circles varied, it may be maintained that all these circles formed the united social milieu. One of the main reasons for that was the following: everyone who took part in the illegal activities, no matter what were its goals and ideological base, was identified as ‘anti-Soviet’, the ideological saboteur of the West’, etc. That identification brought about obstacles in getting education and making a career for dissidents. Often they were arrested for their activities. Shared oppositionists’ life experience (stigmatisation, arrests) provoked the construction of boundaries between the dissident milieu and the loyal citizens. At the same time, it contributed to the formation of the esprit de corps of the movement.

The boundaries of the social milieu and the problem of neighbourhood it is important to investigate the differences between ‘conterrnunal’ (or ‘neighbouring’) social milieux, i.e. milieux that are allied in life style and practices, but at the same time it’s representatives perceive themselves as different from their ‘neighbours’. In the social space of the Soviet society, the neighbouring social milieux for dissidents were on the one hand, the so called ‘dissenting intelligentsia’ and on the other hand, hippies and other representatives of cultural underground. One of the boundaries between dissidents and these social milieus lies in their attitude towards self-realization in profession and in social activities.

The representatives of the intelligentsia in the major part did not have direct and regular contacts with dissidents, and they may be considered to be free-riders of the dissident movement. Just a small milieu among this broad strata, that was named by one of the interviewees ‘dissenting intelligentsia’ was closely related with dissidents. Many of the movement participants came from this milieu.

“To my mind, dissent ideas found support in two strata. One of these strata was, first of all, intelligentsia, namely technical intelligentsia and technical intelligentsia that was interested in humanitarian questions, but not as much humanitarian intelligentsia. And on the other hand, as in the song ‘the janitors and porters’ generation’, i.e. underground humanitarian intelligentsia - those who became janitors, porters and stokers in those steamshop were occupied with humanitarian creative work. And it was there where dissent was born (from the interview with Andrey T., 1961, a participant in the dissident movement since the early 1980-ies).

Both dissidents and those belonging to the dissenting intelligentsia pointed in the interview (even without being specifically asked about that) to the differences between their milieu. One of the distinctions is the attitude towards professional self-realisation that corresponds with self-identity. It was their activities in the movement that often became the main sphere of self-realisation for dissidents to the detriment of their professional career in the Soviet society and personal security.

“These activities - this was all my life, I lived in it. I occupied myself with that 80 percent of my time, and occasionally 100 percent. This was, so to say, my work. And in my basic work, I, so to say, boiled the pot, made money’ (from the interview with Vadim R., 1951, a movement participant since the middle 1970’s).

The representatives of the dissenting intelligentsia construct the boundary with the dissident milieu in the following way:

‘I don’t call myself a dissident because for me it was not a profession. That is why I don’t have the moral right to call myself like that. The group of people, such people as Ginsburg, Gorshenin, Marchenko - they were professional revolutionaries. Although with many of them I was well acquainted and kept company, but I did not become this professional myself. I was standing next to dissent in that sense’ (from the interview with Mikhail B., 1939 y.b.).

Hippies and the so-called “representatives of the unofficial culture” (unadmitted painters, writers and poets) had similar professional biography to that of dissidents. They rejected the
necessity of making career under the Soviet regime, and had the life style demonstratively alternative to the normal soviet one. Therefore, considering them to be alter egos and allies, some groups of dissidents tried to attract them to participate in the protest actions.

"In our close revolutionary circle we concluded that the hippie movement - is a potential revolutionary force, and that we have to establish contacts with it and to try to commend it to the collaboration, because they are close to us, they are non-conformists, inborn iconoclasts. And we began to try actively to arrange contacts with them" (from the interview with Alexander S., 1957, who participated in the protest actions since the late 1970's).

Nevertheless, the attempts to recruit hippies were most often not successful. Willing to deny all possible social activities within the context of soviet society, hippies claimed, that 'politics is a dirty affair', that 'politics and art are incompatible', that dissidents were 'bolshevics vice versa' and so on. Dissidents began to consider hippies to be inactive. Thus, the boundary between dissidents and counter-cultural groups (non-conformists, the frequenter of the cafes "Saigon", "Malaja Sadovaia", "Sinhks"), was constructed on the base of different attitudes towards self-realisation in social activities.

The boundary between dissidents and the neighbouring social milieu was also constructed on the base of shared experience of arrests (of their relatives and/or friends), which was typical for the dissident milieu and its impact on the everyday life in that circle. It was that experience that contributed to the formation of the networks of the movement and of its esprit de corps. This experience strengthened friendship between insiders of the dissident milieu, and at the same time, it weakened their contacts with the 'outside' world. An illustration to that provides the quotation from an interview with a woman, who describes her feelings after the arrest of her husband:

"It is worth describing... Because when a woman stays alone with children, and she is stepmotherly treated at her workplace... And I must admit, that the friends circle narrows as well. I can't say that all my friends disappeared, but their number deceased. Some people stayed friends, but nevertheless, I suppose that everyone feels alone his sorrow. And then, if some of my girlfriends, who do not know what it is to be the wife of an arrested person, if they did not pass through it themselves, it is more difficult for them to understand it. It is very hard to live in one town with the husband and to know that he is there, in prison. Certainly, there were people who tried to encourage me, but I had a feeling that nobody could participate in my pain for him and my anxiety. They could only feel sorry for me. But only those people can understand it and share it, who passed through it themselves" (from the interview with Vera, 1939 y.b., a participant in the movement in the 1970's).

As this quotation illustrates, the closest people for political prisoners and their husbands and wives became those who had been arrested themselves, or who had passed through the arrest of a relative or a friend. Some interviewees claimed that persons, who had had the same life experience became the most close friends, and this friendship replaced kinship ties, though rather often these persons did not have common interests and didn't share ideological views with them. Besides emotional encouragement, the movement participants provided help for the wives of the political prisoners in solving everyday problems. Thus it may be argued that the dissident milieu controlled the private sphere of the movement participants. The private sphere played the greater role for the dissident movement than for the social movements in open societies, because activities of dissidents being illegal could take place only in their flats, which were conspiratorial. Thus, the flats of dissidents functioned as private space and as a place of residence for the 'illegal public sphere' at the same time. The distinctive feature of the dissident milieu was the defacement of the distinctions between the private and the public spheres, and quasi-professional self-realization of the movement participants in the quasi-public sphere, that was at the same time their private space.

Translated by the author

References


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