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Hilary Pilkington, Elena Omel'chenko, and Al'bina Garifzianova. *Russia's Skinheads: Exploring and Rethinking Subcultural Lives*. London: Routledge, 2010. 285 p. ISBN 978-0-4156-3456-4.

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Skinhead subculture is, in my opinion, one of the most interesting and academically stimulating youth subcultures, not just for its long history but particularly for the great diversity of its strands.

The work of Hilary Pilkington, Elena Omel'chenko, and Al'bina Garifzianova dealing with skinheads of Russia is important in two respects. First, it tries to rethink skinhead subculture, which was for a long time in a kind of theoretical stupor created by the interpretive frameworks coming out of the original Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), which were, to a great extent, reconstituted over and over again in subsequent works. Second, it does so by drawing on the postsocialist experience, while most of subcultural theories in general were based predominantly (though not exclusively) on the social reality of Great Britain or the United States. Although this situation is understandable, considering that both were cradles of most youth subcultures (punks, hippies, goths, ravers, etc.), the postsocialist subcultural experience offers an important contribution for understanding contemporary subcultural worlds, alongside data from the postcolonial world (e.g., Huq 2006; Baulch 2007) that is still (for whatever reason) similarly underresearched.

While I generally agree with the basis of their research (and its conclusions as well), I want to point out some of the consequences that are not explicitly discussed and which affect the conclusions the authors draw from their empirical findings.

The first one I want to point out is their explicit rejection of the notion of in/authenticity as an explanatory framework in assessing both subcultural formations and individual actions. For skinheads themselves (as for members of any other subculture), in/authenticity (meaning the criteria for who is and who is not a "real" skinhead) is an important question—in Russia as elsewhere. As criteria of belonging to the skinheads the informants point out such diverse phenomena as musical taste (81, 145), readiness to use physical violence and actual participation in street fights (142), visual style and clothing (150), and political/ideological views. For sociologists the question of authenticity, on the one hand, is important if they wish to differentiate between subcultural and mainstream youth, but on the other it is also an important tool for understanding subcultural identity, as Williams (2011:126–145) pointed out. While the authors enumerate the criteria of authenticity that are important to their informants, they choose not to engage in sociological debate about authenticity, maybe because for them the boundary between skinheads and others is not as important (the issue I will address later).

I completely agree with authors' rejection of the notion of in/authenticity in regard to subcultural formations (whether labeled as urban tribes, scenes, or postsubcultures). Considering the research goals of understanding the "meanings young people attach to 'skinhead' when they choose to call, and to stop calling, themselves such" (1), it is useful to see none of the locally and temporally specific manifestations of skinhead subculture as being more authentic than any other.

However, the rejection of in/authenticity in regard to individual actions (what members of the group were doing in particular situations) I view with some ambivalence. On the one hand, I agree with the authors' choice not to consider any of their informants to be more or less authentic, instead focusing on their individual life trajectories. I fully concur that it provides better insight into the lives of informants not to use any "external" criteria to "filter 'inauthentic' skinheads out of the research gaze" (243), because the issue of in/authenticity should not be enforced on informants by researchers.

But on the other hand, I see the notion of in/authenticity as one of the most important tools for assessing the meaning of being a skinhead by letting the informants explain who and what they see as authentic and/or inauthentic. Although the authors use some quotations from interviews explaining their informants' stances on in/authenticity, the informants' categories are not taken into account in subsequent analysis and interpretation. In the book's conclusion (224), the authors claim that the question of authenticity is less important because of their respondents' reflexivity. But to what extent has this reflexivity supplanted the quest for authenticity?

Thus, while I can agree with rejecting the notion of in/authenticity from an *etic* (the researchers', outsider) perspective, I find it to be a most important category from an *emic* (actors', insider) perspective (Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990; Kottak 2005).

My second argument concerns the use of the notion of "youth cultural strategy" (13) as a means of assessing both structural inequalities and restrictions as well as the agency that actors possess and enforce. This enables the authors to examine skinhead identity from the broader perspective of individual life trajectories (13–14) instead of seeing it strictly subculturally, but this also shifts the focus from the subculture to the individuals and their "subcultural lives" (243). This might be considered either a strength or a weakness, depending on one's perspective.

Considering the third constitutive basis of the research, which is the fact that research was done with actors who at some point in their life (particularly at the outset of the research period) had considered themselves (Nazi) skinheads but rejected or modified their identification with skinhead subculture by the end of the research, makes the question of in/authenticity in emic terms even more urgent. While I see the inclusion (rather than exclusion) or even centrality of liminal members (liminal in the sense of having a shifting identity) as very insightful in understanding the meaning of skinhead for their lives, in employing this approach it is important to pay close attention to the very shifts in their identity and to the aforementioned notion of in/authenticity in an emic perspective.

On this basis, I would argue that the employment, rather than the rejection, of the notion of in/authenticity would enable rereading some of the practices seen as

constitutive of skinhead identity not just as conflicting (as the authors suggest) but as not skinhead at all. The prime example might be that of body piercing practices, seen as part of a skinhead performative style, while actually being pursued by actors who at the time were beginning to question or even reject a skinhead identity.

In my opinion, this would also enable a reinterpretation of the central event of the book, which to a great extent determined the course of all the members of the group (the conflict of two leaders over the gym), not just as a conflict in understanding the group's basis and a struggle over hierarchy and power between two leaders but also as a conflict about the authenticity/inauthenticity of the group's members based on their (sub)cultural practices (e.g., working out versus hanging out). Thus, while one side of the conflict identified an authentic skinhead as one who is prepared to fight and thus saw working out as a corresponding subcultural practice, the other one regarded an authentic skinhead as one who maintained group bonds through hanging out.

Drawing on my experience with Czech skinheads, I also would like to point out what is implicitly present throughout the book but not explicitly addressed in a systematic way—the relations of the actors to “others” (meaning non-skinheads). Considering the experience of Czech and (formerly Czechoslovak) skinheads, one of the most important factors in constituting their identity has been with whom and against whom their identity was negotiated, be it the communist regime (prior to 1989); the mainstream or dominant society; the “subcultural others,” particularly punks as friend/enemies; other strands of skinhead subculture (Nazi skinheads, Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice [SHARPs], Trojans, and, not least, the uniquely Czech strand of skinheads called *Kališníci*) in its local, translocal, and even historical manifestations (British skinheads of 1969). Different strands of skinheads related differently to different “others” and this constituted a great deal of their identity. I would even argue that relations with these “others” were the basis for its constitution (Novotná and Heřmanský 2012; Novotná and Heřmanský, forthcoming).

This book offers some similar accounts of “others” with whom the actors related and whose relations might be seen as important in constituting skinhead identity, being it the mainstream (labeled “kitchen racists”), primary enemies (*nerusskie*, *khachiki*), “secondary” enemies (*antifa*), and also “subcultural others” (punks and hip-hoppers), although I believe the book lacks sufficient accounts of relations with other strands of skinheads. Even if the research focused exclusively on Nazi skinheads, I wonder how they relate to other strands, be it locally, translocally, and/or globally. It was exactly the relations between different skinhead strains that created the most heated debates among Czech skinheads at particular times. The great rise in the numbers of SHARPs at the turn of the millennium might be attributed to their response to the predominantly Nazi affiliation of most Czech skinheads. Similarly, the decline in numbers of Nazi skinheads provoked many former SHARPs to abandon their SHARP identity in favor of the one of the “traditional” skinhead (Novotná and Heřmanský 2012; Novotná and Heřmanský, forthcoming). However, many contemporary strands are implicitly racist and/or xenophobic (Stejskalová 2011). Thus, explicitly and systematically addressing these relations (the ones briefly

mentioned in the book as well as the ones left out) might greatly enhance understanding of the skinhead identity in Russia.

In general, although I would have given more emphasis than the authors on the in/authenticity issue (from an emic perspective), I find their conclusions really inspiring, particularly their theorizations of style in a performative perspective (243). While being somewhat hesitant to designate it as “performative style” rather than “subcultural practices,” I see great interpretive potential in understanding subcultural identity as being constituted, rather than just represented, by actors’ practices.

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