Examining the Subculture Phenomenon: An Application of the Counter-Alternative Method

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Abstract

In the context of contemporary society, a significant challenge in investigating subcultures, traditions, and religions lies in the divergence of opinions among the majority of scholars concerning the focal point of examination. There is a growing fascination with delving into these domains, leading to an escalating number of scholarly publications focused on investigating and comprehending diverse issues in this domain. Nevertheless, as the quantitative metrics rise, the disparities in evaluations of identical subjects among various researchers become conspicuous.

Keywords

subculture, philosophy, counter-alternative method, subculture parameters

Introduction

Current research narratives in the social and behavioral sciences gravitate toward interdisciplinarity (Frodeman et al., 2017; see also Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Haeussler & Sauermann, 2020; Lindgreen et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2017). Extensive studies related to self-identification and social identity exist (Benish-Weisman et al., 2015; Brambilla & Assor, 2020; Cover, 2016; Russo & Stattin, 2017; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013). Group affiliation and the extent of its influence on the individual is of considerable interest (Cacault & Grieder, 2019; Dong & Krohn, 2016; Hohman et al., 2017; Hunter et al., 2017; Thomson, 2015). When contemplating the phenomenon of subculture, the challenge lies in delineating its essence and identifying the features and components that characterize it. Similarly, questions arise concerning the distinctions between religion, tradition, and other related concepts. To address these inquiries and examine the disparities between these phenomena, we employed a counter-alternative research method. The core principle of the counter-alternative method involves conducting research through successive cycles of immersion. The researcher immerses themselves into the subculture, subsequently withdrawing under various pretexts, and then immersing once again. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of the subculture without necessitating full membership. To ensure reliable data, the method involves investigating different groups within the target subculture across multiple turns. By applying this methodology, we aim to discern potential variations across different territories and contexts.

When dealing with three distinct terms, their definitions should inherently diverge. Furthermore, the definition should strive to be the utmost precise and comprehensive, among a wide spectrum of norms, laws, knowledge, skills, beliefs, illustrative activities and behaviors, hypotheses, conjectured notions, convictions, values, and more. These definitions must also account for the historical evolution and dynamic nature of these terms, incorporating established social experiences and aligning with various human activities and real-life changes. Logical consistency, scientific validity, historical accuracy, reality, and other multifaceted criteria should inform these definitions, while ensuring clarity and distinction between the terms for ease of comprehension by any individual.

Methodology

The primary methodologies employed in researching subcultures within the context of the topic encompass anthropological, axiological, and symbolic approaches. In contemporary sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, a subculture is defined as a shared culture among individuals within broader dominant cultures—a distinct cultural sphere characterized by its unique values, customs, and norms, forming an autonomous entity within the overarching culture. From a praxeological standpoint, "subculture" is a concept originating in sociology and adopted by philosophy and cultural studies. It delves into the specifics of diverse population groups, drawing from the fields of ethnography and ethnology, which explore the life and traditions of regions historically distant from European culture, perceived as the arbiter of universal norms for centuries. Notably, the Chicago School's examination of subcultures interpreting them as forms of deviance and delinquency has significantly shaped the understanding of this phenomenon.

From perspective of historical approach, subcultures emerge due to both the incomplete socialization of certain population segments with the dominant culture and their adoption of alternative axiological and normative models. As posited by Robert E. Park (1974), Ernest Burgess (1969), and Louis Wirth (1964), natural spaces or moral domains where deviant patterns concentrate and perpetuate are formed through processes of selection and segregation within society.

In the psychological approach, the distinctive style of each subculture, encompassing image, behavior, and language, serves as the defining trait. The gradual adoption of a subcultural model often elevates an individual's status within that specific context, albeit simultaneously diminishing their standing in the broader social context. As class identity weakens, subcultures emerge as novel forms of collective identification, expressing symbolic resistance to the dominant culture and formulating imagined solutions to structural issues, as posited by Albert Cohen (1955). Paul Willis (1978) and Dick Hebdige (1979) emphasize that identity and resistance manifest through the development of a unique style, utilizing cultural industry commodities to convey conflicts via re-meaning and "bricolage."

Moving beyond the perception of subcultures merely as forms of deviance or resistance, they are described by Willis (1978) and Hebdige (1979) as culturally homogeneous communities internally, yet heterogeneous enough in relation to the external world to facilitate development. Within the axiological method, a subculture constitutes a set of values, perceptions, and behaviors inherent to a social group or specific subject. When marked by systematic opposition to the dominant culture, it may additionally be labeled a counterculture. As outlined by Ken Gelder (2005), subcultures possess their own social conventions, values, and rituals, presenting a blend of social immersion and self-centered dynamics.

Results

When exploring contemporary mechanisms and modes of interaction among diverse sub-cultures, we drew upon the concepts of globalization and regionalization, spanning international levels, with instances of localization, multiculturalism, and transculturalism. This perspective has been examined from various angles by scholars including U. Beck (1992), Z. Bauman (2021), K. E. Razlogov, G. Therborn, V. V. Shtepa (2010), T. Persikova (2008), A. Bennett (2017), M. Shulakevich (2008), R. Robertson (1992), among others (Immerfall & Therborn, 2010; Razlogov & Melville, 1981). The realm of intercultural communication within subcultures as a conduit for universal exchange—entailing information and idea sharing, along with the study and exploration of cultural values of distinct populations—has been expounded upon by P. N. Donets (2004), G. Therborn, I. V. Namestnikova (2003), J. P. Ten (2018), N. V. Tselepidis (2009), V. P. Furmanova (2005), and others.

Considering specialized subcultures in a focused context, scholars such as S. I. Levikova (2004), E. L. Omel'chenko (2004), H. Pilkington (2013), D. Hebdige (1979), A. McRobbie (2000), T.V. Shchepanskaya (2004), L. Leblanc (2001), and more, have delved into this area. It's important to highlight the significance of globally-penned scientific articles, papers, conferences, and symposia dedicated to this theme (Krase et al., 2021; see also Çaliş & Küçükali, 2019; Latzer, 2018; Scott, 2019; Ulusoy, 2016). Nevertheless, an analysis of Ukrainian and international scholarly literature underscores the uneven development of the aforementioned subjects addressed in this study.

Within the course of this research, our Memory Institute's scientific team constructed a heuristic model of subculture. Addressing the challenge of formulating a thorough and comprehensive definition for the term "subculture," a heuristic approach was employed. Heuristics, situated at the intersection of disciplines like philosophy, psychology, the theory of arts, intelligence, structural linguistics, information theory, mathematics, and physics, enables the exploration of a given phenomenon. Heuristic methods contrast with formal, rule-based, multiple-choice enumeration of options, as they expedite decision-making processes, facilitating the identification of correct parameters or sought-after elements. Heuristic models pertain to investigations within the realm of hypotheses, opinions, and conjectures, all rooted in the method of active exploration.

The study encompassed an analysis of over 5,000 distinct subcultures. This exploration yielded a revelation: all these subcultures share and are founded upon eight common attributes (Maltsev, 2021). A model derived from this study was employed for the selection and analysis of the 5,000 subcultures, leading to the examination and eventual exclusion of certain subcultures based on specific criteria. The remaining subcultures were retained on the list. To distinguish between subcultures, religions, and traditions, the framework depicted in Figure 1 was utilized.

The Illustrated Circular Scheme is Comprised of Eight Key Elements:
1. Geographical reference.
2. Counter-factor of the existing culture.
3. Presence of temple structures.
4. Philosophy.
5. Money.
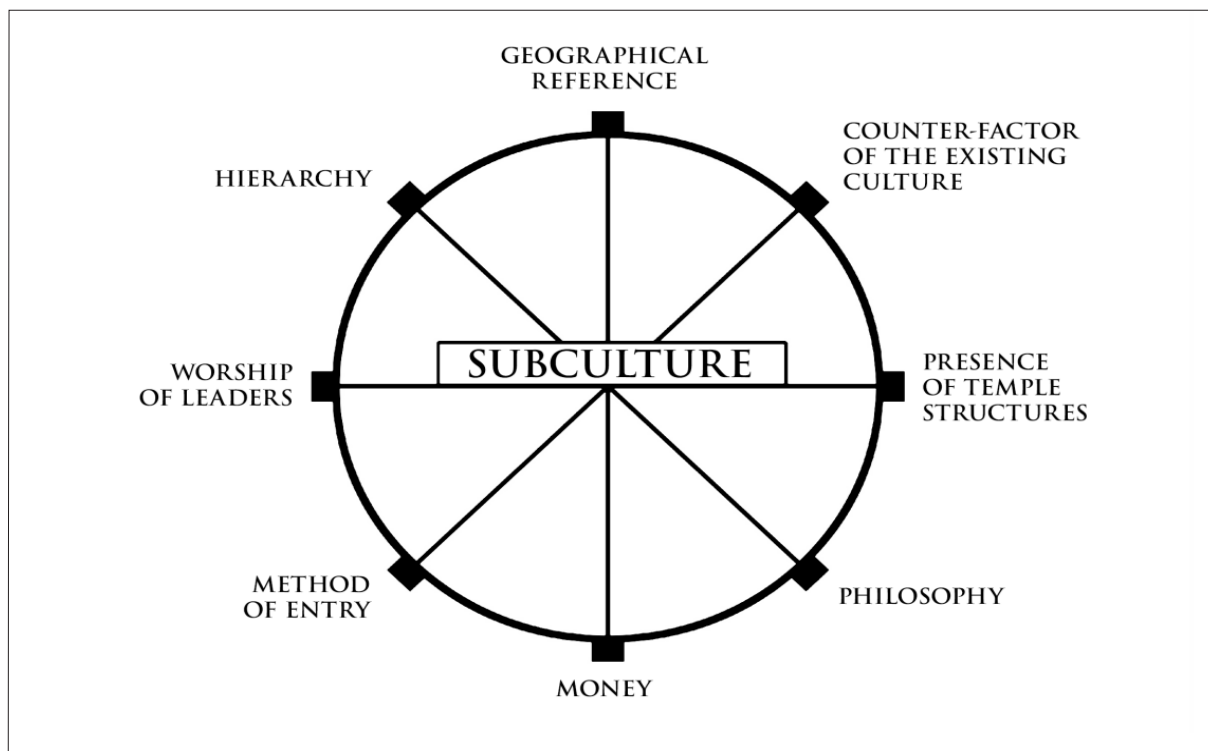6. Method of entry.
7. Worship of leaders.
8. Hierarchy.

Figure 1. Scheme for a Subculture Study

Exploring the Phenomenon of Subculture Through the Lens of the Outlined Scheme

1. **Geographical Reference**. A methodological significance lies in associating a subculture with a specific point of reference, a cultural hub of sorts. Each subculture inherently originates from a distinct geographic location, serving as its geographical anchor. Subculture emerges within specific geographical boundaries, intricately linked to the societal progress of that region. Consequently, the geographical location plays a direct role in shaping its development, as well as influencing the establishment and acceptance of guiding principles, rules, beliefs, behavioral norms, and more. The ongoing advancement, intricacy, and diversification of society contribute to the proliferation of subcultures, which, in turn, leads to the emergence of additional classifying attributes.

   For instance, take the case of Tokyo rockabilly subculture. In Tokyo, there exists a designated gathering spot called Yoyogi Park, where local representatives of this subculture congregate and engage in various activities (Naylor & Halliday, 2001). These Japanese individuals exhibit distinctive fashion choices, including biker jackets and elaborate hairstyles characterized by vertical, upward-swept bangs. Their musical preferences exclusively revolve around rock and roll. This contemporary group of rebels effectively lives a lifestyle reminiscent of the 1950s. The Trival guarachero offers another compelling illustration. Within Mexican culture, an unconventional fashion trend involving shoes with elongated narrow toes has emerged known as Mexican pointy boots (Clayton, 2015). These shoes often evoke associations with the footwear of jesters from medieval times. In the city of Mateuala, a distinct subculture called the "guarachero" emerged, primarily influenced by local tribal music that interweaves pre-Hispanic musical motifs with African rhythms. During the inception of this subculture, people initially attended dances wearing ordinary shoes. However, over time, the residents of tis area engaged in a competitive drive among themselves, their aim was to outdo each other by continually elongating the toe portion of their shoes. This led to the gradual creation of longer and longer shoes, eventually reaching impractical lengths. Nevertheless, this subculture persists in Mateuala, with devoted representatives upholding this distinctive way of life.

2. **Counter-factor of the Existing Culture**. Depending on its origins, a subculture might arise within a traditional cultural context but stand in opposition to its core values. Such formations not only present contrasting paradigms to the dominant culture but also explicitly challenge established cultural values, norms, and morals. In certain cases, they even establish their own system of norms and values.

   This counter-factor can serve as a primary catalyst for the emergence of some subcultures, acting as a direct response to the prevailing culture (Moule et al., 2019). The concept of counterculture (Whiteley, 2015) refers to paradigms that actively oppose established principles within the dominant culture. Examples include various youth movements (Moore, 2015) and subcultures of the 20th century (like hippies) or, in the context of the USSR, the underground rock culture. In the contemporary Western world, the hardcore punk movement serves as another instance (Buchholz, 2019). The roots of such subcultures can also be traced back to mystical inclinations present both in the Western and Eastern cultural contexts, where there is a reverence for purposeless leisure pursuits. Currently, the contemporary pastimes of young individuals in society are causing heightened concern (Bowes et al., 2015; Martínez-Ferrer & Stattin, 2019; Moreno et al., 2016; O'Connor & Portzky, 2015; Young et al., 2014). The emergence of diverse foreign subcultures on a global scale often stands in contradiction to the accepted norms of a particular state's culture.

3. **The Absence of Temple Structures Characterizes Subcultures**. When a specific group possesses a designated sacred site, it becomes a precondition for addressing matters of religion or the transformation of a subculture into a religious entity. Subcultures lack such sacral places. However, certain locations might hold elevated significance compared to others, such as a family residence within 'Ndrangheta or a sports stadium for soccer enthusiasts. In the context of criminal subcultures in southern Italy, although they may feature temples, these are predominantly Catholic temples and not intrinsic to the subculture itself (Maltsev, 2018).

4. **Philosophy.** The subculture is rooted in philosophy, rather than religion. The subculture's composition is agnostic towards one's religious affiliation. An individual within a subculture can even identify as an atheist, provided they embrace the subculture's ideologies. This philosophy can manifest in various forms, spanning from particular beliefs and viewpoints to encompassing a distinctive lifestyle. For instance, during the heyday of rock and roll, adherents commonly rode motorcycles, donned provocative rocker attire, and immersed themselves in the music of Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley. The archetype of the English street hooligan resonated with the youth of that era, leading to a widespread adoption of the "rocker" identity. Leather jackets, wristbands, grinders, and jeans, paired with T-shirts and bandanas featuring the insignia of favorite rock bands or relevant life mottos, formed the rocker's distinctive appearance. Brands like "Levi's" jeans, "Lewis Leathers," and "Grinders" boots were emblematic of this subculture. The "59 Club of England," which initially represented a youth church organization, became a prominent emblem within this subculture.

   Skinheads, too, uphold their distinct philosophy. Originating as a working-class subculture in 1960s UK, skinheads have expanded their presence across Europe, North America, and beyond (Smolík, 2016). Their political inclinations range from ultra-leftist to anti-fascist, encompassing a wide spectrum. Apolitical orientations also exist within this subculture. The skinhead appearance varies, spanning from a relaxed fashion reminiscent of the 1960s to street-punk and hardcore styles.

5. **Money.** A subculture does not engage in raising funds or organizing flock. Instead, it generates its own financial resources, occasionally through illicit means and at other times, through legitimate channels. Take, for instance, the biker subculture comprised of motorcycle enthusiasts and aficionados. Some scholars categorize them as romantic-es-

capist subcultures. In the United States, certain bikers are involved in drug dealing as a means of livelihood.

6. **Method of Entry.** A subculture can be considered as an element within mainstream culture, a part of a specific program, or a component of a certain project. For certain individuals, a subculture might function as an alternative or antithesis to a larger program, or as an autonomous and self-sustaining program. This program could exist either within the overarching project or as an independent entity, representing a potential developmental alternative within the sociocultural system. To a degree, a subculture can also be seen as a distinctive worldview, encapsulating its values and ideals.

Consequently, a subset of individuals aspires to join such associations, seeking new avenues for self-expression. In modern society, teenagers often distinguish themselves from one another through behavior, habits, and evolving worldviews. Frequently, they align with specific subcultures, each characterized by unique rules and developmental trends. The influence of subcultures on teenagers presents a pertinent concern for parents. Achieving entry into a subculture raises a significant challenge and requires substantial effort. Gaining admittance into a subculture is intricate and sometimes nearly impossible, unlike many religious institutions that maintain open doors. Specific criteria or prerequisites must typically be met before an individual can become part of the subculture's ranks.

Upon entering a subculture, individuals often encounter various obstacles. Gaining acceptance within this group requires meeting certain criteria. While existing members might occasionally facilitate someone's entry, the majority of subcultures uphold their own established rules, selection criteria, behavioral norms, mandatory commitments, and tasks.

For instance, within the Calabrian subculture, membership is exclusive to individuals who bear the same last name and are part of the same family. Prospective members must prove their worthiness to join this society. This process involves undergoing a specific baptism rite, which holds paramount importance. Society's baptismal ritual stands as the pivotal act, granting access to all subsequent levels of admission. According to their perspective, the most potent and enduring human connections are genetic, transcending choice. These choices determine and authorize rituals that underscore their importance and enduring nature. This practice has evolved into a more nuanced form that persists to the present day, albeit with modifications that have diminished its symbolic scope.

7. **Worship of Leaders.** Subcultures venerate their leaders (Hinojosa et al., 2014), not deities. At each level of organizational development, subcultures confront a range of challenges, transformations, or obstacles over time. Certain directions might witness complete reversals, rapid shifts within specific facets of the subculture designed to enhance its adaptability or, conversely, the dissolution of the organization and its culture through comprehensive restructuring, potentially involving mergers, acquisitions, or bankruptcy. Typically, fresh and robust managers and leaders arise within established organizations, possessing the capacity to assume control and oversee the implementation of changes. Notably, documented instances exist of transformational leaders whose endeavors focus on destabilizing the existing organizational structure and instigating novel change initiatives.

However, alternative mechanisms exist for the emergence of leaders, even dubbed as idols, who epitomize ideals and personify an exemplary collective image for adherents of a given subculture. These leaders assume the role of revered objects, often serving as role models. For instance, within the rockers' subculture in the Post-Soviet space, legendary figures like "Kino" (and Viktor Tsoi), "DDT" (and Yuri Shevchuk), "Alisa" (and Konstantin Kinchev), Vyacheslav Butusov, Andrey Makarevich, and other stalwarts of the rock scene have attained idol status.

However, within subcultures, leaders must not be underestimated as individuals who fulfill crucial roles within organizations, serving as guiding axes. Many subcultures allocate specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations to their leaders. These leaders might display innovation and a propensity for daring decisions, all while remaining aligned with the or-

ganization's ideals and beliefs during critical junctures. Additionally, leaders often inhabit a marginal role, positioned at the boundary between the organization and the external environment. They address diverse facets of the organization's activities and existence, encompassing realms such as sales, procurement, marketing, public relations, legal and financial matters, research, development, and more. Some leaders participate in nurturing human potential, expanding the subculture's populace, and contributing to the selection, admission, promotion, and recognition of members. Subculture leaders may also serve as educators, guiding their followers, playing a pivotal role in teaching, and assisting in resolving emerging questions.

8. **Hierarchy.** Within any form of organizational subculture, even if it is small or unconventional, an inherent hierarchy exists (more broadly, a hierarchy system). Typically, the larger the subcultural group, the greater the number of hierarchical levels, or "floors," within it. Each distinct floor has the potential to give rise to a different subculture. If the corporate hierarchy encompasses a sufficient number of hierarchical levels, a hierarchy of subcultures is established (akin to the military analogy, featuring "soldier," "cadet," "sergeant," and "officer" subcultures).

    The hierarchy within subcultures can exhibit both harmonious and disharmonious structures. A harmonious structure prevails when a subculture's hierarchy, composed of leadership 'castes' with differing ranks, adheres to the principle of more developed levels at the top, with no contradictions with other cultures. The most fundamental division involves categorizing members into 'upper' and 'lower' groups. An example of this is evident in the Calabrian subculture, where society is divided into Majors and Minors groups, each with its own internal hierarchy."

    Unlike religion, subculture hierarchy is accessible to all members and is not confined to a privileged class like the clergy. In a subculture, any member can eventually ascend to a leadership position, contingent upon specific circumstances. Notably, subculture hierarchies can evolve over time, as seen in the development of the Calabrian subculture. As clans or families expanded, new statuses were introduced, while some clans skipped certain levels or statuses. It's evident that individuals can ascend from the lowest level to the highest status, with established mechanisms and pathways for advancement within the society. A dedicated committee oversees these processes, making decisions regarding further promotion and growth.

Discussion

The hierarchy of subcultures can exhibit both harmony and disharmony. Harmony is evident in a subculture with a hierarchical arrangement featuring leadership "castes" of varying ranks. This harmonious structure follows the principle that upper levels are more developed, and there is no contradiction with neighboring cultures. A basic division often involves categorizing into "upper" and "lower" groups. For instance, within the Calabrian subculture 'Ndrangheta, society is divided into the Majors (Societe Maggiore) and Minors (Societe Minore), each with its own hierarchy (Gratteri & Nicaso, 2010).

Unlike religion, where hierarchy is limited to the privileged class, subculture hierarchy is accessible to all members, allowing anyone, under certain circumstances, to ascend to a leadership position. Notably, subculture hierarchies can evolve over time, as seen in the development of the Calabrian subculture. As clans or families expand, new statuses are introduced, and in some instances, levels or statuses may be skipped. This dynamic reveals that individuals can progress from the lowest level to the highest status, facilitated by specific mechanisms and societal pathways established within the subculture. Oversight and decisions regarding promotions and growth are typically managed by a designated committee.
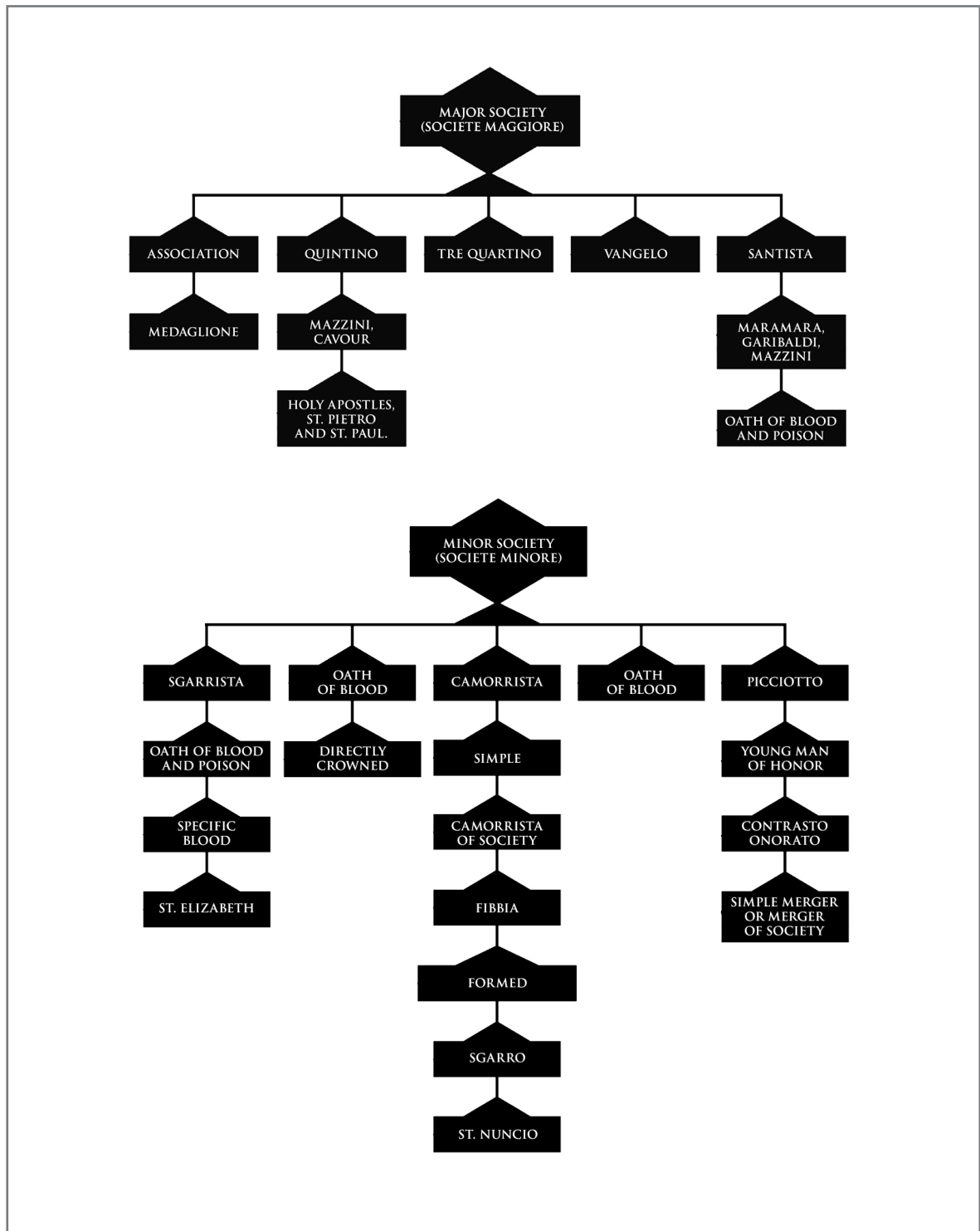
Figure 2. The system of hierarchy in the 'Ndrangheta

Conclusion

Employing the counter-alternative method in studying phenomena like subculture has facilitated a deeper understanding of this intricate subject. This article, founded on the method, presents the constituent components, attributes, and features of subcultures through diverse examples and case studies. The outlined scheme can serve as a valuable tool for comprehensive and qualitative exploration of various phenomena, just as it has been applied individually to subculture, religion, and tradition.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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