

Uzbek Migrants' Everyday Encounters with Street-Level Institutions

Between January and May of 2019 I conducted five months of intensive ethnographic fieldwork in Kumkapi, probably the most ethnically and culturally diverse quarter of the Fatih district in Istanbul, Turkey. Until recently, Kumkapi was known as the center of the Armenian community, home to the seat of the Armenian Patriarchate. But, recently, Kumkapi became a predominantly Uzbek quarter, where thousands of Uzbek migrant workers reside and work. Kumkapi, in the words of many Uzbek migrants I encountered there, is an “Uzbek *mahalla*,” where almost everyone, even local Turks and Kurds, speak and understand the Uzbek language. Walking through the streets of Kumkapi, one can find dozens of cafés and restaurants serving Uzbek food, numerous cargo companies that ship clothes to Uzbekistan, many clothing stores and stalls selling fashions suitable to Uzbek culture, and even *nos* (Uzbek snuff) sold by a local Uzbek-speaking Turk. This recent transformation of (predominantly Armenian) Kumkapi into an Uzbek *mahalla* can be explained by the introduction of the draconian entry-ban legislation enacted in Russia in 2013 and 2014, which compelled many entry-banned Uzbek migrants to reorient their migration destination from Russia to Turkey. Uzbeks can travel visa-free, and they can work and reside informally in Turkey without any immigration papers. As such, more than 90 percent of the migrants I met during my fieldwork possessed neither a residence permit (*oturma izni*) nor a work permit (*çalışma izni*), meaning informal residence and employment was a way of life for many Uzbek migrants in Istanbul. Unlike in Russia, where (undocumented) migrants frequently pay bribes to Russian police officers, Uzbek migrants in Istanbul suffered less from police corruption and enjoyed relatively unimpeded mobility in the city given Turkish authorities’ tacit acceptance of cheap and legally unprotected migrant labor. Thus, the Turkish migrant labor market seemed like a good

alternative to the ever-tightening Russian migration regime, allowing many entry-banned Uzbek migrants to continue supporting their families.

Despite this relatively liberal migration regime, however, many of the Uzbek migrants I interviewed in Istanbul were nostalgic for their Russian migration experiences and planned to return to Russia as soon as their entry ban expired. When I asked migrants to explain why they preferred the Russian migrant labor market to Turkey's, they stated that in Russia they had more control over their working conditions and could take some action when faced with the uncertainties and risks of informal employment. In particular, one of my interviewees, Sherzod, commented that in Moscow one may turn to the "street world" to recover money if s/he experiences problems getting paid for work. In Istanbul, however, such street-based mechanisms do not exist, leaving migrants vulnerable to the whims of dishonest Turkish employers and intermediaries. When referring to the "street world," Sherzod actually referred to protection racketeers in Moscow, individuals such as those we met in the previous chapter, whom migrants approached when they experienced problems related to enforcing contractual obligations related to informal employment.

I suspect these Istanbul experiences confirmed many of my earlier observations about the role of "street-level institutions" in the Russian migration regime. During my fieldwork in Moscow (January 2014–August 2018), I noticed that many Uzbek migrants approached protection racketeers, asking them to "solve questions" (*reshat voprosy*). Migrants interchangeably utilized the terms *reket* and *razborshik* to refer to protection racketeering groups who provided an alternative (to the state) justice, contract enforcement, and dispute settlement through threats and violence. The demand for protection racketeers' services was particularly high in sectors such as bazaars, construction, agriculture, and the informal document markets (e.g., Moscow's Kazansky railway station). Quite often, migrants asked Chechen racketeers to recover their money (typically their salary) from employers and middlemen, offering 20 percent of the total sum of money collected as payment for such services. Chechen racketeers were known as the informal street judges among migrants. In addition, I learned about several instances in which Russian police officers acted on an informal basis as protection racketeers in the migrant labor market, offering salary recovery and physical protection (from other extortion rackets and bandits) for a fee.

As part of my fieldwork in Moscow, I approached 100 Central Asian migrant workers in July and August of 2015, asking the following question (among 90 other questions): "What measures would you take to recover payment if you had not been paid for your work?" In total, 42 percent of respondents stated that they would seek redress from protection racketeers if they experienced problems getting paid for their work. Another 15 percent said that they might seek redress via formal legal institutions, although they were not confident that this strategy would solve their problem given their noncitizen status. Another 43 percent believed

that migrants cannot do anything to claim payment for their work since many of them are without documents and work illegally without a written employment contract. Accordingly, the level of trust in formal legal institutions remained quite low among the migrants I interviewed. Thus, nearly half believed that protection racketeers were useful for addressing their problems, as shown in the following explanation proffered by one respondent:

The laws of the state are unjust and often punish innocent people. If you have money, you can easily bend state laws. But things are well-regulated on the street. Street law is fairer and more just than state law. The main aim of state law is to punish people, but street law is fair and makes a distinction between innocent and guilty people. Money cannot buy everything on the street, but you also need to comply with *erkakchilik* [manliness] rules and keep your word. Therefore, you find more justice and order on the streets than in state institutions. If you are honest and keep your word, the laws of the street will protect you, but if you swindle and exploit people, you cannot escape punishment, even if you have money. (Botir, 36, male, Uzbek migrant worker)

This example may be interpreted as not only a consequence of poorly implemented policies and a weak rule of law but also as a reflection of the existence of plural legal orders in the Russian migrant labor market. An extensive literature demonstrates the various dysfunctionalities of the Russian legal system (Humphrey and Sneath 2004; Ledeneva 2009; Gans-Morse 2012; Hendley 2012). In this respect migration laws are simply part and parcel of the weak rule-of-law environment in Russia (Gel'man 2004; Ledeneva 2013), which is characterized by the prevalence of informal rules and norms governing formal institutions. Under these circumstances we can assume that migrants do not deal with the rule of law but rather invent various tactics and strategies to organize their working lives and to seek redress for their problems. Since many migrants work informally and violate Russian labor laws, employers and intermediaries understand that no state body will enforce contracts and, therefore, have a penchant for swindling migrants. According to Russian legislation, transactions completed in the shadow economy—that is, beyond labor regulations and tax codes—cannot be heard in state courts. Moreover, migrants working in the informal sector are reluctant to seek legal protection from state institutions because they might be further punished by the state for working without an employment contract. Because of their inability to access formal institutions, migrants increasingly rely on street-level institutions such as protection racketeers to enforce contractual obligations in the (informal) migrant labor market.

This chapter explores the interconnections of the migrant labor market, the shadow economy, and street-level institutions and their implications for migrants' everyday working lives and legal adaptation strategies. I investigate these issues through the ethnographic study of the everyday lives and experiences of Uzbek migrant workers in Moscow, carried out between January 2014 and August 2018. Before proceeding to the empirical data, in the next section I review the

literature on protection racketeering in post-Soviet Russia. This review provides the contextual information and defines key terms necessary for understanding the empirical material.

PROTECTION RACKETEERS AND THE STREET WORLD IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

An extensive literature exists on private protections (Buchanan 1980; Gambetta 1993; Fiorentini and Peltzman 1995; Asmundo and Lisciandra 2008). Gambetta's study on private protection in southern Italy has been particularly influential, a study in which he defined the Mafia as a "specific economic enterprise, an industry which produces, promotes, and sells private protection" (1993, 3). Russia has also received much attention through a wide array of research on private protections (Handelman 1995; Aslund 1997; Frisby 1998; Humphrey 1999; Frye and Zhuravskaya 2000; Skoblikov 2001; Frye 2002; Volkov 2002). The emergence of private protection in Russia coincides largely with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the ensuing chaos and institutional vacuum of the early 1990s, which compelled many Russian businesses to rely on criminal protection racketeering groups to provide alternative means of contract enforcement and dispute settlement (Gans-Morse 2012). Therefore, much of the scholarly literature on private protection in Russia tends to focus on developments in the 1990s, when under Yeltsin's leadership the Russian state weakened and lost its ability to ensure law and order. This, in turn, led to the emergence of protection racketeering groups that provided security, contract enforcement, debt recovery, and dispute settlement through threats and violence. In post-Soviet Russia, as Volkov (2002) describes, the transition from a state-controlled economy to a free market (e.g., the liberalization of prices and the privatization of assets) was quickly accomplished without adequate effort to establish efficient state institutions aimed at protecting private property. State institutions were simply inefficient in debt recovery and contract enforcement, subsequently producing a high demand from private businesses seeking alternative structures for enforcement and protection.

Another factor contributing to the proliferation of protection racketeering lies in the reforms of the state security and law-enforcement structures in the 1990s. These reforms aimed to diminish the power of law-enforcement structures by decentralizing and reducing their number of personnel (Volkov 2000). Such changes led many discharged security and law-enforcement officers to seek alternative employment in the "protection racket industry," where they discovered a way to convert their skills into a marketable asset. Volkov (2002) refers to such private protection structures as "violent entrepreneurs" or individuals who offered an "enforcement partnership," what became known in colloquial Russian as a *krysha* (literally, the Russian word for "roof" in relation to the protection racketeers provide to businesses). The types of protection racketeering groups consisted of the following:

(a) units of discharged police and security officers acting as protection racketeers, (b) nonstate and legal private protection companies, and (c) organized criminal and bandit groups. As Volkov (2000) notes, in the 1990s up to 70 percent of all business contracts were enforced by protection racketeers, without involving formal state institutions. Thus, protection racketeering groups were viewed as more efficient than state law-enforcement bodies in solving the day-to-day problems faced by Russian businesses (Frisby 1998, Volkov 1999, Frye and Zhuravskaya 2000).

A review of the literature indicates that “the era of racketeering” ended with the 1990s in most Russian regions (Hendley, Murrell, and Ryterman 2000, 2001; Gel'man 2004; Volkov 2004; Gans-Morse 2012). The bulk of these studies showed a dramatic decline in the use of protection racketeers, and firms began to rely extensively on formal legal institutions and lawyers to resolve problems. In Skocpol's words, “the state was being brought back in” with the onset of Vladimir Putin's regime in Russia. Hence, the restoration of a strong state has become the distinctive feature of the post-2000 period in Russian politics and a major slogan of Putin's presidency (quoted in Gel'man 2004). As Gel'man (2004) notes, soon after Putin became president, agents of “state capture” were peripheralized, “oligarchs” lost their control over the political agenda, regional governors were subordinated to the center, and criminal protection racketeers were marginalized. Yet studies illustrate how that return to a strong state did not lead to the emergence of a rule-of-law environment in Russia; rather, state institutions turned into powerful tools of manipulation, and attacks and threats by high- and low-level state officials directed at property rights have become the dominant feature of everyday business life in Russia (Volkov 2004; Gans-Morse 2012). Understandably, issues such as corruption, kleptocracy, informal institutions, the unrul of law, and authoritarianism have become fashionable topics of research for scholars studying Putin's Russia (see, e.g., Gel'man 2004; Ledeneva 2009; Humphrey 2012; Morris and Polese 2015a). Research focusing on protection racketeers has significantly declined in the last decade.

Based on my ethnographic study of Uzbek migrants' daily experiences in Moscow, I argue that protection racketeers remain a salient feature of the Russian sociolegal environment. Protection racketeers are particularly visible in the informal migrant labor market, providing alternative means to enforce contracts, recover debt, and settle disputes for migrants, whose access to the formal legal system is constrained by multiple structural barriers. Two types of protection racketeers are quite common in the migrant labor market: Chechen and Dagestani protection racketeering groups and (former) police and security service officers acting as protection racketeers. Even though the Chechens and Dagestani are more visible, other ethnic groups such as Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and emerging Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik groups are also active in the street world. Despite these differences, the main functions of these groups consist of security, risk control, debt recovery, and dispute settlement. A review of existing scholarly literature

indicates that there is a lack of research on the relationships among protection racketeers, migrant workers, employers, and intermediaries in the Russian migrant labor market. Existing research on the Russian migration regime focuses on push-and-pull factors of migration (Denisenko 2017); difficult living and working conditions among migrants (Round and Kuznetsova 2016); immigration laws and practices (Kubal 2016b); racism, xenophobia, and the exclusion of migrants (Agadjanian, Menjivar, and Zotova 2017); corruption and migration governance (Schenk 2018); the health status of migrants (Weine et al. 2013); the political economy of housing and migrants' everyday lives (Reeves 2016); female migrants' experiences (Tyuryukanova 2011); migrant illegality and the shadow economy (Heusala and Aitamurto 2016); the social and cultural adaptation of migrants (Mukomel 2013); migrant religiosity and the role of Islam in migrants' everyday lives (Aitamurto 2016); the Eurasian Economic Union and its impact on labor migration (Schenk 2017); the radicalization of migrants (Tucker 2015); transnational practices and the livelihoods of migrants (Urinboyev 2018a); and family migration (Nikiforova and Brednikova 2018). In this chapter I move beyond the existing research by reorienting the focus from "traditional migration research topics" to more hidden and difficult-to-access arenas, thereby providing a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the Russian migrant labor market "in action." That is, I provide an in-depth investigation of interpretations, experiences, and behaviors among migrants when they try to seek "law and justice" through street-level institutions.

MIGRANT LABOR MARKET AND THE STREET WORLD

The Russian migrant labor market can be viewed as a small "state within a state" or a parallel legal order with its own informal networks of power, hierarchies, division of labor, and enforcement mechanisms. The role of ethnic cleavages remains crucial in these informal power relationships. Migrants from Azerbaijan and Armenia are well-established and occupy managerial positions in the migrant labor market. This stems from the fact that Armenian and Azerbaijani migrants came to Russia during Soviet times and established a strong position in the Russian migrant labor market. Bazaars in large Russian cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg are controlled by Azerbaijani migrants, while the construction sector is largely dominated by Armenian migrants. Central Asian migrants, who arrived in Russia relatively late in the 1990s and early 2000s, occupy a weaker position and are often employed by Armenian or Azerbaijani employers. Because many of these employment relationships occur informally (that is, outside labor and tax regulations), Azerbaijani and Armenian employers often withhold or delay Central Asian migrants' salaries. Even if migrants possess the required work documents, finding employers willing to employ them legally and pay the required employment taxes remains quite difficult. Given the absence of formal employment relationships, it is already common knowledge that many migrants are cheated and do not get paid for their work.

Under these circumstances Central Asian migrants frequently approached Chechens and Dagestanis, who act as *qozi* (a *qadi* or a judge) in the street world, providing contract enforcement and dispute resolution services for a fee. Chechens and Dagestanis (both citizens of the Russian Federation) enjoy a reputation as violent *bespredely* (limitless or lawless individuals) in the street world and act as a *reket/razborshik* (racketeer) in the migrant labor market. They are physically fit, skilled in the use of weapons, and some have a criminal record given their past violent behavior. The need for protection racketeers is particularly high in the construction sector, an industry with a high concentration of undocumented migrants and where salaries are frequently left unpaid. A prominent migrant rights activist in Moscow reported that at least 20 percent of Central Asian migrants have had some relationship with protection racketeers.¹ While protection racketeers are viewed as an element of the criminal world, for Central Asian migrants in Russia who operate outside the formal legal system, seeking redress through protection racketeers represents a rational strategy. As Malakhov (2014) noted, the criminal world sometimes acts in positive ways, “covering” migrants in cases when they experience problems with contract enforcement or getting paid for their work. A recent video report by Ozodlik/Radio Free Europe Uzbek Service highlights the role of protection racketeers in the recovery of salaries, where one manager of a cleaning company, who owed Uzbek migrants 150,000 rubles (US\$2,250), was forced to pay 75 percent of the migrants’ salaries after interference from *turmadagi zeklar*—that is, racketeers serving prison sentences (Ozodlik Radiosi 2018).

We must note, however, that protection racketeering groups may also act as extortionists. As reported by Ozodlik Radiosi/Radio Free Europe Uzbek Service (2015), in Ulan Ude, the capital city of the Republic of Buryatia (Russia), a group of Uzbek migrants declared themselves the *smotriashiy* (criminal authority) and demanded a monthly protection fee from Uzbek migrants working in Ulan Ude. This group regularly visited Uzbek migrants’ workplaces, mediated in conflicts between migrants even if not requested to do so, and imposed *razborka* (show-down or final settlement) fees on migrants. Migrants who did not pay were beaten or blackmailed with threats of deportation since many migrants worked illegally. When demanding a fee from migrants, an Uzbek criminal group stated that a large portion of the money generated from migrants was distributed to the *obshak* (a mutual assistance fund among the criminal community) in prison, where their fellow Uzbek criminal authorities were serving prison sentences. This criminal group was eliminated following a special operation carried out by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB).

Russian *siloviki* (security service officers) also constitute a key collective in the migrant labor market. Until recently, many bazaars and construction sites were controlled primarily by Azerbaijani and Armenian businessmen. In the last 10 years, however, 14 markets or bazaars were closed in Moscow by the *siloviki*. The closure of markets resulted from a “fight against contraband, crime, and drug dealing” (O’Flynn 2009). In reality, the main aim of these closures was to seize

properties owned by Azerbaijani, Armenian, or Chechen groups. As a result, the *siloviki*, particularly officers of the FSB, gained control over some markets and construction companies in Moscow. For example, Moscow's largest wholesale food market, Food City (*Fudsiiti*), where thousands of Central Asians work, is informally controlled by a high-level FSB officer.² Many Uzbek migrants I encountered there worked without work documents since they fell under the protection (*kryshovanie*) of a high-level FSB officer who ensured that no raid by immigration officials would occur on the market's territory. Chechen and Dagestani protection racketeers were also absent from the Food City area, since it was an open secret that the market fell under the protection of a top FSB official. In that sense Food City provides an example of the growing role of Russian *siloviki* in the migrant labor market, as illustrated in the following extract:

Food City is a separate republic. It is safe here, and you can work without any documents. FMS [immigration officials] and police don't check us [migrants] here. Even Chechens cannot play a role here. As long as you stay inside the territory of Food City, you can be sure that you are safe from danger. We just pay a *dolya* [share or protection fee] to our *kuratori* [curators] and they make sure that we can work here without problems. One of our curators said that this market belongs to a very influential FSB official. (Arabbay, 34, male, Uzbek migrant)

Some Russian police officers also act as protection racketeers in the migrant labor market. They usually serve as an *advokat* (defense lawyer) during the *razborka*, defending the *posrednik* (middleman) and Russian employers vis-à-vis Chechen and Dagestani racketeers. This was clearly illustrated in the previous chapter when Misha, an Uzbek *posrednik*, described his reliance on the assistance of Russian police officers when his covillagers used Chechen racketeers against him. It should be noted that when police officers operate on the street, they use *pogonyalo* (nickname) and do not reveal their police identity. They also use an ordinary, basic Nokia phone and refrain from using smartphones, fearing that smartphones—particularly iPhones—are tracked by FSB. Such police-based protection racketeering groups are called *krug*, a circle that operates covertly in the migrant labor market and represents an ally to *posredniks* and Russian employers needing protection from other street-level institutions. Not all *posredniks* can become an acquaintance of members of a police-related *krug*. Individuals must work in the construction sector and bazaars for many years in order to build networks and establish relationships with hidden street-level institutions.

My fieldwork indicates that the role and influence of Tajik migrants in the street world is growing. When walking through the streets and metros of Moscow, one can spot many Tajik migrants whose appearance resembles Chechens. Like Chechens, they grow a beard and wear sports clothes, white socks, and running shoes. Even their haircuts resemble those of Chechens. Tajiks imitate Chechens not only in their mannerisms but also in terms of racketeering. It is possible to find



FIGURE 7. Everyday life in Food City, Moscow: Shadow Economy Hotspot. August 2018. Photo by author.

many Tajik protection racketeers at construction sites and bazaars. In addition, some cases exist whereby a Tajik diaspora leader regularly recruits Chechen protection racketeers to settle salary-recovery disputes.³ One important explanation

for the growing role of Tajiks on the street lies in their characteristically tight-knit community and their unity around their ethnic identity. This feature serves as a safety net when someone from the Tajik migrant community gets into trouble or needs help when there is a fight on the street.

A massive brawl between Tajik migrants and Chechens in Moscow's Khovanskoye cemetery on May 14, 2016, illustrates the growing role of Tajik migrants in the street world. Tajik migrants traditionally worked in Moscow's cemeteries by providing services such as grave digging, repairing enclosures around burial plots, or refreshing flowers. According to the *Moscow Times* (2016), the funeral business represents a lucrative sector in Moscow, generating 1 billion rubles (roughly US\$16 million) in profit annually. Officially, Moscow's funeral services are managed by the state-owned burial company Ritual, which enjoys a monopoly over the provision of funeral services. But, as the *Moscow Times* reported, up to 80 percent of the sector operates in the shadow economy, and Tajik migrants form only a small portion of that lucrative shadow business. The conflict between Tajiks and Chechens resulted from the fact that Tajik migrants refused to share 50 percent to 90 percent of their earnings with the newly appointed director of the cemetery, Yuri Chabuev. As a result Chabuev, with support from Chechen racketeers, decided to push Tajik migrants from the funeral services sector. Chechens arrived at the cemetery with guns and threatened to bury the Tajiks in the cemetery if they refused to pay a *dolya* (share). But the Tajik migrants, supported by a racketeer from Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan (Pamir) region, strongly resisted the Chechens and threw them out of the cemetery. These events indicate that the Tajik migrants' sphere of influence is growing, whereby they now compete with Chechens and Dagestanis at the street level.

Many similar cases emerged in the construction sector. For local Russians these incidents simply resemble a fight between migrants, but for migrants it represents a means of survival. Different migrant groups often engage in massive brawls and try to divide territories and spheres of work. These processes are often coordinated by so-called *chernie brigadiri* (black brigadiers) or *kuratori*—that is, various intermediaries and racketeers who divide the territories and sectors into spheres of influence and distribute jobs to migrant workers. For example, minibus (*marshrutka*) drivers in Moscow are primarily Pamiris, an Iranian ethnic group from Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan region. Thus, a Pamiri *kurator* serves as a gatekeeper and does not allow migrants from other ethnicities (even ethnic Tajiks) to enter this sector. In turn, Pamiri migrants pay a monthly share to their *kurator* for protecting their interests. Similar situations exist in bazaars and construction sites, where migrants must pay a share (*dan'* or *dolya*) to the *chernie brigadiri* and *kuratori* on a monthly basis. This illustrates how things work in the Russian migrant labor market. These processes are regulated by street law and enforced via street-level institutions such as racketeers and various intermediaries.

Unlike the Tajik migrant community, however, no strong ethnic identity or solidarity exists among Uzbek migrants. Rather than organizing around their ethnic identity, Uzbek migrants form small communities that include migrants originating from the same region, district, village, or *mahalla*. Thus, place-based identity is stronger than ethnic identity among Uzbek migrants. For instance, migrants from Uzbekistan's Bukhara region do not mix with migrants from other regions such as Fergana or Kashkadarya. Because of the absence of a strong ethnic identity and solidarity, Uzbek migrants remain poorly organized, rendering them vulnerable to the whims of dishonest employers and middlemen. As a result, many cases of salary nonpayment plague the Uzbek migrant community. As a way to cope with the uncertainties and risks of informal employment, Uzbek migrants frequently approach Chechen and Dagestani racketeers in cases of the nonpayment of salaries. I describe these processes in the next section.

BAHA AND HIS TEAM: SEEKING JUSTICE ON THE STREET

Baha is a 28-year-old male migrant construction worker from Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley. Between March and May of 2016, Baha, together with three of his covillagers, completed an *Evroremont* (an apartment renovation according to Western standards and design) in a midrise building located near Moscow's Tsaritsino metro station. Baha and his team members did not possess any work documents and were informally employed by Nuriddin, an Uzbek *posrednik* from Bukhara, an ancient city in Uzbekistan. In turn, this Uzbek *posrednik* worked for a small construction firm that belonged to a Russian woman, Anna Gennadiyevna. Baha and his team worked three months, but they received salary only for two months, while the third month's salary remained unpaid. Each worker should have received 35,000 rubles (roughly US\$550), 140,000 rubles (US\$2,200) for all four men. When Baha asked the Uzbek *posrednik* to pay their salary, the Uzbek *posrednik* said that he had not received payment and blamed the construction company for the payment delays. Then, Baha and his team contacted Anna Gennadiyevna, asking her to speed up the payment. But Anna Gennadiyevna refused to pay them, insisting that she had already paid their salary to the Uzbek *posrednik*. Thus, neither the Uzbek *posrednik* nor the construction firm showed any serious intention to pay their salary, bouncing Baha's team back and forth for two weeks.

Baha and his team did not even consider seeking legal aid from the Russian state institutions given that they all lacked immigration documents and worked without any formal employment contract. They believed that the Russian legal system was dysfunctional and would not protect them even if they possessed all of the required documents and worked legally. Given these circumstances, the most realistic option available to them to recover their salary was to approach

a *razborshik*. Because Baha came to Moscow in 2011 and had worked on various construction sites, he had many friends and acquaintances. Frustrated with being ping-ponged between the Uzbek *posrednik* and the construction firm, Baha contacted his friend Tesha, a migrant from Uzbekistan's Kashkadarya region who was well-connected to the street world, asking him for a contact to a Chechen protection racketeer. This was not the first time Tesha was asked to serve as a bridge between migrants and Chechens; he had handled many similar requests in the past. But, before connecting anyone to the Chechens, Tesha carefully explained the basic principles of street law to Baha:

You need to be a real man (*haqiqiy erkak*) when you deal with street people. If you claim that you are a real man, you have to stay manly until the end (*raz muzhik do kontsa muzhik*). This is the law of Moscow. Honesty and decency are very important traits on the street. Before you tell your story to a Chechen *razborshik*, you must be 100 percent confident that all of the facts and details of your story are true. The main role of the *razborshik* is to establish justice and punish guilty people. If you provide false information and accuse the honest employer (*ish beruvchi*) of not paying your salary, you will pay a heavy price. As a punishment, they will first beat you and then force you to pay the amount you stated in your claim in relation to the employer. Also, you must pay monetary compensation for the time and effort Chechens spent handling your case. They can demand any amount they want for compensation, and you have to pay it. In some cases you will also be ordered to pay moral damage to the employer for tarnishing his name. Therefore, when you contact a *razborshik*, they ask you three times whether the information you have provided is correct. When you transfer your claim to a *razborshik*, you should stop your communication with the employer and follow the *razborshik*'s instructions. It is exclusively the *razborshik*'s call to investigate the case. The *razborshik* will invite both the claimant and defendant to the *razborka*. If the *razborshik* succeeds in recovering your money, you must pay him a fee. There is no fixed rate. Some *razborshiks* ask for 20 percent, while some others work at a rate of 50–50. On the whole, the average price currently is typically 20 percent to 30 percent of what they collect. Often, *razborshiks* also charge the employer as punishment for his dishonest behavior. But in cases when the *razborshik* cannot recover your money, he is expected to pay your money from his own pocket. So, the *razborshik* also has certain rights and obligations. You find more order on the street than inside state institutions.

Events unfolded exactly as Tesha described. After being connected to Chechens via phone, Baha and his team members were asked to provide all of the facts and details of their case. The Chechens repeatedly asked Baha whether he was providing a true story and warned him that he himself would have to pay the price if any of the details were inaccurate. After finishing this initial “manliness ritual,” the Chechens asked Baha to provide them with the address and phone number of the Uzbek *posrednik*. Baha and his team were advised not to take any further action and to wait for the next steps. The migrants agreed to pay 30 percent of the total amount collected (i.e., 42,000 rubles, approximately US\$650) to the Chechens as payment for their work.

Two days later, the Chechens contacted Baha and asked him to come immediately to a designated place on the north of Moscow where the *razborka* would take place. The aim of the *razborka* was to determine the validity of Baha and his team's claim. When Baha arrived at the *razborka* site, he found that four Chechens and the Uzbek *posrednik* were already there. First, Baha and his team were given a chance to present their complaint. Then, the Uzbek *posrednik* was asked to comment on the situation and defend himself if he felt he was innocent. Rather than denying Baha's story, the Uzbek *posrednik* admitted that what was described was true, but he insisted that he too was a victim, blaming Anna Gennadiyevna and her construction firm for payment problems.

The Chechens did not accept the Uzbek *posrednik*'s justification as a valid excuse. In the Chechens' view Baha and his team entered into a "manly agreement" (*erkakcha kelishuv*) with the Uzbek *posrednik*, not with the Russian woman, implying that the Uzbek *posrednik* was responsible for payment to Baha and his team regardless of any other circumstances. The verdict was thus made by the Chechens that the Uzbek *posrednik* would pay Baha and his team's salary within a maximum of three days. In addition, the Uzbek *posrednik* was also ordered to pay 25,000 rubles (US\$400) to the Chechens for the time they had spent to *reshat voprosy* (solve the issue). The Chechens warned the Uzbek *posrednik* that his "throat would be slashed" if he failed to pay the stated amount by the deadline. The Chechens' confident voice relied on the firm belief that Uzbek migrants, like many other migrants in Russia, were rightless *chernie* (blacks), and no serious police investigation would follow should some Uzbek migrant be killed. The Chechens were even aware that the Uzbek embassy in Moscow would do nothing to protect the rights of its citizens in Russia. Not wanting to risk his life, the Uzbek *posrednik* eventually paid both Baha and his team as well as the Chechens, an outcome that would not have occurred if Baha and his team had not resorted to street-level institutions.

TIMUR: SEEKING JUSTICE THROUGH PRISON

Timur is a 26-year-old male migrant construction worker from the Fergana region of Uzbekistan. He arrived in Moscow in June of 2012, shortly after finishing vocational college. Unlike his fellow villagers in Moscow who shared common accommodations and pursued intertwined lives, Timur stayed in a communal, shared apartment where the majority of tenants (*kvartiranti*) were ethnic Tajiks from Samarkand (Uzbekistan) and Khujand (Tajikistan). His decision to stay away from his covillagers stemmed from his efforts to diversify his social network and connections (*tanish-bilish*) in Moscow, crucial for finding a decent job. This was where Timur made Tajik acquaintances and established an extensive network that later proved helpful when he experienced problems getting paid for his own work.

At the time of my fieldwork in 2015, Timur worked on a construction site in Shchyolkovo City, Moscow province. His main job was to install CCTV cameras in newly constructed midrise buildings. Timur's boss was a *posrednik* from

Kyrgyzstan who, in turn, worked for the Russian construction firm. The employment relationship between all parties—Timur, the Kyrgyz *posrednik*, and the Russian construction firm—was based on a *po-rukam* (handshake-based) agreement, implying that these transactions were informal and took place beyond labor and tax regulations. Timur worked for the Kyrgyz *posrednik* for five months, but he was not paid for his last two months of work, an amount totaling 60,000 rubles (about US\$950). When Timur asked the Kyrgyz *posrednik* whether he was willing to pay his two-month salary, the *posrednik* stated that the Russian construction firm was delaying payment, not him. Timur waited for more than two months, hoping that the *posrednik* would pay his salary. But he continued telling the same story. It was thus apparent that the Kyrgyz *posrednik* was unwilling to pay the remaining salary, which led Timur to look for alternative ways of recovering it.

Because Timur shared an apartment with Tajik migrants, he became a part of the wider Tajik community. On a daily basis he ate food with them, slept in a shared bedroom, played cards with them during their leisure time, and even shared sex workers with them when they went to various brothels. Owing to his close relationship with Tajiks, Timur knew that he could rely on them to help recover his salary from the Kyrgyz *posrednik*. When Timur asked his Tajik roommates if they could do anything to help him, they gave him the phone number of their Tajik friend Farkhod, who was serving a prison sentence in one of the correctional colonies (prisons) in the Moscow province.

Farkhod was one of the most influential protection racketeers in Moscow. In 2013 he was sentenced to seven years in prison for racketeering and extortion-related crimes. The fact that he did not reveal the names of his partners in crime, taking individual responsibility for all of the charges, further increased his sphere of influence on the street. Despite being physically situated inside the prison, he was very much present in Moscow's migrant labor market and continued acting as the head of the Tajik racketeering group in Moscow. This was possible as a result of widespread corruption within the prison system. Farkhod and many other inmates had access to smartphones (with an internet connection), as well as to vodka, drugs, and sex workers. All of these "luxuries" were organized by *menty* (low-level prison officials), always looking for ways to supplement their meager incomes. Since a smartphone was considered a sensitive object that could reveal the secrets of the prison, its use and dissemination inside the prison was heavily controlled. Therefore, *menty* secretly carried it to the prison, hiding it in their anuses. Given these difficulties, smartphones were very expensive inside the prison. For example, if the cheapest Chinese Huawei smartphone cost 8,000 rubles (US\$125) in a store, *menty* sold it to inmates for 24,000 rubles (US\$375). Given the difficulty of getting and keeping a smartphone in prison, Farkhod's phone was only on and available for conversations at three times each day: early morning (between 5:00 and 6:30), after lunch (between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m.), and in the evening (between 8:00 and 10:30). Thanks to the availability of a smartphone, Farkhod continued his racketeering

activities and regularly received “warm-up money” (*grev*) both from his partners and migrants. Farkhod regularly used a smartphone-based mobile payment application and updated his social media accounts on a daily basis, posting his own photos and pressing the “like” button on pictures of Russian and Tajik girls.

In accordance with the instructions of his Tajik friends, Timur placed a call to Farkhod in the evening, a time when he was better able to solve street-level issues. After introducing himself and explaining how he found Farkhod’s contact details, Timur recounted all of the problems he had experienced to Farkhod and politely asked whether he could help him recover his salary from the Kyrgyz *posrednik*. In turn, before taking on this challenge, Farkhod asked Timur whether he would be able to stand by his story during the *razborka* and whether he was ready to pay 20 percent of the disputed money recovered. Farkhod also explained the basic rules of street law, emphasizing that Timur must remain honest, behave like a man (*erkakchilik*), and avoid any contact with the police. After Timur accepted these conditions, Farkhod moved to the next stage, wherein Timur was asked to provide the *posrednik*’s ethnicity, full name and phone number, the name of the construction firm, the exact amount of the salary in question, and, most important, the name of the district in which Timur worked. Knowing the name of the district was crucial, since each district had its own *smotriashiy*, meaning Farkhod needed to be sure that he was not stepping on someone’s toes. Finally, after checking all of the details, Farkhod accepted the challenge and asked Timur to await further instructions without taking any independent action.

The next day, Timur received a phone call from Farkhod. It was a conference call where Timur, Farkhod, and the Kyrgyz *posrednik* were on the line simultaneously. Before starting the investigation, Farkhod warned both Timur and the Kyrgyz *posrednik* to be honest and that they would be severely punished if they attempted to bend the truth. First, Farkhod asked Timur to describe what had happened and what claim he had in relation to the Kyrgyz *posrednik*. Then, the Kyrgyz *posrednik* was given the chance to respond to Timur’s complaint. Unsurprisingly, the Kyrgyz *posrednik* blamed the construction firm, stating that he also did not receive his own salary from the Russians. Farkhod immediately interrupted the Kyrgyz *posrednik*, stating that Timur made an agreement with him, not with the Russians, so he was responsible for securing Timur’s salary regardless of other circumstances. Farkhod did not continue the conversation any further and quickly moved to the final settlement and ended the *razborka*.

As a result of the *razborka*, the Kyrgyz *posrednik* was given a maximum of three days to pay Timur’s salary. In addition, the *posrednik* was also ordered to top-up or deposit 15,000 rubles (US\$240) to Farkhod’s phone number. Farkhod made clear to the *posrednik* that his life would be in danger if these two payments were not made by the deadline. Timur was also reminded that once he received his salary from the *posrednik* he must also deposit 20 percent of the salary recovered—that is, 12,000 rubles (US\$190)—to Farkhod’s phone number so that he could continue

using his mobile payment application. Not wanting to tangle with the *zek* (a Soviet term used in relation to persons serving a sentence in corrections facilities or prisons), the Kyrgyz *posrednik* quickly paid Timur's salary and deposited the stated amount to Farkhod's phone number. Timur also deposited money to Farkhod's number the same day.

STREET LAW AND MIGRANT LEGAL ADAPTATIONS

As we have seen in this chapter, many migrants work without written employment contracts, which often results in the nonpayment of salaries. Given the complete lack of formal legal protections, many migrants seek redress from street-level actors who provide alternative (to the state) forms of contract enforcement, debt recovery, and dispute settlement through threats, violence, and street law. When observing everyday interactions in the migrant labor market, it becomes difficult to view the Russian state and its legal infrastructure as a coherent entity. Instead, what we see is an informal, parallel world of migrants based on its own noncodified but socially reproduced and legitimate forms of governance and legal order. From this perspective the apparent reinvigoration of street-level institutions in Russia may be viewed as a reaction to the Russian state's inability or unwillingness to provide decent working conditions for migrant workers. Hence, street-level institutions should not only be viewed as an element of the criminal world; they may very well constitute an alternative legal order when the state and its legal system fail to enforce the rules of the game of society.

Accordingly, one possible inference is that the Russian migrant labor market resembles a "state within a state," with its own informal networks of power, hierarchies, divisions of labor, and legal order. The street-level institutions act as enforcement mechanisms for informal employment relationships. Despite its almost mythical coercive power, the Russian state and its legal infrastructure remain "formally" absent in the street world of the migrant labor market. This argument, however, does not necessarily imply that street-level institutions are completely separate from the state. Rather, the Russian state actors are informally present in the migrant labor market, as numerous racketeers, "street networks," "intermediaries" have varying levels of informal connections with officials and organs of power. The street-level institutions can thus be regarded as parallel legal orders, functioning in a close symbiosis with the state actors, which regulate the rules of the game in the migrant labor market. The intrinsic message of this chapter is that the legal adaptation of migrants in Russia must be understood not only through migrants' capacity to comply with immigration and labor laws but also in terms of their interactions with street-based legal orders that offer alternative forms of redress, legal adaptation, and economic security.