
Russian Bandit Gangs, their Moral Code and Practices of Violence

S. STEPHENSON*

*Svetlana Stephenson – PhD, Reader in Sociology, London Metropolitan University. Address: 166-220 Holloway Road, London N7 8DB, Great Britain. E-mail: s.stephenson@londonmet.ac.uk

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*This article analyses data from a research project on territorial bandit gangs conducted in Kazan. The project involved 32 interviews with gang members aged between 17 and 35. It addresses the moral rules applied within the gangs and their interaction with the members of mainstream society. The author sees the social organization of the gangs as that of male warrior alliances, of pre-modern associations, where economic, social and emotional ties are tightly interwoven. Using an ethnomethodological approach, the author addresses the system of *poniatii*, the moral rules of the gangs, and outlines the fundamental principles that underlie their members' worldview. The moral obligations created by *poniatii* only apply to the relations between the gang participants, while relations with the non-members are based on predation, exploitation and at best patron-client dependencies. Violence towards non-members is very weakly limited. Outside the specific activities which support the social reproduction of the gang, members can also be part of modern institutions and follow their rules. Gang members are orientated towards double incorporation in legitimate and illegitimate structures and their respective moral orders. The article concludes with some reflections on the parallels between the gang rules and the behaviour of the Russian power elite.*

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The collapse of the Soviet socialist system was accompanied by a resurgence of popular violence. Soviet modernity had largely displaced such violence into communal kitchens, the barracks of army conscripts, prison cells and labour colonies, or on to city streets.

But with the crisis of the state and the cataclysmic transition to market capitalism, the country was plunged into a frightening new reality. Exploiting the situation of general lawlessness, racketeering gangs laid siege to the decaying state and its property, and began extracting tribute from new private companies. Younger members of these gangs were involved in the street extortion and harassment of their non-gang peers, burglaries and theft. Eventually, towards the end of the 1990s, the state seemed to have reasserted much of its authority, while the power of the bandits declined. Nevertheless, gangs have remained entrenched in many areas, such as Kazan, Moscow oblast, Ulyanovsk, Yekaterinburg, Krasnodar region and many other urban and rural settlements.

Although the members of these gangs (“real lads” or bandits, as they refer to themselves) are now far less visible on the streets; mass culture and public discourse in Russia are still permeated by cultural references to the gangs of the 1990s, the time of their meteoric rise. In descriptions of current political developments in Russia, there are frequent references to “the lads” (*patsany*) and their moral rules, the “notions” (*poniatiia*). These references are now being made not to gangs but to the Russian authorities, who are themselves seen as behaving according to the same *poniatiia*, especially when it comes to the neglect of formal law, unconditional loyalty to the members of one’s own power clan, a reliance on the use of force, and the persecution of people who are defined as enemies. For example, making a broad statement about the lack of civility in public life, the Moscow journalist and historian Nikolai Svanidze said: “Politeness, propriety, mild manners, readiness to compromise or to have a discussion are equated with weakness in our country. These are not “lad” qualities” [Larina 2012]. The persistent references to the behaviour and the code of the lads may reflect traditional Russian concerns with the rise of incivility and fragility of culture [Neuberger 1993], and express the feeling among the educated classes that they are confronted by groups who do not share their values, groups to be found both at the bottom and at the top of society.

While people readily talk about “laddish” behaviour, the behaviour based on *poniatiia* remains poorly understood. This is in contrast with the code of Russian professional criminals (*vory v zakone*). This clandestine society, the exotic, tattoo-covered aborigines of the Russian criminal underworld, who are thought to have penetrated the depth and breadth of Russian society and established their outposts in the West, have fascinated many filmmakers, writers of crime fiction, and politicians. There are many descriptions of this code by Russian and Western authors [Likhachev, 1935; Chalidze 1977; Varese 2001]. But this society, born in Soviet prisons, did not fare well in capitalist Russia, and while some of its representatives did prosper, they were largely displaced by more entrepreneurial and flexible bandits [Volkov 2002]. The social orders of these societies are very different, as are their codes of conduct. While the law of the professional criminals reflects the almost continuous imprisonment of its members, with its hierarchically organized prison groups, the bandit code organizes the social relations of members who engage in illicit entrepreneurial activities in the community.

In this article I analyse the data from my research project on territorial bandit gangs conducted in Kazan, the capital of Republic of Tatarstan, in 2005¹. The project

¹ For a description of the project see [Stephenson 2015]. The project team included Alexander Salagaev, Alexander Shashkin and Rustem Safin. I am grateful to Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation for providing the funding for this project.

team conducted 32 in-depth interviews with gang members aged between 17 and 35. These were Russian and Tatar males, who belonged to different gangs (*gruppировки*). The interviews were transcribed, and all the names of participants have been changed. Among the themes we explored in our interviews were the moral rules applied within the gangs and the rules of their interaction with the members of mainstream society.

The article has the following structure. I briefly discuss the history of the Kazan gangs and their social organization, which I see as similar to that of pre-modern male warrior alliances. I then move on to discuss the system of *poniatia*, the moral rules of these alliances, and the fundamental principles that underlie them. I address the regulation of violence towards non-members. I show that while having a strong collective gang conscience, the members are also included into modern institutions and follow their rules. They carefully position themselves vis-à-vis the system of formal and informal power, and their behaviour is orientated towards double incorporation in legitimate and illegitimate structures and their respective moral orders. I conclude with some further reflections on the parallels between the gang rules and the behaviour of the Russian power elite.

A brief history of Kazan gangs

Like many Russian urban (and rural) settlements, Kazan has had long-standing traditions of territorial youth behaviour. For centuries Tatar and Russian young people fought each other over turf and participated in arranged group fights. With the Soviet urbanization and industrialization—when new, ethnically mixed city quarters were built to accommodate migrant workers—youth groups became highly assimilated and no longer fought on ethnic grounds, battling instead against their young neighbours from adjacent courtyards and streets.

The first entrepreneurial youth gangs in the city emerged at the beginning of the 1970s. Their existence was covered up by the police and authorities, who did not want to admit the presence of organized crime and violence in Soviet society, but Kazan gangs gained notoriety in 1978–1980, when, coinciding with the trial of members of the large local gang Tiap-Liap moral panic about youth gangs suddenly gripped the city.

Tiap-Liap emerged out of groups of young people who lived around the local industrial plant Teplokontrol. Initially, they were involved in traditional street pursuits, fights and demonstrations of force in local dance halls and other areas. But eventually Teplokontrol street groups were united into a larger gang alliance called Tiap-Liap. This took place under the leadership of Sergei Antipov, a former local, who came back to the area after having served a term in prison. Antipov oversaw much tighter organization of the gang and encouraged the members to develop various criminal schemes. The move of the gang into entrepreneurialism happened in response to the weakening of state control over the economy. At the time a vast illicit economic market emerged in the Soviet Union, when the managers of Soviet state companies began to develop off-the-book production and distribution of goods [*Grossman* 1977]. Tiap-Liap saw new opportunities in this market and began to provide security for these shadow businesses and help transport illegal produce. The gang also began to engage

into its own racketeering business, targeting the managers of state shops and restaurants who themselves had undeclared black market incomes. Although research here is relatively scarce, there is evidence that similar processes took place in other areas of Russia, for example, in Moscow and Moscow region [Belanovsky 1990; Belanovsky 2009].

Gang entrepreneurialism, which made its first tentative steps in the late Soviet period, began to make large strides at the end of perestroika and during the transition to market capitalism. When the first cooperatives and private businesses emerged in the USSR from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, new and existing gangs sought to lay their hands on their incomes. The first case of racketeering in Kazan was registered in 1988, when the street group Dom Obuvi (lit. House of Shoes, a shoe shop in the vicinity of where they lived) attempted to extort protection money from a builders' cooperative [Safarov 2012, p. 46]. Soon youth gangs set up protection rackets (*kryshy*, lit. roofs) for street markets, kiosks, shops, and cafes in their territories, and gang leaders began to demand tribute from the managers of large food-processing, chemical, banking, telecommunications and other companies [Salagaev 2001; Safarov 2012].

The leaders of Kazan gangs, together with their close associates, very quickly began to move away from their territorial roots and by the beginning of the 1990s had already begun to spread their activities to nearby regions and to Moscow and St Petersburg. They also set up fraudulent operations with foreign companies [Nafikov 2012, p. 177-178]. Apart from large-scale protection rackets, the leaders (*avtoritety*), their associates and their own teams (*brigady*) participated in various illegal schemes of tax evasion and money laundering, often hired by representatives of state organizations and state-controlled companies. They acquired company shares, joined company management boards, and by the late 1990s and early 2000s many of them assimilated into legal business. Gang leaders became company owners, State Duma deputies, and heads of large non-governmental organizations, both in Tatarstan and Moscow. Youth territorial gangs, so called "streets" and their alliances, however, have continued to exist on their local turf, mainly in the peripheral areas of the city. They still provide "roofs" for illegal gaming parlours, set up fictitious companies for money laundering, racketeer taxi and bus companies, control street prostitution, sell drugs and set up illegal street parking lots.

Kazan gangs are multi-ethnic organizations. They include Russians, Tatars and representatives of other local ethnic groups. Membership starts at about 16–17. After the age of 25–30 many members stop actively participating in gang activities and only meet their mates socially, but they still retain their status as gang members. It is possible to leave the gang officially, but this involves a ritual expulsion (a severe collective beating) and sometimes a financial fine. Young people in the gangs are divided into age-based cohorts, with a supervisor (*smotriashchii*). The general leadership of street gangs is performed by the *avtoritety*.

The gang as a warrior alliance

While economic activities are vital for the social reproduction of these gangs, they are best seen not as businesses providing protection [Gambetta 1993; Varese 2001], but

as power institutions: “violence management agencies” [Volkov 2002]. Their social organization is best seen as traditional, pre-state associations rather than modern corporate or army-type entities. Modern gangs coalitions of Vikings, Germanic militant tribes, or ancient Greek colonists who formed their own settlements around the rim of the Mediterranean and raided the prosperous city-states [Collins 2011]. Max Weber called such social forms “patrimonial alliances” [Weber 1978 (1922)]. These bands of warriors assembled for raiding and conquering, shared tribal loyalties, and pseudo-kinship obligations.

Writing about mafia organizations, often seen as criminal corporations [Cressey 1971], Paoli [2004] showed that they instead need to be regarded as quasi-familial associations. Using the Weberian concept of “fraternization contract”, she argued that the Calabrian and Sicilian mafia are not rational-legal businesses but male fraternities. They should not be seen as businesses selling protection services to business, as they largely offer protection against themselves, while at the same time engaging in a multitude of other illegal and legal activities. In a more poetic and philosophical exploration of primitive assemblages, Deleuze and Guattari [1983; 2004] described nomadic warrior forms, bands, packs and clans, as “war machines”. They argued that war machines are organized in non-hierarchical, rhizome-type, structures. They attack the sedentary institutions of the state (particularly where the state is weak), pillage and take tribute from settled populations. War machines are separate from states, but they can coexist and compete with them at the same time. All these quintessentially social conceptions of bands, gangs and mafias as warrior alliances, fraternities, war machines, I would argue, represent a better fit with the social organization of a Russian bandit gangs than purely economic approaches.

From top to bottom, the gang is organized on tribal, quasi-kin lines, rather than on rational business principles. The leaders of the gangs are not heads of business firms. They are dominant males who expertly wield power. Such leaders are strong and cunning rulers, who have unquestioned authority over the members of their alliances. According to the members we interviewed, the main quality of a leader is the ability to demonstrate force. This force should be recognised both inside and outside the gang. Petia (23 years old) expressed the view that “the leader must be a tough and confident person who loves power and is willing to fight for it by any means possible.” Taking a similar view, Nafik (27) said that “the leader should be determined, cunning, fair, and not afraid of anything.” Il’sur (26) suggested that “force is the main quality of a leader—force in everything, in health, in muscles, in intelligence, in connections.” In a gang, the leader has unquestionable familial authority and demands complete loyalty from the gang brotherhood (*bratva*).

Tribal unity was extremely important for the members. They often called their organizations “a school of life”, an ideal society, which was morally superior to the modern urban society in which people live without morality, without law (*poniatiia*), thinking only about their own selfish interests. The gang for them is not just a place where they can make money, not only a shortcut to wealth and power with the help of organized violence. Young men join the gang for a variety of reasons, with economic profit being only one of a complex range of motivations, which include a search for protection and companionship, and a belief that in the gang one can become a “real

man” and acquire authority among one’s peers. The gang is a whole world, in which material and emotional aspects, work and pleasure, routine and heroism, unconditional subordination, and a sense of brotherhood are all tightly interwoven.

Despite the variety of organizational formations, which include territorial, street formations and extra-territorial networks linked to the business of leaders, all these forms combine in a single bandit gang, which is bound by common roots dating back to the late Soviet period, the time when most of the gangs emerged, and usually retains the name of the street or district where it was founded. The social reproduction of the extended clan of the gang is supported not just by the obligatory payments made by territorial gangs into the central fund (*obshchak*), but by common identity, tales about the founding fathers, the glorious past of the group and perceptions of the bonds of fraternity that stretch from top to bottom of the gang. Leaders from time to time come to visit the meetings of the streets, take part in the organization of ritual fights between the gangs and make sure that the streets retain mobilized structures which have a certain power in the territory. They help the gangs with the organization of illegal businesses (using their connections with the local authorities and the police), assist in releasing arrested members from police stations, or help with closing criminal cases. Analysis of the system of *poniatiia* further confirms that we are looking at a warrior alliance rather than a business.

The system of *poniatiia*

Poniatiia create a foundation of social order in the gang. They are more than set of instrumental norms, being a complete worldview. The young men often start acquiring this worldview in the process of their life on the streets, well before they join organized gangs, as they spend their teenage years in courtyard (*dvor*) groups. This worldview gets further consolidated when they join the gang.

Poniatiia embody collective perceptions of the world and how to behave it. In interviews, gang members were saying that they lived according to *poniatiia*. As with any other moral rules, *poniatiia* (which I analyse using an ethnomethodological approach) create the cultural unity among the members of society. These moral rules are not transmitted as an oral tradition (although some specific *poniatiia* are cited as moral maxims, as set formulae, for example “what the lad said, the lad did” or “the lad is always right”). They do not derive from the law of the other organized crime community, thieves in law. They are learned in the process of everyday life in the gang, when the lads observe the behaviour of other members of the group and hear their interpretations of what is right and what is wrong. While there may be some small variation in the specific rules from gang to gang, the fundamental principles are common to all.

According to ethnomethodology, moral rules are not categorical laws. Instead, they reflect an intuitive understanding of the principles of group behaviour. *Poniatiia* are not a list of what the members can or cannot do, but “a schema that produces reality” [Wieder 1974, p. 198].

When talking about the code of *poniatiia*, the members always stressed that there were many more *poniatiia* than were being recounted at the time. None of our interviewees would even attempt to recite the code in its totality. One member, Zhenia (24), when asked to describe the gang's code, said:

It is impossible to describe in a nutshell what you learn over the years. I can say that the *poniatiia* do not exist in some pure form. There is the life of “a lad”, about which you learn by being in this environment. You learn how to behave in specific situations and what you must never do. You can't learn it the same way as we learn things at school. You have to go through it yourself and understand it from within. That is why I can't simply say to you, this is this and this is that. [...] I started understanding the code in my school years, coming across different situations. Some things I understood myself, others I learned from my friends who were more experienced.

Poniatiia are flexible, indexical, and the members thought that almost any behaviour or point of view could be defended if one justified his behaviour by the references to *poniatiia*, if one knows how to “speak properly”.

When talking about *poniatiia*, the members never explained their meaning, but used them as moral maxims (for example, the above mentioned “what the lad said, the lad did”). There are many maxims of this kind, but they are based on a fundamental scheme of perception and behaviour, hidden from the participants. The researcher's task is to reveal this scheme. Without this it becomes very difficult to understand the meaning of specific rules. For example, among *poniatiia* the members cited a prohibition against working as ticket collectors on public transport or selling their old clothes. How can we interpret such prohibitions? Is it because they cannot work in poorly paid occupations or admit material need? And why does one need to fight if one is called a trader (*baryga*)? Is it because members follow the traditional norms of the society of professional criminals, who see trade as a disreputable profession? How can we explain the requirement that members be physically strong or the prohibition on the consumption of drugs? Is this because of the instrumental needs of criminal business, which require that the gang build an effective force to protect its share of the market?

From an analysis of gang members' descriptions of *poniatiia*, it became clear to me that in fact other principles underlay these injunctions. Prohibitions on working as ticket collectors or selling old clothes, and the need to protect one's name if called a trader, derive from the fundamental principle of being a member of the elite and never being equated with “commoners,” whose status is inferior to that of the gang members and who are fodder for the members to live off. The need to be physically fit and avoid consumption of drugs relates to the principle of control and integrity of elite male warriors.

I have set out below my own reconstruction of the gang code, made on the basis of conversations with gang members and their descriptions of *poniatiia*. I list these *poniatiia* under each principle.

Behaving as a Representative of the Elite and Never Being Equated with “Commoners”

Upon meeting members of other gangs, a lad should always introduce himself by his nickname and gang name. If asked “Where are you from?” he should never reply “Nowhere.” He should name his gang. The lad cannot lose face, he cannot run away from his attackers, thus letting down his gang. He cannot fight with non-lads or apologise even if he is in the wrong. A lad should not do anything that would equate him with the dominated categories, non-lads (*lokhi*), usually other young men, and traders and businessmen (*barygi* and *komersy*). He cannot show that he is afraid to fight, be victim of extortion, or suffer humiliation without retaliation. If somebody calls him a non-lad, businessman, or trader, he should respond with violence. A lad cannot be involved in selling anything personally (only through third parties), including drugs. He cannot work in the service sector (this includes being a transport conductor). He cannot sell his own old clothes even if he is in need. A lad is always right. He should always be able to justify his position or opinion on the basis of the code.

Control and Integrity

The lad should keep his cool and behave with dignity. He cannot consume drugs or be addicted to alcohol (younger lads are expected not to smoke either). He should show control over his body and appearance. A lad’s clothes should be practical and comfortable and not too flashy. The lad should be clean and tidy (some gangs even punish youngsters who do not clean their shoes.) The lad needs to “watch his words” (*sledit’ za bazarom*). He should not make empty threats or accusations. One of the rules is “What the lad said, the lad did” (*patsan skazal, patsan sdelal*), meaning that intentions, claims, and promises should have direct and immediate consequences. Lads are not allowed to make frivolous displays of weapons; if they produce a knife or a gun, they should be prepared to use it. If asked a question, a gang member should answer straight away and not respond with a question.

Loyalty to the Gang

The lad’s main loyalty is to the gang. He should always support other members, both from his age cohort and from his street as a whole. He should never expose his friends to danger or betray them to the police. He must strive to prevent any personal conflict, resolve disagreements, and abstain from fighting with other members of the same gang (apart from non-serious, playful fights). He should not deceive or steal from other gang members.

Subordinate Position of Women

Women cannot be members of gangs. No female gangs should be present on the territory controlled by a male gang. Members’ girlfriends are not allowed to attend the gang meetings. Gang business always takes priority over a member’s relationships with women. Members should not get into conflict with other members because of women (except for defending close relatives, such as a mother, sister, or wife). If a lad flirts with another’s girlfriend, one can only ask him to stop but should not fight over it. A lad should control his girlfriend and never allow her to show disrespect to his friends. A gang member is not allowed to perform oral sex on his girlfriend—this would seriously undermine his status as a lad, and, if any of the other gang members learn about it, he can be expelled from the group.

This principle, like all other principles, is applied flexibly. In Russian gangs, particularly in their higher echelons, women can work as hired accountants or lawyers, while the wives of leaders can play more serious roles in running the business of the gang—especially if their husbands are away or incarcerated. But this does not negate the fundamentally male character of these violent fraternities and the profound machismo of their members.

In addition to these substantive prescriptions, there are also procedural norms and norms of fairness, which can be seen as relating to the gang structure and organization. These norms, however, were also recounted as part of the code and thus also have the status of agreed-on moral rules.

Democracy and Procedural Fairness

The lad must show respect to older lads and obey the commands given by the group supervisors and leaders. He must be present at compulsory meetings when decisions are made regarding the gang. He must pay money (up to two thirds of his income) to the general fund. Situations that call for moral adjudication need to be resolved democratically—by the street at a meet-up or by a supervisor. If the supervisor cannot decide, the dispute is resolved by the leader. Lads expect fair treatment from their superiors. The older lads are not supposed to humiliate the younger ones or treat them unfairly.

Social and Ethnic Inclusivity of the Gang

The gang should accept all young men who want to join it if they are ready to live according to *poniatiia* and have a good street reputation (for example, they have never behaved cowardly or succumbed to extortion). Any young men, including those having parents or relatives in the police, can join. Discrimination in recruitment on the grounds of social background or ethnicity is prohibited.

Autonomy outside the Organization

The lad can and should have wide range of social connections outside the gang and use them to benefit the organization. The lad has the right to a private life; he can have a family and property and spend his free time as he wants. He can work wherever he wants to (with the exception of working for the police and in proscribed service and trade occupations) and socialize with anybody outside the gang, including members of other gangs, unless their gang is the enemy of his group. The lad is also free to earn money by committing crime that is unrelated to the gang's business.

Quasi-tribal moral system

From this analysis it is clear that *poniatiia* support the social order of the group as a male militant alliance. The members of the group have to be loyal and show bravery and integrity. While the leaders have unquestionable authority, relations between ordinary members are

based on primitive democracy and the essential equality of warrior brothers. Any differences among them (be they ethnic or social) are not recognized, apart from the differences in age status. Elected supervisors must always justify their decisions on the basis of *poniatiiia*.

Lads adopt a pose of aristocratic superiority in relation to the dominated population (largely their non-gang peers and businessmen), and extract tribute from them by rule of might, and on the basis of their own perceptions of what is right. This form of power relationship was very succinctly characterized by the lads as “To load according to the *poniatiiia* and take away the money” (*zagruzit' po poniatiiiam i razvesti na den'gi*). The lads' demands are not based on some hypothetical social or economic contract. This is power as violence, which demands unconditional obedience rather than consent [Arendt 1972]. *Poniatiiia* are used in order to justify a rent-seeking relationship (“X must pay us because this is our territory”, or “X must pay us if he wants his business to run without hindrance” or “X must pay us because he violated our rules”). A patron-client relationship between businessmen and the gangs may also emerge, whereby the businessmen may be able to use of the gang's social and economic resources for their own purposes. They can, for example, use the bandits' expertise and connections with corrupt authorities for tax evasion, for obtaining information about their competitors, or to get loans. In these situations the gangs provide support to their businessmen not as a part of a contract or a business transaction, but because their own prosperity depends upon the stability of the latter's business. But rather than a contract, what we see here is a bond of personal dependency, a bond based on conventions rather than legal obligations. This bond is only as firm as the gang wants it to be.

There are many accounts of the fickle and volatile nature of gang protection from different geographical areas. In Kazan gang members typically gave the businessmen their cell phone numbers to call in case of trouble, but there was no guarantee that if the latter called them and asked for help anything would be done. If a business was subsequently attacked by hooligans, or something was stolen from the property, the gang was unlikely to come to the owner's aid. Similarly, in Saint Petersburg, the bandits' protection did not provide any actual insurance against serious crime, such as robbery, assaults, car thefts, or burglaries [Konstantinov 2004]. Protection of street businesses in Perm was likewise unreliable, and Varese gave examples in which racketeers did not answer the phone when their clients called for help, refused to retrieve stolen goods, committed fraud against a kiosk owner who paid for protection, or switched to another “customer” and turned against the earlier customer with deadly consequences [Varese 2001, pp. 110–120]. For criminals living by the code, reneging on one's word, deceiving, and even robbing “their” businessmen is entirely legitimate. According to the code, bandits only have moral obligations to one another and can cheat outsiders (*kidat' lokhov*) with impunity. Stories of successful deceit were always recounted with great animation and pride. At the same time, outsiders who had entered a position of dependency had iron-clad obligations toward the gangsters.

The limits of violence

The moral rules of the tribe do not extend to outsiders. The gang world is not a world of universal or even traditional patriarchal morality. Only extreme violence toward

businessmen or civilians—particularly old people, women, and children—gets condemned by the gang as a violation of the rules (*bespredel*). Such violence undermines the self-assumed aristocratic status of the group members. Nevertheless, we heard many descriptions of behaviour that the members described as *bespredel*, explained away by as behaviour inspired by “adrenalin”, when they could not stop themselves, or by the fact that the victims themselves violated *poniatiia*, even inadvertently. Some of the lads were more prone to violence, some were less, but the possibility of its use was always present.

As Bogdan (23) said: “To say definitively who you can or cannot beat up [someone] is impossible. Everything depends on the situation. I’ve used violence against those older than me, and those younger, but there was always something to punish them for, so I don’t consider myself an *otmorozok* [a person who does not follow the code] for doing it.”

Kirill (25) expressed less aggressive but still very flexible views on the limits on violence and means of conflict resolution: “I prefer to resolve issues peacefully, without bloodshed, even though we can come and grind everybody into dust at any time. You have to know how to find the right solution, make mutual concessions. But even more I prefer to put people into situations where they are wrong according to the code.”

Ultimately, the limits on violence are imposed by the group itself. At the same time any violence, it seems, needs moral justification, and the lads usually find that the victim is to blame for violence, provoking the lads by their inappropriate behaviour, by a lack of understanding or by a deliberate violation of their own rules.

In encounters with the outside world, members’ constructions of right and wrong have to work in their own favour. The lads, just like warriors in the Homeric epics or the heroes of ancient Greek tragedy, are not supposed to feel guilty about what they do to outsiders. As Yarkho argued, only dishonour and public shame could cause the hero moral suffering [Yarkho 1972]. They did not have an understanding of universal morality which emerged later in Christian culture. The same is true of gang warriors. When it comes to gang life and gang business, they can lie to outsiders, cheat, abuse, and, if necessary, kill them, with very few self-imposed limitations. Nevertheless, they think that without them society would have descended into total chaos. As one Kazan lad, Aidar (24) answering the question whether he likes Kazan, said, “I like our city because we have many correct people [a *pravil’nyi chelovek* or *pravil’nyi patsan*, a person or lad who lives by the code] here compared with Moscow, where there are lots of people who live in *bespredel*, who do not give a damn. Many people here follow the code, and we do not have the same mess as other cities.”

Pragmatism of life, pragmatism of violence

A sense of moral superiority over other residents, which can be traced to the members’ identity as members of a consolidated solidaristic group, co-exists with a pragmatic individualistic attitude to life. The lads are members of a militant clan, mobilized and disciplined, but each of them has many other interests that stretch way beyond their gang. They are part of wider Russian society, and they want to achieve success by any possible

means, including through legal institutions (study or work) and illegal ones (structures of the gang). In their double spiral of mobility, the criminal and legal parts are tightly interwoven. The lads believed that membership of a criminal gang does not preclude social success. On the contrary, it facilitates it, providing access to highly beneficial connections and opportunities.

The lads were highly pragmatic when it came to their behaviour outside the gang. They were ready to play by the rules of the modern institutions of school, university and work. Most of the members we interviewed worked or studied, or did both. Some had manual jobs in construction sites and industrial companies, others worked as company managers, or held official positions in security companies, and one was a paediatric surgeon (a relatively low paid position in Russia which may explain his choice to stay in the gang). The members recounted stories about how they themselves or their gang friends tried to make a political career, participated in meetings of political parties (including the pro-Putin United Russia). In the interviews they often expressed patriotic views about Russia and condemned those nations that were, in their opinions, hostile to Russia (in those days mainly the Baltic countries and America). Some expressed their support for Vladimir Putin, being especially appreciative of his stance in relation to people and governments who challenge Russian interests. Not long before our interviews an incident took place in which the children of Russian Embassy workers were assaulted in a Warsaw park. Putin immediately condemned this assault as an unfriendly act towards Russia as a state, after which several Poles were attacked in Moscow (allegedly by members of the pro-Putin youth organization “Nashi”). As Il’sur (26) said: “I like Putin because I like his harsh policies for improving Russia’s image. The incident with the beating of the ambassador’s children in Poland and the reprisals is just a classic revenge fight (*obratka*). Putin has shown that he’s not going to take any crap from anyone. That sort of guy gets respect, both on the street level and in international relations.”

It would have been impossible to hear such an opinion from members of the professional criminal community, who defined themselves through total opposition to the authorities. But the lads are not alienated from the state. On the contrary, they aspire to having the widest possible social circle outside the gang, and particularly value contacts with people who have formal power. The lads were very proud of any family or neighbourhood ties with people serving in the police, in various state security services, and other representatives of state power. While it is absolutely prohibited to inform on one’s gang mates, informal connections with the agents of power can help in the members’ business, help them to avoid criminal prosecution and help to protect them in various situations of conflict. Having a relative in the police could even help a member to leave a gang if he wanted without going through a ritual of public expulsion.

While always happy to use violence against weak and disorganized victims, the members were full of respect towards those who had, to use their expression, “some power behind them”. Stories about various assaults and extortions often include an exposition in which they try to investigate the position of the potential victim in the local structure of formal and informal power. Meeting a victim in the street, for example, they may start conversation by asking him where he is from, which influential local people he may know, and even whether he takes part in sports. If they see that a

person has friends or family who can come to his defence, the lads can end the situation peacefully (although in some situations, particularly with younger lads, the desire for a fight, a seductive pleasure which they define as “adrenalin”, can still get the better of them). Although they aim to control violence both on the basis of their *poniatiia* and through pragmatic investigation of the balance of force, ultimately violence can never be effectively contained or ritualized; it always overflows [Girard 2005].

Conclusion

Concluding the analysis of the gang’s organization and moral code, we can say that the gangs form warrior groups in their communities. They seek domination over businessmen and civilians on their territories, domination which allows them to extract rent. They share a sense of moral superiority in relation to weak and disorganized enemies or opponents, while at the same time leaving themselves opportunities to always act in accordance with their own pragmatic interests. They believe in the need to defend their own, while assuming no moral obligations in relation to outsiders, the successful deception of whom is seen as a matter of special pride. They go wherever money and recognition can be found; they make no distinction between criminal and legal avenues.

We can find many similarities between the behaviour of gang members and that of the Russian power elite. The post-Soviet political regimes and systems of governance are often described as neopatrimonial, where public institutions are run for the private interest of the power holders [Robinson 2011; Fisun 2012]. As Gelman [2015, p. 11] argues, “the state apparatus within the “power vertical” is divided into organised structures and informal cliques that compete with each other for access to rent”. In this system of power, positions of authority and business opportunities are inseparable, as are legal and illegal ways of making money. Tax and custom duty evasion, money laundering, unlawful monopolization of sections of the market—all these practices are present both in the business of power holders, and in the business of criminal networks.

As the bandits have withdrawn into the shadows of Russian society, they have remained archetypal figures in the collective imagination. It is likely that their *poniatiia* will continue to provide the perfect way to describe the continuing prevalence of patrimonial relations that coexist with modern bureaucratic authority in Russia.

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Российские преступные группировки, их моральный кодекс и практики насилия

С. СТИВЕНСОН*

*Стивенсон Светлана – кандидат социологических наук, доцент, London Metropolitan University.
Адрес: 166-220 Holloway Road, London N7 8DB, Great Britain. E-mail: s.stephenson@londonmet.ac.uk

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Ключевые слова: российские уличные группировки, организованная преступность, неформальные правовые системы, маскулинность, насилие, городская социология

Крушение СССР вызвало кардинальное изменение в практиках насилия, когда в ситуации фактического беззакония, в которое погрузилась страна, рэкетеры начали взимать поборы с предпринимателей и частных предприятий. К концу 1990-х гг. государство вернуло себе значительную часть монополии на власть, и влияние криминалитета пошло на убыль. Однако в некоторых регионах (Казань, Ульяновск, Екатеринбург и др.) территориальные группировки частично сохранили свой авторитет. В целом же в России и массовая культура, и общественный дискурс до сих пор пронизаны ссылками на «реальных пацанов». Оппозиционно настроенная интеллигенция, комментируя текущую политическую ситуацию в стране, часто говорит о «пацанах» с их системой «понятий», и речь идет не о криминалитете, а о российской власти, ведущей себя «по понятиям».

Однако при многочисленных отсылках к этой теме сам моральный свод правил бандитов, их «понятия» остаются слабо изученным. Гораздо больше мы осведомлены о кодексе чести профессиональных преступников – воров в законе, однако последние, будучи порождением советских тюрем, не слишком хорошо адаптировались к капиталистическим реалиям, и их оттеснили более предприимчивые и гибкие представители криминальной среды в основном неуголовного происхождения.

Статья написана на материалах полевого исследования, проведенного в 2005 г. в столице Татарстана Казани. Было собрано 32 углубленных интервью с членами различных бандитских группировок в возрасте от 17 до 35 лет. На основе этих интервью были выявлены моральные принципы, которыми руководствуются преступники во взаимодействии друг с другом и с остальным обществом.

В статье изложена история казанских группировок и описана их социальная организация, построенная по принципам традиционных воинских союзов. Также обсуждаются «понятия», моральные правила этих союзов и фундаментальные принципы, лежащие в их основе. В статье показано, что молодые люди, члены криминальных сообществ, могут быть включены одновременно в формальные и неформальные структуры общества. В заключении проводятся некоторые параллели между правилами преступных группировок и установками российской властной элиты.

Краткая история казанских группировок

Криминальные группировки Казани возникли главным образом из молодежных сообществ. Как и во многих российских городах, в Казани до революции 1917 г. существовала давняя традиция деления городской территории на «свои» и «чужие» зоны, результатом которой становились периодически проводимые ритуальные бои между представителями татарской и русской молодежи. Однако советская ускоренная урбанизация привела к возникновению этнически смешанных рабочих кварталов, что положило конец делению молодежных сообществ по национальному признаку.

Первые молодежные банды предпринимательского толка образовались в начале 1970-х гг., когда возникший подпольный бизнес советских менеджеров привлек часть существующих молодежных групп к обеспечению безопасности их теневых схем и транспортировке нелегально произведенных товаров. Приняв постепенно более структурированный характер, эти сообщества занялись рэкетом, собирая дань с работников кафе, магазинов и других представителей советской сферы обслуживания. Преступные организации, зародившиеся еще при советской власти, активизировались в годы перестройки вместе с возникновением в конце 1980 – начале 1990-х гг. кооперативов и частного бизнеса². Вскоре появилось множество новых молодежных банд, «крышующих» мелкий бизнес, а потом и крупные предприятия.

Довольно быстро казанские группировки распространили свое влияние на близлежащие регионы, затем на обе столицы и даже вышли за рубеж. Кроме охранного рэкета они участвовали в нелегальных схемах по отмыванию денег с участием представителей государственных организаций. Со временем, к концу 1990-х – началу 2000-х гг., верхушка казанского криминального сообщества (посредством приобретения акций и проникновения в советы директоров пред-

² Первый случай рэкета в Казани был зафиксирован в 1988 г.

приятый) интегрировалась в легальный бизнес, вошла в депутатский корпус Государственной Думы и руководство неправительственных организаций в Татарстане и Москве. Но этот путь преодолели не все: некоторые группировки остались на уровне уличных банд, промышляя «крышеванием» нелегальных игровых салонов, проституции, наркоторговли, устройством нелегальных платных парковок и обналичиванием нелегальных доходов.

Система «понятий»

По типу социальной организации преступные группировки схожи с традиционными объединениями воинов догосударственного типа, аналогичными викингам, германским воинственным племенам или античным греческим колонизаторам, основавшим свои поселения на берегах Средиземноморья и совершавшим набеги на близлежащие территории. По терминологии М. Вебера, речь идет о «патримониальных альянсах» – мужских квазиродственных союзах, которые организовывались для захвата территории и сбора дани.

Члены этих отрядов были объединены определенным мировоззрением, что же касается современных бандитов, то их идеология описывается на языке «понятий», которые выражают коллективные представления членов группы о мире и правилах поведения.

Говоря о «понятиях», участники преступных сообществ никогда не объясняли их значение, апеллируя к ним как к моральным максимам, основанным на фундаментальной схеме восприятия действительности. Эта схема содержит восприятие себя и поведение в качестве членов аристократической группы, статус которых принципиально выше статуса нечленов группировки. Они должны следить за речью и телом, вести себя сдержанно и решительно, отвечать за свои слова и поддерживать единство группы. Их отношения основаны на примитивной демократии и равенстве членов воинского братства (при безусловной лояльности лидерам). В этой среде не признаются никакие различия (этнические, социальные), кроме различий в возрасте. Мачистское отношение к женщинам определяет, в частности, запрет последним состоять в группировках или создавать свои криминальные сообщества на территории, контролируемой бандой.

Аристократический статус членов воинского альянса предполагает их право на взимание поборов с бизнесменов и сверстников-непацанов, при этом дань с населения основана не на гипотетическом экономическом или социальном контракте, а на силе, которая требует безусловного подчинения. Между криминальными элементами и бизнесменами могут возникнуть патрон-клиентские отношения, и в этом случае последние используют социальные и экономические ресурсы группировок в своих целях: например, могут задействовать контакты с коррумпированными представителями государственных органов с целью ухода от налогов, для получения банковских кредитов или информации о конкурентах и т.д. Но и в этой ситуации бандиты обеспечивают поддержку предпринимателей не в силу контракта между ними, а по причине зависимости своего процветания от поло-

жения дел в подчиненном им бизнесе. При этом и в Казани, и в других регионах страны защита, предоставляемая преступными организациями, является крайне ненадежной, и исследователи выявляют большое количество случаев, когда бандиты нарушали слово, грабили «своего» бизнесмена и отнимали у него бизнес. Такое поведение было полностью легитимно с точки зрения криминального мировоззрения, поскольку их моральные обязательства действовали только по отношению друг к другу. Истории успешного обмана («развода») пересказывались представителями бандгрупп в интервью с особым воодушевлением и гордостью.

Пределы насилия

У «реальных пацанов» почти полностью отсутствуют самоограничения в применении насилия, хотя риторически они и ссылались на так называемый беспредел. Случаи, когда криминал применял чрезмерный прессинг по отношению к бизнесменам или гражданским лицам, часто объяснялись так называемым адреналином, невозможностью остановиться и отказать себе в удовольствии подавления воли другого человека. Другим объяснением служили нарушение жертвой бандитских «понятий», неуважение, проявленное к бандиту, или отказ согласиться с его требованиями. При этом сами представители группировок считают свою организацию, в отличие от окружающего их городского общества, высокоморальным сообществом и полагают, что без них мир погрузился бы в полный хаос.

Прагматика жизни и насилия

Бойцы отрядов криминальной молодежи, наряду с членством в группировках, работают, учатся и делают карьеры в частном и государственном секторах. «По понятиям» – это их право. Хотя среди представителей группировок часто встречаются полностью маргинализованные лица, для которых криминальная карьера представляется единственной возможностью выжить и продвинуться в жизни, некоторые идут вверх по двойной спирали мобильности, участвуя в легальных и нелегальных институтах. Более того, их взгляды, не связанные с криминальной деятельностью, не отличаются от массовых политических настроений. Многие называют себя патриотами, клеймят враждебные, по их мнению, нации и хвалят Владимира Путина за его умение отвечать насилием на провокации. Они считают, что Путин – «правильный человек» (человек, который живет «по понятиям»). Здесь можно наблюдать радикальное отличие бандитов от воров в законе, которые в целом находятся в антагонистическом отношении к государству.

Члены территориальных бандитских группировок пытаются приспособиться к существующему балансу власти на территории и выстроить максимально широкие контакты, особенно с представителями полиции и других силовых структур. Доносить на членов группировки во властные органы категорически запреще-

но, но неформальные (соседские, родственные) связи с представителями власти приветствуются, поскольку эти взаимоотношения, выходящие за рамки того, что обычно воспринимается как коррупция, могут оказаться полезными для бизнеса группировки и помочь ее членам избежать уголовного преследования, защитить в конфликтных ситуациях.

Выводы

«Реальные пацаны», составляя сплоченные боевые кланы, пытаются создать систему господства на своих территориях, которая позволяла бы им собирать дань с бизнесменов и, если речь идет о молодых членах сообщества, с их беззащитных сверстников-непацанов. Они верят в свое моральное превосходство над слабыми и неорганизованными жертвами, при этом оставляя за собой право действовать в соответствии с собственными прагматическими интересами. Представители молодежных бригад считают себя обязанными защищать членов своего клана, допуская обман и насилие по отношению к тем, кто не входит в их братство. Они стремятся к деньгам и власти, не делая особых различий между криминальными и легальными способами их достижения.

Можно провести определенные параллели между поведением лиц, входящих в группировки, и деятельностью российской элиты. Многие исследователи рассматривают постсоветские политические режимы как «неопатримониальные», где организованные структуры и частные группировки соперничают друг с другом за доступ к ренте. В такой системе власть и собственность, легальные и нелегальные способы аккумуляции капиталов неразличимы. Власть предрержащие демонстрируют безусловную лояльность к членам своих кланов, опору на применение силы по отношению к тем, кто представляет угрозу их политическому и экономическому господству. Пока такое положение дел будет сохраняться, язык «понятий» останется одним из наиболее адекватных способов описания российской политической действительности.

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