

## Section 8. Sociology

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### THE EMBODIMENT OF HYPER-MASCULINITY WITHIN RADICAL RIGHT-WING SKINHEAD SUBCULTURE IN RUSSIA

#### Abstract

**Objective:** to reveal the ways in which hyper-masculinity is embodied by alt-right skinheads in Russia.

**Research methods:** participant observation, historical analysis, interviews, focus groups, discourse analysis.

**Research results:** based on the analysis of skinheads' appearances, activities, values, norms, cultural preferences, patterns of organization, and usage of language, different ways of reproducing patterns of hyper-masculinity within radical right-wing skinhead subculture in Russia were identified, such as shaving heads, participating in street fights, believing in brotherhood, listening to aggressive music, reading books regarding soldiers, organizing bands and bridges, and using militarized narrative; three waves of skinhead subculture were compared; a reduced radicalization of subculture was noticed nowadays.

**Scientific novelty:** the article presents an ethnography of skinhead subculture in a comparative perspective, analyzing the group from 1990 to contemporary days.

**Practical significance:** the conclusions of the article may serve as an explanation of male youth radicalization; the analysis of such cases of radicalization can assist in finding the ways to comprehend and reduce the intensity of youth's deviant behavior.

**Keywords:** Masculinity; Nationalism; Subculture; Radicalization, Skinheads; Youth.

#### Introduction

The 20<sup>th</sup> century signalized the ending of two distinct phenomena simultaneously. Firstly, conventional warfare has started to be considered relics of the past. The willingness to avoid another World War, the practice of nuclear proliferation, and the experience of the Cold War contributed to the overall decrease in the number of conventional wars, at least among

states that possess nuclear, biological, chemical and other kinds of weapons (McFate [1, C. 109]). These traditional wars, or wars of modernity, began to be gradually substituted by postmodern diplomatic and economic wars, resulting in male deprivation of their historical affiliation with warfare, role of soldiers and protectors of their countries, and sanction for violence in the name of a good cause. Secondly, the 20<sup>th</sup> century

can be seen as the age of feminism characterized by three distinct waves of female emancipatory movement which significantly affected the power structures of patriarchy (Humm [2]). As a result, it can be claimed that men started to lose their roles of heads of families, caretakers, heads of enterprises, etc. The ending of the phenomena of undisputed patriarchy and frequent conventional warfare may be listed as reasons for so-called “crisis of masculinity” (Lemon [3]). This crisis of gender identity may take different directions: some people adjust to the changing nature and essence of masculinity, while others resist this process of identity alteration by behaving in a reactionary mode. Politicized subcultures with radical affiliation such as right-wing nationalists are one of the examples of this hyper-masculine reactionary identity assertiveness. This article is concerned with the issue of reproduction of patterns of hyper-masculinity within radical Neo-Nazi skinhead subculture in Russia.

Skinheads replicate conventional wars by constituting an “artificial war”. They often engage in street violence and study combat tactics. Moreover, by making the subculture being associated with street fights, shaved heads, and brutal appearance, skinheads either unintentionally or deliberately make it complicated for women to become a part of the movement. Consequently, it can be argued that right-wing skinheads use their participation in the subculture as a way of demonstrating and endorsing their masculinity, which has been significantly reconsidered and transformed during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. While traditional masculinity highlights positive character traits such as fortitude and courage, hyper-masculinity is related to aggressive behavior, neglect of women, and idea of male monopoly on violence (Mosher and Sirkin [4]). According to Hinojosa [5], traditional constructions of hegemonic hyper-masculinity include “risk-taking, self-discipline, physical toughness and/or muscular development, aggression, violence, emotional control, and overt heterosexual desire”. These traits will be analyzed in relation to skinheads, revealing some

distinctive features of the reproduction of patterns of masculinity within the subculture.

The article is aimed at answering the following question: Drawing on the insights from socio-anthropological inquiry, how is hyper-masculinity embodied within alt-right skinhead subculture in Russia? In order to respond, the following methods were deployed: participant observation, historical analysis, focus groups, interviews, and discourse analysis. The subculture was analyzed in relation to appearances, activities, values, norms, preferences in music, literature and religion, patterns of organization, and use of language and style of narration. The field site is Moscow and Saint Petersburg, which are the cities where the majority of skinhead activities were and are held. The timeframe is from 1990 (*when the subculture started to be transmitted to Russia from Europe and USA*) to today. The period of 1990–2005 is the first “wave” of the movement, while 2005–2010 is the second and most radical one. Today, skinhead subculture is relatively under-represented; people who still adhere to it (*whom I still analyzed*) mostly possess similar cultural preferences as skinheads of the past, but they do not engage in radical direct actions and they have become less politicized. Skinhead subculture of 1990–2010 was a reactionary answer to the changing nature of masculinity, but today skinheads’ radical activity is not observed due to a number of reasons, ranging from governmental prosecution of skinheads to further development of feminist movement which managed not only to challenge patriarchy (*and therefore provoke radical reactions*), but also to educate both men and women in the field of gender equality.

### **Identification of Interview Participants**

«E» – one of the leaders of «Russian National Unity» (RNU; *Russian alt-right militarized nationalist organization*)

«C» – young right-wing politician, member of nationalist movement

«F» – former skinhead and football hooligan

«B» – one of the leaders of skinhead movement in early 2000s, founder of «Schulz-88» (*radical skinhead group of early 2000s*)

«A» – former alt-right skinhead

Rodion – alt-right skinhead

«D» – one of the leaders of skinhead movement in 2000s and 2010s

### **Appearance**

Skinheads' appearance possesses several distinctive features, for example, shaved head or Dr. Martens boots. Before proceeding to these characteristics, it is important to provide skinheads' opinions regarding how they should look like and what is a "beauty standard". Apparently, there are two "trends": 1) Skinheads who rely on militaristic or working class appearance, creating an image of a "tough kid"; 2) Skinheads who are impressed by images of Vikings or "aryan German officers" of the Third Reich who are associated with being tall, blond, and with blue eyes. Regarding the former, "D" pointed: "Look at «sharp» (from S.H.A.R.P – "Skinheads Against Racial Prejudices") – a sleek boy from country house; look at alt-right skinhead – a hardened bold guy, a tough kid". This image is built upon a working class background of some skinheads. Moreover, skinheads who embrace such appearance rely on the idea to look "terrifying", as either paramilitaries or gangsters. Regarding the latter, in turn, «F» highlighted: A blond tall guy, with blue eyes, it is really beautiful". This clearly reflects the standard of beauty common in the Third Reich. Instead of an image of paramilitary terrorist, these skinheads rely on mightiness, majesty, and nobility of appearance. However, not all skinheads are tall and blond, consequently, an image of a "tough kid" with a shaved head, militarized clothes that slightly resembles uniform and coveralls, and «multipurpose» combat boots became the most popular.

### **Clothes**

Jackets that skinheads wear are mostly bombers (*colors*: black, blue, or dark green). T-shirts that are popular include the following prints: military ones, white power, swastika, Kolovrat, or scenes of vio-

lence. Shirts are usually plaid (*this seems to be a distinctive feature of skinheads*). Camouflage and other military attributes are common among skinheads. Moreover, they usually decorate their jackets and bags with military stripes and badges (*usually something related to the Third Reich "aesthetics"*). Trousers are worn with suspenders. The most popular boots are combat ones, for example Dr. Martens. Sometimes, the toe of the boot is encased in metal for the purpose of close combat. The soles are designed to resist acid emissions. However, Dr. Martens are relatively expensive, especially for young and unemployed skinheads. Consequently, some of them buy other military shoes such as ankle boots («берцы»). The laces can be white (*for those who adhere to the ideology of white power and who are racists*) or brown (*Neo-Nazi and Nationalist Socialist ideas*).

This is a classic skinhead outfit of the 1st wave and it still relatively popular. During the participant observation in bars, bookstores, and musical halls, I noticed a considerable number of people adhering to this style. However, its peak of popularity was still in the 1990s. Skinheads of the 2d wave significantly changed the clothing style for purposes of security. "As «B» remembered: "In Schulz-88" we were skinheads, but we did not look like them, because the police was paying a lot of attention to skinheads, they knew the clothes (boots, bombers), so we started to dress less glaringly". So, this classic skinhead outfit is worn by skinheads who see their membership in the subculture as resting upon certain cultural preferences such as music, fashion, or literature. Those skinheads who continue to engage in direct actions continue the 2d wave's tradition of dressing discreetly.

The 2d wave skinheads' clothing resembled football hooligans' style. Combat boots were replaced with comfortable sneakers; plaid shirts and bombers disappeared. Moreover, catchy badges, stripes, and t-shirts' prints with swastika or Kolovrat also lost popularity due to security reasons. Skinheads of the first wave were proudly translating an image of "working class tough kids trained in combat", while

second wave skinheads were putting security and secrecy first. However, despite their alleged rejection of demonstrating political attitudes through clothing, I still noticed numerous signs and symbols in their outfits during participant observation. As «E» told me, “There is a trend for minimalism in skinhead clothing. Large swastika prints and flashy badges obviously disappeared, but they do like small logos, pins, etc.” Apparently, the majority of skinheads still prefer to transmit certain messages through cloths, although they do it less evidently to avoid police’s attention. Third wave skinheads (*skinheads of today*) mostly see their membership in the movement in cultural terms, meaning that they do not practice radical direct actions. Therefore, they are able to dress as classic skinheads, and they do not have to hide from the police. Obviously, there is still a percentage of them who are engaging in street violence from time to time. They inherited the 2d wave’s clothing style, mixing it with football hooligans’ clothes. Such style is close to what is considered «casuals» within football hooligans. The most popular brands are Stone Island and Ralph Lauren (*although these are expensive clothes*), Fred Perry, Weekend Offender, Thor Steinar (*more affordable*). This style is less «terrifying» by sight, but, given that skinheads of the 2d wave and football hooligans have built a reputation of “reckless and violent fighters” (*according to «C»*), this image may scare ordinary people, migrants, or anti-fascists even more than classic skinhead outfit.

#### *Tattoos and Hairstyle*

Classic skinhead hairstyle is shaved head. As I understood, the initial idea was to make it impossible to grab their hair during a fight. However, contemporary skinheads also wear short hair. The reason is that today skinheads rarely engage in direct actions.

Skinhead tattoos are important part of their image. I expected a decline in tattoo popularity within subculture, but it seems that this type of “self-decoration” is still widely practiced. According to «D» and «A», most frequent tattoos are Kolovrat (*Slavic Neo-Nazi swastika*), «Sieg Heil» (*Schutzstaffel slogan*), “my

honor is called loyalty” (*expression of unity and brotherhood*), runes (*pagan symbolism*), swastika (*attachment to Hitlerism*), three crosses (*straight edge symbols*), crucified skinhead (*goes back to British subculture, it means that skinheads have a mission to protect society*), and spider web on the elbow (*dedication to your ideals*). Some skinheads for the purpose of security turned to less eye-catching and politicized tattoos, favoring such patterns as guns, wolves, lions, and warriors. These tattoo themes and patterns are associated with masculinity and such ideas as loyalty, physical force, brotherhood, violence, and idealism. Tattooing is of great importance for the skinhead subculture (Reid and Valasik [6]). A tattoo serves as a self-identifying sign; it clearly defines the belonging of its wearer to subculture.

#### **Activities**

##### *Casual Activities: Concerts, Drinking, Sports*

Concerts seem to be the only activity that has been common in skinhead subculture from 1990s and till now. Music such as Western RAC (*Rock Against Communism*), Heavy Metal, and Russian neo-Nazi rock have been highly popular among members of subculture. Concerts brought large number of skinheads together, allowing them to communicate and listen to their favorite music. As «B» pointed out: “Concerts are about music, beer, girls, conversations – just hanging out. People danced and screamed Sieg Heil”. Traditional masculinity can be revealed even in this citation: «girls» are perceived as a part of a party, together with beer and music. This points to hyper-masculinity of a subculture that is fully dominated by men who consider «girls» as a way to hang out and relax “after a tough day”.

Today, concerts are also one of the means of subculture’s reproduction of cultural code. For example, “Russian Skinhead Pride”, an unofficial formation, organizes concerts almost every month. I visited one of them to observe and those inferences were made:

Greetings with Sieg Heil are much less frequent than in early 2000 s.

There are more women at the concerts than it used to be.

Lyrics of songs became less radical.

These observations suggest reducing hyper-masculinity of the subculture, making it resemble “beer and music brotherhood” of the 1990s and contrasting with radical neo-Nazi formations of early 2000s. However, masculinity is still a characteristic feature of the subculture: concerts’ visitors and musicians are predominantly men. Moreover, there is always «slam» at the concerts: people are not only dancing, but also hustling and jumping in a very aggressive manner. They do it «for fun» and even adhere to a certain “slam ethics”, but it almost always causes injuries among participants, especially giving their heavy boots and strong fists. I noticed that women almost never participate in slam, and this is understandable. Evidently, slam is another way of reproducing male dominance within the subculture: this kind of activity isolates women from the stage, reducing their chances to dance and enjoy the music in a safe way. Only tall and fit guys seem to be able to slam and not get injured. «A» remembered his first time coming around the subculture: “We drank and went to the concert. I was hit with an elbow during slam, I was super drunk, it’s unforgettable”.

All the «skinhead bars» that I visited as a part of my participant observation («Na kranakh» in Moscow, «Zarya» and «Zaliv» in Saint Petersburg) were beer bars. The word «beer» was probably the third most frequently used word after «fight» and «war» during interviews and focus groups (*the latter were held in «Zarya» bar*). As «E» told me, skinheads’ activities of the third and partially the first waves could be summarized in the following way: “drinking beer, seeing like-minded people, waving flags (*at the demonstrations, for example*)”. Beer culture is something special for the members of the movement: “A person comes to the bar, drinks beer, talks to the guys, relaxes” – «A» continues.

Different researchers claim that male alcohol consumption is socially-conditioned, meaning that gender norms and roles matter when analyzing drinking patterns. For example, Fugitt and Ham

[7] observed male alcohol consumption behavior and concluded that “consumption of alcohol by men in social contexts may be strongly motivated by the desire to confirm masculine status”. Beer in this context is perceived as something “belonging to men”, despite a long history of women in brewing. Beer commercials usually present “traditional and stereotypical images of men” (Strate [8]), making it the most masculine drink. Skinheads fully embraced beer culture and masculinity that is attached to it.

Sport has apparently become popular within skinhead subculture since the second wave’s appearance. People who are closer to football hooliganism rather than to skinheads claim that the reason for participation in the movement was in the “realization of sports ambitions” (*as «F» noted*). Sports and straight edge seem to be main features of football hooligans’ movement and some skinhead formations as well. After the first wave of skinheads in 1990s, people seem to split into three categories: 1) More educated and ambitious started to pursue political goals; 2) Aggressive and young formed the second and most radical wave of skinhead subculture; 3) Others joined football hooligans’ «firms» and started to do sports. “Healthy lifestyle and professional sports” became popular within skinheads and hooligans, according to «F». They started to launch professional boxing clubs (*mainly in 2005–2010*). This interest in sports came alongside the idea of “straight edge”. Skinheads and hooligans started to “reject alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes” in order to become “stronger, healthier warriors” (*as «C» noted*). Such ideas are associated with traditional representations of masculinity: men are expected to be physically strong in order to be able to both protect and attack.

#### *Radical Direct Actions*

Radical direct actions were a significant part of a skinhead’s lifestyle, especially during the second wave of the movement that was characterized by dramatic radicalization of young people. This is how «E» once described skinheads’ activities at most radical times: “they walk around the city, set fire to migrants’

enterprises, and slaughter". I asked «A» what is the most memorable part of being a skinhead. He answered: "street fights, although I participated only in few".

Obviously, contemporary skinheads do not engage in direct actions often. The laws and prosecutions are now enforced in much more effective manner than it was during Yeltsin's and early Putin's rule. Murders are now exceptions rather than a casual practice. However, street fights happen from time to time. While I was working on this article a year ago, a mass fight happened. The fight was between anti-fascist and alt-right skinheads, and it occurred after anti-fascists attempted to disrupt a musical concert organized by right-wing skinhead formation "White nights skins". Apparently, guns were used, but nobody got seriously injured.

It may be argued that the most "hyper-masculine" moment in subculture's history is the time of its second wave, when radical direct actions were a routine. This was the moment of unrestrained violence and aggression, accompanied by the embodiment of such traditional masculine features as physical force and ability not only to fight but also to attack.

#### *Occasional Gatherings: Militarized and Sport Events*

The last activity typical of skinheads is military and sports training. Such gatherings could be organized by skinhead formations, especially now, but back in the times of the 1st and 2d waves of the movement, mainly RNU arranged military training in forests and fields, while sport camps were hosted by football hooligans who embraced the idea of healthy lifestyle earlier than skinheads. «E» who was one of the leaders of RNU noted that such military trainings "provided discipline". He continues: "If we talk about patterns of masculinity, well, we are of a paramilitary wing, we should always be ready for war, we are men: during these camps, we wear military uniform, we do a «scout's path», and throw knives as part of training". «D» remembered: "RNU took us to shooting range". Such activities very much reflect militarized masculinity in a way that skinheads and their «pa-

trons» feel that it was and is important to «be prepared» for either such dramatic events as civil wars or for casual street fights. Moreover, they embraced military order and learnt discipline in order to maximize their efficiency as paramilitary groupings.

#### **Values**

##### *Brotherhood and Unity*

Brotherhood seems to be understood as a value of being united and becoming stronger together. «F» pointed to a comparison with Italian mafia: "they were testing each other and becoming stronger". Moreover, he continues: "Skinheads were a brotherhood of war". These values are concerned with overcoming difficulties together, frequently in a militarized context. As «E» told me: "When you go on a mission or to the mountains with a comrade, you walk a long way together, you share the meal and shelter, you overcome difficulties, you acquire shared memories, all these unites people".

Such ideas and suggestions seem to be in line with traditional militarized masculinity concept. Masculinity in Western terms is associated with different characteristics such as being a caretaker, taking initiative, being strong (*both mentally and physically*). However, militarized masculinity is a more specified concept. It can also be perceived as a part of hegemonic masculinity paradigm, but it possesses an important paradox (Tapscott [9]). The paradox is the assumed contradiction between such characteristics as dominance, assertiveness, aggressiveness, independence, self-sufficiency, and willingness to take risks and more feminine values, for example compassion, will to cooperate and to sacrifice (Titunik [10]). From one point of view, men perform their roles as «warriors» that are prepared to "die for the country" (Higate, [11]), but they are at the same time trying to remain disciplined and acknowledge order and general well-being. They look after each other and are ready to sacrifice themselves for their comrades. This is what can be seen in skinhead subculture: they perform masculine roles in a militarized manner. On the one hand, they are «war-

riors» that engage in radical, aggressive, violent and unrestrained direct actions that had led to deaths in the past. On the other hand, they always highlight «brotherhood» and «unity» as important values and talk about the necessity of cooperation, restraint, and order within their brigades and bands.

Furthermore, the words «brotherhood» and «brothers» seem to be understood in a militarized way. «Brothers» are mentioned in the same contexts as «soldiers», for example. «Brotherhood of war» is also a militarized term, suggesting a community that is united by goals of fighting, winning the war together, etc.

### *Mutual Help and Authority*

«Mutual help» continues the discussion about militarized masculinity and «brotherhood» value. It appears that mutual help is one of the main pillars of subculture, and it ranges from some casual favors (*such as helping to shave head*) to full-scale fundraising campaigns (*in case a member of subculture has some serious problems, such as going to jail*). «Helping brothers» was mentioned a lot during the interviews and focus groups.

For example, «C» told me the following: “Skinheads help their prisoners of conscience (*those who are in jail for their views/attitudes*) financially”. However, there are certain conditions to be met: a skinhead should continue to declare his views publicly, and the reason he is in jail should be for a “direct action” or he should have helped skinhead movement a lot in the past. This means that although there is a value of mutual aid, it is not unconditional: a person must deserve help from his «brothers». Authority plays a highly important role: if a person has proven himself as a reliable, strong, and brave, if he has never betrayed skinhead «brothers», and if he possesses merits, he is apparently almost untouchable. To illustrate this, a quote by «D» can be used: “One of our comrades had shown himself in a very bad way: he was beaten by migrants and could not stand for himself properly, although he is a boxer. They took off his bootlaces – and this very humiliating. We were dissatisfied, we

drubbed him and send him to «lightning» («lightning» – in Russian skinhead subculture, a mass fight for the purpose of training, will be explained in the section on «language of war»). I asked: “Why haven’t you simply exclude him from your brigade instead of beating him?”. The answer was short: «He had merits to the movement». This may show how skinheads value authority and merit, and how they understand «mutual aid». Instead of excluding a person, they decided to help him restore his dignity by sending him to the «lightening» where he could prove his bravery and strength once again. This resonates with the ideas of militarized masculinity: on the one hand, there is an element of unnecessary violence (*skinheads beat their own «brother»*), but, at the same time they were worried about restoration of his honor and instead of expelling him they gave him another chance, although in their own distinctive manner.

### **Cultural Preferences**

#### *Literature*

Literary preferences provide important insights regarding skinheads’ attachment to masculinity. For example, «C» remembered: “Skinheads of the 2d wave were reading radicals a lot. They read books about Hitler and decided to make assault squads. Russian literature lacked substantial nationalistic appeal due to communist revolution, so the turn to the Western one”. According to «A», there were books by «conservative, traditional authors, mainly about Third Reich or Russian White Movement».

Moreover, there were periodical magazines published by skinheads that were highly popular among subculture’s members. According to «E», «Screwdriver» («Отвертка») and «Bold» («Под ноль») were the most well-known. «B» was the first in Saint Petersburg to print flyers and publish neo-Nazi/nationalist magazines. He remembered: “There used to be an «informational hunger» back then. People were eager to read at least flyers. I know that my zines were walking from hand to hand at schools. They were rare and they were the “*Forbidden fruit for kids*».

It seems to be obvious that literary preferences of skinheads reveal their deep attachments to masculine values. They mainly read about wars, revolutions, combat tactics and right-wing ideologies. This is closely related to militarized masculinity: subculture's members find it interesting and important to know about the organization of the Third Reich that is famous for strict autocratic order. Moreover, I noticed skinheads' sympathy towards the White Movement that fought for the Tzar and Empire during civil war in Russia. White officers are perceived as "great warriors", revealing skinheads' monarchist traditionalist views.

As a part of participant observation I visited «Listva» («Foliage») bookstores in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. To start with, the main focus of Listva's assortment is on the books that are published by «Black Hundred» publishing agency. "Black Hundred" mainly publishes books by authors that were sympathetic towards the White Movement and therefore were forbidden in the USSR. This also reveals monarchist appeal of skinheads in particular and of Russian nationalists in general.

#### *Music*

Music occupies an undeniably important role in skinheads' culture (Ramat [12]). The most popular genres are Nationalist-Socialist Black Metal (*NS Black Metal*), Rock against communism (*RAC*), Hardcore, and Russian neo-Nazi rock. The lyrics of songs that are performed by these genres' musicians are radical and often aggressive, declaring such ideas as white supremacy, skinhead brotherhood, conservative revolution, etc. Obviously, music sheds the light on the link between skinhead subculture and militarized and hegemonic masculinity. I listened to 20–30 songs and made a list of lines that are most relevant for the discussion of reproduction of masculinity within the subculture:

1. About violence, fighting, skinhead's patriotism, and war:

*From a song by Doberman – "Terrorists with Electric Guitars":*

"Our rage is unstoppable" – unrestrained feeling of aggression

"The hour of the strike is set, and the grenades have already flown" – militarized language

*From a song by Gang of Moscow – "Ian Stuart":*

"In Valhalla, Odin is waiting for fighters like you" – reference to vikings (*that are considered perfect Aryan warriors by skinheads*) and their afterworld and gods

"And to protect the country, I took the sword of freedom in my hands" – language of patriotism and war

*From a song by Untitled – "Glory to Victory":*

"Steel gripped in a heavy hand" – highlighting physical power

2. About brotherhood and unity:

*From a song by Gang of Moscow – "Ian Stuart":*

"Our brother, we remember you"

*From a song by Gang of Moscow – "Vivat, Russia!":*

"We are all one family"

*From a song by Kolovrat – "Two Brothers":*

"Loyal friends, working class, they never betray" – values of loyalty and reference to skinheads' social background

3. About straight edge and health:

*From a song by T.N.F. – "Straight Edge":*

"Everyone should be mentally and physically healthy"

"We need healthy descendants"

It seems that "Kolovrat" is the most iconic group, according to the members of subculture. This musical group also demonstrates the attachment to masculine values.

*Selected Kolovrat album titles:*

1994: Ready to Destroy

1999: Blood of Patriots

2003: Total War

2009: Unity in Action

*Religion*

As was mentioned before, some skinheads adhere to pagan faith and sometimes go to fields and forests to perform Slavic pagan rituals (Pollard [13]). The

festival of Perun is probably the most masculine out all Slavic pagan feasts. During the Festival of Perun, masculine forces are worshipped and demonstrated. «Warriors» engage in fights to prove their endurance and rage.

Neopaganism seems to be a contradictory phenomenon. On the one hand, pagan religion embraces both femininity and masculinity, providing grounds for equality of gender/sex. However, neopagan beliefs are mostly adopted by alt-right groups that are interested in conservative revolution and traditionalism, therefore contrasting old pagan beliefs with Christianity (*at least in Eastern Europe that I studied*). Consequently, pagan religion is often used as another means of embodying hyper-masculinity. As I understood from the interviews, Festival of Perun is much more popular among skinheads compared to Kupala Night (*rituals of which are focused on both femininity and masculinity*). A possible explanation is that Perun's feast is associated with replacement of feminine force with masculine force and subsequent praising of masculine physical abilities.

Moreover, pagan faith is popular because despite embracing both femininity and masculinity, it is traditional and conservative in terms of roles that are assigned to both sexes. As Aitamurto and Gaidukov [14] claimed, “men are regularly presented as strong warriors and women as tender mothers and homemakers” in Russian «Rodnoverie» (*Slavic Neopaganism*). Obviously, alt-right skinheads who embrace the aesthetics of Vikings and their physical power, pagan gods, and heroism (*although it is needed to be mentioned that Viking history contain a lot of legends about female warriors who were fighting with the same bravery as men*), are sympathetic towards Slavic neopaganism that presents a men as a «knight» and women as a “mother and wife”. Filip [15] in his ethnographic study of neopaganism in Poland also highlights the link between pagan faith and extreme far-right masculinities. However, he points to the positive gender dynamics within neopagan groups: women have become more empow-

ered and grown in number. Moreover, during my fieldwork I also noticed that women are searching for their own modified roles and positions within traditional Slavic religion. During one of the focus group interviews (*with «C» and his friend, «I», who is a young right-wing politician from Moscow*), I was told that there is a new wave of interest in neopaganism, and women are a significant part of this Rodnoverie renaissance. In 1990s and 2000s when the right wing (*from moderate politicians to radical skinheads*) was mostly dominated by men, neopaganism that they adhered to was hyper-masculine. However, with the growing number of women in the movement, the faith had also been adjusted. Now, not only Festival of Perun is celebrated, but also numerous feasts that embraces both femininity and masculinity, and women take part in such practices. However, masculinity and femininity remain traditional, as I noticed.

### **Patterns of organization**

#### *Bands, Gangs, Brigades, Firms, and Assault Squads*

It seems that skinheads' formations are divided into those embracing criminal language and gangster image and those adhering to military patterns of organization. The former is therefore linked with unrestrained and lawless violence (*associated with hyper-masculinity*), while the latter embodies militarized masculinity that requires order, strict hierarchy, loyalty, and respect.

Bands, gangs, and firms are more common within younger skinheads who are willing to construct a terrifying, aggressive image of their groups. The most radical and violent groupings were all called either bands or gangs. Firms are less popular within skinhead subculture. They are mostly found within football hooligans' movement. However, those skinheads that were/are connected to both movements call their groups «firms». Football hooligans are known for defiant direct actions; moreover, their motivations for violence are even less clear than of skinheads. In turn, «gangs» and «bands» are parts of criminal narrative and are also associated with violence and non-compliance with the law. Previously, I quoted one of

the interview participants who compared skinheads to the Italian mafia. It seems that criminal discourse and romanticized prison life are respected and embraced by skinheads. The most famous and radical gang seems to be Band CTO of Borovikov and Voyevodin (*combat terrorist organization*), members of which are responsible for more than 13 murders and are now either dead or serving sentences in prison. CTO was a skinhead organization, although they did not dress as skinheads for security reasons. These people completely despised the law and caused a bloodshed in the streets of Saint Petersburg because of their radical Nazi ideology. They apparently perceived themselves as “warriors of racial war”, but they lacked «ethics» and self-restraint (*for example, there is a «ban» on beating women and children; moreover, most skinheads are against murders; CTO did not follow these rules*) that were typical of more formalized and educated skinhead formations that displayed military masculinity. In contrast, CTO members attacked and even killed women and children, and this caused disapproval and condemnation of their actions by other alt-right skinheads.

Brigades and assault squads appear to be more formal and structured organizations, either skinhead or nationalist. For example, RNU members who patronized younger skinheads used the term “assault squad” to describe their subdivisions. «C» remembered: «RNU used swastika as a symbol and created assault squads in the image and likeness of Third Reich». «E», being of the leaders of RNU, continues: “RNU had a clear militarized organization and political agenda and ambitions”. Such organizations were constantly reproducing patterns of military masculinity’s embodiment through a system of military signs and symbols.

#### *Hierarchy and Militarized Positions*

Following the discussion of formations’ self-identifications as gangs or brigades, it is important to consider patterns of organization within these groups. As I inferred from conversations and historical analysis, the more educated and formalized the grouping was, the more it reflected a militarized organization. Skinhead

gangs with young and radical participants were less formal and more spontaneous, with unofficial leaders whose authority rested either on their charisma, myths, or illustrious direct actions. «C» proved it: “In skinhead bands, there is one charismatic leader, a «Führer», who can mobilize supporters and organize direct actions. It is leaderism, like in «Schulz-88» or «Lincoln-88». If we are talking about radical terrorist formations (*such as CTO*), there can be multiple leaders (*Borovikov and Voyevodin, for example*) because there is a need to negotiate tactics and targets (*militarized language*)”. «B», who was the founder of «Schulz-88», noted: “Yes, I was the leader of the group. In early 2000s I was even considered one of the leaders of skinhead movement in Russia, though it was an unofficial status. I did not have any specific credentials, this authority had been reproduced via informal relations and honors”.

In more formalized organizations, “there was a strict militarized hierarchy” (*as «E» remembered*), that was built upon real merits and capabilities rather than myths or charisma. In brigades (*formed by older and more educated skinheads*) there were multiple leaders, those close to leaders (*also elite*), «backbone», and young boys “for errands”. Almost everybody from those close to leaders and from the backbone have specific missions. For example, «D» remembered being responsible for the recruitment, before starting his own brigade.

Obviously, skinheads recreate criminal and military structures, relying on leaders or Führers, building a hierarchy, and assigning «missions» to the members of groupings. In order to understand the nature of masculinity reproduction via different management styles, I researched the topic of gendered management and came to three main conclusions:

Masculinity in management is embodied via vertical structures of organization (*a hierarchy*).

By contrast, femininity is associated with horizontal patterns of organization (*a network*).

Masculine appeal towards hierarchy is linked to the phenomenon of patriarchy: patriarchy is per-

ceived to be a “vertically organized hierarchy”, where white heterosexual men who embrace traditional hyper-masculinity are on the top of the structure, while other forms of masculinity and women are marginalized.

It seems to be obvious that skinheads continuously reproduce hyper-masculinity through adherence to a vertical order that was typical of highly-militarized and hierarchical Third Reich, for example.

### **Language of Violence and Discourse of War**

#### *Violence*

Throughout the fieldwork, I was making attempts to understand the nature of skinheads' appeal to violence and the reasons for violent and aggressive behavior types that they adhere to. One of the most frequent answer was that “violence was the only solution”. However, as the time was passing, it was becoming evident that violence was not that effective in solving alleged migration problems, for example. However, street violence is sometimes practiced by skinheads even today (*although rarely*). The analysis of reproduction of masculine roles and patterns made me think that the nature of aggressive behavior lied in the realm of skinheads' values and norms system. Firstly, they perceive violence in different metaphoric senses: for example, violence is a way to test one's strength or to become closer with «comrades». As «F» noted: “This is the same as the sports brotherhood: if you spill blood together on the carpet in sports, then you become closer with your sparring partner, or even with your friend. You fought, you worked out together, shed sweat – you got closer”. During the conversations it was revealed that there were such things as «lightning» and rite of passage which can be used as illustrations of a concept of “violence as test of endurance”. As «D» remembered: “If you come to skinhead community, you have to «answer» for it. In some brigades, like ours, there are rituals of initiation: you have to endure three minutes in sparring against three people. It may sound funny, but it is a test of fortitude, if you are ready for this, then you have a fighting spirit, and

you will not run when you have to stand and hold on. There were «lightnings» between the brigades to raise morale – this is when two brigades agree and go somewhere in the field to fight. On the «lightning», if a person falls and surrenders, he will not be touched anymore”. Secondly, violence is seen as something natural for men, an instinct. «C» elaborated: “People saw physical violence as the only solution, but many of them noted that it was on an instinctive level – you see that there are a lot of strangers in your country, and therefore you need to protect the others and defend yourself”. Thirdly, violence is compared to drug addiction. «C» continued: “When you realize that you can beat people and not get caught, there is a feeling of power that intoxicates”. Fourthly, violence may be seen as a “proper lifestyle” for men. For instance, I had the following conversation with «B»: “Did you fight a lot?” – “Yes, all the time”. – “Why? Did you see it as a way to solve problems?” – “Well, it is a boy's lifestyle”. Finally, there is a very important quote by «B» that helps to understand skinheads' opinions regarding the alleged link between men and violence: “Men have aggressive instincts. They need to let their rage out. This aggressive nature cannot be realized in the modern world. In the past, you could go to war, be a soldier, become a pirate or something like that, but now there is no such thing in Western and ours society, so boys become hooligans or skinheads”. This is illustrative in terms of representing how the changing nature of masculinity leads some young men to becoming engaged in radical and violent behavior. The 20th century seems to have brought an end to classic masculinity, at least in terms of social, economic and cultural conditions. The decreasing number of armed conflicts (*that are replaced by economic or diplomatic wars pursued with the help of sanctions, for example*) and increasing demand for gender equality had made traditional hegemonic masculinity subject to change. Instead of unconditional dominance over women, men now face a new reality where both femininity and unconventional forms of masculinity (*such as*

gay masculinity) are playing equally important role. While some men adjust to this situation, others face difficulties accepting the need to give away privileges that historically have always been possessed exclusively by men. This is what some social scientists call a “crisis of masculinity” – a situation when masculinity is changing due to social and economic conditions, and men need to embrace it, though some of them find it problematic and therefore may engage in deviant and radical behavior. Hyper-masculinity of skinheads that was revealed and discussed above can serve as an example of the problem of adjustment to a new kind of reality.

Lastly, for the purpose of illustration I collected the metaphors that were frequently used by skinheads for the purpose of describing what violence is:

1. The cult of strength
2. A sense of victory
3. Spiritual and physical unity
4. Being strong
5. Being a man
6. Adrenalin
7. Ecstasy

#### *War and Militarized Narrative*

Discourse of war and combat is another distinctive feature of skinheads’ narrative. The word «war» was mentioned numerous times and in different contexts. Moreover, skinheads usually use military terms and expressions in their speeches. Firstly, war is viewed in the context of potential national revolution and racial confrontation. «C» remembered: “Many skinheads perceived themselves as warriors of a future racial war; thus, if you cannot fight, what kind of warrior of the revolution are you? Fighting was viewed by many as preparation for the great purpose of war. Some skinheads participated in armed conflicts”. Moreover, war may be seen as an end in

itself, being a process of attaining a “greater aim” and way of becoming a warrior. «C» continued: “Many people do not want to live for themselves, they live for a greater purpose. People begin to dress in combat clothes to attract violence and fights in order to both stand out and to crystallize the process of fighting. I remember comparing myself with White Guards. People began to identify themselves with stormtroopers, with the Third Reich officers who were examples of ideal war men. To die for your country, for the sake of the greater aim, it’s an honor”.

Militarized narrative became evident throughout the conversations with skinheads. For example, they use such words as “comrade-in-arms”, «combat-ready», «surrender», «battalion», «military honor», etc. Such expressions reflect militarized masculinity of skinheads.

#### **Conclusion**

To conclude, it is needed to highlight that alt-right skinhead subculture is traditionally and conservatively masculine. The reproduction of masculine roles is performed through the reiteration of certain activities (*for example, street fights*), reproduction of hyper-masculine appearance, marginalization of women, use of militarized and aggressive language, adherence to particular patterns of organization and values/norms, and continuity of specific cultural preferences. Three waves of skinhead subculture are unique in terms of the embodiment of masculinity. Although each of the waves is closely connected to the reproduction of patterns of masculinity, it is important to note that contemporary skinheads demonstrate reduced hyper-masculinity. However, only time will tell how far the transformation of subculture can go in relation to the inclusion of women and rejection of violence as a means of solving alleged social and political problems.

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