasants in the 1930s, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 128, 152–58.

40. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades*, 7.

41. Evgeniia Pishchikova, "Moskovskii dvorik," *Moskovskie novosti*, November 29–December 6, 1998, 27. I thank Sheila Fitzpatrick for drawing my attention to this article.

42. Evgenii Nikolin, "Chelovek prishel s raboty," *Trud*, September 11, 1966, 2.

43. Nikolin, "Chelovek prishel s raboty."

44. Varga-Harris, "Forging Citizenship."

45. In 1953 the Molotov (Perm') city soviet retroactively approved the settlement of eighty-eight unfinished buildings that squatters had taken. It approved for settlement another forty-three unfinished buildings, which presumably went to the designated residents. Similar incidents occurred in Novosibirsk and Ul'ianovsk. In Vladimir, Voronezh, and Syktyvkar, city soviets settled unfinished housing that had not passed inspection and had construction flaws that already needed to be fixed. The source for these reports was a June 21, 1954, Soviet of Ministers RSFSR decree, "On serious shortcomings in housing and civil construction in cities of the RSFSR," in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), fond A-259, op. 1, d. 663, ll. 89–90. An additional source was a 1956 report, "On improving the quality of construction," to the Central Committee and the Soviet of Ministers USSR. See Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii, fond 5, op. 41, d. 57, ll. 2–4.

46. GARF, fond A-314, op. 3, d. 321, ll. 108–10.

47. GARF, fond A-314, op. 3, d. 321, ll. 108–10.

48. On the MVD's efforts to register land squatters, see GARF, fond A-314, op. 3, d. 321, l. 105. See also the Soviet of Ministers RSFSR draft decree in GARF, fond A-314, op. 3, d. 321, l. 107. On the government's amnesty, see the Soviet of Ministers RSFSR decree of July 3, 1954, "On measures for struggling with unauthorized construction," in GARF, fond A-259, op. 1, d. 664, l. 39. On the government's decision to tax land squatters, see the Soviet of Ministers RSFSR decree of November 4, 1955, "On the taxation of citizens who constructed buildings in an unauthorized manner on land plots that were not given to them," in GARF, fond A-259, op. 1, d. 766, ll. 59–60.

49. GARF, fond 9401, op. 2, d. 482, ll. 216–17.

50. GARF, fond 9401, op. 2, d. 482, ll. 216–17.