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*Prison subculture on the background of social changes  
in contemporary Poland*

(Podkultura więzienna na tle przemian społecznych we współczesnej Polsce)

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Changes that take place in society can affect many areas. Among other things, applicable norms in a given community may change. Moreover, the value system may also change. The system transformation in Poland after 1989 initiated a whole set of changes that were aimed at building a free market, creating a civil society and democratization. The consequence of the above was a violent social transformation connected, for instance, with the change of social mentality. The process of social evolution and the associated development of new meanings and values that constitute a model of behaviors relevant to society are still taking place in Poland. Despite the isolative character of the penal institution, social evolution has also arrived there.

The period of systemic transformation initiated a number of changes that included Polish penitentiary. Back then the informal norms of the second life began to be shaped by persons associated with organized crime, which constituted a kind of product of social changes of that period.

Currently in Poland, organized crime consists to a certain extent of people originating from football hooliganism environment. Nevertheless, the above hypothesis is only justified if it is accompanied by the conviction of the multidimensional aspect of this phenomenon.

It is vital to learn about the specific "lifestyle" of football hooligans, the consequence of which in the broad sense is the absolute maintenance of group identity in all conditions. Thus, this peculiar "lifestyle", as a result of committed crimes, then imposed sentences, can be transferred for the "prison walls", and there, while maintaining group identity, will initiate a strong informal group.

Therefore, this peculiar "football fan lifestyle" can be a distinct and strong barrier to the purpose of imprisonment which was clearly indicated in art. 67 § 1 of the Executive Penal Code of June 6, 1997 (Journal of Laws No. 90, item 557, as amended) and which falls within the penological concept defined in the criminal law doctrine as special specific prevention. The punishment should make the convict aware of the social harmfulness of the act committed by them, and thus strengthen the sense of responsibility and

shape socially desirable attitudes. In addition, the basic principle of imprisonment is the system of free progression, which consists in an individualized way of influencing the convicts. In turn, the "lifestyle" of football hooligans and group identity, which in the isolation conditions can still be maintained, may in fact bring counter-productive effects, and the instrumental attitude of people coming from this environment to educational influences will make them indifferent. In the same manner, reference should be made to legal regulations, and those concerning penitentiary influences mentioned in art. 2 para. 2 point 1 of the Act of 9 April 2010 on the Prison Service (Journal of Laws of 2010, No. 79, item 523, as amended).

The main aim of the paper is to search for the relationship between the claim that as a result of social changes in Poland, the prison subculture norms have lost value and the research hypothesis claiming that due to the aforementioned transformations, the prison subculture, through football hooligans, has taken a new form, not without a destructive influence on educational and rehabilitation processes, and thus can constitute a strong barrier to the purpose of the penalty of imprisonment and thus for the expected re-adaptation and social reintegration.

The group identity of football hooligans transferred to penitentiary units may result in the emergence of a new strong informal group that will occupy a central position in informal prison stratification. At present, it is also argued that free-market relations strongly affect the prison subculture. The cult of money, which permeated the prison subculture, is claimed openly. At the same time, one cannot forget about the peculiar renaissance of compatriot relations or the drug market operating within penitentiary units. In addition, it is openly said that drugs are a good for which you can buy other convicts.

Football hooligans have high predispositions to fill the gap of inmates using prison slang, which are less and less numerous. First of all, among football hooligans, we can distinguish a group of people who create a network of organized crime. In fact, since the period of political transformation in Poland, convicts from organized crime structures have occupied an influential position in informal prison stratification, thus

shaping the prison subculture. In addition, even if we began to dispute about the scale of the phenomenon of people creating structures of organized crime coming from the football fandom environment, saying that football hooligans create numerous gangs cultivating aggression and violence should not be controversial. This situation may fill the fear of many convicts who, for their own safety, will establish proper relations with the convicted hooligan so as not to expose themselves to their fellow hooligans outside prison. Adequate situation may be shaped in the relations between the convicted hooligan and the penitentiary staff. In addition, football hooligans strongly support themselves both outside prison and in penitentiary conditions. Ergo, this attitude refers to the aforementioned relations between compatriots. At the same time, the condition for building these strong relations created for the needs of penitentiary conditions is to get rid of mutual libertarian animosities resulting from cheering on various football teams. This is supported by the fact that in libertarian conditions hooligans can unite against the common enemy, which is the police. Secondly, this environment, apart from the mental support, has financial support, which, with the long-term free market relations in penitentiary units, is crucial because it opens the path to the very top of the prison hierarchy. It should also be mentioned that the environment of football hooligans in recent years is combined with groups associated with drug trafficking or legal highs, and these substances are extremely valuable and desirable commodities in prison. Thus, easy access to these substances to imprisoned hooligans may allow them to control other convicts. Thirdly, football hooligans are usually juvenile, and these have always put the greatest pressure on the second life of prison. Finally, the informal rules of football hooligans - the so-called principles of the righteous man, that are their way of life, are so similar to the rules that for years shaped the prison slang environment, that one can hypothesize that football hooligans are today's prison slang users, and their domination in penitentiary reality is only a matter of time.

The history of prison in Poland indicates that belonging to the prison subculture in principle constituted an obligatory barrier to all types of penitentiary interactions. This problem was noticed already in the interwar

period. Then the self-proclaimed justice (*dintojra*) was adopted for penitentiary conditions, becoming the basis for the creation of a prison informal code. Also, this code was strictly related to prison reality. The 1960s to 1989 was the time when the users of prison slang occupied the top of the prison hierarchy, and through their laws and principles decided who is equal and who is more equal in the prison. In addition, the prison slang was a kind of reaction to the Polish People's Republic's prison regime. What was not possible outside prison, became possible in prison. Political transformation in Poland and related social changes found its reflection in the penitentiary reality. This period reflects the great influence a criminal subculture can have on the second life of a prison. Incidentally, the criminal subculture of that period began to shape relationships in informal groups. A group of convicts connected with organized crime has appeared in criminal institutions. In fact, the prison slang users in penitentiary units were also the largest informal group in the discussed period, however, the cult of money which grew more and more powerful, revealed their philosophy created by the Polish People's Republic's system. In penitentiary institutions, as well as outside prison, the one who had money and access to numerous goods was in charge. What is more, the influence of the criminal subculture and the associated unofficial domination of convicts of organized crime structures clearly weakened the importance of norms related to the dirty philosophy of prison slang users.

Currently, through football hooligans, there is an attempt to transfer street rules to penitentiary grounds, where free market relations clearly affect the prison subculture from a long time. It should be noted that over the last years there has been a marked change in symbols and gestures at Polish stadiums. Racist symbolism and related gestures have given way to slogans intended to support imprisoned people who come from football hooligans' environment. This new stadium symbolism may herald the beginning of changes in informal prison stratification, in which the position of the convicted person (or group of convicts) will be defined by the support of persons remaining free.

In addition, a particular group of football hooligans actually creates structures of organized crime, and this further increases their rank in the penitentiary environment. In this case, the criminal subculture, in which these people are involved, affects the prison subculture with increased strength. Furthermore, football hooligans are mainly young people from so-called risk groups. Achieving a quick profit through participation in organized crime structures may arouse great interest among these young people. There will be a whole spectrum of opportunities for criminal acts for them. It is worth adding that football hooligans through action in groups (gangs) are an ideal ground for the formation of criminal structures. As a result, in penitentiary units due to the caliber of committed offenses, there may be more and more young people from football hooligans' environment in the near future. *Nota bene*, currently, in detention centers and prisons, juvenile offenders are the group that strictly obeys the rules and norms of the prison subculture. In addition, the interest in participating in the prison subculture among young people may be due to the fact that for a large number of convicts, a matter of priority is "getting a foot in the door" in the penitentiary reality. It is worth adding that the prison subculture of the juvenile convicts is the most brutal, and the penitentiary social rehabilitation of this group of convicts, which, moreover, was already confirmed in the so-called experiment in Szczypiorno, is a big challenge. What is more, this group of convicts transferred informal norms into prison, which gave rise to the libertarian subculture of the git-men subculture, and which then turned into a subculture of scarf-men who today are called football hooligans. If however, to this young determined person we will add the ideology of the righteous man, whose historical sources should be sought, among others, in the subculture of git-men and we will place it in organized crime structures, we will obtain a profile of a convict who will occupy an influential position in informal penitentiary stratification. A convict with such a profile will fit perfectly into free-market prison relationships, and his libertarian philosophy, which *de facto* shapes the informal norms of the current criminal subculture, will fundamentally affect penitentiary reality. It is enough to add that the convict, who is also a successor to the subculture of

git-men, has a predisposition for quick assimilation to the prison conditions and to the requirements imposed on him by the prison subculture. Ergo, in this case, the process of prizonization can occur extremely rapidly. This is due to the fact that the criminal subculture norms of which the hooligan is the disposer were historically shaped to some extent by an informal prison code. Thus, informal prison standards may be seen by football hooligans as an analogy of the principles of a righteous man. What's more, with the free market relations prevailing in penitentiary units and the lack of the old prison slang, "fanatical hooligans", persons belonging to organized crime structures and the juvenile amongst them, can restore "rigid" and imposed by their own ideology rules that in the near future will cause a kind of informal prison standards renaissance, and these norms will, beyond any doubt, constitute a strong barrier to the purpose of the penalty of imprisonment and thus for the expected re-adaptation and social reintegration.

The research for this thesis was carried out in the Penal Institution in Czerwony Bór, Prison No. 2 in Łódź, Prison in Garbolin, the Investigation Detention Center in Piotrków Trybunalski and the External Branch in Golecze. The research sample in these studies was random and limited to the examination of a "wide range" of persons deprived of their liberty. Participants in the survey were both convicts serving the first time and penitentiary recidivists. The subject of the research, due to the potential impact of hooliganism on other persons deprived of their liberty, was to determine whether in penitentiary units there are ones experiencing psychological predispositions for integration with people with sports interests among these people. The purpose of the research was to enable the fullest picture possible of the "sports interests" of imprisoned persons, starting from their aetiology, to the favored sport discipline, ending with establishing the potential for a group identity among them, which is in fact a kind of social identity.

The results of statistical tests carried out indicated that: football was very popular among convicted persons; martial arts are the sport discipline most often indicated after football; and the aspects of supporting in the form



of the opportunity to meet new people and solidarity, as well as create community with other supporters, which are primarily important for people in the age group up to 30 years have been demonstrated by more than half of this age group, it seems that it is right to say that in penitentiary units people originating from football hooligan environment can be an attractive reference group for people who are not strictly from this environment but because of their psychological predispositions for integration with people with sports interests in combination with a specific passion for sport can be tendencies to create informal structures in isolation conditions. In addition, it should be pointed out that the aforementioned aspects of supporting and conditioning the emergence of a group identity among people with sports interests in the age group of 31 - 40 have been indicated as relevant by nearly half of this population of convicts. It is worth noting that this is, in fact, the largest group of people detained in penitentiary units. Nevertheless, people originating from football hooliganism are usually people up to 30 years old, and the number of people who actually come from this environment and who took part in the survey is not really known. At the same time, the adoption by people with psychological predispositions to integrate with people with sports interests into the group identity of people from the football hooligan community in penitentiary units may be a strong barrier to broadly understood educational processes. Due to strong external support (from outside prison) for people deriving from hooligan environment who remain in the conditions of prison isolation, the deprivation of needs may appear to them as relatively less severe than to the other prisoners remaining in isolation. Therefore, persons deprived of their liberty who are not strictly related to the football hooliganism can involuntarily display the initiative of creating informal structures with these people. A strong and cohesive informal group is a counterweight in prison isolation, and at the same time a barrier to all types of penitentiary interactions aimed at at least juridical improvement of a convict. What is more, proper re-adaptation and reintegration of an isolated person, who maintains his libertarian identity under penitentiary conditions, is in question. The maintenance of a criminal or, more broadly, a deviant group identity leads to a lack of conviction. Traits



that made it easier for him to enter the path of crime will lead to an automatic return to behavior of social pathology.

It should be remembered, however, that the penitentiary environment, which will be deprived of effective forms of educational influence, will become a strictly deforming and pathologizing environment, and the growing problems related to, inter alia, the "new prison subculture", may turn out to be irreversible.

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