EASTERN-EUROPEAN 1968s?

Throughout this paper, I shall focus on explaining the protests of 1968 in Eastern and Central Europe. Before presenting the existing debate, I will clarify that two main concepts compete to define the same large cultural movement. Therefore, on the first level, I will present the working concepts like the 'long 1968' and 'counterculture.'

After explaining the key terms, I will focus on how historiography dealt with understanding the protests in Eastern and Central European of 1968. I want to present the existing work on the reception of 1968 heritage in East-Central Europe and to distinguish between different narratives. Another aim is to find to what extent one can speak about 'transnational ideas' and 'transnational biographies.' More clearly, to what extent can we talk about 1968 as a transnational movement? For the protesters themselves, was it a unitary movement or a fragmented one? On the same logic, do contemporary scholars deal with an 'imagined solidarity' or a real transnational case?

I shall argue that two main directions compete in order to explain the rebellions around 1960s in Eastern and Central Europe. On the one hand, some researchers consider that the political protests from East Central Europe are a *diffusion* from Western Europe. Others, by taking into consideration Prague Spring or other movements born in Eastern and Central Europe, consider that 1968 protests are *independent*, *invented* phenomena, that cannot be compared

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in a larger framework and which were not influenced by other movements. I will argue that we deal rather with a synthesis between *diffusion* and *evolution*.

COMPETING CONCEPTS: COUNTERCULTURE VS. 1968

Before analyzing how historiography deals with the connections and comparisons between youth movements of the 1960s, I shall briefly focus on properly defining the terms. In other words, two main concepts compete to define the rebellions against Establishment in the late 1960s. One is 'counterculture,' the other '68.' The terms are not disjunctive, sometimes they even overlap, but some particularities must be considered.

COUNTERCULTURE

The term 'counterculture' was coined by Theodore Roszak by joining two words: 'counter' and 'culture.' While the term 'culture' is far too complex to be analyzed in such a paper, the word 'counter-' worths some considerations. Initially, it meant in Old French a military maneuver (countre) and from the 16th century was used as an adverb, as well as an adjective in Middle English in order to define an opposition. By using this juxtaposition, Roszak defined counterculture as the social, cultural and literary phenomenon which appeared in the United States after the Second World War. The American scholar started his argumentation by stating that the intellectual sources for the new generation were very eclectic: Hermann Hesse, Zen Buddhism, Henry David Thoreau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler, Herbert Marcuse, Karl Marx and Mao. Thereby, he asked himself what could have been the common denominator of these vast cultural references that shaped a new generation. The answer, according to Roszak, by basing his argument on Karl Marx and Herbert Marcuse, is simple: all of them are against technology, praise nature and turn their back to the modernist project (Roszak 1969: 13) Herbert Marcuse considered that counterculture as well it is a youth movement against the 'affluent society' (in Galbraith's terms), which wants to contest all the existing values:

there is a common ground between the American movement and the French movement. It is a total protest, not only against specific evils and against specific short-comings, but at the same time, a protest against the entire system of values, against the system of objectives, against the entire system of performances required and practiced in the established society. (Marcuse 2004: 44)

This definition rather focuses on the anti-authority aspect of counterculture than on its psychedelic dimension. Even though Marcuse spotted the similarities between youngsters from the United States, France, or Czechoslovakia, he focused very little on analyzing the social particularities of each of the countries. His definition takes as main referential point the United States.

Jeremi Suri offers another explanation of counterculture. In a study from 2013, he presents this phenomenon as the first moment in history when protestors are self-critical about their actions. Even though the Beats, the surrealists, Dadaists and other radical movements were also against the system, intelligentsia was not overtly politically threatening the power. As Suri argues, the ways of contesting the system changed radically after 1960s. He uses the argument of the return of the Conservatives in early 1970s, as a backlash for New Left: "Dissent from within the mainstream shook the foundations of political power, but it did not bring the walls tumbling down. Quite the contrary, widespread protests elicited new acts of political reinforcements by leaders across the world, often in collaboration with one another. This is the paradox of stability in the late 1960s amidst so much internal unrest: not a single major government was overthrown by protesters in 1968 (Suri 2007: 99). The argument is totally valid. Yet, Suri considers not Vietnam, capitalism or communism as the main culpable for the revolts. The main actor that influenced the dynamics of 1968 protests is the Cold War itself:

these popular frustrations were not only a reaction to the Cold War. They were inspired by Cold War rhetoric and encouraged by Cold War leaders—often the same figures the counterculture would later attack. (Suri 2007: 100)

By reading the events from this perspective, the main argument is that Vietnam war, Black Power movements, Prague Spring and then, the Soviet intervention, Rudi Dutschke's speeches,

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the LSD experiments and Herbert Marcuse's theories, as well as antinuclear protests, were all directly opposing Cold War:

Cold War ideas, resources, and institutions made the counterculture. The counterculture, in turn, unmade these ideas, resources, and institutions. (Suri 2007: 112)

To a large extent, the youth unrests from the late 1960s were a direct product of Cold War. One has to be cautious, though, in asserting that counterculture was indeed the decisive factor that changed the evolution of Cold War, as Suri argues. Thus, by comparing Roszak with Suri's position about the roots of the 1960s movement, one can observe that indeed, counterculture was born from and as a reaction against Cold War. From a larger perspective, the reaction against technocracy and „high modernism" is still more used in the field in order to define this large movement. New Left movements from Western Europe cannot be explained as a simple result of the Cold War because the dialectic is much more complicated. The fight can be directed against the Soviet Establishment, against capitalist one, against a particular hegemony, depending on the regional context.

1968 AND 'THE LONG 1968'

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, especially in France, but in Italy or Germany as well, the term '1968' or even 'Mai '68' recurrently replaces 'counterculture.' While American historiography sees this movement as a long phenomenon, the French historiography understands the youthful unrests as a series of events that culminate with May 1968. It is interesting to spot one aspect: when referring to the heritage of 1968, Dreyfus-Armand, Zancarini-Fournel and Levy use the phrase 'the years of 1968' rather than its American terminological equivalent 'counterculture.' (Dreyfus-Armand, Levy, Zancarini-Fournel 2000: 72, Aron 1968, le Goff 1998). Through the term '1968' in France or in Germany, historians define the political ideas that were changed and exchanged across the continent (Suri 2007, Klimke, Sharloth 2008). For instance, Jan-Werner Müller considers that the only concrete factor of conglomerating the global movement was the Vietnam war. However, each country had its particular

protest against other conflicts: in France against the Algerian War, in West Germany against the experience with the Iranian Shah, while in Czechoslovakia with the Soviet invasion (Tismăneanu 2011: 75). The three 'M's were the main intellectual references: Marx, Mao and Marcuse. Retrospectively, conservative historians view '68 as a hedonist movement, while others as a return to anarchism, a progressive detachment from modernism or a moment infused with strong political romanticism (Tismăneanu 2011: 92–94). These approaches, done mostly on a macro-scale, tend to discuss 1960s in global or even transnational context. However, looking for commonalities had its limits: the protests that happened in 1960s had in some cases different aims, even though they were done by the same generation.

Moreover, the use of the term '1968' has its limits: it covers only the immediate chronological surroundings of 1968. Carl Boggs main critique about using this terminology is that through it, one understands the youthful unrests as a self-emerging point, not influenced so much by Student for Democratic Society or other similar movements from early 1960s (Boggs 1995: 331–55).

When dealing with this phenomenon, Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth prefer to extend the research from 1956 to 1977 through a concept which they name 'the long 1960s.' Thus, they explain a larger context in Eastern and Central Europe, which began with the Khrushchev's Speech and ended with Charta 77 (Klimke, Sharloth 2008: 3). Frederic Jameson also argues that 1968 must be understood as a period stretching from 1958 until 1972/1973. His argument is that during this period, structuralism met its crises. The interest in Sartre, Lukács and Croce started to fade away, while new philosophical figures, such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze entered into arena. Frederic Jameson considers that for the first time, the focus is on the gender, ethnic, class, race marginals, which were understood for the first time as 'proper human beings.' (Klimke, Sharloth 2008). As well, another colossal influence was the Sino-Soviet split, followed by a strong interest in the academia in various Maoist doctrines (Jameson 1984: 188–201). The youth movements fade away in 1973–1974, according to Frederic Jameson.

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Even though this theoretician primarily focuses on cultural and intellectual history rather on key-events, his plea for considering 1958–1974 as a period is convincing. His argument is based mostly by using history of philosophy references, but can be extrapolated to other forms of art as well, because of the close-connection between various artistic discourses. Again, one can spot that events of 1968 could not be realized without properly understanding their immediate roots and aftermaths. The use of the reference to 1968 is understandable, as Michael Watts also defends, due to its climacteric aspect. Arthur Marwick as well defends 1968 as a period and shall not focus at all on a singular year:

I do feel that the years 1958 to 1974 form a period, as self-contained as a period can ever be. (Suri 2007: 309)

One can spot a terminological confusion between three main concepts which broadly cover the same large phenomenon: '1968,' 'the long 1968' and 'counterculture.' While '1968' defines the protests, street actions and concrete activities (as Mai 1968, the Prague Spring, Prague Invasion—mainly open, street protests), the 'long 1968' focuses on the context that generated and made possible actions of 1968. An equally important concept is 'counterculture' which focuses on the cultural, literary and social innovations that did not necessarily occur in 1968 (as for instance Woodstock '69). Therefore, the open question is: how can one use correctly and non-abusive the term that defines the best the youthful unrests of the 1960s and particularly, but not only, 1968?

THE MAIN CATEGORIES

When we name a concept does not necessarily mean that we offer a historical understanding to it. Simply choosing '1968' instead of 'counterculture' does not solve the issue at all. Therefore, in order to make the research of this large and complex phenomenon more accessible, a few scholars focused on dividing it into several thematic categories. In 1990, Gil Delannoi proposed two dimensions of the 1960s phenomenon: the aesthetical adventure and the political dimension. The aesthetic part is for him: "counter-cultural, aesthetical, ecological, cosmic, passive, artisanal,

non-violent and encourages the adventure and experimentation. Its model is the autarchic community" (Delannoi 1991: 98). In other words, he refers to the hippie heritage through the aesthetic part. The political dimension is "militant, politically active, internationalist, active, sometimes violent, meets a strong hierarchy, refers to theoretical texts, it links itself to a revolutionary class. Its model is the guerilla" (Delannoi 1991: 101). Through the second part, he understands the New Left heritage. This distinction, loosely related to Theodore Roszak's theory, makes for the first time a distinction between music and politics, between parallel actions that happened during the same context. However, other events, as Prague Spring, cannot be simply explained through this vague conceptualization.

Therefore, it is imperative to look at Paul Berman's works about the generation of 1968. For the American editor and journalist, there were not one, but four revolutions in the 1960s, each with its own distinctive features. The first one was against the middle-class customs. For him, after 1960s, themes such as LGBTQ, abortion or sexuality were much more openly discussed. Abortion or divorce were introduced for the first time in countries like Italy. However, there is a limit for this 'revolution.' Some critiques consider that European counterculture was much more patriarchal and sexually conservative than expected. This 'revolution' also meets its limits in Eastern and Central Europe, where the impact on sexuality was much smaller than in the United States, for instance.

The second revolution dealt primarily with religion. On one hand, various youth 'congregations,' start a new spiritual project, being influenced by Buddhism, Beat poetry, transcendentalism and psychedelia (Berman 1997: 8). This is particularly present in Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco,but with its fallouts across the whole world. On the other hand, another spiritual revolution took place inside of the Catholic Church. The high Vatican circles (through the Second Vatican Council), but also regular priests, were eager to reform the rituals and dogmas. Besides this ecclesial movement, more radical forms emerged. Among the most widespread examples are the *liberation theology* in South America or Isolotto commune from Florence, which was the first Catholic Commune that rejected hierarchism (Berman 1997: 9).

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The third revolution was against the Western capitalism. It used a plethora of New Left references, starting from Herbert Marcuse to Mao's *Red Book*, from Guy Debord to Marshall McLuhan. War in Vietnam was considered the common issue and many youth supported The National Liberation Front (Berman 1997: 8). In Italy, West Germany or Japan, this revolution ended in the early 1970s with urban guerilla groups as Red Fraction Army, Red Brigades or The Japanese Red Army (Berman 1997: 96). Che Guevara was the main model and many artists, as well as musicians, started to be more and more interested in translating the songs about Che and about the 'liberation movement.'

Lastly, another revolution occurred, this time in Eastern Europe, against the Stalinist heritage. This category, named by Berman 'revisionists,' was a new generation of intellectuals and artists, whose main critic was that their countries lost Communist ideals under the bureaucracy, censors and gulag. While for the third category the main sources were Marcuse, Debord or McLuhan, Paul Berman states that the main sources for the revolutionaries belonging to the fourth category were the early texts of Karl Marx, Hegel, Lenin, Antonio Gramsci and Leo Trotsky (Berman 1997: 221). Paul Berman points out clearly that the third and fourth revolutions had totally different aims:

One was spreading the totalitarianism of Europe to the former colonies; the other was undermining the totalitarianism of Europe. One was peaking; the other, just getting under way (Berman 1997: 10).

It is highly important to take into consideration both of the categories proposed by Gil Delannoi—political and aesthetical—when analyzing this large phenomenon. While for the aesthetic dimension, one can easily spot a diffusion of ideas, especially from the Anglo-American space (through rock music), the situation becomes much more complicated when talking about the political heritage. Indeed, popular culture, music, leisure and everyday life met a heavy change after 1960s. Without any doubt, the new music mingled with the existing heritage, as with the existing folklore or other local musical forms. However, one of the largest mutations occured in the political field, where new forms of protests emerged. For the sake of organising this apparent large

and slippery phenomenon, the four categories proposed by Paul Berman are very helpful. However, in some cases, some elements not clearly fit in only one case.

One of these examples is pointed by Paul Berman himself. He brings the example of the concerts by Akord Klub at Reduta Theater, near Wenceslas Square in Prague. For him, these were situated between a political and artistical act because people did not only shouted a political manifesto, but expressed artistically. (Berman 1997: 232, Kusin 2002). As well, Jan-Werner Muller's brings the example of the Situationnistes from France, which were also imagining another society, but using many different poetic languages (Tismăneanu 2011: 192). Thus, such a phenomenon has clearly political aims, but without being a 'psychedelic' revolution. At the same time, they clearly had elements from both of the categories. There is another example as well: other musicians from various countries from East-Central Europe use political references, but in a very hidden, subversive way (what in Romanian was called șopârla[1]) either against the Communist Establishment, or against the Vietnam War. This has other meanings on the other side of the Iron Courtain as well. As a direct influence from Bob Dylan's protest songs, groups as Gerilla együttes from Hungary sing Communist songs. This action, to sing against the Vietnam War, has a totally different meaning in the countries from the Warsaw Pact. Already the Establishment uses a similar rhetoric in order to accuse the United States.[2] The particular situation of this group cannot simply be included in one of the categories presented by Gil Delannoi or Paul Berman.

Even by categorizing such a ample phenomenon, one can see that regional situations vary considerably. Therefore, by using either Berman or Delannoi's categories, one risks to have only a global simplistic approach. Of course, these categories can offer a better distinction between parallel movements such as the emancipation

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1. In English, it means *a lizard*. It refers to lyrics or texts which, to a certain extent were against the system, but not explicitly enough to be pointed out by censorship.
2. This can be particularly seen in the cultural magazines, as *Secolul 20*. Many thematic numbers focus either on Vietnam War attrocities, or particularly present Vietnam literature. As well, the Romanian journal *Scinteia* presents the news about the Vietnam War, by constantly accusing the Americans.

of Afro-Americans, the LSD experiments, and the Prague Spring. Yet, only by applying this pattern we imply that the phenomena from 1960s are simply a diffusion from the United States/ Western World to Eastern and Central Europe, Maghreb, Japan or South America.

It was far more complicated to analyze the students and youth movements against the Establishment for the Eastern and Central European case. Historians had to take into account many different parameters, such as regional and national differences, strong political variations, as well as the presence/or absence of written materials. The youthful unrests from 1960s were radically different, due to strong censorship. However, there were also moments of détente, through which many cultural products could be imported, information passed much easier over the Iron Curtain. That means the cultural exchanges between intellectuals in the Soviet Union and East-Central European countries were not at all isolated from West in what concerns music, film-making or literature (Péteri 2006). Gyorgy Peteri states that in many cases, we deal with a strong form of communication between the countries from East and West Europe. Indeed, after 1960s, the information about counterculture was much more present in East-Central Europe. Therefore, when using the concept of 'Nylon Curtain,' one can easily understand the conditions that made in 1968 various student movements possible.

However, to what extent is it possible to speak about a unified, transnational global movement? The most pregnant dilemma is whether, the political aspect of counterculture/1968 heritage was indeed a transnational movement. The mentioned studies focus on the dynamics between Communist states and counterculture groups, which has its own strong particularities in Eastern and Central Europe. Thus, the open question is: to what extent can one assert that the American counterculture was a diffusion from Western World? When adaptation stops and adaptation begins?

Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth's *1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism* explains the dynamics of the late 1960s in various countries. In comparison with previous works, the book takes also into account the regional variation, as well as the political framework. On a first level, the authors offer a comparative

perspective for each of the country, by focusing on several main points: social and political framework of the country, organizational and social structure of the protest movement, key events, tactics of protests and later narratives about these events. Afterwards, a focused attention is drawn on the transnational relations and networks, particularly on terrorism, environmental movement, narratives of democratization and later legacies. Compared with Gerd Reiner-Horn and Padraic Kenney, this approach offers a much more complex understanding in what concerns the transnational relations not only between Eastern and Western Europe, but also the exchange of ideas within the same ideological bloc. This book, as well as the following collective-study, entitled *Between Prague Spring and French May*, favors the research and focus on personal and institutional networks that led to a permanent diffusion of ideas (Klimke, Sharloth 2011). The evolutionist hypothesis is preferred as an explanation for this movement, in this case.

The next historiographical milestone for this subject is entitled *Promises of 1968*, coordinated by Vladimir Tismăneanu. It builds its argument on Reiner Horn and Padraic Kenney's assumption that 1968 was a transnational moment of revolt. In contrast with the previous works, this study rather focuses on the legacy of this moment than on the institutional and social mechanisms. The core statement of *Promises of 1968* is that Communist party met a strong crisis after the moment of 1968. In the Soviet bloc, 1968 brought the 'death of revisionism' (according to Michnik or Tony Judt). The demands of the Communist 'liberals' were not fulfilled and slowly, the reformers became dissidents. Events such as the Prague Spring, Polish March, Belgrade protests from April 1968, the Croatian Spring of 1970–1971, the self-immolation of Jan Palach shaked the Stalinist foundations of the Eastern bloc, but without managing to offer a viable political alternative (Tismăneanu 2011: 3). The examples throughout this book emphasize that 1968 was a starting point for a new type of protesting in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, through civic initiatives (Tismăneanu 2011: 10). 1968 also expresses a rejection of the Yalta system by the youth and rebels, even though the leaders of their countries continued this framework. Any pluralist direction was crushed or strongly rejected. Three main centrifugal directions

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emerged in the late 1960s in the 'communist commonwealth': the Warsaw Pact (Romania refusing to invade Czechoslovakia), Sino-Soviet split and the Western Communist parties which try to reaffirm their democratic socialism (Tismăneanu 2011: 13). Obviously, Brezhnev did not tolerate the centrifugal directions of the other State leaders.

In contrast with Kenney and Tismăneanu, and along with Klimke's collective volume, Kostis Kornetis, McAdam and Deter Rucht propose another theory: the events were actually independent and appeared roughly at the same time due to global political tensions (McAdam, Rucht 1993: 56–74). Seen from a Leftist perspective, 1968 was the first protest against a 'globalised capitalist world.' While this cause is obvious for the French, West German or American situation, for Eastern and Central European, as well as Spanish, Greek or Italian, it was not necessarily the case. Therefore, one has also to take into consideration an evolution-ist hypothesis as well. Maybe the sources of 1968 were internal rather than external. In this regard, simply accusing capitalist world seems redundant. However, when focusing on the modality of acknowledging new protests, Kornetis makes an undeniable point: for the first time in history, mass-media had a crucial role in defining their common identity:

media created transnational and intercultural linkages, giving the 1968ers the impression that they were part of a united political front (Fink, Gassert, Junker 1998: 3–4).

The academic work that dealt with 1968 from a transnational approach focused, with a certain success, on large ideas which were transferred from both sides of the 'Nylon Curtain.' However, as Klimke and Scharloth demonstrate, regional situations can be far more different than the global picture which Kornetis offers us. Therefore, some questions emerge: in the case of Eastern and Central Europe, do we witness to a transfer of know-how about protests from Western Europe to Eastern Europe (diffu-sion), a protest that emerged in different countries (evolution) or a synthesis? By taking into consideration all the factors, probably, we deal with a complex phenomenon, which was at first influenced by Western ideas and movements, as well

as practices (such as *sit-in,* radically different from what was happening in the 1950), but at the same time, which had its own trajectory. In some cases, the protests were directed against the Establishment, against the Communist regimes, but in other cases, had different aims.

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