
Celebrities as a New Elite of Information Society

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ABSTRACT

Strange as it may seem, celebrity (as well as fame etc.) – despite its increasing role in modern life – is hardly included in the list of the resources, whose distribution defines the major forms of inequality. In the article, it is shown that the personal celebrity has become one of the most important and more and more desired resources in the modern world, which along with the power and wealth creates the major lines of inequality in a society. The subject of the present article is the analysis of characteristics of celebrities as a special elite stratum, which the author names ‘people of celebrity’. This elite includes the top workers of mass media; art, theatre, literature, cinema workers; representatives of show business and fashion; sportsmen, etc. The common feature of this heterogeneous public is that they exploit their popularity, converting it into huge monetary incomes, posts, connections and different benefits.

THE NOTION OF PERSONAL CELEBRITY

As is well known, inequality is typical of every or at least most societies (e.g., Davis and Moore 1945: 243). Sociology considers *power, wealth, prestige, status and privileges* to be the main social benefits and resources, whose distribution defines the major forms of inequality (see, e.g., Davis 1942; Smelser 1988; Lenski 1966; Sullivan 1998; Collins 2004).¹ Sometimes education (or more generalized – ‘skill capital’ [Perrucci and Wysong 1999]) is included in this list. For instance, Berger points out that education is the main ‘capital’ of the new ‘knowledge-class people’ (Berger 1986; see

below about it; see also Coser and Znaniecki 1968; Gouldner 1978); Giddens supposes that education reflects and affirms the existing inequality rather than encourages its elimination (Giddens 1993). Toffler and others quite rightly regard knowledge among such resources (see, *e.g.*, Toffler 1990). Tilly also points out that among all the most extensive historical systems of inequality have depended on control of one or more value-producing resources: information, especially information that facilitates profitable, safe, or coordinated action and media that disseminate such information (Tilly 2003: 35). However, strange though it may seem, *personal celebrity* (as well as fame, popularity *etc.*) is hardly included in the list of those resources (in this connection one should pay attention to Nathalie Heinich's recent note [2009: 85] that sociology must shift 'from recognition conceived as egalitarian respect to recognition conceived as un-egalitarian esteem'). This happens despite the increasing role of this phenomenon in modern life and the fact that the aspiration for it affects value aims of a growing number of people. What is more, it begins to influence the changes of social relations and stratification. The subject of the present article is the investigation of the influence of the personal celebrity factor on the modern society's social life, the analysis of characteristics of celebrities as a special stratum, and reasons for the rapid increase in the importance of social role of personal celebrity in the last century.

What does the notion of personal celebrity mean? In my opinion, it is *a definite kind of more and less widespread information about a person, which in a certain sense distinguishes him or her from the overwhelming majority of those people who possess the same professional or social characteristics.*

Such a discrimination can refer to a) the rate of person's professional or other characteristics (*e.g.*, sanctity, luck, talent, intellect, beauty) valued by social environment; b) the breadth of renown and a high level of reputation in certain social strata and places; c) formal or informal engagement of a person into a higher group as compared to a lower one (*e.g.*, to the 'famous writer' category as compared to the group of 'just a [common] writer'); d) duration of being renown (posthumous fame) *etc.* *The fame can be considered as a high level of personal celebrity as well as an honorable renown.* The indicated

discrimination from the majority of the professional or social groups (guild, brotherhood, corporation, competitors *etc.*) may directly or indirectly advance person's social characteristics and provide her or him with additional benefits in comparison with an average person in a group, possessing the same type of qualities.

INCREASING SIGNIFICANCE OF PERSONAL CELEBRITY AS A SOCIAL RESOURCE

Personal celebrity has always been an appreciated benefit. Even at the beginning of human history the fame of great hunters, warriors, narrators, wizards was very valuable and difficult to achieve. The annals of history tell to what extent people strived for the fame, sometimes performing unbelievable things (see, *e.g.*, Braudy 1986). Thus, Nero being an emperor, sought for the actor's fame. Herostratus set on fire the Temple of Artemis – one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Herodotus traveled through half the world. Scientists and poets, military leaders and kings, monks and cardinals, actors and prophets, knights and ladies, athletes and travelers – all of them competed for the fame.²

Sometimes celebrity gave more power and benefits. Famous wizards, doctors, cooks, actors, orators *etc.* had more 'clients' and higher 'fees'. Famous philosophers in ancient China were sometimes invited to the rulers and generously gifted by them (see, *e.g.*, an episode from Mozi's biography [Taranov 1995: 161–162]). A chief's fame attracted warriors to his retinue. A large number of pupils gathered around legendary magicians and druids. However, despite all the value of fame for certain people during the pre-industrial epoch (when in general there were quite a few literate people) the number of those who got the main means of subsistence with the help of their celebrity or could sharply extend them was very small indeed.

The matter is that, as a rule, in traditional societies the social status was defined by such factors as one's nobility, estate affiliation, corporation membership, land wealth, closeness to rulers *etc.* As regards the personal celebrity, it performed a subordinate role, that is *the one of an additional differentiating factor among socially more or less equal people*. That is why the presence or lack of the

personal celebrity was not essential either for a nobleman's social status, or for the feudal lords' power and for a bourgeois' wealth – except for individual cases, which increased in number with the development of the industrial ‘modern’ market society. Finally, in the modern society a famous writer (singer, actor, sportsman *etc.*) differs from the unknown one in earnings and prestige, as did a peasant from a nobleman or an average nobleman from a duke.

With introduction of printed information carriers (books, newspapers – the prototype of modern media, engravings and other kinds of print) the number of people depending on their celebrity increased and their material possibilities grew as well.³ However, the number of people who could convert celebrity into wealth was not large. It increased with the appearance of new technical means, such as radio, cinema and especially TV as well as with the progress in education, until finally the situation has changed. The increasing role of personal celebrity led to the formation of a peculiar stratum of people connected with it. In the industrial society the celebrity became a sort of capital – a specific, symbolic one. As mentioned above, this article is devoted to the analysis of this stratum's characteristics (see also Grinin 2004, 2007).

THEORETICAL PROBLEMS OF THE ANALYSIS

Some additional notes should be made for the analysis of the given phenomenon. In particular, *personal celebrity is to be added to the list of those features that determine the major forms of inequality*. It is especially relevant for the modern societies, where a celebrity's rating (and in some sense, his or her market price) is directly connected with technical opportunities of communication means and one's access to them. Also the class of people possessing personal celebrity demands a certain name. By analogy with those, whom Berger named ‘knowledge class’ or ‘knowledge-class people’ who provided and distributed knowledge and whose main ‘capital’ was education and symbolic knowledge (see Berger 1986), the stratum of people whose occupation is connected with celebrity and whose major capital is celebrity I decided to call ‘*celebrity class*’ or ‘*people of celebrity*’ (see Grinin 2003: 220–222;

2004, 2007). But of course, this stratum can be named after Mills (2000: 59), just ‘*celebrities*’ or ‘*the professional celebrities*’.

Inequality is a key notion for the analysis of a society's social structure and is the result of the situation when people, who control public values, have an opportunity to derive benefit (Smelser 1988; see also Mayer and Buckley 1970; Kinloch 1987). Consequently, inequality is connected with different accessibility to this or that scarce resource. With respect to personal celebrity, this is the restriction of access to people's attention and an opportunity to influence them. This is a very important resource.⁴ People of celebrity treat it as if they had a natural right to access it. And their authority and prestige are supported by the public and media as if they legitimated the celebrities' right to influence the others.

Modern mass media cannot do without famous people; this is often closely connected with advertising. In other words, there is an obvious symbiosis of mass media with people of celebrity, as well as with public agents, businessmen and culture workers. However, although great possibilities of mass media to influence public were noticed rather long ago ([Ivanov and Nazarov 2000] when, not without a reason, they were called ‘the fourth power’), the similar impact of people of celebrity (in general, as a particular stratum) on public is emphasized insufficiently.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, philosophy and sociology widely witnessed discussions on the topic of ‘great persons’, ‘heroes’, ‘the role of the individual in history’ and so forth (see, *e.g.*, Carlyle 1909, 1963; Plekhanov 1940; Hook 1955; for some aspects of analyzing great individuals' influence see also Hinkle and Boskoff 1957; Abrams 1982: ch. 9; Braudy 1986).⁵ Franklin Giddings, for instance, in his theory of social structure distinguished a class of ‘great people’ in addition to ‘the living’ social classes (Komarov 1990: 64). Such people may remain unknown till their death. As Sorokin fairly pointed out, the main thing is that a group of great people actually represents not a real but an *imaginary* collectivity, as they are united neither by a common aim nor by similar social characteristics (Sorokin 1993: 282), whereas we speak just about a real collectivity of famous people, which has been formed in the last

50 years (and the great people constitute an insignificant part among them).

Perhaps, Mills was the first to point out the fact that famous people became a real social high-ranked group. In a small chapter entitled 'The Celebrities' in his fundamental book *The Power Elite* [1956] he provides a precise description of characteristics of the *social group* of 'professional celebrities' (Mills 2000: 71–93). However, this important idea has been noticed (perhaps, not appreciated or understood) neither by the commentators of Mills' works⁶ nor by the mass media students. Hitherto no serious analysis of this new social layer has been performed (especially with respect to resources possessed by this elite group). I would like to mention Jib Fowles' conclusion (1998: x), that the study of the star – of the role, its occupiers, and its functions – scarcely exists. He also quotes several opinions of the kind of film sociologists and historians. For example, Daniel Boorstin said that the literature on the history of celebrities and celebrity worship was meager (*Ibid.*). But I must confirm, of course, that there are some interesting sociological studies dedicated to the stars' phenomenon and their influence, including such aspects as the emergence of the star system in America and stars as a social phenomenon (*e.g.*, Gledhill 1991; deCordova 1991; Dyer 1992; Fowles 1998; Ndalianis 2002) and the phenomenon of celebrity itself (*e.g.*, Marshall 1997; Rojek 2001; Turner, Bonner and Marshall 2000; Turner 2004), some lines of history of fame (Braudy 1986), not to mention great deal of literature about influences of mass media and mass culture on the different groups of societies, sociology of relations inside and near the circle of stars and so on and so forth (see *e.g.*, McLuhan 1964; Butler 1991; Mackay and O'Sullivan 1999; Hills 2002; Powdermaker 1950; Rosten 1970; Ivanov and Nazarov 2000 *etc.*).

FORMATION OF THE 'PEOPLE OF CELEBRITY' STRATUM

Thus, the last decades have evidenced the formation of a noticeable and powerful stratum of people having large and even huge earnings, the major part of which is derived from the high level and wide range of their popularity. This is a very variegated group of people

that includes a part of TV and other mass communication staff (presenters, quizmasters *etc.*), cinema and theatre actors and actresses, some writers, poets, and artists, certain scientists, comics, singers, musicians, top models, couturiers and other representatives of show and advertising business and those who are engaged in fashion industry, sports, sometimes politics and official establishment (especially ex-officials supported by their former fame) and also celebrities' relatives, who exploit this fact, and just recognizable people, who have managed in this or that way to attract other people's attention. The common feature of this heterogeneous group of people is that they exploit their celebrity, converting it into appointments, money, links and benefits and sometimes even handing it down. The significance of this layer in contemporary society will be probably increasing due to the important contribution made by the growing transparency of information borders, as well as 'the mass media imperialism', that is by the expansion of mass media of the developed countries (especially the USA) to the other countries (Giddens 1993).

In addition, we observe the penetration into this stratum of people, whom celebrity, so to speak, accompanies as their additional characteristic. For instance, the representatives of aristocratic, and especially royal families (it seems sufficient here to mention Princess Diana), politicians, top businessmen, recognized specialists in different spheres *etc.*

Thus, though personal celebrity is not a new phenomenon, in the previous periods of human history one could not find such a noticeable and influential class of people, who are united socially due to their fame and opportunity to appear regularly in this or that way on TV and computer displays, in other mass media and films. Even celebrities who get renown through the old channels as the authors of bestsellers, recipients of famous scientific and literary awards, actors or singers of famous theatres, artists *etc.* have to receive powerful promotion from mass media to hold and expand celebrity. That is why they are constantly spoken about in press, they appear on TV. For example, a popular book is re-worked into a movie, a composer or a poet flashes on TV with a singer, an award recipient gives endless interviews and becomes a TV show guest, a fa-

mous lawyer gives regularly comments on different cases and so on. Besides, these people are connected with each other and with representatives of other elites through personal links. Moreover, people of celebrity begin to take up some new for them types of skill, trade and occupation though they have never got either a talent for this profession or line of work or studied it (*e.g.*, a newly-made ‘composer’ never studied music; a newly-fledged ‘singer’ has not even got a glimmer of voice *etc.*).⁷ Composers, actors, comedians, producers perform as singers, singers try themselves as composers and poets, TV presenters easily become actors and producers. These people try themselves also in politics (as, for instance, Schwarzenegger, Evdokimov⁸ *etc.*). Such a strange universality of celebrities occurs because these people become stronger more and more in the assurance that their main occupation is to be famous (for more details see Grinin 2007). By the way, this is one of the reasons for the deterioration in professional sphere of entertainment genre.⁹ Correspondingly, the prestige of celebrity is growing as well as its scarcity, the tendency to hand the status of celebrity down is increasing.

With respect to their wealth and income, people of celebrity rapidly approach top businesspersons. Nowadays, many sportsmen, artists, singers, showmen and top-models even surpass many entrepreneurs in the rate of their personal incomes, sometimes they amount to dozens or even hundred million dollars per year, for example, Tiger Woods, the golf player, the singer Beyoncé Knowles, the actor Johnny Depp *etc.* (see Miller 2008). The contract of one of the well-paid Russian hockey-players Alexey Yashin mounts to \$87.5 million (Korobotov 2004). Fifty years ago Mills pointed out that in the USA professional celebrities can be put into the same range with those of the ‘metropolitan 400’ of the central cities, that is of the richest families of America (Mills 2000: 71). Now this is a common practice in most countries.

If earlier the noble descent, the place in hierarchies, education and qualification fairly ‘attracted’ money and property, now celebrity is also quite easily converted into other benefits. A prominent person can receive fee just for advertising (interviews, memoirs, lectures *etc.*). The income of the football-player David Beckham

in 2004 amounted to £15 million. At that, football itself brought him £4.5 million, the rest was the income from advertising (Gubarev 2004). In 2007 his income significantly rose and amounted to \$50 million (*i.e.* about £27 million). But, as before he is equally good both in football and on advertising posters (Miller 2008). Moreover, sometimes advertising does not demand much effort, as for instance, in Charley Chaplin's film 'A King in New York' where the publicity agent tells about 10,000 coins for two words: 'yum-yum', which, besides, were written on the blackboard, so there was no need to learn them by heart.

THE REASONS FOR CHANGE OF THE SOCIAL ROLE OF CELEBRITY

Thus, we can remark with respect to the *professional celebrities' layer* that their activities are impossible or difficult without fame, and actually become senseless. Anyway, in social sense these people loose much if not everything without publicity. The above-mentioned points justify that among the *additional social characteristics personal celebrity becomes the major one*. One of the proofs of it is the cases, when the celebrity is obtained through notorious scandals and gives a person a large profit (the interesting case is that of Monica Lewinsky). The reasons for such transformations are evident and interrelated.¹⁰

1. The changes in technical infrastructure. The formation of this stratum is directly connected with the growing significant role of electronic media, the formation of global information space. 'Mass media provide the priority in creation of the world view, in understanding of the human nature' (Shekhovtsov 2000: 362; on the way the ideas of the world events are created see also Pironkova 2000: 28). There is an evident revolution in the patterns of information, its speed and range as well as in its influence and also some great changes in power and possibilities of mass communication, transformations in media culture and so on (see Butler 1991; Webster 1999; Meyrowitz 1999; Marvin 1999; Flichy 1999; Herman and McChesney 1999; Morley and Robins 1999). The growth of the 'people of celebrity' stratum is promoted by changes in transport and communication, allowing to move easily round

the world constantly getting in touch with lots of places in a moment, whereas any movement of 'the stars' becomes an informational 'event'.

2. *The change in material infrastructure.* The creation, processing and transfer of information have turned into a large and rapidly growing sector of economy. People of celebrity represent its very important sector; they often become joint owners or joint managers in show business. Overall, information has become a new valuable product, due to which its distributors climb the ladder and earn money.

It is necessary to point out the closest links between advertisement (a giant sector of economy) and participation of people of celebrity in it. On the one hand, the advertisers are interested in promoting goods with their help; on the other hand, one's personal celebrity can be easily converted into money through advertising.¹¹ The rationality is not believed to be the main customers' characteristic feature. Hence, it is necessary to influence people's emotions and 'neurotic reactions' (*Ibid.*); moreover, the management of human passions gains a scientific precision (Chyukaeva 2000: 75). And it is the people's idols that can easily do it. The huge circulation of show business, media, and advertising campaigns create the most powerful foundation for the quantitative growth of the people of celebrity stratum and its significance as well. It is obvious that the richer these sectors of economy will be, the more noticeable will be the celebrities' role and influence.

Bourdieu concludes that television (and market journalism in general) represents a danger to various spheres of cultural production: culture, literature, science, philosophy, law *etc.* (Maliyer 2003: 68–69). It is worth adding here that we actually observe a certain symbiosis, the cult of mass media (*e.g.*, Hills 2002; Mackay and O'Sullivan 1999) and the above-mentioned types of public consciousness. As a result, the former absorbs different elements of culture, philosophy, science, politics and law, and the latter gains informational entertaining features, which almost start to dominate. In addition, such a symbiosis multiplied by economic factors becomes the strongest foundation for the growth of influence of the people of celebrity.

Besides, mass communication actually becomes a mediator between a producer of ideas and the public (see, *e.g.*, Butler 1991). They have assumed the right to determine the significance of this or that intellectual phenomenon. And without their ‘permission’, it becomes very difficult to gain one’s professional celebrity. Bourdieu is right when pointing out that for an intellectual, who wants to be heard and read, it becomes more and more difficult to resist the growing influence of market journalism. The mechanisms of corruption penetrate deeper and deeper into the academic circles as television begins to play a central role in their action field (Maliyer 2003: 72–73). Thus, those who earlier managed with just narrow professional fame, nowadays, strive for personal celebrity.

3. *The change of the production principle and redistribution of benefits.*

a) Production of mass consumption products created a ‘mass’ society and new customers. Van den Haag fairly notes that both producers and customers behave as if they have passed through the millstones of mass production, and came out of them absolutely alike. He also points out that people as customers need to refuse their own tastes. Eventually, the production of standard things requires manufacturing of standard people (see Ashin 1971: 151–152). Sociologists notice that ‘heroes of production’ have been replaced by ‘heroes of consumption’ (*Ibid.*: 151). People of celebrity are in a way the vanguard of ‘heroes of consumption’. They do not only take part in advertising of goods but also create a stereotype of living, the standards that a person should strive for both in the main and minor.

b) Production and distribution of spiritual wealth have changed. As a result mass culture which is governed by advertisers, television, cinema, pop music and other spheres of mass communications has flourished. Such a culture cannot be imagined without celebrities. ‘The presence of stars is essential to television and cinema’s visual pleasures and economic structure’ (Butler 1991: 15).

c) Consumption of goods, in creating of which people of celebrity take part, can be considered to some extent as a ‘status’ one, that is it increases people’s status and self-esteem (for more details see Basin and Krasnov 1969).

4. *Some peculiar properties of information as a commodity*, which contribute to the increasing importance of the ‘people of celebrity’ layer.

a) Information has become a mass consumption product and it is marketed in sharply increasing volumes.

b) Increasing ways, means and opportunities to influence people. That is one of the reasons to consider mass communication as the tools to rule the society (Moles 1973: 370; see also Mass communication... 2000) and to manipulate consciousness (see, *e.g.*, Shiller 1973; Philippova 2000; see also Mills 2000; Kloby 1999). In fact, with respect to the influence of the consciousness the effect produced by celebrities in some sense even exceeds the one that was produced by the church organization in the previous periods.

c) Creation of the dependency on goods: the majority of shows, games and things of the kind resemble alcohol, the market of which led to distress of many indigenous peoples (about the issue of ‘cult’ media see, *e.g.*, Hills 2002).

5. *Change of general and professional population structure*. Daniel Bell maintained that life in the pre-industrial society was a ‘game’ between a person and nature; in the industrial society work was a ‘game’ between a person and artificial nature (machines, technical devices *etc.*); in the post-industrial society work becomes a ‘game’ between two persons. He meant the explosive growth of the service industry, education, state services and so on (Bell 1973). If one continues this way, we can say that nowadays life is a ‘game’ between a person and TV, cyberspace, people of celebrity through TV and so on. Moreover, the newest technological equipment strengthens the effect of integration of a person into some activity and the reality of activity, even if it is unreal (*e.g.*, Bolyeskina 2000).

Quite often new professions appear because of the specific and intraspecific differentiation of a wide range of occupations, which were not previously connected with playing, artistic, entertaining, charitable, communicative, cognitive and other activities (Alexandrova 2000). This fact is directly related to the problem of my article. But the stronger the professionalism of the former amateur occupations is the more intensive is the process of transformation of these people into a special social stratum.

6. *People's behavior stereotypes change* as well as the moral evaluation of entertainment and unrestrained consumption. It is connected with the appearance of significant spare time which must be occupied (Stebbins 2000). Roman plebs demanded *Panem et circenses!* (Bread and circus!). Since we have 'panem' nowadays, the need in entertainment increases. People spend more and more time with stars and celebrities (see, *e.g.*, Fowles 1998), sometimes much more than with friends and families. Also we can observe the flourishing of 'fan' culture (*e.g.*, Hills 2002).

As early as in the 1930s, Huizinga in his book *Homo Ludens* and other works arrives at the conclusion that the culture of human society has a playing character (Huizinga 1935), and that the original culture cannot exist without a certain playing content (Huizinga 1935, 1950). Nowadays we should not worry about the presence of a game in culture. On the contrary, we must worry about our culture, which is rapidly devoured by the game.

To entertain and enjoy life, to live for oneself, without missing a chance to get pleasure and so on – these hedonistic approaches are becoming a norm from the point of view of modern morals. It cannot be compared either with strict puritan moral values or simple common people sense: to work hard, to save, but not spend money, the duty is first of all, 'business before pleasure' and so on. In fact, diligence has become a negative feature and industrious people are called 'workaholics', implicitly compared with alcoholics. This trend was formed long ago and has achieved an almost irreversible character by the moment. Without ceaseless (and mostly senseless) mass consumption the modern economy will stand still. And people of celebrity play a significant role in strengthening these moral standards.

Thus, summing up some of the above-mentioned points we may understand the following. Firstly, there is a very strong alliance including group businesses (show, advertising, fashion and some others), mass communication and culture in their possibilities and huge interested motives to influence consciousness, tastes, interests, predilections *etc.* of population. People of celebrity rank a very important place among this alliance.¹² Secondly, the contemporary information and business technologies give opportuni-

ties to create a celebrity almost from anybody by means of aggressive and cunning promotion in mass media, advertising companies and so on. That is why to become a star, talent is not important; the quality, which allows becoming a member of a certain group, is much more valued because there is a system, the participation in which determines success. This system creates stars and celebrities very quickly and by means of a certain formula (see Grinin 2007 for more details). So together with mass production ‘the star factories’ were developed. ‘As a business, the networks of mass communication, publicity, and entertainment are not only the means whereby celebrities are celebrated; they also select and create celebrities for a profit’ (Mills 2000: 74).

NEW ELITE: SOME FEATURES AND MORAL CHARACTERISTICS

People of celebrity can be considered as a new elite of modern society. They reflect the spirit of this society best of all. According to the theory of elites, the division into elites and masses is an indispensable part of any complex modern society (Jary and Jary 1995; about concepts of elite see also Bottomore 1966a, 1966b).¹³ Mills considered elite as some supreme circles, whose members are advisedly selected, educated, approved and gain access to the means of influencing the society. Their career and lifestyle have common features, their unity has psychological and social bases and is supported by unofficial links; there is a certain interchangeability of people in chief roles in the hierarchies of wealth, power and fame *etc.*

The idea of such a ruling stratum implies that most of its members have similar social origins, that throughout their lives they maintain a network of informal connections, and that to some degree there is an interchangeability of position between the various hierarchies of money and power and celebrity (Mills 2000: 11–12, 15, 19 *etc.*).

All these features are characteristic for the people of celebrity stratum that I have distinguished.

It is worth adding that all elites (and celebrities in particular) possess, as some sociologists call it, a ‘social capital’ (see, *e.g.*,

Bourdieu 1984; Archer and Francis 2006: 35–36; Perrucci and Wysong 1999: 14–15; Lin 2000), that is the network of necessary and specific social ties. The creation of the new elite entails the appearance of new features of corporativity, as a result now it is not sufficient to possess talent and skills to achieve celebrity. And what is more, it is very often not obligatory nowadays to possess them to such an extent as earlier because the main thing is to get into the respective corporate group and to understand its internal demands, then it makes your name itself.¹⁴

To be celebrated, to be wealthy, to have power requires access to major institutions, for the institutional positions men occupy determine in large part their chances to have and to hold these valued experiences (Mills 2000: 11).

Corporativity also protects from outsiders and provides the inheritance of celebrity. So, only luck can help you to join it without anybody's support. Now a pretender to be a star may not have a specific talent, skill, education of a certain profession (*e.g.*, voice or hearing) but he or she should have a slim and sexy figure. And anyway to become a celebrity, a person should possess not only giant energy, but rush, sociability, grasp, orientation skill, the ability to be liked and please the others, as well as not much appreciated qualities as unscrupulousness, to play up, be crafty and shifty. Besides he or she should forget such features as modesty and shame. That is why a necessity to possess so many qualities, as well as to have art talent and skill, the sense of duty and feeling of high responsibility for the society a man of art should have, becomes with the increasing frequency not obligatory.

We can point out other features of the celebrity elite. Thus, the weekly American magazine *People* publishes an annual list of the 100 World's Most Beautiful People. There are no strangers among them – only Hollywood stars: one of them has the most beautiful eyes, the other – lips and so on (see, *e.g.*, Watts 2008). This fact proves that human qualities, in our case the beauty, are seized by the celebrities (for more details see Grinin 2007). Thus, in other elites the 'sanctity' characteristic belonged to churchmen, bravery and nobility was considered to be a characteristic of knights, wisdom was

believed to be an attribute of *literati*. Monopolization of any benefit, if not restricted, becomes an accumulative process: the publicity attracts publicity as money attracts money, they get married in their own environment, one information medium supports the others and vice versa, so people of celebrity flutter from newspapers pages to TV, then they are heard on the radio, and so on.

People of celebrity's corporations (as all the others) strive to influence society and to gain power. With respect to art, it was noticed that it rightfully acts as an institute and strives to the power as business circles, a church or school does (Duncan 1957); the same strive is largely peculiar to the media and people of celebrity.

Just as in the earlier times the benefice prescribed sanctity to a person and the title rendered aristocratism and nobility, there is an unconscious feeling that celebrity by itself 'guarantees' the outstanding qualities of a person – so celebrities are 'good' by the definition. It is believed that the more famous the person is and the more fame he has, the more dignity he has. In fact, the high rate of one's celebrity cannot actually guarantee that its owner is a worthy and outstanding person. On the contrary, quite often such people are stupid, paltry, disgusting and egoistic, and their personal merits are inversely proportional to their fame. But due to the pointed 'optical illusion' the star-struck, admirers, and fans imagine that their idol is an absolutely outstanding person, and their worship raises themselves in their own eyes. Consequently, any appearance of the star in public creates a great emotional impulse. In public opinion, people of celebrity became desired symbols of glamour, which means everything: luck, happiness, beauty, wealth, smartness, lifestyle *etc.*

Finally, they impudently begin to introduce their own 'Bohemian' morals into public consciousness often breaking its proprieties. Of course, they did not give birth to the commercialization of sex (see Anurin 2000: 90), creation of sex symbols and change of sexual moral norms (see *Ibid.*), but the truth is that 'people of celebrity' intensify and bless these processes; and it is not coincidental that such notions as 'sex-symbol' and 'sex-star' have appeared. By the way, the public outrage can pave one's way to the rows of people of celebrity (some 'shoddy girl', boasting about her

having sex with a number of famous men, by chance has a possibility to become one of the celebrities). Let alone drugs and alcohol widely spread among people of celebrity, as well as stimulants and dope among sportsmen, and so on.

NEW ELITE'S INFLUENCE ON THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY

As any new elite, 'people of celebrity' do not represent a simple addition to a wide range of social strata. The elite influences the structure of the whole society, framing it up in accordance with their interests and customs. So a lot of people, especially the youth, adopt such a credo of lax morals as well as the style of life, habits, ways of behaving, tests and so on from the stars. There is also a more direct influence on the structure of society. For instance, we can speak about the strata or social groups of star-struck people or 'fandom'. A fan is 'somebody who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV program, band; somebody who can produce reams of information of their object of fandom, and can quote their favorite lines or lyrics, chapter and verse' (Hills 2002: ix). So, almost every 'star' in variety of art, show, TV programs, fashion, sports, as well as their teams (especially in sports), creates a sort of sect around her or him. Large football clubs have dozens (and even hundreds) thousand of active fans and fan-clubs. At that point the status of a team or a pop-star's fan becomes an all-sufficient social characteristic; all together fans comprise a growing social stratum. Because of globalization and internationalization of pop-culture such an influence on the structure of the society overgrows national borders – for example, the fans of a star appear in different countries. So Alberoni (1972) groundlessly describes celebrities as a 'powerless elite'.

Besides the professional celebrities, many people become more famous than those who professionally or socially surround them. These are the people whose celebrity is only a secondary achievement (for instance, a famous businessman), or is connected with public attention to their personalities, these are various 'extreme fans', Guinness Book 'recordsmen', eccentrics, 'extremals' and so

on. Only few of them can convert their celebrity into money. On the other hand, as the celebrity becomes more attractive, more people strive for it.

HONOR MEANS BOTHERS

Lifestyle, moral norms, other corporate demands, sometimes pleasant and sometimes cumbrous, are formed within any elite. For the celebrities the latter are connected with the openness of their life, the necessity to be always public, to keep to a diet, to keep fit and so on. As for the change of the image as well as their anatomic characteristics (for instance with the help of plastic surgery and so on) they are far ahead of other elites. Default of this rule can lead to loosing of the fame 'capital', as today a person disappears from the people's consciousness if he or she is not mentioned in the media. 'Long absent, soon forgotten'. Thus, the professional and elite demands imply the necessity for the celebrities to be in the foreground, to appear in different programs and media as frequently as possible, to be open and public, to make private life open to the public, to keep terms with fans and admirers, to hide oneself behind the mask and so on. It is necessary to give constant grounds to the media to talk about you, that is why any trifles, even a toothbrush a famous person cleans the teeth with, plays a significant role. This can make up the whole event. But the most effective thing is the marriage, especially when two stars 'get' married. The divorce and other family events are, of course, of no less interest. So the more often the star gets married and divorced the better.

Long ago nations became unified culturally (see, *e.g.*, Gellner 1984). But to keep this solidarity it is necessary to have common symbols. People of celebrity fit best of all to this symbolic role, as everybody can discuss them with everyone; this topic is available for all people irrespective of their intelligence and other social and psychological characteristics. Gossips of high society, 'pulling to pieces' start playing the role of common culture, and yellow press and the stars themselves contribute to all these. If earlier the scandals could easily spoil the reputation of an actress, a singer *etc.*, now it seems almost impossible to spoil it at all.

On the contrary, the stars strive to get a scandalous advertising, and this is better than nothing. So scandals become a kind of celebrity promotion.

PEOPLE OF CELEBRITY IN RUSSIA

Russian celebrities are of course very similar to the celebrities of the USA and other countries, but Russian stars possess their own peculiarities. Because of the huge importance of protection and '*blut*' (the Russian special term meaning personal acquaintances and profitable connections, a sort of Soviet social 'capital') in the USSR, this channel of formation of people of celebrity still plays a more important role in our country than in others. Correspondingly, the qualification of famous people (especially showmen, singers and pop-musicians) is weaker, but the number of false authorities among them is greater than in other countries. In other words, the leading type of competition with the purpose to become one of the celebrities differs from that in the Western countries, besides, the favoritism when a famous person patronizes the favorite flourishes in the country.

On the other hand, the strict division into strata and social groups in the USSR, each of which was characterized with their own range of privileges and duties, the system of titles ('Honoured' national artists, honoured workers, the members of the writers, composers' and other unions) have contributed to the development of greater corporative feelings of the stars in Russia than in other countries. Besides, among some layers and guilds of Russian celebrities non-official groups are very tightly created, they are, if I may say so, a sort of peculiar 'secret' societies, which promote 'their' people in all TV shows and programs. In-group solidarity of Russian celebrities is especially reflected in their constant attempts to attach 'the child' to the world of celebrities. Correspondingly, the number of dynasties is growing as well.

Since the 'manipulation of consciousness' in the USSR has been carried out with the use of the state machine for dozens of years the role of 'brainwashing' in creating the false fame is also greater in Russia. A less important role is played in this country by such types of creating celebrities as their selection by comparing the actual qualities of the authors, actors and other compet-

ing agents; as commercial ‘support’; as an honest, objective formal evaluation (say, in the form of nominations) *etc.* However, the role of some of these forms grows, especially in publishing industry.

Note also that in Russia the heritage of the former (Soviet) times contributes to a greater (than in other countries) closeness of the celebrities to the state power (and their tighter interaction).

NOTES

¹ Yet, there is no unified approach, these attributes are introduced by different scholars in various combinations (see *e.g.*, Hinkle and Boskoff 1957; Beeghly 1989: ch. 1). One of the famous points of view belongs to Max Weber, who wrote about three major dimensions of stratification systems: wealth, prestige and power (Weber 1946, 1947, 1962; see also Sullivan 1998: 183).

² An excellent example of anthology of such a competition is given in Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* (Parallel Lives). Among many sources concerning the subject see also Goode and his references (1978). An interesting investigation is done in Randall Collins' book (Collins 1998), where a thorough analysis of the degree of fame among the philosophers of different countries for 2,500 years is performed; in addition, he analyzes the sociological background of the difference in their fame.

³ Leo Tolstoy said that he had 600,000 rubles in cash, the majority of which consisted of royalties (Tolstoy 1985: 225–226). Alexander Dumas squandered million francs, the great Russian writer Anton Chekhov had dozens of guests constantly staying in his household, Jack London built a giant mansion. Maxim Gorky's earnings significantly supported the Bolshevik party.

⁴ In fact, the idea of power necessarily implies an opportunity to influence people. According to Max Weber (1962) power is always considered as a possibility to impose one's will on others (see also Davis 1942; Smelser 1988; Kloby 1999) in different ways. Among more recent theories of power there is one that considers it as a communication medium, see, *e.g.*, Luhmann 1979.

⁵ I have already discussed this topic and analyzed various points of view (see, *e.g.*, Grinin 2008).

⁶ See, *e.g.*, Wolfe 2000; Brewer 2005; I can hardly find a word about this aspect in special sociological dictionaries that comprise articles about Mills (*e.g.*, Jary and Jary 1995).

⁷ I call this type of people of celebrity, who represent themselves simultaneously in many occupations only because public knows them, ‘multimachine-operators’. This term denotes a workman operating a number of machines simultaneously. The matter is that in the USSR during the period of Stalin's industrialization the Soviet government stimulated such ‘multimachine-operators’ pace-makers because they

went over the quota several times. For example, weavers operated on several hundreds of looms but the quality of drapery was often very bad.

⁸ A Russian showman who became the Governor of the Altai Region, but his political career cut because of an accident.

⁹ Moreover, by means of such a ‘universality’ the most popular among people of celebrity actually depreciate ‘skill capital’ of the valid professionals and *per se* appropriate it; the process somehow reminding the depreciation (and ruin) of the ‘skill capital’ of the huge number of handicraftsmen (in particular weavers) during the period of the early industrialization when businessmen by means of the appearing machinery and steam machines made all craftsmen’s skills senseless.

¹⁰ Such people who have become the focus of attention initially through no fault of their own, and through a process over which they can have very little control Monaco (1978) categorized as the ‘quasar’ and Turner *et al.* (2000) referred to as the ‘accidental celebrity’.

¹¹ Though some publicity experts also advise to be more cautious while using celebrities, testifying in favor of goods: a celebrity will be remembered, the goods forgotten (Ogilvy 1963), however not so many of advertising companies follow this rule.

¹² Richard Dyer, for instance, writes about film stars: ‘Stars are widely regarded as a vital element in the Economics of Hollywood in terms of: a) *Capital*. Stars represented as a form of capital possessed by the studios... b) *Investment*. Stars were a guarantee, or a promise, against loss of investment and even of profit on it; c) *Outlay*. Stars were a major portion of a film budget – hence their handling, in filmic terms, had to be careful and correct; d) *Market*. Stars were used to sell films, to organize market’ (Dyer 1992: 11). I suppose it completely or even more suits the show business.

¹³ Of course, there are many discussions about the term *elite*, as well as many difficulties in its usage (see, *e.g.*, Weber 1962; Lenski 1966; Bottomore 1966; Stanworth and Giddens 1974; see also Lachmann 1989: 147; Piterberg 1990: 275–276); however, despite all these differences researchers, in my opinion, do not neglect any basic qualities of elites.

¹⁴ When defining the term ‘corporate group’ I follow Max Weber, that is consider it as a social relationship which is either closed to outsiders or restricts their admission by regulations, and whose authority is enforced by the actions of specific individuals charged with this function (Weber 1962).

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