GANGS OF RUSSIA

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From the Streets to the Corridors of Power

Svetlana Stephenson

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Cover image: Young men at a city festival in Nizhny Novgorod, c. 2005. Photo by Alik Yakubovich.

For Bob and Alexei

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Introduction

IN THE SHADOW OF THE STATE

As citizens of modern states, we often see the social world as the world of the state and its shadows. In these shadows we find corruption and predation, violence and crime, primitive brutality and self-serving parochial ties. Organizations that subvert the rule of law and order thrive in the shadows, making our lives unpredictable and unsafe. An organized "enemy" lurks there, and we fear that it can violently intrude into our world at any moment. We glimpse the shadow in films and books, in political rhetoric and in popular sentiment where it emerges in the form of street gangs and organized crime networks, often alongside the ethnic "other" and terrorist conspirators.

But the contrast between darkness and light, the shadow and the nonshadow worlds, is far less stark than it seems. Both are parts of the same social reality; they overlap and coalesce, taking a variety of different forms and configurations. Informal networks and ties extend from parochial systems into the mainstream institutional world, cutting across hierarchical divisions. They defy subsumption into the structures of economy and state. Complex relations of competition, cooperation, and mutual accommodation exist between the state and nonstate formations. State violence and nonstate violence are used simultaneously and often without a clear-cut distinction between public and private benefits. The same people can populate street organizations and criminal structures and aspire to making careers in mainstream society (with some achieving spectacular success). Individuals living in the shadows may have their own specific cultural traditions and beliefs while at the same time also holding deeply conventional,

mainstream views. The "shadow" and the "mainstream" exist together, penetrating each other.

The gang is almost by definition an example of the shadow society. But far from being a group of isolated misfits and criminals, it responds to larger historical processes and can, in certain periods, move from the shadows onto the central stage. This is what happened in Russia during the period of radical market reforms in the 1990s. Street gangs sprang from the shadows and began to command allegiance, to claim resources and power in the street sphere and far beyond. Some went on to evolve into more sophisticated organized crime networks that competed or cooperated with the state as agents of regulation. The world of private individuals and groups, with their horizontal networks of solidarities and dangerous parochial loyalties, eclipsed the public state when the state's vertical structures were fatally weakened both by design and as a consequence of rapid societal change.

The gang as I conceive it in this book is a collective, predominantly male, violent endeavor, a militant alliance or clan that exists in the midst of modern society. In this social organization all forms of human existence are woven together. The gang is irreducible to its economic operations; it cannot be seen, as is now common in gang literature, solely through the lens of criminality and violence or rationalized as a substitute for the authority of the state. It is an elemental force—a form of tribal life with its struggles for survival and domination, its cunning plots and selfless sacrifice for the gang's warrior brotherhood, and its heroic history and foundational mythology. As the pioneer of gang research Frederic Thrasher (1963 [1927], 3) famously said, "The gang, in short, is *life*, often rough and untamed, yet rich in elemental social processes significant to the student of society and human nature."

In the uncharted waters of the Russian capitalist transformation, the gang warriors tried to find ways to stay afloat, to lay siege to, and to extract the wealth of the decaying state and the emerging entrepreneurs, who themselves were new to the capitalist territory and almost totally defenseless in the face of various predators. But for all their elemental qualities, the strategies developed by the gangs had many similarities with the strategies of others who were managing to find their way in the devastation brought by the collapse of the Soviet system. Many people tried to rise in society via cunning and violence, and relied on trust networks in their efforts to divide the spoils of the Soviet economy and gain access to a variety of rents. The new rules of the game that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet civilization brought new heroes and new strategies for success; and the gangs fought, competed, and cooperated with other networks that set out on similar paths.

As Russia embarked on its transition to capitalism, a whole set of economic, social, political, and ideological changes caused the rise of militant, networked, and acquisitive social formations and behaviors. Eventually, in the social settlement that followed the fierce struggles for accumulation in the 1990s, these formations became less prominent, and many of the participants found ways to join the legitimate structures of the state and economy. But these struggles left a lasting legacy—both in the continuing prominence of rent-seeking networks throughout Russian society and in the sphere of mass communication, which continues to be saturated with references to the gangs' codes of conduct—the street and criminal *poniatiia* (mutual "understandings")—and to their representatives, the lads (*patsany*, young men, a term commonly used from the late 1980s onward in Russia to describe street gang members) and bandits.

The analytical and conceptual framework of the book centers around the following main questions: What was the role of the street gang in the evolution of Russian organized crime? How do we analyze the gang as a form of society? How did the gangs' own structures and practices change in response to the historical transformation of Russia under late socialism and during the transition to capitalism? And what are the past and current modes of the gang's incorporation into the wider community?

Street Gangs and the Origins of Organized Crime Networks

The rise of gangs in the 1990s was a product of historically unique circumstances, when Russia, along with other post-Communist countries, embarked on a transition from state socialism to capitalism. This transition brought with it a rapid collapse of the whole social structure, a dismantling of the collectivist provisions of welfare and employment, radical privatization of state assets, and the emergence of private entrepreneurs who received almost no protection from the now debilitated legal and judicial apparatus. While nascent entrepreneurs set up their new businesses amid the ruins of the state socialist economy, masses of Soviet workers were trying to survive by clinging to their old enterprises (that had often stopped paying them a living wage), mining the depleting resources of their social networks, or developing subsistence farming at their dachas. But there was another strategy. It was developed by people who launched projects of economic accumulation and social mobility through violence. They appropriated state resources, exploited the new entrepreneurial class, and developed a variety of ventures in the overlapping domains of the criminal, shadow, and legal economies.

Among the new "successful" groups that gained wealth and power were the so-called *banditskie gruppirovki* (bandit gangs). The streets began to fill with grim-looking youths, dressed almost identically in cheap dark jackets and tracksuit pants. Their leaders, who were often not much older, flaunted their new wealth by wearing garish magenta blazers and heavy gold chains and driving around in foreign cars. Reports of gang-related assassination attempts and murders featured daily in the news. The bandit gangs often started out by racketeering local kiosks and street markets and then moved on to skimming the profits of small and medium-size companies. From here they progressed to establishing protection operations for large companies, with many of the gang leaders becoming company owners and shareholders themselves, and extending the gang's activities far beyond the local territory. Where did these bandits come from? Some scholars have traced them to an alliance between former Communist officials and the criminal underworld of *vory v zakone* ("thieves-in-law", professional criminals), built on Soviet-era black market collaborations (Handelman 1994; Finckenauer and Voronin 2001). Others see them as mostly novel groups of people whose mastery of violence gave them a particular advantage in the growing market for criminal protection. This advantage "could have been acquired either in specific social situations that cultivate physical fitness and fighting skills or in particular life circumstances that produced the psychological dispositions" (Volkov 2002, 6). The members of these new bandit groups (in contrast to more traditional *vory* societies) were former athletes, veterans of the Afghan war, and formerly and currently serving policemen (Varese 2001; Volkov 2002).

One social formation that played a major role in the rise of the bandit gangs has so far been largely absent from the analysis of the origins of Russian organized crime. This is the youth street gang. This omission is particularly striking because youth gangs were among the first organizations to move into the extortion and protection sphere in the post-Soviet period. But scholars of Russian organized crime, if they considered young people at all, regarded them mainly as bands of hoodlums who got together to make money via violent extortion or as fodder for the bosses of organized crime. Neighborhood social networks were largely neglected, while the category of "youth gang" did not play much of an explanatory role in this literature, in which gang activity seemed to fall along the same spectrum as forms of (adult) illegality.

The youth gangs were, however, central to the development of Russian organized crime. At the time when the Soviet system had collapsed and the new capitalist order was just taking hold, street gangs—alternative structures of youth life that were unrelated to the bureaucratic or professional structures of the Soviet state—survived, evolved, and prospered. These territorial bands of young people

established their own local monopolies of force and achieved significant control over the street economy and small businesses in their areas. Their older members, who became widely known as "bandits," graduated to positions of authority in serious organized crime networks. The gangs came from a distinctive male street culture, with trust networks forged through street camaraderie and battles with local enemies. Male warrior brotherhoods rising from the world of the streets, together with other forms of solidarities (forged in communities of sportsmen or Afghan army veterans and also giving rise to bandit groups), created the social structures in which the illegal entrepreneurial activities of post-Soviet organized crime could develop.

Street Gangs as Warrior Alliances

Although they come to the fore in times of crisis of the social order, youth street associations have always been present in human society in one form or another. Groups in which boys have learned to be "real men" through collective violence have been a feature of social life from time immemorial. Countless generations of boys around the world grow up playing and fighting in the streets, in a space of freedom from adult control, where they can assert their masculinity, develop friendships, and protect their turf. From graffiti in ancient Pompeii that testified to victories of local street warriors over youths from neighboring settlements, who came to the city to watch theatrical performances or gladiator games but were really looking for a fight, to graffiti in modern cities marking the territory of various street fiefdoms, urban walls have witnessed and recorded many fights and confrontations. In these battles young men acquired skills and a mental outlook historically seen as crucial to societies in which frequent outbreaks of war demanded the cultivation of male violence, vigor, and honor.

These forms have lingered well beyond ancient times. Across the world, youths still form gangs united by the bonds of male kinship, collective violent experiences, and often promises of material spoils. The gang as a traditional social form embedded in the fabric of modern societies seduces its members with its claim of innate superiority to outsiders and by its members' apparent bravery and mastery of violence, freedom from the obligations and limitations enforced by adult society, and promises of fairness and mutual protection.

Modern gangs, as Randall Collins (2011) observed, have the same type of premodern authority as the warrior coalitions of Vikings, Germanic militant tribes, and ancient Greek colonists who formed their own settlements around the rim of the Mediterranean. Max Weber called such social forms "patrimonial alliances" (Weber 1978 [1922]). These bands of warriors that assembled for raiding and

conquering shared tribal loyalties and pseudokinship obligations and developed mythologies about their fictive ancestors.[1] In modern cities, warrior forms, according to Collins, are reproduced by youths from working-class backgrounds who form their own small patrimonial tribes and rebel against the disciplinary power of schooling. While the modern bureaucratic state has tried to displace patrimonialism, the space of the street has remained resistant to state penetration, and here these forms still thrive.

Viewing the gang as a patrimonial warrior alliance allows us to see it in ways that are different from the traditional approaches of gang research, which tend to view gangs as vehicles of social and cultural resistance or as instrumental criminal enterprises. Although there are different types of gangs, they can all be described as multifunctional, largely male militant alliances held together by personal interdependencies and loyalties to the group and by the collective exercise of violence.

The archetypical figure of the warrior has a central place in the gang's own mythology and folklore. But while the archetype of a warrior possesses the imagination and informs the behavior of the gang, its appeal is much wider and cuts across social, ethnic, and class divisions. Whenever we talk about social constructions of masculinity, the figure of the warrior inevitably comes to the fore. In film, literature, and mass media, gang warriors, boardroom warriors, and police warriors provide templates for powerful masculinity. In societies organized in accordance with the patriarchal gender order, the idealized forms of masculinity involve qualities such as toughness, courage, aggression, adventurousness, success, loyalty, and dominance over women and weaker and homosexual men—all of which are concentrated in the persona of the warrior.[2] The warrior is not external to society as is, for example, the classical bandit as described by Eric Hobsbawm (1985), who attacks from outside, robbing the rich and powerful. He can be both outside and inside of society, subverting its rules but also asserting its deepest values.

The complex of values represented by the warrior is particularly prominent in certain cultural and class milieus, and among them is undeniably the culture of urban working-class youth. The association between urban working-class and low-class culture and street gangs has been the cornerstone of much gang research. Studies have shown that this culture accentuates the values of tough

1. Weber (1987 [1922]) developed the concept of "patrimonialism" as a tool to explore systems of political authority based on kinship ties, patron-client relations, and informal rules and regulations. In patrimonial systems power operates on the basis of arbitrary discretion, material dependence, and personal loyalty of members of the extended quasi-kinship network.

2. On patriarchy and the social construction of masculinity see, e.g., Connell 1987; and Messerschmidt 1993; 2000.

masculinity, reflecting class conditions in which a lack of opportunity to succeed makes personal bonds of peer-to-peer support, mastery over violence, personal bravery, and resistance to outside authority a source of masculine pride and status.[3] Lacking the opportunity for integration into mainstream society, young people can fall back on militant patrimonial forms as a source of identity and membership or as a vehicle for illegal economic success. Through violent street performances young men who otherwise possess very few resources can achieve situational dominance over more privileged members of society, "reverse" their structural disadvantage, and build their own street social capital.[4]

At the same time, it is important to note that gangs are not exclusively confined to working-class and low-class urban environments. Village fights between groups of young men learning to display their strength and manhood were a feature of most European peasant societies (Tilly 1974b). From Finland to France, group youth combats were still being fought at the end of the nineteenth century (Haavio-Mannila 1958; Ploux 2007). The same was true of Russia, and territorial fighting gangs (as well as entrepreneurial gangs) can still be found in rural areas. Apart from villages, gangs have also been present in socially mixed urban residential settlements. Multiethnic, socially diverse street groups of young people formed a core part of urban life in the Soviet Union. To this day, across Russia young men, united by allegiance to their turf and not by specific class origins, play out ancient scenarios of honor and territorial defense, with some drifting toward associations of a more criminal nature.

From Street Groups to Mafia Networks—and Back?

In modern society, youth street associations tend to be both endemic and short lived. Young people abandon their street groups when they move into the world of family and work. But during certain historical periods these short-lived tribes can become more permanent organizations. They can start to expand and colonize new territories and in some cases develop their own "extortionate platforms" (Hobbs 2013, 227) from which they launch protection operations and other acquisitive schemes.

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3. The association between working-class and low-class culture, masculinity, group delinquency, and violence has been addressed in many classic sociological and criminological texts (see, e.g., Cohen 1955; Miller 1958; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967; Willis 1977).

4. On street violence and situational stratification see, for example, Collins (2004; 2008); on violence and street social capital, see Sandberg (2008) and Harding (2014).

When does this occur? Although historical research into the evolution of gangs has been scarce, Randall Collins (2011) has suggested that gangs can develop a long-term presence in the community if they get access to economic resources. If they find ways to penetrate the state itself, they can turn into another patrimonial form, a mafia. Eventually, the state finds ways to defeat the mafia, while the gang alliances continue to operate, albeit in constant confrontation with the state repressive apparatus. In the Soviet Union in the 1970s the gangs did indeed begin to gain access to economic resources during the period of the growth of the Soviet shadow economy, at which point some of them turned into stable neighborhood forms. With the collapse of the socialist state, many street gangs evolved into mafia-type organizations, penetrating economic and political structures of the state. All this took place in the condition of disassociation of youth from the structures of modern society and increasing influence of patrimonial structures that existed in the Soviet Union, including the associations of professional criminals, the vory v zakone.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s the Russian state became stronger, the capitalist economic order became more established, and the power of organized criminal groups began to wane. The vertical structures of mafia-type organizations were weakened, and the gangs began to revert to more disorganized forms. But, as the new power regime developed, it became apparent that the strengthening of the state did not lead to the triumph of law and order. The state does not function the same way in all countries, and in Russia the state and criminal networks are not involved in a zero-sum game but instead form complex relationships of competition and cooperation. Although they were weakened by gang trials and a reduction in racketeering opportunities, in many areas organized gangs did not disappear but became entrenched within well-established hierarchies of state power and local systems of violent regulation.

The Gang and Society

In the Soviet Union, those gang warriors whose key battles took place in the courtyards and on the streets of their neighborhoods and those who tried to lay their hands on the spoils of the country's shadow economy were not pirates or foreign invaders but residents of villages, working-class quarters, and socially mixed residential blocks. They lived in the community and led other lives when outside the space of the streets—as students in vocational colleges, factory workers, or young professionals (unless they found themselves in trouble with the law, which could lead them to the revolving doors of penal institutions). Apart from the dispositions acquired in the world of the streets—an aptitude for violence

and loyalty to their comrades-in-arms—the members of street gangs might also share mainstream Soviet values. They believed that by fleecing dishonest and corrupt Soviet shop or restaurant managers they were upholding socialist justice. Similarly, when the new times came, they embraced capitalist ideology and began to see themselves as hard-working entrepreneurs.

Russian gangs are not alien to society; they are firmly embedded in it. They include both exclusively criminal operators and people who can be respectable and hold professional jobs. Their members have multiple connections stretching from their close neighbors and relatives to representatives of the Russian state. They are pragmatic and micropolitical in their social orientations, and they try to create a wide web of obligations and favors around themselves. Moreover, the organizational structure of the Russian gang fits with these orientations in that it is highly flexible and allows its members to maintain their multiple memberships and networks (themselves highly useful for gang business).

Throughout their history, Russian gangs have remained part of the community. In their glory days in the 1990s, their members rose above many of their neighbors and acquired significant power on the street, in the local economy, and further afield. But, as life stabilized and a new social settlement emerged in Russia at the beginning of the 2000s, gangs found other ways of incorporation into society. The days of their spectacular rise were over, but they found new niches in the shadow and criminal economy on and off the streets. Their violence has also remained a part of the wider field of private force that exists in the shadow of the state.

Although some have now become legitimate entrepreneurs, many bandit leaders remain well positioned in the web of official and unofficial power in their territorial communities, and they can still use the organizational and violent resource of street gangs if it is necessary for their business or political interests. Over time, the bandits' code of conduct has entered the wider sphere of cultural communication and become a constant referent when it comes to the unofficial rules of Russian politics and everyday life. New instabilities and new crises always risk bringing the figure of the bandit back to the foreground of social life.

"Abridged Maps"

Street groups in which boys grow to be "real men" are ubiquitous in Russia. There are various street peer groups (e.g., *dvorovye kompanii*—"courtyard groups"), territorial groups defending the local turf, and more organized entrepreneurial gangs. But research into the various Russian street organizations and gangs has been relatively scarce. To borrow Dick Hebdige's (1988) expression about youth subcultures, such organizations have been "hiding in the light."

In prerevolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union the imperatives of male street culture, the rituals of street life, and the various territorial practices of violence were off the radar of state officials, the police, and educators. In late imperial Russia and throughout the Soviet period the street life of boys and young men in its many manifestations—group recreation, fights, harassment of passers-by, or more criminal pursuits—was seen mainly through the lens of the catch-all category of "hooliganism," with working-class men being regarded as particularly prone to such disorderly behavior (Neuberger 1993; Tsipursky 2008; Fürst 2010; LaPierre 2012). From the early days of the Soviet regime the state viewed street hooligans as agents of resistance who corrupted young people and took them away from Communist organizations such as the Young Pioneers and Komsomol. This perspective continues to be shared by some academic authors who view street hooligans as agents of resistance to the Soviet state (Kozlov 1999; Gorsuch 2000). Whether or not they were deliberately resisting Soviet power in a political sense, the so-called street hooligans undoubtedly challenged state control by creating spaces of autonomy in the world of the streets. The state tried (largely unsuccessfully) to reclaim its youths, and its persistent failure to do so was blamed on the youths' poor upbringing (*vospitanie*) and on inadequate control of young people by parents, teachers, and employers (Connor 1972; LaPierre 2012).

Following James C. Scott's (1998, 3) argument about modern European states' visions of the social world, I would say that the Soviet state simplified social reality, working from "abridged maps" that represented only the slices of reality that were of interest to it. It was partially blind in its knowledge of collective street life, young people's territorial identities, and the actual meanings of the practices to which it applied its crude classifications. By projecting anxieties about the nonconformist, "unsocialist" behavior of citizens onto the figure of the hooligan and criminalizing routine misbehaviors, the Soviet regime created deviance on a massive scale (LaPierre 2006).

Social research into youth street organizations and gangs was virtually nonexistent, with the exception of research into the gangs of orphaned (*besprizornye*) and abandoned (*beznadzornye*) children in the Soviet Union of the 1920s and early 1930s (see, e.g., Fürst 2010). The first publications on street and criminal gangs appeared only toward the end of the 1980s, during Gorbachev's perestroika. Russian administrative criminologists—I refer to their work in chapter 1—analyzed group delinquency from a social-control perspective and used data collected in corrective institutions and detention centers. The notable exception was the work of the group of Kazan sociologists led by Alexander Salagaev, who studied violent gangs on the basis of interviews with gang members in the community, as well as interviews with law enforcement, businessmen, and local residents. More research

about gangs in particular Russian regions appeared over the years, but these were relatively small-scale studies. I address them in chapters 1 and 2.

Street social organizations and the traditions of youth territorialism have also started to attract scholarly attention, mainly from Russian anthropologists (Kuleshov 2001; Shchepanskaia 2001; Golovin and Lurie 2008; and Gromov 2009 among others). But, generally, their practices are still poorly understood, and the members of street groups continue to be seen as low-class young men who are backward, ignorant, and dangerously prone to violence. In other words, they are still seen as hooligans, although the word itself has fallen out of favor, and now are widely known as *gopniks* (Pilkington 2002; Omel′chenko 2006).

The Setting and the Study

In order to trace the evolution of street organizations and gangs and follow the ways they integrated into the wider society and polity, we need historical and social research and data. Although the literature here is scant, there is one area in Russia where sources on juvenile street life and practices of violence can be found, starting with some famous literature that dates back to the nineteenth century. This is Tatarstan, a region on the Volga. In the late Soviet period, Tatarstan was the first place where the existence of violent street groups was officially recognized and where the first gang criminal trial (the trial of Tiap-Liap) took place. The gangs then became the subject of police research and journalistic investigations. In the 1990s, Tatarstan became renowned for its *banditskie gruppirovki*, which also expanded into other areas, including Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and then established their interests abroad. It became the region of Russia where the first trials of "organized criminal communities" (OPS) took place at the beginning of the 2000s. Tatarstan was also the place where the first major sociological project of research into gangs, directed by Alexander Salagaev, took place, beginning at the end of the 1980s and continuing well into the 2000s.

Tatarstan is the main case study for this book, and I was fortunate to work on this research with Alexander Salagaev and his colleagues Alexander Shashkin and Rustem Safin. In 2005 we conducted a study that involved interviews with gang members from gruppirovki across Kazan. The interviewees were all male, seventeen to thirty-five, of Russian and Tatar ethnicity—reflecting the social composition of their organizations. We also interviewed law enforcement officers, teachers, school psychologists, and local residents in communities affected by gangs. In 2011, I conducted additional research in Kazan. I have also drawn on analyses of the available sources on street organizations and gangs, past and present, in other areas of Russia and made use of the data from my study of youth street

organizations in Moscow in 2006. I discuss the methodology in the Methodological Note at the end of this book.

While the book is mainly anchored in research and fieldwork in Kazan, a city notable for the advanced development and entrenchment of its gangs, wider research confirms that the results can be considered representative of Russia as a whole (although ethnic gangs still await their researchers). All gang research is highly contextual, as these organizations are rooted in local cultural traditions as well as in class configurations, residential histories, and patterns of settlement. But, for all that, Russian gangs share similar features that reflect the specific character of Soviet urbanism, whose legacy continues to this day. Here people have tended to live in socially and ethnically mixed settlements in relatively stable enterprise-based social systems, and, despite growing social and housing inequalities, in many areas across Russia these residential patterns are still in place. All over Russia, except in the hearts of major cities, young people grow up in *dvor* (courtyard) societies and participate in neighborhood social networks. A review of research on street social organizations across the former Soviet Union by Dmitrii Gromov (2009), with data covering the period from the mid-1950s to the present day, showed that these organizations have had similar codes of conduct based on requirements for members to demonstrate mastery of violence, loyalty to the group, authority, and integrity. They also set limits on violence in relation to noncombatants, young children, women, and the elderly. The considerable degree of ritualization of violence in these groups may reflect the late modernization of Russia and the cultural influence of village traditions of ritualized fights.[5]

Kazan's neighborhood street groups demonstrate all the characteristics identified by Gromov. More specific is the entrepreneurial gang or, to use the term that emerged in the 1990s, the bandit gang. This type of gang has particular organizational characteristics, such as age-based cohorts, a system of money collection for the *obshchak* (the gang's common fund), defined leadership roles, as well as strong connections with the world of organized crime that are absent in more disorganized street groups. But Kazan-type entrepreneurial gangs have been far from rare in the Russian underworld. By the mid-1980s, similar gangs emerged across the country (Pilkington 1994, 143–44), likewise developing serious organized criminal operations in the 1990s and showing signs of social entropy with the economic and political stabilization in the 2000s. I present available evidence of the existence and evolution of such gangs across Russia.

5. The groups are not all identical. While predominantly male, some admit girls, although they tend to stay at the periphery of group activity. These groups also differ in the strength of their organization, the degree of compulsion put on local young people to join, and the extent of violence and criminality.

What may be specific to Kazan is the extent of incorporation of the gang members into the larger society. With the exception of the more marginalized young men with low education and skills who come from highly disturbed family backgrounds, the participants in our project studied in high schools and universities, and many older members worked as builders, industrial workers, and even as junior managers, doctors, and lawyers. This quite extraordinary state of affairs (at least from the point of view of international gang literature) can be explained by the wide availability of legitimate employment, both in the state and service sectors but also in industry and the building trades. Here organized industrial labor is still an option for young people, although, as elsewhere in Russia, manual jobs are relatively low paid and no longer a source of collective pride and identity (Walker 2009). In Kazan, with its low rate of unemployment, we do not yet observe a fractious working-class and low-class culture in which young people, inhabiting the zones of postindustrial exclusion, may see the bottom rungs of the drug trade ladder as their only option (Hagedorn and Macon 1988; Taylor 1990; Padilla 1992). Moreover, perhaps paradoxically, the absence of concerted gang suppression policies and persistent criminalization of youth gangs (discussed in chapter 6) may prevent further disassociation and exclusion from society of those young people who do not commit serious crimes, and may leave them with the chance to build a different life.

To my knowledge, no other research has so far been conducted in Russia that addresses the issue of gang members' social incorporation into criminal or mainstream society (or, as often happens in Kazan, into both simultaneously). Having limited data makes it difficult to make assumptions about whether we can apply this "double helix" model of gang members' social memberships to other regions of Russia. As more research emerges it will become possible to fill in the details of gang life across the country.

Current study of the Russian gang and its evolution in the context of historical change under late socialism and during capitalist transformation is one part of my long-standing project, which aims to understand the social organization of Russian society "from below" at the time of transition to market capitalism. In the 1990s, I studied the societies of street children and youths, and adult homeless people (Stephenson 2001; 2006; 2008). In the course of that study I examined their social networks and their attempts to survive by finding ways to access the resources of the city. This book adds another dimension to this project. What I describe here is no longer the world of desperation and survival; this is the world of high stakes, the world of action, adventurousness, and a sense of possibility. I explore how gangs of young men attempted to take a shortcut to wealth and power through crime and violence, and what happened to them and to the country as a result.

Structure of the Book

In chapter 1 I look at traditional structures of youth violence and at the emergence of entrepreneurial gangs in the 1970s and 1980s. I suggest a typology of street organizations and gangs, dividing them into four types—street peer groups, territorial elites, entrepreneurial gangs, and autonomous ruling regimes—and trace the evolution of forms of youth collective violence in Kazan in response to the specific challenges and opportunities created by rapid urbanization, the proliferation of the shadow economy, and growing social differentiation.

In chapter 2 I examine the growth of violent street social organizations as a result of the crisis of the Soviet system and the emergence of new entrepreneurial opportunities amid the chaos of economic transition. I show how profound insecurity, associated with the collapse of livelihoods and the rise in crime, pushed young people to seek membership in various ground-level networks, including subcultural networks, organized prostitution, criminal networks, and gangs. I discuss the hopes and aspirations that young people associated with gang membership, which ranged from personal protection and subsistence to entrepreneurial success, and how they set about realizing these. I then examine the evolving composition of the Tatarstan gangs, their changing practices of violence, their territorial expansion over the course of the 1990s and how their development was paralleled elsewhere in Russia.

In chapter 3 I explore further how the gangs made their money. I discuss the historical context of the development of economic violence in post-Soviet Russia and then analyze the social relationship of protection and the predatory and clientilistic systems of power relations that the gangs established with businessmen and members of the public. I show examples of how they penetrated corporate and state-based networks and describe the social strategies their leaders developed to achieve legitimacy. I then address the changes in gang business as the state gained the upper hand and the gangs' retreat from large-scale protection rackets into more street-based operations and into control of markets for proscribed commodities (drugs, illegal gambling, prostitution, etc.).

In chapter 4 I analyze the organization of the gang, the devices it uses to ensure its social reproduction, and the challenges it faces in conditions of growing social and economic differentiation among its ranks. Although their leadership structures turned their attention to serious criminal business, I show that the gangs remained forms of weakly differentiated societies. Their egalitarian ethos and personal loyalties did not interfere with business but, on the contrary, proved to be highly useful, especially in conditions of constant instability and risk. It is the erosion of these bonds of solidarity as a result of social differentiation that weakens the gang.

In chapter 5 I consider the backgrounds of gang members, what attracts them to the gang, and their plans and aspirations for the future. I look at various biographical narratives and consider three types of transition to adulthood—criminal, working-class, and professional. I discuss a specific Russian "double helix" model of youth transitions, in which young people follow both criminal and mainstream careers. I show that gang members tend to see themselves as "normal" members of the community and that they actively invest in a variety of social ties and particularly value informal relations with the local police and other representatives of the Russian deep state.

In chapter 6 I look at the place of the gangs in the local communities and at their attempts to position themselves as agents of popular justice and popular violence who police the borders of belonging and punish transgressors of the local social order. I consider the opinions of local residents about the gangs and the ways in which the gangs fit into the interaction between power regimes in Tatarstan and elsewhere in Russia.

In chapter 7 I present my reconstruction of the gang code. I explain my methodological approach to the analysis of the code, set out the fundamental principles of the code, and address the similarities and differences between the moral rules of the bandits and those of the vory community. I finish by describing the evolution of both codes in the conditions of market capitalism.

In chapter 8 I address structures of feeling and behavior in the violent world of the streets and how they are produced through the membership of street organizations. I analyze violent rituals and trade-offs, conflicts, and how they are resolved by using the common understandings of right and wrong that exist in the shadow of the state.

In chapter 9 I address the wide dissemination of gang culture in post-Soviet Russia and how different sections of the population view the world of criminal organizations as either embodying values of heroic masculinity and brotherly bonds or as exemplifying the country's descent into primitive violence and parochial clans. I show how the gangs' code and vocabulary provide a new lingua franca that reflects the institutional conditions to be found at all levels of Russian society, from the streets to the corridors of power.

The conclusion to the book summarizes the trajectory of the street gang in the late Soviet period and during the time of transition, and addresses the ongoing penetration by gang members of formal structures and how they remain significantly incorporated in their communities. I end with an assessment of how gangs may change in response to new economic and social realities facing Russia.

1

STREET ORGANIZATIONS AND GANGS IN RUSSIA

The existence of violent youth gangs in Kazan was brought to the attention of the Soviet public in 1988 when *Literaturnaia Gazeta* published an article by Yuri Shchekochikhin called "Ekstremalnaia model'" (The extreme model). This included the first published mention of the "Kazan phenomenon." In this and further publications it emerged that this city had dozens of youth gangs involved in serious violence and crime. Similar gangs, many formed back in the 1970s, were "discovered" in Naberezhnye Chelny, Almetievsk, Nizhnekamsk, Buinsk, and other areas of Tatarstan, as well as in other parts of the Soviet Union.

Why did Kazan, Tatarstan, and the wider Soviet Union experience such a surge in gang violence in the 1970s and 1980s? To understand this we need to look at traditional structures of youth violence and at the specific challenges and opportunities created by rapid urbanization, growing social differentiation, and the proliferation of the shadow economy in the USSR.

Typology of Street Organizations and Gangs

Groups of adolescents seeking adventure, fighting for turf, developing their own small street ventures, and finding out in the company of peers what it means to be a man have been a long-standing feature of social life all over the world. Successive generations of young men have grown up on the streets before joining adult society and leaving their street adventures and misdemeanors behind them.

Commitment to their own societies and oppositional subcultures away from adult control generally begins to wane as young people move into adulthood, although some young men find ways to commodify their violence through various criminal collaborations (Willis 1977; Collins 2011; Hobbs 2013). The street world is usually a mix of various social forms, territorial and nonterritorial, criminalized and noncriminalized. Many different definitions and typologies of gangs have been offered by Western authors. Contemporary criminological classifications typically distinguish gangs by their illegal activities (Klein 1971; Miller 1982; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991; Spergel 1984). However, some criminologists (Hagedorn and Macon 1988; Venkatesh 2000; Moore 1991; Kontos, Brotheron, and Barrios 2003; Hallsworth and Young, 2005) take an alternative approach in which criminal involvement is seen as a relatively small element of what defines and distinguishes peer groups and gangs from one another, with social organization, and the meanings of their practices, playing more prominent roles. Taking the latter perspective, I look at gangs within a continuum of street organizations and divide them here into four types—*street peer groups*, *territorial elites*, *entrepreneurial gangs*, and *autonomous ruling regimes*. These types are differentiated by their structure, the type of violence they use, and the targets of their violent control.

The *street peer group* is perhaps the most common type of youth organization throughout the world (McGrellis 2005; Kintrea, Bannister, and Pickering 2011; McAlister, Scaranton, and Haydon 2011). While often lumped together with criminal gangs, street peer groups are characterized not by criminality, which, if it exists at all, can be opportunistic and episodic, or by some unconscious rebellion against dispossession but by their deep attachment to local places. The street peer group is held together by horizontal informal ties, and its violence tends to be spontaneous and situational.

In Russia such groups are ubiquitous. These are typically loose neighborhood networks without hierarchy or leadership. These street societies tend to comprise several friendship groups living in the same block of apartments, or apartment blocks from the same or neighboring streets. The core contingents of these groups are young men between thirteen and seventeen, although they can also involve girls. Small boys—and sometimes girls—from the age of seven or eight ("the little ones") often affiliate themselves to the network, although they are not usually considered real members. Young men leave the world of the streets when drafted into the army at eighteen or at the start of their working lives.[1] They hang out together on the streets in the warmer times of the year and in underground cellars and lofts during winter. They listen to music, go out

1. Pilkington (2002, 123) refers to these organizations as *dvor* groups, from the Russian word for the courtyard of a housing block.

in groups to soccer matches or the movies, and make trips to local parks and to the countryside to enjoy barbeques in the summer or to go skiing in winter. The traditional Russian urban residential pattern—several multistory buildings sharing a courtyard—provides a perfect setting for young men's societies.

Growing up in their street groups, young men develop particular character traits that can be linked to "hegemonic masculinity"—an ability to show toughness, bravery, and to inspire respect and fear (Connell and Messershmidt 2005). These masculine qualities are particularly valued in the volatile world of the streets. In his essay "Where the Action Is" Goffman (1967) showed that on the street, where many fateful situations with uncertain outcomes can occur, the most important qualities are being quick-witted, brave, able to react quickly to provocation and to show confidence, poise, and integrity. These skills are acquired by boys starting at a young age as they grow up playing and fighting outdoors and face the challenges and risks that life on the streets brings. The street requires an ability to take chances, to put oneself on the line, and the "capacity to receive and give injury of both a physical and a verbal kind" (211). These qualities, Goffman noted, are highly praised in the "Western cult of masculinity" (209), and they present a ceremonial backdrop to communal life.

In some ecologies we can observe the presence of territorial groups that take it on themselves to protect the local space against outsiders (mainly young people from other areas). Such groups exist all over Russia as *territorial elites*. These groups often have informal leaders, typically an older youth whose charismatic personality and physical force inspires fear and awe among local adolescents. They may have different age cohorts and "ranks" with their own "soldiers," "lieutenants," "generals," and so on. Despite this appearance of stratification, however, their world remains closer to the world of childhood play than to the world of modern organizations (Katz 1988).

Violence in these groups is ritualized and directed at categorically defined "enemy" groups (residents of neighboring areas and sometimes ethnic and racial "others"). Territorial elites are typically male structures in which young men construct themselves as elite fighters, masters of the local space, defending the territorial order of social relations (Suttles 1968). They develop defensive place-based concerns, which lead to fights with "outsiders" and harassment of "intruders" (Golovin and Lurie 2005; 2008).

Territorial elites tend to emerge in places where individuals have already established strong reputations in their community. Here, as Randall Collins (2008, 332) explained, the fighters use "social technologies of violence," specific forms of self-presentation and conversational devices, to assert their dominance without the need to resort to immediate physical confrontation. Where violence is used, this may take the form of a duel or arranged mass combat.

The emergence of entrenched territorial practices is more likely to occur—in Russia and in the West—in the urban periphery rather than in metropolitan centers (Thrasher 1963 [1927]; Hallsworth 2005; Golovin and Lurie 2008; Kintrea, Bannister, and Pickering 2011). In Russia these tend to be either peripheral areas of large urban settlements or whole territories of small and medium-sized towns. These practices are also present in rural areas.

Research by Russian anthropologists has shown that organized fights between groups of local boys formed a core part of village life at least until the 1960s. Groups of young boys and adolescents collectively defended their street or village against their peers from neighboring areas. Adults sometimes took part in these battles as well. In these territorial fights, participants followed particular rules, such as not to use weapons, not to hit an adversary when he is on the ground, and never to use violence against women, children, or old people. Ritually prescribed arranged fights were an important part of village festive life, often coinciding with weddings and other celebratory events. They were used to test the strength of adversaries and reinforce the solidarity of male peer groups (Kabanov 1928; Bernshtam 1988; Shchepanskaia 2001; Morozov and Sleptsova 2004). With the industrialization and urbanization of Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, mass staged combats between groups of young male workers began to take place in the working-class areas of the rapidly expanding cities. Neuberger (1993, 65) describes gang fights in the outskirts of Saint Petersburg around 1900 in which young men clashed over turf and local girls. They were reported to follow a strict honor code and fight one another only for specific, commonly agreed on reasons. While very little is known about urban gangs in late imperial Russia, in postrevolutionary Russia, gangs of orphaned and abandoned children, roaming the streets and riding trains from town to town in search of food, were more likely to be fighting for survival than engaging in the defense of turf.[2] But in the postwar Soviet Union, territorial fights between rival groups of youths became a common occurrence in industrial towns, where, as Juliane Fürst (2010, 185) explains, loyalty to one's factory or place of living "came to substitute family and village ties."

Even in the late Soviet period, arranged group fights were common in rural and peripheral urban areas, where the first and second generations of urban dwellers had come to live (Zabrianskii 1990, 129–30). Research conducted in many Russian cities and towns (Ul′ianovsk, Ulan-Ude, Murom, Tikhvin, Kirov, and others) reveals the continuing presence of youth territorial elites who

2. On abandoned children in Russia in the 1920s to 1930s and in the post–World War II period, see, e.g., Goldman (1993), Ball (1994), Kelly (2007), and Fürst (2008; 2010).