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## Possession as a Subject of Psychological Research

*The article deals with the psychological aspect of the concept of "possession" in the context of the psychological influence on the perception of this phenomenon by youth. It analyzes students' perception of the "possession" phenomenon.*

**Key words:** *possession, fanaticism, faith, religion, cacodemonomania, attitude, personal values.*

Religion starts to play an important role in the process of formation of the system of public and individual values in the history of our country nowadays. Religious priorities start a trend of their realization more often. The number of religious associations which have appeared for the last years may indicate the increased influence of religion on society. The following data of polls testifies to the place occupied by religion in the life of a modern person: 4,4% of Russian citizens consider themselves atheists, 60% – believers, and 27% – unbelievers.

Thus, understanding and assessment of the influence of religion on a person, his/her spiritual and psychological state is an important task for psychology and many other humanities.

According to S. Ozhegov religion is a form of public consciousness, a complex of mystical representations based on belief in supernatural forces and beings (gods, spirits) that become an object of worship. Similar definitions one can find in English. Thus, Webster defines religion as a faith and reverence of God which are usually expressed in a certain behavior and execution of rituals. Other definitions of religion are given in sociology. According to David Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist and philosopher, religion is a "united system of faiths and practices dealing with sacral things". Another representative of functionalism in sociology – Radcliffe-Brown – considers that religion is an element of social structure providing social unity which is necessary for survival of society. Walsh speaks about the necessity to distinguish two concepts: religion and spirituality. He writes that religion has many meanings; it means the interest in the divine and the supreme life values. Spirituality concerns the direct experience of the divine [8].

Due to the increasing role of religion the problems of the study of faith, communion and religious fanaticism become urgent.

In A.V. Romanov's work the faith analysis directly corresponds to the human doctrine – the theory of personality, personal bases of knowledge and cognition,



doctrine of truth and freedom, consciousness philosophy, the human soul doctrine.

Faith was considered as the last reason of human life at all times. The problem of faith is a problem of identification, finding and preservation of the fundamental timeless cultural values which oblivion is equivalent to dissolution in a social and individual non-existence.

Faith is an extremely personal, prelogical reason of human culture.

As L.N. Mitrokhin notes, in religious studies the most actual and urgent are fundamental traditional, "eternal" problems one of which is the faith problem.

All of this testifies to the effect that the philosophical analysis of faith is an integral part of religious studies and, first of all, philosophy of religion [10].

According to M.N. Kuznetsova, the problem of religious fanaticism has gained special relevance in modern conditions. In spite of the fact that the high level of education of population is characteristic for modern society, and the church is not the dominating social institute anymore, religious fanaticism continues to function.

Transforming the experience of religious faith up to the maximum tension and the limiting forms of expression, religious fanaticism may be shown in any religion and can be used as means of solution of various political goals, psychological problems which are determined by both social conditions, and spiritual needs of the religious person [6].

In the context of these problems the interpretation of the "possession" concept is of special interest.

Possession is a full and comprehensive submission of the person's mind to something, any thought or desire.

According to representations of some religions (including Christianity), possession is a condition when the person is under the command of one or several spirits, gods, demons, evil spirits or the devil. It is meant that such supernatural beings are often hostile to the person and usually work for the purpose of damaging. According to faiths, possession means that a supernatural essence enters the body of a person, but sometimes a source or sources of possession can govern the person distantly. Such representations have appeared as an attempt to explain various diseases of the person [7].

Hysteria and possession is a manifestation of an "evil curse". If a woman is the subject of this "evil curse", they call her hysterical woman. Such women feel in themselves the presence of strange forces; they hear voices, lose self-control; they constantly lament, squeal and wail in an animal way; they have convulsive attacks and faints. Only the knowing person owning special skills and abilities has to treat such "evil curse". The inexperienced one can easily "contract" the disease [4].

Islamic representations about demoniac possession signs (possession by shaitans, djinns) substantially differ. They think that among the symptoms of demonical possession there are inadequate behavior, hallucinations, mental pathol-



ogies; the possessed may have losses of consciousness, nightmares, loss of pain sensitivity or causeless pains. If not to take measures (not to drive the djinn out), the possessed will either go mad, or die [12].

Modern medicine considers possession a special case of mental disorders. The so-called obsessed have classical symptoms of hysteria, maniacal syndrome, psychosis, Tourette's syndrome, epilepsy, schizophrenia, and split personality [7]. In the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) possession is mentioned in paragraph F44.3 "Trance and Possession" (Trance and possession disorders); it is differentiated from schizophrenia, psychotic and organic disorders, the conditions caused by contusion or intoxication [5].

In the split personality cases the "alter ego" of 29% of the interrogated considered itself as a "demon". Besides, there is a monomania form (a paranoia version) which is called demonomania or demonopathy when the patient believes that he/she is possessed by one or several demons.

Sometimes they meet "healing" through exorcism, which, in turn, is connected with the effect of placebo and autosuggestion. Some people who considered themselves possessed, actually had narcissism or low self-esteem and behaved as "the possessed with demon" to draw attention to themselves.

There is a version that possession cannot occur without the victim's consent, at least the subconscious consent.

In psychiatry the patients suffering from multiple personality suppress the hatred that works like a magnet for evil influences which are sometimes perceived as external spirits or ghosts. Mania always speaks about any abnormal condition and if the patient thus believes in the reality of influence of spirits, he/she is not able to ignore the idea about demonic possession. A strong physical or psychological trauma can lead to such disorder; it opens a certain "window" in consciousness, giving an evil ghost an opportunity to enter through it.

In some cases of multiple personality psychiatrists found out that it is exorcism – even a simple mention of the name of God – that eliminated one or more secondary persons, and as a result the patient could become the undivided person again.

James H. Hyslop who was a head of the American Society of Psychical Research and who studied the phenomenon of possession with a spirit in the book "Contact with the Other World" (1919) wrote that if people believe in telepathy, they can enter another person distantly. And if it is so, Hyslop said, it is unlikely that bad or good ghosts are the only beings who are capable to get into the person from outside. Hyslop has also found out that people suffering from hysteria, multiple personality, dementia praecox or any other mental disorder show, as they consider, faultless signs of incursion of any incorporeal beings into their souls. He called physicians to consider it in treatment of such people.

Dr. M. Scott Peck, who calls himself "a stubborn scientist", a Harvard University graduate and psychiatrist practicing in Connecticut, has said that two his patients



suffered from possession with spirits, besides the pronounced symptoms of multiple personality. As Peck has found, these were evil ghosts actively destroying consciousness of his patients [3].

Psychiatrists call the mental disorder when the person believes that the devil has entered his/her body or the body of his/her relatives as *cacodemonomania*.

*Cacodemonomania* is a known mental disorder and it is extremely widespread.

In 1923 Freud called *cacodemonomania* the neurosis when the person creates demons by himself/herself. In his opinion demons are a result of repression of desires.

Exorcism is also known in Islam under the name of driving out of a djinn. The ceremony is very similar to the Christian one.

There is a tradition of exorcism of a dybbuk in Judaism. The dybbuk is a soul of a criminal or a reprobate which cannot leave the Earth and has to enter another person. Driving out of the dybbuk is carried out by a *saddik* (an authoritative rabbi) at presence of a *minyán* (ten Jewish male adults).

According to Christian representations there are the following signs of possession with demons: aggression, curses and maledictions of the Christian church, saints, etc., convulsions, epileptic seizures. Strange behavior, hallucinations, etc. are the symptoms of mental diseases. The possessed speak on behalf of those who possess them. They display anxiety when someone says his/her prayer, churches, etc. They demonstrate intolerance to water, especially holy water, abilities to levitation, telekinesis, teleportation, etc., possibility to speak unknown languages (the **xenoglossy** phenomenon), compulsive thoughts about suicide/murder [1].

Nowadays possession is not a rarity anymore; the quantity of spiritual diseases grows in arithmetic progression. Priest Rodion has said that demons enter the interior of a human body by the whole gaseous being just as the air enters it. An astral essence (demon, evil spirit, spirit etc.), having entered the person, does not mix with his/her soul, but stays in a body, violently possessing the person's soul and body.

When the astral essence enters the person it is not always perceptible and is not at once shown. There is a hidden possession with a spirit, i.e. the control of the spirit over the mind, when demons lead thoughts as they want, through passions (temptations, lust, and sins).

Sometimes the possessed starts to feel in himself/herself strange and alien "something"; he/she hears a voice which depresses his/her will and aspires to the leadership in the physical body regulation. Demons often speak, bark, howl, hiss, and turn the air blue through the person. At such moments the person's consciousness is most often deactivated, and the unfortunate does not know what "his/her" demon does. In other cases a person realizes himself/herself during attacks, hears the demon shouting in him/her, but can do nothing. Some people change not only a voice, but also eyes, a look.



Spirits constantly experience a sharp power hunger. For mankind it is dangerous to underestimate these powerful space astral beings, and especially their master – Gagtungra (devil).

Possession or a spiritual disease often comes to light when the person comes up to holy relics, to the miracle-working icon, when they sprinkle him/her with holy water and anoint him/her with holy oil, but it is especially shown during saying special conjuring prayers on driving out of an evil ghost (exorcism) which are always said in a Holy place, usually in a monastery [9].

In psychology it is possible to consider the “possession” phenomenon from the point of view of suggestion. For this purpose we appeal to Uznadze’s work.

Uznadze writes that if to consider the attitude as an integrating link of mental life, one of its types – the fixed attitudes creating the person’s identity – assumes the role of the property. The sense of motivation consists in that the person looks for and finds such actions which correspond to the main attitude of the person strengthened in life. Creation of the motive assumes creation of the attitude corresponding to behavior. However the content of such attitude depends on persons’ needs and, in particular, on an arsenal of the attitudes of great personal weight fixed in the past. The attitude created in a moral and sense situation easily joins the system of dispositional attitudes and needs by means of will. Behavior is developed according to such attitude. Thus, the fixed attitudes of great personal weight are a basis defining what the person will decide, to what needs people will address to create the attitude and make it actual according to a moral and sense situation. The self-image which includes the person’s most innermost values is based on the attitudes developed by the person in the course of accumulation of life experience, education and influence of the social environment. These are fixed attitudes of great personal weight. The more the conscious ego-ideal is based on such fixed attitudes, the stronger all personal components are controlled by will. This proposition makes it possible to unite the specified feature of attitudes with the concept of individuation of K.G. Jung, self-actualization of A. Maslow, etc. The essence of this process consists in the fullest, complete differentiation and harmonious combination of all aspects of the person, his/her conscious and unconscious components. In fact, Uznadze says the same things: at the level of objectivation the subject meets the problems which solving demands the choice (at a conscious level) of an action, which not only corresponds to requirements of the environment and own purposes, but also will be coordinated with the fixed attitudes of great personal weight [8].

In her work N.A. Savchenko writes that now in science it is possible to distinguish two approaches to understanding of the sense attitude essence: 1) as a form of expression of personal sense in the form of readiness for a certain activity as a whole (A.G. Asmolov, 2002); 2) as one of forming executive mechanisms of activity (D.A. Leontyev, 2003). These approaches reveal various aspects of functioning of the attitude. Sense attitude can be considered not simply as



a situational factor and not only as the structure regulating actual activity but as a structure which possesses the opportunity to leave the context of actual activity and to influence the person's complex development, acting as one of its factors. This fact is important at preadult age when active formation of the person's sense sphere is carried out. Sense attitudes, being regulatory structures of personality, are a factor of successful development of the professional. Inadequate attitudes may essentially negatively influence the person's further professional development [11].

There is a burning problem of "possession with demons" (bad and/or good) in the Chechen republic today. They discuss this subject in society and broadcast on the local mass media and the Internet. The center of Islamic medicine for exorcism and treatment by means of the methods of Islamic medicine was created in Grozny (Chechen republic).

On these grounds it is necessary to study this phenomenon and the influence of the events on an individual perception and psychological state of youth in the republic.

Having considered theoretical aspects of the problem in conformity with our hypothesis, we have carried out the research using a questionnaire and testing of the third-year and second-year students of Chechen State University.

The questionnaire consisted of 24 questions a third of which was formed by test questions, since, considering painful sharpness and tabooeness of the problem, the examinees felt psychological fear and tried to shirk direct questions, regarding them unacceptable and not harmless to their health. 100 girls and 96 young men took part in the research.

The analysis of the questionnaire showed that 62 of 100 interrogated girls believed in existence of the beyond and possession with demons, 29 of 100 interrogated girls were doubtful about the possibility of possession, and 10 girls did not believe that the phenomenon of possession with demons is real.

The analysis of 96 questionnaires of young men showed that 70 of them completely accepted the existence of the beyond and possession with demons, 23 of the respondents doubted such possibility, and 3 persons categorically did not believe in it.

According to an ethnoconfessional group all respondents class themselves as Muslims and profess Islam. The respondents consider their families religious. A special interest is caused by the answers given to some questions of the questionnaire, such as: "Is it real that each person is a subject to possession with spirits?", "Do you consider yourself possessed with evil spirits?", "Do you believe in possession with the devil?", "Is it necessary to be afraid of demons?", "Can a demon possess a believer?" In the answers we met contradictions which made it possible to draw a conclusion that this subject is personally **tabooed**. In their opinion free and open discussion of this subject can cause bad consequences in the form of possession.



We have also carried out testing of the same contingent by means of 4 techniques: "Taylor's Technique of the Measurement of Anxiety", "Shmishek's Questionnaire", "Eysenk's Technique of the Temperament Estimation", "Rotter's Technique on the Locus of Control Identification". These techniques were used for the purpose of revealing of their personal and individual features for estimation of negative influence of the information concerning the possession phenomenon.

The preliminary data of the processed techniques shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents have the choleric and melancholic types of temperament, external locus of control, heightened anxiety, demonstrative, emotive, exalted, cyclothymic type of character accentuation.

It should be noted that at the stage of adoption of ethical standards through the system of personal values the person, using all mechanisms of generation of senses, comes to "supposing" of senses – when the sense of the comprehended content reveals through a special existential act in which the subject establishes the importance of something in his/her life by own conscious and responsible decision [2].

Thus, if the level of the development of sense sphere is high, there is no predisposition to fanatical and obsessed forms of behavior.

For resistance to destructive forms of behavior in the student's environment there is a need of preventive measures seeking to develop the sense sphere of both the student's age category and senior pupils of comprehensive schools.

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