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Peers/strangers/others? The youth of Dagestan in search of group identities

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the map of youth cultural scenes in Makhachkala, the capital of the Republic of Dagestan, and the third largest city in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. The uniqueness of Makhachkala's youth space is associated with the specific geopolitical and cultural circumstances of the history of the republic. This is set against the context of post-Soviet transformation: rising unemployment and severe inequality; the revival of Islam; radical changes in the gender regime, the ethnic and religious composition of Dagestanis; and a complicated political agenda involving the struggle with radicalization, and the growth of a terrorist threat. Thus, we consider it important and timely to study the local youth socialities, which exist in such a contradictory context. The research that underpins the article is focused on two opposing youth scenes in Makhachkala: street workout (inscribed in the context of the local patriarchal regime), and the anime community (symbolically resisting the pressure of social 'normativity'). Using the theoretical concept of cultural scenes and a case-study approach (in-depth interviews, participant observation, community mapping), the potential to categorize youth that are not centred (that is, who are outside the 'core' of the capitalist world-system) is critically considered through the opposition between subcultural and mainstream groups. The key aim of the article is to demonstrate the importance of using the construct of the 'other' (that which is alien or dangerous) as the main way to define the more subtle (often latent) structure of group identity and cultural capital of a community. This also describes the intra- and inter-group solidarities and the value conflicts of youth in a complex and contradictory local urban environment. In this case, the process of growing up and the socialization of youth involve the selection of different strategies of acceptance and resistance to the social order, the structure of normativity and images of success.

KEYWORDS Youth; cultural scene; group identity; Caucasus

Introduction

The issues discussed in this article are at the intersection of two problematic areas of contemporary social science. Firstly, the well-documented

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subculture/post-subculture debate (Bennett 1999, Hodkinson 2002, Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004, Hesmondhalgh 2005), particularly the discussion of the possibility of using subcultural or post-subcultural concepts to study the cultural practices of youth that are outside the 'core' of the capitalist world-system (Pilkington *et al.* 2002, Omelchenko 2013, Omelchenko and Sabirova 2016, Nayak 2016). Secondly, we are engaging with 'transition studies', which problematize a linear scheme of young people's transitions from a state of dependent childhood to an independent adult identity within the framework of developmental stage models such as school-to-work transition, housing transition and domestic transition (Morrow and Richards 1996, Coles 1997). In particular, it is noted that growing up in the post-modern world is individualized, and is becoming less attached to such sites of identity formation as the home, work and the church, which generates multiple, contradictory and fragmentary transition experiences for young people (Chisholm and Bois-Reymond 1993, Hollands 2002, Skelton 2002, Valentine and Skelton 2003, du Bois-Reymond and Chisholm 2006).

Analysis of empirical data and involvement in the ongoing transformations taking place in Russian society allow us to discuss significant and sometimes cardinal regroupings both within particular (specific, exclusive) youth communities and sub/cultural groups, and between them and the mainstream. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, polarization occurred between the groups of the so-called 'advanced' and 'normal' youth on the basis of their attitude to the West as a cultural, symbolic and geographical 'Other' (Pilkington *et al.* 2002). However, recent research, in particular, a survey among students of universities and colleges in Kazan, Makhachkala, St. Petersburg and Ulyanovsk indicate that, firstly, there is an increasing number of new vectors of solidarity and polarization, and secondly, that the space of youth cultures is becoming increasingly fragmented, and the trajectories of group identity formation are becoming increasingly complex. This is facilitated by such factors as the ongoing development of information technologies and the virtualization of everyday life, the reinforcing of discursive and practical pressures from the authorities on youth, the conservative turn in domestic and foreign policy rhetoric, and a new round of geopolitical and ideological confrontation with the West (Omelchenko and Sabirova 2016).

The empirical focus of this article is youth cultural life in Makhachkala, the capital of the Republic of Dagestan, which is one of the republics of the Russian Federation. Taking two 'polar', in many ways, urban scenes (street workout and anime), we will show how actual youth identities and socialities are designed and reproduced, both in discourse and in everyday life on the very periphery of a globalized world.

Methodologically, a fruitful step in this context is to combine the concept of solidarity, referring to the communicative nature of contemporary youth socialities and the concept of scene (Straw 1991, 2004, Shank 2011, Stahl

2004, Woo *et al.* 2015), linking the formation of solidarity with the specific social conditions of 'place'.

The context of growing up: Dagestan

Makhachkala is the capital of the Republic of Dagestan. It is the third largest city in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation and is located on the western coast of the Caspian Sea. It was founded as a military fortification in 1844 at the height of the Caucasus War, which ended with the suppression of the national liberation uprising of the peoples of the North Caucasus (Babich 2007). The settlement received the status of a city in 1857, and was named Petrovsk (later Port-Petrovsk) (Kazhlaev 1967, Tahnaeva 2007). In 1921 the city was renamed in honour of the Dagestani revolutionary Makhach Dakhadayev. The rapid development of Makhachkala occurred during the Soviet period. From the 1930s to the 1980s, the population of the city increased more than tenfold, and the creation of an urban infrastructure, an education system, and a basic industrial infrastructure occurred (Gadzhiev 2013).

In the early 1990s, Makhachkala, like other Russian cities, experienced de-industrialization caused by the political collapse of the Soviet Union, and the transition from a planned to a market economy. The city is no longer an industrial centre, and reoriented itself to serve the needs of agrarian economy. It has become a site of agriculture trade and a place of investment of agrarian capital (Starodubrovskaja 2014). The collapse of enterprises, economic turmoil and a difficult criminal situation led to the out-migration of some urban groups, primarily workers, employees and intellectuals. This migratory wave coincided with the counter-flow of migrants arriving from the rural (mountainous) areas of the republic (Kapustina 2014). The formation of the Makhachkala agglomeration over the period 2002–2010, which was accompanied by the partial inclusion of suburbs inhabited by the arriving rural migrants, caused an abrupt population growth. The share of 'old urbanites' is now only one-seventh of the population of present-day Makhachkala (Starodubrovskaja 2014).

The growth of unemployment and social polarization, which are largely stimulated by the total dependence of Dagestan on federal subsidies, are further important consequences of post-Soviet transformation. According to Enver Kisriev (2012), the property differentiation of the republic's population is one of the highest in Russia. One thousand families (about 6500 people or 0.3% of the population of Dagestan)

possess enormous resources and influence political relations in the Republic. 5–7% of the population, having considerably improved their financial position, represent a higher-level property elite. Twenty to Twenty-five percent of the

population make great efforts to keep at 2–5 times above the subsistence level. However, the majority of the population (about 70%) live in poverty.¹

This scenario of transition is typical for most Russian cities, however, the regional specifics should be noted. Today, Dagestan is ethnically the most diverse region of the Russian Federation. Over 30 ethnic groups were recorded in the census (Goskomstat Rossii 2002, 2011), 14 of which are recognized as nationalities and registered in all official documents. These are *Avars*, *Dargins*, *Kumyks*, *Lezgins*, *Laks*, *Russians*, *Tabasarans*, *Azerbaijanis*, *Chechens*, *Nogais*, *Rutulians*, *Agulis*, *Tsakhurs* and *Tatas*. The out-migration of the Russian population has been a distinctive feature of the post-Soviet period. The majority of this population lived in urban areas and was associated with industry. The share of the overall Russian population over the period from the early 1990s to 2010 has decreased from 10% to 3.6% (Ibragimov 2011).

A further important factor in the daily and political life of Dagestan is religion. The republic in the post-Soviet period became the epicentre of re-Islamization, manifested in the rapid growth of religious Islamic institutions, and the spontaneous desecularization of everyday life. As communist ideology lost its dominant position, religion 'regained its status as an officially approved faith, and is seen as an indispensable component of a "normal" way of life' (Kisriev 2000). The religious situation is characterized by a struggle between so-called traditional Sufi Islam, represented by the Muslim Spiritual Board of Dagestan and supporters of 'new' or 'pure' Islam, 'Salafis' (Wahhabis). After the armed conflict of 1999² and the official ban of so-called Wahhabism, this confrontation (in which not only religious actors but also federal and regional officials are involved) went into a latent phase, but did not cease (Makarov 2000, Souleimanov 2005, Walker 2005, Yarlykapov 2006, Kisriev 2007, Dzutsev 2011, Bobrovnikov 2017). In recent years, in connection with the situation in the Middle East and the creation of 'Islamic State', the rhetoric of the 'Salafis threat' has played out in Dagestan. New overtones, reinforced by extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and tortures of civilians, have resulted in counter-terrorist operations against the radical underground, and persecution of communities that are in opposition to 'official' Islam (Campana and Ratelle 2014, Souleimanov and Petrtylova 2015).

The ethnic and religious 'otherness' of the republic, which is overlaid with real religious and near-religious conflicts, is often exploited beyond its borders to construct the image of an aggressive, dangerous 'Alien'. This portrayal is consistently reproduced, both on the everyday level and in political rhetoric, thus portraying the population of this subject of the Russian Federation as beyond all-Russian civil consensus (Barash 2012, Bedrik 2015). Outside the region itself, young Dagestanis, as 'persons of Caucasian nationality', (a cliché-stigma circulating in Russian public discourse) constantly face

discrimination in the spheres of employment, housing, and in relationships with the police and authorities (Karpenko 2002, Skripkina 2010, Shnirelman 2014). The rhetoric of a 'struggle against extremism' justifies the federal authorities special attitude towards Dagestan, which in practice often results in the granting of special powers to law enforcement agencies, as well as the arbitrary restriction of civil rights and freedoms within the republic (Ibragimov and Matsuzato 2014, Starodubrovskaja 2014).

These factors create a 'controversial' space for young people growing up and experiencing socialization, in which different social logics and 'transition' scenarios co-exist and clash. The collapse of industry led to the dismantling of the Soviet 'from school to work' transition model, in which young people were led carefully through institutional steps that provided more or less equal access to public resources (education, culture, mobility) and positions in the labour market. The dominant pattern today can be called 'from high school to unemployment/bullshit job'. On the one hand, the prestige of higher education, which was formed through Soviet ideology still exists – practically all young people aim to go to university (Tagirbekova 2012). On the other hand, after graduating from an educational institution, a young Dagestani, as a rule, is long-term unemployed, or gets a low paid job that does not equate to the university diploma which has been received (and quite often bought) (Varshaver 2014). Unemployment in Dagestan has a young face: almost half of unemployed in Dagestan are young people from 15 to 30 years old. Also, 70% of the population of this group has no full-time job (*Oficial'nyj sajt* 2018). At the same time, both in the sphere of education and in the labour market, 'there are particular job placement rules, i.e. the main guarantee for quickly finding a good job is the presence of patrons or access to needed networks of social relations' (Trotsuk 2007).

Through the media and via the Internet, young people become acquainted with another, and more westernized version of consumer society is practised. Being one of the key recipients of re-Islamization, young people actively join in both the competition of religious and secular projects, and in the confrontation between 'traditional' and 'new' Islam. Although in both camps there are representatives of all ages, the conflict between them is often represented by authorities as an intergenerational one and the Wahhabi problem – as a 'youth problem'. The religious life of young people is constantly the focus of close attention by the authorities and law enforcement agencies.

In addition, most young Makhachkala residents live in a liminal situation between the city and the village. The process of young residents growing up takes place in the context of a prolonged transition from a labour society to a consumer society that is also accompanied by rapid changes in the identity of the place itself. The city is not revealed to them in the form of a ready-made landscape that ensures a consistency in terms of reading

and experiencing the city space. Thus, before they become urbanites, they still have to rethink, or rather, to invent their own urbanism as a way of life.

In conditions of uncertainty related to the fragmentation of society and the crisis of social institutions in the transition from a labour to a consumer society, when none of the logics ‘work as they should’, informal sites for socialization and growing up – that we will designate as ‘scenes’ – increase in importance.

Scene as an informal site of socialization

Scene is a local social world, acting as an environment for city identities and solidarities, based on self-expression values, mutual lifestyle and shared cultural sensibility (Straw 1991, Stahl 2004, Shank 2011, Omelchenko and Poliakov 2017).

This world is supported by a network of people whose cooperative activity, organized by their common knowledge of the conventional means of doing something, produces ‘the very thing ...’. In the production and maintenance of the ‘scene’, informal ties and knowledge are the priority, and are acquired during the movement of participants from the periphery to the centre of the ‘scene’ (Straw 2004, 2015). As a key category of cultural studies, the ‘scene’ allows us to consider emerging identities and solidarities, on the one hand, as fragmented, diffuse and freely selectable, and on the other hand, as tied to specific places and/or spaces in which, according to Will Straw, local tendencies interact with global trends (Straw 1991).

‘Scene’ is ‘at the crossroads’ of ethics and aesthetics. On the one hand, it functions as a site for the representation of cultural identities – a space in which everyone has the opportunity to see and to be seen (Straw 2004, Kahn-Harris 2006, Silver *et al.* 2010; Silver and Clark 2015). On the other hand, it is a separate ‘ethical world’ (Straw 2015), in the context of which a certain moral regime is cultivated (tolerance – homophobia, patriarchy – gender equality, consumerism – asceticism, etc.). Such a regime helps to establish the rules and means by which each participant’s behaviour is legitimized in the ‘scene’. Through the acceptance (and rejection) of the values cultivated within the ‘scene’ reference to the imagined community occurs (Omelchenko and Sabirova 2016).

In western academic debate, the scene is discussed in the context of the transition from an economic model based on formal rationality, to ‘post-Fordist economic activity ... as embedded within informal connections and an ongoing attentiveness to rumor and opportunity’ (Straw 2002, p. 252; see also Grimes 2015). From this point of view, the scenes presented here cannot be seen as typical, since Dagestani society is the ‘periphery of the periphery’. Our argument is that the scene emerges as a ‘response’ to the

existential uncertainty that accompanies a period of transition, whether from industrial to post-industrial society or – as in the case of Dagestan – from socialism to capitalism. The scene functions as an alternative to the socializing institutions of the family, education and work, which in a new context lose their totalizing character, and are unable to answer the question of how to live (and grow up) in these new conditions.

We have found that combining a ‘scenic’ conceptual framework with a youth solidarities approach, which has been developed to study the cultural practices of young people outside the capitalist core, is beneficial. As empirical studies show, the material basis, the substance of late socialist and post-socialist youth cultures is communication (Pilkington 1994, Pilkington *et al.* 2002, Omelchenko 2013). This communication is not rigidly attached to certain styles or obligations of the group norm, but develops around cultural innovations and practices and can embrace stylistically, symbolically or ideologically different youth groups through a commitment to certain common orientations and values (Omelchenko 2013).

By solidarity we mean a special form of sociality that is formed around value-ideological vectors, which are fundamental for a social group. This solidarity allows opposition to antipode groups, where there is a symbolic (or real) struggle for cultural, political and value domination. Today, the main lines of value confrontation around which solidarity is formed are consumerism and anti-capitalism, antifascism and nationalism, collectivism and individualism, pacifism and militarism, patriarchy and gender equality and loyalty to state power and anarchy (Omelchenko 2011).

Furthermore, the scene can be interpreted as a locus of solidarity, area or space where solidarity is being produced/realized through everyday communication and cultural practices. The constellation of regimes of solidarities creates an ‘ethical world’ of the scene, that legitimizes the cultural activity of its participants.

The analysis of youth identities, carried out in the late 1990s, made it possible to identify a significant axis of polarization of youth cultural scenes in the post-Soviet space outside of the metropolis, with a developed club culture and Western-type consumption. The most important marker by which young people themselves defined their cultural orientation was by the distinction of *advanced* (sometimes progressive, alternative) and *normal* (conventional) youth. The building of cultural hierarchies within each scene was based on the mutual positioning of *our* mini-groups in relation to *other* ones, which were determined through the characteristics of cultural tastes (music, cinema, the media), attitudes to the West, the type of consumption, and forms of creative and commercial activities. The *advanced* young people were oriented to the outside world and strived for new opportunities. The West served as a source of information and an orienting mark on the

global horizon, but *advanced* youth were also the most critical of it. The horizons of *normal* youth were confined to the immediate environment, their cultural strategy was to maintain local ties, but in their own way, they were included in 'global' consumption (Pilkington *et al.* 2002). We take this distinction as the starting point for the discussion of the two scenes focused upon in this article, which to a certain degree represent the two extreme poles of the 'normal – advanced' axis we have described. At the same time, we proceed from the fact that with the development and widening of access to information about various cultures around the world, and the expansion of the number of Internet sites promoting various political and stylistic trends, new types of networks and connections of those who share these trends are being formed. Youth cultural scenes, both on-line and off-line, are becoming increasingly diversified (Omelchenko and Sabirova 2016, Omelchenko and Poliakov 2017).

Empirical basis and methodology of the research

This article is based on data gathered as part of the project 'Fields of positive interethnic interactions and youth cultural scenes in the Russian cities'.³ The research was carried out in four Russian cities: St. Petersburg, Ulyanovsk, Kazan and Makhachkala. In each city, quantitative and qualitative methods were used. A quantitative survey was conducted among students of secondary special education institutions and universities (800 questionnaires in each city, the total number of respondents 3200). Then qualitative in-depth interviews were carried out with representatives of various youth communities in each city (total 169), as well as eight case-studies.⁴ In Makhachkala, two youth communities – workout and anime scenes – were investigated. These communities, in our opinion, employ different (and sometimes opposing) cultural strategies and life styles and create specific spaces for growing up and socialization.

The case-study of the Dagestani street workout scene was carried out in Makhachkala in September 2016 and April 2017. The researcher⁵ carried out participant observation of street training and interviewed participants involved in the scene and those who surrounded it. A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with adolescents and young men between the ages of 14 and 25. During the course of the observation, a field diary was kept, which was also included in the final data analysis.

The case-study of the anime scene was carried out in March and April 2017.⁶ Twenty-four in-depth interviews were conducted with young people aged 17–25 – key participants in the anime scene, cosplayers, festival spectators, venue organizers and other non-formals in the city. The researcher observed the life of the anime scene for a month, participating in subcultural 'gatherings' and friendly meetings.

Anime and workout in the context of youth cultural scenes in Makhachkala

According to the results of the survey carried out amongst students of higher and secondary special education institutions in Makhachkala ($n = 800$), the most popular youth groups in the city include: football fans (25.9% of respondents), participants of street workout (20.1%), 'active Muslims' (18.5%), fans of board games (18.3%), cyclists (15.7%) and participants of the low-riders (fans of lowered vehicles) movement (7.2%).

Thus workout is the second most popular youth scene in Makhachkala, whereas the anime scene is encountered less in the survey – only 6.6% of respondents identified themselves with anime culture. However, communicative involvement in the scene is much higher – 28.9% of the students surveyed noted that their friends are anime fans and 35.7% know about the existence of such a scene, but do not engage with it themselves. This data show therefore that both the workout and the anime fans are visible youth groups in the urban space. We will now focus on the analysis of the life styles of the participants in these two significant city youth scenes in the context of growing up and socialization, and will consider the anime and workout scenes through the notion of 'significant others'.

Urban spaces and composition of the scenes

Street workout is a 'lifestyle sport', which 'is less institutionalized than more traditional 'modern' sports; has fewer formal rules and regulations and less formal restrictions and exclusion; and tends to be opposed to traditional forms of competition, also promoting a participatory ethos' (Wheaton 2000, p. 436). As a practice, workout includes performing various exercises on street sports grounds, on horizontal bars, parallel bars, wall bars ('Swedish walls') and monkey bars. The main emphasis is on working with your own weight and developing strength and stamina. In the post-Soviet space, workout has acquired a number of features from the social movement for a healthy way of life [e.g. a life without drugs and alcohol], which combines free training with educational activities. In Dagestan, the 'core' of the scene makes regular trips to remote villages (auls) and gives lectures and master classes in schools, colleges and universities.

The Makhachkala workout scene has existed for more than five years and brings together teenagers and young people (exclusively men) aged between 14 and 25. The number of participants can vary from 20 to 100 people. Periodically, attempts have been made to institutionalize the 'scene', for example, there are plans to create a formal organization with membership rules and regulations. However, to date workout remains open to new participants and access to it and departure from it is relatively flexible.

Graduates of Makhachkala universities (between 21 and 25 years old), who met through the social network VKontakte, make-up the core of the 'scene'. The mobile (but numerically predominant) periphery consists of school and college pupils. Training spaces in Makhachkala include a typical sports ground on Askerkhanova street, a space for workout at the 'Trud' stadium, and a horizontal bar located on the city beach, where complex acrobatic exercises are carried out.

Recruitment to the scene mainly occurs via social networks (VKontakte and Instagram). School and university administrative structures, where exhibition performances take place, as well as friendly sports communities (for example, the community of street parkour) are also included in the network. The Makhachkala 'scene' occupies a central position in relation to workout 'scenes' in other cities in Dagestan (Izberbash, Kaspiisk, Derbent) and furthermore, the Dagestani 'scene' is part of the wider Russian workout 'scene'.

In socio-demographic terms, the average Dagestani workouter is an unmarried young man from a low-income family. Often these are single-parent families where the mother is the sole wage earner. The parent or parents are typically employed in low skilled positions in the public or service sector, in market trading or are engaged in unskilled physical labour. These young men have rarely travelled outside of Dagestan and never abroad. The exception to this is short-term visits with relatives to carry out 'shabashka' (semi-official seasonal construction work) in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Those who have already finished their education are normally unemployed.

Anime has also existed for more than five years and brings together anime fans, cosplayers, venue organizers and other non-formals in the city. It should be noted that in Makhachkala, interest in anime began to emerge over the period 2000–2005 when Japanese animation productions (for example, 'Shaman King', 'Sailor Moon', 'Naruto', 'Pokemon') were broadcast on central Russian TV channels and became very popular among schoolchildren.

Many Dagestanis became familiar with anime culture later, thanks to friends, relatives and acquaintances, who 'infected' them with the new trend. Anime was discussed with friends or on websites, and on Internet forums. However, the starting point for the development of the local scene was the Festival of Japanese and Korean culture, held for the first time in Makhachkala in 2012. This festival united anime fans and other 'advanced' youth of the city.

The 'core' of the modern anime scene includes participants and spectators of the initial festivals (10–15 people). They hold the power within the community, produce the scene and define its boundaries. Most of the 'senior' participants in the anime scene can be referred to as middle class. They are graduates or senior students of the city's secondary and higher educational institutions (19–25 years of age), those who are involved professionally in

the creative industries and also those who started their 'subcultural careers' by organizing events, creating DIY attributes and performing at the annual festival.

A further group of non-formal⁷ youth of the city is on the periphery of the scene – the 'new generation' of anime fans (12–18 years old): members of the festival audience, volunteers and simply fans of Japanese and Korean culture. It should be noted that unlike the workout community, the anime scene is heterogeneous in terms of gender. However, girls are the more active participants of the scene and are at its core – they organize the festivals, carry out crafts or experiment with their appearance, for example, hair colour, style of clothes and make-up. This is connected, above all, with the narrow normative frameworks of male socialization, which exist in Dagestan. The 'normal' majority (adults and other young people) regards such experiments with appearance and performance at festivals as deviant practices that require immediate regulation.

Unlike the workout scene, which is sustained through weekly training sessions at sports grounds, on an everyday level the anime community is concentrated in virtual space – it is reproduced through daily communication taking place in social networks. In the real world, the scene is embodied in rare (e.g. every two months) subcultural 'gatherings' ('skhodki'), but the key event is the annual Festival of Japanese and Korean culture, composed of a concert programme and cosplay defile.

In terms of their biographical path, informants see anime as a logical continuation of their subcultural career and as part of the 'style supermarket' (most young people during their school years identified themselves with gothic and emo cultures). That is why the community members' style is comprised of a combination of 'standard' informal elements (e.g. backpacks, non-conventional shoes, unisex style and in some cases brightly coloured hair) and subcultural attributes. The latter includes badges with anime characters on them, popular among the participants of the scene. One of key vectors of solidarities of anime scene is built on the denial of 'standard', 'common', 'mass' clothes consumption, for example clothes that are sold in the city's markets and shops (with rare exceptions). That is why a 'usual' youth, in a sense, becomes an opposite group for anime solidarity concerning clothes and life-style consumption.

Shared meanings and boundaries of the youth scenes

Discursively **workout** is constructed as a disciplinary practice, which is focussed on adolescents and young men, and ensures their correct gender socialization during the transition to adulthood. Informants define their participation in the scene in terms of what 'normal' young male (Dagestanis,

Muslims, 'guys from the street') should do. On the one hand, workout is a popular global practice, a fashionable trend, on the other hand it is similar to practices of 'yard socialization', common in Dagestani society, where boys and teenagers acquire a strong body and learn to behave like men, under the supervision of older brothers and male members of the neighbourhood. Powerful and bodily enhanced masculinity is a key vector of solidarity that links scene participants with one another as well as scene itself with 'whole' Dagestani society.

The main activity is 'training', which lasts for one hour and includes components of training, meeting for companionship and filming. At the beginning of the 'training', a 15-minute warm-up is held under the guidance of senior workouters, after which everyone carries out their exercise 'programme'. For beginners, pull-ups on the horizontal bar, push-ups on the parallel bars and push-ups from the floor are mandatory elements of the programme. Many participants of the scene begin their training by watching videos on social networks and on YouTube. Following the example of successful workouters in other Russian regions and other countries, they spend a lot of time taking photos and videos to maintain their own profiles on social networks.

Now I'm planning to shoot a training video. And so we video all the time. Performance – video. We have our operators, with pictures. Constantly we shoot a video. We are very active on social networks, on Instagram, we have a profile on Instagram. The channel and this Vkontakte group. We are doing this PR constantly. (Workout_2_M).

The posting of visual content serves several purposes: it supports the individual status of a workout, it serves as a showcase for his skill, it promotes the popularization of workout in Dagestan and it provides a virtual presence of Dagestan on the global workout scene. Usually training and presentation videos are shot during training sessions on the cameras of cheap smartphones. However, there are also 'professionals' who specialize in the shooting of staged videos within the scene.

Training sessions and video shoots do not interfere with the close communication, which takes place during and between exercises, sometimes even taking their place. Many regular participants in the scene prefer to train individually, and use the collective 'trainings' to 'have a chat'. The topics covered include: the internal routine of the scene; study and admission to higher educational institutions; and the latest fights in MMA [Mixed Martial Arts], computer games and movies or series.

Training sessions are held four times a week in the evenings. For the majority of regular participants of the scene, workout is their main leisure activity and the primary source of company outside of the family circle. On Sundays, conversations that have begun on the training ground often continue in nearby cafes or pizzerias, where they also play board games, such as Monopoly.

The religiosity (Islam) is also a key vector of solidarity for the workout scene. The domination of Islam in the space of the scene is fixed visually (the presence of the prayer rug), performatively (regular individual and collective Namaz) and with the help of special norms of behaviour. In the context of repressive activity on the side of the authorities in relation to the so-called Salafis, the workout scene acquires another important function – that is of a safe space in which religious youth can freely discuss, among other things, the problems of religious life and where they can find like-minded people with whom information can be exchanged.

If workout is a socially approved practice, then **anime**, on the contrary, is problematic and has become the focus of attention for ‘normal youth’ in Makhachkala, as well as amongst parents and relatives of informants. For example, dying hair bright colours (informants or their friends), wearing non-formal clothes, making bodily modifications (tattoos, piercings, etc.) often lead to ‘moral panics’ among ‘adults’. As S. Cohen suggests, certain groups and their practices can be represented in the media or everyday discourses as a threat to social values and interests (Cohen 1972).

In the case of anime fans, ‘right-thinking’ relatives (‘tukhum’) and other adults build moral barricades, and often assess anime fans’ participation in the ‘gathering’ (‘tusovka’) as deviant behaviour that must be controlled and suppressed. Firstly, anime and informal gatherings (tusovki) are often associated with ‘bad company’, the members of which consume alcohol and drugs, and reject traditional values, religious prescriptions and violate established norms.

‘Oh, it’s her fault’ (she quotes her friend’s mom). ‘You look at her and change because of her, she dyes her hair, that is all, the problem is in her’. There were attempts to get rid of me, but I went and and met her mother. She (the mother) thought that if I was in that company, if I look that way, then I would drink or whatever else, I would connect her daughter with bad company (anime_N5_F).

Secondly, watching anime and reading manga along with adopting the styles shown are seen as a legitimate childhood practice. However, when a person is a student, or an adult, it is then seen as deviant. In particular, parents’ logic of normalization for girls is associated with the need to ‘get married’; subcultural style, according to relatives, lowers the chances of finding a partner.

Participants in the anime scene thus experience constant pressure from the normalizing discourses of parents, teachers and other young people. Non-formal style invariably draws the attention of the ‘tukhum’ (relatives) and becomes the main focus. Due to this, many informants, who in everyday life openly display their own style, will on occasion ‘play’ the part of ‘the right Dagestani’, for example, during visits to relatives (in the village), they

will wear clothes that are unusual for them but conventional for wider Dagestani society:

Yes, a separate wardrobe, I even have separate clothes for events, but these are dresses of different lengths, I do not know why my mother always buys them and even swears that I do not wear them. Of course, I will not wear them. This, well, when you go somewhere to visit, although already all the guests are used to what I wear, I usually have for a 22-year-old adult lady ... They are used to that I am (creative profession): 'She's sick, leave her alone!' That is, something like that. And so you have to wear it from time to time [?], but even if you go to some funeral, you will not go there in jeans. I have to wear dresses. (anime_№2_F)

The image of the 'right Dagestani' includes not only having a certain style, but also, as already noted, holding certain religious views. In particular, a 'normal' young man should practice Islam and observe its rules. It should be noted that among the members of the anime community, there are both atheists and religious young people. However, with parents' and grandparents, at university or in wider social circles, young people will try not to emphasize their atheism and some are forced to constantly play the 'game of religiosity'.

I said that I am an agnostic. And in general, everyone reacts very negatively and tries to impose their own beliefs.. I do not know what will happen later. Maybe, I will believe, maybe, I have such a period in my life now, I do not deny this ... All, the whole family [is religious], not only my mother. Grandmother, uncle, aunt, sisters, all are religious and I generally do not like to talk about it, well, discuss this topic with them, even when we come to the cemetery, they read prayers there, I [covers his face with his palm]: one, two, three, four, five. (anime_№11_M.)

Social pressures from others have shaped certain views about what is right within the community. In fact, the scene acts as a space where normative expectations are weakened, where young people can 'be themselves' and not play the part of 'normal Dagestanis'. Anime fans described, that their company accepts people with different views and values (for example, with different beliefs, faiths, ethnicity, age). Hence, the cosmopolitanism and tolerance toward one another are the key vectors of solidarity in the group. Anyway, one thing that is unacceptable in their community is to impose your ideas, values and views on others.

It is important to note that young people on the anime scene do not define themselves in terms of local and ethnic identity: they do not use the terms 'Dagestani', 'Avari' or 'Lezgin'. On the contrary, the scene participants' daily practices are aimed at constructing a cosmopolitan ('advanced') identity through consumption (using AliExpress (a global on-line retail service), or buying second-hand), social networks (many friends outside Dagestan),

values and in some cases the complete exclusion of themselves from the social space of Makhachkala:

I almost never go out of the house and even now I can hardly force myself out of the house ... I'm so used to the fact that every guy might say something, maybe even hit me, but that rarely happens. You stand there, they begin to pester you, pester you, pester you, you are silent. (anime_№ 4, F.)

The anime and workout scenes present different scenarios for socialization and growing up. Participants in the workout community are focused on local (territorial) life styles. They represent themselves as 'normal youth' and support such regimes as moderate patriarchy, heterosexual masculinity, religiosity and homophobia. The participants in the anime community are oriented 'outwards'. The key vectors of solidarity in the anime scene can be defined through such regimes as tolerance, gender equality, not patriarchy, pacifism, cosmopolitanism and the rejection of homophobia. However, along with the visible differences which exist between these two youth communities, both scenes can be considered as 'alternative socialities' which are ideologically opposed to the significant 'Other' personified in the image of the 'gopnik'⁸ ('rednecks', 'vagabonds', 'scumbags').

Significant 'others': 'gopniks'/'vagabonds'/'hachis'/'tigers'

A healthy lifestyle, cultivated in the context of the workout scene, resembles a box with a false bottom where, under the layer of anti-drug and anti-alcohol rhetoric, there is also a layer that competes with another project of 'street' masculinity in the image of the 'gopnik', 'rednecks', 'scumbags'. As a discursive 'Other,' *rednecks* have two essential attributes: a tendency to spontaneous illegitimate violence and a marginal social status; these are exactly the problems that are solved at the micro-level of the workout scene. Informants said that their 'parents' culture requires them to be strong and 'not afraid' of violence:

Since youth, it's like, from childhood, we were inspired to do it there. For example, my father, if he is there [said:] do not be afraid of anyone there, fight there if something happens. We were brought up like this, in short, you are made a muzhik immediately here. (workout_№1_M)

However, at the same time, this requirement is associated with a lack of access to socially approved 'markets of violence', e.g. situations where the use or demonstration of force (brutality, bodily strength, the ability to fight and win) is 'exchanged' for higher social status. There are two key markets of violence in Dagestan. The first one is combat sports, in particular, freestyle wrestling, which is extremely popular among young men in Dagestan. Many of the workouters had also attended combat sports clubs and some continue to attend them. However, it is widely believed that there is a 'glass ceiling' in

combat sports, beyond which further development is possible only if financial resources are available.

The money issue is particularly acute in the case of another, less prestigious, but in demand 'market of violence' in Dagestan, that is serving in the 'organs' (OMON (Special Purpose Police Unit) FSB (Federal Security Service), MChS (The Ministry of Emergency Situations)). To get a real 'male' job, which is also well-paid, you must pay a bribe, some estimates put the amount of this as equal to the annual budget of a Dagestani family:

Well, for example, I went from the army and came to work for the police, I was there, they (police) said I should pay 120–150 thousand (Rubles) [to get this job] What? I have passed through the army, I got a military identity card, Exams [in police] physical tests are not a problem for me <... > I laughed, said: Thank you, It is not for me, I have the right [to work here] by law, he also laughed 'you know what laws we have', I say; 'I will not pay' and I left. (workout_Nº1_M)

There remains a street where violence can be 'exchanged' only for a lower, marginal – in relation to educational terms – social status. In terms of informants, involvement in street violence means to be a 'redneck'; an uneducated, unsuccessful young man with a tendency for spontaneous violent behaviour.

The participants of the workout scene resolve this contradiction by constructing an alternative space for presenting themselves to others, where the demonstration of one's own force is not connected with violence.

However, overcoming marginality can also be seen as a separate problem that does not relate to violence, but is closely connected to the structure of opportunities offered or excluded by the family, the school/university and the labour market. The following excerpt from a research diary shows the contexts of social exclusion that are very real for informants: the devaluation of higher education; unemployment or the precarious 'bullshit' job; and a permanent semi-dependency on parents that does not cease, but is only prolonged by marriage.

A [workouter] mentioned that his uncle graduated without attending the university/ My father, he said, simply paid money for him. B [workouter] picked up that none of those present, having received higher education, will work in their specialty, since there are no such jobs. B said: 'Say, C. [one of the trainers] graduated from economics [faculty of economics], but nobody needs economists.' I asked why he was studying then. B. answered: 'It's so fashionable when you marry your son to say that he's graduated from the law or medical faculty.' C. Supported him: 'And he really can not heal'. I asked: 'What if they leave?' B. responded: 'Those who leave, yes, they learn really and find work.' I: 'Why do they not leave then?' B.: 'Do you know what the system is here? You are found a girl when you are 20, parents marry you off and you vagabond ("bichuesh") with her here.' (field notes, 7.03.2017)

The identification of a life style as vagabonding (from the vagabond ('bich') – a fallen, drunk man, a pariah) connects socio-economic downward mobility with the problem of a lack of (self) respect and recognition from others. Social isolation and stigmatization become a payment for the enforced failure to comply with the normative obligations of traditional masculinity, that is, to have a career and a meaningful job that provides for the family.

The scene provides the workouters with the resolution of this problem at the micro-level. It functions as a central life interest (Stebbins 1992), a space for the application of efforts based on special training and skills, in which it becomes possible, as Stebbins (1992, 47) states, 'to make a career, experience important moments, achieve goals and participate in life'

Workouters see scene participation as a job that allows them to branch out. Thanks to the educational work, the individual and group social capitals acquired within the scene are converted into recognition outside of it – in the 'whole' society.

According to the narratives of representatives of the *anime scene*, 'gopniks', 'rednecks' and 'bulls' are those who are on the other side of the barricades in terms of values. They are the main antipode for anime fans because they demonstrate opposite values and behaviour, for instance, they have conservative views on gender and lifestyle, and actively impose their views on what they see as 'proper' through force:

And khachi believe that non-formals ['nephors'] are, sorry for the expression, fags. Even if with girls, they are kind of tolerant, they do not really show it, but when they see a non-formal guy, everything explodes inside them, they consider themselves absolutely [right], they think that they are absolutely allowed, in that case, to do something with this person and somehow correct this world for the better, in their opinion, but this is not correct. (anime_N2_F.)

In terms of the key everyday practices of 'bulls', informants talk about joint get-togethers ('tusovki') and walks through the city streets, accompanied by 'conversations', 'incursions' and 'accosting' of non-conventional-looking youth.

The clashes with the 'gopniks' were described in narratives in the context of the entire subcultural experience of the young people who participated in the study. In the diachronic perspective, during their school years (2008–2014), the city streets, parks and the embankment were represented as extremely dangerous spaces for non-formals, in which there were constant fights, 'incursions' and 'raids'. 'It was difficult when all of us were beaten and so on, so, you imagine that in addition to ... having the strategy of retreat, we were still moving like ninjas around the city, no one saw us' (anime_N14_M.).

However, *now* Makhachkala is described as a more liberal space in which to live, where the tension between 'yard' and 'informal' youth is gradually in decline. Nevertheless, although the city centre is represented as a relatively

safe space, where 'gopniks' 'behave more modestly', then the suburbs and outskirts of the city are described by many respondents as emotionally unpleasant places for walks and 'get-togethers' and sometimes as unsafe.

I have a friend, even acquaintance, he had an orange briefcase, hachi just abused him because of a very bright briefcase and beat him ... another friend who had shaved temples and a fringe, he was also beaten up because of his hair. (anime_№13_M.)

Aggressive and violent models of 'yard youth' behaviour, aimed at the social exclusion of non-formals from the urban space, contributed to the development of specific practices of non-formal behaviour in the city, which can be conditionally divided into tactics of 'mimicry' in the urban space and 'withdrawal' from meetings with 'gopniks'.

We do not all risk it here, it's the hair color that causes very bad reactions, especially with the guys, for them it's some kind of object for mockery, it's impossible to pass by them, it's better to plug your ears, it's immediate: 'What's the matter with you? Were you dipped into paint? Did you fall into the sewer? You could be used to paint a fence!' (anime_№4_F.)

Such experiences of clashes in the urban space, described in the narratives, often led to disguising particular clothing, with, for example, caps, shawls, bandanas and hats.

Since 'gopnikness' was defined in terms of its mass character, one of the main tactics of moving around the city, which was repeatedly cited by informants, is the practice of avoiding meetings with large companies of lads who share a common style and behave 'loudly' on the street. 'To get around, go to the other side, do not come into contact with', 'walk by that company'.

I walk along the street, I always look around and I always expect danger, I always expect, especially when I'm with a guy, I'm afraid that someone will say something to me, word for word and he can be beaten, just I have already had it with another guy, there were such situations. (anime_№17_F)

However, it was not always possible to avoid such meetings. That is why many informants talked about their own individual 'interactions' with *gopniks*. The most common tactics were: 'do not pay attention', 'do not answer', and 'do not react'. However, the practice of 'incursion' ('naezd') (Looking West, p. 144) could be accompanied not only by words, but also by violence, which then required non-standard tactics of behaviour. For example, a young man talks about his experience of using other tactics of interaction. In a conversation with a 'gopnik' it was important to find common lifestyle points – 'to find a common language' or to use relevant categories:

That is, when the conversation starts: 'Do you know that I'm an Avarian?' Another asks me 'Why?' [with regard to his participation in the community] – 'to meet

Girls! (I say) and so on. 'I'm just bored!' – 'So I go to the gym', 'And when I've already gone' they say: 'Come on, normal boy'. (anime_№14_M.)

Conclusion

The main aim of the article was to analyse the local specifics of youth cultural scenes in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, through a study of two youth communities: street workout and anime. The selection of these two group identities was not accidental. It was connected both with the overall design of the research project, within which the study was carried out, and with the characteristics that were revealed of the participants from the selected cases in terms of their attitudes to other youth communities in this Russian city. The analysis of the overall geopolitical situation in the republic helps us to understand the uniqueness of Dagestani youth's trajectories of growing up and socialization. This uniqueness is a result of the history of the republic within the Soviet Union and the severity of experience during the post-Soviet period. The most important factors which characterize the post-Soviet period include: the rapid growth in inequality, property polarization, unemployment, changes in the ethnic composition of the population, the out-migration of the Russian population, the transformation of Dagestanis' way of life along with changes in the rural and urban composition of the republic.

Furthermore, in recent years, the rapid revival of Islam and its growing influence and the accompanying cardinal redefinitions of the construct of the 'correct' Dagestani identity, including its gender dimensions, have become increasingly salient. The study showed that the socialization of the current generation of young Dagestanis is connected, to a large extent, with the complicated political agenda of the (officials say) 'struggle against radicalization and the growth of the terrorist threat'. The survey data, gathered as part of the study, demonstrates that all respondents define themselves in relation to Islam. Further, Islam has become extremely important, not only for the formation of a regional identity, but also for self-positioning in the context of their company, that is the community which is chosen for leisure and for participation in collective cultural practices. This article did not encompass all the differences between youth cultural scenes or all aspects of the choices and inclusion and solidarity of young people around important values, practices and urban spaces. Instead, two, in a certain sense opposing, cases of youth community in Makhachkala were chosen: street workout (inscribed in the context of the local patriarchy regime) and an anime community (symbolically resisting the pressure of social 'normativity'). It was important to understand the significance of the contradiction between these group identities, which was rhetorically emphasized both by the workouters and by the anime participants. This led us to pose the question, can we

continue to use the theoretical framework of an 'advanced' (subcultural youth minority-oriented toward 'Western' values, open to difference) and 'normal' (conventional youth, focused on the values of locality, neighbourhood and patriarchy)? Alternatively, is the contemporary (in our case the local) situation of the youth space in Makhachkala more complicated? Are the constructs of 'ours' and 'others' formed by more complex scenarios?

Analysis of the data obtained during the ethnographic research showed that the use of the construct of 'scene' helps not only to study the specific creative clusters of contemporary cities with a developed infrastructure of leisure and subcultural spaces, but also to understand the specifics of socialization of peripheral youth in a situation of uncertainty. Here the scene becomes a kind of alternative space to such institutions of socialization (family, education, work), a kind of social niche that helps to gain status and to interpret the meaning and direction of life outside the framework defined by the available milieu. The combination of a framework using the construct of 'scene' with a solidarity approach enabled us to examine the specifics of the key (core) values and norms that cement the communication of the scene participants. The most important marker for defining the cultural orientation of young people of the late 1990s was the distinction of *advanced* (sometimes progressive, alternative) and *normal* (conventional), when self-referral and the definition of 'ours' and 'others' occurred through the characteristics of cultural tastes (music, cinema, media), attitudes towards the West, the type of consumption, the view 'inward' (protection of norms and values of locality and neighbourhood) or 'outward' (focus on the centre, openness to the new), as well the type of gender regime (patriarchal or liberal). Yet, in the case of our research, this framework 'advanced – normal' was not sufficient for understanding the substance of group identities. The use of ethnography helped us to understand the latent values complementing our vision of subcultural choice, as well as the practices of public presentation and demonstration of group identities in the urban context. The selection of the workout scene and the anime community was determined by the visibility and prominence of these groups in Makhachkala, as well as by the apparent contradiction between the values that form the basis of their solidarity.

For young men involved in the workout scene, it is important to position oneself as ordinary Dagestani guys, Muslims, or lads from the street. For these young men, it is the open space, which is accessible for observation, which becomes a significant factor in demonstrating the right masculinity and 'Dagestanness', where Islamic religiosity, along with the cult of a strong body, acts as an indispensable element of mainstream normality. For the participants in the anime community, on the contrary, the street, especially the non-central city spaces, becomes a security threat that pushes them to develop special tactics of resistance and mimicry, to maintain a 'game in

religiosity', and to employ practices of concealing the parts of their identity that are not approved of by the 'normal' majority.

How informants differently constructed the image of a significant 'Other' or 'Alien' was found to be more subtle and important for the subsequent analysis. This led to the conclusion that despite the visible differences between the workout and the anime communities, they can both be considered as 'alternative socialities', ideologically opposed to the significant 'Other', personified in the image of 'gopnik' ('redneck', 'vagabond', 'scumbag'). Despite the differences in how the informants from these two scenes defined 'the other and the alien', the right to open street violence demonstrated by the gopnik is the most important in their description. For all the informants, this feature is a marker of marginality, a lack of education and social disadvantage. Both workouters and anime participants find it unacceptable to defend their identity and prove their worthiness and 'normality' through aggression, physical violence and humiliation of human dignity. At the same time, despite the similarity of the symbolic 'Other', for both the workouters and the anime scene, this image in each case is associated with its own discursive ontology and suggests various interaction strategies. For workouters 'gopnik' is 'our Other', whose marginality stems from the immanent contradiction inherent in current scenarios of correct masculinity. Thus, the main task of the workout scene is to correct such a 'spoiled' identity. In the context of the anime scene, 'gopnik' is a representative of another youth scene, an 'Alien' scene. It represents a real source of danger and determines their attitude towards the 'streets' and other public spaces of Makhachkala. That is why the main task for participants of the anime scene is not to defend the legitimate values of street life, to create a space for style performance and communication, which is safe from the presence of 'Others'.

Notes

1. The Dagestani War began when the Chechnya-based Islamist group, led by warlords Shamil Basayev and Ibn al-Khattab, invaded Dagestan on 7th August 1999, in support of Salafi rebels. The war ended with a major victory for the Russian Federation and the Republic of Dagestan, and the retreat of the Islamists (Souleimanov 2005).
2. This stratification is especially deep in Makhachkala, where the majority of budget transfers allocated to the republic remains. This money, through corruption schemes, fall into the pockets of bureaucracy and related businessmen.
3. Supported by a Russian Science Foundation Grant no. 15-18-00078. Within the research project, the following city case-'scenes' were selected: in Makhachkala, workout and anime; in Ulyanovsk, a female Instagram site – a 'scene' for caring for oneself (which became an off-line 'scene' of 'normal club get-togethers') and eco-volunteers; in Kazan, a rap-'scene' (Tatar rap) and participants of search expeditions ('poiskoviki') [Those who seek and re-bury the remains of soldiers

of the Second World War]; and in St. Petersburg, a post-Gothic 'scene' and vegans.

4. Anonymized.
5. In Russian 'look like *Papuan*' is a rude phrase, which means look ridiculous, not civilized, dressing too brightly.
6. 'Non-formal' is a common name in Russian for members of different subcultures. It has appeared in USSR, when subcultures (punks, hippie, style hunters) were contraposed to 'formal' and approved by authorities youth organizations (pioneers, comsomol). Today the notion is being used to describe youth that participates in different youth scenes (especially, creative), that has particular style and values. For anime scene participants, such a name in Russian ('neformal', 'nifer') is self-descriptive.
7. 'Gopniks' is a collective image of a certain masculine identity, represented through special practices and occupied spaces. 'Gopniks', in academic literature, are defined as a 'collective community', which has a narrow spectrum of interests and 'unconsciously' repeats group behaviour patterns (see Gavriluk 2010, Kosterina 2006). In Makhachkala the terms 'vagabonds', 'khachi', 'bulls', and 'tigers' are used as synonyms of 'gopniks'.
8. In Makhachkala 91.4% of respondents consider themselves believers and about 20% define themselves as 'active Muslims'.

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