

Biker and Rock Subcultures in Azerbaijan

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Biker and rock subcultures share almost the same set of values, dress code, behavior and moral norms. The cultural connection between the biker subculture and the *metalhead* subculture, which was created by fans of the metal genre of rock music, is very close. Thus, rock music has always been the basis of the playlist of bike shows and moto festivals, and rockers have preferred motorcycles as a means of transportation. Bikers and metalheads share a similar dress code and appearance (long hair and beard, tattoos with special meaning on their limbs, leather clothes and gloves, etc.), special slang and speech style, moral and behavioral norms, and specific manners. Both subcultures existed in Azerbaijan during both the Soviet and independence periods, sometimes they were only on the margins and sometimes they were rather popular.

Some believe that rock subculture is a phenomenon that combines special moral values, styles, norms and rules, and above all, a belief that a person has the freedom to choose their own way of life in protest of the norms set by the state. Russian culturologist and philosopher Georgy Knabe says that rock is a socio-cultural factor that opposes fundamental principles in a particular cultural environment.^[1] Soviet rock switched to underground activities due to its protest motives. With few exceptions, there were no obvious signs of protest against Soviet values in any form of art. Even in the absence of open protest, not chanting ideological values was sufficient for being subjected to prohibitions. For that reason, those Soviet rock bands that did not promote Soviet ideology operated underground. As for Azerbaijan, until the second half of the 1980s, there were not any underground or semi-legal rock ensembles, as they necessarily operated within

the Soviet ideological framework. Soviet and Russian rock journalist and music critic Artemy Troitsky writes that “unlike Moscow and Leningrad, rock in Baku was not in a semi-secret state. The disbanded groups were replaced by pedantic, obedient groups with a reliable repertoire.”^[2]

With the emergence of the rock’s metal genre in the 1970s, a subculture called *metalhead* or *headbanger* emerged among metal fans in the United States and the United Kingdom, and began to spread to many countries in various forms, depending on the development of the metal’s subgenres and its regional scenes. However, the first stage of rock bands’ appeal to metal in Azerbaijan began in the late 1980s. Therefore, neither this genre, nor the metalhead subculture existed in Soviet Azerbaijan. Although rock subculture did exist in the country during the Soviet era, the development of the metal genre could only be seen in the 1990s

Although the biker subculture began to emerge in Azerbaijan in the second half of the 1990s, in general, its age in the country is little over 50 years. In the 1950s and 1960s, motorcycle sports were developing, and Azerbaijani motorcyclists were achieving good results. The tradition of using motorcycles as a means of transportation began in the 1980s as a result of the influence of bikers in major cities of the USSR. This subculture was further developed in the 2000s and 2010s with the opening of shops selling foreign branded motorcycles and biker accessories. During these decades, there were several motorcycle clubs in Azerbaijan which also organized various festivals, shows, and races.

This article discusses the development of rock music in the period when Azerbaijan was part of the USSR – from the second half of the 1960s to 1991 – and the rock subculture associated with this music, as well as the biker subculture in Azerbaijan during both the Soviet period and independence. While writing this article, I referred to several *samizdat* magazines, articles and interviews published in the Azerbaijani press and

news outlets, several official websites, and the opinions of several people who gave me short interviews, as well as my own observations and notes.

Rock in Soviet Azerbaijan

Although rock music originated in Azerbaijan in the second half of the 1960s, the popularization and full development of both the music genre and the subculture based on it began in the mid-1980s because of the partial elimination of censorship during *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. In the 1960s, this genre emerged in all Soviet republics, including Azerbaijan, as a result of the influence of Western European and American rock (*The Rolling Stones*, *Deep Purple*, *Led Zeppelin*, etc.), especially the *Beatlemania* wave. At that time, in addition to Moscow, Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), and Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg), Beatles records and tape recordings were allowed to be sold, provided that their name was not mentioned on them, in *Melodiya* music stores in the capitals of each Soviet republic. Hence, the Beatles were more popular among Soviet musicians. Soviet musicians secretly listened to other foreign rock bands through radio stations such as *Voice of America* and *Radio Liberty*.^[3]

The transformation of rock music into a part of Soviet culture took place as a result of the initiative of musicians imitating Western rockers to organize as *vocal instrumental ensembles* (VIA – *Вокально-инструментальный ансамбль*) with the support of the Komsomol authorities.^[4] As there were progressive people in the Baku Komsomol organization, they created conditions for the activities of ensembles playing Western music genres, which were considered alien to Soviet culture, provided talented groups with training places, and helped them to participate in concerts.^[5] Influenced by foreign rock bands, teenagers and young people formed various groups in schools and universities, as well as in culture houses, imitating them in their style of dress, hairstyle, code of

conduct and performance. The first rock VIAs of Azerbaijan were formed mainly as amateur bands in secondary schools and universities. For example, *Experiment OK*, formed in the 1960s, consisted of senior students of School No. 20, *Eskulap* was created by composer Rafiq Babayev at the Medical Institute, and *Üç alov* (*The Three Flames*) and *Xürrəmilər* (*The Khurramis*) were founded by the students of the Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University and today's Azerbaijan State Economic University, respectively.

The party bodies of the USSR did not welcome the spread of rock music, which reflected Western culture and especially Beatlemania, among the youth. For example, in the 2nd issue of the journal *Musical Life* (*Музыкальная Жизнь*), published in 1964, it was written that "the Beatles are one of the many tools used to poison the brains of Western youth and distract them from serious social responsibilities."^[6]

The wave of multicultural explosion in the United States and Western Europe in the 1960s infiltrated a number of closed countries. Successive counter-cultures (*hippies, punks, skinheads*), movements (*feminism, globalism, Black Panthers, Rastafarianism*), new waves in the fashion industry, cinema and literature in Western Europe and the United States also echoed in the USSR. Rock music was a part of this multicultural wave. The Soviet government could not prevent the mass trend in Western music, which was rapidly gaining popularity among teenagers and the youth.

To partially prevent this, and to limit young people to Soviet-censored local music, certain restrictions on rock bands were imposed. This created a kind of rock style typical of the USSR, local in nature, close to pop style, and the Soviet government wanted to keep young people in the atmosphere of Soviet music in this way, without separating them from rock.^[7]

The first rock bands in the USSR were banned from being called

rock bands, thus, they were presented as VIA. VIAs' repertoire consisted of a mixture of "bard" (бардовская музыка), "urban romance" (городской романс) and pop genres, as well as folk songs, which were popular in the USSR at that time. For in the Soviets, rock music was declared a product of the decadent Western culture, and the activities of local VIAs were allowed, at least declaratively, within the Soviet ideological framework. Composer Eldar Mansurov, who was the pianist of the *Experiment OK* ensemble in 1960-1970, says that "to divert the attention of ideological organizations, rock music festivals were held under the name of the *Working Class Songs Festival*. Or when one of these organizations heard songs during training and protested, the musicians used to say that it was a protest song of English miners against the owners of the mines. Party activists were eager to believe in such deceptions."^[8]

The difference between Soviet VIAs and Western rock bands was that the former were under constant censorship, and their work had to reflect the shades of the official ideology of the Communist Party, and the ensembles had to operate within the framework of this ideology. Therefore, the party bodies had strict control over the concerts and other musical and entertainment events in which rock ensembles participated en masse. Festivals and competitions with the participation of VIAs were also organized under the supervision of party bodies.

In his *Rock Music in the USSR*, Troitsky wrote that rock music came to Baku in the mid-1960s. The main reason for this was the activity of the Komsomol leadership of the city as well as their rather positive attitude towards Western art in light of the strictness and prohibitions of the Soviet authorities. Therefore, for more than 10 years, various festivals and competitions were held with the participation of rock ensembles. The names of these festivals and concerts sometimes did not include the term *rock*. "The main leading ensembles of the first stage (until the early [19]70s) were *Eskulap*, *The*

Khurramis, *Express-118*, *Pəzəvəng* [*Giant*], *Üvet*, which performed rather soft rock and r&b. Undoubtedly, the most advanced rock band in Baku was *Rəng* [*Color*], which a brass section for the first time.”^[9]

Representation of the Azerbaijan SSR by the band called Three Flames in the TV contest *Hello, We Are Looking for Talent* (*Ало, мы ищем таланты*), which was broadcast on USSR State Television in 1969, was the first time that Azerbaijani rock reached beyond the republic. It was the first and only rock band representing the Azerbaijani SSR in that program. In the memoirs of the band’s solo guitarist and vocalist Chingiz Adib, it was noted that in the TV competition, where first place was not given to anyone, *Three Flames* was awarded second place. Therefore, the band was considered the winner.^[10]

As a result of the activity of the leadership of the Azerbaijani Komsomol, various festivals and competitions were held in Baku, which were ideological in name, but reflected the true musical vision of the youth in essence. One of them was the 1969 *Golden Autumn Festival* held at today’s Baku Sports Palace, it was one of the first significant events for Azerbaijani rock.^[11] The week-long festival, consisting of three stages, featured pop music under the name *Estrada-69*, mugham and folk songs under the name *Mugham-69*, and jazz music under the name *Jazz-69*. There was no special day for the rock genre at this festival. Nevertheless, rock ensembles performed on pop days. This was one of the signs that rock music was not brought to the fore. *Express-118*, *3 + 2*, *Color*, *Məşəl* (*Torch*), *Ritm* (*Rhythm*) and other rock ensembles performed in this festival.

The first Soviet VIAs, most of which did not have their own style, imitated Western rock until the second half of the 1970s. The repertoire of an average VIA consisted mainly of cover versions of popular foreign rock songs of that time. Hikmet Hajizadeh told me in a short interview that Azerbaijani

rock VIAs began to create their own styles only in the second half of the 1970s. These ensembles based their repertoire on jazz-blues genres, folk and other songs. In the 1970s, a jazz-rock subgenre with ethnic elements also emerged and developed. Azerbaijani folk songs were also performed by these bands in the rock style. Hajizadeh noted that at that time, as a result of unofficial and amateur recordings of rock songs, which is specific to the Azerbaijani rock culture, *magnetizers* (songs recorded on amateur tape recorders) became available. In addition, in those years, there was a phenomenon in Soviet rock called *kvartirnik*. Because songs that did not pass Soviet censorship were not allowed to be performed in public places, rockers performed a kind of mini-concerts at homes – in apartments or other small facilities – in acoustic versions for a small audience. Since such events were held in apartments, the word *apartment* (квартира) in Russian gave rise to the word *kvartirnik* (квартирник). Concerts in such small circles led to close communication between listeners and performers. The musicians got to know their audience better while the listeners met different musicians who played non-traditional music. An example of an apartment rock band was *Monge's Method* (Метод Монжа), an underground band in Baku in the 1980s and 1990s. Hajizadeh himself performed as a guitarist in a rock ensemble created by the students of the Physics Faculty of today's Baku State University in 1972. He said that the ensemble was the last generation of rockers to perform jazz-rock, and that the later ensembles rather preferred more popular disco songs.

Baku hippies were one of the groups in close contact with *kvartirnik* rock musicians. Hippies, who were not welcomed by society, had a tendency to non-traditional music and were able to communicate enthusiastically with such musicians with different tastes. Baku hippies, who imitated the rockers and the Western hippies, could often be seen at music gatherings organized by *kvartirnik* rockers. Baku hippies felt more comfortable and safer at such gatherings.

Troitsky writes about the Azerbaijani rock bands of the 1970s: "In the early 1970s, there were bands that were looking for their own style and experimenting with different musical directions. Under the leadership of Jahangir Garayev, *Cürbəcür* [*Diverse*] and *Brevis*, which had similar styles to *Chicago* and *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, were formed. Among the rock bands of Azerbaijan in the [19]70s, the most popular bands were *Experiment OK* and *Aşıqlar* [*Ashugs*]. The latter used national musical instruments such as tar, oud and kamancha."^[12]

The first rock festival in Azerbaijan with the participation of only rock ensembles was organized in 1970. First place in this festival was taken by the university's *Şimşək* (*Thunder*), and second place was shared by *Eskulap* and *Experiment OK*. Rafiq Rasulov, the solo guitarist of *The Khurramis*, said that "at that time, there was a great interest in rock music in Baku. Our ensemble wanted to make something new at the rock festival organized in 1970 on the occasion of the 51st anniversary of Azerbaijan State University [today's Baku State University]. That is why we went to the festival barefoot, in jeans and with long wigs on our heads to look like *The Rolling Stones*. This aroused great interest in the audience."^[13]

Golden Autumn Festivals were held several times in the early 1970s, and rock ensembles participated in each of these festivals. In 1974, the festival was banned for some time for its alleged ideological damage and its avocation of Western values.^[14]

The driving force of Soviet rock music was the Russian (RSFSR) rock bands, which set the trends. Rock bands of the RSFSR were at the center of Soviet rock. As festivals in Moscow, Leningrad, and Sverdlovsk became more popular, bands from 14 other republics sought to participate in these festivals and establish contacts with their Russian counterparts. Other republics invited RSFSR rock bands to concerts in their republics. For example, in 1987, the legendary Russian rock

band *Akvarium* performed in a concert organized by the *Jangi* informal association at its namesake Cinema and Concert Hall in Baku.^[15]

In the USSR as a whole, rock, like other works of Western art, began to develop and gain popularity only in the 1980s due to the softening and weakening of censorship. Popular Soviet rock bands had already begun to release official albums and shape their style. There was also an entire infrastructure available for Soviet rock, amateur recording studios, and samizdat publications on rock music.^[16] The first samizdat rock magazine in the history of Azerbaijani rock was *RokOko*, published in 1989 by journalist Vahid Mustafayev. The first issue of the magazine was published in March of that year. This independent magazine, consisted of a few pages, featured articles on foreign, Soviet, and local rock 'n' roll. The magazine, which served as a stimulus for both young rockers and rock listeners, organized a rock festival named *RokOko* at the Green Theater in 1991. It should be noted that Mustafayev, a member of the rock band *Charley ATL* (playing saxophone), which was founded in 1987 and won the *Сипок 4* festival in 1991, was the director of the first music videos for rock songs. In 1991, he shot music videos for the legendary band *Yuxu's* (*Dream*) *Xəzərin sahilində* (*On the Caspian Shores*), and in 1993, for *Charley ATL's* *Körpə* [*Infant*]. Both videos were shown on television in 1993 on the ANS TV channel, founded by Mustafayev himself.

One of the first official rock festivals in the history of Soviet rock was held in 1980 in Tbilisi: *Spring Rhythms: Tbilisi-80*, which lasted 9 days (March 8-16). Eduard Shevardnadze, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, was one of the organizers of the festival, which was attended by 18 rock bands, including 1 from the Estonian SSR, 1 from the Latvian SSR, 1 from the Turkmenistan SSR, 3 from the Georgian SSR, and 12 from the RSFSR. Next, in 1981, the Melody Recording Studio released a

gramophone record consisting of pieces performed at the festival. In the 1980s, rock festivals were held in various countries of the USSR. From 1985 to 1989, the annual *Lituanika* Festival was one of the most prestigious festivals in the USSR.

With the establishment of the City Youth Modern Music Center under the Baku Komsomol Committee in 1987, both rock festivals and rock concerts began to be held in Baku. A Rock Club was also established under this center. Jazz critic and journalist Azer Javad Aliyev organized two festivals at the Green Theater for two years in a row – 88 *Rock-Panorama* with the participation of 17 bands in 1988 and *Rock-Panorama 89* with the participation of 28 bands in April 1989.^[17] The first rock festival in Azerbaijan, where the metal genre was performed, was *Rock-Panorama 89*. *Qrimsiz* (*Without Makeup*), *Gözəllik İnstitutu* (*Beauty Institute*), *Minarə* (*Minaret*), *Şüur* (*Consciousness*), *Aerolit*, *Komendant saatı* (*Curfew*), *İz* (*Trace*), *Charley ATL* and other rock bands were participants of this festival. In the 7th issue of the *RIO* samizdat magazine on rock music, published in Moscow in July 1988, the section called *Baku* talked about the *Rock-Panorama 88* festival as follows: “We have just received information about [this festival]. Participants – *Qrimsiz*, *Etiket*, *Neysan*, *Faust* (former *Stayer*), *Ozan*, *Talisman* bands, Y. Kogan, V. Rahimov. The guest – Nikolai Copernicus (Moscow).”^[18]

In the second half of the 1980s, when rock music became popular throughout the USSR, the center of Azerbaijani rock began to be considered not only Baku, but also the city of Sumgayit. As the rock centers in the RSFSR, which was the driving force of USSR rock, were Leningrad and Sverdlovsk, the Azerbaijani rock centers were Baku and Sumgayit. *Miraj*, *Debüt*, *Qrimsiz*, *Vaqabond* and other bands were formed in Sumgayit. In the 1980s, VIAs operated in almost every culture house of Sumgayit. Of course, these ensembles were forced to sing songs about *how nice it is to live in a Soviet country* in the first

parts of the concerts, but the second parts were dedicated to those ensembles and featured mostly rock music.^[19] According to Chingiz Eyvazov, drummer of the legendary *Yuxu* formed in Sumgayit in 1988, some people connect the development of rock in Sumgayit with the fact that it was an industrial city. Thus, the city, which has numerous factories, is associated with heavy music. The industrial rhythm requires an electric and international sound, which corresponded to the main features of Sumgayit as a city. Eyvazov, however, believes that the dominance of Sumgayit in Azerbaijani rock music as much as Baku was due to the performance of *Yuxu*. "It seems to me that after *Yuxu*, Sumgayit became a rock city. Until us, I had never heard that Sumgayit was considered the birthplace of rock. Many people said 'these are the guys from Sumgayit' while referring us"^[20]

During the Soviet era, several bands participated in festivals and concerts abroad. For example, *Ozan* (founded in 1981) was part of a delegation of young people from different Soviet republics in a number of Central and West African countries, *Aşıqlar* (founded in 1973) performed in Mongolia and Afghanistan, and in 1990, *Dərviş* participated in the Mainz rock festival in Germany. Unlike these bands, however, *Yuxu* operated abroad, in Turkey, for several years (1991-1994).

Just as the 1969 *Golden Autumn* played a major role in Azerbaijani rock, 20 years later, the 1989 *Golden Autumn* was a breath of fresh air for many rock bands. Unlike the former, in 1989, the competition was held in three genres: jazz, rock and pop music. Rock bands such as *Yuxu*, *Minarə*, *Dərviş* participated in the 1989 *Golden Autumn*. *Minarə*, along with 17 other bands, also participated in the *Rock-Panorama-88* and *Rock-Panorama-89* festivals.^[21] After the 1989 *Golden Autumn*, one of *Yuxu*'s songs, *Mother*, was sent to Mainz, a sister city of Baku, and the following year the main album *Mainz-Rock 90* included that song. The band members learned about the

existence of this record through the press.^[22] An interesting fact is that the name of the band was written on the disc in the Cyrillic alphabet in the form of *ЮXY*. The Germans, on the other hand, thought that the name was related to mathematics: 10, X, Y. From then on, *Yuxu* was sometimes called *10XY*.

About the Azerbaijani rock bands in the 1980s, Troitsky writes that “for a long time, *Ozan* was the only active representative of amateur bands in universities. It successfully plays its music, going through all stages, from hard rock to electro break. In the early [19]80s, other professional bands also played rock. The most interesting band was *Talisman*, created under a band called *Qaya [Rock]*. *Günel* soft-rock band had several successful concerts under the direction of Rafael Akhundov. After a while, this band was transferred to *Aksiya [Action]*.”^[23]

The democratic atmosphere, softening, and partial elimination of censorship brought to the USSR by Gorbachev’s *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* since the mid-1980s also created favorable conditions for the development of alternative cultures. These conditions played a great role in the revival of rock music and rock subculture. Rather than imitating Western bands, Azerbaijani rockers formed their own styles and experimented with various subgenres. During this period, rock concerts and festivals were organized in Baku, various subgenres of rock, and even metal, were played. Especially in 1987, 1988 and 1989, new rock bands (*Lucky Strike*, *Krizis [Crisis]*, *Qara şəhər [Black City]*, *Monge’s Method*, *Albert [Албберт]*, etc.) appeared. *Qara şəhər* was one of the first rock bands in Azerbaijan that played metal. It should be noted that the metal genre, despite gaining great popularity in the West in the 1970s, arrived in the Soviet Union later, due to the existence of strict censorship.

During this period, some people began to work as producers and PR managers of the rock bands. This played a great role in the

formation of Azerbaijani rock subculture. Various Azerbaijani bands travelled to other Soviet republics, and bands from cities such as Moscow, Leningrad, and Sverdlovsk came to concerts and festivals in Baku. One of the first rock promoters in Azerbaijan was Nazim Samadov, who played a major role in the development of the rock movement in the 1980s. He worked with bands such as *Qara Şəhər*, *Krizis*, *Komendant saatı*, and traveled with them throughout the USSR.^[24] Samadov organized several rock concerts in Baku. Valery Kutyumov, a member of *Krizis* from 1987 to 1993, said of him that “Nazim was able to work with any administrator. He entered the offices as if he were the producer of stars like Elton John. I knew we needed someone like him.”^[25]

Biker subculture

The process of the formation of the biker subculture, which emerged in the United States in the mid-1950s and in the USSR in the mid-1980s, in Azerbaijan dates back to the late 1990s. Although its development in the country began in the late 2000s, this subculture is still more popular in narrow circles, mainly among minority groups. In Azerbaijan, as in the rest of the world, unlike ordinary motorcyclists, bikes are a part of the lifestyle of the representatives of this subculture.

In 1950-1960, there were moto-sports in Soviet Azerbaijan, and not only in Baku, but also in Sumgayit and Ganja. There were a large number of professional motocross and motoball players. Teams of moto-athletes, who gained considerable prestige in Soviet Azerbaijan, performed well both in the All-Union competitions held in the USSR and abroad, and won prizes in various championships. For example, Azerbaijan was represented by the *Khazri* (*Хазри*) team at the USSR moto ball championships. In those years, this team was able to achieve good results several times. It took 3rd place in the 1968 championship, and 5th place in the 1974 and the 1977 championships. In 1981,

Azerbaijani athletes won the USSR Cup.^[26]

Until the 1970s, motorcycles were rarely used as personal vehicles. Apart from the traffic police's trikes and sports motorcycles, only a few ordinary civilians rode motorcycles. The growth of interest in this vehicle and the increase in its use began in the 1970s. In those years, mainly *Ural*, *IJ*, *Dnepr*, *M-72* and other Soviet-made motorcycles were used. A more fashionable and elite motorcycle brand was *Jawa* (*Ява*), produced in Czechoslovakia. Although young motorcyclists in the Soviet Union preferred this model, *Jawa* was inaccessible to many motorcycle enthusiasts due to its relatively high price. However, since the USSR was the largest importer of *Jawa* motorcycles, there were a large number of their users in almost all Union republics, including Azerbaijan. From 1971 to 1980, the owners of these motorcycles in the USSR and Czechoslovakia regularly held events called *Meetings of the Friends of Jawa* (*Слёты друзей Явы*). One such meeting even took place in Baku in 1980. Azerbaijanis who owned Jawa bikes repeatedly participated in motorcycle festivals in various cities of the USSR and Czechoslovakia.^[27]

In the 1980s, the place where both ordinary motorcycle enthusiasts and professional motorcyclists spent most of their time was the *Motodrome* in the Bilajari, once the rallying point of the Azerbaijani opposition and now home to the Baku International Bus Terminal. Athletes trained there, tested their bikes, and at the same time organized small competitions. In the 1990s, motorcyclists, who usually gathered at the Motodrome on certain historical days, especially on Youth Day, marched from there to Velotrack, where they joined the cyclists and made several rounds in the city in groups. As in previous decades, motorcycle enthusiasts in this period used mostly Soviet-made brands. Motorcycles produced in Japan and Western Europe were rare because they were both expensive and difficult to import into the USSR. The USSR was the second largest producer of motorcycles in the

world after Japan and produced high-quality motorcycles.^[28]

Currently, moto-sports competitions in Azerbaijan are organized by the Motorcycle Sports Federation. Founded in 2002, the Federation hosted a moto show and a motoball game in Baku in 2007, and an open city motorcycle championship in 2008 with the participation of 11 athletes in Sumgayit.^[29] In general, the first official biker club of the USSR – *Night Worms* was founded on May 31, 1989 in Moscow. After the collapse of the USSR, it became a member of the International Bike Movement in 1992 as a Russian biker club. In 2018, its members also visited Azerbaijan during a motorcycle race.^[30]

Since the formation of the biker subculture in Azerbaijan began only in the late 1990s with the establishment of the first moto club, the relevant subcultural terms began to appear in the same years. A few years after Azerbaijan gained independence, various dealers began to bring bikes of Japanese brands.^[31] They also sold different types of clothes, accessories, etc. typical for bikers. These increased the interest of young people in bikes. The opening of official brand moto salons in Azerbaijan dates back to 2000s and 2010s: *Yamaha* in 2007, *Suzuki* in 2010, *Kawasaki* and *Harley Davidson* in 2011.^[32] The opening of these moto salons also played an important role in the spread of subculture and the increase in the number of moto clubs.

The first biker club in Azerbaijan, MOTOSAURS, was established in September 1999 by 11 young bikers. In this club, each biker had his own nickname, for example, *Bublik*, *Prokuror*, *Çinici*, etc.^[33] Most members were either ethnic Russians and or Russian-speakers. One of the main difficulties of the members was the lack of spare parts for the bikes they drove, made in the USSR and Russia. The reason behind this lack of spare parts was that it was not profitable for businessmen to import them from Russia due to the small number of motorcycles in the

country at that time. However, starting from 2002-2003, the process of importing spare parts to Azerbaijan began to expand, and now bikers could easily get them.^[34]

During its existence, some MOTOSAURS were accused of various motor hooliganism. The members rode their bikes in the streets of Baku in groups, without wearing helmets and necessary documents, violating traffic rules. Therefore, there were scandals between traffic police and club members. In 2002, there was a lot of media coverage about a scandal involving the arrest of a biker nicknamed *Çinici*.^[35] On October 4, 2008, MOTOSAURS, along with several other local motorcycle clubs, organized the *Baku Bike Fest 2008* on Shikh Beach. This event was one of the greatest successes of the club because it was the first bike festival in the history of Azerbaijani biker subculture.^[36]

The moto club *Insurgents MC* was founded in February 2010.^[37] After the dissolution of the MOTOSAURS, some of its members joined the new club. *Insurgents MC*, one of the most active moto clubs, made significant contributions to the development of the biker movement in Azerbaijan; it repeatedly represented the country at moto festivals abroad, and organized several motorcycle races in Baku and other cities. Since 2008, the club has been organizing moto parties in Nabran on the third Saturday in August for several years.^[38] These parties, with the participation of bikers from Russia, Georgia and Turkey, included rock concerts, bike rides, various competitions related to bikes and bikers (the fastest bike, the dirtiest bike, the most charismatic biker, etc.). In 2014, the participation of *Insurgents MC* in the bike show *Qayıdış [Return]* organized by the *Night Wolves* in Crimea caused a big scandal. This show was dedicated to the *Reunification of Crimea with Russia*, hence it was in fact politically motivated and aimed at celebrating the Russian annexation of Crimea. The presence of Azerbaijani bikers there implied that they were

supporting Russia in the Crimea dispute.^[39] At that time, both Ukrainian and Azerbaijani media reported that by participating in this show, the bikers were acting against the official policy of the Azerbaijani government and would turn Ukrainian public opinion against Azerbaijan.

One of the most prestigious bike clubs in Azerbaijan is the *Land of Fire*, formed on the basis of *H.O.G. (Harley Owners Group)*. The club, which consists only of Harley Davidson bike owners, was founded in 2015.^[40] Any biker with a Harley-Davidson bike and VIN number can become a member. Currently, the *Land of Fire* has more than 15 members, including people of various professions such as businessmen, doctors, financiers, marketers, and entrepreneurs. The club has repeatedly organized motorcycle races abroad, participated in various European motorcycle festivals. In 2015, the club members rode for total 12,000 kilometers in 12 countries to promote the European Games in Baku and to represent Azerbaijan at the European Motorcycle Festival in San Trope Bay, Grimo on May 7-10.^[41] Vahid Mustafayev, director of the *Baku HOG Azerbaijan* group, also organized motorcycle races and festivals.^[42] Mustafayev, who is engaged in several different professions, is also one of the most active bikers in Azerbaijan.

One of the distinguishing features of the biker subculture is that being a representative of this subculture requires additional material costs. In addition to one's enthusiasm and interest, one needs to purchase things like bikes, special clothes, accessories. Therefore, as in other parts of the world, the majority of bikers in Azerbaijan are financially well-off.

One of the characteristic features of bikers is that they are prone to hooliganism, which was also characteristic of Azerbaijani bikers at certain times. Until the first half of the 2000s, members of the aforementioned MOTOSAURS Club were accused of hooliganism, breaking the rules, and not using

safety equipment. Several times the club members did not obey the traffic police and they even had arguments with the police officers. However, in the following years, such negative situations began to disappear. In 2010, on the contrary, bikers began to show a calmer, more loyal, disciplined and polite character and behavior, while at the same time constantly striving to break negative stereotypes and prove that bikers are polite people. In 2014-2015, bikers in various media outlets and social networks complained they were treated unfairly by State Traffic Police (STP) officers, that they were unfairly fined and in some cases their driving licenses were confiscated.^[43] According to unofficial information, there were several reasons behind this attitude. One version was related to the collision of several bikers in Baku with the Interior Ministry motorcade in 2014, and the other was related to the bikers driving at high speed and made noise near the president's suburban residence. Yet another version was that the newly appointed head of the Patrol Service Regiment of the Baku Traffic Police in 2014 had a bias against bikers. Bikers often cite these three reasons behind the state pressure. In 2015, a group of bikers appealed to President Ilham Aliyev regarding this issue and complained about the activities of STP officers.

Another characteristic of Azerbaijani bikers is that they are closed and do not seem eager to reach a wide audience.^[44] In addition to the media's little attention to bikers, they themselves are not inclined to be on the agenda. In Azerbaijan, as elsewhere in the world, bikers have a warm attitude to rock music, which is due to the fact that rock is a symbolic genre of a biker subculture. As in the case of Western bikers, there is a hierarchy in Azerbaijani moto clubs, the leadership of moto clubs is elected and any issue is decided after deliberation among the members.

One of the specific features of Azerbaijani bikers is that the vast majority of them are of Russian origin or Russian-

speakers. In general, it is safe to say that the main means of communication for Azerbaijani bikers is Russian. This can be seen in the clubs' websites, social media pages and groups, and in their interactions with each other. One of the more interesting points is the presence of female bikers in the Azerbaijani biker subculture. However, the vast majority of bikers are men.^[45]

One of the distinguishing features of Azerbaijani bikers from other subcultures is that the bikers are usually in their 40s and even 50s. This shows that although representatives of any subculture are mainly young and adolescents, older people can also belong to a subculture. However, this feature is not so typical for the representatives of other subcultures in Azerbaijan.

In lieu of a conclusion

The article provides information about the development of rock music in Azerbaijan from the beginning in the mid-1960s to the period of independence, the relevant activities of rock bands and rockers. During this period of about 25 years, the development of rock in Azerbaijan can be divided into two stages: the first stage covers the period until *Perestroika*, which began in the mid-1980s in the USSR. During this period, rock music, like other forms of Western arts, was severely censored, rock bands were called *ensembles* in the Soviet style, and rock concerts and festivals were controlled by the Communist Party and Komsomol organizations. The second stage, which began in the mid-1980s and lasted until the collapse of the Soviets, is a period in which rock music developed more freely, without serious pressure; rock bands formed their repertoire as they wished, and other subgenres of rock emerged, rock festivals and concerts were organized almost every year. The second topic was about the biker subculture in Azerbaijan during both the Soviet and independence periods. The article analyzed the rock subculture as well as certain features of the biker subculture, compared Azerbaijani bikers

with their Western counterparts, and touched on the existing problems related to this subculture.

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[2] <https://iskrene.livejournal.com/tag/%D0%91%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%83-%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BA>

[3] <https://news.milli.az/culture/129407.html>

[4] О.С.Празднова, “Специфика проникновения рок-культуры в СССР”, ЖУРНАЛ: ЦЕННОСТИ И СМЫСЛЫ Издательство: АН00 “Институт эффективных технологий” (Москва), ISSN: 2071-6427,Номер: 3 (49) Год: 2017 Страницы: 111-119.

[5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0032PK8peM>

[6] Музыкальная Жизнь, N2, 01.02.1964 – “История советской рок-музыки (Новые ‘идолы’).”

[7] О.С.Празднова, “Специфика проникновения рок-культуры в СССР”, ЖУРНАЛ: ЦЕННОСТИ И СМЫСЛЫ Издательство: АН00 “Институт эффективных технологий” (Москва), ISSN: 2071-6427,Номер: 3 (49) Год: 2017 Страницы: 111-119.

[8] <https://news.milli.az/culture/129407.html> emphasis added.

[9] “Рок-музыка в СССР: опыт популярной энциклопедии” :сост. А. К. Троицкий. – М. : [Книга](#), 1990, 383, emphasis added.

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<https://www.trend.az/life/socium/3268483.html>

[11] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0032PK8peM>

[12] “Рок-музыка в СССР: опыт популярной энциклопедии” : сост. А. К. Троицкий. – М. : [Книга](#), 1990, 383.

[13] <https://lent.az/news/121035> emphasis added.

[14] <https://www.trend.az/life/culture/1031817.html>

[15]
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[18] Журнал – РИО № 7 (23), июль 1988, vurğu əlavə edilmişdir.

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[22]
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[38] <https://news.day.az/society/606680.html>

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