

WARMING UP: THE COLLECTIVE WORK OF SOCIABILITY IN BELARUSIAN FITNESS CLUBS

Emily Curtin

Emily Curtin, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Baruch College. Address for correspondence: Baruch College, B4-260, 55 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA. ecurtin@gradcenter.cuny.edu.

Why do Minsk residents ignore their neighbors while waiting for the elevator but chat with strangers in the gym locker room? What makes the affective environment of the fitness club so different from those found in public and quasi-public spaces, like residential buildings, grocery stores, and bureaucratic offices? In this article, which is based on 17 months of ethnographic research, I analyze the effects of Belarus's burgeoning consumer culture on social relations in the capital. After exploring some historical origins of Belarus's unfriendly service culture, I trace a (partial) shift in the buyer-seller dynamic away from the Soviet principle of "the customer is always wrong" towards a more customer-centric orientation. Drawing from my observations and interviews in training gyms, CrossFit boxes, capoeira classes, aerobics clubs, and yoga studios, I argue that the positively charged affective environments of gyms and fitness studios are created with framing devices (such as club décor and rituals) which serve to bracket off the space from everyday life and permit people to temporarily assume more open and outgoing personas. The emotional labor performed by club administrators, instructors, and clients themselves also helps to create the warm and welcoming environments that are critical both for business and for allowing clients to establish connections and friendships with other club members. The article concludes with a discussion of the solidarity that emerged following the contested August 2020 presidential election. While it appeared to many that this newly discovered national unity and goodwill appeared "overnight," I suggest that instead we have witnessed the culture of friendliness found in fitness clubs and other new consumer spaces spilling over into public life.

Keywords: Minsk; Consumer Culture; Fitness Clubs; Emotional Labor; Public Etiquette; Protests; Belarus

Why do Minsk residents ignore their neighbors while waiting for the elevator but chat with strangers in the gym locker room? What makes the affective environment of the fitness club so different from those found in other public and quasi-public spaces, like residential buildings, grocery stores, and bureaucratic offices? Based on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2016 and 2018, this article explores the everyday implications of larger socioeconomic changes by examining the way that *minchane*¹ interact with *neznakomtsy*, those with whom they are not

¹ Unless otherwise noted, italicized words and proper names are transliterated from Russian, the primary language spoken in Belarus.

acquainted. In what ways is Minsk's burgeoning consumer culture transforming social relations? Drawing from my observations and interviews in training gyms, Cross-Fit boxes, capoeira classes, aerobics clubs, and yoga studios, I show how emotional labor and fitness club framing devices help produce environments conducive to sociability, network building, and mutual support. I then discuss changes in etiquette and norms of sociability in the context of the recent political protests, arguing that the culture of friendliness found in gyms and other new consumer spaces appears to have spilled over into public space.

BACKGROUND: THE SOCIOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF CONTEMPORARY BELARUS

Unlike its postsocialist neighbors, Belarus did not undergo "shock therapy" privatization in the 1990s and has not "transitioned" to capitalism since. About 50 percent of the economy remains in state hands (Champion and Kudrytski 2019), and at the time of writing President Aleksandr Lukashenko had recently begun his sixth term since taking office in 1994. Under Lukashenko's authoritarian regime, Belarusian organizations in the cultural, educational, media, and business spheres have faced censorship, repressions, and various forms of harassment. Social protests have been met with beatings, arrests, and detentions, the brutality of which has been well publicized in the aftermath of the contested August 2020 presidential election. However—without wishing to minimize the state's history of violence and repression—I would like to clarify for the reader unfamiliar with the country that Belarus is neither North Korea nor the Soviet Union of the 1930s. Under normal circumstances, people going about their daily lives do not behave as though they are under surveillance or at risk of sudden arrest. Everyday transgressions such as fare hopping on public transport (*ekhat' zaitsem*) and discreet outdoor drinking are fairly common. While I was in the field, people in one of my fitness chat groups sometimes shared memes poking fun at the president, and a friend employed in the public sector reported that she and her colleagues felt comfortable discussing their criticisms of the government at work.

In terms of their links to the outside world, many Belarusians travel abroad, and most people get their news from independent Belarusian and foreign media outlets rather than (or in addition to) the state-controlled channels. Before the 2020 election, there was no widespread internet censorship in a country where 83 percent of the urban population is online (*Belarus in Figures* 2019).² Despite the lack of major economic reform from the top, coffee shops, multinational fast food and clothing chain stores, and other "lifestyle" consumption opportunities have been proliferating in Minsk and other Belarusian cities. In many ways, life in Minsk does not differ

² In all urban areas in 2018; the figure for Minsk in 2020 is likely higher.

greatly from that in the urban centers of Belarus's democratic neighbors—a reality that is obscured by the oft-repeated “last dictatorship in Europe” label.³

While most English-language literature on contemporary Belarus focuses on Lukashenko's repressions, the country's “failure” to transition to a capitalist democracy, and/or Belarusian national identity, this article explores a more quotidian subject. Casting an ethnographic eye on the qualities and affective dimensions of everyday spaces and encounters, I argue that Belarus's emerging consumer culture is transforming social relations in contemporary Minsk.

UNFRIENDLY SPACES, “SAD MASKS,” AND PUBLIC ETIQUETTE

When I began my dissertation fieldwork on Minsk's new fitness cultures, I had spent enough time in the Belarusian capital to consider myself more or less inured to the indifference and occasional hostility of its public spaces. And yet I admit it still rankled me on occasion. It bothered me that strangers almost never said “excuse me” in the metro, no matter how hard they bumped, pushed, or shoved. I became quite flustered one afternoon when I took a coat up to the cash register at the state department store and the cashier barked, “What do you want!?” I was likewise unnerved when midway through my signing a credit card receipt at the grocery store the cashier violently snatched it out from under my moving pen, as if to say, “You've signed enough and you're wasting everyone's time.” Most of all, it bothered me that in my building's stairwell (*pod'ezd*), which was shared with residents of only 11 other apartments, most of my neighbors would stare coolly but not respond when I said hello to them.

Of course, locals also have these experiences, although they have a different set of expectations and generally do not greet their neighbors (as I did out of habit). How do *minchane* themselves view Minsk's public etiquette and service sector norms, and how do they interpret them? Before I discuss what is different about the atmosphere and sociality of the city's new fitness spaces, I want to provide a wider context by depicting the typical public affect in Minsk as seen through the eyes of Belarusians.

“Gloomy” (*ugriumyi* or *khmuryi*) is a word Belarusians often use to describe their national countenance. “Belarusians are gloomy and unfriendly in public,” my friend Dasha told me. “When we come home from abroad, it's especially noticeable. But we are not gloomy by nature,” she clarified (1). A young architecture student I met, just back from a trip to Georgia (a country known for its hospitality), also noted that in comparison to that of Georgia, the public face of Belarusians was depressed. But like Dasha, she drew a distinction between appearances and true character: “If we're all wearing sad masks, then Georgians all wear cheerful ones” (2). By contrast, another of my interlocutors, 34-year-old Lena, thought of the gloominess not in terms of a performance or a disguise but as a sign of an authentic alignment between one's in-

³ For an incisive critique of the limitations of media and scholarly representations of Belarus and Belarusians, see Ackermann, Berman, and Sasunkevich (2017).

ner mood and its outer expression: “Well, our Russian mentality⁴ is such that we are rather gloomy. We don’t smile much, only with loved ones. That is to say, we behave more sincerely. When we want to be sad, we are sad; when we are feeling cheerful, we show it” (3).⁵

An unwillingness to hide one’s bad mood can sometimes come out as aggression, as in the unsettling encounters I describe above. The widely read online lifestyle magazine *CityDog.by* touches on this issue in a piece about how Belarusians are seen by their Eastern European neighbors. An ethnic Belarusian who grew up in Minsk before moving to Lithuania says:

I visit Minsk quite often, and every time I pay attention to people’s behavior. They are aggressive. In queues, stores, and clinics, I constantly experience stress: rudeness and obnoxious behavior [*khamstvo*] are par for the course.... In Lithuania people are calmer somehow. They will never raise their voices at you, they will politely wait while you bag your groceries at the checkout or count out your change, apologize if they bump into you on the bus, and gently squeeze past so as not to hurt anyone. (*CityDog.by*, 2015)

Minchane offer their own explanations for public rudeness, among them, “the climate is bad,” “our salaries are low,” and, as my 65-year-old landlady liked to say, “now there are too many uncultured people here from the countryside.” Younger people sometimes associated unfriendliness as something old-fashioned and Soviet, like the 20-year-old student who told me that her neighbors, like mine, ignore one another in their building. “I think it’s kind of a leftover thing from socialist times, because I try to greet everyone when I come and go,” she said (4). A more provocative theory of social atomization was put forth in the aftermath of the 2020 election by an anonymous user in the anti-Lukashenko Telegram channel *Stop Being Afraid!*:

Have you ever wondered why in our country there have never been banknotes issued with portraits of Belarusian historical figures? Or why Lukashenko’s government has always forbidden erecting monuments to national heroes, poets, writers, etc.? Or why, for example, in the early 2010s, the “Food Not Bombs” campaign was broken up—when students who wanted to feed the homeless were beaten and the food was dumped onto the sidewalk? The answer is very simple. The government’s number one task is to divide us, to create a dog-eat-dog society [*chtoby chelovek cheloveku byl volk*], so that no one helps each other, so that no one trusts anyone. (*Khvatit Boiat’sia!*, Telegram, September 9, 2020)

⁴ Talk of “Russian” mentalities or behaviors is not uncommon in Belarus (a Russian-speaking country). I interpret this as a discursive construction that gestures towards Russian speakers’ shared cultural heritage and not as a political or national identification with the Russian Federation.

⁵ Dale Pesmen writes in *Russia and Soul*, “I was often told that politeness was not *dush-evnyi*,” that is, soulful or sincere (2000:93).

Whatever the reasons for *minchane's* public gloominess, it is a widely acknowledged facet of life in Minsk, and one that informs my interlocutors' perception of the very different atmospheres that prevail at places like gyms, CrossFit boxes, and yoga studios. However, before we explore the affective qualities of these new commercial spaces, I want to provide further context through a discussion of Belarusian service culture in a historical perspective.

Postsocialist Eastern Europe is not a region known for its friendly service culture, and Minsk is no exception. While it may be more noticeable to foreigners, rude or indifferent treatment by salespeople occasionally bothers locals as well. One day my friend Natal'ia, an outgoing professor in her early 50s, related a frustrating interaction she had with an employee at a clothing store. The saleswoman's tone and expression seemed to say, "What did you come here for? What are you doing here?" Natal'ia sighed. "You already know, our country has this mentality ... I just close my eyes" (5). Masha, a confident 41-year-old advertising professional, complained about the way some receptionists in fitness clubs used to act (when there were fewer clubs and therefore less competition):

There's the type of administrator who sits there—my God, who sits as if she's some kind of queen. And she looks down at you like, "Well, how did *this* dork wind up here?" There used to be several of these gyms, where the people thought that you owed *them*, and not the other way around! (6)

As a foreigner, one of the questions I heard most often from young people was how I found the service in their country. I came to understand that this subject was a source of anxiety for people, who seemed to worry that a few unaccommodating waiters or clerks could be putting Belarus's international reputation on the line. In contrast to the United States, where rudeness is often expected from wealthy elites, my interlocutors explicitly tied friendliness to a higher level of culture and education. Those who had experienced (and appreciated) friendly service abroad often interpreted this cultural difference as evidence of the superiority of capitalist economic systems over socialist ones. Not coincidentally, Western tourists in Eastern Europe also tend to draw the same conclusion when confronted with inefficient and unfriendly service (Frase 2013).

SOVIET SALES CLERKS AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIALIST CONSUMPTION

Surly sales clerks and poor customer service in Soviet and post-Soviet places *are* related to the experience of state socialism, although the relationship is less straightforward than it appears at first blush.⁶ Before I discuss the affective environments of Minsk's new fitness clubs and their larger significance in terms of changing social and

⁶ Of course, specific regional histories and norms also shape the tone of interactions between strangers in the post-Soviet space; I have found service and retail employees in Saint Petersburg and Odessa, for example, to be much friendlier than those I've encountered in Minsk.

labor relations, I will provide some historical context for the “old” norms of retail interactions, which still dominate in many establishments in the Belarusian capital and which, I will argue, can be traced back to the politics of Soviet consumption and its attendant notions of culturedness.

As historians and anthropologists alike have observed, the issue of consumption was, for various reasons, fraught under state socialism. In self-conscious opposition to market- and consumption-oriented capitalist economies, Soviet (and subsequently Eastern Bloc) regimes emphasized that it was production that was “the foundation of wealth, morality, and worth” (Rogers and Verdery 2013:445). The specter of Western “irrational” consumption swayed by individual desires threatened the collectivist spirit of the new regime and was therefore feared and vilified by Soviet authorities (Reid 2002:242). In the early days of the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks aimed to bring the demanding bourgeois shopper to a heel. Sales clerks were no longer to display deference to shoppers and indulge their whims since “this unequal relationship symbolized the reenactment of class struggle on the sales floor” (Hilton 2009:1). Judging by newspaper articles and letters to the editor in the Soviet press, the relationship between customers and service workers had not improved much by the late Soviet period, despite authorities’ increased attention to the sphere of personal consumption (Koenker 2021; Paretskaya 2010).

The fact that state stores were often lacking in quality goods exacerbated the tension between retail workers and shoppers, since the former were frequently forced to deal with angry customers demanding explanations for deficiencies and shortages (Bogdanova 2015; Hilton 2009). These sales clerks, who were mostly young and poorly educated, were further disparaged for “their unwillingness to smile for the customer,” which was attributed to “poor training, a lack of socialist consciousness, a low level of ‘culture,’ and lack of social status” (Koenker 2021:874).⁷

EMOTIONAL LABOR AND THE ADDED VALUE OF FRIENDLY SERVICE

In today’s Belarus, where shortages are no longer a problem, relations between sellers and customers have thawed only slightly. As more Belarusians have opportunities to travel abroad⁸ and experience friendly customer service, what once seemed like a normal, if frustrating, part of everyday life has become a source of shame—another sign that their country does not measure up to an imagined set of European standards (Ackermann, Berman, and Sasunkevich 2017:4). Many Belarusians view good

⁷ On the subject of the smile, Diane Koenker writes, “It has been widely observed that smiling in public is not a part of Soviet culture, and we need not assume that politeness requires a smiling face. But it was Soviet commentators who made that equation, praising smiles when they were given and complaining when they were not. They distinguished honest Soviet smiles from the artificial capitalist smile: one was a genuine product that came from the heart, and the other was bought and paid for” (2021:874).

⁸ Popular holiday destinations include Western European countries, the postsocialist states with which Belarus shares a border, Georgia, Turkey, Egypt, and Thailand.

service in Western capitalist countries as a reflection of better salaries and happier people in a way that is reminiscent of how citizens of socialist states are said to have interpreted the high quality of Western-produced goods in the late twentieth century. According to Krisztina Fehérváry, Eastern Europeans assumed the paternalistic state-subject relationship particular to state socialism also applied to capitalist democracies. They therefore read capitalist countries' abundant and high-quality products as "iconic of a superior political system based upon human dignity," while second-rate products and shortages were considered proof of socialist regimes' negligence and even "inhumane" treatment of their subjects (Fehérváry 2009:429, 454).

The same misunderstanding of capitalism and consumer markets seems to guide Belarusians' assumption that sales clerks are friendlier abroad because they enjoy high living standards. The reality of course is that service industry jobs in Western countries are not prestigious occupations. In the United States, service workers earn low wages and often lack even the most basic social protections. In addition, those who interact with customers as part of their job are expected to provide added value for their employers through the performance of emotional labor. Emotional labor, as Arlie Hochschild describes it, refers to "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" ([1983] 2012:7). Rather than being a spontaneous expression of a positive outlook or servile disposition, the friendliness of service workers is the product of their efforts to control however they might *really* be feeling—tired, depressed, annoyed, or angry with a difficult customer—to maintain a pleasant and accommodating persona. While Hochschild first coined the term "emotional labor" in 1983, the pressure placed on workers to coddle customers and maintain a relentlessly positive demeanor has only increased in the past 40 years with shifts in the economy and labor market.

In contrast, Soviet shop workers could not effectively be coerced by higher-ups to perform emotional labor on the job. While authorities were concerned about how to improve the image of service, an issue which "occupied a prominent place on every official agenda," they were unable to enforce any widespread changes (Koenker 2021:876). Soviet shop clerks *were* monitored to the extent that customers could register complaints against them in either the store complaint book or in a letter to the press, but this did not usually result in anyone being fired, as store employees ultimately controlled the narrative and ensured that the customer was always in the wrong (Bogdanova 2015; Hilton 2009).

Attracting customers was also not priority for state stores under socialism. In the centrally planned economies of the period, as Katherine Verdery reminds us,

The whole point was not to sell things: the center wanted to keep as much as possible under its control, because that was how it had redistributive power; and it wanted to give away the rest, because that was how it confirmed its legitimacy with the public. Selling things competitively was therefore beside the point. (1996:26)

The lack of competition between establishments, shops, and firms during the Soviet period meant that this “added value” of friendliness was not necessary to move merchandise. Given the well-known shortages, there was certainly no incentive for a shopkeeper or manager to draw people into their store: if these places had goods, people would line up to buy them anyway. One American business professor reported the following anecdote about the opening of the first McDonald’s in Moscow in 1990: After several days of customer service training a young Soviet teenager asked the trainer a very serious question: “Why do we have to be so nice to the customers? After all, WE have the hamburgers, and they don’t!” (quoted in Frase 2013). Another factor to consider besides the lack of competition between businesses for customers is that there was less competition between workers: in a place with guaranteed employment, there is no incentive for people to expend emotional energy pretending they are always in a good mood and happy to be serving customers. While no one wants to receive rude service, we can appreciate that under the Soviet system workers were spared the indignity of having to assume a servile attitude towards customers and could conserve their emotional energy for their personal lives.

THE UNEXPECTED WARMTH OF NEW LEISURE SPACES

In Belarus low “official” unemployment rates and a relatively small private sector mean that capitalist customer service norms are less prevalent than in other post-socialist places in Eastern Europe. Still, the consumer culture boom that occurred in the Belarusian capital in the 2010s transformed the city’s affective (as well as visual) landscape. In the second half of the decade especially, new bars, coffee shops, and fitness clubs seemed to open every week. The novelty of these consumer spaces makes Minsk an ideal place to look at coexisting “socialist” and “capitalist” behavioral norms. While one still regularly experiences the stereotypical Soviet brusqueness in Minsk, in some of these newer spaces one can find an atmosphere of unexpected warmth—smiles, recommendations, and even small talk. New and old, state and private spaces sit side-by-side, each throwing the particularities of the other into relief.

In the following discussion, I explore the environments and sociality of various kinds of fitness clubs including gyms, CrossFit boxes,⁹ and aerobics, yoga, and capoeira studios. In these spaces I found public behavior to be remarkably different from that which I encountered in my building, on the metro, or in the supermarket. Given my experiences of being ignored in my *pod’ezd*, I was surprised to find it was the norm to say “hello” when entering a fitness club locker room and “goodbye” when leaving, whether or not you recognized the people present or expected to see them again. Sometimes strangers would initiate conversation with me, and once I was even offered a homemade oatmeal cookie by a woman I had never met before. For me

⁹ CrossFit workouts combine high-intensity interval training, powerlifting, gymnastics, and Olympic weightlifting. While CrossFit studios in Minsk are referred to as “clubs” (*kluby*), in the US they are called “boxes.” I mostly use the latter terminology in this article to avoid overusing the word “club.”

these interactions occasionally led to friendships. The vertical relationships I observed (and participated in) between fitness studio management and trainers and their clientele were also characterized by a spirit of camaraderie. Some studios organized events for participants outside of normal classes, like nutrition lectures, competitions, barbecues, and trips to the *bania*. Others served tea after class to encourage people to linger and chat with the instructor and other people from the class. These gestures helped to seed relationships that, for many of my interlocutors, extended well beyond the walls of the club.

THE FITNESS STUDIO AS REFUGE FROM EVERYDAY LIFE

What conditions have led to this culture of friendliness in the fitness club? Keeping in mind that the fitness studios in question are for-profit businesses, what is being sold here and how is it produced? An atmosphere of warmth in the gym or fitness studio setting is especially important given the feelings of vulnerability and embarrassment that attend new clients. In a city in which an estimated 100 new clubs opened in 2016 (Kovalevskii 2017), the competitive edge represented by a friendly environment is much sought after by club managers. Central to these clubs' success is their creation of upbeat and community-based spaces against the backdrop of what many *minchane* perceive as a gloomy and reticent society.

One way that club managers create an environment conducive to sociability is through the arrangement of the club's interior space. Elements like the layout, lighting, paint, and décor of a fitness studio help to set the mood and demarcate the space from the outside world (Sassatelli 1999:229). The most trendy clubs and studios in Minsk were designed to help gym participants temporarily adopt new dispositions by transporting them to imaginary places, away from the worries and drudgery of everyday life. Below I will discuss three examples of thoughtfully arranged fitness spaces, all of which have foreign-language names: Yoga Place, Moby Dick Gym, and Axé Capoeira.¹⁰

One of the most well-known and prestigious yoga studios in the city, Yoga Place, is located on the third floor of an old factory building on an up-and-coming pedestrian street called Oktiabr'skaia (October). Oktiabr'skaia, which features a mix of working factories, casual food joints, a fancy burger place, bars, and a music venue, is "like a bright red rag for young people," as one of my interlocutors phrased it (2). The studios at Yoga Place are clean and modern with exposed brick walls, polished wood floors, open wooden shelving, and houseplants—a look that is becoming increasingly ubiquitous in the virtual and real spaces attended by the aspirational global middle classes. This "faux-artisanal aesthetic," as one writer calls it, can be found in coffee shops "in Odessa, Beijing, Los Angeles, or Seoul," spread by the circulation of images on Instagram and Airbnb listings (Chayka 2016). Scattered around the studio room and the hallway are objects associated with Eastern religions, including a small Buddha head, a hamsa, prayer beads, incense sticks, and line drawings of Hindu dei-

¹⁰ While these are names of actual places, the personal names used in the article are pseudonyms.

ties. A receptionist at this studio explained that the owner “does everything possible to create the studio’s atmosphere. Having flowers in the space and making people comfortable through the details, even down to the subscription card, which has a special design” (7). Judging by the Google reviews of Yoga Place, these details are not lost on its customers, who mention them as often as they do the instructors and the yoga classes themselves. A few excerpts from these reviews give us a better sense of how Yoga Place creates its special atmosphere:

Unbelievably cozy place, perfect if you’re new to yoga. Everything is thought out down to the most trivial details. The pleasant homey atmosphere begins at the reception desk, for which we can thank the wonderful and polite administrators.

For me the details are important: [an overall environment of] comfort comes from cleanliness, a well-designed interior, spacious dressing rooms, [nice] smells, free tea and snacks, and tactful and knowledgeable administrators.

At Yoga Place there is a special atmosphere of coziness and kindness, which is not available in other studios, as far as I’m aware. The main room and dressing room are very well-equipped: there is always nice soap in the dispenser, calming music, and competent and attentive mentors. And tea, which is a special treat after practice.

Thank you to the girls at the front desk for their cordiality, kindness, and ability to create a cozy environment!

(Google Reviews, Yoga Place)

For Belarusians, most of whom have lived through periods of material scarcity, the impact made by these “little details” and the unexpected warmth of administrators is powerful. Tight budgets (and perhaps a lack of trust) mean that bathrooms in administrative buildings (including universities) rarely have toilet paper, soap, paper towels, or working hand driers. Additionally, there is virtually no culture of “freebies” in Minsk, so in a typical cafeteria customers are charged even for condiments and packets of sugar. Within this context, the comfortable, well-equipped bathrooms and complimentary tea and snacks at Yoga Place feel especially luxurious.

A couple hundred meters down the road from this yoga studio is another fashionable spot called Moby Dick Gym. In keeping with the aesthetic of other businesses on Oktiabr’skaia Street including Yoga Place, the points of reference for Moby Dick are the so-called creative districts of global cosmopolitan cities. A quintessential “gym that is not just a gym” (as an acquaintance named Liza described it), Moby Dick features a café window at its entrance selling high-quality espresso drinks and protein shakes where patrons can sit at the outdoor tables and enjoy a coffee before, after, or independently of working out (8). The gym’s rather idiosyncratic interior design scheme combines several motifs, all of which take the gym patron to another time and place. On the walls of the cardio area are black-and-white murals depicting a whale and a shirtless mustachioed man whom I take to be Moby Dick and Captain Ahab. In the weight room the walls feature large reproductions of vintage black-and-white portraits of circus performers as well as, somewhat incongruously, a photo of a

young Arnold Schwarzenegger. Moby Dick's locker room has a more contemporary aesthetic, with skateboarding, music band, and novelty stickers stuck on the lockers as if to recall the hallway of an American high school from the 1980s or 1990s. What these eclectic motifs have in common is that they are all far removed from any identifiably local aesthetic. Moby Dick's design elements—like those of Yoga Place—help to seal its reputation as a place for trendy young people tapped into global consumer culture while at the same time creating a refuge from everyday life.

The physical environment of the gym or fitness studio not only helps clients escape the world of work and obligations but also enables them to temporarily adopt new affective dispositions. Axé Capoeira,¹¹ which is housed in an enormous former factory that now hosts dozens of small local businesses, is brightly painted in the colors of the Brazilian flag—yellow, blue, and apple green. The Brazilian origins of the sport act as a frame for how its Belarusian participants interact with each other, even when they are not “playing capoeira.” One evening before a class at Axé, I was sitting with Katia, a woman in her mid-30s, who was providing me with some historical background on the sport. At some point a young local man entered the space, embraced Katia, and kissed her on both cheeks—something I had never seen anyone in Belarus do before. Though I did not comment on it, Katia interrupted her narrative to explain: “Usually we have to greet each other with a hug and a kiss. So Brazilian. Because they are so emotional. So we also became a little bit more open-minded” (9).

Later, when I met Katia again, I questioned her about the appeal of Brazil for her capoeira group. She admitted that most Belarusians assumed that Brazilians lived the way they did in the soap operas that were popular there (and in Russia) in the 1990s. She herself pictured Brazil as a sort of dreamworld that inverted her everyday reality. “It’s the very opposite of Belarus in terms of everything,” she explained. “The temperament of the people, the style of life, and of course the weather conditions. So it’s something like, ‘Wow!’” (9). In practicing capoeira, Katia and others in her group embodied an imagined Brazilian identity not only in terms of the physical movements required of the sport but by adopting a more warm and affectionate style of greeting at the studio.

While these three fitness spaces—Yoga Place, Moby Dick, and Axé—have different aesthetic points of reference and target slightly different (though conceivably overlapping) types of clients, they share an element of escapism, offering themselves as temporary portals to places seen as hipper and more cosmopolitan than Minsk, where the people are more cultured, warm, and caring. The use of décor and material objects associated with faraway places to construct romantic fantasies of more comfortable or exciting ways of living has its precedent in the apartments of 1970s and 1980s Soviet intelligentsia, in which a foreign stamp collection, a portrait of Ernest Hemingway, and a bust of Queen Nefertiti might coexist in a living-room display cabinet (Boym 1994:286). These “still lives,” Svetlana Boym writes, tell “a story of

¹¹ The Portuguese word *axé* can be translated as “good vibes” or “powerful energy.” Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian martial art that incorporates elements of dance, self-defense, acrobatics, music, and song.

travels real or imaginary—of journeys to exotic places and escapes into wishful thinking” (285–286). The aesthetic overlap between contemporary fitness clubs and late Soviet-era apartments draws our attention to the fact that part of the allure of Minsk’s new consumer spaces is that they make semipublic various things that people are used to encountering only in private, such as friendliness, complimentary tea, hand soap, and comfortable couches.

CLIENT-CENTERED SPACES AND THE COLLECTIVE WORK OF SOCIABILITY

When I posed the question to Valentina, a 59-year-old economist, about why it was that strangers would greet me in the gym locker room while my neighbors ignored me in the stairwell, her response supported sociologist Roberta Sassatelli’s assertion that “gym environments are ... specialized places relatively separated from the external reality” (1999:230). She told me she would often encounter the very same people in her neighborhood fitness club as she did in her building and that, indeed, people with whom she would chat freely at the gym would sometimes barely acknowledge her in their shared lobby. “Everybody is focused on their own issues in front of the elevator,” she explained. “But the club is a distinct, set-off place where there’s one focus and one topic of communication” (10).

The décor of the fitness space demarcates it from everyday life and helps social actors assume affective dispositions that they would normally reserve for more intimate social settings. However, these framing devices can only do so much. As Sassatelli points out, “sociability in the gym does not come spontaneously; on the contrary, it is largely the result of collective work, performed by clients (with the result that a certain clientele will, to a degree, define the tone of a club) and by trainers (whose job in many ways is relational and emotional)” (2010:68). The client does her work in this coproduction by greeting others in the locker room, by encouraging new participants, by lingering and mingling after class over tea, and by participating in weekend outings or competitions and in group chats on the messaging app Viber.

The trainers’ role in the coproduction of a friendly atmosphere at the fitness studio is equally important—and yet usually more fraught. Besides the explicit services they provide, such as creating exercise programs and providing nutritional information, trainers must also do the less tangible work of maintaining the right attitude and managing clients’ emotional needs. The latter responsibilities necessarily involve some degree of deference—if the customer was “always wrong” during the Soviet period, the tables have turned. At the main CrossFit box I attended in Minsk, the relationship between clients and trainers resembled capitalist buyer-seller dynamics much more than those between authoritative Soviet coaches and their protégés. Despite the punishing intensity of the trainings, CrossFit is considered by most participants to be a recreational activity rather than a competitive sport. The trainers therefore do not hold anyone to a particular standard of fitness and rarely discipline participants. Even when a trainer notices that a club member is not doing the

sets of exercises as instructed (provided he is not in a position to hurt himself), he does not say anything.¹² This came up in an interview with my trainer Sasha when I asked him whether he noticed any differences between how men and women behave at the gym.

Sasha: When we do a circuit [of exercises], men are more likely to fib. If we do something for three rounds of ten, women do three rounds of ten. Men may do three rounds of seven and say they're done.

Me: I also noticed that! Like, how did this guy finish so quickly?

Sasha: It happens pretty often. They don't want to look bad.

Me: You never say anything?

Sasha: No. It's a little sneakiness, but it's not bad, it's normal. What difference does it make if we're doing circuits? I may ask, how many did you do? The first guy says six, so the second guy says six too. (11)

The flexibility displayed by the trainer and his tolerance for individual transgressions of the rules present a notable contrast to other sectors of Belarusian society, like bureaucracies and state stores, which tend to be strictly bound by protocol. For a CrossFit trainer to discipline participants or hold them to a standard of "correct" behavior would be incompatible with a capitalist business model in which the "customer is always right" (Heywood 2016:126).

EMOTIONAL LABOR AND THE TRAINER-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

Given the current oversaturation of the fitness club market in Minsk, it is not enough to provide a space for athletic people to work out. Instead, clubs must bring more and more people into the fold by filling various roles in clients' lives. By stressing the personal aspects of the relationship of exchange, this business strategy relies on the performance of emotional labor by clubs' employees. The following description, relayed to me by Alina, a 24-year-old CrossFit trainer, gives us an idea of what specifically this work can entail:

First of all, a trainer should be attentive to small details. That is, not only a person's form [while doing an exercise], but also his mood. As soon as you see that he's starting to fade, you should immediately cheer him up. People come to you for training, which means they trust you. For this hour, you are their mentor and their best friend, and you need to help them with everything they may need. But at the same time, you should be strict enough so that they work out for the entire time and not just show up and lie down. (12)

¹² In every training there would be one or more circuits—sets of three to seven exercises (e.g., push-ups, pull-ups, kettlebell swings, crunches, jumping rope, barbell lifts, etc.)—that we would do a certain number of times or for as many repetitions as possible for a certain duration of time.

Trainers are expected to be a trusted “friend,” but also rigorous enough in their coaching that the client sees results and considers her money to be well spent. “You need to try to maintain this balance all the time,” Alina told me. “It’s very difficult sometimes” (12). Other relational aspects of a trainer’s job include being consistently positive and encouraging, socializing with club-goers before and after trainings, checking in with people who miss multiple sessions, and engaging with clients on social media and in online chat groups.

Some trainers I spoke with told me they have clients who work with them mostly for the company and conversation. A personal trainer named Vova described his relationship with one of his clients: “Maybe this person doesn’t need me to coach him and can train on his own, but he needs to socialize. And he finds what he’s looking for in our trainings” (14). Ol’ga, who has a bit of a cult following, also told me about a client who comes to her classes just to spend time with her:

I understand that to [this client] it makes no difference which exercises I tell her to do. I know I should give her exercises that work her different muscles. But she doesn’t care! The main thing for her is that I’m there and that she’s ready to do what I say. I guess for her it’s about my energy and charisma. (13)

I heard these sentiments from fitness participants as well. For example, Mariia, a 37-year-old woman who runs a research organization, stressed the social and emotional aspects of her relationship with her CrossFit coach Sasha. To her, his personality is more important than his expertise:

My favorite coach is Sasha, because he worries about everyone, talks to everyone, and is a kind of friend to everyone. There are trainers who may be better than he is in understanding some technical matters, but they—well, you feel that they need you less. But Sasha actually worries about you, and this is very important. (15)

While both male and female trainers were expected to perform the traditionally female-coded emotional labor required to build relationships with clients and make them feel good about themselves, I observed that the expectations for trainers varied slightly by gender. Male trainers often flirted lightly with female clientele. My interviewees suggested that this was often initiated by the women rather than the trainers. Below is an excerpt from a conversation with Vova:

Vova: I’ve had situations where women give me signs that they like me. I make it clear that we can be friendly but the relationship is professional.

Me: Is this unmarried women or...?

Vova: All kinds. I’ve had clients who were married, but they simply flirt. Because they want some attention, to socialize. (14)

Female trainers, on the other hand, sometimes took on a maternal role with clients. Alina, the CrossFit instructor quoted above, told me she had to both soothe men who whined about doing difficult exercises and be delicate when communicating to

them that they had taken heavier weights than they could handle (12). One body-builder and personal trainer I interviewed referred to her clients as her “children” (16), while Ol’ga said her coworker teases her for talking to clients as if she’s their mom. “I say ‘Well, what about it?’” she told me. “They are my people, my kin, my clients” (13).

Part of trainers’ emotional labor consists of suppressing negative emotions at work. Sometimes trainers and instructors vented their frustrations to me concerning clients who think that they are the ones who should call the shots. The administrator from Yoga Place lamented that some people “want to have a service more than they want to do yoga” (7), while Vova complained to me about those clients who felt they were entitled to skip exercises they did not feel like doing. He elaborated:

Many come and think, “I am paying money, so you should do everything.” But you can’t lose weight on someone’s behalf! That is, the client is the one who wants to lose weight, so he needs to do something. But he doesn’t understand. He doesn’t do what I tell him, but says, “I want to do this exercise, this exercise, and this exercise. This other exercise, I don’t want to do.” (14)

When I asked trainers what aspects they found most difficult in their work, some of them mentioned the pressure to always be “on.” Svetlana, a trainer in her late 20s told me:

It’s hard to have to always be in a good mood, to always give people positivity and love. You can get tired of people sometimes. On the one hand, they charge you with energy, but then sometimes I just want to shut down and say, “Don’t touch me.” (17)

Vika, a sunny 26-year-old dance instructor, echoed this sentiment. She also said that people “give you their energy,” but added, “sometimes I get tired of people because they are everywhere!” (18).

Another challenge for trainers in their relationships with clients is maintaining the boundary between professional and friend. Alina explained:

I try to be friends with clients but not let them get too close, because as soon as the client becomes your friend, it’s very difficult to work with him. It’s especially important to keep your distance with men. Well, these young guys—they like to try to cross the line a bit. With them you should always be a little stricter than you really are. (12)

Sometimes trainers expressed regret that they could not reciprocate the openness their clients extended towards them. Ol’ga, the charismatic aerobics instructor, confessed that although she felt close to her clientele and knew much about their personal lives and problems, she was unwilling to disclose to them that her husband was seriously ill because they looked to her to always remain upbeat and positive. She demanded the same of the other instructors she employs: “I

show up in a good mood, and my team should as well" (13). In relationships between trainers and clients, emotional labor and genuine emotional connection often coexist.

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND THE ROLE OF THE SMILE

The trainers I interviewed were keenly aware of the fact that a large part of their job consisted of building relationships with clients and making them feel good. Sasha, the CrossFit trainer quoted above, explained:

Our first aim is not developing bodies but creating the club atmosphere. Everyone has a lot going on at work and at home with their children, so here we need to relax. Therefore, the atmosphere should be pleasant. A positive environment is important. (11)

One of the ways that trainers and administrators create this positive and welcoming environment is by smiling at people when they enter or leave the club. Smiling in public in Belarus (and in other Russian-speaking and Slavic places) is not customary and is sometimes associated with American insincerity and mindless positivity, as previously discussed. Aware of this cultural norm, I was surprised by how often the subject of smiling came up in my interviews. For example, Natal'ia, the professor in her 50s quoted above said, "For me, a really big role is played by a smile, by someone saying they're glad you came. A person [working in a fitness club] should have a good disposition and offer a good reception when you come in. If the trainer is happy to see you, it means a lot" (5). Describing her favorite trainer (Sasha), a 27-year-old woman from my CrossFit box explained: "He's a better fit for us [than another trainer]. He is more positive, and when he smiles it puts you in a good mood" (19). While not every trainer and administrator I encountered smiled at me when I walked into their club, in my experience it was a common practice.

Of course, friendliness in the gym or fitness studio setting can take time to get used to for people habituated to different norms of public etiquette. Vika told me that at one point she worked in a club where trainers and clients did not acknowledge each other or interact outside of the class. "So," Vika said, "when I would smile and greet people, they would sometimes look at me like, 'You are too cheerful, you must be on drugs.'" She laughed. "It was hard, because everyone was so gloomy, so serious, not even realizing they need to relax" (18). It is likely that this club's clientele was caught off guard by Vika's friendly reception. In this case, the burden of emotional labor is extended to the clients, who are being invited to perform an affect that does not come naturally to them in public spaces—to don a "cheerful mask," we might say.

The idea that the act of exercising helps people access more positive affective states came up repeatedly in my interviews with both trainers and fitness enthusiasts. In her hip-hop dance classes Vika tries "to somehow make people smile at themselves, to make them laugh, to teach them how to make life a little easier" (18). Lena, the woman who said that "the Russian mentality" is one of gloominess, told me,

“When you exercise, you receive joy and you radiate it outward. You want to smile more, you want to be a more positive person” (3). Polina, a 31-year-old aerobics instructor, sees fitness as the antidote to the somber national mood:

Well, maybe you noticed, in Belarus everyone is sad and gloomy, so fitness helps us to be a little happier. Well, this is physiological, the production of the hormone of happiness and pleasure takes place.... That is, you come to fitness and leave behind all your negativity and you receive a charge of some vivacity, energy, a positive feeling. And you go home happy. It’s great. (20)

In this positively “charged” environment, some of my interlocutors reported they found it easier to connect with other people. Valentina, the economist in her late 50s told me, “Charging ourselves with positive energy [through exercise], we attract other people, and then, yes, we get another charge of energy from them” (10).

MEETING NEW PEOPLE AND “THE FEELING OF BEING PART OF A GROUP”

Fitness club clientele are both producers and consumers of gym sociality. They are drawn to fitness studios because these spaces offer elements of escapism and play, a “charge” of positive energy, and the attention, support, and friendship of trainers. But clientele also contribute to the club atmosphere in various ways. By greeting strangers in the locker room, for example, they help to create the warm and friendly environments so important to a club’s image and reputation. Sometimes club-goers are welcoming to newcomers from the start, such as the core members of Ol’ga’s aerobics studio. As one of them explained, “The atmosphere here is very pleasant, [we’re] like a small family. You come to your first class and you don’t feel any shyness or anything like that. Everybody’s really open” (21). Other people take longer to warm up to unfamiliar faces. Galia, 30, told me that when she and a girlfriend started working out at an old-school working-class gym, the men who trained there initially assumed they were not serious about lifting.

At first they looked at us askance, then all the men began to get to know us, to say hello. And now we have a gang. We’re constantly joking around, pulling pranks on each other—it’s a real second family. Everyone is always happy to see you, they will help you, laugh with you.... I like this kind of atmosphere. (22)

By being open and friendly with newcomers, more experienced fitness club members help socialize initiates into the distinctive affective environment of the club. Trainers, administrators, and club décor may set the tone of the fitness space, but it is the club-goers themselves who do much of the work of creating and maintaining an intimate and supportive group dynamic that helps gyms and studios attract and retain members.

One of the reasons fitness club communities are so important is that it can be challenging to meet new people as an adult. Sasha, who worked a nine-to-five job before becoming a trainer, told me he thought that the individualized and com-

petitive environment of the workplace made it too difficult to make friends. “You work at your computer and you don’t even know your neighbors [in the office],” he said (11). Lena, who along with her husband was part of a close-knit group of friends at one of my CrossFit studios, also described the challenges of forming new connections:

You can make friends only with your work colleagues or maybe meet someone in the yard outside your building or in the playground with your kids. In ordinary life it’s quite difficult. But when we started coming [to CrossFit] to train, we met everyone, [people with whom] we would never otherwise have crossed paths. (3)

Svetlana, who in addition to being a trainer runs a fitness academy for aspiring instructors, told me that nowadays “a lot of young people come to the fitness club just to hang out” (17). She said she met a guy who admitted that he had no fitness goals but liked to come to the gym to walk around, socialize, do a couple of reps here and there and then sit on the couch and have a protein shake.¹³

For those *minchane* I met who were not working—either because they were on maternity leave or retired¹⁴—the fitness studio environment was an especially important source of sociality.¹⁵ But for many of my interlocutors, regardless of their specific personal circumstances, the social aspect of fitness had become as important as the body- and health-related goals that had brought them to the club in the first place. As one 30-year-old woman who works for an NGO put it, “It’s not only about coming and paying your money and working out, it’s also about society, about the group. It’s the feeling of being part of a group” (23).

BEYOND THE CLUB: TRAVEL, LEISURE, CHAT GROUPS, AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

For some fitness participants, especially those involved in group trainings like CrossFit, capoeira, and aerobics, the sociality of the club extends well beyond its physical boundaries. For example, a couple of clubs organized “fitness tours” to warm places like Egypt and Turkey, while Axé Capoeira members travelled to workshops in Russia, Poland, and the Czech Republic. Yoga Place now offers a “yoga camp” outdoors in the Belarusian countryside, and my regular CrossFit studio sends a group to Moscow once

¹³ In her ethnography of fitness clubs in Japan in the 1990s, Laura Spielvogel (2003) also observes that some people came to the clubs primarily to relax and enjoy a beer or an ice cream in a pleasant environment.

¹⁴ At the time of my research women were entitled to three years of maternity leave for each child. The age of retirement for women was 55.

¹⁵ Of course, fitness clubs are not the only sources of sociality for *minchane* beyond the spheres of work, family, and close friends. I also met and spent time with people involved in English-language clubs, outdoor salsa dancing, the clubbing/party scene, religious organizations, adult education classes at a senior center, the multilevel marketing company Amway, and other special interest groups.

or twice a year to participate in regional competitions. About the latter, Lena said, “It’s great, it’s like [participating in sports] in childhood. It’s like a little Olympics” (3), while another person too young to have been a Pioneer compared the club’s expedition to Moscow to a “Soviet children’s camp.” “There’s a spirit of competition,” she said, “but at the same time everyone supports each other” (24). Outside of club-organized events, many people socialized informally with friends they had met through their involvement in fitness, taking trips to the *bania* and the cinema, hosting barbecues and New Year’s Eve celebrations, and even going on group holidays abroad.

Internet chat groups provided another space for interaction among fitness club members—some of whom did not actually know each other in person because they trained at different times. In my CrossFit chat group, which had over 100 members, people shared the “workout of the day,” jokes, memes, and club news and events. They also used the chat forum to solicit and offer advice and recommendations and occasionally to sell goods (such as a trunkful of sneakers procured from abroad). The chat group for Ol’ga’s aerobics studio likewise provided a space for exchanging information about practical matters ranging from how to find a lawyer to where to print business cards. Ol’ga also uses the chat to promote offers for self-care treatments like manicures, pedicures, and massages at local businesses with which she has a partnership (13). As Polina, one of Ol’ga’s employees, described the chat, “It’s mutually beneficial, a kind of symbiosis. It’s really cool” (20).

CONCLUSION

A common criticism of fitness culture in the West—that it represents a narcissistic focus on individual body projects (Ehrenreich 2020; Lasch 1991)—cannot be meaningfully applied to the Belarusian context. In Minsk new consumer spaces like gyms and yoga studios are far from frivolous or apolitical. My research suggests that participating in fitness helps people create connections and opportunities in a society many locals experience as atomized and impersonal. Fitness spaces thus serve a number of important functions in terms of building the larger social body in a society undergoing economic and political change: negotiating new market forms and behavioral norms without embracing Western capitalism wholeheartedly. These spaces manage to serve multivalent needs, providing opportunities for sociality, mentorship, trust-building, networking, informal exchange, and mutual support. In post-Soviet Minsk, where older forms and sources of social ties are potentially eroded by changes in labor markets, increased migration from home villages, and changed workplace norms, participation in fitness communities offers people a way of creating and maintaining that most treasured resource of the socialist period: connections. Where older forms of social life begin to transform and even crumble, new consumer spaces like fitness clubs help bear the burden of people’s needs in a system still governed to some degree by Soviet practices but without the range of support provided under the Soviet system.

In this article I have explored how some of the norms of capitalist consumer culture—for example, comfortable and modern spaces and friendly accommodating personnel—help to create an atmosphere set off from everyday life, in which the norms of public gloominess and indifference towards strangers are inverted. I want to conclude with the suggestion that the affective environment found in fitness clubs and other new spaces of consumption has begun to spill over into public and quasi-public spaces. To return to the place where we started, the apartment building entranceway or *pod"ezd*, I share an observation from Vova, the personal trainer we heard from above:

Now it's more fashionable to greet your neighbors. Earlier you would enter the building, go into the elevator together, and no one would ever greet each other. Even if you lived there together for 20 years. But now I know of some buildings where people chat with each other. And they don't just greet each other, they become friends and go to each other's places as guests. In my building, that's happened. (14)

What are the larger implications of this greater demand for—and performance of—friendliness in Minsk?

In light of the recent demonstrations, Minsk residents' behavior towards strangers assumes a new significance. The solidarity exhibited in the massive demonstrations, workers' strikes, and volunteer organizations that have sprung up since the rigged August 2020 presidential election have taken many people both inside and outside the country by surprise. In a recent *New Yorker* article Masha Gessen (2020) speaks with 35-year-old Svetlana Sugako from the Belarus Free Theatre,¹⁶ who along with her partner spent two days and nights in prison after being snatched off the street by riot police:

As they left the jail, they saw that volunteers had set up tents with food, water, and first-aid stations. There were counsellors available, and rides on offer to anywhere in Belarus. "I'd never seen anything like this," Svetlana said.... "We were locked up in one country and released into another."

The Minsk-based anthropologist Andrey Vozyanov told me in September 2020 that this feeling of awe was a prevailing sentiment in the city. He started seeing placards at rallies reading "We didn't know each other until this summer" and "I found out that I have a huge family." The anonymous Telegram user I quote above, who accused Lukashenko's regime of intentionally creating a "dog-eat-dog" society, concluded their post with a similar sense of having witnessed a national awakening: "But solidarity has emerged this summer. And we realized that we are Belarusians. We are a wonderful people. We can unite, help each other, and defend one another" (*Khvatit Boiat'sia!*, September 9, 2020). Vozyanov told me that this newfound sense of connection "is infiltrating into the everyday." Telegram chat groups related to news, politics, and organizing sprung up in local neighborhoods (*mikroraiony*), in-

¹⁶ Incidentally, I met Svetlana in the locker room of a CrossFit club while doing my fieldwork.

cluding Vozyanev's, from which, he says, "I never would have expected any grassroots activity." People in his *mikroraion* organized picnics, played football, decorated the neighborhood with red and white¹⁷ ribbons and balloons, and talked nonstop about politics. He also described a change in the public mood, which is "very elusive but articulated by many":

In Minsk you cease to be afraid of strangers, unless they are uniformed and/or in balaclavas. The fact of [Sviatlana] Tsikhanouskaya's victory [in the presidential election] is taken as a firm one, and people believe that every stranger on the street is on their side. People smile at each other, which I did not observe much in Belarus under Lukashenka.¹⁸ (Personal communication, September 12, 2020)

Many factors, most notably the brutality and violence with which the state has responded to peaceful protestors, have united people against Lukashenko's regime and galvanized them into action. A suspension or inversion of social norms—in this case the outpouring of warmth among strangers—is, of course, characteristic of liminal moments such as the one at hand. However, I would like to pose the question of whether this postelection solidarity truly appeared "overnight," or if it had been bubbling below the surface in recent years in places like private fitness clubs. Could a new culture of friendliness have spilled over into public spaces where rudeness and gloominess once prevailed? These and the other questions I raise in this article fall outside the purview of the political scientists who dominate the scholarly discourse on Belarus. However, as I hope I have demonstrated, the imponderable shifts in social relations that are best captured by an anthropological approach provide an important avenue for exploring economic and political change in Minsk.

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¹⁷ The colors symbolizing the opposition.

¹⁸ I have preserved here Vozyanev's spelling of these politicians' names, which are transliterations from the Belarusian.

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All of the following interviews took place in cafes, parks, or fitness clubs in Minsk between 2017 and 2018.

Interlocutor	Age	Gender	Occupation
(1) Dasha	28	F	dentist
(2) Nina	20	F	student, architecture faculty
(3) Lena	34	F	economist
(4) Sasha	20	F	student, architecture faculty
(5) Natal'ia	53	F	professor, ecology faculty
(6) Masha	41	F	advertising professional
(7) Zoia	25	F	yoga administrator
(8) Liza	24	F	visa department, foreign embassy
(9) Katia	36	F	manager, beverage import company
(10) Valentina	59	F	economist
(11) Sasha	33	M	CrossFit trainer
(12) Alina	24	F	CrossFit trainer
(13) Ol'ga	35	F	fitness studio owner, aerobics instructor
(14) Vova	28	M	personal trainer
(15) Mariia	37	F	head of a government research organization
(16) Lina	28	F	personal trainer
(17) Svetlana	27	F	fitness academy director and personal trainer
(18) Vika	26	F	dance instructor and IT worker
(19) Marina	27	F	development specialist, retail
(20) Polina	31	F	aerobics instructor
(21) Zhana	32	F	manager, hospitality industry
(22) Galia	30	F	chef
(23) Nika	30	F	human rights defender, NGO
(24) Bela	26	F	internet marketing specialist

СОГРЕВАЮЩАЯ РАЗМИНКА: КОЛЛЕКТИВНЫЙ ТРУД СОЦИАБЕЛЬНОСТИ В БЕЛОРУССКИХ ФИТНЕС-КЛУБАХ

Эмили Куртин

Эмили Куртин, факультет социологии и антропологии, Колледж имени Баруха. Адрес для переписки: Baruch College, B4-260, 55 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA. ecurtin@gradcenter.cuny.edu.

Почему жители Минска, ожидая, когда придет лифт, игнорируют стоящих рядом с ними соседей, а в раздевалке спортзала начинают общаться с незнакомцами? Чем эмоциональная обстановка фитнес-клуба настолько отличается от обстановки других публичных и квазипубличных пространств (например, многоквартирных домов, продовольственных магазинов, офисов)? В основе моей статьи лежит 17-месячное этнографическое исследование. Я анализирую, каким образом активно развивающаяся белорусская культура потребления влияет на социальные отношения в столице страны. Рассмотрев некоторые исторические предпосылки, породившие не приветливую белорусскую культуру обслуживания, я отмечаю (частичный) сдвиг в динамике взаимоотношений между покупателем и продавцом, а именно – отступление от советского принципа «клиент всегда неправ» в сторону большей клиентоориентированности. Опираясь на наблюдения и интервью, проведенные в спортивных залах, на тренировках по кроссфиту и капоэйре, в клубах аэробики и студиях йоги, я утверждаю, что позитивно заряженные эмоциональные пространства спортзалов и фитнес-клубов создаются посредством таких фреймирующих приспособлений, как оформление клуба и особые ритуалы. Все это отгораживает пространство клуба от повседневной жизни и позволяет посетителям на время войти в более открытый и общительный образ. Эмоциональная работа, которую выполняют администраторы клубов, инструкторы и сами клиенты, также помогает создать теплую, принимающую обстановку, критически важную как для бизнеса, так и для того, чтобы клиенты могли завязывать между собой знакомства и дружбу. Статью завершает дискуссия о солидарности, сформировавшейся после президентских выборов в августе 2020 года. Многим представляется, что новоявленная национальная сплоченность и стремление к кооперации возникли «в одночасье». Однако я полагаю, что таким образом распространилась на публичную жизнь культура дружелюбия, принятая в фитнес-клубах и других новых потребительских пространствах.

Ключевые слова: Минск; культура потребления; фитнес-клубы; эмоциональный труд; публичный этикет; протесты, Беларусь