The dispatch in October 2005 of Mikhael Khordokovsky, the Russian oil magnate found guilty of corruption, to a penal colony 3775 miles from Moscow is a reminder that sending people to the peripheries is a deeply sedimented response to deviancy in Russia (Pallot, 2005). To visit her husband, Inna Khordokovskaya has to undergo an eleven-hour flight and a fifteen-hour train and car journey to Krasnokamensk in the Far East; but she is more fortunate than other women in Russia who have family members detained in one of Russia's penal colonies—she can afford the journey. For the majority, the remote, extraurban locations of Russia's penal institutions mean that visits are prohibitively expensive, time consuming, and physically challenging. Research among prisoners in the West has shown that the maintenance of contacts with family and friends is an important factor in the successful rehabilitation of offenders and, for this reason, but with varying degrees of success, Western penal systems attempt to place prisoners close to home. In a series of revisions to the Correctional Code, which lays down the rules for the treatment of prisoners, since 1991 (King, 1994; Mikhlin and King, 1998; Perminov, 1999) post-Soviet Russia has declared itself to have a similar aim, but it is hampered by the physical infrastructure of prisons inherited from the Soviet era. As a result, like its predecessors, the current Russian state is subjecting prisoners to a double isolation: firstly, by virtue of their incarceration, and secondly, because prisons are located in out-of-the-way places. But it is not only the large prison population that experiences this isolation; one in three men in Russia are either related to someone in custody or have been detained in the past themselves (Zubov, 2000, page 4). Everyone who has a relative or friend in custody is a victim of Russia's continuing propensity to confine prisoners to the geographical margins. Nor should the 1.5 million people employed in the penal service and their families be forgotten. They are also participants in Russia's penal geography of exclusion. Population is 'shaped' in myriad ways by the location of penal colonies: directly, by its influence on where people live, and indirectly, by the impact it has on rates of homelessness, divorce and marriage, patterns of child rearing, and rates of crime. Russia's penal–industrial complex remains as much a defining feature of post-Soviet life as it was during the Soviet period.

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Abstract. Fifteen years after the collapse of communism, post-Soviet Russian remains a 'high-imprisonment society', second only to the USA in the relative number of people held in prison (570 per 100 000 population compared with the USA's 714 per 100 000). This gives a total prison population of around 800 000 people. These people are detained in penal facilities built during the Soviet era, the majority of which are in peripheral locations. Because the peripheries have been selected as 'sites of punishment', Russia's distinctive 'geography of penality' makes the maintenance of social contacts of prisoners difficult and undermines attempts to reduce the rates of recidivism in Russia. Women are drawn into the penal complex by virtue of their relationships with the majority male prisoner population, a process which transforms them into 'quasi-prisoners' and reproduces gender stereotypes.
The penal system in Russia developed in response to male criminality. ‘Transportation’, corporal punishment, and hard labour—the defining features of the prerevolutionary penal system—were quintessentially ‘male’ punishments, with women cast in the role of ‘accompanying persons’—even though they were sent to Siberia ‘in their own right’ in a ratio of 1:5 women:men (Kennan, 2002; Schrader, 2002). In the Stalinist GULag all categories of prisoner—women and men, adults and juveniles—were incarcerated together and no provisions were in place for prisoners to maintain contacts with family and the outside world. Indeed, a hallmark of the Stalinist system was how it fragmented social networks, rewarding those who—like Pavlik Morozov, the boy who became a symbol of loyalty to the state over family—betrayed their relatives and friends to the authorities (Kelly, 2005). People sent to the labour camps were forcibly disengaged from the rest of Soviet society while the process of their reeducation through labour took place. The GULag did engage with whole family groups—in the mass deportations to the peripheries of class enemies, such as the rich peasants and ‘disloyal’ ethnic minorities, when guilt by membership of the group meant that all generations of a family shared a common fate (Polyan, 2001). In this case, the remote location of the special settlements (spetposeleniya) in which the deportees were forced to live guaranteed their isolation and invisibility from the rest of the society.

I have written previously about how the post-Stalin state reproduced a Foucauldian attachment to ‘regulation by exclusion’ by retaining expulsion to the geographic margins as a punishment form (Pallot, 2005). After the denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Party Congress in 1956, and the rehabilitation of many GULag victims, there was a vast reduction in the USSR’s prison population which was also accompanied by some improvements in the conditions under which prisoners (always hovering around the 750 000 to 1 million figure) were held. However, the post-Stalin state’s record for respecting prisoners’ human rights continued to be poor. By contrast, the post-Soviet state has made genuine efforts to apply international standards for humane treatment to its prison population. One area that the Russian penal service has committed itself to improving is in helping prisoners to maintain family and social networks beyond the prison walls. To this end, the country’s revised Correctional Code enshrines the right of prisoners to correspond with people outside prison, to receive parcels, to make telephone calls, to receive visitors on short (four-hour) and long (three-day) visits, and to spend time in a family unit outside the prison walls (Perminov, 1999). These changes, introduced into a system which, in terms of the physical distribution of its facilities, has not changed since the end of communism, has resulted in the reemergence of the prerevolutionary tradition of family members making the trek to the peripheries to be reunited with their husbands, sons, and brothers which is captured in the catchphrase ‘gde much, tam zhena’ (where the husband is, so is the wife). The historical models are the wives of the Decembrists—the group of nobles who in 1825 staged a demonstration in St Petersburg against serfdom—who followed their husbands into exile and were notable for their good works, such as setting up schools for exile families, and for creating a small corner of civilisation in the otherwise wild Siberian frontier. Compared with their forebears, travellers in penal Russia today have the advantage of modern transportation, so that instead of taking weeks or months, journeys to prisons can be completed in under a week or, for the fortunate, in a day. As in the past, the trek to visit incarcerated relatives is both an act of reaffirmation of familial or friendship ties and a means of improving the quality of life of prisoners who, especially in the most remote regions, can suffer from serious material deprivations, including shortages of food, associated with the crisis in the penal economy since 1991 (MHG, 2003). Today’s visitors take with them material goods and food, and those who cannot make the journey send these things by parcel. A controversial soap opera that was showing on Russian television
in 2005 was entitled *Zona* (the Zone—the popular name for a prison). Most of the action takes place in the prisoners’ dormitories or commandant’s office, but every episode figures the *priemnyi punkt*—the waiting room—with a small hatch through which parcels of provisions can be handed for transmission to those within. The people queuing up to hand in their parcels belong to Russia’s vast population of quasi-prisoners: people who, while not prisoners themselves, have their lives shaped by the penal system.

I am borrowing the term ‘quasi-prisoner’ from American penology (Comfort, 2003). It is a term used to describe the people who maintain contact with prisoners held in US penitentiaries, which in the American context largely means black Afro-Caribbean and Latino women. The concept of the quasi-prisoner signals the way in which relatives of detainees are forced to submit to the disciplinary control of the penal system: from the choices they can make about how to spend their weekends (as visiting times are determined by the penal institutions), what they wear (there are dress codes that visitors are required to adhere to), and what they eat (in California, there is a prohibition on bringing food into prisons).\(^1\) Discipline, as Foucault argued (1987; see also Philo and Parr, 2000), does not stop at the prison gate but spreads its tentacles through the whole of society, working through taxonomy and the timetables of the workplace, school, and hospital to create a vast carceral complex. Quasi-prisoners are located at the interface between the direct power over the body exercised in the modern penitentiary and the more diffuse power of the disciplinary state. In this paper, I discuss how Russia’s quasi-prisoners experience the geography of penality within the context of policies aimed at reducing the isolation of Russian prisoners.

### Methodological and ethical issues

Research on the Russian penal system necessitates the use of an eclectic range of sources. The Russian Penal Service is a closed, secretive organisation, which in the past has not engaged in penological research of its own and has not welcomed the interest of outsiders. Since 1991, and particularly under its current modernising head, Yuri Ivanovich Kalinin, the service has begun to open up. Inspectors from the Council of Europe have had to be let in but, additionally, it has been prepared to embark upon collaborative projects with independent researchers. Nevertheless, much information still remains confidential. A breakthrough was made in the 1998 when the penal service consented to make a census of the prison population with the Ford Foundation, which was published in two volumes (*Kharakteristika* 2001). No raw data are included in these volumes, and there are some obvious lacunae in the information included. Relevant to the present study is the fact that the census has no data about the distribution of prisoners by region. I have had to follow the time-honoured method of research into the Russian penal system of piecing together these data from a variety of ex-prisoner sources. The accuracy of these is, inevitably, questionable as they rely upon prisoner and visitor recollections. I have been able to supplement them with my own survey conducted during the course of February and April 2006 in L’govo penal colony, as a pilot study for a larger ESRC-funded project exploring women’s experiences of imprisonment in Russia. The L’govo colony is one of three women’s juvenile colonies in the Russian Federation. It has a total population of 300 inmates aged between 14 and 21 years, and who are serving terms of 18 months to 8 years.\(^2\)

The survey involved a questionnaire, which was administered by research patterns in the Ryazan Academy of Law and Management, and follow-up interviews with thirty women.

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\(^1\) See, for example, the website of the California Department of Corrections which has a seven-page “Guide to Visitors” (http://www.cya.ca.gov/Visitors/docs/inmateVisitingGuidelines).

\(^2\) Juveniles are defined as 14 – 18 years of age in Russia, but the colony has a separate detachment for prisoners over the age of 18 who are due to be released before their 21st birthday—in order to save them from being transferred to a colony for adult women.
prisoners and six prison offices, including the governor, which were conducted by the author and Dr Laura Piacentini of the University of Strathclyde over a four-day period in April 2006. The result of this survey will be the subject of another publication, but some information and statistics are relevant to the present discussion.

Doing any prison research involves complicated ethical issues, and this is doubly the case in Russia which has a weak tradition of respect for prisoners’ human rights. In the case of the L’govo survey, the normal protocols about informed consent were explained to the penal authorities and we sought confirmation that these had been followed in obtaining volunteers for the questionnaire survey and interviews. The interviews had to be conducted in the presence of a prison officer, which meant that there was an unequal power relationship between interviewer and interviewee. No such problem exists in the case of the principal source used for this paper. This is the website of an independent ‘information—analytical project Arestant’ (http://www.arestant.msk.ru). Arestant’s aim is to provide support for prisoners and their families by exchanging information needed to navigate all stages of the penal process. Arestant answers questions sent into it and it also manages a ‘guest book’ where people are invited to share their experiences in open forum. The section of the guest book relating to visits to penal colonies provides a unique source of factual information not available elsewhere about the location of penal institutions, and gives a voice to the people who have been drawn into the penal system whether as its inmates or visitors. The purpose of the information exchange is to impart practical information about how to get to particular penal colonies, what to take, where to stay, and local rules about early release. The Penal Service does not provide this information. Comments on the condition in which prisoners are held are discouraged. Despite its practical content, the Arestant website continues a long tradition in Russia of labour-camp testimony—but with the difference that, in this case, the balance lies with quasi-prisoners (there are some blogs from ex-prisoners, but they are in a minority). The testimonies are in the public domain, so necessarily their authors’ identities are disguised by the use of first names only (such as ‘Masha from Moscow’), initials, or pseudonyms—the choice of which often provides insight into the author’s consciousness of her situation: ‘a Decemberist’s wife’, ‘Floggin’, ‘A Rambler’, ‘Tribune’, and ‘I won’t forget’. In my use of extracts from these testimonies in what follows I have not felt it necessary to reanonymise the authors. The region, colony number, and date of posting allows readers to track down the particular extract from the thousand or more on the site. The majority of site users are Muscovites who have access to a computer, so the results from the site are skewed towards the better off and computer literate. Judging from their names and the use of the feminine grammatical form, 80%—90% of the people posting messages are women.

I have used Russian terminology to identify different types of penal institution. Thus, the word prison (tyurma) is reserved for the small number of cellular institutions (currently nine) that are analogous to the Western penitentiary. Correctional colonies (ispravitel’nie kolonii) hold the majority of prisoners, and are divided according to the severity of regime into ‘special’, ‘strict’, and ‘general’, and by function into juvenile colonies for offenders between 14 and 18-years old, medical-isolation colonies for prisoners suffering from TB and AIDS, and colonies for foreigners. The majority of prisoners are divided within the colonies into detachments (otryady) and their living accommodation is typically communal, in dormitories of up to fifty people. Prisoners are also divided according to their entitlement to privileges, which depends upon their disciplinary record. Figure 1, for reference, shows the internal organisation of a women’s penal colony. There are also so-called penal settlements (kolonii-poseleniya) that have been likened to open prisons in the West in terms of their regime, and remand institutions or isolators (SIZOs—sledstvennie izolatori) for people awaiting trial.
The geographical framework of the Russian Federation’s penal institutions was laid down in the 1960s in the reorganisation associated with the dismantling of the GULag. Although Stalin’s penal system continued Russia’s centuries-long tradition of expelling people to the peripheries, maps of the GULag, with their characteristic watchtower symbols, show that far from being confined to remote regions, there were very few places and types of settlement excluded from its reach (Appelbaum, 2003; Solzhenitsyn, 1978). Nevertheless, by far the majority of the victims of the Stalinist repression, whether prisoners or exiles, found themselves confined in extraurban locations with the state going to considerable lengths to isolate them from the public gaze. After the death of Stalin and the amnesties that followed, a reshuffling process took place as certain places and
regions were selected to retain their penal functions (Pallot, 2002). These were primarily places that were suitably distant from the major population centres of the country and away from national borders. They constitute(d) a discontinuous arc stretching from the north of Archangel oblast in European Russia, through the Volga–Urals region, and on into West and East Siberia—including their northern hinterlands. In the ‘penal heartland’ whole rural districts came to be dominated by penal institutions and took on the character of company towns: the penal service was the principal employer and was responsible for maintaining infrastructure, manufacturing household goods, and providing food for the civilian population. By the end of the Soviet period, many of these regions were populated by second-generation and third-generation prison officers, exprisoners who, for a variety of reasons, had preferred to ‘stay on’ after release, and a motley collection of in-migrants and native inhabitants. In contrast to places in the penal heartland, Moscow was purged in 1965 of its correctional labour colonies, the closures taking place rapidly, under cover of night, with prisoners transported out of the city to a variety of colonies in other regions. Most oblasts, of course, retained some correctional colonies, and the regional centres retained remand prisons, but the important point for the subsequent development of Russia’s penal geography is that, when faced with choices on dismantling the GULag, the Soviet state did not bring the locus of punishment into the metropolitan centres but decided instead to carry forward the historic practices of isolation and spatial exclusion. There was continuity at the lower spatial scale as well, in the design of ‘correctional labour colonies, perimeter fences and watchtowers remained, as did the barracks and the internal zoning of territory into accommodation blocks, administration, workshops, and punishment cells.

The impact of the current distribution of penal institutions on the pattern of prisoner placements at the regional level

After the collapse of communism, prisoner numbers in the Russian Federation increased so that the total exceeded one million in the second half of the 1990s when Russia temporarily displaced the USA as the country with the highest rate of imprisonment. This growth in prisoner numbers effectively prevented a spatial restructuring of the inherited system of penal colonies. Russia’s geography of penality is, thus, uneven with oblasts in the ‘penal heartland’ having many times more prisoners per head of population than oblasts in the central region. Table 1 shows the existence of prisoner ‘donor’ and ‘recipient’ regions, the extremes being Moscow city, which has only two correctional colonies for adults but ten remand prisons, and the Komi republic in the European North with thirty-three colonies but only three remand prisons. The Komi republic, Mordovia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Perm’, Archangel, and Sverdlov oblasts together have 211 of the Russian Federation’s 760 correctional colonies—28% of the total. This compares with 7.9% for the bottom ten regions, including the two capitals.(3)

One feature of the post-Stalin penal system was the separation from each other of different categories of prisoner. Whereas in the 1930s and 1940s, women and men and juveniles and adults were held in the same colonies, in the post-Stalin era they were held in separate institutions. Today, each category of penal institution has its own particular distribution. Remand colonies, juvenile colonies for boys, and general regime colonies for men are found in virtually all regions, but with concentrations of (3) There are some anomalies in the table: the North Caucasus has a low rate of imprisonment but a large number of colonies, which is explained by the high background population. Likewise the high imprisonment rates in the Jewish AO and Tyva, where there are comparatively few colonies, is explained by the sparse population densities of these regions.
general regime men's colonies in the penal heartland. Coverage of colonies catering for minority prisoner groups is incomplete. The severest regime colonies, for prisoners on life sentences, are concentrated in remote parts of the penal heartland, as are the isolation colonies for TB and AIDS sufferers. Penal settlements also tend to be concentrated in peripheral oblasts because many were converted from spetsposeleniya to which repressed social groups were deported in the Stalin era. The distributional pattern of women's penal colonies is one of 'dispersed concentration'. Women constitute

Table 1. The top and bottom ten regions ranked according to the number of detainees held in Ministry of Justice penal institutions per 100 000 population in 1998 (source: Moscow Centre for Prison Reform website: http://www.prison.org/facts/human_4.htm; Goskomstat Rossii, Prawoporyadok v Rossii. Statisticheskii Aspekt 2003, page 69; http://www.arestant.msk.ruleoorcenterl.shtml).

| Region or republic       | Total number of people detained (in thousands) | Rate of incarceration: detainees per 100 000 population | Number of registered crimes per 100 000 population | Number of colonies | Remand | Juvenile | Correctional |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------|----------|-------------|
| Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Top ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment |
| Komi republic            | 19                                            | 1620                                                    | 2105                                              | 3                 | 0      | 33       |             |
| Mordovian republic       | 14                                            | 1460                                                    | 1297                                              | 3                 | 0      | 17       |             |
| Jewish Autonomous oblast | 3                                             | 1340                                                    | 2969                                              | 0                 | 1      | 3        |             |
| Perm’ oblast             | 40                                            | 1320                                                    | 2509                                              | 2                 | 3      | 46       |             |
| Krasnoyarsk krai         | 38                                            | 1220                                                    | 1869                                              | 4                 | 1      | 42       |             |
| Tyva republic            | 4                                             | 1170                                                    | 2408                                              | 1                 | 0      | 4        |             |
| Chitinsk oblast          | 14                                            | 1060                                                    | 2236                                              | 1                 | 1      | 9        |             |
| Archangel oblast         | 16                                            | 1050                                                    | 1577                                              | 3                 | 1      | 17       |             |
| Irkutsk oblast           | 29                                            | 1030                                                    | 2572                                              | 4                 | 1      | 17       |             |
| Sverdlovsk oblast        | 48                                            | 1020                                                    | 1997                                              | 4                 | 2      | 39       |             |
| Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment | Bottom ten oblasts by rate of imprisonment |
| Bashkortostan republic   | 21                                            | 510                                                     | 1339                                              | 5                 | 1      | 14       |             |
| Kursk oblast             | 7                                             | 510                                                     | 1529                                              | 2                 | 1      | 4        |             |
| Kalmykia republic        | 2                                             | 500                                                     | 1456                                              | 1                 | 1      | 3        |             |
| Sakha republic           | 5                                             | 480                                                     | 1452                                              | 1                 | -      | 7        |             |
| Voronezh oblast          | 12                                            | 480                                                     | 1420                                              | 3                 | 1      | 8        |             |
| North Caucasus region    | 74                                            | 450                                                     | n/d                                               | 9                 | 3      | 17       |             |
| Leningrad oblast         | 28                                            | 440                                                     | 1904                                              | 7                 | 1      | 9        |             |
| St Petersburg city       | 1566                                          |                                                          |                                                    |                   |        |          |             |
| Belgorod oblast          | 6                                             | 390                                                     | 2111                                              | 3                 | 2      | 5        |             |
| Moscow city              | 18                                            | 200                                                     | 1894                                              | 6                 | -      | 2        |             |
| Moscow oblast            | 13                                            | 200                                                     | 1160                                              | 10                | 2      | 3        |             |

Table 1. The top and bottom ten regions ranked according to the number of detainees held in Ministry of Justice penal institutions per 100 000 population in 1998 (source: Moscow Centre for Prison Reform website: http://www.prison.org/facts/human_4.htm; Goskomstat Rossii, Prawoporyadok v Rossii. Statisticheskii Aspekt 2003, page 69; http://www.arestant.msk.ruleoorcenterl.shtml).
a minority of Russian prisoners, 6.5% of the total, and are housed in just forty colonies but, like the colonies for men, these are densest in the penal heartland. The Central Federal District, for example, which has over one quarter of Russia's population, has just one colony and one remand prison and two of the country's three juvenile colonies for women. Meanwhile 66% of all women's colonies are located in the Volga and the Urals Federal Districts, with the Mordovian and Chuvash republics, Perm', Sverdlov, and Chelyabinsk oblasts having between them one quarter of the national total.

In an attempt to support the family, the revised Correctional Code asserts the principle that people should serve custodial sentences in their 'home' region. However, minority categories of prisoner are exempt from this requirement and there is a catchall clause that effectively permits the penal service to send any prisoner long distances if there are insufficient places in the home oblast (Perminov, 1999, pages 130 – 131). Table 2 shows how far the prison service had been able to achieve its new aim by 1999. Between 1989 and 1999 the percentage of prisoners held 'out of region' improved but, as the table makes clear, some prisoner groups suffer disproportionately from Russia's penal geography: for example, compared with the average of 12.2%, 43.6% of women, over 50% of prisoners in special (the severest) regime colonies, and 41% of prisoners in penal settlements were held outside their home oblast in 1999. Juvenile prisoners, on the other hand, appear to fare better, but the table does not disaggregate by gender. Because they have just three colonies, female juvenile prisoners are mostly held out of region. In the L'govo colony, only 1.4% of inmates came from Ryazan oblast, and a further 17.8% come from neighbouring oblasts, mainly Moscow. Calculating distances as the crow flies between regional capitals, 41.7% of the prisoners in L'govo in March of 2006 came from distances greater than 1000 km, 13.1% from distances of 500 to 1000 km, and 45.2% from distances within 500 km.

Table 2. The distribution of prisoners in 1999 in relation to their oblast of origin (source: Kharakteristika 2001, volume 2, page 56).

| Place of incarceration | As a percentage of the total prison population |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
|                        | prisoners of no fixed abode                  |
|                        | in settlement                               |
|                        | where prisoner registered                    |
|                        | in region, but not in settlement,            |
|                        | where prisoner resident                      |
|                        | in region other than that in which           |
|                        | prisoner sentenced                           |
|                        | in region other than that in which           |
|                        | prisoner resident or sentenced                |
| All prisoners in census years |                                                   |
| 1989                   | 8.9                                           |
|                        | 8.3                                           |
|                        | 41.5                                          |
|                        | 8.1                                           |
|                        | 33.2                                          |
| 1999                   | 1.8                                           |
|                        | 17.0                                          |
|                        | 66.8                                          |
|                        | 2.2                                           |
|                        | 12.2                                          |
| Men’s penal colonies by regime |                                                   |
| general                | 1.9                                           |
|                        | 18.0                                          |
|                        | 68.8                                          |
|                        | 2.3                                           |
|                        | 9.0                                           |
| strict                 | 4.8                                           |
|                        | 13.5                                          |
|                        | 67.5                                          |
|                        | 2.2                                           |
|                        | 12.2                                          |
| special                | 4.9                                           |
|                        | 4.9                                           |
|                        | 33.0                                          |
|                        | 3.2                                           |
|                        | 54.0                                          |
| life prisoners         | 4.7                                           |
| total                  | 3.3                                           |
|                        | 15.4                                          |
|                        | 66.2                                          |
|                        | 2.3                                           |
|                        | 12.8                                          |
| Women’s penal colonies by regime |                                        |
| general                | 3.4                                           |
|                        | 11.0                                          |
|                        | 38.8                                          |
|                        | 2.2                                           |
|                        | 44.6                                          |
| strict                 | 5.0                                           |
|                        | 20.0                                          |
|                        | 21.4                                          |
|                        | 27.2                                          |
|                        | 26.4                                          |
| total                  | 3.5                                           |
|                        | 11.5                                          |
|                        | 37.9                                          |
|                        | 3.5                                           |
|                        | 43.6                                          |
| Juvenile colonies      | 0.7                                           |
|                        | 15.5                                          |
|                        | 67.7                                          |
|                        | 1.3                                           |
|                        | 15.0                                          |
| Penal settlements      | 1.8                                           |
| Cellular prisons       | 4.1                                           |
|                        | 8.2                                           |
|                        | 23.4                                          |
|                        | 3.0                                           |
|                        | 61.3                                          |
The overall reduction in number of prisoners sent out of region since 1989 has been achieved largely as a result of more careful planning of prisoner placements. However, the prospects for sustained improvement, which would call for a costly construction programme and a reduction in the average size of colony, will remain slight whilst prisoner numbers remain high.

**Figure 2.** Distribution of penal institutions in 2005 in Perm’ oblast.
The distribution of penal colonies between regions is only one element of the problematic geography of penality in Russia. Within regions, the distribution of colonies enhances the isolation and invisibility of Russia's prisoner population. The Russian penal service does not produce data about the intraregional distribution of colonies but it is possible to map the location of colonies from their postal addresses. Figure 2 does this for Perm' oblast, in the centre of the penal heartland. Perm' is large in UK terms—its north–south extent is equivalent to the distance between London and Scotland—and the majority of colonies are concentrated in its northern hinterland, at distances of more than 300 km from the regional capital. These include the strict and special-regime colonies for serious offenders, as well as penal settlements at the other end of the security spectrum and isolation colonies. Other categories of prisoner, including juveniles and women, are held in more centrally located colonies. Remand colonies are located in: the regional capital of Perm' city; Kudymkar, the capital of the former Komi–Permjak autonomous oblast; Solikamsk, the gateway to Perm's vast penal hinterland; and in Kizel, the former coal-mining centre.

The etap: the journey to the colonies

In penal Russia the disjuncture between absolute and relative distance is acute, and has become more so since the end of the Soviet Union as transport costs have spiralled and services to the peripheries have been cut back. For prisoners, the 'etap'—or prison transport—exacerbates the disjuncture. Decisions about where prisoners are to serve their sentences, and the organisation of the transports to get them there, lie with a special directorate in the Penal Service. Just as the new Correctional Code requires the directorate to try to accommodate prisoners in their home region, so it has a target of less than ten days for delivery of prisoners from remand colonies to the colonies where they will serve their sentences. Table 3 shows how the system was performing in 1999. The results roughly map onto the pattern for sending prisoners out of region. Thus, while over three quarters of all prisoners spend under ten days in transit, the minority categories of prisoner—including women, men with life sentences, and prisoners destined for cellular prisons and for penal settlements—take longer on average. Again, these aggregate figures can be supplemented by survey data from the L'govo penal colony.

Table 3. The average length of time taken in transporting women and men prisoners in 1999, in percentages (source: Kharakteristika 2001, volume 2, page 16).

| Length of journey time to colony | under ten days | ten days to one month | over one month |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------|
| **Men's penal colonies by regime** |               |                      |                |
| general                          | 81.4          | 10.0                 | 8.6            |
| strict                           | 81.0          | 9.9                  | 9.1            |
| special                          | 49.5          | 30.1                 | 20.4           |
| 'lifers'                         | 14.7          | 25.5                 | 59.8           |
| total                            | 79.3          | 10.8                 | 9.9            |
| **Women's penal colonies by regime** |               |                      |                |
| general                          | 67.2          | 21.9                 | 10.9           |
| strict                           | 46.1          | 30.9                 | 23.0           |
| total                            | 66.0          | 22.4                 | 11.6           |
| **Juvenile colonies**            | 74.6          | 15.0                 | 10.4           |
| **Penal settlements**            | 53.8          | 21.5                 | 24.4           |
| **Cellular prisons**             | 37.5          | 34.2                 | 28.3           |
| **All convicts**                 | 77.2          | 12.2                 | 10.6           |
Among the respondents to the questionnaire, 31.5% took less than one week to arrive at the colony, 43.5% one to four weeks, and a remarkable 25% spent over four weeks being moved. The majority of girls were transported by train, in special carriages (Stolypin carriages) divided internally into cages for different categories of prisoner. The journey times were long because the transports go via transit points at each of which new prisoners are taken on board. The girls sleep on the trains for most of the transport, although they also spend periods of up to a week at transit prisons (95.2% of the respondents). It emerged from the interviews that the trains take circuitous routes: for example, prisoners from remand colonies in Kostroma, northeast of Moscow, are taken to Ryazan via Yaroslavl', Smolensk, Tula, and Voronezh—a total of 1648 km instead of the 3-400 km following the 'normal' route. There is not necessarily any correlation between distance and the length of time a transport takes. It took the penal service one month, for example, to transport 'Ira' from Moscow to L'govo—a distance of 185 km, whilst it was able to transport 'Ksenia' from Kurgan, more than 1500 km away, in four days. For the majority of girls the prison transport is a stressful experience that is exacerbated by the fact that they are not told prior to setting out how long the journey will take and where it ends. The final leg, from the transit prison in Ryazan to the colony, takes place at night. During the transport the girls are out of contact with their families. On arrival in L'govo girls are kept in quarantine for two weeks, and it is during this time that relatives are informed of their whereabouts and given details of the visiting regime.

The interviews with the girls in L'govo confirmed the prior reports of the poor conditions prisoners experience during transit. Cells in the transports are overcrowded and unhygienic and food is in short supply; the mixing of sick and healthy prisoners, men and women, spreads TB and other infectious diseases (Abramkin, 1998; Al'pern, 2004). The etap in its present form compounds the punishments handed out by the courts: it is the first stage of the process of isolating prisoners—a particularly harsh introduction to Russia's penal geography.

‘Wives of the Decembrists’
The postings on the Arestant website can be read in two ways. First, they can be mined for the empirical information they contain about the location of the colonies, the degree of difficulty accessing them, and local rules governing visits. The visitors’ narratives of their journeys to the colonies show how attempts by the post-Soviet state to promote contacts between prisoners and the outside world perpetually run up against the sheer practical difficulties associated with Russia's inherited penal geography. Just as the time spent in prisoner transports ‘stretches’ the distance between home oblast and colony for the prisoners, so the costs of travel and accommodation, bureaucratic hurdles, and logistical difficulties stretch the distance for the quasi-prisoners as well. Secondly, the narratives can be read for what they convey about how visitors experience Russia's penal geography. The postings on the Arestant site uniquely give a voice to the, mostly, women who journey in penal Russia. (4)

The author of the first extract is, in fact, a young man. It is taken from a letter that he wrote to his mother with the request that she publicise it. It is included here in order to give meaning to the word ‘remote’ that I used in the section above to describe the

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(4) There are no data on penal visitors, although individual colonies keep records of visits. Conversations with senior figures in the Penal Service confirm that the majority of visitors, both to men’s and to women's colonies, are women (personal communication Colonel T Schmaeva). In the case of juvenile colonies, the most frequent visitors are parent(s). It is notable that men are infrequent visitors to adult women prisoners. This is attributed by the Prison Service to the shame attached by society to women’s criminality, which is interpreted as a denial of their femininity (Kharakterisitka 2001, page 364).
location of penal settlements. Penal settlements are reserved for people who have committed less serious offences (for example, manslaughter, accidental deaths, ecological crimes, and minor fraud), as a reward for good behaviour, and as a halfway house for prisoners nearing the end of their term. The majority, for historical reasons, are located in the peripheries of the oblasts making up Russia's penal heartland. The son writes about his first impressions of the Ust'-Tsipel—a penal settlement located 220 km north of Perm' and at the end of 30 km of dirt road:

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I have arrived at the edge of the world in a settlement of the type typical of the 1940s ... . A god-forsaken place ... they get water from a well here, the buildings are falling down through age, the electricity supply breaks down nearly every day because the lines ... are rotten. We only get electricity three days a week ... . It was minus five last night, ice is already on the ponds, and snow fell. There's nothing strange about that in this region. From here you can see the Urals ridge and snow permanently lies there. It's very cold! If it's already this cold in the autumn, what's it going to be like in the winter? That's the Urals for you! ... . Nature is top class here ... at night you can see the sky, like nowhere else. Even the smallest stars are visible .... Of course, when I arrived I fell ill. It was because of the change of climate. I've also made my acquaintance with bed bugs—they won't let me sleep—I'm so fed up'' (Perm', KP-8, Maria R, 5 October 2005).
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It is obvious that visits to places like Ust'-Tsipel are difficult for relatives. Cost, which in the case of extended visits to out-of-region colonies can run into several thousands of rubles (including train, bus, and taxi fares; hotel accommodation; and the cost of provisions), is a major obstacle. ‘Likusha’ (Dagestan IK-7, 14 October 2005) calculated that the round trip from Moscow to a penal colony in Dagestan cost her 15 000 rubles, which is twice the current average monthly wage. Time is also an issue, since out-of-region visits can take people away from work for a week or more. Furthermore, travellers in Russia’s penal regions have to be physically and psychologically strong, as Tatyana’s account of the journey to visit her boyfriend in the penal settlement in Yangory, Archangel oblast, shows. She describes the last section of her journey that began 1000 km to the south, in Moscow:

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To get there was complicated, actually unrealistic. First, you have to take the train and bus ... to the settlement of Sevroonezhsk .... Arriving there you have to find your way to the main administration and get a pass for the ‘train’ to the regime zone .... If you are given a pass you can go to the station to await the ‘train’ to the colonies. The station is a small room without glass in the windows, no heating, and one bench .... The train is supposed to set off at 8.40 pm, but sometimes it doesn't come until 9.30 or 10 pm .... I've put ‘train’ in inverted commas because this isn't really a train at all—it's a single wagon ... of the old prison design, but with the internal cages removed. Moreover, the track isn't the ordinary sort—it's narrow gauge, so that you feel like you're on an American rollercoaster. Sometimes, the train comes off its tracks ... [and] comes to a stop in the grass .... Prison guards travel with the driver; they check your passport and ask where you are going and whom you are visiting ... they didn't always ask for my documents but this is probably because I went there three times in four months and everyone remembered me .... The journey takes 4–5 hours and sometimes the ‘train’ also pulls wagons with felled timber and provisions ... with the result that it can sometimes arrive at 1 or even 4 or 5 o’clock in the morning. A vehicle waits at the destination ... it takes you to the visiting room in the colony ... very few people go there for visits; mainly mothers and sometimes a wife. When I went there, the whole zone was in shock; they said that it was the first time a young woman had visited .... The convicts in Yangory need everything; warm clothes (it’s cold even in the summer),
blankets, medicines, kettles, utensils, and, in the summer, anti-mosquito cream—there are so many flying insects there that it’s impossible to see more than 3 meters in front of your face. On maps this place is shown as uninhabited” (Archangel, KP-27, Tatyana, 4 November 2004).

Tatyana’s ‘epic’ journey to the regime zone is not exceptional. Maria, visiting her husband in Krasnii Bereg in the penal region north of Solikamsk in Perm’ oblast, for example, has good advice for other women undertaking a similar journey:

“How to get there? From Perm’ to Solikamsk there is a bus .... It leaves at 11.30 am—don’t be late. It costs 167 rubles one way. You arrive at 4 o’clock in the afternoon in Solikamsk ... and here in the square you will see a [commercial] bus waiting. It usually goes at 16.30 ... the ticket costs 65 rubles .... How long the journey takes depends on the weather and the state of the road. In the winter when there is a blizzard ... the bus can get stuck, but there are passing all-weather timber trucks that you can hitch a lift with. The locals ... are very friendly and curious ... but they always will guess that you are the relative of a prisoner, because you have large bags with you and look lost. They are afraid to have dealings with the ‘relatives of a prisoner’ .... They won’t offer a bed ... but they will tell you how to get to Baba Anya’s place: she does beds for a symbolic price ... only take your own linen because she is so poor she doesn’t have any ...” (Perm’, IK-5, Maria, 25 January 2005).

Colonies located near urban centres are not necessarily easy to access, as another visitor to a colony in Perm’ oblast describes:

“The bus from Perm’ is comfortable with TV and video and costs 150 rubles one way. It takes about 3 – 3½ hours. The bus stops on the way at the settlement of Chel’va, where you will find aunties from the village selling the most delicious pies that cost 10 rubles each. They are very tasty with potatoes. Don’t worry about the money—buy one for your prisoner. In order not to miss your stop, after about two hours ask the driver to drop you at the turning for zone 38. And now the difficult bit begins—you’ve got about five miles to walk (an asphalted road with no pavement) .... If you thumb a lift they will put up the price because they know you are the relative of a prisoner. Lots of military vehicles go past but they never pick you up—they are not allowed to mix with families of prisoners” (Perm’, IK38, Maria, 28 January 2005).

As these extracts show, the quasi-prisoner status of women begins on the journey to the colonies: the women, identifiable by the bags of provisions they carry and the destination stop they ask for, are vulnerable to exploitation and are deprived of normal hospitality. It is evidently only Baba Anya’s poverty that inclines her to open her house to quasi-prisoners. The correspondents to the Arestant website continually remind other women to conceal their identity, but this is often difficult in the sparsely populated rural regions where other types of visitor are rare.

Like any travellers in a foreign country, visitors to penal Russia need to have the correct travel documents. As Tatyana’s narrative above indicates, visitors entering ‘regime zones’, where there is a high density of colonies and penal settlements, have to secure entry to the region in order to be able to proceed onwards. At the ‘frontier’ post, the details of the prisoner to be visited are telephoned forward in order to confirm that the individual is indeed at that colony and that he is entitled to a visit (the Arestant site contains sad stories of women who arrive at a colony after several days on the road only to find that their relative has been moved to another colony or that his visiting rights have been withdrawn). The existence of closed penal regions is not confined to the geographical peripheries: they can be found in the ‘ecumene’ as well. The rural district in the southwestern corner of Mordovia, a four-hour drive from
Moscow, is such an ‘internal periphery’—its gateway town, Pot’ma, deleted from Soviet maps (and still hard to locate):

“once you get to Pot’ma you will have to give your passport details at a guard post ... and show where you have come from and where you are going. Then they let you through. Beyond the guard post there is a decent asphalted road through the forests, the settlements, and zones. I needed Yavas ... [there] opposite a small square with some shops is a road to the left which takes you to ... penal-settlement number 8, although it’s difficult to call it a ‘settlement’ ... . There are two barracks for 140 people ... . One of the barracks is for men and one for women; the women’s is separated by a wire netting” (Mordovia, KP-8, Pavel, 16 August 2005).

Lena (Mordovia, IK-5, 26 May 2004) makes an historical reference when recording her impressions of visiting one of the colonies in Mordovia:

“to get to Leplei is another 25 ‘taiga’ kilometres ... . There is nothing but colonies. If you are going there for the first time, I advise you to prepare yourself; the place is, of course, creepy. Have a read of Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag archipelago. It’s just the same today—nothing has changed.”

Once they arrive at the colony, visitors have to apply for permission to meet with a prisoner. Under new rules, governors are not allowed to deny visits so long as they fall within the permitted parameters. These parameters include specifications about the number of visits allowed per annum (this varies according to the regime under which the prisoner is held, but generally does not exceed four), and meetings can be denied if the prisoner is in the punishment cell or medical isolation block. The prison governor has to be given proof of the relationship with the prisoner, and can deny meetings with nonrelatives. One important area over which colony governors have discretion is whether to allow visits with common-law partners, and on what terms. Some colonies allow one extended visit on the condition that the couple marry before the next visit is due. Evidence has to be provided to the governor that the relationship is serious: this can be in the form of a certificate from the district housing authority, militia, or neighbours showing that the couple has been cohabiting for two years; or the existence of a child—confirmed by the birth certificate. Common-law wives may be required to provide colonies with medical evidence that they are free of TB, AIDS, and sexually transmitted diseases. Colony number 2 in Voronezh is among those doing its bit for Russia’s marriage statistics by requiring common-law partners to marry if they wish to visit:

“Partners are allowed extended meetings only once, on condition that for the next visit you are married. I got married to my husband in the colony .... I had to pay for the notary to come .... I collected her from the Palace of Weddings in town ... the ceremony took five minutes and we were allowed an extended visit straight afterwards” (Voronezh, IK-2, Nataliia, 5 August 2005).

In contrast, a neighbouring penal settlement was not permitting any visits, either short or extended, with common-law wives in 2005 (Voronezh, KP-10, Anna, 18 October 2005). Statistics on the rate of marriage and divorce among prisoners are not encouraging for the authorities. According to the 1999 Census, among men prisoners who were married at the time of sentencing, 31.5% divorced while in prison, and the figure for women was 47.7%. Against this, some 3.9% of male prisoners and 1.8% of female prisoners had married while in prison.

Visitors to colonies are vulnerable to the way in which particular colony governors choose to interpret the rules on visits, and this exacerbates their powerlessness in relation to the penal authorities. Unlike the USA, where states have formal complaints procedures for prison visitors, there is no independent adjudicator in Russia to which visitors can take their complaints. They are therefore in a weak position to insist upon
their rights. Arestant contributors warn other women against making any complaints when they visit colonies for fear of retribution against the person they are visiting. Maria, whom we have already met describing her visit to her husband in Krasnii Bereg, includes the following advice:

“Don’t be concerned when the guards are polite to you, especially if you have experienced rudeness in other colonies. They will smile at you and ask how the journey was and whether you have any complaints. Don’t complain—remember that your loved one will be blamed for telling tales and as soon as you leave will be punished ... in Krasnii Bereg they are masters at punishment ... (sorry for the emotion)” (Perm’, IK-5, Maria, 25 January 2005).

Regardless of whether they are entitled to a short or long visit, distance means that visitors often have to find overnight accommodation within striking distance of a colony. According to people writing in to Arestant, places catering for quasi-prisoners in the settlements around colonies often change inflated prices because of their guests’ status. In order to realise the penal service’s new commitment to support contacts between prisoners and their families, many colonies have converted buildings into ‘hotels’ for visitors. They contain communal rooms for supervised short visits, and variable numbers of living rooms for extended visits when the prisoner is allowed to stay with his or her family. Visitors have to pay for these rooms, and the income constitutes an important source of revenue for cash-strapped colonies. The rates charged for the overnight rooms, the range of facilities provided, what products can be brought in for the duration of the visits, and the frequency and type of searches made of visitors are subject to large variation. Olya, whose partner is in a colony in Rostov oblast in south Russia, gives general advice to women embarking upon their first extended visit to a colony:

“Dear Girls, don’t take any precious things with you. Take bed linen, a towel, toiletries for two people so that your husband doesn’t have to bring these from the zone ... take his favourite bright free clothes, especially if in the zone they make them wear a uniform. Don’t go to a meeting with any gold jewellery, with bottles of perfume—these will be confiscated. Take a notebook and pencil—they’ll be useful. Any money above what you need to pay for the room will be taken off you (you get it back when you leave). In some colonies they allow you to be photographed with your husband as a keepsake .... Usually the hotel in the colony [consists of] ... small rooms each with a bed, table, a pair of stools, a shared kitchen and bathroom and sometimes a fridge. The cleanliness and comfort of the hotel depends upon the colony boss .... Naturally, take with you food that is fresh and tasty. Bear in mind that you can cook. In the kitchen there are usually saucepans, plates, spoons, forks, and cups. I advise you as soon as you arrive to move like a bullet and grab the best utensils. A special deficit is forks .... Also remember that you will be searched. They can look through your provisions. Generally they open all boxes, pepsi-cola bottles, and packets ... take with you your favourite videocassettes—there may be a player or a TV in the common room. ... I advise you all to prepare everything at home so you don’t waste time cooking. Always there is a crowd of mothers and sisters in the kitchen chatting half the day ... the wives tend to spend more time in the rooms with their husbands” (Rostov, IK-15, Olya, 2005).

Judging from other descriptions, there are colonies where the administration has made considerable efforts to provide a pleasing environment for extended visits, but these may be the exception. Arestant contains numerous complaints about overpricing for the facilities provided, but acceptance of the conditions in return for being able to see their loved ones underlines the unequal nature of the women’s relationship with the colony.
Olesiya, returned from her first visit to her husband in a colony in Tsentral'nii, Ryazan oblast, writes:

“I went to see my darling husband ... [in the colony hotel] there is a shared kitchen, two hot plates, utensils, and mice running around like horses. But I didn’t meet any cockroaches. In the room there were two beds, one in which we slept. It was terribly cold. The central heating didn’t work and there were only two blankets. We slept in our tracksuits. The mice kept me awake all night—but my husband was used to them. The shower was communal and it ran permanently with tepid Ryazan water. But this is all trivial compared with the fact that I was able to see him!!! Even in such a god-forsaken place, I was in heaven to be with him. My husband had lost weight terribly ... we reminisced about our life together, and I showed him photos of our son” (Ryazan, IK-1, Olesiya 18 October 2005).

Similarly Maria, writing about the extended visit she was permitted after she had married her husband in a colony in Voronzh oblast, did not begrudge the money:

“In the room there was a double bed that dated from the GULag—it was all lumpy and hard, a small table, washbowl, a cupboard with its doors off. Later because it was so cold and because ... [having just got married] ... we were privileged guests we were allowed a small heater. The toilet, shower, and kitchen were clean enough .... . There was a children’s room but it was locked and a common room with TV and ashtrays made from the lids of coffee jars .... . In general, I was happy with what I found .... . The guards only came in to escort prisoners and visitors—once a day. The hotel supervisor saw that I was frying potatoes and mushrooms asked if she could have little—I gave her some. She was starving poor thing ... they came for my dear one at one o’clock and he took with him all the bed linen I had brought, the utensils, soaps, books, photographs, manicure scissors, coffee, tea, meat paste, apples, a silver ring ... after the meeting I understood that our feelings had become stronger than before and that no material problems could detract from my happiness. This was the first extended visit in four years. He has only 2½ years to go ...” (Voronezh, IK-2, Maria, 16 October 2005).

One month later, Maria was back on the web reporting that her new husband had been transferred to a prison hospital suffering from TB. Olga, who also has a husband in a colony in Voronezh oblast, is less compromising about prices, complaining that the 2000 rubles charged for a three-day visit for herself and her son was twice the rate in an ordinary hotel in the town. She writes:

“the cold in the room is just unbearable, you have to go to bed fully clothed and ... you are not allowed a heater. What it’s like in the zone itself, I can’t imagine—my husband doesn’t say much about it. Probably it’s a scandal like everywhere else” (Voronezh, IK-9, Olga, 15 December 2004).

The practical difficulties involved in maintaining contact with prisoners are the context within which the figures shown in table 4 have to be interpreted. The census does not record the percentage of prisoners who have no contacts of any sort with people outside the colonies (including by letter), but statistics for the number receiving parcels indicate that the figure must be about 60% for women and 70% for men. Compared with these figures, the percentage of prisoners who receive visitors is very low and must, in part, reflect the difficulties accessing colonies. Telephone-conversation rates are difficult to interpret since many colonies in the geographical peripheries either do not have telephones or do not have the staff to supervise calls.

The survey in Lgovo allowed the frequency of visits to be compared with the distance of the colony from prisoners’ parental homes. Predictably, the incidence of visits was lowest for girls from the most distant oblasts (58% of respondents whose parental home is more than 1000 km from Ryazan had received no visits) and highest
for those from nearby oblasts (60% of respondents from within 500 km of Ryazan received at least one visit a year). Prisoners do not always want to maintain contacts with family members and vice versa, but in cases where this is desired, distance can place pressure on what may be fragile relationships, and this must damage the prospects of prisoners’ successful reentry into society.

**Gender in the Russian penal system**

Foucault’s observation that the discipline of the prison does not stop at the prison gate has a particular resonance in Russia. The argument rests on the proposition that power flows from the organisation of bodies in space. Foucault had in mind the micro-geography of the prison, but it is obvious from the Russian example that his insight applies to higher spatial scales. The current distribution of penal colonies has repercussions for the whole of Russian society in the identities it constructs for people. The experiences of women quasi-prisoners reinforce society’s understanding of their primary role as mothers and wives. The Russian Penal Service takes for granted that the woman is pivotal in maintaining the family, but this is in the context of an extremely conservative understanding of ‘family’. ‘Nontraditional’ families, including, for example, same-sex relationships, are not included in the definition. In juvenile colonies, the sanctity of the traditional family cannot be questioned: in L’govo the work of the colony’s psychologist and social worker are directed primarily at supporting links with parent(s), even in cases where there has been a history of abuse, and of bringing the girls to an understanding of ‘their guilt before their parents’.

The descriptions of rooms, prices, and lists of permitted produce and other ‘travellers’ tips’—down to which pies are worth buying en route that women post on the Arestant website, underline their domestic role and reinforce preexisting gender stereotypes. Furthermore, they are indicative of the degree to which the Russian penal complex has been successful in mobilizing women’s labour to solve its current economic problems. The system of penal colonies was expanded on the basis of forced labour and, although no longer expected to contribute to national economic plans, colonies are expected to cover a substantial portion of their costs by the use of prison labour in production (Piacentini, 2004). Loss of orders and competition from cheap labour outside have resulted in high levels of unemployment among prisoners. The consequent

| Type of social contact          | Frequency of contact | Female average | Male average |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Receipt of parcels             | Maximum number       | 16.5          | 28.7        |
|                                 | Fewer than maximum   | 39.8          | 40.9        |
|                                 | None                 | 43.7          | 30.4        |
| Long visits                     | Maximum number       | 6.8           | 17.0        |
|                                 | Fewer than maximum   | 14.0          | 21.9        |
|                                 | None                 | 79.2          | 61.1        |
| Short visits                    | Maximum number       | 9.2           | 21.1        |
|                                 | Fewer than maximum   | 19.7          | 29.5        |
|                                 | None                 | 71.1          | 49.4        |
| Telephone conversations         | One–more than five   | 14.9          | 15.5        |
|                                 | None—for technical reasons | 17.5  | 36.2        |
|                                 | None—lack of money   | 7.9           | 1.7         |
|                                 | None—nobody to speak to | 7.9 | 3.8         |
|                                 | None—no desire       | 52.0          | 56.3        |

Table 4. Frequency (in percentages) and types of contacts maintained by prisoners in colonies, 1999 (source: Kharakteristika 2001, volume 2, pages 63, 67, 69).
funding gap has been partially filled by provisioning by prisoners’ relatives. However, while the women’s narratives can be read as an acceptance by them of their traditional role in society, at the same time they can be read as an attempt on their part to contest both their powerlessness and Russia’s harsh, masculine, penal culture by sharing knowledge about how to navigate penal Russia and by inserting ‘feminine’ domesticity into the communal, male, public space of the penal colony.

Women are not just quasi-prisoners. Approximately 40,000 people held in penal colonies are women. They are treated differently from men, in line with gender stereotypes, and in this respect Russia is similar to other high-imprisonment societies (Bosworth, 1999). Certain statutes in the Correctional Code are directed towards supporting the maternal role: women with children under the age of 14 years, or who are pregnant, can receive suspended sentences, children may accompany their mothers to prison up to the age of 4 years; and women with children with them in prison are entitled to various privileges, which include extra rations and not being placed in punishment cells (Shmarov, 1999, pages 92 – 124). Moreover, women, have been the preferential recipients of amnesties, and the Penal Service has increased the number of women’s colonies with nurseries attached. However, there are no provisions that recognise women’s other special needs and, as already observed, women prisoners suffer disproportionately from the geography of colonies. According to Lyudmila Al’pern (2001a; 2001b; 2004), who has been researching women prisoners for the last decade (and draws attention to the 14,000 women who die each year as a result of domestic violence), women prisoners find themselves in the disciplinary and isolation cells more often than men—and for trivial offences such as smoking in the wrong place or swearing. She has also drawn attention to the attitudes to women within the Prison Service that are often deeply gendered—rank-and-file officers insisting that women offenders are ‘bad mothers’ and that prison nurses are better able to ‘give the children a childhood’ than are their biological mothers (Al’pern, 2004, page 113). Meanwhile, the language of the Russian penal system, with its military overtones and stress on correction (ispravlenie) and education (vospitanie) reminds women prisoners of the hierarchies of power to which they are subject. The inmates of women’s and juveniles’ penal colonies are organised into ‘detachments’ (otryadi) as in men’s, and share dormitories and communal bathroom facilities—which can include open communal lavatories. This collectivism denies women privacy, forcing them to live their lives in ‘male’ public space.

Conclusion
The prospects for change in Russia’s geography of penality—that victimises as well as punishes—are not, in the short term, encouraging. Although there are humanitarian and economic reasons for Russia trying to achieve a more proportional spread of prisoners, there are strong interests working in the opposite direction. Among these interests are those of the ‘penal practitioners’—people working in the penal service—whose stored experience will continue to influence the practical choices that Russia makes about its system of punishment. The majority of prison officers in Russia are used to working beyond the public gaze, and they have been socialised into a system whose emphasis is on exclusion and separation—rather than on rehabilitation and (re)integration. Furthermore, were penal colonies to be relocated it is not obvious that existing rank-and-file employees would find alternative employment. The colonies are often located in poor rural districts where their presence is an important factor preventing the total destitution of places which have suffered badly since Russia’s adoption of the market. Research in the USA on the proliferation of penitentiaries in California has demonstrated that ‘inferior public goods’, such as penitentiaries, can
be used to reinvigorate failing economies in socially marginal places: prisons are labour-intensive, nonpolluting and can provide a stable economic anchor for any community (Cherry and Kunce, 2001). If the people inhabiting Russia’s penal regions have strong interests in maintaining the present geography of colonies, so too do the inhabitants of the ‘donor’ regions who are able to displace deviancy to the peripheries. Valerii Abramkin (1998), the well-known prison reformer, has drawn attention to the negative consequences of this for crime reduction in the metropolis. Rather than take responsibility for someone who has completed his sentence, he suggests, Moscow finds it easier ‘to provoke him, arrest him and send him back’ to the peripheries.

It would be reasonable to think that because so many people are touched in one way or another by the penal system, the Russian population with their new-found democracy will constitute a force for change. The small amount of research that has been done on popular attitudes to crime and punishment suggests otherwise. Evidence from the postsocialist countries shows that after a period of softening, in reaction against the socialist regime’s harsh penal environment, neoliberal economic and social policies and media attention may encourage the resurfacing of ‘traditional policies of social exclusion and stigmatisation’ (Krajewski, 2004). Mary McAuley, who has researched Russian attitudes to youth crime, concludes that “as Russia continues to experience the strains and stresses of modernizing its economy and society, and politicians seek solutions to the problem of crime, we should not be surprised to find them receiving support from the public for more repressive measures” (2005, page 3). Piacentini (2004, pages 183 – 184) raises the same possibility, fearing that Russian “will mimic the managerialist and extra punitive agendas of some European nations where better ordered penal bureaucracies tie in with punitive populism to service tough law and order agendas.” If these pessimistic predictions come about, high prisoner numbers will continue to prevent a restructuring of Russia’s penal geography in a way that is essential if the country is to make a transition to a more humane system of dealing with its offenders.

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