

NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN BELARUS – AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF BELARUSIAN ROCK MOVEMENTS

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Abstract: The rock movement, which has been formulated in Belarus since the 1960s, in addition to the music and its subcultural dimension, can be analysed on the national level. It includes socio-cultural demands and is highly geared to the values. It becomes a carrier of the “national idea” and from the sociological point of view can be regarded as a new social movement. It can be a good tool for observing the changes occurring in the national identity sphere in Belarusian society.

Keywords: New Social Movement, Belarusian Rock, Culture.

НОВЫ САЦЫЯЛЬНЫ РУХ У БЕЛАРУСІ – АНАЛІЗ ДЗЕЙНАСЦІ БЕЛАРУСКІХ РОК-РУХАЎ

Анотацыя: Рок-рух, які развіваецца ў Беларусі з 1960-х гг., акрамя музычнага і субкультурнага вымярэння можа быць прааналізаваны на нацыянальным узроўні. Апошні ўключае ў сябе сацыякультурныя аспекты і цесна звязаны з каштоўнасцямі, што робіць яго носьбітам “нацыянальнай ідэі”. З пункту гледжання сацыялогіі рок-рух можа быць разгледжаны як новы сацыяльны рух. Ён можа стаць добрым інструментам для назірання за тымі зменамі, якія адбываюцца ў сферы нацыянальнай ідэнтыфікацыі ў беларускім грамадстве.

Ключавыя словы: новы сацыяльны рух, беларускі рок, культура.

Through its specific form and multidimensional nature, rock becomes a message which uses a variety of sources of meaning – music, speech, dress, gestures. Rock music in Soviet conditions was a part of the counterculture and a tool for formulating social demands but not in a form of a program. Also in independent Belarus rock music becomes a counterculture and as such is a valuable witness of the development of a social movement.

The life cycle of a social movement involves several phases, from the early stages until its end. The time of birth is determined by the existence of favourable structural conditions: an appropriate structural context, tensions, generalization of beliefs and the initiating event (which, despite its individual character is of symbolic and emotional resonance for the entire population, causing it to shake, but also contributing to the action), leads to the inception of a new social movement.

In the case of Belarus and Belarusian music movement, its origin goes back to the beginning of the 1960s, with the activation of youth subcultures: hippies and rock'n'rollers. The structural context being the result of the conditions of life in the Soviet state was further strengthened by the tension experienced by young people who could not express themselves and their needs in the forms permitted by the state and in the field of music. Youth rebellion intensified following such incidents as the assassination of a hippie – Viačaslau Maksakau in 1970, or the expulsion from the university of Uladzimir Kandrusievič in 1972, who was an organizer of beat festivals (Saharau, 1999: 158-159).

Belarusian music movement flourished in the 1980s, along with the activities of the first Belarusian rock bands: *Bonda*, *Mroja*, *Miascowy Czas*. In the 1990s, especially in their latter half, Belarusian music movement intensified its activities. Favorable structural context at that time was designated by the coming to power of President Lukašenka and the subsequent re-elections led to social protests (October Square demonstrations in 2006 and 2010), reinforced by the beliefs in shared ideas.

In the case of Belarus, it is difficult to talk about the end of a social movement, although one can observe a decrease in its activity in terms of “street fighting”. The weakening of the movement in Belarus, which can be observed, is not a result of the “crisis of victory”, but rather of lack of success (which ought to be understood as a change of norms and principles), which discourages some members of the movement. In the symbolic and cultural sphere, that is in the Belarusian rock music, the new social movement is still active, and with each new song or album of leaders of the movement (Belarusian musicians) new supporters are mobilized.

The new social movements aim to politicize the behaviors of the civil society, so that they oppose the expansive activities of the state. They take

forms of direct activity (demonstrations), as well as symbolic behaviors (undermining the aesthetic canons, symbols imposed by the state) (Sztompka, 2002: 148-178). What is more, echoes of the political demonstrations can be heard in music, which transfers the physical fight to the field of symbolism and culture. Political decisions, such as changing national symbols, changes in educational programs in schools, “correction” of history textbooks, by removing the events that did not match the current political line, soon were reflected in Belarusian music (i.e. group *UltraВожык* in the song “Ідэалогія” from 2004 describes the president and his policy of ideological propaganda) (*UltraВожык.*).

The movement does not have one leader, but a larger group, who are not necessarily interrelated, or even aware of their role. Certainly among them there are such charismatic characters as Liavon Vołski, Zmicier Vajciuškievič, Aliaksandr Kulinkovič or Siarhej Michalok. The process of new members joining the movements resembles the volcanic model. They are not from one particular group or social or professional class. What unites all the participants is the “Belarusian idea”. Values that they fight for are of post-materialistic nature, refer to issues of identity, freedom, peace, fulfillment and community. These key words can be found in the artistic output of Belarusian musicians.

The internal behaviour of the music movement in Belarus was conditioned by the political and cultural situation of the country. On the one hand, it was influenced by the changes in the political system, on the other hand by the transformation of awareness, the politicization of cultural and linguistic issues in the country. The existence of the patriarchal state of Belarus is continuously present in the discourse of the scientific, social and political life of the country. Constant references to Russia which evokes the issue of Belarusian national identity as a construct separate from the influences of its eastern neighbour, as well as provokes to search various fields of identification, reaching much deeper than the structure of the state. The music output recalling issues related to the country’s ethnic roots (e.g. on pagan metal scene, as well as in ethnic music many elements of Belarusian folklore are drawn on: groups *Znič*, *Kamaedzica*, *Troica*, *Guda*) is not only a form of searching for their own identity, but also a manifesto of cultural autonomy.

The phenomena occurring within the Belarusian national identity sphere resemble more and more constructed project called “the people of Belarus”, which is created and based on still available or historically certified ideological elements of Belarus, such as the heritage of the Principality of Polack, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania tradition, the Belarusian language, Belarusian folklore, Pahonia and white-red-white flag.

To sum up, Belarusian music movement takes the form of dissent of the existing canons and standards that regulate social behaviors. It refers to the freedom of the individual and the nation, to the right to protect their cultural heritage, and to respecting their history and language. The cultural values of the Belarusian nation are therefore at stake in the conflict with the authorities.

Belarusian music movement cyclically faces problems that are related to the loss of the movement's potential and discouragement of its participants, in spite of the failure to achieve the intended goals. It might be caused by the loss of faith in the movement's success by some of its supporters, by outflow of participants because of migration, seeking a new form of activity seeing no effects to date, by the tiredness with continuous failures, by a change of social situation of the group members...

Activities of the movement include mainly critical and educational aspects, undermining the existing canons and patterns, as well as educating by formulating their own slogans, referring also to the cultural and historical heritage of Belarus.

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