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DYNAMICS OF MORAL PANICS CONCERNING CHILDREN AND YOUTH: HISTORICAL-SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article presents a historical-sociological analysis of dynamics of moral panic emergence in the Western and Russian society. On the secondary analysis ground of sociological research data 1980-2000s and their correlation with the historical facts it has been established that the focus of moral panic is around vulnerable groups: young people and children. Youth and children can be a subject as well as an object of moral panic, since they are either "victim" or "offender" in different contexts .The author explains this pattern from the point of view that the younger generation is taken as the "successor" of the current socially active group. Therefore, it causes the concern for the moral health of the society future"basis".

Expressive social movements, which are getting more popular among young people, constitute a particular danger regarding the society future "basis". Joining a certain subculture, the individual adopts its behaviour patterns and value system. Attracting more and more participants, this process becomes natural and widespread, it is seen by the society and the media as a moral decline, the total deformation of values and worldviews.

According to the results of the research, it has been concluded that moral panics produce ambivalent social changes. On the one hand, a control and sanctions are toughened, on the other hand, the archaic values and norms are eliminated and individuals are adapted to the contemporary social reality.

1. Introduction

Significant changes occur in the society in the context of globalization processes accelerating, information technologies upgrading and expansion of the media abilities, they manifest themselves in the destruction of cultural and national borders and the formation of the so-called "global village" (M. McLuhan). The mass media have an important role in this process. Meeting the needs of a mass audience, they limit the ability of individuals to select, check and interpret facts independently and thus they universalize their perception of the world. The modern society has been developing in conditions of media reality, where the media got the opportunity to design social problems and program a social response to them.

Another consequence of social changes is the erosion of values and normative boundaries of morality, the worsening situation of spiritual crisis and the transition of the society into an anomic state "after virtue" (A. MacIntyre). As a result, "increasingly in the focus of public attention there are problems, qualified as a serious threat to the existing system of spiritual norms and values, which can lead to the destruction of society in the long term" (Yefanov, 2016). Journalists, civil servants and public figures are interested in dramatizing these problems and maintaining a public interest in them. Eventually, the results of the campaigns promoted by the media for these issues are often excessively emotional reactions of the society to them, called moral panics.

2. Problem Statement

The social reality analysis of the last three decades shows that the concentration of main moral panics is around vulnerable groups: young people and children. Youth and children can be in different roles: as a subject and as an object of the moral panic, because in different contexts they are either "victim" or "offender".

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is a sociological substantiation of the dynamics of moral panics emergence concerning children and young people in Western and Russian society.

4. Research Methods

A historical-sociological analysis is applied. A secondary analysis of the results of Western and Russian sociological studies 1980-2000s is correlated with the historical facts of the period under review.

5. Results

The largest group is made up with moral panics associated with the **youth**. As M. Khadzharov noted, the growth of crime and criminalization of the society in the 1990-ies contributed to the deformation of moral values, it "led to the erosion of values and philosophical ideas about the right way of life. Freedom as a moral category was understood as all-permissiveness. On the ground of this misperception a whole layer of the youth was formed who did not recognize human values, moral principles and legal norms" (Khadzharov, 2012). According to the scientist's view, the youth poses a

potential threat to the society. The younger generation is perceived as the "successor" of the current socially active group, thus it arouses its concern for the moral health of the society future "basis".

Expressive social movements, which are getting more popular among young people, constitute a particular danger regarding the society future "basis". Sociologists agree that the emergence of new groups for Russian people is a "violation of the nation's cultural foundation, a serious social disease which equals the alcohol or drugs influence" (Ryumin, 2012). The concern of the society connected with the actions of any youth community often turns into a moral panic; consequently its participants are labelled as "deviants".

According to D. Gromov, moral panics as "an effective tool of social manipulation" represent a mechanism for the youth communities development. After S. Cohen he also notes that moral panics "do not only frighten the society with "folk devils", but also give them publicity, ensuring a flow of new members into these communities. The media often creates a canon of a subcultural pattern, which is followed by neophytes" (Gromov, 2012). The scientist puts forward the stages of emergence and further consolidation of youth groups:

- the emergence of the group;

- a detailed media description of the community features;

- the growth of public phobias, accompanied by the emergence of a moral panic which is characterized by the excessive attention accentuation to the "mythologized image" of the group;

- the formation of a "reverse reaction", when the youth actively join the community by taking behavioral patterns presented in the media.

This model was characteristic both for the youth communities of the Soviet period (the emergence of neo-fascists, lyubers and the growth of the hippie movement) and contemporary Russia (the growing number of skinheads and the popularization of the gothic subculture). For example, gathering information about the "youth with a swastika" promoted street anti-fascist activities and the stereotype, hippie being a culture of drug-users, amplified the deviance, thus it made new members of the movement use drugs. However, statistics showed that there were not more drug-users among hippies than among representatives of other youth movements.

The abundance of the news in the late 1980s about groups in Tatarstan aroused a moral panic called the "Kazan phenomenon". A series of articles about the fighters for the "normative" behavior of the Soviet people understood by them quite specifically became the "starting point" in the growth of the lyubero subculture. The murder of the Tajik girl in St. Petersburg contributed to phobias around skinheads, after that the Northern capital was considered to be the "city of skinheads", and the events of 2007 when the news flashed in Belgorod, that skinheads across the country would gather there for the celebration of Hitler's birthday, generated a lot of rumors: from the citizen unrest to the information about the victims of the supposed scuffle.

V. Yarskaya-Smirnova sees the basis of the subculture's victimisation in exposing one's life to public, "it is resulted in a moral panic and hysteria, the identity of the individual and human rights are violated in the society, where fundamentalism and a policy of discrimination reign. The question concerns the sphere of the political and economic discourse, getting dividends from militaristic, aggressive layers

of culture: when those, who are not similar to normal ones, are victimized" (Yarskaya-Smirnova, 2010). In a crisis society subcultures act as a source of the increased danger – a sort of a moral panic's producer.

As E. Omelchenko noted, the Soviet youth "did not cause moral panic among the public" (Omelchenko, 2005). However, in Europe and on West hooliganism as a reason for the emergence of moral panic in the mid-1950s was mentioned for the first time by J. Pison, who explained this phenomenon by the fact that in the era of the industrialism reaching "adulthood" by young people was accompanied by a sense of anxiety. When changing the habitual way of life and losing established principles, the youth begins to look for themselves, where they can apply their capabilities, they unite into groups and thus constitute a real threat to the society.

In the late 1980s the rave-movement with the musical direction "house" gained its popularity in the world, R. Liseev compares its penetration into Russia with a moral panic. The media protest against the underground brought a new demand to the new genre, "as a result, a moral panic became a traditional way to increase the sales of the youth music" (Liseev, 2005), which was often favoured by the youth industry itself.

In turn, I. Kon believes that one of the reasons for the emergence of a moral panic, concerning young people, was the liberation of a sexual culture. Its first "wave" of the 1920s caused a tough censorship and repressive measures to the art of that time; the second "wave" of the post-perestroika period promoted the emergence of anti-sexual slogans which called to block a sexual education, it was considered by scientists as "the genocide of Russian youth with all its consequences" (Kon, 2002).

Another "wave" of moral panics is associated with the construction of an increased danger in relation to **children**. According to C. Critcher, "modern moral panics tend to concentrate around children and childhood" (Critcher, 2003). However, depending on the nature of the conflict, children can have opposite social roles: either "victim" or "offender".

In the mid-1990s America was shocked by the monstrous crimes of teenagers, seemed to be addicted to games, it was the beginning of a moral panic about computer video games. Public activists claimed that such hobbies of teenagers provoked cruelty, uncontrolled aggression and caused the strongest addiction. Shooting in American secondary schoolsт and especially the tragic events in the Colombian school in 1999 aroused a moral panic, accompanied by the speeches of top government officials, including President B. Clinton. The result was not only an affective reaction on the part of parents, who were concerned about the fate of their children, but also great economic consequences. After that, the educational institutions began to buy video surveillance cameras and special photo badges for each student. However, then it turned out, that the connection between computer games and the unrestrained aggression of schoolchildren was minimal, there are not less crimes among adults than among teenagers, and, according to official statistics, "for example, there are three times more people, struck by lightning than those, killed in school" (Killingbeck, 2001).

In the late 1990s another moral panic flashed in the US – the news about the murders of children on the ritual ground, – modeled on the basis of the individual communication – gossip and rumors. M. de Young points out the so-called "Three Persons of the Devil" – ways of constructing the problem. She considers a ritual violence as an "ideology of undermining", as an "auditory panic" and as a "modern legend" (de Young, 1997), where the attention is focused on the traumatic nature of stress. As a result of

the persecutions, the roots of which, according to D. Lemmings and K. Walker, came from the time of "witch hunts" (Lemmings & Walker, 2009), dozens of suspects were detained, but later all of them were released – the investigation could not establish the guilt of any "satanists".

And twenty years earlier – in the 1980s – America was struck by a moral panic about the use of drugs. The phenomenon itself "reached" Russia only by the mid-1990s.

Confirming the thesis, put forward earlier by S. Cohen, that moral panics is an exaggerated reaction to a condition that does not correspond to the real danger, P. Meilahs conducts a study on narcomania, where in the course of the survey he finds out that schoolchildren are aware of the situation with the use of drugs significantly better, than their parents. This fact actualizes the idea that "the real knowledge of the drug situation by schoolchildren makes them less prone to a moral panic and apocalyptic moods broadcast by the media" (Meylakhs, 2007). Understanding the essence of the problem – in this case with drugs – contributes to a more sensible mediate assessment of the situation, "moral reasoning", the individual's protection from the effects of moral panics, and, in turn, the sense of danger leads "to the struggle for moral purity of the ranks". The moral panic regarding drugs was born in the 1990s after the information about the attack of drug-users on pensioners became a kind of "catalyst" and the disappearance occurred at a time of the economic crisis in early 2000s, accompanied by a high inflation.

S. Mayorova-Shcheglova debunks the moral panic regarding childhood, connected with modern information technologies, when "children of the Internet do not communicate with each other at all. Using computers, children are educated about sex. Children get used just to having fun. Children become violent after the Internet. ICT construct new pictures of the world in children" (Mayorova-Shcheglova, 2009). According to the results of the survey, which were confirmed with the data of the Public Opinion Foundation, S. Mayorova-Shcheglova concludes that along with a high level of computer literacy and the use of IT technologies both in educational and leisure activities the modern "media generation" does not become less socialized: they communicate with peers in real life and do not go into a virtual space, and information about violence and sex is obtained from TV screens. The older generation initiates such moral panic, since the "adult culture" tends to emphasize the "deviance" of the peculiarities of the "youth culture", constructing it as "deviant" for the accentuation of its subordinate position in the society" (Raikhshtat, 2006). In this regard, sociologists call modern politics in relation to children and young people – acts of "punitive use (with the emphasis on punishment and control)" (Yarskaya & Lovtsova, 2010).

Studying the construction of another social problem by mass media – the protection of the orphans' rights, – P. Gorodetskaya notes that this issue did not occupy a leading position in the public arena, and the primary awareness of the problem magnitude (i.e., the number of foster children in orphanages) occurred only in the mid-1990s. At the same time, the killing of Russian children in American foster families was in the focus of public attention, when the society sounded the alarm, and then it was followed by tough statements on the part of the country leaders. However, the Western press considered the "actions of the Russian Federation as an attempt to raise the wave of public hysteria" (Gorodetskaya, 2008). Thus, the construction of the moral panic took place, since more attention was

focused on the "violation of children rights than on their protection", presenting a picture of the threat to the viability of the society.

6. Conclusion

The concentration of moral panics, connected with children and young people, is due to the fact that the younger generation is considered to be a kind of "successor", which replace the current socially active group. Therefore, it causes its concern for the moral health of the society future "basis".

Expressive social movements, which are getting more popular among young people, constitute a particular danger regarding the society future "basis" (the emergence of hippies, ravers, lyubers, neo-fascists, skinheads). Joining a certain subculture, an individual borrows its behavioral patterns and established system of values. Attracting more and more participants, this process becomes natural and widespread, it is seen by the society and the media as a moral decline, the total deformation of values and worldviews.

The actions of future "successors" of a socially active group are considered as a threat to social structure destruction. At the same time, a constructive role can not be excluded, since moral panics, connected with youth movements, help to modify the social structure, eliminate the rudiments of archaic values and norms and thereby help individuals to adapt to the modern reality.

The construction of moral panics regarding childhood also indicates the ambivalence of the process. If a tough control and punishment occur as a result of social worries about narcotism, game addiction of teenagers and their awareness by means of the IT-technologies, thereby increasing deviance, the children themselves are getting more informed, devoid of panic and, thus, ready for sensible perception of social reality.

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