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CANCEL CULTURE: NEW INTERNET IDEOLOGY?

150 western intellectuals published a letter («A Letter on Justice and Open Debate», 2020) in defence of justice and open the debate in the middle of 2020. The collocation «cancel culture» wasn't mentioned there, nevertheless it was the main topic – social pressure, strong enough, to silence or even to ruin the lives.

Most of the people who signed up for the letter had already the experience of dealing with the «cancel culture». For example, Rowling J.K. («Harry Potter Fan Sites Disavow J.K. Rowling for Her Anti-Trans Stance», 2020), whom wards were regarded as transphobic («J.K. Rowling – Twitter», 2020) Margaret Atwood, who was condemned by and in result excluded from the feminist community for signing a letter («An Open Letter to UBC: Steven Galloway's Right To Due Process», 2016) demanding a fair trial in the case of the teacher accused of the sexual violence, but responded publicly («Am I a bad feminist?», 2018) alluding to the great problems of modern feminism; Steven Pinker, linguist and phycologist, who was publicly shamed for referring to study, that claimed that the racism in the American society is declining. In result a public letter was written in which people demanded him to be excluded from a list of the prominent members of the American Linguistic Association.

Needless to say, «Letter of 150» caused a major response, as it's outrageous to stand up for the values of the Age of Enlightenment in our progressive times. Without being affected, this paper proposes that the «cancel culture» is a way bigger problem than it appears to people who signed Harper's letter. Here we can see not just a rise of authoritarian practice, but a whole change in the political discourse, which, of course presents current political and social practices, expresses social identities, political ideology, and culture. (Yakovlev and Yeremenko, 2020, p. 74)

«Cancel culture» and «gaslighting»

Numerous opponents of the «Harper's letters» are taking part in a practice that they themselves call «gaslighting»: they claim that there is no such thing as the «cancel culture», it's all just a myth and conspiracy as there is only an institute of reputation. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez stated («Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – Twitter», 2020) that people, who had been «cancelled», didn't work with the big publishing houses, otherwise they were not cancelled, people just didn't like them. The New York Times columnist Charles Blow wrote (Charles, 2020) that the «cancel culture» was just freedom of speech, it wasn't just that the public was now using it against the rich and powerful.

Huffington Post's article («Don't Fall for The 'Cancel Culture' Scam», 2020) gives some examples of attempts to cancel someone that did not result in anything. The author notes, however, that sometimes innocent people are also accused, which is unfortunate, but as the saying goes, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.

The resemblance to a popular logical fallacy, known as the survivorship bias, is uncanny. Celebrities can criticize the «cancel culture» not because it's aimed exclusively at them, but because they're the ones who are fit to withstand it. As far as it goes, they are the only defenders of the real victims, those who don't have enough resources to confront being cancelled. Most casualties of the «cancel culture» are in the dark: the young scientists, who are afraid of research in controversial fields («Think Cancel Culture Doesn't Exist? My Own 'Lived Experience' Says Otherwise», 2020), the clerks, who are sacrificed in the name of modern agenda («Google fired James Damore for a controversial gender memo – now he's suing», 2018), the ordinary civilians, who were unfortunate enough to make an off-hand comment on Twitter («How One Stupid Tweet Blew Up Justine Sacco's Life», 2015), which often led to the unpleasant consequences («Death of a Porn Star: August Ames Suicide»).

American Youtuber and political commentator Natalie Wynn, best known online as ContraPoints, who is generally considered to be quite progressive made a video («Cancelling») about how she herself became a victim of «cancel culture». The backlash was caused by a collabora-

tion with a transgender actor, who was close to being 60 years old at that moment. Modern day trans community, which consists generally of younger people, weren't pleased with his views on transgender issues, and, in result, were infuriated with Natalie, for even featuring this person in her video.

Analysing her experience, Wynn pointed out a few key features of cancel culture:

1) presumption of guilt

The accused aren't being listened to, the accusations are immediately changed from specific to abstract. If the first rendition goes along the lines of «person A accused person B in a bad behaviour», it quickly turns into «Person B exhibits bad behaviour», which soon turns into «B is a bad person».

2) essentialism

Christianity promotes to love the sinner, but to hate the sin, but the same method does not apply to cancelling people. You need to hate the person precisely. That's why one little mistake can outweigh countless scientific or artistic achievements in the eyes of the public, because this mistake is now the core essence of the defendant.

3) contagiousness

Target of the act is not the accused, but third parties. The whole point is to pressure their friends, colleagues and everybody else to distance themselves from the victim, otherwise they will be cancelled themselves. People and institutes are quick to get rid of the accused, as those, who are cancelled are placed in a social quarantine.

Shame and guilt

We do not need many formal rules to live in society, but there is a huge layer of everyday informal ones, and the sanctions for violating them are also informal: a reputation, public shaming and an ostracism as an extreme form.

But why does all this work and affect us? The fact is that we are driven by social emotions and these emotions are different.

Among the bunch of theories that explain why Western Europe is the most developed region, there is one very original, its author – Deepak Lal,

a British economist of Indian heritage. In his book «Unintended Consequences» (Lal, 1998) he writes that it's all about social emotions, through which order is maintained in society, the main of which – a shame and a guilt.

Shame is an emotion that arises when we look at our actions from the standpoint of other people. It occurs when we lose face in public or are afraid to lose it. Guilt does not require the presence of witnesses, fear of God is a form of guilt, because punishment will be, regardless of whether you sinned in front of witnesses or in solitude.

It is clear that these emotions are present everywhere in different proportions, but most cultures have historically relied on shame, which gave rise to a certain collective-oriented attitude. In Europe, everything was the same: a culture of shame prevailed in the ancient cities, and its opponents were advised to drink poison.

But later Christianity made guilt the main social emotion of the Western world. This happened, largely due to church policy. The backbone of the culture of shame is the extended family, which the Catholic Church has always struggled with: it forbade marriages between distant relatives, divorce, remarriage, and encouraged love marriages instead of the traditional courtship. The church did this for a reason: the practical meaning of all these forbidden things – to keep property within the family, but the possessions of childless, deprived male heirs, widows and widowers who did not remarry, all this went to the church, which became way richer due to destruction of the extended family.

But how could unarmed men weared cassocks impose their rules on secular authorities? Precisely via guilt: the fear of excommunication, the God's punishment, the purgatory, etc. Thus the church hierarchs inadvertently gave rise to the phenomenon of a man driven not by the collectivist sense of shame but by the individualistic sense of guilt. The church gradually lost power after the Reformation, but the culture of guilt only strengthened: individualism became the cultural basis for entrepreneurship, capitalism and the industrial revolution.

Deepak Lal died in 2020, but we can assume that he visited the Internet not so often. Because everything that happens on social networks is

nothing but a global revenge of the culture of shame in the West. After all «cancel culture» is a culture of shame in the most concentrated form, only one thing is not clear.

The culture of shame requires that a person has to be rooted in a community that «shames» him. How then does the new culture of shame work? And here we can just mention something even further from the original theme – the culture of Japan.

Chrysanthemum and tweet

In the midst of World War II, American anthropologist Ruth Benedict was commissioned to study Japanese culture. In 1946, she published the book «The Chrysanthemum and The Sword», in which she contrasted Japanese culture of shame with American culture of guilt. «A society that inculcates absolute standards of morality and relies on men's developing a conscience is a guilt culture by definition, but a man in such a society may, as in the United States, suffer in addition from shame when he accuses himself of gaucheries which are in no way sins... In a culture where shame is a major sanction, people are chagrined about acts which we expect people to feel guilty about. This chagrin can be very intense and it cannot be relieved, as guilt can be, by confession and atonement. Where shame is the major sanction, a man does not experience relief when he makes his fault public even to a confessor. So long as his bad behavior does not 'get out into the world' he need not be troubled and confession appears to him merely a way of courting trouble. Shame cultures therefore do not provide for confessions, even to the gods» (Ruth, 2005, p. 222–223).

The main social emotion of the Japanese, at least in the times described by Benedict, was shame. The author writes about how the Japanese lived for centuries in a state of potential conflict between various forms of debt: to a family, to a prince, to an emperor and any violations of them were a shame. If the conflict turned out to be unsolvable, the Japanese would come out of it in the usual way – seppuku, and the most spectacular «swordsmen» became national heroes.

At the same time, the culture of shame in Japan proved to be stronger than its analogues in other societies, even the nearest ones, such as the

Chinese. And here Benedict quotes another anthropologist – Jeffrey Gorer: «In most societies where the extended family or other fractional social group is operative, the group will usually rally to protect one of its members who is under criticism or attack from members of other groups. Provided that the approval of one's own group is maintained, one can face the rest of the world with the assurance of full support in case of need or attack. In Japan however it appears that the reverse is the case; one is only sure of support from one's own group as long as approval is given by other groups; if outsiders disapprove or criticize, one's own group will turn against one and act as the punishing agents, until or unless the individual can force the other group to withdraw its criticism. By this mechanism the approval of the «outside world» takes on an importance probably unparalleled in any other society» (Gorer, 1943, p. 27).

Shame in Japanese society crosses the social groups borders and becomes comprehensive. A person who is ashamed will not find support anywhere: neither at home, nor among friends, nor in the work team. What does it all remind of? Of course, «cancel culture», where a person should be condemned everywhere, everyone should turn away from it: a family, the colleagues, the friends. The desire to universalize shame is the same contagiousness and essentialism of the «cancel culture».

The notorious novelty of the «new ethics» is that it doesn't allow the diversity of ethical systems in different social groups, and also doesn't allow a person to perform different social roles with an autonomous reputation. The «canceling» is completely indiscriminate: if Joan Rowling said something inappropriate about trans people, the new ethic wouldn't be limited to destroying Rowling as a public expert on gender problems, it is necessary to be erased Rowling from all social realities where she exists: as Rowling-public person, as Rowling-writer, etc.

Natalie Wynnnotes that the «cancel culture» generates a huge number of hypocritical apologies in the same video. As Ruth Benedict writes, a repentance is not at all inherent in a culture of shame: a repentance, a confession, and an anguish are all attributes of the culture of guilt. If

your act isn't publicly condemned in the culture of shame, there won't be need to repent. The purpose of public condemnation is not a repentance, but a punishment.

Therefore, we see at the same time in the case of the «cancel culture» many hypocritical apologies that clearly appeared only because their author was exposed. And at the same time we see that people who sincerely apologize are being trampled.

But why does the new culture of shame tend to such uncompromising universality, since the society tends to be divided into the factions with different norms? Unless this society has not isolated itself for centuries on the islands, eradicating all attempts to progress.

And now let's try to imagine a completely transparent social environment there are no borders, and information is spreaded instantly. We invented the Internet, the transparency of that contributes to the emergence of such hypertrophied culture of shame. The World Wide Web leaves people as much privacy as the thin paper walls of a traditional Japanese house.

Conclusions

But what is so bad about the culture of shame compared to the culture of guilt? It could be said that individualism, formed by the culture of guilt, is the basis of European civilization, that the presence of various forms of ethics in different social groups is the key to the development of society. However, there is another point that seems to be the most important. Although Deepak Lal reduced the culture of guilt mainly to the fear of the afterlife, Ruth Benedict gave a clearer definition: «living up to one's own picture of oneself» (Ruth, 2005, p. 223).

The culture of guilt is based on the «reflecting self», the «rational divine principle,» the «moral law within us,» or more simply, the conscience. The culture of shame is the culture devoid of the conscience, so by replacing internal reflection with an external stimulus – the fear of condemnation by the crowd, we lose the ability to make the moral judgments on their own, we lose our freedom.

Natalie Wynn notes one important point in her video: «cancel culture» is a kind of «mob justice», simply put – the Lynch trial. Participants in

«network shaming» usually do not understand their own strength, because can one tweet seriously hurt? However, a million similar tweets can easily trample a person.

Similar «scattering» of responsibility occurs in the traditional biblical execution by stoning. Everyone threw a stone, but a man was killed – all together, not separately. Historically, cultures of shame have been contained by the fact that the range of people who can affect an individual has usually been limited. However, imagine a society where this circle is (potentially) infinite and literally everyone can throw a stone of the moral condemnation, even from the other side of the ocean. We reinvented the Internet.

Of course, it's impossible to stop people from expressing their opinions. The only break here can be an individual reflection and the realization that exactly his stone can be decisive, that is conscience and our freedom.

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U.S.-UKRAINIAN RELATIONSHIP: THE VIEW FROM UKRAINE

On September 1, 2021, Presidents Joseph Biden and Volodymyr Zelensky had met. On the one hand, the Ukrainian politicians had great hopes for this meeting, and on the other were ready for its possible unsuccessfulness. The meeting intense anticipation formed in the politicians' and the expert' minds three possible algorithms for the further interstate relations development: formal or informal progress; stagnation or maintaining the status quo; regression of U.S.-Ukrainian relationships. In addition, nervousness among the Ukrainian establishment (regardless of political orientation) has been exacerbated by recent events related to United States and Russia negotiations, Nord Stream 2, Afghanistan, etc. Significant attention to the results of this meeting were paid by Russia officials, indirectly – representatives of some EU states.

Negotiations at the highest level might not have been the starting point for a qualitative renewal of bilateral relations, but it is hardly possible to call them useless. Based on general assessments of the visit results, most Ukrainian experts and media got the impression of a new round of «old-new» acquaintance in order to develop new