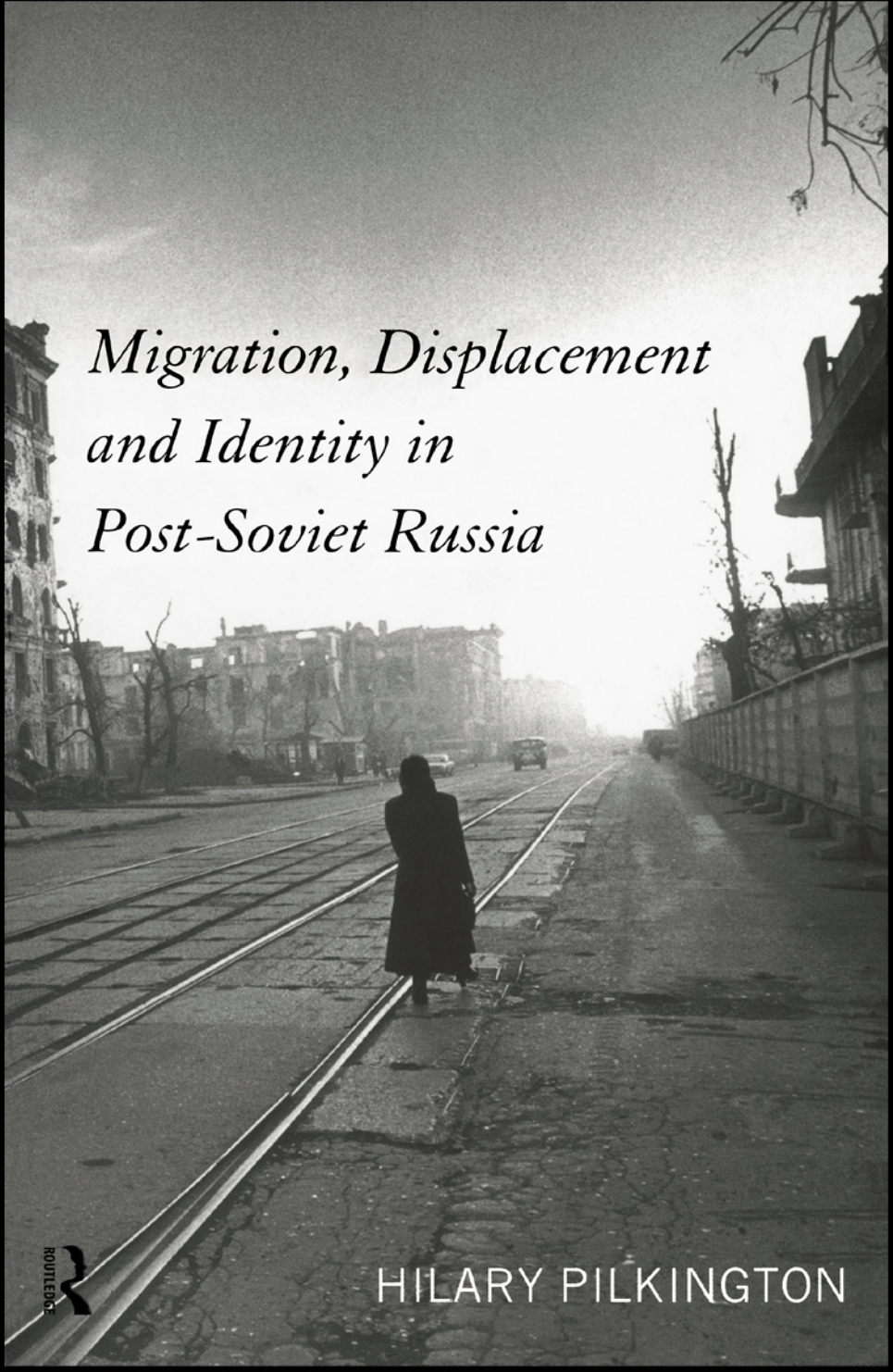

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Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia

Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, around 25 million ethnic Russians found themselves politically and culturally displaced, forming a new 'Russian minority' in each of the newly independent states. Since then, around 3 million Russians have either chosen or been forced to return to Russia. The process of 'going home' has been far from smooth for returnees and receiving population alike.

Using completely new empirical data drawn from in-depth interviews with almost 200 forced migrants and refugees, Hilary Pilkington's extensively researched study explores the experience of reintegration from the perspective of those displaced. She asks how the experience of these self-confessed 'other' Russians informs an understanding of contemporary Russian society and, in particular, the problematic reconstruction of a post-Soviet *Russian* identity. The study also places the experience of Russian returnees in the context of the wider political significance of the Russian 'diaspora' question. In so doing it develops a critical appraisal of current Russian Federation and regional migration policy.

Hilary Pilkington's book employs the example of post-Soviet Russia to illuminate wider debates surrounding migration, displacement and identity of significance to the global community.

Hilary Pilkington is Senior Lecturer, Centre for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Birmingham.

For Tony
and our daughter Eleanor

Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia

Hilary Pilkington

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administratively. Its successful completion would not have been possible without the knowledge, skill, support and endurance of Elena Omel'chenko, Guzel' Sabirova and Ul'iana Bliudina in Ul'ianovsk, and of Natal'ia Kosmarskaia and Tat'iana Sheikina in Orel. My deepest thanks to them and to the team of sociologists at the Centre 'Region' at Ul'ianovsk State University for their invaluable contribution to the project. In Moscow Vladimir Mukomel' and Lidiia Grafova gave me invaluable insights into the complexities of working to improve the understanding of migrant issues and I thank them for sharing information and opinions with me. I am indebted also to Nikolai Semenovich, the director of the farm in Orel region where I conducted most of the interviewing, who sadly died earlier this year. The fieldwork itself would not have been possible without the selfless help and interest shown by a number of families in Orel region and Ul'ianovsk whose assistance made the work run more smoothly than I could have anticipated and whose kindness, hospitality, support and friendship will remain the strongest memories of those months. In particular my deepest thanks to Valentina Leonidovna and Gennadii Ivanovich, Arta and Kostya, Svetlana Grigor'evna, Aleksandr Nikolaevich and Natasha, Faina and Rafael and Boris Petrovich.

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Hilary Pilkington
Birmingham, July 1997

Note on transliteration

Works cited in the text in Russian are transliterated according to the Library of Congress system except where names of individuals or places have become widely known in a different form (e.g. Yeltsin). Bibliographical references to works in English by Russian authors are cited in the form in which they have been published and where these publications are referred to in the text, that form is used.

Part I

Policy and practice: The formation of the Russian migration regime

1 Did they jump or were they pushed?

Empirical and conceptual issues in post-Soviet migration

This book does not provide a history of migration studies in the former Soviet Union[1] or an exhaustive account of current migrational movements in the former Soviet space.[2] It focuses on a particular social phenomenon: the movement of the Russian-speaking populations[3] in the former republics of the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation during and following the collapse of the USSR. It charts the experience of those displaced by this political upheaval and asks how that experience informs an understanding of the relationship between migration, displacement and identity in post-Soviet Russia. By way of introduction, this chapter outlines the empirical and theoretical obstacles which must be negotiated in order to address this question. It argues that traditional divisions between macro- and micro-level studies and existing categories of migration studies, based on a differentiation between economic (voluntary) and political (involuntary) migrants, may have to be unfixed in order to conceptualize successfully current migrational flows in the former Soviet space.

NUMBERS AND NAMES: MEASURING MIGRATIONAL FLOWS IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

By 1992, the world counted 17 million officially registered refugees and asylum-seekers, 4 million people in 'refugee-like situations', and an estimated 23 million people 'internally displaced' (Overbeek 1995:17). By the beginning of the 1990s, in the public mind 'international migration' was no longer associated—as it had been in the 1960s and 1970s—with primary and, subsequently, secondary labour migration but had become synonymous with the term 'refugee crisis' (Salt 1989:432). In a world already deeply troubled by mass population movements, the collapse of the Soviet Union was, without doubt, unwelcome; it created a host of new international borders and potential refugees to cross them. Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union did not solve ethnic conflict in the region or the flight across borders

which it had provoked. The process of decolonization and nation-state building in the newly independent states only encouraged further population displacement in the region. Consequently, in the last decade the former Soviet Union has been transformed from a country whose population was surprisingly reluctant to migrate, especially over long distances, into a region whose very stability is threatened, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by current migration trends.[4]

In these migrational flows, it is Russia which has proved the net recipient; since 1993 Russia has had a positive migrational exchange with all of the former Soviet republics. Table 1.1 indicates net migration rates between Russia and the former Soviet republics in 1994.[5] Using official data broken down by nationality on the numbers entering and leaving Russia from each of the former Soviet republics, this table illustrates three important trends. First, the positive total balances ('all nationalities') show that Russia today is a recipient, not a donor nation, in terms of migration within the post-Soviet space. Second, the data show that, with the exception of the war-torn Transcaucasian states, it is ethnic Russians[6] who make up the majority of the net in-migration, ranging from 85 per cent from Belarus to 62 per cent from Tajikistan. Finally, the data show that many non-Russians choose to migrate to Russia, including, in the case of the Transcaucasian states and Ukraine,

Table 1.1 Net migration between the Russian Federation and the former Soviet republics, 1994

Country	*Russians*	*All nationalities*	*Titular nationality*
Azerbaijan	18,982	43,371	9,685
Armenia	4,555	44,574	36,542
Belarus	13,274	15,632	–40
Estonia	8,223	10,192	104
Georgia	24,224	62,176	11,792
Kazakstan	234,323	304,499	703
Kyrgyzstan	42,901	56,542	–3
Latvia	19,340	25,031	328
Lithuania	5,389	6,931	332
Moldova	7,553	11,978	4,866
Tajikistan	25,841	41,969	2,057
Turkmenistan	13,036	17,369	417
Uzbekistan	93,481	135,352	3,783
Ukraine	101,256	138,981	27,576
Total	612,378	914,597	–

Source: *Goskomstat 1995:424–7*

large numbers of the former republics' titular nationalities;[7] 82 per cent of net in-migration from Armenia consisted of ethnic Armenians, for example.

Given the concern in government circles about the prospects for future natural population growth in Russia—due to rising mortality but falling birth rates—one might expect a favourable response to what are quantitatively moderate rises in in-migration. Indeed, as Figure 1.1 shows, total in-migration from republics of the former Soviet Union has fallen for two years in succession and the figure for 1996–700,000—is actually less than the in-migration to Russia in 1980 (876,000) (Goskomstat 1995:400). However, it is not the annual in-migration figures which concern the Russian authorities so much as the manner in which these people arrive—since they have significant social welfare needs—and, above all, the ethnic character of the migration which indicates a potential for mass inward flows in the future. There were 25.3 million ethnic Russians living in Soviet republics other than the Russian Federation according to the last Soviet census of 1989. In addition there were approximately 11 million members of other ethnic groups living outside their titular republic whose primary cultural affinity is to Russia and who are often subsumed into the 'Russian' diaspora as 'russophones' or the 'Russian-speaking' population and considered potential returnees to Russia.

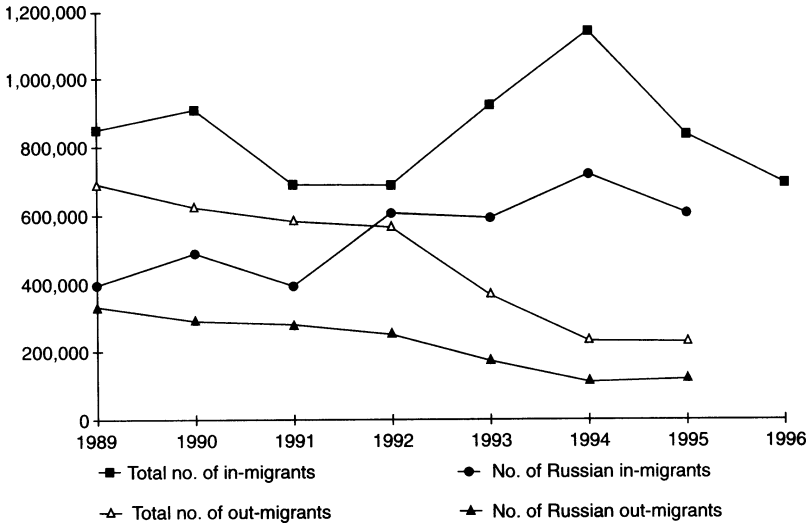

Figure 1.1 In-migration to and out-migration from the Russian Federation from and to the former Soviet republics, 1989–96
Source: Goskomstat 1995:422–3

Since July 1992, the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation has been monitoring migrational flows from the former republics and registering those arrivees who were forced to leave their former place of residence as a result of persecution. Of the 3 million people having moved from the former republics to Russia since then, just over a million have been registered as forced migrants or refugees.[8] Figure 1.2 shows the number of forced migrants and refugees registered annually since data collection began. These figures represent registered forced migrants and refugees only and, although the procedures for gathering data have been significantly improved since 1992, none the less there are considerable problems in using these data as a reliable indicator of total numbers of 'involuntary' migrants from the former republics.[9] The most recent problem is that of the peculiar status being given to those displaced as a result of military conflict in Chechnia. Although currrent Russian legislation does provide for the granting of 'forced migrant' status to those displaced within the Russian Federation (see Chapter 2), the authorities have been increasingly reluctant to register those fleeing Chechnia as refugees or forced migrants. The Russian Federal Migration Service registered a total of 117,000 refugees or forced migrants from Chechnia in the period 1992–5 (Codagnone forthcoming). Thus it is estimated that less than 9 per cent of those who fled Chechnia after December 1994 obtained such status and that there are currently almost 500,000 displaced people from this region who have not been registered and granted appropriate status in the normal way (Mukomel 1996:143).

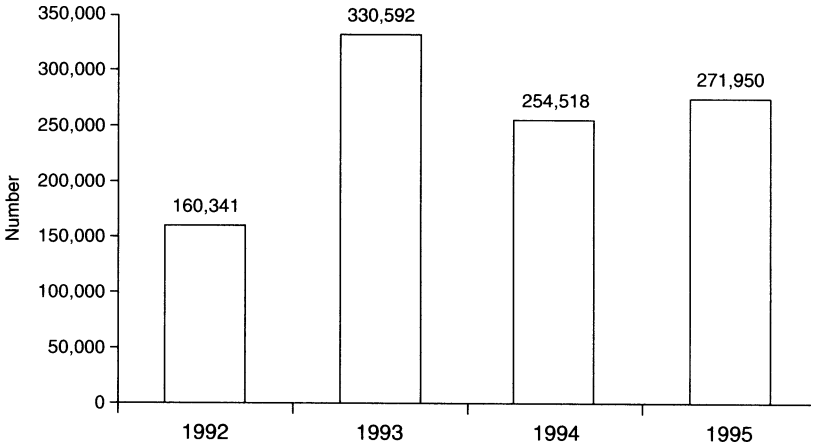

Figure 1.2 Number of refugees and forced migrants registered by the Federal Migration Service, 1992–5
Source: Federal Migration Service data cited in Codagnone (forthcoming)

From these data, the Federal Migration Service seeks above all to determine the size and direction of future migrational flows. Figure 1.3 shows the change in the region of origin of refugees and forced migrants over time. It clearly indicates the replacement of the Transcaucasian[10] states by Central Asia[11] and Kazakstan as chief sources of out-migration from 1994. Of course, these data require contextualization. The fact that half a million Russians have left Kazakstan since 1990, for example, does not necessarily indicate a mass exodus; it actually constitutes only 8 per cent of the Russian population in Kazakstan (which numbered over 6 million in 1989) (Codagnone forthcoming). On the other hand, the very size of the Russian population suggests that there is potential for even greater numbers to return to Russia in the future. Russian government estimates are that a further 2 million to 5 million forced migrants will move to Russia from the former republics over the next ten years (Dmitriev 1995b; Lemon 1995a).[12] Figure 1.4 shows the percentage of the Russian populations in the former republics having out-migrated in the period 1990–4 and indicates that it is in only a few former republics—specifically Tajikistan and the three Transcaucasian republics—that the movement of the mobile Russian population is almost exhausted. Indeed, the Federal Migration Service has already recorded a rise in the number of forced migrants and refugees registered in 1995 over 1994 ('Migratsionnii prirost uvelichilsia pochti v dva raza' 1995; Dmitriev 1995b), even without including those displaced following the military intervention in Chechnia. The source of this increase is equally clear: 73 per cent of refugees and forced migrants registered in 1995 arrived from Central Asia and Kazakstan.[13]

Predictions regarding the region of origin of future returnees suggest the largest inflow will continue to come from the states of Central Asia and Kazakstan. The head of the Federal Migration Service, Tat'iana Regent, has estimated that Russia will receive 3 million returnees from that region alone (Slater 1994:41) while academic analyses suggest that 30–50 per cent of the Russian-speaking population from the region will migrate (Levanov 1993:26).[14] However, estimates of the number of Russians likely to leave other areas are being revised down. Regent's prediction in 1993 that 500,000 would return from the Baltic states[15] now appears high. The Russian Ministry of Labour currently expects no more than 300,000; a figure in agreement with Levanov's estimate of 18–20 per cent of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic states (Levanov 1993:36). The migration of Russians from those former republics which are culturally close to Russia—Belarus and Ukraine—appears more likely to take the form of labour migration than permanent out-migration in the majority of cases. This is supported by the data in Table 1.1 and Figures 1.3 and 1.4;

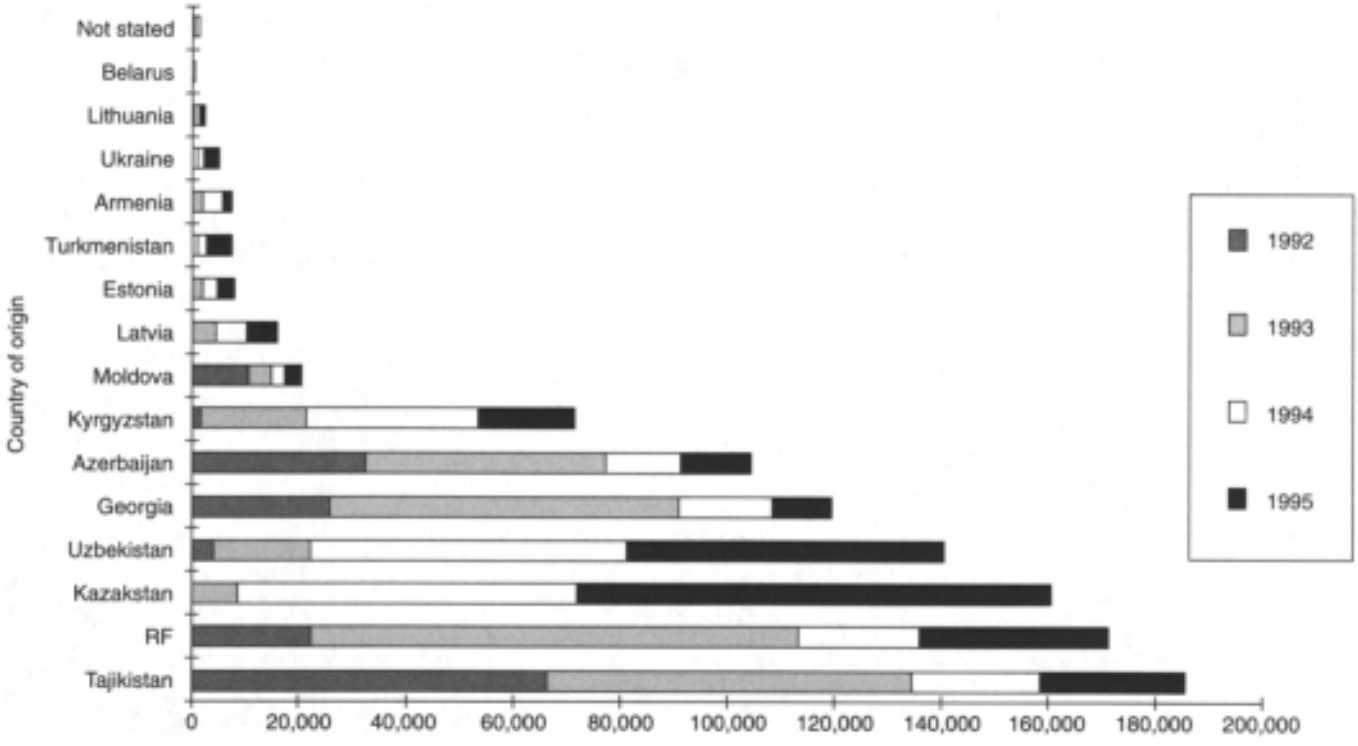

Figure 1.3 Number of refugees and forced migrants registered in 1992–5, by region of origin
Source: Federal Migration Service data cited in Codagnone (forthcoming)

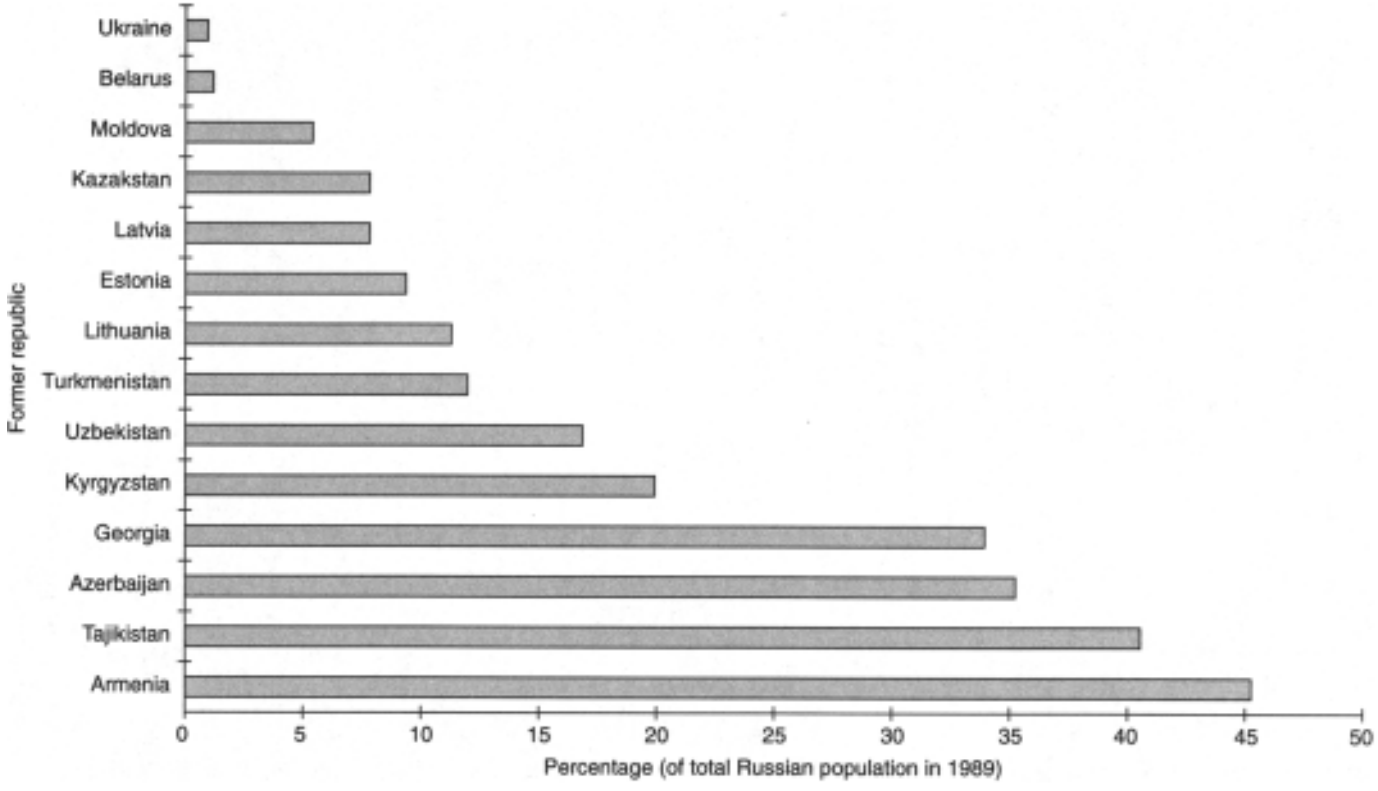

Figure 1.4 Percentage of Russian populations in the former republics having out-migrated, 1990–4
Source: Codagnone (forthcoming)

Federal Migration Service data confirm the indication in Goskomstat (State Statistics Committee) statistics that the majority of those entering Russia are ethnic Russians. Russians have consistently constituted the majority of inward migrants from the former republics as a whole (54 per cent in 1990, 66 per cent in 1992 and 63 per cent in 1994 (Goskomstat 1995:422)) as well as of officially registered refugees and forced migrants (76 per cent in 1993, 67 per cent in 1994 and 77 per cent in 1995 (Komitet po delam SNG i sviaziam s sootechestvennikami 1996; *Informatsionno-analiticheskii Biulleten'* 1995:21)). The balance is constituted primarily by members of the titular nationalities arriving from their own countries afflicted by civil war, economic crisis and political instability. Table 1.1 indicates that Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians are most likely to move from their own states to Russia. In contrast Belarusians and Kyrgyz are more likely to *leave* Russia for their own countries.

As is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, these data are so coloured by the politics of the migration debate that it is difficult to construct any 'true' picture; they can be read either as showing a sharp increase in the proportion of non-Russian immigrants in 1994 (Russian Independent Institute for Social and Nationality-based Problems 1994) or as indicating an overall increase in the proportion of Russians over the period 1990–4 (Trubin 1996). What is probably indisputable is that the figures suggest that a significant number of those migrating to Russia at the current time are labour migrants. Indeed, during the first half of 1996, 222,000 foreign citizens from 116 countries were officially employed in Russia, which is 30 per cent more than during the corresponding period of 1995. Of these over half had come from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and labour migration almost certainly accounts for the surprisingly high in-migration noted in Table 1.1 from Ukraine; over a third of the total number of registered foreign workers are currently citizens of Ukraine ('Labour immigrants in Russia' 1996).

A new flow of citizens of countries from beyond the former Soviet Union (the 'far abroad') into Russia is causing the Russian government increasingly to distinguish between these people (often referred to as 'asylum-seekers') and refugees from the former republics (the 'near abroad').[16] According to UNHCR data, by 1 July 1996 almost 19,000 families (70,000 people in total) from the 'far abroad' had submitted applications for asylum. Most were fleeing Afghanistan (63 per cent), Iraq (mainly Kurds) (10 per cent) and Somalia (9 per cent) (*Vynuzhdennie Pereselentsy v Rossii* 1995:54; Michugina and Rakhmaninova 1996:48). The Moscow office of the International Organization for Migration estimates the current number of such asylum-seekers at 120,000. As in other countries of Europe, in government thinking the issue of asylum-seekers is inextricably bound to that of illegal or undocumented migrants. In Russia this concern is new but very real; there

are claims that hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants have entered Russia due to poor security along the external borders of Russia and other CIS states (Rutland 1995). The head of the Federal Migration Service stated that there were 500,000 'illegals' in Russia at the end of 1995 and suggested that this number would grow by 100,000 annually. More extreme estimates are that illegal immigration may be running at more than 500,000 people a year (Russian Independent Institute for Social and Nationality-based Problems 1994). Some of these are economic migrants (mainly Chinese and Vietnamese), others are so-called 'transits': asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants—mainly from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Iraq—using Russia as a staging post to Scandinavia, Western Europe and North America.

A final migrational flow causing concern is the outflow from the former Soviet Union of its most active and educated population to the west. Fears were raised by the rapid growth in emigration following the enactment of legislation allowing free exit from the Soviet Union; whereas up to the mid-1980s an average of around 3,000 people emigrated abroad from Russia annually, by 1990 the annual total had reached 104,000 (Michugina and Rakhmaninova 1996:47). Initial alarm about emigration to the west has largely abated, however, as predictions of its acceleration—ranging from 2.5 million to 25 million (Segbers 1991:6)—have not been realized. These estimates were constructed from public-opinion data and sociological surveys which clearly captured aspiration rather than real intention and are cited now primarily for political effect (see Salt 1992:66; Chesnais 1992:37; Grecic 1993:145).

Although the issue of out-migration from Russia to the west lies beyond the scope of this book, there are points of intersection with migrational flows from the former republics to the Russian Federation, with which this book is concerned. First, emigration from Russia to the 'far abroad' has stabilized in the 1990s; just 110,000 people emigrated from the Russian Federation in 1995 compared to the 104,000 in 1990 noted above. Second, emigration out of Russia to the west has been low in comparison to emigration from other former Soviet republics. Emigration from Russia has constituted around 30 per cent of total migration out of the former Soviet Union when the population of Russia constituted 51 per cent of the Soviet population (Michugina and Rakhmaninova 1996:47). Likewise, ethnic Russians have constituted only 26 per cent of those emigrating (ibid.). This is explained by the fact that the initial wave of east-west emigrants largely consisted of members of smaller ethnic groups who had 'ethnic homelands' or established diasporas in the west, primarily Armenians, Jews, Germans, Poles and Greeks (Terekhov 1994; Shevtsova 1992). Indeed, 52 per cent of those having emigrated abroad from Russia are ethnic Germans (Michugina and Rakhmaninova 1996:47).

Thus Michugina and Rakhmaninova suggest that as few as 140,000 Russians have emigrated between 1989 and 1995 and these primarily due to mixed marriages with other ethnic groups more prone to emigration. Fears in the west of mass economic migration from Russia to Western Europe thus have not been realized; emigration continues to bear an ethnic character consisting primarily of Germans, Jews and Greeks emigrating to Germany, Israel, the USA and Greece; these countries received between 95 and 97 per cent of emigrants from Russia between 1989 and 1994 (Goskomstat 1995:402).

FRAMING THE THEORETICAL ISSUES: GOODBYE TO THE 'PUSH' AND 'PULL'?

Since naming these migrational flows constitutes the first step in conceptualizing them, it might be considered expedient to draw up a typology or classification of types of migrant in the former Soviet space for further study. Indeed, in the course of the above discussion a number of *de facto* (administratively defined) 'types' of migrant have already emerged: the 'forced migrant'; the 'refugee'; the 'asylum-seeker'; the 'transit migrant'; the 'undocumented' or 'illegal' migrant; the (internally) 'displaced person'; and the 'labour migrant' ('guest-worker'). In addition there is a broad group of incoming migrants from the former Soviet republics who are not registered by the Federal Migration Service and thus not 'named'. By default the latter become viewed as 'voluntary' migrants—sometimes referred to as 'repatriates' or 'returnees'—to be considered separately from 'involuntary' or 'forced' migrants.

The split between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' migrants is the first dichotomy which has traditionally shaped migration studies. The distinction is grounded in a deeper theoretical division between explanations of migratory movements either as a result of a combination of 'push' and 'pull' factors (voluntary migration) or as the product of structural, global inequalities and the violence associated with nationalism and independence movements (forced migration and refugees) (Richmond 1993:7–8). Although in academic studies typologies are now highly sophisticated and most will recognize grey areas between voluntary and involuntary migration, the fundamental dichotomy between refugees and economic migrants has been persistently reinforced by the migration regimes of recipient countries and thus remains the dominant discourse. Post-Soviet Russia provides an excellent example of such a migration regime in formation and this forms the subject of the first part of the book. It traces the changing political agenda of the recipient state and the impact of this upon the migration regime which has increasingly drawn on the distinction between economic (voluntary) and political

(involuntary) migrants which underlies theoretical migration models and state practice in the west.

The second dichotomy obscuring the theorization of current migratory processes is the distinction between 'structure' and 'agency' in explaining migratory movements (Richmond 1994). Classic models of migration are grounded in an assumption that the movement of populations is driven by rational choices borne of economic hardship. 'International migrations' are in this sense merely extensions of long-established rural to urban migration processes which arise due to the economic underdevelopment of the home country and the attraction of economic prosperity elsewhere. Migration is driven by 'push' and 'pull' factors acting on the individuals who move either because social and economic forces in the place of origin impel them to do so or because they are attracted to places of destination by one or more social and economic factors (Boyd 1989:640). The approach assumes that individuals make rational decisions on the basis of available knowledge of objective conditions (Goss and Lindquist 1995:320).

The alternative to this voluntarist approach is the adoption of a structuralist framework. The structuralist approach to labour migration focuses on the macro-economic processes that produce socio-spatial inequalities and constrain the life chances of individuals as members of specific social groups in particular places. Migration is seen not as the aggregate consequence of individuals exercising rational choice but as the result of socio-spatial inequalities systematically reproduced within global and national economies. International migration, in this understanding, far from reducing spatial inequalities and leading to equilibrium, intensifies inequalities and perpetuates underdevelopment as human capital is lost abroad (ibid.: 322). Even in structuralist theories which do not rely on the concept of direct 'exploitation of the periphery' via colonialism (as does dependency theory), the global market economy nevertheless is seen to establish flows of capital and commodities and create the ideological conditions that produce potential migrants (ibid.: 323).

The third dichotomy concerns the level of analysis of migrational processes which is conducted *either* at the macro *or* at the micro level (Richmond 1993:10). It is the macro level of analysis which has dominated the literature to date on post-Soviet migration between states of the former Soviet Union. This literature seeks to identify actual and potential migration flows by describing the socio-economic, demographic and ethnic characteristics of the 'Russian diaspora' and their position in the successor states of the Soviet Union—the length of time resident in the former republic, degree of integration into the host community and position within the political structure of the new republics (Bremmer 1994; Kolstoe 1995; Melvin 1994 and 1995; Shlapentokh, Sendich and Payin (eds) 1994; Chinn and Kaiser 1996).

Macro-level studies of immigrant adaptation (economic, social and cultural integration) have not been so numerous, although a number of Russian studies exist (Cherviakov, Shapiro and Sheregi 1991; Vitkovskaia 1993; Boikov and Levanov 1993b; Efimova 1994; Kozlov 1994). Micro-level studies concerned primarily with socio-psychological or socio-cultural components of migration decisions and experience are virtually absent in the literature on migration in the former Soviet space.[17] Micro-level studies of migration in western literature often focus on motivation for migration weighing up the 'push' and 'pull' factors involved, and this is repeated in what literature there is in Russian.

These three dichotomies have implicitly, if not explicitly, governed conceptualizations of Soviet and post-Soviet migration. This has led to fundamentally opposed explanations of the phenomenon of the in-migration of Russians from the former Soviet republics in the post-Soviet period and these explanations are outlined below. What is argued is that in fact all three of these dichotomies must be abandoned in order both to describe and conceptualize current migration from the former Soviet periphery to Russia. The chapter concludes with the elaboration of an alternative framework within which to approach the phenomenon of post-Soviet migration; it is this framework which structures the subsequent chapters of the book.

HOMO SOVIETICUS AS 'RATIONAL MAN'? STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN POST-SOVIET MIGRATION

In western Sovietology, political compulsion was seen to govern most aspects of Soviet life. Surprisingly, therefore, patterns of migration in the Soviet Union were most often interpreted using classic migration models rooted in modernization theory. Classic studies such as that by Lewis and Rowland (1979) explain long-term trends in migration in the USSR as adjustments by a population to changing economic conditions and the structure of production and consumption, which occur with economic development. People were seen to move in response to job opportunities and migration to act to equalize the supply of and demand for labour on a regional basis (Lewis and Rowland 1979:5–10). Inter-republican migration was interpreted as a continuation of inter-regional migration in that it extended the normal rural to urban migration patterns driven by individual rational choice.

Despite widespread images of organized population movement and strict social control, therefore, Lewis and Rowland argue that, in fact, most migration in the USSR occurred as a result of individual volition. Migration, they suggest, was primarily voluntary and also largely unorganized (Lewis and Rowland 1979:15–19); rapid industrialization led to a fundamental redistribution of the Soviet population largely as a result of free migration