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As a manuscript

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**Interpretations of Masculinity in Makhachkala's Male Youth  
Communities**

Thesis Summary for the purpose of obtaining academic degree PhD in  
Sociology

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## 1. Statement of the research problem

The relevance of the study stems from its inclusion in the debate about how male subjectivity is changing amidst the profound structural and cultural transformations of our time. The academic literature notes that large-scale changes in the economy and society, on the one hand, and the progress of social movements advocating the emancipation of groups discriminated against on the basis of gender and sexual identity, on the other, are undermining the structural and cultural foundations of hegemonic masculinity of the most mass male groups, creating the preconditions for the revision of traditional male roles and the emergence of new patterns and forms of male identity.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, researchers<sup>34</sup> note a skewed production of academic knowledge about masculinity, which, both conceptually and in terms of empirical focus, bears the strong imprint of a privileged global "metropolitan" view. Under these conditions, it becomes a crucial task to investigate how masculinities are constructed in peripheral countries and regions, based on theories, concepts, and data that adequately reflect regional and country specificity.

First, Dagestan is an example of a transforming peripheral society with a complex ethnic and religious composition. First, in recent decades the republic has been undergoing an active transition from traditional society to more modern forms of social organization, driven by urbanization and the development of market relations in the post-Soviet period.

Second, the republic has relatively recently undergone rapid re-Islamization, during which the role of Islam in both private life and the socio-political sphere has increased dramatically. Religion became the ideological foundation for the so-called "conservative turn," which led to a broad public consensus on gender segregation and male domination of women.<sup>5</sup>

Third, the North Caucasus is a region with great potential for conflict and violence due to its complex socio-economic situation, the presence of many unresolved territorial, religious, ethnic, and inter-clan conflicts, the dynamics of simmering armed conflicts, the prevalence of religious radicalism, the opacity of political governance, which is exacerbated by high corruption

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<sup>1</sup> Kimmel, M. S. (2018) The contemporary "crisis" of masculinity in historical perspective. In *The making of masculinities* (pp. 121-153). Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, E. (2010). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Archer L. (2001) 'Muslim brothers, black lads, traditional Asians': British Muslim young men's constructions of race, religion and masculinity. *Feminism & Psychology*. 11( 1), 79-105.

<sup>4</sup> Messerschmidt, J. W. (2012). Engendering gendered knowledge: Assessing the academic appropriation of hegemonic masculinity. *Men and Masculinities*, 15(1), 56-76.

<sup>5</sup> Starodubrovskaya I. V.(2019) The crisis of the traditional North Caucasian family in the post-Soviet period and its social consequences. *Journal of Social Policy Research*. 17( 1), p. 39-56.

of regional governments and the quasi-colonial nature of relations with the federation, and the fact that the region has a high level of state power.

These processes expose the internal instability of the gender order, pushing social actors to a critical revision of masculine roles and cultural scenarios of masculinity. The focus on youth masculinity allows for an even more radical research lens, as the social significance of youth is linked to expectations of actively "making gender" through mastering appropriate practices and patterns of masculinity, as well as asserting and defending one's own version of male identity in the face of problematic other markers of social status.

## 2. Degree of development of the problem

Existing developments in the field under study can be divided into the following groups:

First, it is the study of the domestic experience of the transformation of male identities due to the reconfiguration of the social, political, economic and gender foundations of the Soviet system. In this direction, researchers, on the one hand, focus on the field of discursive and symbolic production, studying the emergence and functioning of constructs and symbolic representations of masculinity in the late and post-Soviet gender order,<sup>678910</sup> on the other hand, seek to identify strategies of gender behavior and self-positioning developed by different groups of men, in response to changing labor market conditions<sup>1112</sup> diversifying cultural models and scripts of marriage, seven<sup>13141516</sup>

Second, there is research on youth masculinities. Young men are often at the center of the debate on masculinity because young people (and adolescents) are traditionally seen as the main

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<sup>6</sup> Kon I. S. (2010) Masculinity in a Changing World. *Voprosy filosofii*, (5), p. 25-35.

<sup>7</sup> Ryabov O. B. (2012) "Mr. John Lancaster Peck": American Masculinity in Cold War Soviet Cinema (1946-1963). *Woman in Russian Society*, (4), p. 44-57.

<sup>8</sup> Zdravomyslova, E., & Temkina, A. (2013). The crisis of masculinity in late Soviet discourse. *Russian Social Science Review*, 54(1), 40-61.

<sup>9</sup> Meshcherkina E. (2002) Genesis of masculine consciousness: Experience of reconstruction of masculine identity of middle and working class. In S. Ushakin. (Ed.) *About masculinity* (pp.268-287). Moscow: Novoye Literaturnoye Obozreniye.

<sup>10</sup> Chernova Zh. (2007) Model of "Soviet" fatherhood: discursive prescriptions. In E. Zdravomyslova, A. Temkina (Eds.) *Russian gender order: a sociological approach : a collective monograph* (pp. 138-168). Saint-Petersburg: Publishing house of European University in St. Petersburg.

<sup>11</sup> Vanke A. V., Tartakovskaya I. N. (2016) Transformation of Russian Workers' Masculinity in the Context of Social Mobility. *The World of Russia. Sociology. Ethnology*. 25(4), p. 136-153.

<sup>12</sup> Ashwin S., Lytkina T. (2004) Men in crisis in Russia: The role of domestic marginalization. *Gender & Society*, 18(2), p. 189-206.

<sup>13</sup> Kon I. S. (2006) Fatherhood as a component of male identity. *Demoscope Weekly*, (237/238) URL: <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2006/0237/analit03.php> (accessed 10.05.2022)

<sup>14</sup> Kon I. S. *A boy is the father of a man*. Moscow: Vremya, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Rozhdestvenskaya E.Y. (2020) Involved Fatherhood, Caring Masculinity. Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes. No. 5. P. 155—185. <https://doi.org/10.14515/monitoring.2020.5.1676>. (In Russ.)

<sup>16</sup> Rothkirch A. (2011) *The Male Question. Love and Sex of Three Generations in Autobiographies of Petersburgers*. Saint-Petersburg: Publishing house of the European University in St. Petersburg.

indicator of social change and simultaneously the main object of moral panics related to gender, sexuality, and corporeality. Key to this focus are such research subjects as male socialization within educational institutions<sup>171819</sup>, the relationship of masculinity to class,<sup>20212223</sup> ethnicity and race;<sup>242526</sup> popular culture and media<sup>27</sup>. Of particular note are ethnographic studies that reveal the connection between youth masculinities and local cultural practices, strategies, and life plans of Russian youth.<sup>2829303132</sup>

Thirdly, there is the tradition of studying masculinity within the institution of sport, in which two leading lines can be distinguished. The first body of work is devoted to the analysis of the construction, corporeal embodiment and symbolic representation of hegemonic and dominant forms of male subjectivity in institutionalized sports.<sup>333435</sup> Other authors<sup>363738</sup> focus on how the gender regimes of contemporary sporting cultures are changing in Western societies, opening the way for contestation to articulate new forms of male identity that are less connected to the

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<sup>17</sup> Haywood, C., & Mac an Ghail, M. (2012). 'What's next for masculinity?' Reflexive directions for theory and research on masculinity and education. *Gender and education*, 24(6), 577-592.

<sup>18</sup> Connolly, P. (2006). The Masculine Habitus as 'Distributed Cognition': A Case Study of 5-to 6-Year-Old Boys in an English Inner-City, Multi-Ethnic Primary School. *Children & Society*, 20(2), 140-152.

<sup>19</sup> Gilbert, R., & Gilbert, P. (2017). *Masculinity goes to school*. Routledge.

<sup>20</sup> McDowell, L., & Lehmann, W. (2004). Redundant masculinities? Employment change and white working class youth. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 29(4), 612.

<sup>21</sup> Nayak, A. (2006). Displaced masculinities: Chavs, youth and class in the post-industrial city. *Sociology*, 40(5), 813-831.

<sup>22</sup> Skeggs, B. (1997). Formations of class & gender: Becoming respectable. *Formations of Class & Gender*, 1-200.

<sup>23</sup> Roberts, S. (2013). Boys will be boys... won't they? Change and continuities in contemporary young working-class masculinities. *Sociology*, 47(4), 671-686.

<sup>24</sup> Archer, L. (2001). 'Muslim brothers, black lads, traditional Asians': British Muslim young men's constructions of race, religion and masculinity. *Feminism & Psychology*, 11(1), 79-105.

<sup>25</sup> O'Donnell M., Sharpe S. (2002) *Uncertain masculinities: Youth, ethnicity and class in contemporary Britain*. Routledge.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, B. K. (2004). Passing, cultural performance, and individual agency: Performative reflections on Black masculine identity. *Cultural Studies? Critical Methodologies*, 4(3), 377-404.

<sup>27</sup> Nayak, A., & Kehily, M. J. (2013). *Gender, youth and culture: Young masculinities and femininities*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

<sup>28</sup> Pilkington, H., Omelchenko, E., Flynn, M., Bludina M., Starkova E. (2002). *Looking West?: cultural globalization and Russian youth cultures*. Penn State Press.

<sup>29</sup> Pilkington, H. (Ed.). (1996). *Gender, Generation and Identity in Contemporary Russia* (Vol. 32). London: Routledge.

<sup>30</sup> Kosterina I.V. (2011) Vital and stylistic features of masculinity practices in the youth environment: Saratov, PhD Candidate of sociological sciences thesis.

<sup>31</sup> Gromov, D.V. (2013) The construction of masculinity in the street kid's environment Im *Ways to be a man. Transformations of masculinity in the XXI century*. Moscow: Zvenya, p.169-183.

<sup>32</sup> Isupova O. G. (2020) Gender Specificity of Youth Life Planning in the Russian Far East. Public Opinion Monitoring: Economic and Social Changes. No 5. C. 602-628.

<sup>33</sup> Messner, M. (1989). Masculinities and athletic careers. *Gender & society*, 3(1), 71-88.

<sup>34</sup> Messner, M. A. (1990). When bodies are weapons: Masculinity and violence in sport. *International review for the sociology of sport*, 25(3), 203-220.

<sup>35</sup> Sabo, D. (2001). Doing time, doing masculinity: Sports and prison. *Prison masculinities*, 61-66.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, E. (2010). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. Routledge.

<sup>37</sup> Atkinson, M. (2011). *Deconstructing men & masculinities*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>38</sup> Wheaton, B. (2000). "New lads"? Masculinities and the "new sport" participant. *Men and Masculinities*, 2(4), 434-456.

ideology of traditional patriarchy, less competitive, and more inclusive of women and other groups of men.

Fourth, there are works devoted to the analysis of masculinity in peripheral Muslim societies, which often focus on problematic and "crisis" forms of male subjectivity that emerge as a reaction to Western domination and intervention and the onset of a global neoliberal order that contributes to the precarization and marginalization of large parts of the male population in Muslim regions.<sup>394041</sup>

Fifth, these are works that reveal the specifics of gender relations in the North Caucasus and Dagestan. The focus of such studies lies in the transformation of gender regimes under the influence of modernization<sup>42434445</sup> To understand the context, it is also of interest to study the works that give an idea of the dynamics of socio-economic and political processes<sup>464748</sup> in the Republic of Dagestan, that reveal the importance of religious and ethno-cultural factors in the life of Dagestanians,<sup>495051</sup> that examine changes in the family and the dynamics of

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<sup>39</sup> Ghoussoub, M. (2000). Chewing gum, insatiable women and foreign enemies: Male fears and the Arab media. In M. Ghoussoub & E. Sinclair-Webb (Eds.), *Imagined masculinities* (pp. 227-235). London: Saqi Books.

<sup>40</sup> Conway-Long, D. (2006) 'Gender, Power, and Social Change in Morocco', in Ouzgane, L. (ed) *Islamic Masculinities* (London, New York, Zed books).

<sup>41</sup> Rizk, A., & Makarem, G. (2015). Masculinity-under-threat: Sexual rights organizations and the masculinist state in Lebanon. *Civil Society Review*, 1, 97-108.

<sup>42</sup> Lytkina T.S. (2013) Transformation of Traditional Masculinity in the Modern North Caucasus. In: Tartakovskaya I.N. (ed.) *Ways to Be a Man: Transformations of Masculinity in the 21st Century*. Moscow: Zven'ya: 235–249. (In Russ.)

<sup>43</sup> Sirazhudinova S. V. (2013) Gender Policy in the republics of the North Caucasus: Current Trends. *Woman in Russian Society*, 66(1), p.14-19.

<sup>44</sup> Sirazhudinova S. V. (2015) Gender Boundaries and Prospects of Gender Dialogue in the North Caucasus // *Woman in Russian Society*, 74(1), p. 53-61.

<sup>45</sup> Lytkina T.S. (2013) Transformation of traditional masculinity in the modern North Caucasus. In I.N. Tartakovskaya (Ed) *Ways to be a man: Transformations of masculinity in the XXI century* (pp. 235-249). Moscow: Zvenya.

<sup>46</sup> Ibragimov, M. R., & Matsuzato, K. (2014). Contextualized violence: politics and terror in Dagestan. *Nationalities Papers*, 42(2), 286-306.

<sup>47</sup> Starodubrovskaya I.V., Zubarevich N.V., Sokolov D.V., Intigrinova T.P., Mironova N.I., Magomedov H.G. (2011) *North Caucasus: Modernization Challenge*. Moscow: Delo.

<sup>48</sup> Sirazhudinova. S. V. (2015) Modern socio-political processes and transformations in the Republic of Dagestan // *State and Municipal Management. Scientific Notes*, 1, p. 128-133.

<sup>49</sup> Ware, R. B., & Kisriev, E. (2001). Ethnic parity and democratic pluralism in Dagestan: A consociational approach. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53(1), 105-131.

<sup>50</sup> Bobrovnikov V. The "Islamic revival" in Dagestan: 20 years later // *Central Asia and the Caucasus*. - 2007. - №. 2 (50). - C. 161-172.

<sup>51</sup> Yarlikapov A. A. (2012) Modern Dagestan: Current Ethno-Political and Ethno-Confessional Problems // *Sociodynamics*, 3, p. 130-153.

intergenerational relations<sup>5253</sup> , that reveal the specific functioning of the institution of sports in<sup>5455</sup>

However, despite the interest of researchers in gender issues in Dagestan, the issue of constructing masculinity remains poorly reflected. At the same time, the clarification of this issue not only contributes to the development of gender theory, but also, as similar studies conducted in other regions show, opens the way to a deeper understanding of the regional characteristics of the functioning of social and political institutions, as well as problems of inequality, violence and political radicalism. This dissertation research is intended to fill this gap.

### 3. Research question:

The focus of research interest is How group interpretations of masculinity are constructed and reproduced in male youth communities in Makhachkala. The emphasis is on the group, intersubjective dimension of youth masculinity, which reflects theoretical assumptions about the relationship between masculinity and homosociality and the increasing importance of peer groups in the transition from childhood to adulthood in conditions of urbanization and the decay of the traditional family. Makhachkala was chosen as the location for the study because it is a key arena for urbanization and modernization processes in the Republic of Dagestan.

### 4. Purpose and Objectives of the Study;

The aim of the study is to identify the specifics of functioning of group interpretations of masculinity in the male youth communities of Makhachkala. The set goal defines the range of research tasks:

Based on the existing academic literature, to identify the characteristics of the socio-economic and political situation in the Republic of Dagestan, significantly affecting the configuration of the gender order and the construction of masculinities of male youth in Makhachkala.

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<sup>52</sup> Starodubrovskaya I.V., Kazenin K. I.I. (2014) North Caucasian City: Territory of Conflicts. *Obshchestvennyye nauki i sovremennost'* [Social Sciences and Contemporary World]. No. 6: 70–82. (In Russ.)

<sup>53</sup> Molodikova I., Watt A. (2014) *Growing up in the North Caucasus: society, family, religion and education*. Routledge.

<sup>54</sup> Solonenko M. (2012) *Wrestlers for Power: Sports Communities and their Role in the Political Life of Dagestan*. In: Karpov Y. (ed.) *Society as the Subject and the Agent of Power: Essays on the Political Anthropology of the Caucasus*. St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie: 91–110. (In Russ.)

<sup>55</sup> Kolesnik N. (2018) “Oh Sport, You are the World”: On the Interaction of Power and Sport in the Russian Regions. *Vlast' i Elity* [Power and Elites]. No. 5: 387–417. DOI: 10.31119/pe.2018.5.14. (In Russ.)

To reconstruct the content of the hegemonic ideal of masculinity by identifying the semantic constructs and symbolic oppositions that structure the discursive space of Dagestan youth masculinity;

To determine the repertoires of gender practices, approved life careers, and cultural strategies that provide interpretive contextualization of hegemonic principles within the communities in question;

To describe the structural conditions and mechanisms of maintaining group constructions of youth masculinity;

To identify intersectional intersections of group interpretations of masculinity with actual group identities, distinguished on the basis of cultural and social background of the informants,

To analyze the influence of the nature of homosocial ties in communities on the formation of masculine identities.

The object of the study is group constructs of masculinity in male youth communities, and the subject of the study is the meanings that make up the content of these constructs. The empirical objects of the research are the participants of male youth communities in Makhachkala, formed around freestyle wrestling and yard sports (street workout). They represent the most mass stratum of Dagestan youth, a conservative "moral majority" in which there is a consensus about gender segregation and the dominance of men over women. The focus on youth masculinities is important because there is an active construction of masculine identities with not yet formed dispositions that provide a conscious agreement with gender fate, there is a reflection on the content of gender constructs and roles.

## **5. Limitations of the study**

The main limitations of research are set by qualitative methodological paradigm, which assumes participation of the researcher in the processes under study and influence of his axiological and epistemological settings on research results, active subjectivity of research object in defining and explaining social reality, subject-subject nature of relations between researchers and informants. The goal of qualitative research is not the production of truth as some sort of correspondence to an objective state of affairs, but an exploratory reflection on the lived world of those being studied. The feminist and postcolonial optics of gender studies obliges the researcher to reflect on her own position in the field of study, postulating the embeddedness of power relations in the processes of knowledge production and representation. As applied to my study,

this means that the representations of group constructions of masculinity of Dagestan youth are neither exhaustive nor monopolistic.

## 6. The theoretical and methodological foundations of the study were:

1) The concept of hegemonic masculinity<sup>565758</sup>, which postulates the hierarchical models of masculinity and the existence in society of a hegemonic model of male behavior that legitimizes the domination of women and subordinate / marginalized groups of men, which occurs at the intersection of the cultural ideal and institutional power and is constructed at the local, regional and global level.

2) Works revealing the functional significance of homosociality as a group, intersubjective dimension of masculinity and a social mechanism that ensures the typification of collectively shared meanings of male life, the normalization and exclusion of substandard behavior,<sup>596061</sup> and the construction of horizontal male solidarity based on emotional and somatic closeness, trust and friendship<sup>626364</sup>

3) Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural habitus and cultural capital and their reception in academic studies of masculinity and sport.<sup>656667</sup> An important contribution to the adaptation of Bourdieu's ideas to gender studies is the concept of male habitus as a combination of bodily and mental dispositions, which is the "natural" basis for distinguishing between men and non-men and, therefore, the social reproduction of gender differences.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. Routledge, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Connell R.W., Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005) Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*. Vol. 19. No. 6: 829–859. DOI: 10.1177/0891243205278639.

<sup>58</sup> Demetriou, D. Z. (2001). Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique. *Theory and society*, 30(3), 337-361.

<sup>59</sup> Bird, S. R. (1996). Welcome to the men's club: Homosociality and the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. *Gender & society*, 10(2), 120-132.

<sup>60</sup> Flood, M. (2008). Men, sex, and homosociality: How bonds between men shape their sexual relations with women. *Men and masculinities*, 10(3), 339-359.

<sup>61</sup> Meshcherkina, E. op. cit.

<sup>62</sup> Hammarén, N., & Johansson, T. (2014). Homosociality: In between power and intimacy. *Sage Open*, 4(1), 2158244013518057.

<sup>63</sup> Thurnell-Read, T. (2012). What happens on tour: The premarital stag tour, homosocial bonding, and male friendship. *Men and Masculinities*, 15(3), 249-270.

<sup>64</sup> Omelchenko E. L. (2014) Skinhead identity in the local context: homosociality, intimacy and the fighter's body. *Ethnographic Review*, 1, p. 61-76.

<sup>65</sup> Huppatz K., Goodwin S. (2013) Masculinised jobs, feminised jobs and men's 'gender capital'experiences: Understanding occupational segregation in Australia, *Journal of Sociology*, 49(2-3), p. 291-308.

<sup>66</sup> Wacquant L. (1995) Pugs at work: Bodily capital and bodily labor among professional boxers, *Body & society*, 1(1), p. 65-93.

<sup>67</sup> De Visser, R. O., Smith, J. A., & McDonnell, E. J. (2009). 'That's not masculine' Masculine Capital and Health-related Behaviour. *Journal of health psychology*, 14(7), 1047-1058.

<sup>68</sup> Behnke K., Meuser M. Gender and Habitus. Fundamental Securities and Crisis Tendencies Among Men // Gender in Interaction: Perspectives on Femininity and Masculinity in Ethnography in Discourse / Ed. by B. Baron, H.



4) Post-subcultural conceptions of youth that operate with the concepts of "solidarity," "life styles," and "cultural strategies" and emphasize the importance of global-local positioning in the construction of current youth identities.<sup>6970</sup>

## 7. Study design and methods

The work was carried out in a qualitative methodological paradigm using a research strategy of comparing two cases. The first case study, examining the practices and perceptions of participants in the Makhachkala street workout community, was implemented by the author of this study in 2017-2020 during research expeditions to Makhachkala as part of the project "Creative fields of interethnic interaction and youth cultural scenes of Russian cities", implemented by the Youth Research Center of the Higher School of Economics (grant of the Russian Science Foundation № 15-18-00078), under the leadership of E.L. Omelchenko. All the empirical material within the framework of the research case study "street workout" was collected by the author of this work with the support of the employees of the Center for Youth Studies D. Omelchenko, A. Maiboroda, E. Onegina. The results of this stage are presented in the publications:

Poliakov, S. (2022). Masculinity constructing among street workout youth in post-Soviet Dagestan. *Sport in Society*, 25(2), 353-368.

Omel'chenko, E., & Poliakov, S. (2017). The Concept of Cultural Scene as Theoretical Perspective and the Tool of Urban Communities Analysis. *Sociologiceskoe obozrenie*, 16(2), 111-132.

Poliakov S. I. (2020) Youth street workout scene, Makhachkala. In E. Omelchenko (Ed) *Youth in the city: culture, scenes and solidarities* (pp. 400-420). Moscow: National Research University Higher School of Economics.

Poliakov S., Maiboroda A. (2021) Understanding the Gender Dimensions of Youth Cultural Scenes: A Youth Ethnography, In E. Omelchenko (Ed) *Youth in Putin's Russia* (p. 91-136). Palgrave Macmillan.

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Kotthoff. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2002. P. 153-175.

<sup>69</sup> Pilkington, H., Omelchenko, E., Flynn, M., Bludina M., Starkova E. (2002). *Looking West?: cultural globalization and Russian youth cultures*. Penn State Press.

<sup>70</sup> Omelchenko, E. (2013). Solidarnosti i kulturnye praktiki rossijskoj molodyozhi nachala XXI veka: teoreticheskij kontekst [Solidarity and Cultural Practices of the Russian Youth of the Early 21st Century: The Theoretical Context]. *Sociological Studies*, (10), 52-61.

Omelchenko E. L., Polyakov S. I. (2020) The concept of cultural scene as a theoretical perspective and tool for the analysis of urban youth communities. In E. Omelchenko (Ed) *Youth in the city: culture, scenes and solidarities* (pp. 92-109). Moscow: National Research University Higher School of Economics.

The second case study, whose empirical object was the participants of the freestyle wrestling sections in Makhachkala, was realized in the framework of an individual postgraduate project "Masculinities of Dagestan youth" (grant No. 19-311-90056 from the Russian Foundation for Basic Research). The author of this work made two expeditions - in March and June 2020 to collect empirical material. The results of this stage are reflected in the article Poliakov, S. I. (2021). Wrestler;s Masculinity in Dagestan as a Local Hegemony. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, (10), 116-124.

Both cases combined a semi-structured in-depth biographical interview method with uninvolved observations and unstructured conversations. The interview guide included questions that allowed us to reconstruct the informants' social background and life trajectory, as well as their ideas about ideal and normative masculinity. The method of observation was used both to verify the information that was obtained through communication with the informants and to capture the poorly reflected and unverbilized aspects of social reality. The total empirical basis of the thesis research was:

- 30 in-depth semi-structured biographical interviews with pupils of freestyle wrestling sections, current and former freestyle wrestlers aged 14 to 35, as well as freestyle wrestling coaches in Makhachkala.

- 29 in-depth semi-structured biographical interviews with adolescents and young men between the ages of 14 and 25, participants in the street workout community in Makhachkala and its satellite city of Kaspiysk.

- 68 hours of observations and unstructured conversations with current and former street walkers and freestyle wrestlers, their friends, parents and relatives.

Recruiting was conducted in sports organizations (children's and youth sports schools, official and unofficial wrestling sections) and places of group training (stadiums, beaches, school sports grounds), thematic communities in social networks. The researcher's personal networks, formed during repeated research expeditions to Dagestan in 2015-2017, and recruiting by the "snowball" method were also used.

To process and make sense of the collected data, a combined strategy was used, combining thematic analysis to highlight and compare "cross-cutting" themes, motifs, and narratives with "grounded theory" principles and techniques (theoretical sampling, solid coding, focused coding, axial coding) to produce theoretical judgments (low-level theories) about the meanings shared by participants in social interactions. The analysis was conducted in NVivo software. The results of a comparative study of both cases are presented in the article by Sviatoslav Poliakov. *Masculinity Constructing in Dagestani Male Youth Communities, Europe-Asia Studies*. 2021 (*in press*).

## **8. Scientific contribution of the study to the development of the subject field**

The author collected and analyzed an empirical database including 59 in-depth semi-structured biographical interviews with participants of Makhachkala youth communities and their social environment and 68 hours of observation and unstructured conversations. Based on the results of the study, 5 articles were written and published in journals indexed in Q1 and Q2 of the bibliometric systems Scopus and WoS. A theoretical and methodological framework for a nuanced description of the processes of constructing masculinity was developed, taking into account the complex ethnic composition and religious situation, the colonial historical background, high conflict potential, characterizing the chosen region. For the first time an attempt has been made to reconstruct masculinity as a system of meanings and practices organizing power and inequality relations in Dagestan in a specific regional socio-economic and ethno-confessional situation, and a detailed description of collective constructs of masculinity of two groups of young men - freestyle wrestlers and street athletes has been given. For the first time a description and sociological conceptualization of the street workout scene as a post-sport practice and its regional and country specificity are considered.

## **9. Main results**

1) The current gender order in Dagestan is taking shape in the context of a complex transformation that is associated with the processes of deindustrialization, urbanization, globalization and the destruction of traditional community in the post-Soviet period. On the one hand, we can observe the formation of a broad social "conservative consensus" regarding male dominance over women and gender segregation. On the other hand, the concept of traditional patriarchy comes into conflict with the emerging socio-economic stratification, in which the model of masculinity associated with professionalism and economic solvency is inaccessible to many men. This model is hindered by the imbalance of the economic system, the domination of

particularist norms in the labor market, and the privatization of channels of social mobility by local elites.

2) For the bulk of urban male youth socio-economic precarity is enhanced by age dynamics - uncertainty of both social status and position within the gender order, as well as lack of access to legitimate resources for constructing masculinity. Under these conditions, strategies of construction of male identity are actualized, which rely a) on (strong) corporeality as a basic inalienable form of masculine capital and a "natural" basis of male dominance, b) on sports as a key social mile and stage of formation and representation of youth constructs of masculinity.<sup>71</sup>

The masculinity of freestyle wrestlers is the main contender for local hegemony, embodying the cultural ideal of the real man, constructing his subjectivity in violent confrontation with other men. The hegemony is structurally based on the mass character of freestyle wrestling, the high prestige of a wrestling career, the institutional closeness of wrestling communities to the state and their bloc with the religious-conservative "majority". There is an obvious connection between this model of masculinity and the regional political culture, which is characterized by the exclusive role of the power factor in political and economic life, which creates a demand for the services of quasi-professional groups, the resource of which is real or potential violence. Moreover, with the decay of traditional society as a result of urbanization, wrestling is in demand as an institution of proper masculine socialization, ensuring the maintenance of the power of older men over younger men. High status pushes wrestlers to construct public masculine images and maximize their representation in public space, while family and catexis are less significant spheres of self-realization.

Street walkers support the basic principles of local hegemonic masculinity while distancing themselves from direct physical violence and aggression in favor of more peaceful forms of articulating masculinity. In the discourse of streetwalking, the "strong body" is conceptualized as a "healthy body," and strength is revealed through the possession and skillful manipulation of the body in individual performances. At the level of visual representations, the body of the walker is far removed from those patterns of "heavy" wrestling bodies. It is described as slender, flexible, light, and aesthetically attractive, which generally corresponds to the canon of fitness culture. At the same time, such a body remains strong, and the masculine capital that is accumulated in the course of training has liquidity in the field of combat sports. It is a variant of accomplice masculinity, comfortable for teenagers and young men who do not fit

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<sup>71</sup> The analysis of the socio-economic and cultural context presented in theses 1 and 2 appears in all the publications submitted for defense.

into the rigid framework of wrestling masculinity: for example, young men who cannot participate in strength sports due to injury or disability, or those who associate their future career with education and work in their profession.

3) Constructs of youth masculinity are based on ideal-typical scenarios of social mobility. As far as wrestling masculinity is concerned, this scenario reflects the experience of the successful conversion of the symbolic capital accumulated in sports into political influence and economic self-sufficiency. Because of the current configuration of relations between freestyle wrestling and the authorities in Dagestan, victories in sport often become a springboard for careers in politics, public administration, business, and law enforcement. Champion status in Dagestan opens the door to prestigious areas of employment that are associated with power and power domination: titled athletes are elected to deputies, appointed to important positions in the state apparatus and regional authorities, and invited to work in the police or the FSB.<sup>72</sup>

Street workout provides young men and adolescents with a leisure career that provides them with habitual confidence and access to the identity of a professionally established man in the midst of scarce economic and cultural resources. Act in the neoliberal logic of individual "work on themselves," investing time and effort in their bodies in order to turn them into signifying strength, success, and health. In this way, the low-resource youth, widely represented in this (post)sports discipline, addresses their own social marginalization. At the same time, one can speak of a soft revision of the foundations of the gender order, due to the increasing influence of a global culture articulating a different kind of male hegemony.<sup>73</sup>

3) Group masculinities are constructed in symbolic opposition to the "Other"-groups of non-covenantal youth who refuse normativity in dress and behavior.<sup>74</sup> By using the label "informals" to refer to the "Other," young men emphasize historical continuity with the cultural strategies of "normal" youth, who were in conflict with subculture and advanced youth during perestroika and in the first decade after the collapse of the USSR, and reproduce their own discursive "normality," manifesting adherence to local norms and practices of masculinity. The Daghestani code of normative masculinity includes exaggerated heteronormativity, piety, recognition of the authority of elders, and adherence to the norms of customary law (adat).

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<sup>72</sup> This thesis is revealed in the publication Poliakov, S. I. (2021). *Wrestler's Masculinity in Dagestan as a Local Hegemony. Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, (10), 116-124.

<sup>73</sup> This thesis is revealed in the publication Poliakov, S. (2022). *Masculinity constructing among street workout youth in post-Soviet Dagestan. Sport in Society*, 25(2), 353-368.

<sup>74</sup> The construction of gender identity through symbolic positioning and moral sovereignty is analyzed in detail in an article by Poliakov S. (2022) *Masculinity Constructing in Dagestani Male Youth Communities // Europe-Asia Studies. (in print)*.

Consistent defenders of these principles are wrestling communities, for which confrontation with the "Other" (both symbolic and real) is a strategy for constructing their hegemonic position through the realization of moral sovereignty - the obligation and ability to maintain the moral order and the collective reputation ("honor") of all Dagestani society. Famous wrestlers (and representatives of other martial arts) often call for combating manifestations of "debauchery" and "vice," as well as exerting force on those who are seen as carriers and promoters of immoral lifestyles and alien values.

The masculinity of the workouters is symbolically opposed to both the informal "Other" and the marginalized hypermasculine "Other".<sup>75</sup> If the first opposition allows us to label the participants of the street workout scene as a faction of "normal" male youth included in the hegemonic consensus, the second can be seen as a kind of symbolic status mobility through distancing oneself from masculine practices that are associated with poverty, uneducation and social disadvantage. Street athletes also assume a part of the moral order by cultivating a so-called "healthy lifestyle," which in addition to regular exercise involves abstaining from the stigmatized practices of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.<sup>76</sup> Regular exercise is positioned as a pedagogical and socio-philanthropic project aimed at fostering responsible attitudes toward health and morality in adolescent men. This symbolic positioning correlates with the collectives that the workouts see themselves as part of. On the one hand, they see themselves as a faction of "normal" youth who share a conservative patriarchal consensus. On a local level, workouters are positioned as entirely assembled from the background practices of physical improvement that are part of the Dagestani culture of male backyard pastime and socialization. On the other hand, they strive to be "their own," in a transnational network of street workout, and relate their experiences to those of young street athletes from other regions and countries.

4) The significance of Islamic religiosity in the construction of masculinity is revealed in many ways.<sup>77</sup> First, an obvious consequence of the alliance between religion and sports has been the Islamization of the hegemonic model and the public image of the Dagestani man, who, in addition to his outstanding physical features, has become obliged to be demonstratively pious, attend mosques and comply with the Muslim dress code. First, religion performs the function of an ideology that legitimizes the dominant masculinity in society by giving it a hegemonic character, thereby eliminating the question of the nature and character of domination achieved

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<sup>75</sup> This thesis is revealed in the publication Poliakov, S. (2022). Masculinity constructing among street workout youth in post-Soviet Dagestan. *Sport in Society*, 25(2), 353-368.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> The construction of gender identity through symbolic positioning and moral sovereignty is analyzed in detail in an article by Sviatoslav Poliakov. *Masculinity Constructing in Dagestani Male Youth Communities // Europe-Asia Studies*. 2021 (in print).

through the effective utilization of violence. Second, Islam is a link between gender and regional (Daghestani) identity, opposing both ethnic particularism within the republic and Russian identity, which is articulated through affiliation with another religious tradition (Christianity) or secularism. In addition, as a central vector of the solidarization of "normal" youth, religion mitigates the tension generated by hegemonic masculinity and promotes the reproduction of horizontal homosociality - male "brotherhood".

5) There are significant differences in the characteristics of homosocial environments that provide typification of individual experiences and representations of masculinity, depending on the type of sports culture.<sup>78</sup> The homosociality of wrestling companies is formed in conditions close to a total institution, which contributes to the formation of a social substance - a male "brotherhood", which is cemented by discipline, lifestyle, loyalty to each other and to coaches. Another important effect is the unprecedented (in comparison to other communities) representation of masculinity, which is largely fueled by the similarity of individual experiences and attitudes. The wrestlers are the most traditionalist on the issue of the power of the elder over the younger, which is particularly evident in their attitudes toward marriage. The matrimonial trajectories (already realized or assumed) presented in the narratives of this group are extremely standardized: marriage is performed according to the will and choice of the parents upon reaching a certain age. The most preferred brides are considered to be girls from "their" clan village.

Streetwalking refers to so-called post-sport practices<sup>79</sup>, typical features of which are an emphasis on "grassroots participation," an ideology that combines individualism, hedonism, self-realization, freedom, extreme, broad inclusiveness, and the absence of competition and aggressiveness characteristic of mainstream sports.

Within this discipline, a wide variety of styles and scenarios of masculinity, corresponding to the basic principles of the hegemonic consensus, are possible and acceptable. Compared to wrestlers, street athletes exhibit a wide range of matrimonial attitudes, from "traditionalist" to "modernist.

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6) Global culture is a source of concern for young Dagestani men about identity stability, which is heavily influenced by state propaganda focused on the issue of homosexual

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<sup>78</sup> For a detailed analysis see Poliakov S. (2022) Masculinity Constructing in Dagestani Male Youth Communities // *Europe-Asia Studies*. (in print). and Poliakov, S. (2022). Masculinity constructing among street workout youth in post-Soviet Dagestan. *Sport in Society*, 25(2), 353-368.

<sup>79</sup> Wheaton, B. (2010). Introducing the consumption and representation of lifestyle sports. *Sport in society*, 13(7-8), 1057-1081.

<sup>80</sup> On the stylistic differentiation of masculinity in the street workout community see the article Poliakov, S. (2022). Masculinity constructing among street workout youth in post-Soviet Dagestan. *Sport in Society*, 25(2), 353-368.

propaganda.<sup>81</sup> In general, male youth, rooted in a conservative consensus, construct their subjectivity in opposition to the Western LGBT-tolerant "Other. At the same time, one can see how low-resource youth groups adapt global cultural trends to create individualized masculine images and scenarios with a higher prestige in the global gender order. For instance, for workouters, one possible leisure career option that defines their status as men is to succeed within the global virtual scene of street sports. Thanks to the availability of the means of creating and distributing photo and video content, they are able to broadcast the male images they create on the training grounds to a wide audience outside of Dagestan and achieve online popularity.

## **10. Provisions made for the defense**

1. Significant for the construction of youth masculinities in Makhachkala are the contexts of urbanization, deindustrialization, economic imbalance, and re-Islamization of Dagestan society, which, on the one hand, affirm a cultural conservative consensus regarding male dominance over women and gender segregation, and on the other, problematize legitimate age-transition scenarios and masculinity projects related to professional careers and economic success. Overlaying these dynamics is a high level of conflict, creating a demand for masculine identities based on expressions of power and violence.
2. local hegemonic masculinity embodies a cultural ideal that combines strong corporeality, which serves as a natural basis for the dominance of men over women and of certain groups of men over others, Islamic religiosity and moral sovereignty, implying the responsibility of men to maintain moral order within Dagestan.
3. The principles of hegemonic masculinity are contextualized differently within the socialities under consideration. Wrestler masculinity, which claims to be the fullest embodiment of the hegemonic ideal, relies on the "body-as-weapon" as a basic form of male capital, an ideal life career involving the conversion of athletic success and recognition into political power and influence. Wrestlers maintain moral sovereignty in real and symbolic confrontation with the cultural "informal" other. The maximalism of street-wrestling is more in line with the co-creative model. It is a gender identity of men who support hegemonic principles but are not willing to bear the costs of the hegemonic model. It is based on healthy and nonviolent corporatism, subjective mobility within a leisure or volunteer career. The responsibility for moral order is realized by them in the pedagogical project of raising the "younger generation."

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<sup>81</sup> This thesis is described in detail in the article by Poliakov S. (2022) *Masculinity Constructing in Dagestani Male Youth Communities // Europe-Asia Studies. (in print).*



4. The model of wrestlers' masculinity is structurally supported by the mass character of freestyle wrestling, its functional significance as a priority institution of male socialization, within which the construction of masculinity is coordinated with the subordination of the elders, the alliance of wrestling communities with political, power and religious elites. The masculinity of street warriors relies on the network infrastructure of autonomous communities, real and virtual, that exist all over the world. Therefore, wrestlers strictly associate themselves with local social norms and values and oppose themselves to global Western culture, while street walkers take a buffer position, seeking recognition at the local level and in the context of the global post-sport scene, maintaining a symbolic opposition to the cultural "Other, while using global culture as a source of symbolic resources for constructing their gendered identities.

5. In terms of intersectionality, the intersection of young men's masculinity with their Islamic identity is significant. Religion provides the ideological legitimation of local hegemony and links masculinity to regional (Dagestan or North Caucasus) belonging. Muslim masculinity symbolically opposes both Russian (Russian) identity and local ethnic particularism.

6. The degree of typification of interpersonal constructs of masculinity depends on the form and nature of homosocial communities. The total character of the freewill struggle leads to the formation of exclusive quasi-family hierarchical male "brotherhoods", within which there is a strong homogenization of meanings and scenarios of male life. The inclusive and voluntary and recreational nature of inclusion in street wrestling practices contributes to the formation of homosocial communities with blurred boundaries and weakened hierarchy, in which a diversification of masculinity styles and scenarios becomes possible.

## **11. List of publications of the author of the thesis, which reflect the main scientific results of the thesis**

### Articles to be defended

Omelchenko, E., Poliakov, S., & Mayboroda, A. (2019). Peers/strangers/others? The youth of Dagestan in search of group identities. *Cultural Studies*, 33(5), 841-865.

Poliakov, S. I. (2021). Wrestler;s Masculinity in Dagestan as a Local Hegemony. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, (10), 116-124.

Poliakov, S. (2022). Masculinity constructing among street workout youth in post-Soviet Dagestan. *Sport in Society*. 2022. Vol 25. No. 2. P. 353-368.

Poliakov S. (2022) Masculinity Constructing in Dagestani Male Youth Communities // *Europe-Asia Studies*. (in print).

### **Other publications**

Omelchenko E. L., Polyakov S. I. The Concept of Cultural Scene as a Theoretical Perspective and Tool for Analyzing Urban Youth Communities // *Sociological Review*. 2017. T. 16. № 2. C. 111-132.

Polyakov S. I. (2020) Youth street workout scene, Makhachkala. In E. Omelchenko (Ed) *Youth in the city: culture, scenes and solidarities* (pp. 400-420). Moscow: National Research University Higher School of Economics.

Poliakov S., Maiboroda A. (2021) Understanding the Gender Dimensions of Youth Cultural Scenes: A Youth Ethnography, In E. Omelchenko (Ed) *Youth in Putin's Russia* (p. 91-136). Palgrave Macmillan.

Omel'chenko, E., & Poliakov, S. (2017). The Concept of Cultural Scene as Theoretical Perspective and the Tool of Urban Communities Analysis. *Sociologiceskoe obozrenie*, 16(2), 111-132.

Polyakov S. I., Epanova Y. V. (2020) Radicalization and Inequality in the Narratives of the Second Urban Generation of Muslim Youth from the North Caucasus. *Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes*. No. 3. P. 269—294.

### **12. Appropriation of the results of the study**

The article "Wrestling Masculinity in Dagestan as a Local Hegemony" won the competition for the best publication of the journal "Sociological Studies" in the category "Successful Debut."

### **Conferences**

Becoming an Adult in Contemporary Society: Exploring Practices of Adulthood and Perceptions of Maturity (St. Petersburg, December 30, 2019). Paper: Becoming an Adult in Contemporary Society: Exploring Practices of Adulthood and Perceptions of Maturity

XIX April International Scientific Conference on problems of development of economy and society (Moscow, April 10-13, 2018). Report: Resistance to socio-economic exclusion in everyday practices of the Makhachkala workout scene".

XXI April International Scientific Conference on the problems of development of economy and society (Moscow, April 12 - May 29, 2020). Report: Masculinity Styles of Dagestan Low-Resource Youth: The Example of Makhachkala's Street Walkout Community

International Conference "Urban Youth Cultures: Solidarity, Creativity, Activism" (St. Petersburg, November 30 - December 1, 2017) **Report:** Resistance via practices: Workout scene of Makhachkala in the social landscape of Dagestan.