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# *Gopniki*

## Peripheral Masculinity in Post-Soviet Russia

*By*

Eli Albert Loeb

*Advisor*

Larissa Rudova

A senior thesis submitted to the Department of German and Russian of Pomona College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

*to*

Pomona College

Claremont, California

May 2020

This paper represents my own work in accordance with Pomona College regulations

# Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been completed without the help and support of a great many people. First and foremost, thank you so much Larissa Vladimirovna for an amazing four-year journey. You have been an incredible advisor during this thesis process, and throughout my college experience – none of this would have been possible without your help. On that note, I would like to thank the Russian and German Department for playing such a large part in my college career. A special thank you to Dr. Martinez-Tebbel, whose gender studies classes senior year opened my eyes to a whole new realm of theory and completely changed the trajectory of my thesis for the better and more interesting. Thank you mom and dad for, I guess, everything, but specifically, the fantastic help with getting this project over the finish line. Shout out Elias and Laura for the comradeship during my semester in Russia; I may not have survived to tell the tale of the *gopniki* without it. Shout out Marion for the constant support, encouragement, and reminding the rest of us to have fun. Shout out to Blaise for always being down to talk theory with me over Appa and Fif. Shout out Addison for playing it out of the back, participating in shenanigans during quarantine together, and supporting onlyfans_48947583. Also, a big thank you to Mrs. Roby for tolerating me all those years in Russian class at Friends, I certainly would not be here without you. This is just the tip of those who directly or indirectly helped me with this process, and to all of you not mentioned, спасибо!

# Note on Translation and Transliteration

The Library of Congress transliteration system is used in my paper for most Russian words and names. However, in the case of cited authors, I defer to the publisher's transliteration if one is provided. For the sake of easier reading, I have chosen to render "ё" as "yo" and "й" as "i" in my text. The names of famous figures will be presented in their popular form, for example "Yeltsin" rather than "El'tsin" is used.

All translations of Russian texts and lyrics are my own unless otherwise noted.

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# Abstract

In the 1990s, packs of tracksuit-clad youth from the suburbs known as *gopniki* descended on Russia's cities. These problematic youth, embodying a unique strain of violent masculinity, rapidly rose in prominence during a time of national crisis. The *gopniki* faded just as quickly when Russia entered the new millennium. The influence of *gopnik* worldview did not diminish with the movement, however, and *gopniki* continue to influence Russian culture. This study of primary Russian source material examines the theoretical, ideological, and historical origins of this under-researched group, and explains their lasting influence on Russians in a rapidly changing world.

# Foreword

Squatting with comrades in a knockoff tracksuit or simple shirt and trousers, leather shoes and a newsboy cap that nods to the days of the Revolution. A developed body, vulgar vocabulary and propensity for violence and cigarettes. The *gopnik* cuts an immediately recognizable figure throughout the former Eastern bloc. Rife during the dying days of the Soviet Union, the *gopnik* identity and style had an outsized impact on Russian culture throughout the 1990s. To this day, even with the *gopnik* less prevalent on the streets, they continue to influence areas as varied as fashion,[1] hip-hop, visual media, literature and language.

While other subcultural youth groups have inspired ethnographers and sociologists, such as Hilary Pilkington, insufficient work has been done by Western researchers to document this impactful group that possibly dwarfed all other *neformaly*[2] when it came to numbers and ubiquity across Russia. Aside from cursory descriptions in academic studies of Russian youth culture and presentations by memers and bloggers on the internet, the semiotics (outward appearance, actions, and more) of the gopnik has not been addressed in depth by English language publications. Even Russian sources remark on the lack of academic research[3] done on *gopniki* and other “provincial” youth movements not located in Moscow and St. Petersburg.[4]

There are several reasons for this lack of prior research. The first being that *gopniki* in general are not known to be the most agreeable, progressive, academically minded, accepting people. It is more difficult to interview or do a study on a group that looks at authority and higher education with distrust or disdain. Second, the height of *gopnik* prominence coincided with the darkest periods of economic turmoil in Russia. This was an extremely difficult period for all, not the least academics, and a large study of miscreants from the suburbs was hardly any department’s funding priority. Further, the Western academics flooding into the newly unlocked country were much more interested in Western style youth (i.e., understandable to a Western audience)[5] and privatization. This paper corrects that omission, relying in large part on Russian-language primary source material, illuminating the *gopnik* phenomenon, theorizing the reasons behind the origin of the *gopnik* culture, detailing the semiotics and habits of its members, and exploring the ways *gopniki* have influenced Russian life and culture.

This study has three parts. In the first chapter, "The Origin and Evolution of the *Gopnik*," I explain the social and theoretical origins of the *gopniki*. I apply theory on gender, masculinity, and nationalism to uncover the societal tensions of the late Soviet Union. I trace how the relaxation of information during *glasnost* gave connected urban Soviet youth unequal and unprecedented access to Western and alternative identities. This irreversibly upset the built-in hierarchies of the USSR by providing meaning outside the confines of Party control and doctrine. The inevitable confrontation between urban youth and suburban youth without access to these new West-influenced identities would lead to the creation of the *gopnik* identity. The chapter concludes by describing how these proto-*gopniki* of the late 1980s retaliated by violently asserting their form of masculinity on Russia's urban youth.

In my second chapter, "The Essence of a Real *Patsan*," I detail the historical origins and practices of the *gopniki* – a group that has very little scholarly work written about them in English. Here, I describe the *gopnik* masculinity, how it was performed, and explain the reasons behind their stereotypical attire, actions, language, and body techniques. I also reveal the historical influence of peasant and waif culture on Russia's 1990s street youth. Finally, I explore what set *gopniki* apart from the *neformaly*, and why they cannot be classified as a subculture or society.

The third chapter, “Squatting Slavs in Tracksuits: The Lasting Imprint of *Gopniki* on Post-Soviet Russian Culture,” answers the opening question of this study. Why do *gopniki*, a widely hated group of youth, continue to influence Russian culture 20 years after their physical presence all but vanished? In this chapter, I focus on four areas of Russian creative culture: meme, music, film, and fashion. The information from my first and second chapters helps explain the cultural relevance of specific examples of *gopniki* in media. I describe how the *gopnik* identity has affected the above cultural fields, and focus on the allure of gop-culture two decades into Putin’s Russia. It becomes clear that a combination of the *gopnik*’s originality, worldview, defiance, and Russianness lie at the heart of their present popularity. Indeed, this study highlights that the current popularity of *gopniki* should not be viewed merely as a comical meme of squatting Slavs in tracksuits. Rather, the lasting interest of *gopniki* in Russia may be understood as a populist measurement of the clash between Western globalized culture and traditional views of Russian identity.

# I. The Origin and Evolution of the Gopnik

By looking at the societal turmoil of the late-/post-Soviet epoch through the lens of critical and gender theories, we can see clear trends and motives. This chapter, in large measure, explains the *gopnik* phenomenon by applying gender theory to a relatively under-scrutinized topic revealing that which is hiding in plain sight. I argue that the defiant masculine *gopnik* identity arose in the post-Soviet sphere as a manifestation of the "crisis of masculinity" from the laborer's loss of preeminence in the late Soviet Union. The growth of new (particularly West-inspired) identities during this time upset the state-constructed gender/class/political order and threatened the security of the Soviet 'nation'. Groups of rapidly disenfranchised suburban or provincial[6] youth bonded over this shared loss of economic / political benefits and sought to reassert a Russo-Soviet masculinity on other youth subcultures. This hyper-masculine identity gathered and has maintained cultural momentum through the assertion of distinctly Russian values and its rejection of the political and cultural encroachment of the West.

There are three main factors that led to the formation of the *gopnik* identity. First, the failure of Communist ideology and constructions of masculinity following Stagnation[7] in providing young Russian men with a semblance of purpose and fulfillment. Second, the slow collapse of the Komsomol in the late 1980s, and its eventual disintegration, removed the largest controller of Soviet youth culture, and provider of social and economic safety net for Russia's working class and problematic youth. Third, the opening of the Soviet Union's informational gates during *glasnost* caused an overwhelming flood of Western culture and identities that were only accessible to a limited portion of the population. In concert, these factors created a divide between those in city centers that had access to fulfillment, and those that became *gopniki*.

## Gender, Masculinity and the Soviet Union

To understand where the *gopniki* came from, we must recognize that the phenomenon was a particular response to a major crisis happening in the Soviet Union. Although inextricably related to the economic and political turmoil of a once great empire falling apart, the *gopniki* also were responding to a Russian cultural crisis of gender, identity, and of a man's place in a changing and Westernizing society.

But what exactly *is* gender, and how could one claim it inspired thousands of young provincial Russian men to rove in packs, to beat up youth of other marginalized groups, or to squat in courtyards eating sunflower seeds? Briefly, it is widely accepted by theorists that 'gender' is something we *do*.[8] We *perform* gender through thousands of choices, gestures, tones, actions, signs, and demeanors. Each of these choices are societally coded to mean anything between a and z. For example, a baby in America with earrings would generally be read as female, a baby wearing blue as male. While gender and sex are not the same thing, they are related, and in turn are related to sexuality – all of which exist on spectrums with many distinct points.

Historically, people have been pushed into conforming to either male or female cisgenderhood, with other identities labeled as 'deviant,' 'abnormal,' or dangerous. For example, genders in the Soviet Union were seen as distinct categories, "communities of individuals endowed with specific biological and psychological characteristics occupying a particular position in society".[9] This bio-essentialist view strongly encouraged citizens to follow specific roles within a larger Soviet construction. With ever multiplying technologies of surveillance and control (such as the web, concepts of beauty and fitness, mass media, our peers and family), as discussed by Foucault, modern society has many ways to *discipline* bodies, pushing us to confirm into accepted definitions of 'maleness' and 'femaleness,' so as not to challenge the existing gender order[10] that structures society.[11] This ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ put in other terms is masculinity and femininity.

Just as there are many gender constructions and gender theories, there are many masculinities. Key to my arguments about the *gopniki’s* origin are the ideas of hegemonic masculinity and “protest” masculinity. In *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, Connell and Messerschmidt describe ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as a pattern of practices that allows and maintains: (1) men’s domination over women; (2) a structured hierarchy of competing masculinities, with the hegemon at the top.[12] Hegemonic masculinity is the most honored way of being a man in a certain place and at a certain time, is constantly being renegotiated, and is embodied by very few people.[13] “Protest masculinities” are those that embody the hyper-masculine claim to power (here meaning both physical bodily power, and also the ability to influence events) enjoyed by hegemons but lack the economic or institutional resources / authority to fully challenge it.[14] To Connell, hegemony means “ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.” In the Soviet Union the Communist Party and the Komsomol (monolithic, massively encompassing Soviet youth organization)[15] constructed and maintained these masculine (and feminine) identities. However, unlike in most places before or after, ascendency was held by the Party and these Soviet identities were deliberately constructed to maintain the Bolshevik Party’s dominance over its citizens. Thus, attainment of a personal feeling of purpose, achievement or power was intrinsically tied to the Party – no form of identity outside Party lines was considered valid. Attempts to break out of the box, such as those by the *stiliagi* after WWII, were inevitably quashed. Proper masculinity was a core part of Soviet identity propaganda.

In the place of “naturally”[16] formed hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (see below), the Bolshevik theorist of the early Soviet Union created a model of the New Soviet Man and New Soviet Woman for citizens to aspire. Many of the characteristics of the New Soviet Man are also embodied in what you may picture in a hegemon – hard working, strong leadership, exquisite care of the body, and a sharp mind. However, the New Soviet Person unselfishly dedicated themselves to the collective and a Communist future.

During Stalin's reign, two main identities were forged that could be said to represent, according to Zdravomyslova and Temkina, a "hegemonic Soviet masculinity" – the Stakhanovite worker,[17] and the war hero.[18] Both sacrificed all – a personal life, their family life, and sometimes their own life – selflessly for the State, its industrialization, and its defense from the encircling capitalists and fascists. Of these, the Stakhanovite was the most accessible. Any man (or woman) who worked hard enough, dedicated themselves to labor, the collective, and the Communist cause could achieve national renown and rewards (such as a car, a chance to meet the General Secretary, a new apartment). For much of the Union's existence, the simple yet principled working man (in theory if not in praxis) was valued over the highly educated intelligentsia, as he contributed more directly to Bolshevism's central tenants.

While these "hegemonic" identities certainly relied on patriarchal constructs of male power and the need to protect the women at home, they were, in practice, slightly ungendered. For example: women served in the military in various capacities, held jobs, and attended the maintenance of the state rather than the maintenance of patriarchy. Further, the above identities were quite static and as the terms and conditions of Soviet life changed, the most honored way to be a citizen, for men, was hardly renegotiated. Compounding this, the economy of the late Soviet Union was one of long-term stagnation rather than rapid industrialization, and there were no longer wars of popular nor ideological meaning to which one would want to give their life. By the late 1980s, it was nearly impossible for Soviet men to achieve the vaunted hegemonic male status that was available to their fathers, nor did it mean anywhere near as much if they did. Soviet "manhood" was weak and under threat.

## Masculinity in Crisis

The widespread malaise among men in the Soviet Union spanning the 1980s to early 1990s came to be known as a "crisis of masculinity."[19] This crisis had several origins and very real effects on the direction of the Union. First, as detailed above, Soviet men felt stifled by the prescribed definitions of masculinity: the soul of the masses had long grown weary of an ideology that had not brought about major upgrades in quality of life in a long time. Stagnation and the strengthening of the Party State under Stalin had not only sapped people's enthusiasm about the Communist cause but turned obedience to the Party into a ritualistic afterthought. By the 1980s, the Soviet ideal's lack of a "positive evaluation of autonomy and private values," chafed rather than inspired.[20] Instead of a plethora of "New Soviet Men," the USSR was inundated by the maligned *homo sovieticus*.

*Homo sovieticus* was the "antihero" of the Soviet ideal, who "lacks ambition or respect for work, is blindly obedient to the party and takes advantage of collective labor, and drinks heavily to cope with his feelings of impotence," finding himself the butt of many *anekdoty* (jokes).[21] The weakness of this prominent figure of late Soviet society strengthened people's doubt in Communism. Neither could the Soviet man prove himself by fulfilling masculine roles defined in Communism, nor could he (most importantly and a source of much angst) fulfill "traditional" masculine roles such as owning property, political expression, and being the sole breadwinner; the latter being just the tip of deeper gender problems in the USSR. This late Soviet man was repeatedly infantilized and emasculated, yet could not seem to do anything to change that narrative.

Compounding men's "crisis of masculinity" was the successful fulfillment of both Soviet and traditional masculine roles by women during this period. Created in tandem with the New Soviet Man was the New Soviet Women. While original constructions of Communist 'womanhood' in the 20s were very radical (freedom from all domestic and childrearing duties, near complete gender equality, easy access to abortion and divorce, but not contraception),[22] the New Soviet Woman was designed as a family-oriented compliment to the Man.[23] This shift under Stalin back to a much more conservative definition of the family was greatly inspired by the millions of people lost to famine, war, revolution and purges throughout the 1930s and 1940s. As a result of the above tragedies, there was (and still is) a substantial numerical inequality (over 1 million more women) between genders that continues to inspire pronatalist policies in Russia today.

To further understand how, even in its pseudo-traditional patriarchal familial construction, the New Soviet Women subverts masculinity in the USSR, we must look at how it diverges from the 'emphasized femininity' of the West. Emphasized femininity is the female complement of hegemonic masculinity, in that it represents the "most valued" way of being a woman in a patriarchal society. However, where hegemonic masculinity leads to ascendency, the attainment of the 'ideal feminine' leads to further submission to patriarchal (state) constructs.[24] The ideal Soviet woman deviated from a traditional reading of emphasized femininity in that she shared many characteristics with her "hegemonic" male counterpart. She, too, filled the "manly" roles of manual laborer, scientist, factory worker or manager, and could be recognized for her labors as a true *Stakhanovite*. By performing these acts of Soviet masculinity in a non-male body, as Halberstam would argue, Soviet women made their masculine power all the more "legible."[25] And unlike the *homo sovieticus*, the New Soviet Woman *had* an attainable, ideologically central role to play – reproduction.[26] Thus, women could be said to enjoy a stable place in Soviet society as partial breadwinners, leader of the family, and the role of "mother" as idealized by the Party.

This does not mean that women shared, or were portrayed to share, an equal position in Soviet society to men. The Party promoted what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'masculine domination,' and the symbolic violence used to maintain patriarchal ascendency. In calling it a "crisis" of masculinity, Soviet theorists reinforce the "dehistoricization and eternalization of the structure of … sexual division" by saying that masculinity being in a "crisis" is unnatural; in other words, they are stating that society is *naturally* dominated by patriarchal masculine constructs.[27] Bourdieu explains that sexual and genital difference were socially constructed to 'naturalize' male domination by seating it in biological difference between sexes.[28] Therefore, the reporting of the "crisis of masculinity" worked to sustain the Party enforced subordination of Soviet women.

Despite the infantilization and discrediting of the Soviet man, the lower status of women remained evident. One need only look at the majority men held in positions of power in government, the Party (e.g. Politburo), and factories to see men continued to hold a privileged place in all spheres of public life. Further, the priority placed on reproduction reinforced a standard of submission, docility and beauty that must be maintained in public and private life, softening the blow of the New Soviet Woman's masculinity. Pronatalist policies also made factory managers reluctant to hire a woman who may take paid maternal leave, with the passing over of qualified candidates common. Additionally, (in conflict with aspirations for equal and independent coexistence of genders in the family outlined by early Bolshevik theorists) women were still expected to fulfill homemaking and childrearing duties[29] (while men were held exempt) on top of their participation in the workforce, in what is known as the "double shift" or "double burden" that partially defined women's experience in the USSR.[30] Implicitly, women were asked to make a choice between career advancement and having a happy family (child), as depicted in movies such as *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (dir. Vladimir Menshov, 1980). In light of these burdens, Soviet women's successful fulfillment of both civic and also ideological duties tested male masculinity at its weakest. That Communism seemed unable to find a "solution" to this gender problem was disillusioning to many unfulfilled men.

## The Komsomol Crumbles

By the late 1980s, the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* had all but broken the economic and ideological might of the Soviet Union. *Perestroika*, or "restructuring", was Gorbachev's attempt to kickstart a Soviet economy and society that had long been stagnant under the reign of Brezhnev. In brief, perestroika consisted of modest economic reforms, nuclear disarmament and military retreat from Afghanistan in 1988, and the policy of *glasnost*.[31] *Perestroika* is notable in that in its attempt to kickstart a stagnant Soviet economy, replete with industry not updated since the 30s, it managed to break what was still hobbling along. This ushered in the *defitsit* (дефицит) economy, long lines and general absence of goods.

*Glasnost* or "openness," meanwhile, represented an unprecedented concession of power by the Soviet government. Implemented in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster to strengthen citizen's trust in the party-state via much increased transparency, *glasnost* saw a relaxation of censorship, the opening of long-locked archives, deregulation of music, and a lowering of informational borders. Importantly, it gave Soviet youth unprecedented access to Western (rather than Party crafted/approved) depictions of Western culture – its music, standards of living, styles, and youth scenes. As Soviet youth were exposed to new lifestyles, traditional ones were simultaneously being tarnished. The unleashed press began denouncing and uncovering the dirty past of anything and everything Communist. Even the most holy aspects of the Soviet Union, such as Lenin and the Komsomol, were disparaged. It is one thing to have a country that improved your life and benefited you internally vilified, but for youth who never experienced the USSR’s miraculous growth, never lived through the Great Patriotic War, never saw it go toe-to-toe with another superpower, it must have been the final straw in their belief in a country that could not provide them with a hopeful present or tangible future.

For Soviet Youth, life had not “become better” nor “more cheerful” and they began to look externally for ways of life and meaning.[32] Western music, clothing, movies were unprecedentedly accessible. Major urban areas saw an explosion of “informals” (*neformaly)* and “*tusovki*”[33] (Figure 1) organized around music, economics, politics, literature, bodybuilding, black market activities.[34] These new avenues provided youth with an escape from the realities of an inert and decaying state. This was a major threat to the future of the Soviet Union in that youth were forming identities outside the ideological confines and control of the state/Komsomol.

While it is widely noted that schools are a place for the surveillance and enforcement of masculinity and femininity, and the reproduction of the nation,[35] in the Soviet Union much of that work was done by the Komsomol and its feeder youth organizations.[36] Formed in 1918 for youth

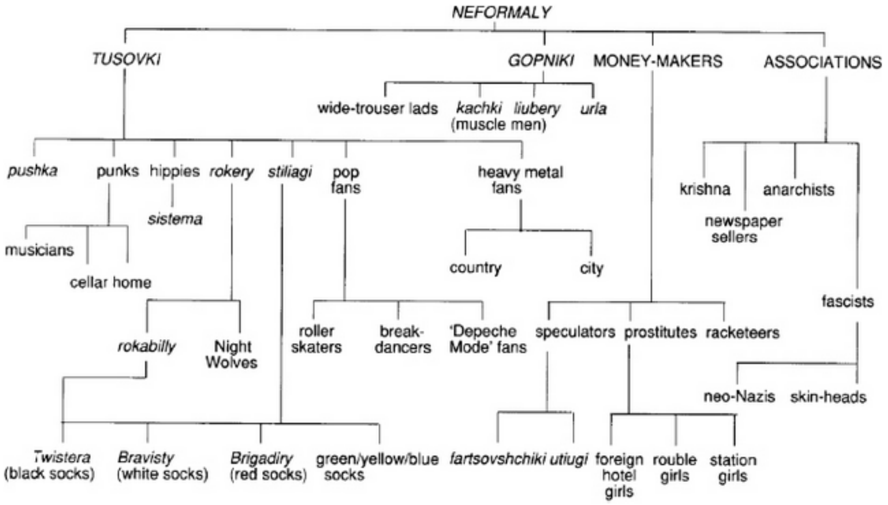
NEFORMALY
TUSOVKI
GOPNIKI
MONEY-MAKERS
ASSOCIATIONS
wide-trouser lads
kachki (muscle men)
liubery
urla
pushka
punks
hippies
rokery
stiliagi
pop fans
heavy metal fans
krishna
anarchists
newspaper sellers
sistema
musicians
cellar home
country
city
fascists
rokabilly
Night Wolves
roller skaters
break-dancers
'Depeche Mode' fans
speculators
prostitutes
racketeers
neo-Nazis
skin-heads
Twistera (black socks)
Bravisty (white socks)
Brigadiry (red socks)
green/yellow/blue socks
fartsovshchiki
utiugi
foreign hotel girls
rouble girls
station girls

*Figure 1: Neformaly of Moscow in early 90s. Adapted from Hilary Pilkington,* Russia’s Youth and Its Culture.

ages 14-28, the Komsomol became an essential part of indoctrination, job training, education and introduction into the work force. The organization's affirmative action potential cannot be overstressed, with hundreds of thousands of rural and poor youth using it as a gateway into higher education and the public sphere previously barred from them. Historically, the Komsomol was a key location for reproducing the Ideal Soviet – the class-conscious, selfless, and collectively committed citizen discussed above. Indeed, the allure of being able to reconstruct the self under Communism was one of its greatest draws during its early years,[37] and the Komsomol was a nexus of peer-review, criticism, and self-effacement – all necessary for control of the youth population and the instilment of ideologically charged definitions of masculinity and femininity. "Youth" held a vaunted place in Soviet symbolism. They were enshrined as the "constructors of Communism," thus, strong control was vital.[38] Furthermore, they were seen as the link between the Union's revolutionary past and its bright future, with the Komsomol forming the ideological keystone of that temporal bridge.[39] For much of the USSR's existence, all of the above gave participation in the Komsomol true ideological and self-empowering meaning.

It is important to emphasize that the Komsomol was for all intents and purposes the *only* youth organization in the Soviet Union. *The* authoritative figure on youth policy and programs, it had a bureaucracy that mirrored the state's, and registered as its members much of Soviet youth. For the state, it was extremely important in its attempts to implant itself within the Soviet family. A comparison to any American youth organization must inevitably understate the Komsomol's import. One must imagine that all American youth, starting at the age of six, enter a "Scout" system, without alternative, with all of its propaganda but with a closer connection to the state; that all summer camps, internships, community service opportunities, recreational halls are facilitated by this Scout system; that the Scout system deliberately and systematically eliminated any competing youth organization, no matter its benefit, to maintain a monopoly.[40] This was the scope of the Komsomol's role and influence for much of its existence. Therefore, a threat to the Komsomol was credibly a threat to the continuation of the Soviet Union.

However, as time passed, the financial and political benefits of Komsomol membership declined, ideology decreased, and institutional buy-in waned throughout "stagnation." Soviet youth found the institution stale, ritualistic and lacking in the opportunities they cared about.[41] Even so, the Komsomol remained the only youth organization with no formally funded alternative. By the late 1980s the Komsomol leadership was woefully out of touch with the youth it served, with Gorbachev admitting that "the masses of young people are moving on one side of the street and their [Komsomol] leaders are moving on the other and, furthermore, in the opposite direction."[42] Youth had long decided that the Komsomol could only provide them with a *homo sovieticus* future, and that fulfillment lay outside state constructs. Despite attempts at reform, the damage to the Komsomol was permanent and it was disbanded in 1991.

## A "Neformal" Challenge to the Soviet Nation

The demise of the Komsomol amounted to a crisis as impactful as the "crisis of masculinity" that hastened it. This becomes clear when one looks at the impact of the Komsomol's failure on a Soviet "nation." The Komsomol was a major unifying aspect of the Soviet national family and vital for the promotion of its culture. It was a major locus of the state's injection into family life, and its phasing out destabilized the Soviet "national" project.

Patricia Hill Collins' theory of nationhood helps describe the impact of this on the "nation." In *It's All in the Family*, Collins argues that a nation's ideation of the "ideal family" and "family values" help sustain the state and naturalize its inequalities, hierarchies and power structures.

Further, in the US the family itself is not "organized around a biological core, but a state sanctioned, heterosexual marriage"– the key point here being that the state and the idea of family are symbiotically reifying.[43] The idealized family structure naturalizes external hierarchy by mapping familial age and gender order to structures of race, class, privilege. For example, structurally underprivileged groups are frequently equated to children by oppressors, with the oppressors envisioning themselves as needed rational parent figure that guides the immature and infantile. The domination of the husband over the wife in patriarchal constructs naturalizes patriarchal gender order in society.

In the USSR, the "ideal family" went through several carefully constructed phases of transformation. It is important to remember that at the time of the revolution, and for many years after, the former land of the Russian Empire was occupied overwhelmingly by peasants. While the rather communal nature of the Russian peasant family aligned well with Communist sentiments, its abundance of "non-productive work" (household task that take up a large portion of women's days), absence of state ties aside from male conscription, and low levels of education were seen as backwards and not conducive to a forward-looking industrial country. In response, Bolshevik Party members theorized and implemented several radical changes to the idea of the family. From "releasing winged-Eros" and (briefly) decriminalizing homosexuality,[44] to collectivizing all household and child-rearing responsibilities, to aiming for the "withering away of the family" (alongside the state) in favor of loving unions between energized class-conscious workers, the "vanguard party" looked to revolutionize the very foundations of family-hood, and, having uprooted its traditional property and church based bonds, plant modernity and communism.[45]

While these revolutionary beginnings were eventually pegged back, the glue used to piece back together the denuclearized family was the ever-increasing presence of the state. Under Stalin, the internal hierarchies of the family were not the "traditional" dualities of husband→wife or parents→children, but rather state→(wife/husband)↔youth. The party sat at your dinner table and listened to what you said, the state provided you with employment and housing, your true "father" was Stalin, the *vozhd*, "Father of Nations" and provider of a "Happy Childhood!" The continuation of the state's place in the family was secured through its role in child rearing. In the place of the mother in a peasant household, the state took charge of the educational and moral upbringing of youth. In Lenin's words, it was "the task of the [Komsomol] to … train Communists" and "imbue them with communist ethics;" in return, youth brought the party and their "communist ethics" back into the family.[46]

Throughout Stalinism, youth were encouraged to inform on their family members, and while this extreme form of state intrusion withered away under Brezhnev and Khrushchev (the boom in independent apartments helped this too), the state continued to hold a dictatorial place in family life. Thus, the Soviet family naturalized state power and intrusion into daily life while requiring participation in Communist life to reproduce proper ethics and values. It drilled in hierarchies of party→state→citizenry, productive worker→idle materialist, Komsomol/Party member→average comrade.

When youth started abandoning long held communist identities for West-inspired ones during *perestroika,* it not only threatened the reproduction of Soviet culture and politics, it also threatened the above hierarchies built into Soviet society. While these shifts did not endanger the position of those in power, it *did* upset the many members of the working class who derived prestige and meaning from the labor-oriented Bolshevik system. The Party and the Komsomol had always been a source of upward mobility and reward for workers, and as those institutions crumbled so did the services for working youth (such as recreational facilities, job training programs), pushing them to search for solutions outside the confines of the state.

Urban youth with connections, on the other hand, were thriving under the relaxation of cultural controls. Rather than attending rallies or brigades, Komsomol age youth in Moscow were dancing to Western music at cafes, reading poetry in Pushkin square, or going to concerts by the many new Russian rock bands.[47] New identities centered on musicians or genres, styles of dress, or particular lifestyles were at the core of the *neformaly* explosion. Many of these identities were inherently materialistic and created a division between those with access and those without.[48] Naturally, those living in city centers – the children of *apparatchiki*, factory managers, professors – had such access and proximity to goods and cultural events, whereas those living in the suburbs did not. That many of these groups were male dominated (aside from some of the music-oriented groups) was not coincidental, the yearning for *peremen*[49] in the ways youth could express their masculinity was strong. These were purposeful responses to the masculine malaise they saw around them. New hierarchies, inaccessible to most working youth, were being formed around which lifestyles were the coolest, which groups listened to the best music, dressed the best, had the most attractive women. Entrenched in those group hierarchies were hierarchies of the masculinities they embodied – there were the gentle metropolitan *stiliagi*, the anti-societal punks, the business oriented black marketeers, and, at the top of it all, the hyper-masculine bikers.[50]

To working and rural youth this was a violent disruption of the Soviet "family" built up and reinforced over the past 70 years. This necessitated, to some, a similarly violent response to protect that "family." Suburban youth felt unfairly left behind by a rapidly material society that no longer valued Bolshevik tenants of hard work, the collective good, and deference to the Party. This tumultuous period saw the rise of suburban youth who figured themselves the protectors of

Russia's true interests, as the vanguard against Western influence and decadence, the defenders of Communist values: these youth would eventually be called *gopniki*. Although more powerless than ever to impact their world, the *gopniki* built a cultural edifice that would bring back an illusory feeling of hegemonic masculinity and a better Soviet past. This edifice is described further, as the *real'nyi patsan*.

# II. The Essence of a Real *Patsan*

Having explored the emasculated origins of the *gopniki,* it is now helpful to describe the "gop-culture" so that we can better understand its influence on society. The truth behind *gopnik* youth is covered in depth by few Russian sources, and virtually no English ones. Thus, to understand how the *gopniki* have affected Russian culture, and why they are popular in 2020, a deep understanding of *gopnik* culture and practices is imperative.

The first thing one must understand about the *gopnik,* is that it is a character of paradoxes. They are seen as uncultured, yet have helped create a memorable niche of Russian culture. They are referred to as *gopniki* by all but themselves. They are one of the most recognizable depictions of "Russianness" outside Russia today, yet are hardly seen in the country itself anymore. Their actions were extreme(ist), and yet the views they held are now extremely mainstream. During the 90s they were possibly the largest "sub-culture" in Russia, yet could hardly be described as a subculture at all.

Even working with source material, there are so many complications and contradictions about who the *gopniki* actually were. This chapter is part history, part anecdote, and part theory. First, a focus on the etymology of the word "*gopnik*" reveals the history of the two waves of *gopnik* prominence in Russia, and the story of the USSR's problematic youth. Learning of their socioeconomic and geographic origins leads to the next section, exploring the characteristics of *gopniki*. Finally, we examine where the *gopniki* went and address questions about their cultural status. Ultimately, this chapter helps tie together the reasons for their emergence with the reasons for their lasting influence, highlighting their disdain for a changing and westernizing world that was moving away from their traditional Russian masculine identity.

## Gopnik: What Does That Mean?

The etymology of the word "*gopnik*" requires a historical examination of the two waves of *gopnik* prominence in Russia. The *gopniki* of the 90s largely came from the suburbs of large cities, or from the surrounding countryside. Viewed as coarse and primitive, they always traveled in groups patrolling their territory, beating up those who got on their nerves and committing petty robbery. These teens were ubiquitous throughout the early part of the decade, and seemingly came out of nowhere. As one source related:

> *We encountered them in courtyards, at bus stops, in underground passages. Over time, the name [gopnik] of the most widespread subculture [sic] became a commonplace [epithet]. The person swearing on the marshrutka – gopnik. The guy who didn't throw his cigarette in the ash tray – gopnik. Who drank on the street and loudly made fun of passerby – gopnik. (Evgenii Mori)*[51]

These negative connotations have stuck with the name, with *gopnik* now being used in reference to any "poorly raised" miscreant or brute one encounters, rather than an actual *gopnik*. This negative reputation has led some to theorize that "gopnik" comes from the slang "gop-stop" (гоп-стоп) or the verb "gopat'" (гопать), both being prison slang for robbery.[52] The uncertain root of the word stems from the sudden appearance of *gopniki* on the streets out of seemingly nowhere in the late 1980s, with the term appearing at the same time. However, the 1990s were not the first time "gopniki" invaded Russia's cities, and thus I believe the origin of the word is found further back in time.

The 1920s were also a time of crisis in the Soviet Union, and post-revolution Russia saw an explosion of uncontrolled youth. Many sources refer to the *Gosudarstvennyi obshchezhitie proletariata*, the "State dormitory of the proletariat," or G.O.P. – a communal tenement for street children, orphans and homeless youth – as an origin for the name.[53] Specifically, the G.O.P. was a converted hotel on Ligovskii Prospekt opened in 1920s Petrograd (St. Petersburg) for the countless youth flooding into Communist Russia's major cities in search of work.[54] The prevalence in the surrounding neighborhood of these young people led the neighbors to add the Russian suffix "-nik" (the equivalent of "-ist" or "-er") to "gop" to create "gopnik" as a way to refer to them.[55]

Unfortunately, the youth of Ligovskii Prospekt were not unique to the early Soviet Union. Between 1917 and 1922 the number of orphans and abandoned children throughout the Union increased from 30 thousand to around 4 million.[56] According to the 1897 Imperial Census, around ¾ of the population of Imperial Russia were peasants, [57] and unaccompanied children flooded in from the countryside following the revolution. The Civil War and ensuing famines devastated the countryside, prompting people of all ages to flee to major cities. There was little ability to feed extra mouths, and many minors made the trek towards centers of opportunity. The Soviet orphanage system was quickly overwhelmed and in major cities youth homelessness and street life skyrocketed. As Catriona Kelly notes in her excellent study of childhood in the USSR, the early "liberalness" of orphanage administration, and frequent "open door" policies helped foster a criminal street youth culture among waifs in cities.[58] During this period, street children were generally seen in a generous light as pitiable, innocent and crafty (an example of this depiction can be found in Ilf and Petrov's famous comedy *12 Chairs*) rather than criminal and a scourge on society. Nonetheless, gang ethos was very prevalent among waifs, with groups forming strict hierarchies and generating a waif folklore that romanticized transgression.[59] Making matters worse, "morally defective" orphans were frequently grouped together in homes, solidifying pseudo-criminal networks.[60] A preponderance of crime during the early Soviet period was committed by youth – thievery, prostitution, street-trading, gambling – and the government eventually changed its liberal attitude towards problematic youth.

By 1926 sentiments about the orphan population were shifting from the early liberal policies to more draconian measures. Stricter regulations on how orphanages should be run were implemented, and there was a general push to remove the eye-sore of waifs from public view.[61] Orphans and the homeless were not the only children affected by these changes, as the growing number of unattended kids from proletarian families entered street culture. In Soviet society, with both parents working full-time jobs, especially in working class families employed at factories, children would find large portions of their day outside of school without an adult to watch over them and regulate their activity.[62] To cut down on unmitigated youth crime, the age of being tried as an adult was lowered significantly, and the penal system started to be used to remove "morally defective" children from orphanages and the streets. By 1935 street kids were often seen as potential criminals, whose guiltiness was assumed. Rather than being shuffled around orphanages, problem children were frequently tried in court and sent to penal colonies with other criminals and "enemies of the state."[63] Fortunately, by the end of the Stalinist period, and certainly after his death, punitive measures were generally relaxed. In their stead, orphans and problem children were generally put into technical schools (PTUs, FZUs), factory schools, and other trade schools to push them into the workforce and hopefully rehabilitate them into Communist society.[64] This tactic remained generally unchanged throughout the rest of the USSR's existence, and these technical schools were frequent breeding grounds for the types of "hooliganistic" youth that became *gopniki*.

When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the country was again entering a period of turmoil. For the reasons described in the previous chapter, youth were experimenting with new identities that deviated from the Party line. Although connected youth in city centers were able to spin this into music or style-based subcultures, youth in the suburbs and provincial areas were largely left out. Without recreational options nor organizations that could continue to provide for them, maligned youth found other ways to spend their time. The disenfranchised suburban youth that began to emerge during this period became the second generation of "gopniki," like those from 1920s Petrograd, to sweep through the nation.

The first of these proto-gopnik youth groups to thrust itself into the spotlight were the "liubera" or "liubery" of Moscow. Hailing from the proletarian suburb of Liubertsy, they would frequently travel into Moscow proper in attempts to claim space and beat up members of those *neformaly* that offended them.[65] The culture valued shows of strength, purity, boxing, karate – the upholding of an anti-Western pseudo-proletarian hyper-masculinity showcased through their simple, clean dress and heavily muscled bodies. During this time underground gyms formed across

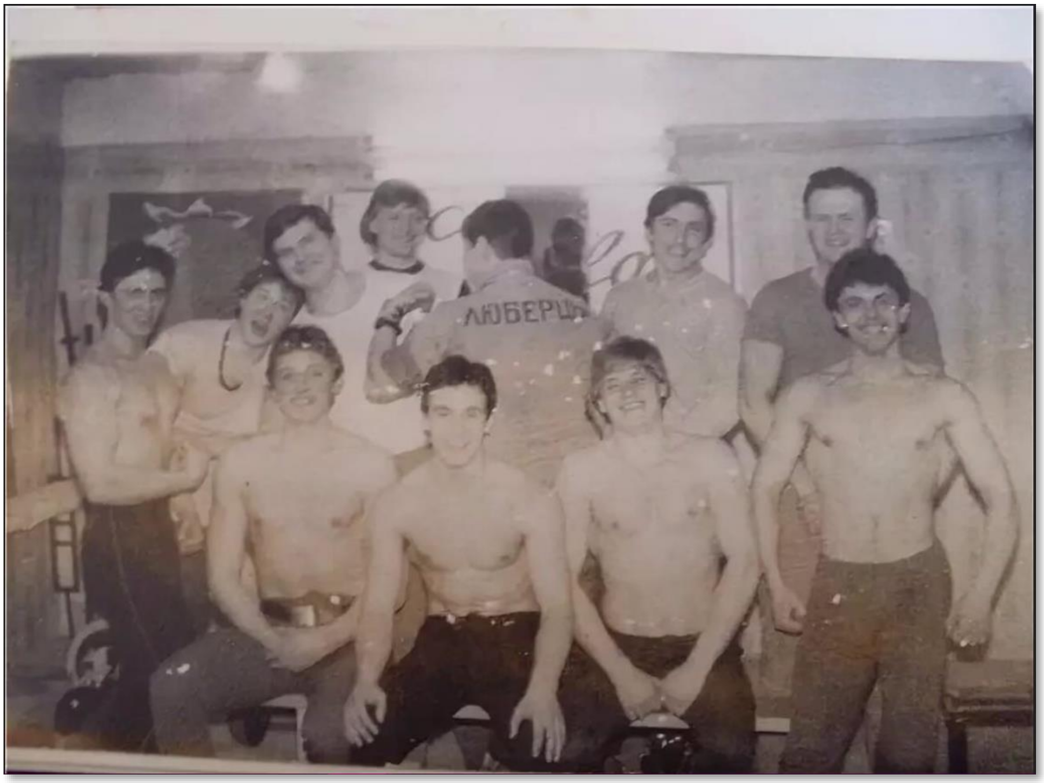

*Figure 2: A group of liubery in an underground gym. The boy's shirt says "Liubertsy" the suburb they come from.*

the country in numbers, with *kachki*, amateur bodybuilders, a staple across more provincial cities and suburbs, and a central part of the *liuber* identity. Local groups formed territorially around these gyms or specific courtyards solidified the importance of group cohesion and brotherhood to the *liubera,* and later *gopnik*, identity. However, it is important to note that there are several factors that set *liubera* apart from the *gopniki*. Unlike with *gopniki*, *liubera* had a concrete philosophy, a credo of sorts that motivated their actions, style of dress, and physical activity. *Liubera* also had a structure of communication between groups with a distinct leadership, rather than simple geographically oriented hierarchies. It is also interesting to note the relatively high participation of girls in the *liuber* movement in comparison to their complete absence amongst *gopniki*. These women would also participate in *liuber* actions, attired in old-fashioned and unstylish Soviet dress.[66]

Although metropolitan youth saw *liubera* as uncultured and provincial, *liubera* themselves saw Westernizing youth as traitors to their own country, and themselves as its protectors. *Liuber* views on this matter were influenced by the large number of veterans returning from Afghanistan at the time who were outraged by the masses of Western loving youth.[67] While later *gopniki* inherited their dislike for *neformaly,* the *liubera* were distinct in their aspects of ideology and commitment to their, albeit slightly extreme, moral compass. They frequently got in fights with hippies, punks, *stiliagi,* and would steal the sub-cultural trinkets off members of urban subcultures, yet lacked the materialistic impulses of later *gopniki* to use the petty crime as a means for self-enrichment that was showcased by the more violent and crime affiliated ur-*gopniki* of Kazan.[68] Their pseudo-puritanism extended to an anti-drug stance and a general temperance when it came to alcohol and substances that would be detrimental to the proletarian body. The final note of importance about the *liubera* was that they rose in infamy alongside increasing nationalism in

Russia. Although the press sensationalized the violent impact of their activities, many saw their actions as patriotic and just. A key inheritance of the *gopniki* from the *liubera* was the blind eye the police frequently showed to their violence. With the Komsomol no longer running youth brigades, *liubera* took it upon themselves to conduct what they saw as their duty to break up groups whose message weakened Communist/Russian national unity. Even as the *liuber* movement faded, giving way to the *gopniki* of the 1990s, the tradition of protecting *nash*, ours, while beating up anybody *ne nash*, not ours/us held as a central tenant of gopnikism.

## The Semiotics of Squatting Slavs

After Putin, vodka, bears, onion-domes, and the hammer and sickle, one of the most recognizable Russian images is that of the squatting, Adidas-wearing *gopnik*. The stereotypical look: shaved-headed youth squatting in a *dvor*, drinking and smoking, spitting sunflower seeds, decked out in tracksuits or leather jackets, newsboy caps, pointy leather shoes or adidas. Inside Russia itself their brutish manners of speaking and provocative phrases are feared and parodied in equal measure by city-dwellers. Their ubiquity led to *gopnik* becoming a negative epithet even after they all but vanished.

When the *liubera* and *gopniki* first emerged, their unfashionable proletarian look stood out against their classmates who conformed to western styles. While the leather jacket was common, the classic image of the *gopnik* captures them wearing their adidas trackie.[69] Introduced to the Soviet Union during the 1980 Moscow Olympics when the German sportswear company provided the kits for the host nation, the Adidas tracksuit became a coveted yet exceptionally rare item before the transition to capitalism. As Pilkington relates, in 1988 *gopniki* were still associated with Soviet tracksuits and outerwear.[70] The choice of tracksuit possibly has its roots in their comfort, sportiness and working-class nature that was worn in the gym and on the street. Another staple of the *gopnik* look is the newsboy cap. This piece harkens back to the days of the original *gopniki* and symbolizes the general *gopnik* sentiment of returning Russia to a mythical greater past. Squatting, meanwhile, has its roots in Russian prison / gulag culture – places to sit outside were infrequent or non-existent in the labor camps, and rather than sit on the cold ground, inmates elected to squat. This tradition was passed onto youth who would squat (always with their heels on the ground) in their shared courtyards to hang with friends, drink cheap alcohol, eat sunflower seeds and smoke cigarettes.[71] The consumption of sunflower seeds, or rather the process of cracking and spitting the shells onto the ground was a particularly important tradition. Symbolically, the act of spitting the shells around them showed their disdain for good manners and the constraints of urban society. Additionally, the sunflower seed itself is generally associated with peasant and proletarian culture in Russia and solidifies the *gopnik* connection to tradition.

Even though the *gopnik* is best known for their style outside of Eastern Europe, within Russia they are probably best remembered for their actions. For example, many recall their aggressive and potentially dangerous encounters that one must learn to avoid.[72] While known to especially target those who stood out, *gopniki* would also harass or provoke a passerby in search of conflict or personal gain. One respondent in Valentin Golovin and Mikhail Lurie's study describes *gopniki* as "[if] a simple dude is walking by – they [gopniki] run up to him, yeah, beat him up, steal something from him. That's [the type of people] *gopniki* [are]."[73] However, most sources note that *gopniki* do not unilaterally provoke conflict – some citing that the *gopnik* code of honor requires a reason for every fight.[74] Some examples of verbal provocation include asking if a passerby has "a couple rubles" or "a light" on them,[75] cursing, calling people over, or generally insulting them.[76] Unlike the *liubera* the came before them, *gopnik* thievery is widely acknowledged, including by their members, as mostly motivated by self-enrichment – even theft/battery of punks and *neformaly* members.[77]

Another integral note about *gopniki* is that they always traveled, operated, and acted in packs. The fact that they are almost exclusively referred to in the plural ("-i") reinforces this. Rather than emphasizing individuality, *gopnik* culture stresses group cohesion and conformity. The collective's opinion matters the most, and any action must be approved by all. Any feat of strength, manliness, bravery meant nothing unless it was observed by another group member. The groups themselves were very territorial in nature, forming around a specific *dvor*, block, or mini neighborhood. Among *gopniki* there is no official nor standardized hierarchy, but deference was typically given to members who have been with the group longer.[78] It is widely recognized that while *gopniki* have no written code, they lead their lives «по понятиям», by following the criminal/prison code.[79] Criminal/prison culture, while not directly tied to *gopnikism*, had large

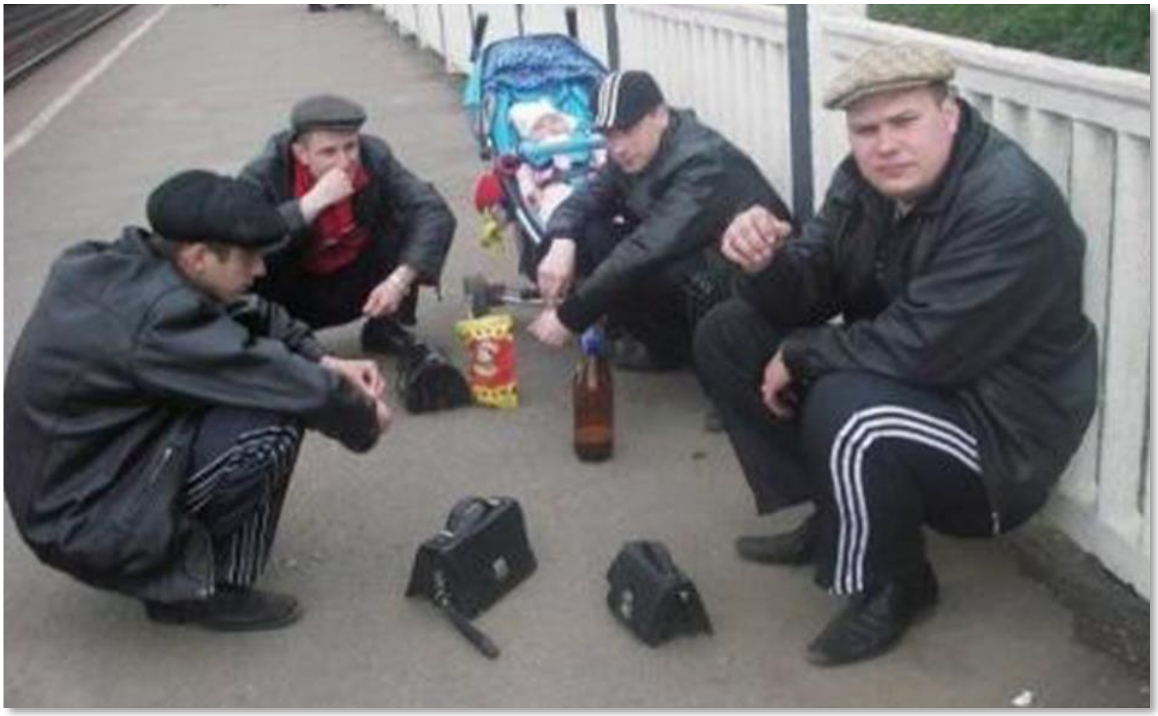

*Figure 3: Some older gopniki cracking sunflower seeds.*

effects on how they dressed, interacted, and spoke. The introduction of much prison slang and ways of speaking, much of which is not suitable to be printed here, to the general public came about via *gopniki*.[80] Their foul language, impatient aggressive attitude, and overall thuggery helped lend the word *gopnik* its negative connotation.

Possibly more interesting than how *gopniki* were viewed by others, is how they viewed themselves. Unlike almost any other youth movement or subculture they *never* referred to themselves as *gopniki*. Rather, they always said they were just “normal lads” (*normal’nye patsany)*.[81] The choice of *patsan* as the term of self-identification is interesting in itself,[82] but far more telling about their worldview is their choice of “normal” and what they mean by it. It is apparent that “normal” here does not mean “like the majority;” even the dullest *patsan* realizes most people do not act like him. Rather, *gopniki* are asserting that they lead their lives the *proper* way, that they *should* be considered what makes someone a proper man. The very core of the *gopnik* worldview is the proclamation of their superior masculinity. A proper man should, like them, “always be ready to fight” and assert their physical dominance over those who think themselves better.[83] The proper man should focus on building their physical strength, showing off their bravery, and acquiring a beautiful woman.

Part of their anger at those *neformaly* who sit above them in the social ladder (in other words, all of them), is that “they/the other,” *ne nash, chuzhie*, those who are not properly Rus, are succeeding while “ours,” *nash*, the true Russians live on the periphery of social, cultural, and financial life. Quoting Pilkington, this insecurity that they will *always* be on the margins, always on the periphery, drives the *gopnik* “desire to acquire and adopt the outdoor trappings of urban life [not just the look, the cash, the car, but most importantly the physical space itself, the sense that you *belong* in the city -EL], without the [accompanying] spiritual values” that their affluent westernized counterparts have adopted.[84] What is paradoxical here, is that *gopniki* cede that the urban is the pinnacle of society, that their way of life, imported to the edges of the city from the countryside, is still superior and *more Russian*.

Upon a closer look, the country roots of *gopnikism* are apparent and form their views on masculinity. According to Sergei Ushakin, "swearing, drinking, smoking, talking with women, participation in fist fights with other boys, organizing hooliganistic pranks and tricks on your neighbors… - all of this were considered a part of raising sons" in the countryside.[85] While the material conditions of the Russian countryside improved somewhat between the 19th- and 21st-centuries, many of the traditions and sentiments have remained the same. For example, the importance of group action and fighting to *gopniki* remained a normal part of childhood in Russian villages and towns, as noted by Golovin and Lurie. They report that in small towns, feuds between "territorial" youth groups have been passed down for generations, with the tradition of large-scale fights stretching back at least to the 1800s.[86] A matter of note from their study was the lack of *gopniki* in the countryside, instead, the main tenants of what made you a "normal *patsan*" in the city were simply a part of normal life in the countryside. Titillatingly, the conditions that push *gopniki* to socialize as they do in city suburbs (lack of resources, places of congregation, activities) are commonplace in the countryside, with few, if any, stores catering to subcultural needs and styles. Additionally, the lack of critical mass means that only one or two subcultures can really survive in most towns, and that many of their participants would be accused by urbanites of "gopnikism."[87]

## ***Gopnik* as an Expression of Crisis Response**

Knowing the origin of *gopniki*, we can address a final question: what exactly were the *gopniki* – a subculture, movement, worldview, or common street gang culture? Their impermanence makes the latter unlikely, as while styles change, the entire way of life has all but vanished 20 years into Putin's reign.[88] It is also hard to call them a movement as there was no national, or even local, organization nor official structure. As for subculture, while they did have their preferred ways of dressing and speaking, they had no overarching ideology, and unlike most any subculture in existence, rather than emphasizing (verbally) their distance or superiority from/over the norm, they vehemently state that they *are* norm-al. Further, most subcultures have some sort of overarching code, organizing structure, or affinity network – the *gopniki* had none of these. There was no local or national coordination between *gopnik* groups, no shared music tastes, and no written manifesto. The same reasons make it hard to place them under the more encompassing Russian word for community (*soobshchestvo*).[89] Gavriliuk claims *gopnikism* to be mostly a worldview, but I would argue this is a slightly limited understanding.[90]

It is true that their position and view of the world set them apart from other youth at the time, and that those two factors were a major part of what bound one *gopnik* group to another, but that does not explain why they disappeared. Considering that more people share their views on patriarchy, manliness, nationalism, and xenophobia now than at any point during the 90s, their absence is somewhat shocking if you constrain their previous prevalence as a shared worldview. However, if one acknowledges the economic and political turmoil of the 90s, and the ensuing stability of the Putin years, the possibility of *gopnikism* as a technique of crisis response cannot be ignored. Indeed, that the two peaks of *gopnik* prominence were during the 1920s and 1990s, the two most traumatically transitory periods in modern Russian history, cannot be ignored. Thus, in my opinion, the *gopnik* was a mechanism to cope with one's whole life being uprooted. Thrust from a country way of life to the inequality of the city, the *gopnik* view was a way to assert and preserve the self in a time of major change.

The next chapter examines how the *gopnik* image affected and continues to influence Russian culture. It is these modern depictions of the *gopnik*, created after their actual prevalence that first acquainted me with the group, and sparked my interest in unraveling the questions their existence raised. Their actions and mannerisms have sparked both mockery and cult-like status, and a lasting cultural influence that goes beyond your general “only 90s kids would understand” type fads. Looking at their expression through multiple forms of media will help us understand what made the “technique” so ubiquitous and successful, and how similar movements have gained traction throughout the world.

# III. Squatting Slavs in Tracksuits: The Lasting Impact of *Gopniki* on Post-Soviet Russian Culture

This project would be incomplete without presenting the cultural (re)productions of the *gopniki* that initially sparked my interest in them, and without which this study would never have been written. I refer, of course, to the "squatting Slav" genre of memes. As will be shown, the *gopnik* has lasting cultural relevance through many forms of media, the most prevalent of which happens to be the meme. This chapter explores why the image of the *gopnik* has prevailed over the past 20 years while the physical embodiment of the *gopnik* identity has not. I will look at both culture that they inspired – such as music and fashion – and forms of culture that have helped construct how they are viewed today, such as film and memes.

Before looking at more classical forms of media and representation, study of the *gopnik* as meme is surprisingly informative. Tropes that are found across other "art-forms" about the *gopnik* are neatly synthesized here – stereotypes, truths and falsities are coalesced into a general "squatting Slav" image that has infested the Russian internet since at least 2010.[91] Certainly, the *gopnik* as meme has been the most widespread representation of the identity, and, in fact, one of the most successful (consumption-wise) representations of "Slav-ness" off of the Runet (Russian-speaking internet; a neologism from the ".ru" address and internet) in the 2010s. Immediate proof of this is that a search for "Slav" in any popular search engine will present images exclusively of *gopniki*. On a personal note, it was these memes, particularly from the popular Facebook page "Squatting Slavs in Tracksuits," that first introduced me to *gopniki* and started my fascination with them. As more and more Russians (and Eastern Europeans) entered the international web, the "squatting Slav" meme rose to higher prominence with people "cosplaying" as *gopniki* in as far-ranging locales as Brazil and South Korea.[92] The success of the meme is undeniable, and although it seems to have passed its peak (approximately 2015-2018) it is certainly still common and can be credited with preserving and popularizing the *gopnik* in the past decade. That raises the question of what makes the "squatting Slav" as successful an image as it is, especially considering that the memes are frequently devoid of text, only requiring the image and some background knowledge to enjoy.

This feat can partially be ascribed to the nature of "memes" and this meme's origins. To review, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a meme as "an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture" virally, frequently undergoing mutations, specifications and improvements.[93] The ease with which members of the internet community and creators can engage with the *gopnik* identity and spread it has made it singularly successful at maintaining the *gopnik*'s influence on Russian culture and outsider understandings of Russian-ness. However, the second facet mentioned above, the origin of the "squatting Slav" meme, is more telling and ultimately interesting.

Unlike many other memes of "Russian-ness" or "Slav-ness" that are created by outsiders mocking those in, the "squatting Slav" and *gopnik* as a meme was largely created by Slavs, for other Slavs, about the particular type of Slav that is the *gopnik*.[94] According to Tikhomirov, the *gopnik* image seen today (rather than factual, non-memetic depictions) was formed on the Runet by "creatives" as a strategy to solidify what made "us – normal youth", what designated someone as a typical metropolitan (global) youth; the answer that these "creatives" (non-professional artists, bloggers, writers, general teens on the internet) came up with was "not *gopniki*."[95] In other words, the bygone *gopnik* of the 90s was sculpted into the boogieman of contemporary Russian society to signify *not-normal*, dislikable, maligned youth. Tikhomirov, writing in 2011 continues, saying that:

> *The astounding popularity of [the gopnik] image is evidenced in a quote from Ya. Levin and M. Ames: "If you were to believe the Russian blogosphere, it would seem that the Gopnik is so ubiquitous in Russia […] that they are flooding over the borders [….] sites mock and ridicule Russian gopniki with such zeal* [r'iano] *that it passes as praise* [uzhe perekhodit v slavoslovie]*".*[96] *As one of our respondents noted, "no other subculture* [subkul'tura] *has as many creatives dedicated to it: films, songs, poems, collages; no other [group] has become such a popular object of universal hatred [as the gopniki]" (male, born in 1990). 156*

The Levin and Ames quote is particularly interesting for several reasons: its time of writing, the focus on *Russian* gopniki, and its insight into the almost praising nature of Russian bloggers' hatred. First, Levin and Ames were writing in 2007, a time when internet penetration in Russia was only 25% (compared to 75% in the US. Note that Russia's penetration was, and is, still higher than other former Soviet countries' excluding the Baltic states) – a fraction of Russia's urban population and constrained to those living in major cities at that.[97] Thus, the early formative narrative about the *gopnik* was fervently constructed on the Runet by youth with means, with little to no input by the rapidly dwindling current, or even former *gopniki*. Mocking images, videos, texts were gathered on now defunct sites with names like "yagopnik.ru", "gopnic.ru", "gopniki.net" that tongue-in-cheekily catered to *real'nyje patsany*.[98]

As more of the post-Soviet world came online, these mocking memes of remnants from the 90s spread from the Runet to other Slavic countries interested in sharing depictions of their *own* "gopniki." And indeed, the *gopnik* as a Slavic phenomenon was not unique to Russia. All formerly communist countries of the Eastern Bloc experienced some sort of decline leading up to, and crisis following the transition to capitalism and privatization. All had significant proletarian populations in decaying suburban sprawls that saw their worth and opportunities vanish in the free market. Each had booming black markets and varying levels of criminality that captured the attentions of youth. And in every one of these countries there was some form of *gopnik*-like disaffected youth who adapted a similar response to crisis of identity as the *gopniki* of Russia did (for example, the *dizelaš* of Serbia) – yet they were not exactly the same as *gopniki* and most have been studied even less, to the extent that it would be hard to parse which aspects of the identity were original and which were constructed later on. Nevertheless, the meme of the *gopnik* was contributed to and percolated by other Slavic countries enough that by the time the English-speaking internet got its hand on it the sources were distributed sufficiently for the meme to be cemented as one of “squatting Slavs”, with the word *gopnik* a lesser known afterthought. Regardless, creators from across the Slavic world have steadily added to the lore that is the *gopnik*, appropriating them for funny images and videos, attributing various negative trends to them, and yet always holding what can only be interpreted as a reverence or sympathy for them. This mania has been abetted by various video games that take place in the former USSR, such as S.T.A.L.K.E.R. or the Metro games based on Dmitri Glukhovski’s novels, and the proliferation of Russian speaking players in FPSs such as Counter Strike using *gopnik*-like foul language. This is part of the reason that two of the most commonly known Russian words to international youth are “cyka blyat” – a combination of rather obscene words that generally expresses frustration.[99]

What makes the “squatting Slav” meme popular enough internationally to partially dominate the narrative of Russian stereotypes (replacing “hacker” or “spy”), is not immediately clear from the information above. It has similar overtones to that of the “Florida Man,” a tinge of exoticism and stupidity that can coalesce into a form of idiotic ingenuity at times, yet hardly do you see Floridians spreading the memetic narrative of themselves with as much fervor as the Slavic community. That songs, movies, television shows, and fashion have been dedicated to, or inspired by the *gopnik* differentiates its virality from other memes. This pushes us to explore these other media to find a root in the identity's draw outside of as a focus for mockery.

## Music

Gopniki's relationship to music is interesting, in that, although no singular music style made a unique impression on *gopniki*, gop-culture has made a lasting impression on music. Unlike almost all Russian subcultures of the 1990s, they were not known to rally around a specific genre or band. Of course, the music had to be suitable for a "proper man" to listen to, but this did not exclude pop, rock, EDM, folk, or *patsanskii* rap. While this variety in taste could be attributed to the lack of connection between *gopnik* "cells," none of my sources note music to be an important aspect of their identity. Them not listening to a particular form of music, however, does not mean that they did not affect the Russian music industry; they have been featured in songs since the late Soviet Union, and many artists either came from the same downtrodden suburbs as they, or would have been counted among their ranks.

As with the "squatting Slav" memes, the *gopnik*'s appearances in Russian music frequently are mocking or negative, however they tend to be presented more as society's scum rather than society's joke. For example, one of the first appearances of "gopnik" in written text is in *Zoopark*'s (pioneering Russian rock group) 1984 song "Gopniki." The date of the song is interesting, as the youth that would come to be popularized in the 1990s as *gopniki* were hardly prevalent, not to say anything of *liubery*, and Gorbachev was not even the General Secretary. Even at this early date before *gopniki*, the image painted agrees with the current popular usage of the term "gopnik" in Russia to generally refer to a thuggish youth:

> *Who guzzles* [khleshchet] *warm Port, who doesn't warm beer in Winter,*
>
> *Who spits like a camel, who laughs like a hyena [orig. nightjar*, kozodoi*]?*
>
> *Who shits in our entryways, who yacks on the metro,*
>
> *Who is always ready to black our eyes and jab a pen in your side* [vsadit' vam v bok pero]*?*
>
> *The answer is Gopniki!*
>
> *Gopniki!*
>
> *Gopnichki!*
>
> *They mess up my life* [oni meshaiut mne zhit']*!*[100]

As is evident, *Zoopark* construct the *gopnik* as societal scourge for their connected urban (dissident) audiences. Rock in the Soviet Union, like almost all forms of music and art, was a highly controlled substance up until the fall of Communism; performances were facilitated and largely inaccessible or required connections to attend. Thus, like with memes, an image was being constructed without the input of its subjects, creating a divide between central and suburban youth.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian music was more accessible, but also was quickly swamped by Western imports. As the *gopniki* rose and citizens fought through the "Wild East" of the 90s, rap music became more popular in the former Eastern bloc. While not really understanding the racial aspects of American hip-hop, many people identified with the struggle for survival, safety and success in urban cores. Hip hop gave a language for their anxieties that they did not previously have.[101] The *dizelaš* movement in particular (alongside turbofolk) co-opted the hip hop look and music.[102] In Russia, rap tends to be a much more middle-class affair than in the US, and is almost exclusively white (for obvious reasons, and they do not see it as problematic) and has frequently been accused of being rather inauthentic.[103] However, several rappers have been able to carve out (semi) authentic niches, and *gopnik*-like rappers rank among them.

An excellent example of the mashup between American music and Russian *gopnik* style is Seryoga's (b. 1976) hit 2004 song "Black Bimmer" (*Chyornyi Bumer*). It is a delightful clash between American hip hop culture and distinctly Russian style. The beat is a virtual copy of Busta Rhymes' 2003 song "I Know What You Want," and in the various music videos many of his posse sport contemporary American street apparel that is woefully out of place in Russia. Counter-posed to this, the song opens with, and the beat is dominated by, the accordion (a very popular instrument among proletarian Russians) and many of the dancers wear the *gopnik*'s iconic newsboy cap, effectively proving their *Russian* street cred. Lyrically, the song is distinctly Russian, relating a story about his backwater suburban hometown where there were limited opportunities and little joy for him aside from his car:[104]

> *I grew up on the edge of a worker's town (a!)*
> *A dude with a cool hat, a shabby gold tooth (hop!)*
> *I'm a dude with ordinary looks, no beauty am I (sho?)*
> *[…]*
> *Now our 'hood was on the outside of town (a!)*
> *And day and night, bottles clinked all around (hop!)*
> *The local boys drink hard, they don't know about fitness (chop!)*
> *All because there's no perspectives nor business (lets!)*
> *Ay, my street had seven buildings* [domov]*, three 'bandos (a!)*
> *There's nothin' to do here, our cats* [murki] *howl from* toska[105] *(hop!)*
> *And there's nothing I care for 'til dusk*
> *When I cruise the neighborhood in my black bimmer*[106]

Seryoga here is relating an adolescence that many *gopniki* could identify with – growing up in the outskirts of a town, surrounded by decaying identical apartment buildings from the 60s, with little else to do but drink. The upbeat melody masks the pain of the lyrics and a sense of almost betrayal.

He reveals that the highest goal a lad from his neighborhood had was attaining a car by any means, with the BMW the most coveted. Furthermore, Seryoga is reinforcing *gopnik* masculinity here, portraying women largely as objects to be collected in his music. The lyrics essentially detail him buying women with the allure of his black BMW, admitting that it certainly isn't his looks that attract them. Most importantly, though, Seryoga with his #1 hit (in Russia) popularized the *gopnik* look in the early 2000s, queering popular memory of them to something cooler and possibly more sympathetic to audiences.[107] Beyond Seryoga, contemporary artists such as TOMM¥ €A$H have also picked up the *gopnik* look as way to show their "street cred" in an authentically Slavic way. The influence of *gopniki* on Russian street apparel was certainly significant and will be discussed in more depth below.

There is one final but important music genre that in recent years has been increasingly associated with *gopniki* – hard bass. Tellingly, hard bass, a genre that is essentially "a Russian take on hard house" did not exist until the early 2000s, after the *gopnik* wave had crested, and did not spread outside of St. Petersburg until later.[108] The confusion is easily explainable. Videos of hooligan Slavic youth (purposefully) in stereotypical *gopnik* attire aggressively "pump dancing"

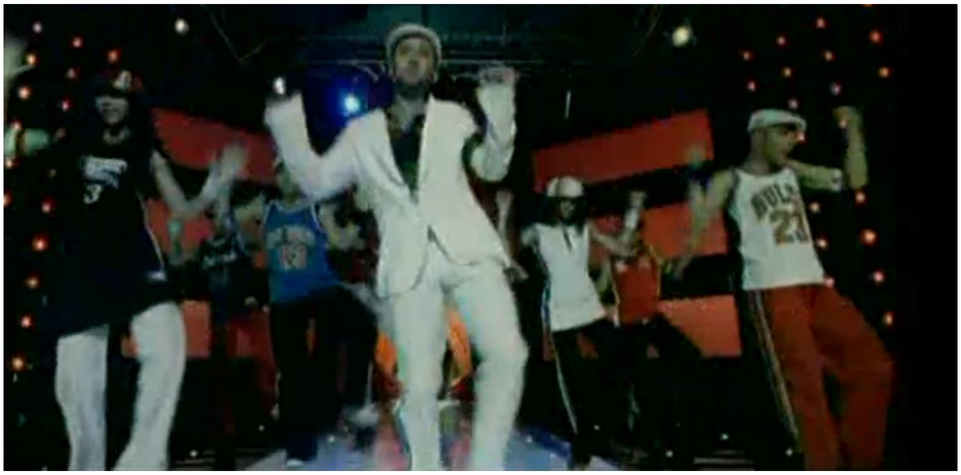

*Figure 4: A still from the Black Bimmer music video. Note that Seryoga (center) and several of the dancers wear newsboy caps along with obnoxiously stereotypical hip hop attire.*

to hard bass around their towns as a way to display local pride, or even protest have flooded the internet since about 2013.[109] This is a curious case where the meme has redefined reality with hard bass attributed to *gopniki*, and thus to Russians due to the prevalence of the meme, post-fact, despite the widespread dislike for the genre in Russia itself.

## Film

Film plays a large part in consumer constructions of masculinity, and movies and television certainly helped shape *gopnik* identity and masculinity, while also being partially (in)formed by *gopniki*. Action and war films present the attributes that makes one a *normal'nyi patsan*. Although the Russian film industry barely scraped by throughout the 90s, films like *Brother* (1997) and *Bimmer* (2003)[110] popularized a violent masculinity as an anti-hero who does what he must, and what is ultimately right, to survive the Yeltsin years. While these films came out after the formation of the *gopnik* identity, it is hard to argue that *gopnik* masculinity was not on the minds of the creators as they created their brutal 90s landscapes. Danila of the *Brother* franchise prowls a broken St. Petersburg seemingly inundated with thugs, attempting to find order or safety amidst the chaos, safety only he can seemingly provide for himself and those around him. As for depictions of *gopniki* themselves, ideological restrictions of the USSR hardly allowed films to feature problematic or "failed" youth in anything but a correctional setting (which happens to be the setting of *Patsany*, a 1983 film dealing with the type of proto-*gopnik* problematic youth discussed in the previous chapter).

It was not until *perestroika* and *glasnost* that censorship loosened to the extent that films featuring societal issues and risqué topics, including the *gopnik*, could be shown. While not explicitly about *gopniki*,[111] the Franco-Russian 1992 film *Luna Park* centers around quintessentially *liubera* youth. The opening scene is symbolically rife with images of *gopnik* nationalism and the battles of masculinity that were happening at the time. Starting with a close-up of a stony-faced Slav, the camera pans back revealing heavily muscled bare-chested *liuber* youth armed with sticks and chains. The group leader tears off his jacket, revealing more muscles and a Russian tri-color sash slung Rambo style across his chest as the foes they intend to “clean” from Russia are revealed; a horde of leather-laden long-haired bikers whose dirtiness and materialism as they motor across a muddy field sharply clashes with the short-haired clean aesthetic of the “pure” Russians. The symbolism continues as we switch back to a low angled cut of the leader revealing one of Moscow’s “Seven Sisters” and a waving Russian flag in the background. Then, to visually demonstrate that Russian = good and West = bad, the leader is handed a Coca-Cola can which he proceeds to crush with one hand. After an extended battle with hundreds on each side, the scene ends with the main character using a Soviet bulldozer to bury the motorcycles, cleansing Russia of them.[112] The message could not be more explicit – the invading Western identities and cultures are bad and dirty, the home-grown Russian culture must be fought

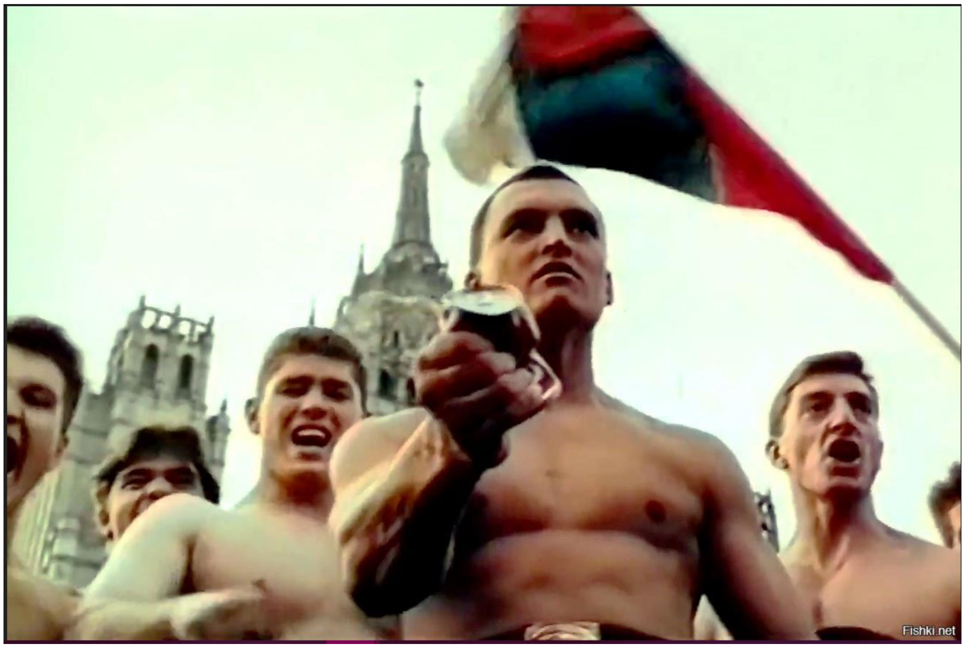

*Figure 5: Still from the opening scene of Luna Park.*

for and protected. The scene is a physical manifestation of the battle of identities and masculinities that was occurring between *gopniki* and West-inspired *neformaly*. The film came out at a time of low morale in Russia, rather than being defeatist, it showed Russian civilization triumphing over the West. While this was not the only Russian film to positively depict *gopnik*-type youth, *Luna Park* is distinct for its creation during the heyday of the *liubery*.

However, time has not been kind to *gopniki* in film, as we have also seen in meme culture. Perhaps the best-known depiction of them in Russia is that of the Gopniki "Bashka and Rzhavyi" from the comedy sketch show *Dayosh' Molodyozh'!*[113] On air 2009-2013, Bashka and Rzhavyi[114] were the two most popular and longest running characters on the show. *ДаЁшь МолодЁжь!* portrayed the *gopnik* as exorbitantly dumb, always seeming to get himself into trouble with the police, the older boys in the neighborhood or their peers. Unlike the memes being formed around *gopniki* at the same time, the show did try and keep Bashka and Rzhavyi true to the image and mannerisms of actual *gopniki*. The show can be highlighted for its usage of *gopnik* language, introducing it to a wide audience of young adults. Furthermore, the show interestingly makes their "gopniki"[115] sympathetic characters that, while being bullies at times, never seem to succeed and have horrible luck (that said, other *real'nye patsany* in the show, such as the *Botanik's* (*gopnik* slang for nerd) older brother Kaban (Boar) are portrayed as more classically brutal *gopniki*). On top of speaking often in slang, Bashka and Rzhavyi frequently engage in stereotypical *gopnik* behaviors, such as cracking sunflower seeds and drinking light beer while squatting with their feet on park benches, extorting peers for cash and mobile phones, and generally loitering in their apartment building's stairwell.[116]

Stereotyping and mocking *gopniki* has become mainstream, and culturally popular. One particular *Dayosh' Molodyozh'!* skit touches on almost all common *gopnik* stereotypes, serving as a fictional public service announcement by the "Worldwide Fund of Gopniks" (parodying World Wildlife Fund) about the endangered species that is "Gopnicus Europeicus".[117] While "just 15 years ago they were a large part of our population" police have arrested groups of squatting youth, shutdown grandmas illicitly selling sunflower seeds ("we took away their source of sustenance"), and replaced the local PTU with "Financial-Economic Academies" ("then we took away their natural habitat"). The skit goes onto to ask, "help conserve the gopniki, there are not very many left" before stating that the WGF "defends wild people". The skit acknowledges the disappearance of the real *gopnik* from modern day Russia, but seems almost saddened by the fact that these thuggish bumblers have vanished from the suburbs. Just as with the meme and music, there is an undercurrent of fascination with these "wild people" that goes beyond open mockery. On the surface this fascination seems very different than the championing of the *liubera* in *Luna Park*, but is it? It is possible that the interest in the *gopnik* masculinity and character itself is what drives their continuing influence on Russian culture.

## Fashion

Above all else, the realm where the draw of *gopnik* masculinity is undeniable is the world of Russian street wear. As discussed in the previous chapter, Adidas as a brand has a cult status in Russia, and not just among *gopniki*. It was the first major Western brand to enter the USSR, and the paucity of factories east of the Iron Curtain made their sneakers and tracksuits especially coveted.[118] The prevalence of low-quality imitations among suburban youth has inscribed the Adidas counterfeit to the *gopnik*-as-meme's identity, with "abibas," four-stripes and other egregiously fake articles of clothing attaining a coveted and almost legendary status in their own right.[119] Alongside "practicing" *gopniki*, the black Adidas tracksuit was common apparel for bouncers and bodyguards in the 90s, many of whom were former *gopniki*.[120] The associative ties between the Adidas tracksuit and the *gopnik* are so strong that one high-end franchise store made fun of the look by putting a squatting mannequin in their store window decked in *gopnik* Adidas attire, with a sign saying "Adidas target audience is no secret… have any seeds?"[121] Ultimately, the association has proven self-defeating, with the hatred for the *gopnik* (and the average citizens fear of being perceived as one by peers or the police) overriding most feelings of 90s nostalgia for most. Even the burst of "New Russians" wearing expensive Adidas tracksuits in an appropriation of the *gopnik* look was short lived. Evidently, Russia was not able to embrace the "revival without nostalgia" for the 90s that allowed the *dizel* look to reappear in 2010s Serbia.[122]

Flying in the face of this sentiment, Gosha Rubchinsky (b. 1984) – one of Russia's most well-known fashion designers internationally (if not the best known) – has embraced the *gopnik* look and masculinity in his aesthetics and shows. Rubchinsky has been known to try and change the Western narrative about Russia since his very first show. For him, fashion is a way to redefine interpretations of Russia, and the runway a location for staging specific performances of masculinity that align with how he'd like Russia to be viewed.[123] To the surprise of the fashion world, rather than picking classic models to present his works, he frequently uses deliberately *gopnik*-esque youth with close cropped hair and pimply faces.[124] His 2017 Spring/Summer show in particular is noted for dressing youthful faces in outfits of extreme or brutal masculinity, but to what end?[125] Is he trying to depict an anti-glamour oil money-free Russian masculinity to the world or a vulnerable one?

The question becomes more urgent when we consider that his works are not made with the Russian consumer in mind, in fact he is not very popular in Russia itself.[126] While it may seem confusing that Russians would not appreciate a home-grown high-end designer, especially one that writes in their native language, such an interpretation ignores that Russians associate Cyrillic on clothing with lower quality, fakes, etc. The exoticism that an English speaker sees in a Gosha article is absent for the Russian. Thus, Gosha is designing with the outside in mind, designing to convey a certain message about Russia that changes how we think of it.

This brings us to the guiding question of this project – why choose the *gopnik* as his messenger? What is it about the *gopnik* that Gosha, and the thousands of content creators on the internet, think is worth broadcasting to the outside world? Why document this masculinity, this Russian identity, that is such an anathema?

# Conclusions

The *gopnik* worldview and *gopnik* masculinity have a special draw 20 years into Putin's Russia, a draw that was unthinkable in the 1990s. For one, enough time has passed to allow some sort of nostalgia for the Yeltsin years to develop, although this is more likely among those who have no memory of Communism, or little memory of the Russia during that time. And to an extent, this is certainly the population of 15 to 30-year-old Russians, who creates the *gopnik-as-meme* image. A sizable amount of Russia's youth agree with the conservative direction Putin has taken the country, and the *stability* of a controlled state has a widespread appeal to it in Russia that is understandable if you look at its 800-year history. In fact, the openness and liberalism of the 1990s is utterly out of place in Russia's timeline, and the shock of it is apparent in the feelings of chaos associated with the period. While many youths rebelled against the former Communist morality and limitations, the *gopniki* stayed the tried and true Russian course.

In fact, the nationalist, anti-West, patriarchal and circle-the-wagons views held by *gopniki* are generally commonplace in modern day Russia, although they were utterly against the grain around the fall of the USSR. In a sense, the *gopnik* was altogether anachronistic. His beliefs, style and reverences were/are always stuck in the past in one form or another: he revered the Soviet Union and Russian pride when his country was obsessed with the West. He was xenophobic, homophobic, and oppressively patriarchal at a time when Russia was relaxing the uptight moralities of Bolshevik ideology. He held traditional Rus'ian ideas of how a man should act, hold himself in society, and interact with women. All of these were woefully out of place in the 1990s, but have moved to front and center under Putin. Popular nowadays is the idea of the *muzhik*, the real man, an idea not very dissimilar from the *gopnik*'s "real'nyi patsan", differing mainly in its reverence for law, order, and stability rather than for criminal/street culture. While the *gopniki* will always be hated by the urban elite for their abrasiveness, foul language, poor manners, and violence it is more than coincidence that their image has become so prevalent in modern day Russia, despite them having vanished long ago. It is unquestionable that their actions against other subcultures would not be frowned upon nowadays. *Gopnik*-like groups, such as the "ultras" of football clubs, frequently are deployed to break up protests by progressives, giving the state and the police a level of plausible deniability, and presenting an air of the people being on the side of conservatism.

Another national attraction of the *gopniki*, are their authentically Russian status. The *gopniki* developed organically as a defiant **Russian** identity at a time when Russia was being culturally taken over, and, in the minds of many nowadays, purposefully destroyed, by the West. The *gopnik* represents a misunderstood form of "nash" that looks to protect Russians from the encroaching outside world – that which is "ne nash" or "chuzhoi." There is a sentiment, long held by Russians, that they are the last bastion of conservatism and Christianity after Constantinople fell. That they are encircled by those who wish to see them fall – a sentiment that has only been strengthened by events such as the invasions of the Golden Horde, Napoleon, the Nazis, and the encroachment of NATO after the Cold War. Furthermore, the *gopniki* revered an unattainable "better past," when Russia was acknowledged as a global superpower, and the world was properly ordered. In recent years, Putin has heightened official nostalgia of Russia's geopolitical peaks during Socialism, notably reviving the specter of Stalin as a figure more positive than not. People look at what the *gopniki* believed in, and agree with it as they too look for a period of time filled with purpose and the respect they believe they deserve.

The resurgent popularity of the *gopnik* reflects the national populism that is currently sweeping through parts of Europe and the West. An attachment to national tradition is a comfortable and familiar anchor in a turbulent world. The *gopniki* have been both decades behind their times, and decades ahead, but always rooted in a prideful Russian identity. And as with populist cultures that attract a following in other countries, they reflect a deeper sentiment that must be understood and must not be disregarder and disdained. This study highlights that the current popularity of *gopniki* is far from an entertaining meme of squatting Slavs in tracksuits. Rather, it is a measurement of the clash between Western globalized culture and traditional views of Russian identity. In the years ahead, whether the *gopnik* culture waxes or wanes, their presence will reveal much about the sentiment of Russian culture towards globalization and the Western world.

# Notes

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[1] Graham Roberts, “Angels with Dirty Faces”; Aleks Eror, “Dizelaš.”

[2] “Non-formal” (as in not recognized by the State) youth groups that sprouted up in the late 1980s.

[3] It is important to note that there has been a non-insignificant amount of (very) non-academic writing and pseudo-research done on gopniki by Russians, and that it is impossible to write about gopniki without citing these sources.

[4] Михаил Лурье and Валентин Головин, “Идеологические и территориальные сообщества молодежи.” 56

[5] An extreme example of this is Hillary Pilkington’s 2010 book “Russia’s Skinheads,” on skinheads in Vorkuta. She and her fellow researchers admitted to the moral difficulties they had with such a study, a group more disagreeable than *gopniki*, and yet even this was done over a study of *gopniki* – a “group” with no direct Western parallel nor influence.

[6] Note that in Russia, wealth is highly centralized in urban cores. As one moves away from the city center, resources and opportunities diminish, housing becomes more and more congested and crime is more prevalent. Unlike the pattern of urban flight in the US of the rich to the suburbs, immigrant and poor communities are pushed to the outskirts in Russia. Thus ‘suburban youth’ are primarily from lower / working class families.

[7] Stagnation is the name for the late Brezhnev period, about 1975 to 1984, when the USSR’s leaders were old, policies unchanging and stale, and the economy hobbling along.

[8] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

[9] Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, “The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse.” 15

[10] Per Zdravomyslova, gender order is a hierarchical system of relations between and among genders that encompasses all aspects of life, for example “marked” vs. “un-marked” positions such as a “female” policeman or “male” nurse. When we hear certain words or professions, we have an assumed gender that goes with it.

[11] Sandra Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power.”

[12] R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity.” 832

[13] It is worth noting that *all* masculinities are in a constant state of renegotiation and adapt to maintain male dominance in some form

[14] *Ibid.*, 847-848

[15] All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth, “*Vsesoiuznyi Leninskii KOMmunisticheskii SOiuz MOLodyozhii”,* i.e. Komsomol

[16] Here “naturally” is used to contrast against the deliberated construction (relatively) free from negotiation that was Soviet masculinity – the top stated the ways to live and people followed.

[17] *Stakhanovism* was a movement in the 1930s inspired by the extremely productive miner Alexei Stakhanov (1906-1977). “Shock workers” would emulate his ‘super-human’ feats and try to exceed the quota. Record holding workers were frequently awarded with apartments, cars, and chances to travel. Men and women were *Stakhanovites*.

[18] Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, “The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse.” 21-22

[19] *Ibid.*. 13

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[20] Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*. 350

[21] Michelle Smirnova, "Multiple Masculinities." 210; *Anekdoty* are a type of Soviet (and Russian) humor in the form of stories set in a handful of well-known tropes

[22] William Rosenberg, *Bolshevik Visions*. Multiple locations; "Bolshevik Visions" is a collection of early Bolshevik texts on the theorization of family life, intimacy, and gender roles under Communism.

[23] Michelle Smirnova, "Multiple Masculinities." 214

[24] R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity." 848

[25] J. Halberstam, "An Introduction to Female Masculinity." 2

[26] Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, "The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse." 26

[27] Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*. viii

[28] Wherein the vagina and penis are made as discursively distinct, one representing power/top, the other oriented with submission/bottom, and the symbolic dualities (i.e. wet/dry, soft/hard, inside/outside) that are used to legitimize the division, even though they are circularly based on this socially constructed division.

[29] Keep in mind that the 'simple' task of shopping for groceries in the eternal *deficit* economy of the Soviet Union could be a monumental task requiring the waiting in hours long lines and visiting multiple stores in the hopes they will have milk or eggs or other basic goods.

[30] William Rosenberg, *Bolshevik Visions*. See Kollontai's article for example, 67-76

[31] Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*. 60-62

[32] "Life has become better! Life has become more cheerful!" - Stalin

[33] Roughly translates to an affinity group or club

[34] Figure adapted from Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*.

[35] C. J. Pascoe, "'Dude, You're a Fag.'"

[36] Such as the 'Pioneers' and 'Little Octobrists'

[37] Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*. 356

[38] Elena Omelchenko and Guzel Sabirova, "Youth Cultures in Contemporary Russia." 255

[39] Felix Krawatzek, "Fallen Vanguards and Vanished Rebels?" 181-182

[40] Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*. 50, the Komsomol did actively destroy rival formal and informal youth programs.

[41] Felix Krawatzek, "Fallen Vanguards and Vanished Rebels?" 182

[42] Felix Krawatzek, *Youth in Regime Crisis*. 150, Italics removed

[43] Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All in the Family." 63

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[44] In fact, before sharply retracting any tentative support for LGBT starting around 1927, significant research was done into sexuality with the head of the Health Commissariat publishing a book stating homosexuality as completely natural. It is also interesting to note that before the Europeanization of Russia (notable as the time when Jesus changed from being clearly Middle Eastern to Scandinavian White in all icons and depictions), homosexuality was common and seen as natural.

[45] William Rosenberg, *Bolshevik Visions*. Referencing several articles contained within

[46] *Ibid.*. 21, quoting Lenin's "Tasks of the Youth Leagues"

[47] Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*. Chapter 4; According to Pilkington, in 1986 there were only *six* music cafes in all of Moscow! This was a major complaint people had about the Komsomol – youth wanted places to informally congregate and the state was not providing them with it.

[48] Note, money was *not* an inhibitor to goods in Soviet Russia, rather it was *access* to goods based on your position in the Party or your connections. Goods were acquired *po blatu* -- like quid pro quo, but it was a system of favors (*blat*) by which you could get a TV, entry to University, oranges, etc.

[49] "Changes" the word here having extra meaning at the time due to its connection to Viktor Tsoi's song in the movie *Assa*

[50] Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*; Pilkington and Ignorant, "'If You Want to Live, You Better Know How to Fight'"; Omelchenko and Sabirova, "Youth Cultures in Contemporary Russia."

[51] Евгеный Мори, "Гопники." Translation my own

[52] В. В. Гаврилюк, "Гопники Как Феномен в Среде Молодежи." 127

[53] Joachim Habeck and Aimar Ventsel, "Consumption and Popular Culture among Youth in Siberia", 7; В. В. Гавилюк, "Гопники Как Феномен в Среде Молодежи", 127; Я. Левин and М. Эймс, "Куда ты делся, русский гопник?"

[54] Евгеный Мори, "Гопники."

[55] It is important to note here that this is all speculation, and that the G.O.P. itself may just be a St. Petersburg myth. An informative exploration of the origin of the word "gopnik" is on the Russian language Wikipedia page for *gopniki*.

[56] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World*. 193

[57] In Russian, "peasant," *krestianin*, is still a common (and not as derogatory as in English) word to refer to those who live in provincial areas / those who practice agriculture.

[58] *Ibid*. 205

[59] *Ibid*. 201, 205

[60] *Ibid*, 197

[61] *Ibid.* 230

[62] *Ibid*. 208

[63] *Ibid.*. 230, 232-3

[64] *Ibid*. 238

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[65] Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*. 103

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] *Ibid*. 188

[68] *Ibid*. 109

[69] Anastasiia Fedorova, "Adidas, a Love Story."

[70] Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*. 189

[71] Евгеный Мори, "Гопники."

[72] В. В. Гаврилюк, "Гопники Как Феномен в Среде Молодежи." 128-130

[73] Михаил Лурье and Валентин Головин, "Идеологические и Территориальные Сообщества Молодежи." 67

[74] "Негласные правила советских гопников."

[75] A more contemporary line being something like "do ya have a cell on you?"

[76] В. В. Гаврилюк, "Гопники Как Феномен в Среде Молодежи." 130

[77] *Ibid*. 130

[78] Евгеный Мори, "Гопники."

[79] Ирина Костерина, "Конструкты и Практики Маскулинности в Провинциальном Городе." 127

[80] And those who mocked them

[81] В. В. Гаврилюк, "Гопники Как Феномен в Среде Молодежи"; Ирина Костерина, "Конструкты и Практики Маскулинности в Провинциальном Городе."

[82] In Russian it has connotations with youth, i.e. in standard speech it is how you would refer to a young boy or teenager, not necessarily a young man.

[83] Ирина Костерина, "Конструкты и Практики Маскулинности в Провинциальном Городе." 128

[84] Hilary Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*. 187

[85] Каринэ Берберова, "Эволюция моделей маскулинности в российском обществе." 202, quoting Ushakin (translation mine)

[86] Михаил Лурье and Валентин Головин, "Идеологические и Территориальные Сообщества Молодежи." 60-61

[87] *Ibid*. 63

[88] Also, their lack of official ties to organized crime differentiate them from some other territorial urban youth cultures.

[89] Note that this word for community is more in line with an understanding of its English counterpart when used in reference to i.e. the gay "community", or the journalist "community". "*obschestvo"* on the other hand is more in line

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with ideas of society as a whole, the neighborhood "community" – a mosh posh of people in a given place rather than a group with shared ideals. (Continued from above)

[90] В. В. Гаврилюк, "Гопники Как Феномен в Среде Молодежи." 127

[91] Сергей Тихомиров, "«Креатив» в Молодежной Культуре: Особенности Конструирования Образа Гопника." Multiple sources cited in the article about *gopniki* as an internet phenomenon date to before 2010. It is interesting to note that most of these cites that "collect" information and images of *gopniki* no longer exist, their domains have frustratingly expired or been bought by someone else.

[92] Sasha Raspopina, "Opinion."

[93] "Meme | Definition of Meme by Merriam-Webster."

[94] A good example of one of these Russian meme creators is the video collecting Instagram account "Look at This Russian".

[95] Сергей Тихомиров, "«Креатив» в Молодежной Культуре: Особенности Конструирования Образа Гопника." 156

[96] Я. Левин and М. Эймс, "Куда ты делся, русский гопник?"

[97] "Russia"; "Internet Penetration United States 2017."

[98] Сергей Тихомиров, "«Креатив» в Молодежной Культуре: Особенности Конструирования Образа Гопника." 160

[99] Meaning "bitch whore/fuck" and, as said, expressing frustration. It is interesting that сука is stylized in Cyrillic, yet блядь is in Latin.

[100] "Зоопарк - Гопники - Текст Песни."

[101] Milosz Miszczynski and Adriana Helbig, "Introduction." 2

[102] Jovana Papović and Astrea Pejović, "Revival without Nostalgia." 83

[103] Milosz Miszczynski and Adriana Helbig, "Introduction." 1

[104] The following is my translation, however, it is influenced by that from https://lyricstranslate.com/ru/CHERNYI-BUMER-Black-Bmw.html

[105] There is much written on the meaning of *toska*, and I will refrain from translating it here.

[106] "Серёга (Seryoga) – Чёрный Бумер (Black Beamer) Lyrics | Genius Lyrics."

[107] A funny anecdote: the song was/is so popular that its tune is used to teach Russian words at the Concordia Language Village camp.

[108] Aleks Eror, "Russia's Hard Bass Scene Is Completely Insane."

[109] Aleks Eror.; https://youtu.be/y90yaLFoYoA is an excellent example of pump dancing.

[110] Not directly connected to *Black Bimmer*, but both helped promote the other.

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[111] Technically the film is about neo-Nazis, but searching *liubera* on the Runet gives back stills from the opening scene as image examples. It is widely agreed that while the directors call them neo-Nazis, the men depicted are undeniably *liubera*.

[112] Pavel Lungin, *Луна-Парк. (1992г.).*

[113] "Go young people! Go!"

[114] "Rusty" in reference to his red hair.

[115] As opposed to real life *gopniki*

[116] An interesting inclusion by *Dayosh' Molodyozh'* is the *gopnitsa*, the female *gopnik*, in many of their skits. The *gopnitsa* is a newer phenomenon, and not really attached to the predominately male movement of the 1990s. Instead, it is a derogatory word used to describe "trashy" urban teen girls. A possible cultural equivalent is the "kogal" of Japan. The *gopnitsa* in the show, "Shakira," is portrayed in generally negative terms for any Russian audience. She chews with her mouth open, has a gold tooth, opens beer with her teeth, has bad manners, has an annoying laugh, is violent, and spits sunflower seeds on the pavement.

[117] *Даешь Молодежь! Дайджест - Спецвыпуск Башка и Ржавый 2.*; This and the following quotes are from the skit that starts at 4:29.

[118] Anastasiia Fedorova, "Adidas, a Love Story."

[119] I saw several people four-stripe "adidas" sneakers while in Russia.

[120] Anastasiia Fedorova, "Adidas, a Love Story."

[121] Сергей Тихомиров, "«Креатив» в Молодежной Культуре: Особенности Конструирования Образа Гопника." 159

[122] Jovana Papović and Astrea Pejović, "Revival without Nostalgia."

[123] Graham Roberts, "Angels with Dirty Faces." 21

[124] *Ibid.* 30

[125] *Ibid.* 31

[126] Miles Klee, "'Slav Squat' Meme History."

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