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## **The Pre-History of the Hungarian and Romanian 1968ers**

**[Geneza węgierskiego i rumuńskiego pokolenia 1968]**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the Romanian and Hungarian youth of the late 1960s. More specifically, it aims at understanding how their childhood experiences differed from those of their counterparts in the West and even in other Soviet Bloc countries, and how this influenced their tactics of opposition. The oral history interviews present a more complex picture than one of a simple generation gap between the 1968ers and their parents. In some cases, the former challenge the authority of their parents, while in others they continue their struggle.

### **Keywords**

'68er generation, hippie, Eastern European counterculture, dissent

### **Słowa kluczowe**

pokolenie '68, hippis, kontrkultura w Europie Wschodniej, sprzeciw wobec reżimu



### The Need for Oral History

The youth movements of the late 1960s have been the focus of a range of different interpretations. “Traditionally” historians have focused on the national perspective in order to explain the student revolts. In my paper, I intend on focusing on various reactions against the communist establishment in Romania and Hungary around the late 1960s, from rock music to New Leftism or other artistic forms. The main agents are musicians, intellectuals, poets, and artists who were teenagers in the late 1960s. I will use oral history in order to understand to what extent “1968” was indeed a protest and what the concept of protest itself meant for the 1968ers.

The first work that deals with this topic was published in 1969. With *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Theodore Roszak became the first observer to call the social, cultural, and literary phenomenon that appeared in the United States after the Second World War a “counterculture.” In his analysis, he claims that the intellectual inspirations for the 1960s generation were very eclectic and included: Hermann Hesse, Zen Buddhism, Henry David Thoreau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler, Herbert Marcuse, Karl Marx, and Mao.<sup>1</sup> Thus, he asked himself what could have been the common denominator of these diverse cultural reference points that shaped a new generation. The answer, according to Roszak, who based his argument on Karl Marx and Herbert Marcuse, is simple: they all criticize technology, praise nature, and turn their back on the modernist project.

Matters were further complicated by the American writer Paul Berman, who demonstrated that there was not one, but four revolutions in the 1960s. In *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968*,<sup>2</sup> Paul Berman states that each of these revolutions had its own distinctive features and paradoxes. The first revolution challenged middle-class customs. For Berman, topics such as LGBTQ, abortion, or sexuality entered the public debate after the 1960s.

Meanwhile, the second revolution dealt primarily with religion. Various youth “congregations” started a new spiritual project that was influenced by Buddhism, Beat poetry, transcendentalism, and psychedelia. Next, the third revolution was a backlash against Western capitalism. It used a plethora of New Left references, ranging from Herbert Marcuse to Mao’s *Red Book* and encompassed Guy Debord

1 T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Berkeley 1969, pp. 3–22.

2 “In San Francisco and in hippie districts around the country, a handful of adventurous souls were gathering up bits and pieces of Buddhism, Beat poetry, transcendentalism, Mexican folklore, psychedelic mind expansions, and God knows what else, and were funneling those random oddities into a vague new sensibility, with results that were much less than a religion.” See: P. Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968*, New York 1997, p. 8, 33.

and Marshall McLuhan, among others. The war in Vietnam was considered to be the common issue that united them, and many young people supported the National Liberation Front.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, another revolution occurred, this time in Eastern Europe, against the Stalinist legacy. This category, to whose representatives Berman referred as “revisionists,” was a new generation of intellectuals and artists whose main criticism was that their countries had abandoned their communist ideals because of bureaucracy.

Berman’s argument about the four revolutions is helpful because it sheds insight into the complexity of the global protests. After Berman’s distinction, others soon diversified their approaches. Beginning in the late 1990s, other scholars also focused on comparing the different revolts of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, a large amount of historical literature from the 1990s still focused on the national narratives.

The fortieth anniversary of the 1968 protests stirred a lively debate in Eastern and Central Europe. The context was slightly different. Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared in 2007 that in his country May 1968 had led to “a moral and intellectual relativism” and “no difference between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, true and fake.”<sup>4</sup> This statement caused many public reactions, and scholars revisited this topic in order to react to Sarkozy’s statement.

Naturally, French scholars were in the forefront of the debate. However, it had a strong impact in Eastern and Central Europe as well. In East-Central Europe, the fortieth anniversary raised awareness of belonging to a common generation of protesters. Not only scholars explored this topic; former activists wrote about it in retrospect as well.<sup>5</sup> However, due to a “triumphalist approach” in some of the cases, the “long 1968” became a theme that was useful in the search for commonalities even where there were none.<sup>6</sup>

3 *Ibidem*, p. 10.

4 A. Piquard, *Nicolas Sarkozy veut “tourner la page de mai 1968”*, “Le Monde”, 29 April 2007, [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2007/04/29/nicolas-sarkozy-veut-tourner-la-page-de-mai-1968\\_903432\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2007/04/29/nicolas-sarkozy-veut-tourner-la-page-de-mai-1968_903432_3224.html) (accessed: 01.05.2019); H. Samuel, *Nicolas Sarkozy Blames the Generation of 1968*, “The Telegraph”, 29 April 2008, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3557797/Nicolas-Sarkozy-blames-the-generation-of-1968.html> (accessed: 04.05.2018).

5 G. Demszky, *68-as Vagyok*, “Index”, 17 August 2008, <http://index.hu/velemeney/olvir/dg68/> (accessed: 27.10.2017); T. Gaspar-Miklos, *TGM: 1968. augusztus 21., Prága*, “Mérce”, 21 August 2018, <https://merce.hu/2018/08/21/tgm-1968-augusztus-21-vasarnap-praga/> (accessed: 06.09.2018).

6 R. Gildea, J. Mark, A. Warring, *Europe’s 1968: Voices of Revolt*, Oxford 2013, pp. 3-4.

Secondly, most of the scholars dealing with this topic used the approach of intellectual history. By using such an approach, other elements of the late 1960s, such as music, drugs, or communal living, became obscured and out of any conceptual framework. In this context, a new generation of scholars drew attention to less-known cases, such as musicians, actors, or simply teenagers who were caught in this “vibe.” Thus, the methodological change shifted from intellectual towards oral history. Previously, there were a few scholars who had already worked on the 1968ers and how they emerged as subjects into history.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, Robert Gildea, Anette Warring, and James Mark offer a fresh comparative reading of the events of 1968. In their approach, they focus on the dynamics between the generations, the psychology and family backgrounds of the main actors, as well as on defining the establishment they protested against. With a greater availability of comparative studies, as well as oral history projects, recent scholarship has changed the focus from reading archival materials or articles of the period to a more dynamic perspective: that of oral history.

In this paper, I would like to explore the pre-history of the 1968ers, or the social, political, and cultural conditions that made the emergence of these subversive groups possible, through oral history. I want to explain the social, cultural, and family backgrounds in which the 1968ers grew up in the late 1940s and 1950s. Thus, the first part concentrates primarily on the emergence of the main protagonists: activists, musicians, and students, but also intellectuals. I focus on the specific context in which 1968ers from Hungary and Romania were born and raised. I intend on focusing on the pre-history of the 1968ers from Hungary and Romania; that is, on the postwar conditions which made the 1968 protests in Eastern and Central Europe possible. My aim is to scrutinize how historical processes such as de-Nazification, Stalinism, or de-Stalinization, or singular events like the 1956 Hungarian Uprising or deportations, contributed to the formation of a new generation.

My first task is to understand the family environment in which the future protesters grew up. In some cases, as Gildea, Mark, and Warring demonstrate, the 1968ers came from families with an interwar communist legacy. The family political background strongly influenced their ways of protest. Due to the specific context of East-Central Europe, in many cases the absence of one parent marked their childhood. The reasons for this are multiple: some of their parents had died as a result of the Holocaust, while others had been deported to the Soviet Union. My intention is to see to what extent such traumas contributed to their later forms of protest and how they integrated such absences into their narration.

7 L. Passerini, J. Wallach Scott, *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968*, Middletown 1996, pp. 2–20.

Secondly, I will move on to fantasy and children's literature as well as films from the late 1950s and early 1960s. By analyzing what they read and watched in their childhood and adolescence, I intend to see how books shaped their worldviews. This paper is based on the testimonies of the interviewees and plays an important role in my analysis, since in many cases this was the first question I asked in the interview.

Lastly, an important event for those living in Budapest was the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which deserves a particular attention, because most scholars readily agree that it had a long-term impact on forms of protest against the state across the whole of East-Central Europe.

As my research demonstrates, various intellectual and artistic networks challenged the hegemony of the Hungarian and Romanian nomenclatures by using different "vehicles of protest." Regarding Hungary, I present the structure of the "subversive" group which was indicted during the Maoist conspiracy trial. Calling themselves "the true Marxist-Leninists," high school and university students György Pór and György Dalos formed a subversive group in Budapest in the mid-1960s. Their rebelliousness challenged the bureaucratization of the Hungarian Communist Party. Their argument was that the Hungarian leaders had betrayed the revolutionary ideals. Maoism was at the core of their ideology as a counter-reaction against the bureaucratization of society. Their group became radicalized when they understood how Mao's idea challenged Soviet hegemony in Eastern and Central Europe. The Vietnam War was a further catalyst; in response to it, various student demonstrations were staged in Budapest. Pór and Dalos openly protested against the Hungarian Communist Party, and they exploited their close links with musicians and visual artists to share their ideas.

By the time Pór was put on trial for "Maoist anti-state conspiracy" in June 1968, their ideas had disseminated to music groups, which in turn further spread their political message to their audiences. Soon spotted by the secret police, they were charged for conspiring against the state. From the transcript of the trials, one can understand that even though their number was small, their actions engaged many other people from Budapest universities.<sup>8</sup>

Aktionsgruppe Banat (Action Group Banat) was a literary discussion group formed by members of the German-Swabian ethnic minority from Banat, Romania. Strongly influenced by 1968 debates in Western Europe, particularly West Germany, students like William Totok, Anton Sterbling, Ernst Wichner, and Rolf Bossert created a unique cultural circle. Action Group Banat was the only case

8 Open Society Archives, HU OSA 300-60-2:2/2, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Romanian Unit: RFE Confidential Reports on Romania, Box 2.

in which Romanian 1968ers used Marxist revisionism as a “vehicle of protest” in order to challenge the authority of the state.<sup>9</sup>

Even though they came from the same city, the music group Phoenix had few cultural and ideological commonalities with the members of Aktionsgruppe Banat. Phoenix was a rock band that had been founded in 1962. In the 1970s, the group, which was led by Nicu Covaci, became one of Romania’s most influential rock bands. Thousands of students came to see them live. Due to their large popularity, the Communist Party could not simply forbid their activity.<sup>10</sup> Still, the *Securitate* and the Youth Division of the Communist Party used other mechanisms to limit Phoenix’s impact on young people. Through this case study, I argue that “the long 1968” was much more than a solely political phenomenon.

### **The Common Denominator: A Common Generation**

At first glance, one could say that these groups are totally different, both in their political orientation as well as their aesthetic preferences. There are few common elements between the Hungarian Maoists and the Romanian hippies, between Aktionsgruppe Banat and Phoenix. Still, I argue that there is a strong commonality, which the protagonists themselves noticed: they belong to a single and unique generation. In very broad terms, they were the first generation of East-Central Europeans to have been born and raised exclusively under communist rule.

Therefore, this project will use the premise of the sociologist Karl Mannheim, for whom a generation is more than a simple “social group.” For him, a generation is defined by exposure to certain processes and events: “Members of a generation are ‘similarly located,’ first of all, in so far as they all are exposed to the same phase of a collective process.”<sup>11</sup>

Mannheim argues that social changes influence youth across different regions in the same way. Global phenomena such as nationalism, war, industrialization,

9 “Ceea ce este important, și uneori este distorsionat în receptarea ulterioară, mai ales în România,... grupul s-a revendicat din neo-marxism, nu era un grup anti-comunist - aceasta este o distorsionare, o mistificare a chestiunilor. Noi am crezut că prin metodele marxismului putem combate regimul care e.” (“What is important to know - and sometimes distorted in the later reception - is that the group was Neo-Marxist, it was not an anti-Communist group, this is a mystification of things. We thought that we could fight the existing regime through Marxist methods”). See: Romanian National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives, Oral History Archives (later: A10 CNSAS), Interview with William Totok recorded by Cristina Anisescu in Bucharest, 2011, no DVD 79, vol. 1, fragment 1. William Totok/ Wichner Ernst de Cristina Anisescu, 2010.

10 C. Dobrescu, *The Phoenix That Could Not Rise: Politics and Rock Culture in Romania, 1960-1989*, “East Central Europe”, vol. 38, no. 2-3, 2011, [https://brill.com/view/journals/eceu/38/2-3/article-p255\\_6.xml?lang=en](https://brill.com/view/journals/eceu/38/2-3/article-p255_6.xml?lang=en) (accessed: 30.04.2019).

11 K. Mannheim, *The Problem of Generations*, in: *Theories of Ethnicity*, W. Sollors (ed.), London 1996, p. 110.

or deindustrialization always had a strong impact on shaping the way in which a generation behaves, feels, and thinks.<sup>12</sup> In this context, I will argue that events like de-Stalinization, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, as well as finer and more subtle phenomena have affected the evolution of this social group. Following Mannheim's assumption, the social sciences have drawn a fine distinction between the concepts of a cohort and a generation. A cohort is defined as "a set of individuals who pass some crucial stage at approximately the same time, like marriage, first employment, and especially birth."<sup>13</sup> In a broader sense, a cohort is "the aggregate of individuals who experienced the same events within the same time interval."<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, a generation is composed of several cohorts, and it is much more clearly defined as a sociological category. Following Mannheim's assumptions, some sociologists have argued that there have been several generations in the Western world: the Lost Generation (the members of which were born between 1883 and 1900 and witnessed the First World War), the G.I. Generation (born between 1901 and 1924), the Silent Generation (1925–1942), the Baby Boomers (1940–1960), Generation X (1960–1980), and, finally, the Millennials (1980–2000).<sup>15</sup> Throughout my paper, I will focus on the protagonists born between 1945 and 1955. Even though they belong to one generation, the two cohorts, those born between 1945 to 1948 and 1949 and 1955, respectively, clearly distinguish themselves.

The second reason for using the term "generation" comes from self-identification with it, both then and retrospectively. Among Baby Boomers, the 1968ers consider themselves as belonging to a "unique generation." Furthermore, it is commonly accepted in the vernacular discourse to call 1968ers a distinctive "global" generation. Both participants and scholars studying the phenomenon share the opinion that youth from the United States, France, West Germany, and Japan all had a common collective identity which bears the name of a "generation."<sup>16</sup>

However, at a global level, this statement has to be put under scrutiny. All of the protagonists have projected their own values, expectations, disappointments, and ideals onto the late 1960s, protests. For instance, for the activists and dissidents

12 J. Pilcher, *Mannheim's Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy*, "The British Journal of Sociology", vol. 45, no. 3, 1994, p. 484.

13 G. Carlsson, K. Karlsson, *Age, Cohorts and the Generation of Generations*, "American Sociological Review", vol. 35, no. 4, 1970, p. 710.

14 H. Schuman, J. Scott, *Generations and Collective Memories*, "American Sociological Review", vol. 54, no. 3, 1989, p. 359.

15 Even though this book itself is highly controversial due to its "prophetic character," it has its practicalities: the terminology is in use in much sociological research of the Western world; W. Strauss, N. Howe, *Generations*, New York 1991.

16 1968: *A Student Generation in Revolt*, R. Fraser (ed.), New York 1988; A. Von der Goltz, "Talkin' 'Bout My Generation": *Conflicts of Generation Building and Europe's "1968"*, Göttingen 2011; Berman, *op. cit.*

from East-Central Europe, belonging to the '68 generation was the first step into dissidence. The dissident and human rights activist Miklós Haraszti emphasized to me at the end of our interview that the generation of 1968 determined the opposition that led to the fall of communist regimes: "It was the generation of '68 who made the change. It was [Václav] Havel, Adam Michnik, and our lot... we were all sixty-eighters."<sup>17</sup>

Apart from a "common collective memory," the third argument for referring to a "generation" comes from psychology. In the recent discussions concerning the concept of a generation, a controversial issue has been whether the protests of the late 1960s were only a generational conflict.<sup>18</sup> Usually, the rebellion of the 1968ers has been understood as a reaction against their parents. However, more and more scholars have been suggesting that such protests could also be a continuation of the aesthetic and political behaviors of their parents. According to this view, it would seem that the concept of a "generation" is useful, but not sufficient in order to understand the upheavals of the 1960s around the globe.<sup>19</sup> I would like to argue that both generational conflict as well as generational transfer have shaped the identities of the 1968ers.

Influenced by Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli's approach to youth and social movements, the collective volume *Europe's 1968* proposes another type of reading by focusing on the role of subjectivity rather than on the exchange of ideas. Thus, I follow the synthetic approach used by Gildea, Mark, and Warring.<sup>20</sup> My hypothesis is that a series of factors which apparently had little significance contributed to their tactics of protest. In this regard, I consider family background, childhood books and formal education, foreign languages to which they had access, and the presence of formative role models to be factors that influenced the ways in which they protested. Events like the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the self-immolation of Jan Palach, or Woodstock determined their option of subversive tactics.

Later, books, friendships, and the dialectic with the state also influenced their point of view. Therefore, another aim of this dissertation is to understand how censorship and various state institutions interacted with the marginal groups. Without any doubt, there was direct opposition, but also compromises and negotiations between the factions. The secret police were clearly interested in the dynamics of these groups, but at the same time other factors influenced their reactions as well.

17 Interview with Haraszti Miklós recorded by Adrian Matus in Balatonfüred, 22 August 2018, Adrian Matus personal archive, p. 2.

18 H. Sándor, *Kádár gyermekei – Ifjúsági lázadás a hatvanas években*, Budapest 2009, pp. 10–11.

19 A. Schildt, D. Siegfried, *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960–1980*, New York–Oxford 2006.

20 R. Gildea, J. Mark, A. Warring, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–10.



This leads me to the fourth argument in favor of the use of the concept of “generation.” After reading the archival material dedicated to the youth, especially the investigations of the secret police, I realized that a “criminal category” called “hippie” appeared in the 1960s. In my research, I follow how throughout the 1960s the category of “youth” appeared not only as a sociological one (i.e., to understand the needs of the youth in a state, to improve their quality of life, etc. ), but also as a criminal one. The file *Problema hyppiotă* (“The Hippie Problem”) is a clear testimony of how the youth became a distinctive category in the eyes of the *Securitate*.<sup>21</sup> Youth also appear as a distinctive category in newspapers and journals, both as subjects and as a separate public. By using this argument, the historian Sándor Horváth argued that all such discourses (in public and private spaces) created and shaped the evolution and identity of the 1968ers as a countercultural generation. Instead of solving “such behaviors,” they further catalyzed their reactions.<sup>22</sup>

Still, the concept of “generation” raises another question: to what extent is the sample representative of the larger story? To what extent does personal experience reflect the situation of a larger social group? Are the groups the exception or the norm? Rather than focusing on large groups, I use micro-historical analysis to explain how personal stories fit at the personal, family, local, and national levels. For some, the late 1960s were the moment of their radicalization, while for others that period was simply a fad. However, they often believe that their actions were representative of their whole generation.<sup>23</sup> By corroborating the variety of sources, I would like to reconstruct the context of the 1960s as faithfully as possible. Since my research is qualitative, I have decided to work on specific samples and typologies in order to show the complexity of this cultural movement rather than aim for statistical social history relevance. Thus, I propose the following categories:

- 1) dissidents: Haraszti Miklós and Dalos György from Hungary, William Totok and Wichner Ernst from Romania;
- 2) musicians: Nicolae Covaci and Mircea Florian from Romania;
- 3) students: Maya Micu, Doru Colodeiciuc and Jozsef Klein from Romania;
- 4) non-participants from the same generation: Gabenyi Annelie, Sergiu Cioiu, Paul Haragus and Bala Erzsébet.

In formulating my thesis, I also aim at understanding the protagonists’ point of view and how their identities were formed in the late 1960s. I rely on oral history

21 AIO CNSAS, Problema Învățământ. Tabele Cadre Didactice. Tabele Plecări Definitive Din Țară. Problema Hippyotă. Arhiva Fond Documentar, D8833, vol. 22 [File Name: The Education Issue. Tables concerning Teaching Staff. Tables concerning definite emigration issues. The hippie problem].

22 H. Sándor, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

23 R. Gildea, J. Mark, A. Warring, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

interviews. At the first level, oral history interviews will help me to compensate for the archival gap. Furthermore, I believe that oral history can have another aim for my research: to understand how political and social events have influenced the memory formation of my subjects. In this regard, I will follow Luisa Passerini's approach to the memory of 1968ers. She conducted the interviews with 1968ers not necessarily to confirm or inform about historical events and factual data, but rather to explore how personal and political relationships were negotiated in the 1960s: "[N]ot to collect facts, not to clarify what did and did not happen in the past, but to explore the ways into which the relationship between private and public, personal and political is negotiated. It is the negotiation that produces identity, the sense of membership in a collective, whether it is 'women,' 'the working class,' or 'the generation of 1968.'"

To put it another way, the protagonists' memory was shaped by collective experiences. Thus, the interview is not a sum of factual statements, but it represents "an expression and representation of culture" which contains the markers of ideology, memory, and subconscious desires.<sup>24</sup>

However, it is not only the narrator who creates the narrative; the interviewer does it as well. As in the Riddle of the Sphinx, the role of the interviewer is crucial for this topic because it can even influence the nature of the source itself by asking some questions instead of others.<sup>25</sup> Throughout my interviews, I asked the interviewees thematic questions, which were complemented by spontaneous questions that emerged during the sessions.

However, I did not conduct all the interviews for this project by myself; in a few cases, I used interviews that had already been done by other researchers for other projects. The final result of the interview is the production of both: the narrator and the researcher.<sup>26</sup> In this context, the historian becomes not an intermediary between the reader and social class, but a protagonist him- or herself.<sup>27</sup>

In any interview, there is another human apparatus that contributes to memory formation apart from the narrator and the interviewer: the transcriber. If we

24 L. Passerini, *Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism*, "History Workshop Journal", vol. 8.1, 1979, pp. 82-108.

25 *Ibidem*, p. 86.

26 A. Portelli, *What Makes Oral History Different*, in: *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, L. Del Giudice (ed.), New York 2009, p. 235.

27 "The narrator is now one of the characters, and the telling of the story is part of the story being told. This implicitly indicates a much deeper political and personal involvement than that of the external narrator. Writing radical oral history, then, is not a matter of ideology, of subjective sides, or of choosing one set of sources instead of another. It is, rather, inherent in the historian's presence in the story, in the assumption of responsibility - which inscribes her or him in the account and reveals historiography as an autonomous act of narration. Political choices become less visible and vocal, but more basic". See: *Ibidem*, p. 30.

go further, there are also all the people who helped the interviewer to establish the contacts and to settle the interview. Therefore, by “multiple subjectivities” I understand all these human layers that influence the nature of the interview.

Taking all this into consideration, the use of an oral history interview done by someone else definitely has its limits. Not only the questions, but also the verbal and non-verbal reactions of the interviewee can differ depending on the interviewer. Though I concede that using an interview conducted by another oral historian has its risks, I insist that in some situations it can better reflect the memory of the protagonists.<sup>28</sup> To this, I add that in some cases it is impossible to interview others.

However, when using various types of interviews, distinctions have to be made. When I read interviews done by my fellow oral historians, I take into consideration the “multiple subjectivity” aspect by understanding the relationship between interviewer and interviewee (professional, friendship, acquaintance); class (belonging to the same social and professional class or not); the context of the interview (a research project, archival material, done for a doctoral dissertation, etc.); the aim of the interview (the history of a narrator’s life, the history of a specific context, etc.); and the recording type (transcription based on notes, audio recording – digital or cassette – or video recording, etc.).

I argue that one of the most important factors that influence the quality of the interview is when it is conducted. I use one example in the discussion: Nicu Covaci, the lead vocalist of the musical group Phoenix, gave an oral interview in a very specific context. He came to the Secret Police Archives in 2009 to check his file. Despite the fact that the *Securitate* had continuously harassed him, he discovered at the archives that he did not have a personal file. In this context, the Oral History Institute from the Secret Police Archives proposed to interview him. His strong emotional answers to the questions posed by the interviewer show the specific reaction to the context. Such unique conditions cannot be replicated in another context.

I would also like to briefly mention the technical context of recording. When doing my personal fieldwork, I chose to use a video camera and a parallel second audio recording. My aim was to capture not only the voice, but also the gestures and reactions. In many of the cases, the narrators also presented me with pictures or other documents from that period. Finally, the transcription was done in standard language (Romanian, Hungarian, or English). I transcribed and archived their narratives in my personal database.

28 D. Reinisch, *Subjectivity, Political Education, and Resistance: An Oral History of Irish Republican Prisoners, 1971-2000* (Unpublished Thesis, European University Institute), Florence 2018, pp. 4-5.

## The Childhood Experiences of a Generation

### The Impact of Postwar Europe on Family Structure and Demographics

Born in the aftermath of the Second World War, activists and musicians like György Pór, Miklós Haraszti, or Mircea Florian were among the first Hungarian and Romanian youth to be raised only under a communist regime.<sup>29</sup> They grew up in a troubled context. In major cities, their parents often had to rebuild their bombed-out homes, while food and other resources were scarce.<sup>30</sup> Due to war, the male population had decreased. Demographic statistics show that the gender ratio in Hungary and Romania strongly changed as a consequence of the Second World War due to combat victims, deportations, and diseases.

According to the Romanian Census of 1948, approximately 48.3 per cent of the Romanian population was male and 51.7 per cent was female;<sup>31</sup> in Hungary, the respective proportions were 48.2 and 51.2 per cent.<sup>32</sup> More than the gender disproportion, in Hungary a demographic anomaly affected the change of generation. Due to the First War and the mobilization of men, significantly fewer births were registered between 1914 and 1918. This had direct consequences in postwar Hungary, since this population reached adulthood roughly around 1945: the number of those born between 1914–1918 (and thus were between 21 and 25 years old) was half the size of any other cohort.<sup>33</sup>

In other words, the adult population that was ready to establish families was smaller than in previous generations. Furthermore, poverty was another strong factor that discouraged youth from establishing families and having children. Still, despite these factors, the state was determined to increase the population. In Hungary, for instance, Anna Ratko, the Minister of Health, proposed and passed a policy to increase the birth rate after the Second World War.<sup>34</sup>

29 The oldest person from the Maoist trial was Malgot István, born in 1941, followed by György Dalos, born in 1943. All the others were born in 1945 and the youngest was Révai Gábor, born in 1947. See: Open Society Archives, HU OSA 408-3-8:1/1, Individual Case Files, György Pór and His Associates: Dossier of Investigation. Transcript of Trial No. 1.

30 Taking a more general approach, Frank Biess and Robert Moeller talk about the long-lasting impact of the Second World War in: F. Biess, R. Moeller (eds.), *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, New York–Oxford 2010.

31 A. Galopentia, D.C. Georgescu, *Provizor. Rezultatele provizorii ale Recensământului Republicii Populare Române*, "Probleme Economice", vol. 2, no. 42, pp. 18–19.

32 *Population Number of Hungary by Sex and Age, 1 January, 1870–2060*, [https://www.ksh.hu/interaktiv/korfak/orszag\\_en.html](https://www.ksh.hu/interaktiv/korfak/orszag_en.html) (accessed: 26.06.2019).

33 *Ibidem*.

34 "In the worst days of Stalinism, with apartments hard to find, purges frequent, and jobs uncertain, no one wanted to have babies. The sinister however, ordered otherwise, to keep the birth rate going."; Open Society Archives, HU OSA 300-40-1. Hungarian Unit. Box 503. Youth. Youth Problems, 1969.

Meanwhile, important medical improvements helped to decrease the infant mortality rate. While in 1941 infant mortality was 115.6 for every one-thousand live births, this number decreased to 91 by 1949.<sup>35</sup> Encouraged by social policies and with the help of medical improvements, Hungary's total fertility rate peaked at around 1953–1955.<sup>36</sup>

In Hungary, there is even a name for those born between 1949 and 1953: *Ratko Korszák* (The Ratko Generation). This generation reached adolescence in the mid to late 1960s. According to demographic data, in 1966 2,246,487 of Hungarians were between 15 and 29 years old. In other words, the Ratko Generation was composed of 818,519 people, which represented roughly 8 per cent of the population.<sup>37</sup>

In broader terms, the postwar context and technological explosion irreversibly changed traditional life patterns. Many of the 1968ers' families were among the first or second generations that moved from rural areas to the city.<sup>38</sup> Agricultural machinery changed the old "modes of production and the work experience of the older generation" in the sense that the labor force was no longer needed.<sup>39</sup> To this, the collectivization process encouraged migration from rural to urban areas across all of postwar Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>40</sup>

Consequently, the traditional patriarchal family, in which the father (or even grandfather) established the hierarchy, became less prevalent and was slowly replaced by a more equitable partnership. Women had a more active role in society, at least compared to the interwar period. Companionship and joint responsibility slowly replaced the authoritarian decisions of one family member. It became much more common for both the parents to work outside the home. However, the gender discrepancies were still present inside families.<sup>41</sup> Still, the Hungarian and Romanian 1968ers were the first generation to witness the transition from large, patriarchal families to smaller ones with more shared responsibility on a large scale.

35 STADAT - 1.1. Population, Vital Statistics (1900), [https://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng/xstadat/xstadat\\_long/h\\_wdsdoo1b.html](https://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng/xstadat/xstadat_long/h_wdsdoo1b.html) (accessed: 26.06.2019).

36 *Ibidem*.

37 Open Society Archives, HU OSA 420-2-1:1/20, Collection on the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research: Publications and Research Reports: Manuscripts, Background Materials', p. 9.

38 K. Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56*, New York 2013.

39 Open Society Archives, HU OSA 300-6-2, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute. Media and Opinion Research Department. East Europe Area and Opinion Research, Box 3, File 1.

40 G. Kligman, K. Verdery, *Țăranii sub asediu: colectivizarea agriculturii în România (1949–1962)*, Bucarest 2015.

41 Open Society Archives, HU OSA 300-6-2, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute. Media and Opinion Research Department. East Europe Area and Opinion Research Box 3, File 1, pp. 4–6.

This was the context in which the 1968ers were born and their identity was shaped. Next, I will emphasize how family upbringing influenced the political and aesthetic identity of the Hungarian and Romanian 1968ers. The future 1968ers did not come from the same social or ethnic backgrounds. As I argue in this section, the political context affected protagonists who had a different class background in different ways. The families of the 1968ers had to cope not only with economic difficulties, but also with political instability, which materialized in the late 1940s. Their early childhood was affected by de-Nazification, Stalinism, and, finally, de-Stalinization. Each of these processes marked on its own the evolution of the 1968ers.

Thus, the point to explore next is how Hungarian Maoists personally related to the Holocaust by taking into consideration that many of them belonged to Budapest's Jewish community. Next, the case of the *Aktionsgruppe* will be subjected to scrutiny in order to understand how they made sense of their family contexts. As Piotr Osęka, Polymeris Voglis, and Anna von der Goltz argue,

[...] tales of childhood and family backgrounds are thus important milestones in the narratives of the activists of 1968; they mark the starting point that set them on a particular path. Activists often relate their journeys into activism as natural progressions, as building on particular family traditions, or they tell a story that centres on struggle – one that involved rejecting specific elements of their upbringing, such as religious or social values, or their parents' politics altogether.<sup>42</sup>

### **Personal Stories: Making Sense of the Holocaust**

While the power of communism was growing, the legacy of Nazism was still present in East-Central Europe. From their early lives, the Nazi legacy influenced the lives of the activists from Budapest and Romania in very different ways. This is a recurring theme in the life-story narratives of the 1968ers. György Pór was one of the activists of the mid to late-1960s in the so-called Hungarian Maoist group. His aim was to challenge the authority of the Hungarian state by using an alternative communist discourse. Pór was born in the Jewish Ghetto of Budapest in late 1944, while it was still under Nazi occupation.<sup>43</sup> He lost his father during the war: “Yeah, well, I was born into a Jewish family and I did not know my father, so I was born out of wedlock, as they say. And during the war, my father disappeared and then my mum got married two times actually.”<sup>44</sup>

42 P. Osęka, P. Voglis, A. van der Goltz, *Families*, in: R. Gildea, J. Mark (eds.), *op. cit.*

43 “[...] 1944, December 28th, Budapest in the Jewish Ghetto of Budapest so still under the Nazi occupation of Hungary.” See: Interview with Pór György recorded by Mark James in Brussels, 15 March 2009, for the project “Europe’s 1968”; R. Gildea, J. Mark, A. Warring, *op. cit.*

44 *Ibidem*, p. 1.

Like Pór, Simon Péter (born 1946) was one of the dissidents indicted in the late 1960s for “challenging the state order.” He recalls that his grandparents were killed during the Holocaust: “I didn’t know the grandparents from my mother’s side, because they had died in Auschwitz.”<sup>45</sup>

The writer and activist György Dalos was raised in a liberal Jewish family, mostly by his grandmother.<sup>46</sup> His father died in 1945 due to poor treatment while conscripted into forced labor service during the Second World War. During the war, Jewish men in Hungary were not allowed to participate in combat, but sometimes they were forced to work in various tasks. Both in the police investigations of the 1960s and in the interviews, Dalos does not use the label “Holocaust victim” when he refers to the death of his father, but as an effect of forced labor service, a direct effect of the Holocaust (*munkaszolgálatban halt meg*): “[M]y father died in July 1945, from lung disease, not in labor camps and not in the [Budapest] ghetto.”<sup>47</sup>

Actress and writer Anna Koós was closely linked to various alternative theatre groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Her parents were involved in the underground communist movement. Some of the relatives from her mother’s side died in Auschwitz.<sup>48</sup>

The personal dimension of the Holocaust contributed to the cultural viewpoint of the activists throughout their whole lives. Broadly speaking, in most cases in which a relative had died during or as a result of the Holocaust, this problem was mentioned in family discussions, and, later on, it influenced their further intellectual development. György Dalos recalls that for him, the tragedy of the Holocaust was closely tied to the absence of his father:

[T]here was no stage in my life when I was not aware of my Jewishness. [...] However, the nature of this Jewishness changed in time, because it started in the situation created by Holocaust: not only could I not know my distant relatives, but I did not know my father, either. [...] So, this is the Jewish experience, the part of the catastrophic experience that man gets; it is not a mature situation, but I was born into it.<sup>49</sup>

45 “Az anyai nagyszüleimet nem ismertem, mert ők Auschwitzban meghaltak.”; Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár 1956–Os Intézet Oral History Archivum (later: OSK), no. 2/1, Interview with Simon Péter recorded by Gáti Tibor, Budapest, 25 November and 3 December 2008.

46 OSK, no. 825 Sz., Interview with Dalos György recorded by Keller Márkus, Berlin, 17 May 2005, p. 4.

47 “[A]pám is 45 júliusában halt meg, tüdőbajban, nem a munkaszolgálatban, és nem a gettóban,” *Ibidem*, p. 6.

48 OSK, no. 822, Interview with Koós Anna, Recorded by Lugossy István, Budapest, 2004, p. 2.

49 Interview with Dalos György..., p. 187.

### Missing Fathers: The Deportation of the German-Speaking Population to the Soviet Union

In a different way, the Nazi heritage and de-Nazification also directly affected the German communities living in Hungary and Romania. However, it had similar effects on the personal memory of the 1968ers. Historically speaking, Swabians and Saxons, German ethnic groups that had been colonized by the Habsburg Empire, had lived in scattered communities throughout East-Central Europe for hundreds of years. Even though they assimilated well in nation-states like Czechoslovakia, Romania, or Hungary, during the Second World War some of them collaborated with the Wehrmacht, the army of the Third Reich.<sup>50</sup> Thus, after the Second World War the local population, either Hungarian or Romanian, felt threatened by these communities, while politicians demonized them by calling them “German colonizers.”<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the relationship between Swabians or Saxons and other national groups worsened after the war. Furthermore, Stalin decided to deport many Swabian and Saxon communities in the Soviet Union as a form of punishment for their participation in the German invasion. On January 6, 1945, the Romanian government received a note according to which all Saxon men between the ages of 18 and 45 and all women between 18 and 30 years of age had to be mobilized. These German-speaking adults were deported to Soviet Union in order to do “reparations in kind” and to help rebuild the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> The German community in Romania in particular was strongly affected by this measure.

The journalist and literary critic Anneli Ute Gabanyi (born 1942) recalls that her uncles from her mother’s side of the family were forced to enroll in the German army.<sup>53</sup> After the Second World War, they left Romania with the retreating army. Nevertheless, the rest of the family remained in the country, even though they were under threat due to the activity of their relatives. In this context, her father did not mention the fact that he was an ethnic German in the census; therefore, he managed to circumvent the deportation. However, Gabanyi’s mother declared that she belonged to the German ethnic group. Being much more under threat, her mother escaped to the Făgăraș Mountains, where she was hidden by a shepherd.<sup>54</sup>

50 C. Mezger, *Youth, Nation, and the National Socialist Mobilization of Ethnic Germans in the Western Banat and the Batschka (1918–1944)*, Florence 2016.

51 B. Trencsenyi, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Negotiating Modernity in the ‘short Twentieth Century’ and Beyond*, New York 2018, p. 302.

52 H. Baier, *Deportarea etnicilor germani din Romania in Uniunea Sovietica: 1945 culegere de documente de arhiva*, Sibiu 1994; C. Budeancă, *Imaginea etnicilor germani la românii din Transilvania după 1918: studiu de caz: județele Hunedoara, Alba, Sibiu cercetare de istorie orală*, Târgoviște 2016.

53 AIO-CNSAS, 262, vol. 1, Interview with Gabanyi Annelie recorded by Cristina Anisescu in Bucharest, 26 November 2011, Minute 7:00–13:30, not transcribed.

54 *Ibidem*.



The Romanian-born German-language novelist Herta Müller was also born into such a complex family situation in 1953. Her father volunteered for the SS during the Second World War, and her mother was deported to the Soviet Union in 1945. This situation created a conflicted feeling about the Nazi legacy of her parents when she became a teenager:

I think my father was seventeen when joined the army, the SS. When I was in the city, I used to tell him: 'Look what the Nazis did and look what Hitler did! How could you be so passionate and blind? How come you never thought about what kind of politics you got into - because he was a simple soldier - and you ran like a donkey after criminals?'<sup>55</sup>

### **The Imprisonment of “Class Enemies”: “Until I Was Eleven, I Did Not Know I Had a Father”**

Not only the ethnic minorities were persecuted. In the late 1940s, another wave of repression followed, in which the parents of other 1968ers suffered. The context changed. This time, Stalin wanted to assert his full power in the satellite states. That meant that local communist parties had to come to power as soon as possible. However, even though Soviet troops occupied each of the Eastern and Central Europe countries, their presence was not enough to install a single-party structure. Different countries demanded different tactics in adopting communism. While Sovietization was quick in Hungary and Czechoslovakia due to the strong presence of the interwar Communist elite, in Romania, the local communist factions needed the assistance of the army due to the weakness of Communist Party.<sup>56</sup>

As a result of political tensions and vendettas, the interwar political elite was imprisoned. In Romania, not only political figures, but also the former supporters of interwar parties were seen as threatening. The former right-wing supporters (Legionaries) were jailed or deported to the remote area of Bărağan (south-eastern Romania) for their open political convictions. This situation directly influenced the lives of some musicians. The father of Nicolae Covaci (born 1948), the guitarist and soloist of the group Phoenix, was jailed as a political prisoner.<sup>57</sup> The absence of

55 “Tatăl meu cred că a avut 17 ani când s-a dus în armată, în SS. Și eu, când am fost în oraș, eu tot i-am zis: «Uite ce au făcut naziștii și ce a făcut Hitler! Cum ai putut tu să fii atât de euforizat și orb și cum nu te-ai gândit niciodată în ce politică ai fost băgat, ca măgarul - pentru că el a fost un simplu soldat -, ai fugit ca măgarul după criminali!»”; G. Adameșteanu, *Interview with Herta Müller*, Bucurest 2010, <https://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/9225/Gabriela-Adamesteanu-Herta-Muller/Limba-romana-participa-la-limba-germana-in-care-scriu>. (accessed: 30.06.2019).

56 B. Trencsenyi, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

57 The archival file of his father can be read here: [https://www.iicmer.ro/fise-matricole-nou/?drawer=Fise%20matricole%20openale%20-%20Detinuti%20politici\\*C\\*C%2008.%20Cot%20-%20Crissoghelos\\*Covaci%20Gheorghe%20I](https://www.iicmer.ro/fise-matricole-nou/?drawer=Fise%20matricole%20openale%20-%20Detinuti%20politici*C*C%2008.%20Cot%20-%20Crissoghelos*Covaci%20Gheorghe%20I) (accessed: 30.06.2019).

a parent marked virtually the entire childhood of Covaci, as his father came back from Canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră only when he was eleven: “[M]y father was in jail. He was a Legionnaire [a member of an anti-Semitic interwar right-wing political party], and that is why he was arrested. I think I was one or two years old when they took him. I did not meet him until I was eleven; I did not even know that I had a father.”<sup>58</sup>

In a 2011 interview conducted by the CNSAS Oral History Institute, Covaci said that all his bandmates from his first music group Sfinții (“The Saints”) grew up without their fathers: “[U]s... especially in Phoenix, or even more than that [...] the group the Saints was a fatherless group. None of us had a father.”<sup>59</sup>

### **The Children of Victims, the Children of Perpetrators**

The interviews show that even though the future hippies were born after the end of the Second World War, the impact of Nazism was still present in their daily lives. In some cases, they had lost a parent. In many other situations, they had relatives who had died in the Holocaust, had been deported to the Soviet Union for collaboration with the Germans, or would later be arrested for opposition to the communist regime. In other words, both totalitarian regimes left a major impact on their lives. This situation contributed to building their political position. Thus, the reaction against the political establishment was not only a public statement, but also a reaction determined by their intimate life experiences. The political context had a direct impact on their early childhood: deportation, political imprisonment, or death on the front led to childhoods that were often marked by the absence of a parent. Only subjective testimonies can emphasize the personal trauma that many individuals witnessed in their family lives. On a more theoretical level, when researching Italian 1968ers Luisa Passerini argued that this generation had an ambivalent opinion about their fathers. Both the presence and the absence of paternal figure created an internal conflict for the 1968ers: “[T]he new culture is one of opposition. When it succeeds, it’s dialectical: in its discontinuity with respect to the liberal father, it seeks a continuity of values; in its continuity with the proletarian tradition, it recognizes a lack of consistency on the level dearest to it, the level of identity.”<sup>60</sup>

58 D. Gorgonaru, *Interviu Nicu Covaci, Fondator Phoenix: „Pentru Mine, Bătaia a Fost Ruptă Din Rai.”*, „Adevarul”, 1 November 2014, [https://adevarul.ro/entertainment/muzica/interviu-nicu-covaci-fondator-phoenix-pentru-mine-bataia-fost-rupta-rai-1\\_54538a170d133766a867b5b7/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/entertainment/muzica/interviu-nicu-covaci-fondator-phoenix-pentru-mine-bataia-fost-rupta-rai-1_54538a170d133766a867b5b7/index.html) (accessed: 25.02.2021).

59 AIO-CNSAS, nr.DVD 14, numele intervievatului: Nicolae Covaci, vol. 1, capitolul 1, de catre Cristina Anisescu, Minute 3:17.

60 L. Passerini, J. Wallach Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

The political and aesthetic opinions of their parents were among the first elements that contributed to the formation of the identity of the 1968ers.<sup>61</sup> However, when comparing the narratives of different 1968ers, Piotr Osęka, Polymeris Voglis, and Anna von de Goltz reached an interesting conclusion. They correct the mistaken consensus that the 1968ers simply contested the identity of their parents through a so-called “generational gap.” The identification level is much more complex than simple opposition.<sup>62</sup>

At the first level, they rejected their political stances if they had collaborated with the Nazi or Stalinist regimes. If they were the children of perpetrators, they rejected their political stances. Additionally, if the relationship of the activist and his or her parents was not a close one, then usually he or she challenged the family values. For instance, György Pór had an adoptive father with whom he had a difficult relationship from the age of six. His fight against his stepfather corresponded with his rejection of the state:

I had a stepfather from the age of six until I left the family home at the age of twenty-one. And my stepfather was a true believer communist, so I was raised in basically a communist family. My teenage rebellion against paternal authority coincided with the rebellion against state power, because what connected them was not only that my stepfather was an instructor of the Communist Party’s political school at some point in his life, but also the basic hypocrisy that I noticed both in my family and at the level of state politics.<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, those who had a “resistance family” background justified their own actions as a continuation of their parents’ legacy, by being the “children of the victims.” In this case, the family legacy played an important model of self-revenciation and justification for their political stances. In an interview with the activist Tariq Ali, the Transylvanian-Hungarian philosopher Gáspár Miklos Tamás (born 1948) declared that his parents belonged to the illegal interwar communist movement and spent years in prison before 1945. As in the case of György Pór or Simon Péter, many of the close friends of their families died either as a result of political persecution or during the Holocaust.<sup>64</sup> He states that his political

61 *Ibidem*, pp. 34–36.

62 “[W]hile activists usually explained their politicization as a natural progression or as a result of a struggle at home, few activists emulated or rejected their parents unequivocally.” See: R. Gildea, J. Mark, A. Warring, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

63 Interview with Pór György..., p. 10.

64 “My father was a writer and an editor, my mother worked in a hospital [...] and you know [...] they were people whose best friends, associates, and family members were exterminated in 1944 for having participated in the Resistance. So [...] they came from a very [...] heavy revolutionary past.” See: T. Ali, *The World Today - Eastern Europe After The Fall*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hA9ZMOpv47c> (accessed: 25.02.2021).

identity is a continuation of his family legacy. He claims that the disappointments of his parents' generation were related to the communist promises which were never fulfilled:

[T]hey belonged to that enthusiastic anti-Fascist generation, hoped for a new dawn for humanity in the 1940s, and when they were confronted with the Stalinist system, they were disenchanted and heart-broken about it all, especially, you know, in the spring of '56, when the crimes of Stalin were unmasked. [...] They were disappointed and bitter people when I grew up. They kept their ideals but had a very low opinion of socialist reality.<sup>65</sup>

He argues that his and his generation's political activism began exactly on the grounds of the disappointment of their parents, for whom the nomenclature had betrayed the ideals of the revolution:

We started off on the Left, most of us, on the critical Left, which was passionately hated by the authorities and started from an egalitarian social criticism of a system that pretended to be exactly that: socially just and liberating, but it wasn't [...] and therefore, dissidence started by calling the system out on its own original founding ideals.<sup>66</sup>

Usually, the political awareness and stance of an individual become apparent only during late adolescence and early adulthood.<sup>67</sup> Other factors also contribute to the political and aesthetic identity of an individual. However, what I argue is that the political stances of their parents played a crucial role. Such evidence adds weight to the argument that their political or aesthetic stances were not born only as a "rupture" or "generational gap," but also as continuity with their family background. This depends on if they consider themselves to be "the children of perpetrators" or "the children of victims."

### **Cultural Products and the Early Education of the 1968ers**

Yet, apart from the family, another element contributed to the formation of the modern "subject": institutional education. I shall move the discussion to the context in which the 1968ers grew up. The question is: how did the political context influence their education and what they read? We have already learned about the family context in which they grew up and how they positioned themselves towards their parents' aesthetic or political leanings. Now, I will scrutinize the cultural products available

65 *Ibidem*.

66 *Ibidem*.

67 M.K. Jennings, R.G. Niemi, *Generations and Politics: A Panel Study of Young Adults and Their Parents*, Princeton 2014, pp. 8–9.

in the childhood of the 1968ers. Particular attention will be dedicated to the children's literature that was available at that time in the context of censorship. Although it may seem trivial to know what literary protagonists shaped their imagination in primary school and what novels they had to study, I believe it is worthwhile discussing the educational background of the future 1968ers. In retrospect, the interviews show that they relate their "protest identity" with the literary protagonists of their childhood.

A second argument for this option is that, as we will see in later sections, many of them became the leading samizdat intellectuals of the 1970s and the 1980s. Therefore, their ideas strongly influenced their peers, artists and musicians. Furthermore, in some cases they stated that such literary heroes influenced their way of writing and contesting the establishment.

Before I focus on the testimonies of the activists, I shall briefly contextualize how the communist parties of East-Central Europe managed to control the cultural discourse. One of the aims of the Communist Party was to dominate not only the political area, but also the cultural means of production. More specifically, after the Second World War the Soviet Union exported socialist realism, the only permissible cultural trend, through institutions like the Writers' Union of Romania (*Uniunea Scriitorilor din România*) or the Hungarian Writers' Union (*Magyar Írószövetség*). The Communist Party promoted poets, painters, and writers who followed the new principles. In return, the Communist Party discharged and sometimes even imprisoned those who opposed the new trend. Suddenly, censors saw modern literature, avant-garde poetry, surrealism, and jazz music as products of "bourgeois society." Paradoxically, such principles, which are called "Zhdanovian" (after their promoter, Zhdanov), in many cases forbade the avant-gardist and nonconformist literature of the interwar leftist culture. Finally, socialist art promoted communist values and the glorification of the proletariat.

Censors removed poets, painters, and writers who did not conform to Zhdanov's principles from school and university curricula. Censors filtered not only the academic canon, but also literature taught in schools. Following Moscow's directives, they imposed socialist realism as the dominant form. Generally speaking, literary studies scholars agree that the period from 1948 until 1953 was an arid one with respect to aesthetic values. I do believe that the discussion of the relevance of 1948–1953 literature is far more complex, however.<sup>68</sup>

68 The debate about the relevance of socialist realism inspired important academic works that focused either on literary criticism, like A. Goldis, *Critica în transee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului*, Iasi 2011. Ioana Macrea-Toma has analyzed how literary institutions formed, in: I. Macrea-Toma, *Privileghiul. Instituții literare în comunismul românesc*, Cluj-Napoca 2010. Ștefan Baghiu has focused on the percentage of translated novels in the Romanian language by referring to *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului tradus în România de la origini până la 1989*.1: Ș. Baghiu, *Translating Novels in Romania: The Age of Socialist Realism. From an Ideological Center to Geographical Margins*, "UBB Philologia", vol. LXI, 2016, pp. 5–18.

What is at stake for my argument, though, is different. The large amount of available Hungarian or Romanian literature from this period was strongly influenced by Soviet books. For example, more than 40 percent of all books that were translated into Romanian between 1948 and 1958 were from Russian. This peaked in 1954, when 55 percent of translated literature came from the Soviet Union. For the sake of comparison, it is worth noting that French literature, which achieved its absolute apex in 1959, with 25 per cent of the books that were translated into Romanian, came in second place.<sup>69</sup>

### **Spy-Novels and Fadeyev**

Therefore, in the first years of the imposition of the new trend, Romanian and Hungarian pupils could read mostly books about Soviet heroes. They had Pavel Korchagin (from *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky) or partisans from the Second World War like Volodia Dubinin and Oleg Koshevoy as models.<sup>70</sup> One of my interviewees, Miklós Haraszti declared that he avidly read such books, and his role model was Oleg Koshevoy, the protagonist of Fadeyev's novel, since it was the only option available in libraries:

I 'swallowed' the translated works of Soviet children's literature at a rate of 'one of a day' as well as whatever literature was available at the library. I lived in Sziv utca, and the library was at Oktogon, which was November 7th Square at that time. I was famous then, as it was reported many times to my parents that I was reading on the street when walking to and from the library. [...] Yes, I loved the classics, Fadeyev's *Molodaya Gvardiya* or *The Young Guard*.<sup>71</sup>

György Pór recollects that he had eagerly read Marx since he was eleven years old. He perceived the German philosopher not as a distant figure, but as a "personal friend":

I read the history of the Soviet Communist Bolshevik Party at the age of eleven. [...] I was fascinated by the story inspired by the revolutionary struggle of the working class, the workers' movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so I had those childhood heroes like Marx – who to me was not a German philosopher but almost like a personal friend.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, whereas Haraszti's models came from Soviet literature, Pór had other historical revolutionary models: Spartacus and Benjamin Franklin:

69 Ş. Baghiu, *op. cit.*, pp. 5–18.

70 S. Preda, *Patrie romana, tara de eroi!*, Targoviste 2013.

71 Interview with Miklos Haraszti..., p. 1.

72 Interview with György Pór..., p. 6.

[I]n more general terms, every revolutionary movement became something very attractive to me and something that I wanted to learn more about. Thus, I became interested in Spartacus's revolt against Rome, or I read a book I still remember about Benjamin Franklin and the American Revolution. [...] I wanted to become a revolutionary from about ten or eleven.<sup>73</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1950s, the situation became more relaxed. In Romania, children eagerly read Winnetou books<sup>74</sup> or Jules Verne.<sup>75</sup> Mony Bordeianu (born 1948), the first lead singer of the group Phoenix from Timisoara, read books by James Fenimore Cooper in German. He received such novels from his aunt, who lived in West Germany: "I learned to read at a very early age. I used to receive books by James Fenimore Cooper, about encounters with Indians, from my mother's sister who lived in Germany. Because they were so interesting, I quickly learned to read them."<sup>76</sup>

Children like Pór or Haraszti could also read spy novels in addition to partisan stories. Such novels, which praised the communist regime and criticized capitalism, became fashionable for children, since they were less ideologically infused. Miklos Haraszti said that he found joy in reading books about spies: "But then a bit later, I loved a peculiar type: spy novels. There was a guy called Kennedy, whose non-fiction book was *I Rode with the Ku-Klux Klan*. Or there were the Rickett couple's *We Were spies in China*, so kind of positive spies who go to discover what the enemy does in the service of a good cause [...]."<sup>77</sup> As a side observation, Haraszti said immediately afterwards that such novels shaped his personal style of writing: "[A]ll my books which I later wrote followed this pattern, so they were a kind of investigative spy novels, undercover spy novels. One was my *Factory* book, the other was how guided literature works under disguise."<sup>78</sup>

These statements by Haraszti and Pór demonstrate that they self-identify the roots of their activism in their childhood and teenage reading. This observation challenges the assumption that such subversive groups became radical only when they read the texts of Mao or Che Guevara. In other words, by referring to such readings which formed their tactics of protest, they argue that the root of their discontent was already present in their childhood.

73 *Ibidem*, p. 6.

74 Interview with Radu Nicolescu recorded by Adrian Matus in Bucharest, April 2019, personal archive, p. 9.

75 Interview with Klein Jozsef, recorded by Adrian Matus in Bucharest, April 2019, personal archive, p. 4.

76 M. Bordeianu, *Nebunul cu Ochii Inchisi*, Bucharest 2016, p. 25.

77 Interview with Haraszti Miklós..., p. 1.

78 *Ibidem*, p. 2.

### Rejecting School Textbooks

Socialist realism was among the few literary and cultural trends tolerated in the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, children could read less ideologically infused genres such as spy novels or Westerns. Still, such reading was mostly done in their free time. In other words, 1968ers had to read assigned books for school. Thus, I will move next from the fictional books that they read in their free time to the compulsory texts in their school curricula. As I have previously mentioned, the 1968ers were the first East-Central European generation formed by the principles of communism. Still, what was a literature or history school lesson like?

György Dalos recalls that during his school years he read classics such as the national poet Sándor Petőfi or William Shakespeare. Only after 1957, when he got a card at a public library, did he read books by Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Jules Verne, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy. Not only literature, but also history became an ideological battleground. Children could read only the filtered version of past events at school. In 1950s-era Romania, the historian and propagandist Mihail Roller (1908–1958) interpreted Romanian's past through a strong pro-Russian lens by using anti-nationalist Marxist-Leninist discourse. His main statement from the book *Istoria R.P.R.* ("The History of the Romanian People's Republic") was that Romania's past was linked to the Slavic world.<sup>79</sup> This book was compulsory reading in schools. In return, censors and the Ministry of Education forbade references to books which contradicted Roller's point of view.

One of my interlocutors, Paul Hărăguș, who was born in Feldru, Bistrița-Năsăud, said that he had to prepare for the middle school final exam in history by reading Mihail Roller's book. On the other hand, he managed to read alternative books, kept either in his family library or borrowed from his philosophy teacher or his father. However, he could not talk openly about their contents at school.<sup>80</sup> Thus, he was skeptical of the information he received at school and preferred to inform himself about cultural trends from informal networks or private libraries.

Thus, the 1968ers argue that in addition to their family backgrounds, their childhood readings shaped their tactics of protest. My point is not to claim that such childhood books radicalized them. Instead, the interviews show that Fadeyev, spy novels, Marx, and non-ideologically infused historical books formed their identity of opposition. All the interviewed activists have offered examples of literary protagonists who belong to the typology of the outlaw: soldiers belonging

79 B. Trencsenyi, *op.cit.*; but also L. Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, Bucharest 1997.

80 Interview with Paul Hărăguș and Maya Micu recorded by Adrian Matus in Satu Mare, Romania, 18 December 2018, personal archive.



to underground movements, spies, or revolutionaries. Such books also contributed to shaping their later style of writing, as in the case of Haraszti. György Dalos even mentioned that reading Marx as an adolescent created a feeling of being special and more powerful than the others.<sup>81</sup>

### **“You Just Don’t Go Against the Empire”:**

#### **The Influence of 1956 Revolution on Protest Tactics**

#### **The Political Context of the Hungarian Revolution**

In the long term, family and education contributed to the formation of the identity of the activists, hippies, and musicians. However, specific events also played an active role for the 1968ers in shaping their tactics of protest. Specifically, I am referring to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

In short, after the death of Stalin, communist Party leaders became more courageous in asserting their own autonomy. East-Central European countries wanted to distance themselves from Moscow’s direction. However, it was far too risky to directly challenge Moscow’s hegemony through the political discourse. As a result, culture became the first field in which intellectuals challenged the role of the party. To put it bluntly, intellectuals first challenged the “aesthetic principles” of socialist realism, but they soon moved to the philosophical grounds of communism.

The 1952 speech of the Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža at the Yugoslav Writers Union in Ljubljana launched a bold initiative for criticizing communist systems from the inside.<sup>82</sup> Even more popular than Krleža, the Yugoslav philosopher Milovan Djilas became the first popular voice that challenged the Stalinist legacy in East-Central Europe. His book, *The New Class*, critically analyzed how the communist state created a new type of oligarchy. This work opened a new path for dissidents and ultimately became a pivotal text used by revisionists across the whole Eastern Bloc throughout the 1960s.<sup>83</sup>

Not only did intellectuals slowly started to challenge the “dogmatic” position, but soon after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, during which Khrushchev denounced “the Stalinist cult of personality” behind closed doors, communist Party secretaries became more open to “de-Stalinization” principles. In particular Imre Nagy in Hungary and Władysław Gomułka in Poland emphasized the need for national exceptions, as well as arguing for the adaptation of communism to the needs of their country. In this context, they became more permissive towards intellectuals, allowing them to express their own

81 Interview with Dalos György..., p. 39.

82 B. Trencsenyi, *op. cit.*, pp. 361–362.

83 D. Milovan, *The New Class: An analysis of the communist system*, Orlando 1957.

political opinions. This radical change in thinking and the ensuing actions soon contradicted Party guidelines and especially the world view of former Stalinists.

The Hungarian case is particularly illustrative for showing how initial de-Stalinization went much further. As mentioned previously, the key actor was Imre Nagy, Prime Minister of Hungary from 1953 to 1956. His background was not markedly different from that of other high-ranking officials from Soviet satellite countries. During the First World War, he had been taken prisoner by the Russians. In 1917, he became a communist and later fought in the Red Army. After the war, Nagy came back to Hungary, but he left the country in 1930 due to its political situation. He quickly found refuge in the Soviet Union and lived there until 1944.<sup>84</sup> With the support of the Soviets, Imre Nagy replaced Rákosi as prime minister on July 4, 1953. His first initiative was to announce his new ambitious political plan. The new program, called the New Course, extended to five main areas. In the economic field, Nagy tried to put an end to heavy industrialization and place more emphasis on consumer goods production.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, in agriculture, the New Course ended forced collectivization and allowed some autonomy to small farmers. The third policy aimed to improve living standards by reducing price levels. The most “spectacular” policy was the closing of penal camps and amnesty for political prisoners.<sup>86</sup> Finally, the last policy aimed at creating a larger institutional framework for the alternative voices of ordinary people.

However, the population became gradually more dissatisfied because these measures did not improve the living standards of the Hungarian people; they actually worsened them.<sup>87</sup> Parallel to that, by having a more permissive framework, intellectuals became much more courageous in debating contemporary Hungarian issues. Among them, the Petőfi Circle became the best known, especially for its revisionist version of Marxism. Their debates cleverly avoided clearly taboo subjects such as the one-party system and instead dealt with other themes of national significance. Nagy saw this opportunity as a way to have new possible allies. Thus, he connected with such dissatisfied individuals from the nomenclature, both writers and technocrats. After the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Rákosi was named as responsible for the “de-Stalinization process,” but he soon resigned from his position of leadership in the Communist Party. He could not cope in the new post-Stalinist context by using his “Stalinist reflexes.”<sup>88</sup>

84 I. Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism*, Stanford 2005, p. 16.

85 C. Bekes, M. Byrne, M.J. Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, Budapest-New York 2002, p. 5.

86 *Ibidem*, p. 6–7.

87 *Ibidem*, p. 12.

88 *Ibidem*, p. 1.

In the late summer of 1956, history became more favorable for Nagy again. Firstly, the crisis at the top level of the Communist Party had no solution. Then, an important input came from another country from the Eastern Bloc. In Poland, Gomułka dismissed the pro-Soviet high officials from the Party. Predictably, Nikita Khrushchev came to Poland and, after long negotiations, he reached a compromise with his Polish counterpart. What was a compromise for the Polish cause became a victory for the Hungarian revisionist faction. The reformist faction in Hungary encouraged journalists to publish the discourse of Gomułka in the official press, dubbing it “the Polish way to socialism.”<sup>89</sup>

Between the lines, they wanted to encourage a similar move in Hungary as well. The next day, a group of young people announced a student gathering. Initially meant as a march of solidarity with Poland, on October 23, 1956, 200,000 people protested against the government in front of Parliament in Budapest. Hungarian students proposed “Sixteen Points,” the most important of which were articles 1, the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and 12, freedom of opinion and speech.<sup>90</sup> By appearing on the balcony of Parliament, Imre Nagy became the “prime minister of the revolution.”<sup>91</sup> The Soviets initially hesitated to use the full force of the Warsaw Pact because of Khrushchev’s aim for an East-West détente. After initial reluctance to use military force, the Soviet army attacked Budapest and other cities on November 4, 1956. Thus, the Soviets removed Nagy’s followers from the government and replaced them with Janos Kádár’s faction. In the meantime, fighting continued on the streets, as disparate factions unified against the external enemy. Nevertheless, the Warsaw Pact armies crushed the resistance by November 10, 1956.

### **Hungarian 1968ers’ Recollections of the 1956 Revolution**

Such street fights between various factions and the Warsaw Pact armies created strong and vivid memories especially for those who lived in Budapest or other bigger cities. Consequently, the memory of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution played an important role for the 1968ers as well. In 1956, György Dalos was thirteen years old. He recalls that during the first days of the revolution his grandmother told him that the Americans would intervene soon. Initially, he shared a feeling of hope with his family, but that changed after the Soviet invasion. Soviet troops came and entered into their private apartment, a moment when the young Dalos became afraid.<sup>92</sup> Fear grew a few days later, when he realized that the Soviets had

89 *Ibidem*, p. 2.

90 Document no. 24, The Sixteen Points Prepared by Hungarian Students, 22–23 October 1956; cited in: *Ibidem*, pp. 188–189.

91 I. Rév, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

92 Interview with Dalos György..., p. 24.

deported his history teacher because he had attended the protests. He realized that “one should be afraid here now” (*hogy itt most félni kell*).<sup>93</sup>

While Dalos’ recollection of 1956 emphasizes a feeling of fear, György Pór recalls that the events of 1956 shaped his opposition against his father. Being a teenager, he decided to support the decisions of the Communist Party and to be against the freedom fighters in the streets:

My first understanding of ’56 was not an independent intellectual one; I was just an indoctrinated twelve-year-old who held the official Party line against my father who had joined the revolution [...]. I just held that position that anyone that wants to eliminate the socialist system and bring back an older mode of social organization, the capitalist system, is counter-revolutionary.<sup>94</sup>

Galicza Péter was another member of the subversive group created by György Pór. He came from a communist cadre family, and although he was only six years old during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, he had vivid memories of the freedom fighters. Galicza saw “people heading to the forest, with rifles in their hands” as well as Soviet tanks.<sup>95</sup> His family wanted to be kept up to date about the events, and they listened to the radio.<sup>96</sup> Another member of the same group, Simon Péter, was hospitalized in Szabadság-hegyi Clinic during the 1956 Revolution.<sup>97</sup> The most vivid image for him was seeing people shot on the street. The images of people being shot for standing up against the state created a substantial amount of restlessness.<sup>98</sup>

This is the first particular characteristic that distinguishes the Hungarian 1968ers not only from the “global 1968” narrative, but also from other East-Central European countries. Most of the protestors of the late 1960s did not witness

93 *Ibidem*, p. 24.

94 Interview with György Pór..., p. 26.

95 “November 4-e után – ha jól tippelem – egyik napról a másikra olyan dolgok történtek, amiket én is észleltem. Például láttam, hogy a Széher úton mindenféle szedett-vedett népek jönnek fel az erdő felé, puskákkal. Egy vagy két nap múlva pedig szovjet tankok jöttek ugyanazon az útvonalon felfelé. Feltűnő volt, mert nem egy-kettő lézengett ott, hanem rendszeren mentek fel. A fegyveresek nem nagy és egybefüggő csapatokban, hanem kis csoportokban kószáltak felfelé. Ha az ember kinézett az ablakon, akkor látta ezeket a figurákat, ahogy mennek felfelé. Aztán jöttek a tankok, azok viszont falkában, három-négy-öt együtt.” See: oSK, no. 882, Interview with Galicza Péter recorded by Molnár János in Budapest, 2007, pp. 59–60.

96 M. János, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

97 oSK, no. 884, Interview with Simon Péter recorded by Gáti Tibor in Berlin, 17 May 2005, p. 21.

98 “[T]his created for me a very negative impression. I think that [...] this has two faces. This 1956 moment. There are also positive, also negative aspects. I think that both aspects have to be taken into consideration.” See: *Ibidem*, p. 21.

such violent scenes and murders as teenagers as Pór, Dalos, or Haraszti did.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, they saw how the state intervened in the protest and how soldiers shot civilians who stood up for their rights. This created strong affective memories throughout their lives, as the interviews show. Specifically, the strongest shared feeling was fear. In the longer term, this common feeling influenced the way in which Hungarian activists reacted against the system. To take a case in point, Miklos Haraszti has argued that such dramatic events determined the absence of any open protests in 1968. Intellectuals avoided an open confrontation, but at the same time the Hungarian state apparatus was much more cautious about any public gatherings. Haraszti believes that the same mistake Hungarians had made in 1956 was repeated by Prague students in 1968: “[T]he Hungarian intelligentsia was totally mesmerized by the 1956 experience. In 1968, with Czechoslovakia, in 1970, in 1974, in 1976 in Poland, they always talked in a despising way about all those guys who didn’t get the Hungarian lesson: they just don’t understand that you don’t go against the Empire.”<sup>100</sup>

### **“Divide and Conquer” Always Works: The Limited Impact of the 1956 Revolution in Romania**

While the 1956 events changed the tactics of protest in Hungary, they had a very limited effect in Romania. Whereas in Hungary this revolution was a fusion between a top-down reform inside the Communist Party and a bottom-up protest against stopping such a reform, in Romania only the students expressed their grievances. There was no similar reformist trend inside the Communist Party in the Romanian case.<sup>101</sup> In this regard, the ideological demands were replaced by immediate complaints, such as about the quality of food in the public canteens. Nonetheless, others went further: in Bucharest, the students asked for the elimination of Marxism-Leninism and the Russian language from the core curriculum at their university.<sup>102</sup>

Having learned about the events from neighboring Hungary, youth from Timisoara became more courageous and organized a protest. On the November 2, 1956, 2,000 students from Timisoara were arrested after a public demonstration.

99 This argument, invalidated by recent scholarship, was used in the 1970s and 1980s to present the 1960s rebellion as a product of the prosperous state in which activists grew. See: R. Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*, Princeton 1977; R. Fraser, *op. cit.*

100 Interview with Haraszti Miklós..., p. 4.

101 V. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*, Berkeley 2003; J. Granville, “If Hope Is Sin, Then We Are All Guilty”: Romanian Students’ Reactions to the Hungarian Revolution and Soviet Intervention, 1956–1958, “The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies”, no. 1905, 2008, p. 80.

102 J. Granville, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11.

In Bucharest, students intended to organize a similar demonstration on November 5, 1956, but it was too late. Not only had the Soviet army invaded Budapest on November 4, but they also had organized a similar military maneuver to discourage any possible reactions against the state. In other words, on November 5, 1956, Soviet troops pre-empted the plans of the students. They occupied the University Square, the place where the students had planned to gather the same evening.<sup>103</sup>

In the region of Transylvania, the authorities managed the situation in a different way. Because Cluj's population was 48 per cent Hungarian, this called for particular measures.<sup>104</sup> Although this city represented a promising context for turmoil, Romanian and Hungarian intellectuals from Cluj did not manage to create any coherent engagement against the system. For this reason, communist leaders managed to cope with the situation by using the old principle of "divide and conquer." They profited from the tensions between different ethnic groups and no common ground was formed. Of course, students disseminated leaflets as in Bucharest and Timisoara, but no bigger actions happened.

Indeed, many Romanian 1968ers do not recall the protests from their own country as much as they do the events that happened in Hungary. Moreover, their memories of the Hungarian events were less intense, because they witnessed less violence on their own streets and most of the news came later or via Radio Free Europe. Nevertheless, in broader terms, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution had a long-lasting impact particularly for the Hungarian 1968ers. While the "absent parents" and Zhdanov's principles applied in their first years of school are features shared virtually by all East-Central European 1968ers, observing such large street fights was a characteristic experienced only by Hungarian dissidents. Protests did not spread in Romania as easily as one might have been expected. Transylvanian Hungarians did react against the communist regime, but not by referring to any Marxist revisionist discourses. Their grievances were different than in Budapest, as instead they were asking for very specific demands.

However, what is more interesting is that the communist leaders in the two countries collaborated closely during and after the event under the close supervision of Moscow. After the Hungarian Revolution, Soviet agents took Imre Nagy hostage and took him to Snagov, a resort town situated some forty kilometers north of Bucharest.<sup>105</sup> Among others who were deported was the philosopher György Lukács, who later played a prominent role in the late 1960s protests in Budapest. Unfortunately, Nagy did not have the same luck. He was executed in secret

103 S. Covaci, *Persecuția: mișcarea studențească anticomunistă, București, Iași (1956–1958): Nume de cod 'Frăția Paleolitică': documente din Arhiva Securității*, Bucharest 2006.

104 J. Granville, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

105 N. Imre, *Însemnări de la Snagov. Corespondență, rapoarte, convorbiri*, Iași 2004.

on June 16, 1958, in Romania. Nonetheless, other Romanian members of the Party distinguished themselves after the 1956 protests. The future president of Romania in the 1990s, Ion Iliescu, had just come back from a study program in the Soviet Union and was elected secretary of the Youth Union Central Committee in 1956.<sup>106</sup> He investigated the protestors from Timisoara.<sup>107</sup> Later that year, he became responsible for the oversight of students belonging to national minorities. He would occupy a similar position in 1968 as well.

Thus, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 had its importance in the recollections of the generation of 1968ers. The Hungarian dissidents adopted a cautious approach in interactions with the authorities. The Romanian 1968ers knew about the aftermath as well through indirect sources. Therefore, they avoided a direct confrontation with the state, as in other East-Central European countries, like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

### Conclusions

In this paper, I aim at understanding how family background, educational upbringing, and specific events shaped the “pre-history” of the 1968ers. First, I argue that the social and cultural opinions of the activists are also linked to their parents’ political activity. Traditionally, researchers dealing with the “long 1968” have proposed that the political stances of the activists are symptomatic of a “generational gap.”<sup>108</sup> My analysis differs from these in proposing that there is in equal measure a continuity and transmission of ideas. Still, this depends on the activity of their parents and if they consider themselves to be either the “children of perpetrators” or “children of victims.” Another aspect which also influenced their stances was their personal relationship with their parents. The class background of the family also played its own role in the formation of the teenagers. The urban middle class was much more interested in the newest musical, cultural, and social trends than the rural class.

Though strongly infused by ideology, the books my narrators read in their childhood also contributed to the identity of the 1968ers. Reading them shaped them in two ways. They emotionally identified with protagonists who belonged to the typology of the outlaw, but, later on, some of them were influenced by the writing style as well. In return, they rejected the school curricula because they were very arid in cultural references. That is why later on, when translations became

106 J. Granville, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

107 S. Both, I. Iliescu, V.A. Stănculescu, *Spatete Înăbușirii Revoltelor Studențești Din Timișoara, in 1956*, [https://adevarul.ro/locale/timisoara/ion-iliescu-victor-atanasie-stanculescu-spatete-inabusirii-revoltelor-studentesti-timisoara-1956-1\\_50ae38c37c42d5a6639acb62/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/locale/timisoara/ion-iliescu-victor-atanasie-stanculescu-spatete-inabusirii-revoltelor-studentesti-timisoara-1956-1_50ae38c37c42d5a6639acb62/index.html) (accessed: 05.02.2019).

108 A. Schildt, D. Siegfried, *op. cit.*

more widely available, they eagerly read everything as a mechanism of compensation. In comparison with other activists and protestors, the Hungarian 1968ers had strong affective memories which then impacted their tactics of protest. On the one hand, this event showed that the Communist Party's monolith could be challenged. However, for the Budapest youngsters, it also demonstrated that an open conflict is dangerous.





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**Summary**

This paper focuses on Romanian and Hungarian youth of the late 1960s. More specifically, it aims at an understanding of how their childhood experiences differed from those of their counterparts in the West and even in other Soviet Bloc countries, and how this influenced their tactics of opposition. The oral history interviews present a more complex picture than that of a simple generation gap between the 1968ers and their parents. In some cases, the former challenge the authority of their parents, while in others they continue their struggle. At the same time, other generational experiences were significantly different than the 'global 1968'. This chapter challenges the traditional assumption that these teenagers only challenged their family and institutional legacy in a broader context. Instead, the political stances of the Hungarian and Romanian 1968ers were not simply 'ruptures' or 'generational gaps', as scholars have previously argued. Rather, they also continued their family's heritage in their protests.