



1968.  
A Global  
Approach.

Edited by Grzegorz Piotrowski

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# Preface



# 1968: A Global Change

Grzegorz Piotrowski

This volume is an outcome of a conference. "Generational Experience/Transformational Experience of 1968" was held in Gdańsk in May 2018, the 50th anniversary of 1968. The goal of the conference was not only to commemorate the important historical events and to check what is still left today of the social revolution but also to see if any mechanisms observed in 1968 can affect the contemporary world.

1968 became a turning point in the histories of many countries – both in Europe, and beyond. The events of the time took different forms, but in many cases became an important caesura for national histories and marked a certain generational experience. From the Prague Spring and attempts to liberalize communism, through the anti-Semitic March campaign in Poland, and the May events in France, Germany, Mexico and Japan, 1968 mobilized large groups of people, resulting in an emergence of new elites and new types of activists, both of which transformed entire societies.

In all cases, these events were a reaction against the "old" – the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, the establishment, the cultural and political elites of the West, the old Institutional-Revolutionary party of Mexico,

etc. The events also coincided with the development of countercultures, subcultures and art movements. New tactics and slogans were introduced into mainstream discourse. "The new" penetrated public opinion.

Culture played a significant role: on the one hand, prominent artists took part in the events and made their voices heard; on the other, the youth-propelled cultural revolution was in the air almost all over the world. 1968 rose to become a symbol of a new kind of revolution: one that was grounded in cultural matters, with French students calling for changes within the higher education system, Polish students opposing the censorship of a major theatre play, and Americans building a large anti-war movement. As a symbol, 1968 seems rather misleading; that special year saw a culmination of changes that had been accumulating for at least half a decade. In 1968, the sixties reached boiling point.

There were numerous contexts for the events. One was geopolitics: in the early 1960s the cold war rhetoric began to soften, though the Cuban crisis of 1962 and the growing involvement of USA and Russia in local conflicts in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world, reinforced the polarization. Moreover, this involvement shifted from covert intelligence operations and coups to large-scale military activities such as the war in Vietnam and the compulsory military draft in the US. These tensions affected the East and the West; other issues arose with the Chinese model of communist revolution becoming more and more problematic for the Kremlin. The tensions reached a peak in the border war between China and USSR in 1966.

Another change in the global context, decolonialization took place throughout the 1960s, completing a long collapse of global empires and challenging the political status quo. Former colonies struggling for independence not only attracted the attention of both global superpowers, but also gave an impulse to other national liberation processes throughout the world, empowering minorities on the one hand and questioning grand narratives [such as communism] on the other. This tendency resulted in a disillusionment with communist and, to a large extent, capitalist – ideologies. Additionally, it forced thinkers and activists alike to search for alternatives.

The second context is demographics. The generation responsible for the protests in 1968 was one that had no experience of World War II, of the Holocaust or of the atrocities of military conflict. This is why the movement against the war in Vietnam began to grow so strongly in the US [and many other countries as well], why young French students supported the emancipation of former French colonies, and why young socialists in the

Eastern Bloc began to call for reforms in their socialist countries. What is also important was the emancipation of the youth as a separate social class: the children raised in late 1950s and early 1960s had a much larger chance to get the education they wanted.

The third context is technology. With president Kennedy announcing that USA would bring man to the moon, the sixties are now remembered as the "can do" era. Apart from the spectacular event of 1969, numerous minor developments have made great impact, too, improving the living standards [measured by the number of refrigerators, washing machines, and TV sets per household] and facilitating routine labour. According to Jerzy Jarniewicz, 1968 had a large influence on people who later formed high-tech companies; it created in them the awareness that the world is a complex and interconnected system (2019). In Jarniewicz's view, an approach of this sort was closely related to experiments with mind-opening drugs [mostly LSD] on the other hand, and inspirations from far-East philosophies that became part of the hippie counterculture, on the other. intensive growth of media industry allowing people access to what was happening around the world, armed conflicts appeared to be just at our doorstep,. The media not only helped to spread information and develop trends around the globe, but also began to be seen as part of the system the youth rebelled against.

The fourth context are the arts and the political engagement of artists. Beginning with the poets from the Beat Generation, popular culture became the new "opium for the masses". The Beatles were at some point "more popular than Jesus Christ". In contrast to musicians, filmmakers, and writers of the previous decade, many artists in the 1960s openly stated their political views and anti-establishment attitudes, consequently attracting large and predominantly young audiences.

The arts and social movements developed a growing synergy, the best example of which was perhaps the "summer of love" of 1967 that was more than just a gathering around music. A sense of unity was there among young people rebelling against their parents in all possible ways: from clothing and hairstyles [or lack thereof], through music, lifestyle, to values and beliefs. Jarniewicz claims that love began to be used as a tool for doing politics, of opposing the actions of the generation of the parents (2016). Young people began to protest against the whole political system, rejecting the bi-partisan organization of the US [biggest riots organized by the Yippie movement accompanied the convention of the democratic party] or criticizing politics in the global context as such. New social experiments, such as communal forms of living or the use of hallucino-

genic drugs, were strongly supported by artists and therefore replicated on a large scale among their audiences. This trend spread across borders and even beyond the Iron Curtain, with hippie groups emerging in the Eastern Bloc, and copying their Western counterparts.

The development of counterculture was a bonding element for a whole generation of people who entered their adult lives at the end of the 1960s. A brief glimpse of the key events associated with the movement shows that the rebellious youth were, in the end, just a minority. However, they were a minority so loud that nowadays they are seen as "the voice of a generation". Besides the strength of the voice, the most crucial issue in this case was perhaps the formulation of radical claims, which, as it seems, resonated powerfully within the society in general, and the youth in particular. Many of these claims undermined the existing political and social order, making the "1968 generation" a revolutionary one. Besides undermining the concept of family (through the foundation of communes, new ideas in child raising, etc.), the generation challenged numerous other aspects of life, offering criticism of the career rat-race, consumerism, fashion, as well as of conventional approaches to psychiatric illnesses (with the foundation of anti-psychiatry), nature and the environment.

The fifth context is ideology. The wave of neo-anarchism in the late 1960s and 1970s that accompanied the rise of autonomism and of autonomous left, changed the scope of anarchist critique. A new understanding of oppression was developed to include other means of control. These were no longer limited to state power (and its repressive tools such as the police) and capitalism but also included cultural frames (such as sexism and misogyny – both of which affected state policies), ethnic and sexual matters, and many more. Additionally, mass media were recognized as an enemy – and their role as the 'fourth power' was acknowledged.

The changes in power relations – and in the understanding of power – though they took place a long time ago, were only identified by post-structuralist and post-modernist thinkers. Michael Glavin notes: "Foucault has challenged the pre-Enlightenment conception of power as emanating from the top (the monarch) and suppressing a subject below. He shows that, with the spread of Enlightenment thought, power has come to operate in a much more insidious way on what he calls a 'micropolitical' level through the technology of power called discipline" (2004). In Foucault's words, "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of

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[...] authors in this volume present various ways of understanding 1968 as a moment of symbolic change

his own subjection" (1995: 202–3). The technology of disciplinary power is focused on the individual and has been applied across numerous institutions of social life – prisons, schools, mental institutions, armies – across what Foucault calls a "disciplinary society" (Foucault 1995: 216).

The revival of anarchism accompanied the growing discontent with traditional leftist parties, and with the political establishment in general. Key factors here were the development of the Italian Autonomia Operaia, the German Autonomen, and the events of 1968 – especially the breakthrough May happenings in Paris and the role Situationists played in them. At the time, anarchism joined other currents: radical antiracism, feminism, and the more classical criticism of work. Thus, the classical working-class politics was profoundly challenged. Eric Kerl links this development to the inability of anarchism to adapt to modern times: "The failure of anarchism to convincingly offer a coherent strategy for fighting oppression meant that many turned to variants of identity politics. Rather than a unified movement, this resulted in an increasingly disjointed residue of identity-based anarchisms; green anarchism, anarcha-feminism, anarchist people of color, queer anarchism, etc." (Kerl 2010).

Looking at these contexts over half a century later, authors in this volume present various ways of understanding 1968 as a moment of symbolic change. Laurence Cox does so in "How 1968 Changed the World: Movements Making History, History Making Movements" and Mate Szabo follows suit in "1968 Hungary in the History and History of Ideas". Michel Wieviorka, in his chapter on "May 1968 and Social Sciences", analyses the impact of 1968 on the evolution of broadly understood humanities and social sciences. Alain Touraine summarizes the philosophical background of the historical events in an article called "The May Movement or Utopian Communism".

Other papers discuss specific contexts that are often underrepresented in the literature of the subject. Kei Takata presents Japan in "Connecting with the First or the Third World?: Two Paths Toward the Transnational Network Building in the Japanese Global Sixties", while Demet Lüküslü offers a commentary on the events in Turkey ("Political Journey of Turkey's 1968: From a Privileged Youth to a Political Defeat"). In addition, Grzegorz Piotrowski and Przemysław Ruchlewski discuss a specific Polish version of 1968 in their chapter focused on the anti-Semitic campaign launched by the Polish communist party, and the ways it shaped a whole generation of anti-communist activists.

Other articles in this volume are more focused on presenting the events of 1968 from today's perspective. Sergio Zermenio does so in "1968: The Primitive Democrats. Fifty Years Later, What Has Changed and What Still Exists?". Mikołaj Rakusa-Suszczewski, in turn, places emphasis on a particular topic in his "May '68 in France: 'The Cunning of Capitalism'".

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A black and white photograph capturing a massive crowd of people filling a city square. In the foreground, a long, white banner is held aloft by several individuals, its fabric slightly rippled. The banner features the words "MOVEMENT FOR SOCIETY" in a bold, sans-serif font. Behind the banner, the dense heads of the crowd are visible, stretching towards the background. In the upper portion of the image, a multi-story building with numerous windows stands prominently. A sign on the building's facade reads "HOTEL BIEN".

How 1968  
changed  
the World

# How 1968 changed the World: Movements Making History, History Making Movements<sup>1</sup>

Laurence Cox



1.  
This paper draws on  
my work with Salar  
Mohandesi and Bjarke  
Risager for Voices of  
1968 [Mohandesi et  
al. 2018]. Neither is  
responsible for my  
perspectives presented  
here.

## SUMMARY

As activists in social movements, we live in the shadow of the “long 1968”, the wave of struggles that shook the world from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. This is as true in Prague or Derry, with their very different movement histories, as it is in Paris or Chicago, in Bologna or in Mexico City. How we challenge power today, what movements we ally with, how we think about possible futures and how we organise ourselves still depends on the decisive historical moment that 1968 certainly was. This article does not attempt to celebrate (or condemn) 1968, but to understand a legacy which shapes our own movement landscapes – in order to be better able to think forward to another, more successful attempt at transformation.

## INTRODUCTION

Across the “global North”, social movements after 1968 are often seen as different. The rise of a “new left” – together with the decisive decline of Stalinism and social democracy as perspectives for social change – mark this shift in political practice. A similar development is evident in the emergent tendency to think about “social movements” as multiple, as well as by the rise of what is now called “social movement studies”.

More specifically, the decisive ground of politics has changed from a strongly-institutionalised politics of interest groups and state-led economic development within a post-war, post-imperial settlement [examples of which include the welfare state or corporatist arrangements of the old West, the authoritarian forms of “state socialism” of the old East, and the national-developmentalist models of post-colonial societies of what was then called the Third World, by analogy with the French Revolution’s Third Estate] towards a fundamental contestation of how decisions are made – or, in other words, of where power lies and where it should lie.

The central roles of the nation state and the political party [which followed from the economic centrality of the single state and its role as arbiter of distributional politics] have been displaced, not only by neoliberal globalisation but also by politics “below” and “beyond” the nation state. The acceptance of existing cultural hierarchies [centring on the members of the “nation”, on men and on a stifling conformity to “normal” sexuality, “normal” bodies and minds, “mainstream” culture and so on] has met with a fundamental questioning and remaking of everyday lives as well as with attempts to forcibly restore the earlier *status quo*.

In much of the global North, 1968 marks *a*, if not *the*, decisive transition for social movements from the period of the “European civil war” [Pavone 2013] which reached its peak between 1916 and 1948. In that earlier period, the modern nation-state displaced the dynastic states of the Hohenzollerns, Romanovs and Hapsburgs, and the Ottoman Empire. The new states were forged by liberal-democratic, nationalist, peasant and workers’ movements in conflicts that reached their height in the revolutions of 1916–19, the fascist backlash from 1922–1945 [and later in Spain, Portugal and Greece], the European Resistance and the carve-up of the continent between the US and USSR [Thompson 1982]. Today’s authoritarianisms in Poland, Hungary, Italy and Turkey dress up in the clothes of that period but have no new content to offer and no new states to create: the hope for the future, meanwhile, lies elsewhere – not in the

creation of a new kind of state. These are not unusual observations, but they do beg the question of *how* and *why* this sort of change happens.

1968, in fact, is not the only such transition in the shape of social movements. Some features of the period opened by 1968 can be found in earlier movements, too. The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century offer numerous examples: the intensive dialogue between what later feminists would call “the personal and the political”; a counter-cultural challenge to the dominant culture including issues of gender and sexuality, politicised diasporas [in this earlier period Jewish, Irish, Polish, Italian among others], vegetarianism, alternative religions and radical education; significant waves of direct action; and a radical internationalism which sought to connect movement issues as well as movements across borders. As it seems, we cannot construct a universal historical shift from “before 1968” to “after 1968” without risking an oversimplification.

There were also multiple “worlds” of 1968. Struggles within the Eastern Bloc, the capitalist West and what by 1968 was mostly a post-colonial South took different forms. Even within any of these the trajectories and outcomes of movements were radically different: Italy as against Britain, Czechoslovakia as against Yugoslavia, Mexico as against India [even leaving aside awkward cases such as China or South Africa]. How can we understand these divergences in other than *ad hoc* ways? These dilemmas relate to a wider question in social movement research: how can we think about waves of social movements and revolutions and at the same time try to understand intervening periods of relative routine when dominant forces are able to contain struggle within a broadly stable normality?

There are two intellectual traps to be avoided here. One is the temporal provincialism of identifying 1968 as the axial point in world history. A natural temptation for general [and sociological] commentators, such a misconception ignores the longer timeframe mentioned above. It also ignores the fact that, in the Eastern Bloc, 1968 had an important second act, in 1980–81 in Poland and 1989–90 everywhere – and that in much of the global South 1968 was itself the second act, following on and attempting to radicalise the moment of national independence. The long 1968, in other words, has to be situated in both time and space.

The other trap is that of over-specialisation [or historical particularism]. Those who fall into it, refuse to think through the relationships and comparisons between countries, between different movement waves, or between highpoints of struggle and periods of conservative tedium. In this picture most of the social world is taken for granted and all we are

really thinking about is the foam [or, at best, the wave] on top of a deeper sea. This gives us an *histoire événementielle* which can explain nothing, because it does not question how a wave of revolutions is produced out of a passive society, or how post-colonial Britain – with its art-school hippies, the settler society of Northern Ireland, with its grim struggles over local power, and the developing Maoist struggles of newly-independent India – are connected as part of a single world system.

This paper, then, attempts to relate “waves”, moments of social crisis and social movement landscapes in a systematic and hopefully organic way to illuminate the long 1968. Section I discusses how movements make history, the way in which social movement waves provoke organic crises. Section II, in turn, discusses how history makes movements, as well as the way in which the outcomes of crises shape movement landscapes. Finally, section III discusses the implications for social movements today in the shadow of 1968.

#### SECTION I: MOVEMENTS MAKING HISTORY

 2.  
This section draws on  
Cox and Nilsen 2014.

There is no general agreement on how to define, or explain, social movement waves or waves of revolutions<sup>2</sup>. There is, however, more agreement that such waves do in fact take place. Some waves are generally accepted: along with the long 1968, most authors would identify the Atlantic Revolutions [America, France, Haiti, Ireland], the revolutions of 1848, the period of 1916–23 [or its variants] as well as the year 1989 as social movement waves, whatever the authors’ views on other periods and their assessment of the time and space boundaries of particular waves.

Empirically, all such waves over the past 250 years were focused in particular regions of the world-system. I want to propose, firstly, that this fact can be explained in terms of the weaknesses of specific regional hegemonic arrangements – which is almost a tautology [how else could we assess the relative strength or weakness of particular arrangements?] Secondly, and again a near-tautology, I want to suggest that a sufficiently extensive and radical wave itself constitutes a crisis, and does not merely reflect one taking place somewhere else.

These are not simply tautologies, though. Thinking about the situation in this way focuses our attention on the power relationships between collective social actors: the relationships of leadership, alliance, collusion,

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In much of the global North, 1968 marks *a*, if not *the*, decisive transition for social movements from the period of the “European civil war”.

co-optation, clientelism, resignation or resistance which in these waves move from a perhaps fragile hegemony to a moment of crisis before being reconstituted in necessarily new ways, whether the new arrangement consists of a restoration on a different basis or a new revolutionary order.

To unpack this somewhat: any long-term strategy for capital accumulation requires a relatively stable social order, as Gramsci taught us. At its simplest, this involves an actor leading the direction of social development [Touraine's "historicity", 1981] which has "horizontal" allies among other dominant actors constituting a general unity around this project, "vertical" support from (some) subaltern actors in return for material and/or symbolic concessions, the resignation of (other) subaltern actors and the coercion of yet others. Within each of these collective actors there is typically some contestation between those factions who see their interests as bound up with the current order and those who seek a better (for them) alternative; in normal circumstances, however, the factions supporting the hegemonic system of alliances are comfortably dominant.

Any large-scale or radical movement mobilisation *can* disrupt this complicated arrangement. In 1968 we see this happening in several dimensions:

- the emergence of new social actors;
- contestation within previously supportive actors
- previously coerced actors now manifesting effective resistance;
- previously resigned actors once again seeking to assert horizontal agency.

These changes successfully disrupted the existing hegemony in multiple states across the global North. As this sketch suggests, in a system of relationships, a change within a single collective actor involves a change of relationships to the others. Most dramatically, the actor which takes the lead in forcing the crisis is liable to be completely transformed by it, if indeed it survives at all, by virtue of the variety of new relationships which it enters into.

To take two extreme contrasts, Italian student radicals and their organisations would go through radical transformations over the following decade in which individuals and networks nonetheless often remained consistently active from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s and beyond. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia similarly went through a dramatic transformation in the period 1967–68, from the shift towards reform to

the purges following the Warsaw Pact invasion, in the process changing its relationship to popular forces and political reformers alike.

## SECTION II: HISTORY MAKING MOVEMENTS

"There have only been two *world* revolutions. One took place in 1848. The second took place in 1968. Both were historical failures. Both transformed the world".

Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein published these observations, rather unfortunately, in 1989. Their point was not so much about the location of these revolutions within the world-system or their structural impact as about the way in which they shaped what I call movement landscapes. They go on to write:

"In both cases... the political ground-rules of the world-system were profoundly and irrevocably changed as a result of the revolution. It was 1848 which institutionalized the old left (using this term broadly). And it was 1968 that institutionalised the new social movements. Looking forward, 1848 was in this sense the great rehearsal for the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution, for the Baku Congress and Bandeng. 1968 was the rehearsal for what?" (1989: 98)

Specifically, their claim is about the state-centric nature of popular politics after 1848. For 1968 they cite the successful containment of the radical left in the West, its degeneration in the East and the disappointments of national independence in the South – as well as the inherited weaknesses of the various old lefts of the period, which made them less and less plausible as bearers of hope for a new dawn. In other words, their claim is that the crisis of 1968 reshaped movement landscapes (the relationships within which movements are embedded) in truly fundamental ways.

It is possible to agree with this, and to prioritise these two dates as the key foundational moments of the old and new lefts and the modes of organising associated with them, while acknowledging the significance of other revolutionary waves. The Atlantic revolutions were the moment when the liberal-nationalist-democratic combination was – if not created, because it can be found in the English Revolution – formalised and generalised as the ideology that was exported southwards from the American Revolution, eastwards from the French Revolution, and in more subterranean ways around the world by the Haitian Revolution. The revolutionary

wave of 1915–23 [starting with Ghadar, the Easter Rising and Petrograd] gave birth to a vision which married anti-colonialism, state-founding and the hope for development on the exploited periphery of the capitalist world system. In its core, the new wave of left energy and temporarily successful revolutions provoked the rise of fascism as a radical new way of organising popular mobilisation for elite purposes.

The post-1945 independence struggles of Africa and Asia established durable relationships [of alliance, subordination or coercion] between educated nationalist elites, peasant movements, urban workers and sometimes religious forces – as well as made promises of social change whose partial fulfilment would fuel the rebellions of the global South's 1968. Lastly, the "long 1989" (beginning with 1980 in Poland) was not only a second act of the earlier rebellions; it also marked a transition, often within the event itself, from the earlier perspective of radicalising the revolution or realising its real meaning (in this sense it was very similar to many global South perspectives). In countries like the GDR, the fact that the struggles initially spearheaded by long-time dissidents were taken over by emergent forces (at once naïve in relation to the unequal realities of life under capitalism and moving towards a fool's nationalism encouraged by the west) led to a scorched-earth setting in which grassroots movements struggled to survive while the far right took over the streets.

As can be seen, this paper develops and extends Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein's argument in two stages. In section I, it was argued that social movement waves [sometimes] provoke organic crises. In this section, in turn, I argue that the outcomes of such crises [almost always] reshape movement landscapes – although I take this world-revolutionary aspect, in their terms, as not being restricted to the very dramatic and widely shared transformations of movement landscapes following 1848 and 1968, but including at least the four other waves just mentioned.

The concept of movement landscapes is intended to facilitate the historical-comparative analysis of specific (national, world-regional, local etc.) contexts. As the metaphor suggests, movement landscapes are internally interrelated, layered, historically constructed and bounded. The implication is that it is a mistake to attempt to understand movements in isolation. Rather, we should try to see them as part of relationships of alliance, opposition, collusion, etc.

Moreover, we should think these relationships as being relatively long-lasting features which define "business as usual" in a given period

between movement waves. This is not limited to the question of the relative centrality attributed to the local state and the modes of organising that follow from it. It also appears as the everyday assumptions that movement actors make about what they can achieve and what kind of goals are worth seeking; who their allies, potential patrons, easy audiences are; who are not plausible allies or even de facto enemies; what issues are strategic; etc. It thus includes things like whose votes can be counted on for which candidates; who jointly issues calls for demonstrations; which movements' participants overlap; who shares a movement infrastructure; and so on.

The origin of such landscapes, according to this analysis, is usually to be found in prior movement history, in particular in organic crises which "reshuffle the cards" around these relationships. We could contrast, for example, the relative significance of political and cultural radicalisms in shaping the west European and Anglophone movement landscapes of the long 1968 and beyond.

However, it is not only the crisis but also how it is resolved which is decisive here. As in 1848, the actors which were hegemonic prior to 1968 initially responded to the crisis with temporarily successful measures of coercion. Similarly to their 1848 counterparts, they subsequently attempted to reconstitute hegemonic relationships on a new basis. This, however, only met with limited success. Again as in 1848, over the space of several decades following the crisis there would be a remaking of states, of structures of popular consent and of economic strategies. Neoliberalism would displace not only western organised capitalism but also eastern state socialism and southern national-developmentalism, as the previously dominant factions within the leading social actors were displaced by new factions promoting new strategies built around new alliances: hegemonic relationships were rearranged not only above but also below (Lash and Urry 1987).

The crisis of 1968 can be defined as organic, in that *despite* superpower support and temporarily effective coercion it was impossible to subsequently restore hegemonic relationships on the earlier basis. We can see this equally in the failed attempts to restore popular support for state socialism in Czechoslovakia and de Gaulle's brief Indian summer, and the longer-term transformations symbolised in 1988 and 1989 by a world in which Michel Rocard and Alexander Dubček could take leading roles, however briefly.

It was not inevitable that this crisis be resolved from above. Other such crises [the Atlantic Revolutions, 1916 or 1917; elements of the European resistance, anti-colonial agitation] were resolved from below. The resolution from above, as Hilary Wainwright (1994) and others have shown, typically entailed the selective recuperation of some elements of "1968", reconfigured as a consumerist claim for individual choice and the partial inclusion of women, ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, etc., within the structures of neoliberalism.

This reconstructed hegemony thus necessarily involved a shift in the leading group, its horizontal and vertical allies, and the construction of new boundaries around coercion and resignation. Since movements contested these processes, the remaking of movement landscapes did not simply transcribe generic elite strategies, as some accounts suggest. Consider, for example, the contrasting situation of the movements coming out of the US and Northern Irish civil rights movements vis-à-vis their local states.

As the 1970s wore on, in western Europe at least, this reconstruction meant that individual movements were often increasingly pulled between more radical wings (oriented to alliances between movements from below) and more conservative wings [seeking inclusion, acceptance or at least tolerance within the newly-developing order]. Movements thus had to rethink how they oriented themselves towards the new economic relationships, the new hegemony expressed within the state, and the new cultural hierarchies – or rather fight out, internally and externally, how they shaped their goals in relation to these. These conflicts shaped the struggles of the 1970s in particular, as the shapes of movement defeat and of the remade state became clear.

### SECTION III: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MOVEMENTS TODAY

I want to conclude by noting that we are now well into a comparable period of organic crisis, as Alf Nilsen and I noted in 2014. The crisis of consent of neoliberalism follows an earlier crisis of legitimacy forced from the left by the alterglobalisation movement, resistance to the US war on Iraq, anti-austerity struggles, and the complex movements of 2011 (*indignad@s*, Occupy and the Arab uprisings).

In this period we saw a long stalemate that resulted from the meeting of an irresistible force (a wave of mobilisations which would have won in the 1990s) and an irresistible object (the structurally-embedded neoliberalism of the 2000s). As in 1968, the capacity of the existing hegemonic *status quo* to recover was real, but limited: it was sufficient to prevent a victory "from below and on the left", but not to maintain popular consent and hence the strategic viability of the previous hegemonic project – in the current case, that of "progressive neoliberalism" (Fraser 2017).

Unlike in the twilight of Fordism and Stalinism, however, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century there was no elite alternative ready and waiting; there was also no real equivalent for the systematic and well-institutionalised strategies and networks that underpinned the victory of neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Figures to the right of progressive neoliberalism certainly exist (Murdoch, the Koch brothers and so on) but they lack a strategic vision of the new world they want. Hence the current period of experimentation – Gramsci speaks of "monsters" – in which different elite-led combinations (the many iterations of Trump's administration, the rolling shambles of Brexit and so on) seek to maintain their own personal interests at the head of temporary and *ad hoc* combinations of factions. We see not so much a new, coherent and concerted economic strategy (as in the early 1970s) but rather interest groups constituted within the earlier order seeking to maintain short-term advantage and to find a political force capable of expressing it.

In northern and eastern Europe, defection from the neoliberal alliance is mostly taking place to the right (with the significant exceptions of Momentum and Nuit Debout), reflecting the limited levels of popular organisation which movements from below have managed to achieve in these countries. Right-wing politicians focussing on the spectacle of racism and authoritarianism more than strategic plans offer only symbolic compensations for austerity. As I write, Italy's new government is promising an end to austerity, not because it means to follow on the promise, but in order to hold a symbolic confrontation with the EU's budget rules.

In these contexts, we might say, we have seen something like the GDR's two 1989s: our movements were able to provoke a crisis of hegemony, but what filled the space we opened was a mobilisation from above. This new right mimics the forms of grassroots mobilisation but its racist "common sense" (in Gramsci's meaning, too) is shaped by mainstream media, the agencies of the security state, the anti-refugee politicians (social democratic as much as Christian democratic) of the old era, and the most xenophobic elements of popular culture. Racism, in this con-

text, is not even primarily about migrants or refugees: it is about putting the old wine in new bottles. The far right does not represent a new economic or social strategy or direction, but an attempt to keep the show on the road at any cost.

On Europe's western and southern periphery, however, there is a different kind of crisis, one where there is no popular majority for the politics of austerity or neoliberalism. Strong left movements have created a situation where regular breaches in formal legitimacy are required to maintain austerity (rerunning referenda, twisting the arms of elected governments, installing technical governments, the Portuguese presidential veto on left-wing measures and the Greek tragedy of 2015), and in effect the periphery is ruled under the sign of a constant state of exception.

In neither Europe is there as yet any sign of a stable resolution which would bring a broad popular consent behind a new strategic direction. There are no real equivalents of the 1970s liberals waiting in the wings; in turn, the 1920s come to mind with fascism expressing the crisis of consent and an old order flailing around to maintain itself by coercion if necessary. Of course, as history tells us, the smile is likely to wind up being on the face of the tiger.

From above we are seeing a period of experimentation, or in other words "making it up as they go along". Trump and Brexit on the one hand; the increasing paralysis of EU institutions on the other; authoritarian leaders exploring how far they can push the dynamic of centralising power and radicalising hatred against internal opposition and ethnic Others (an experiment also happening outside Europe, in states as different as India, Turkey and Brazil).

From below, we have seen that movements against neoliberalism continue to seek an adequate form: from summit protests and social forums via "squares" and new parties to Blockupy, Altersummit, DiEM25 etc. Most of these, necessarily, privilege some type of alliance-building or attempt at developing what might be called a proto-hegemony. If they have not, as yet, found a convincing and sustainable strategy, they have not lost their struggle either. The outcome has not yet been decided.

What the experience of 1968 suggests for our present period is that it is not the *form* of popular organisation that constitutes the crisis for power: capitalism, the state, imperialism, patriarchy and racism were challenged in very many ways by struggles with very different ideologies and modes of organising. It is not that the form of organisation does not matter: it is

rather that it is not an adequate explanation for outcomes. What is key is *popular participation*, which takes different forms in different countries, with their own different movement landscapes. Form matters, here, in its recognisability to newly-mobilising groups *both* as meaningful *and* as being significantly different from existing forms. We can therefore hope that mobilising in this way, through these organisations or with these allies will make a difference.

The logic of this analysis for radical activists today is that we should not be seeking to form our new alliances with other groups *as they are*: we do not need, for example, to attribute nationalism to popular groups and seek to adopt it. What we need to do is to find our interlocutors in those other groups and develop strategies through which we can act together to construct a broader popular participatory front coming "from below" as much as possible.

The genius of 1968, and of any genuine period of revolutionary upsurge, is expressed in the sounds of many different popular groups finding a new voice, finding their voice for the first time, or finding it after a long period of silence. What that voice will be, in a new setting, cannot be known in advance, either from outside or from within the group's existing culture. The voice is, essentially, emergent. What activists can do is to help amplify those voices and draw them into serious and practical conversation about how to make a different world than the one that the right seeks to force on us.

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*COUP DE FORCE*

May 1968  
and Social  
Sciences

# May 1968 and Social Sciences

Michel Wieviorka

More than two centuries later, the passions of 1789 are far from being extinguished. It is enough to mention the name of Robespierre for debates to reappear immediately – including those which have been considered closed. Contrary to what the historian François Furet claimed (1978), we cannot really think that the Revolution is over.

How could we, then, consider May 1968 to be so? How could the page be turned, just half a century later, when the distance between us and the clashes of the day is still modest on the scale of history? How could we reduce to a simple question of historical knowledge the large tensions and confrontations of ideas that are only about fifty years old?

## MEMORY, HISTORY

The actors and witnesses of the “incidents” of 1968 – as fierce enemies of the May movement said – are still in large numbers in this world. The collective memory is full of innumerable individual recollections: active and contrasting, sometimes changing, as is all memory. May 1968 still belongs to its actors and witnesses.

But fifty years have passed. It is as much as what separated the end of the First World War from the same May 1968, which has long been written in school textbooks, and which now also belongs to history.

More precisely, isn't May in France such a singular historical moment specifically because of its unique scenario? A young actor born of a new post-industrial era, the student movement emerges in the public space and involves in its mobilization the declining, old actor of the dying, industrial era – the workers' movement – who then lives its last fires? On the other hand, since 1968, there has not been a major historical episode of any kind – be it war, colonization or decolonization, or even a huge cultural and social upheaval [even if there have been major economic crises]. Between 1918 and 1968, the French had known the Leagues and the fascist peril of 1934, the Popular Front, the Second World War, the Indochina War, the Algerian War... And then, there was nothing on this scale, except, perhaps, recently, the contemporary terrorism of jihad, the war against Daech, the horrors of Charlie and the Hypercacher [January 2015], the Bataclan [November 2015] or Nice [July 2016].

The fiftieth anniversary of May 1968 may seem strange. How to focus on remembrance and commemoration, memory and history, in times when "presentism" [as described by historian François Hartog in 2003] seems to prevail over history?

Still, it is necessary to agree on the historical periodization, indeed, and to question the rupture that May 1968 possibly constitutes. If it concludes a phase from which France emerged from history, and if it inaugurates a post-historical period that will prove to be half a century long, and if, finally, it is a question of seeing in it the moment of a rupture, then, what about another periodization, which places in 1973 the real mutation of our country, like others?

May 1968 appeared in full growth, and had nothing to do with the consequences of the Kippur War [October 1973], with the first oil crisis, with the accelerated changes in immigration, with the accelerated changes in work organization and management, with the beginning of mass unemployment and exclusion, with the prodromes of the urban crisis and, finally, with the end of the Golden Thirties, which was absolutely not at fault in 1968. This could invite us to distinguish between cultural change – which is indeed spectacular in the case of 1968 – and political, social and economic transformations, which really came much later.

## A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

But 1968 is not France's monopoly, it is a global phenomenon; we would call it "global" today, but at the risk of anachronism. The social movement of the time – in what it presents as a cultural, youthful, student protest – precedes the "events" of the French May itself. Those who, at the time, showed the most understanding for the student revolt inaugurated in France at the University of Nanterre with the March 22nd movement – sociologists Alain Touraine and Edgar Morin in particular – date the birth of this worldwide set of protests at 1964, and the Free Speech Movement of Berkeley, when students at this Californian university protested against the ban on political activities there. And before the beautiful month of May, at the end of January 1968, in Poland, protests against the regime took the form of a demonstration against censorship, which had just banned a show. There, too, it took the form of a cultural, intellectual and student tour, with [which would be characteristic of the protests in Central Europe] a strong political and anti-totalitarian impact. In some respects, however, numerous countries belonged to the great global wave of what would become the 1968 movement. Thus, in February, Czechoslovakia witnessed the beginning of the "Prague Spring", and in Italy, students occupied the University of Rome. Then, many countries, on all continents, would experience strong movements of protest.

France was, therefore, part of a global movement inaugurated before May 1968, in which it also gained, in the world's eyes, a high place – perhaps even the most central, the most significant. The blindness of the daily newspaper, *Le Monde*, under the prestigious pen of Pierre Viansson-Ponté dated 15 March 1968, was already noticeable. In the opening of an article often quoted henceforth he claimed: "What characterizes our public life today is boredom. The French are bored. They do not participate in the great convulsions that shake the world, the Vietnam War certainly moves them, but it does not really affect them". And the same blindness dictated the conclusion: "Anesthesia may cause consumption. And in the end, as we have seen, a country can also perish from boredom".

Perish from boredom? Various signals had been indicating for some time that not everything was an anesthetic in France. For example, the "Langlois affair", named after Henri Langlois, the founder and director of the French Cinémathèque, venerated by film lovers, and dismissed from his functions by André Malraux, Minister of Culture who reproached him for calamitous management. Effect? The mobilization in February was large enough to push back the power, which returned Langlois to his position

in April 1968. When it comes to social matters, I turn, didn't the strikes in Rhodiaceta [immortalized by filmmaker Chris Marker] and Berliet in 1967 [as well as the demonstrations against the social security ordinances in Le Mans, or, on another level, the analyses of a Serge Mallet on the "new working class" – Mallet 1963] also invite us to consider something other than anesthesia and annoyance?

#### THE MOVEMENT WITHOUT SELF-REFLECTION

Contrary to popular belief, the French movement, at least in May 1968, was not politically structured, led or organized by leftist, revolutionary, Marxist-leninist or other ideologies or groups. First of all, it was a cultural protest, which operated by contagion in a network, and attacked with great spontaneity various forms of authority that were quite archaic: the order that reigned in universities, the submission of television to a political power that had aged badly, the consumer society, with its advertising and its manipulation of needs... but also whatever Régis Debray may have said ten years later ("May ingeniously grants capital's wishes, even if it means breaking its taboos and incurring its thunder – Debray 1978]. Certainly, leftist groups did exist, but it was only afterwards, in the reflux of the movement, that they would prosper, imposing their categories in the understanding of the protest. Trotskyist leader Alain Krivine, for example, remained almost unknown until the 1969 presidential election, when he had the idea of running for office. On the other hand, when it comes to giving meaning to the revolt, student and then worker, very early on, the interpretations that would dominate took a revolutionary, and especially Marxist twist, while the actors, in May, were at no time led by any leading forces, nor were they tempted by the takeover of state power (Cohn-Bendit 2008, Geismar 2008). Thus, some demonstrations passed in front of deserted ministries where it would have been very easy to enter: this did not interest the demonstrators. Taking action seemed likely to aim at taking political power in a revolutionary way. To some, the protests were, as Trotskyist leaders Daniel Bensaïd and Henri Weber said, a "dress rehearsal" where vanguard forces would have made their first steps and laid the foundations for the revolution to come, in the way that 1905 in Russia prefigured 1917 (Bensaïd and Weber 1968).

The important thing here is not so much that these leaders were wrong, but that the type of categories they proposed could have become a kind of vulgate, a dominant discourse, especially in the ebb and flow of May

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How we challenge power today, what movements we ally with, how we think about possible futures and how we organise ourselves still depends on the decisive historical moment that 1968 certainly was.

1968, when workers returned to work and an increasingly leftist agitation came to try and keep alive the aspiring wave that had fallen back. After 1968, and until today, the tragedy of the new French social movements is that they have constantly thought of themselves in categories that denied them, perverted them. They have been unable to fully impose the ideas and images of new contestations onto their cultural meanings. They have been unable to mark their entry into a post-industrial era, which will only be understood much later as the era of information and communication, the one in which the subject, individual and collective subjectivity rise to face logics emerging on a global scale. They put the new wine in old barrels.

We can think that there is a link between the weakness of social and cultural struggles in France [from 1968 until, very recently, *Nuit debout*] and the ease with which they have been penetrated by leftist ideologies: when they begin to impose themselves, decomposition threatens, the end of the struggle, or the radicalisation and temptation of violence are never very far away. It is necessary to distinguish here, analytically, the question of the historical, modest weight of *Nuit debout* from that of its sociological importance, which is perhaps not insignificant. To illustrate: *Nuit debout* experiments with new techniques of debate, decision-making and mobilization, far removed from the traditional functioning of leftist groups.

#### THE HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AND 1968

This strange disjunction between the meaning of action and the categories that reflect it has also affected the humanities and social sciences in depth. Already before and especially after 1968, but hardly during the month of May, these disciplines were strongly dominated by structuralism, under different variants. Marxism [which was renewed intellectually under the main impetus of Louis Althusser and, secondarily, of Nicos Poulantzas], anthropology [with the immense figure of Claude Lévi-Strauss], sociology [with Pierre Bourdieu], philosophy and history [with Michel Foucault], Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and many others, etc., have shaped the main understanding of the May movement, the one adopted by many of its actors after the event, and many of those who later wanted to identify with it. However, it was a mistake on the part of Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, in the mid-1980s, to criticize May 1968 in a book entitled *La pensée 68* [1985]. The authors attacked anti-humanism, which they attri-

buted to the movement: they confused the thoughts and ideologies born before, and having prospered after, with the meaning of the May revolt.

A current in the human and social sciences, nevertheless, refused to follow this downward process. The members of this current refused to proclaim the death of the subject; on the contrary, in May, they saw the expression of subjects becoming actors. And it is no coincidence that those who best embodied this type of approach, Alain Touraine and Edgar Morin (the latter very close to Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort) were closely involved in the May movement: both were well acquainted with the American experience, both taught in Nanterre, where Daniel Cohn-Bendit, then a student, was one of the main leaders of the emerging protest. Each of the two, in their own way, took sides with the May 1968 movement, in their public positions, but also in their analyses [Morin, Lefort and Coudray 1968; Touraine 1968].

#### THE SOCIOLOGY OF ACTION AND ITS OPPONENTS

In doing so, they faced three families of intellectual and political opponents: first of all, all those who, in one way or another, constituted themselves as the opponents of May 1968, including the sociologists speaking of an academic crisis [for instance, Aron, Crozier and Boudon]. Raymond Aron greeted with a "Vive De Gaulle" the speech of the Head of State taking over on 30 May 1968, just before the imposing demonstration of support for the regime on the Champs-Élysées, when he had just criticised General de Gaulle for his remarks on Jews, "a self-assured and domineering people" (during a press conference, 27 November 1967). Aron spoke for the movement of a "psychodrama", before publishing *The Unobtainable Revolution* in which he clarified his very hostile analysis [Aron, 1968]. Michel Crozier also criticized the university system, and then spoke of crisis in a sarcastic tone to reflect the movement he had also observed at Nanterre. Raymond Boudon analyzed May 1968 in terms of the crisis of academic opportunities, perverse effects and frustrations [Boudon 1969].

Then there was the second front, whose analyses focused on the movement, action, and subjectivity of the actors. In this front there were proponents of a leftist, revolutionary interpretation of an action that never took place. It seems to me that today we can say that the revolutionary interpretations of May 1968 are denied, which is something that those who, like Henri Weber, promoted them in their time, readily admit. And yet,

this type of thinking remains a part of the discourses that has accompanied social struggles since 1968.

Finally, the third front was the one where the sociologists of the movement, the action, and the subjectivity of the actors clashed with intellectuals proposing a structuralist approach. Surprisingly, many witnesses, participants, or admirers of the May movement were implicated in it.

It could be claimed today that anti-humanist, structuralist thinking has lost ground while at the same time it continues to thrive. The principle applies to the analysis of such varied contemporary phenomena as anti-globalization movements, global terrorism, the importance of religion, the rise of the extreme right, or the dissemination of hate speech and fake news on social networks. Various studies focus on the subjectivity of actors and on the processes of subjectification and de-subjectification upon which they are built, but which can also develop into violence, hatred or despair.

Let us add that in the debate on ideas, it may have happened that, between these four families of thought, partial, and very provisional, alliances were played out. Confronted with structuralist discourse, Boudon, Aron, Crozier, Touraine or Morin could all find themselves criticizing Bourdieu.

Beyond the historical knowledge about ideological confrontations that has accumulated over the years, a return to May 1968 can help us, finally, to better build the debates that are likely to animate the human and social sciences today. Further research will surely shed light on action, whether public or private. But it will do this not merely by continuing to keep the debates of the 1970s alive [in the manner of Gérard Bronner and Étienne Géhin, whose recent book reactivates without renewing the criticisms launched thirty or forty years ago – Bronner and Géhin, 2017], without opening up to the world, as if only French sociology existed. May 1968, in fact, invites us to observe “global” points of view as alternatives to those of “methodological nationalism” that Ulrich Beck [2006] so strongly criticized. In short, we are encouraged to add new levels of analysis – responding to the way the protest agitated the entire planet – without ignoring the specificities of the national societies in which we live.

In the face of the above, it seems that the disciplines of the human and social sciences should become more aware of the fundamental question that constitutes the current core of their internal intellectual tensions: should we start, in the concrete analyses, from the actors, or the system? From the subjectivity of individuals, or from structures? From social

relations (but also ruptures between actors), or from the determinations that are external to them?

In the 1970s and 1980s, the human and social sciences seemed to be organized around a few major paradigms; later, these disciplines seemed to be experiencing a kind of intellectual pulverization, or a scattering of theoretical orientations. While it is excessive or premature to speak today of a recomposition, it may nevertheless be noted that polarizations seem to be starting to emerge again.

Among these other approaches, the most active today are those that stem from the subjectivity of the actors, on the one hand, and those that focus on interactions between actors, on the other. But interactionist approaches are essentially ahistorical, and apolitical. We must, in turn, also talk about history and politics, as is the case with 1968. This is why if there is any continuity between what we can understand from 1968 and contemporary approaches to action, we must look for it in the thoughts of the subjects and of the movement rather than in the approaches that focus on interactions.

In a way, the commemoration of 1968 invites us to highlight the polarization views on the period and on the years that followed, but without locking oneself in. This invitation encourages us to clarify what constitutes a paradigmatic opposition, between thoughts of the subject, subjectification, action, social relations, and thoughts of determination, structures, systems, abstract mechanisms, instances, or devices.

There are other oppositions to structuralist or deterministic thoughts than those of the traditions embodied by Touraine or Morin; there are the interactionist currents, the cognitive sciences, and the strategic or utilitarian perspectives. And if there is no reason to federate these approaches, which are more opposed than complementary, we might still consider as central the very cleavage that separates them from the most rigid or systematic deterministic modes of reasoning.

Finally, May 1968 emerged in societies where not only revolutionary ideas were flourishing, but also where violence enjoyed a real aura in relatively broad political and intellectual circles [anti-colonialist, Third Worldist, Marxist of all kinds, anarchist, etc.]. It is enough to evoke, by way of illustration, Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Student and then worker action was interpreted in revolutionary categories as an emancipation that could justify violence. But in reality, the movement was never tempted by violence nor willing to take

over state power by force, from the street. The paradox of May 1968 is also that it inaugurated the era that is ours today, in which political violence is generally disqualified, and in which revolutionary ideologies are essentially rejected and depreciated. The movement was democratic and non-violent; ideas were not. Today, in turn, ideas are more so, but there is no action comparable to that of the time. It is certainly because May 1968 was fundamentally non-violent that research in the humanities and social sciences today can make violence and the emergence from violence an object of study, and not just a question of political orientation to which the researcher must or must not submit.

Translated from French by Marlena Duda

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# The May Movement or Utopian Communism

# The May Movement or Utopian Communism

Alain Touraine

Economists have accustomed us to talk in the main countries of Western Europe about the miracles [Italian, German] of their reconstruction after the fall of Nazism and, in the case of France, to speak of the Glorious Thirty [1945-1975].

These expressions are correct and this period, which in total was quite short, was one of the most brilliant in our industrial history. We have lived a long time, both in our economic and political lives, on the inspiration of the great initiatives of the Liberation taken by General de Gaulle and by the most organized forces of the Internal Resistance, in particular by the Communists and by an elite of high-ranking officials trained in the Resistance.

But we cannot forget that these three decades of national reconstruction have had other aspects. The first, most visible and dramatic, was the French rejection of decolonization, which formed an impressive contrast: on the one hand there was this French blindness and on the other the intelligence of the United Kingdom transforming its colonial empire into a Commonwealth that gave birth to great modern countries – Canada and Australia in particular – and to independent India led by Nehru and

his successors [until the nationalist party, when it came to power, brought India closer to authoritarian nationalist regimes in the Third World]. The French Indochina war [which ended with the capitulation of Dien Bien Phu] and then the Algerian war [which provoked a French military coup d'état in Algiers that threatened the Metropolitan France itself], did not prevent General de Gaulle from making France, apparently victorious on the ground, accept Algeria's independence in 1962. Between these two major crises was the brief intervention of Pierre Mendès France, which led Tunisia and Morocco to negotiated independence.

Industrialized Europe had been transforming into social democratic societies until Mrs. Thatcher in the United Kingdom and President Reagan in the United States imposed a policy in the service of increasingly financialized capitalism. But France isolated itself in the construction of an alliance between communists and socialists that allowed François Mitterrand to come to power.

The extreme European left during this period was paralyzed [or even destroyed] by the Soviet occupation of half of the European continent, to which the vast majority of the population was strongly opposed. France and Italy, where the left had been largely dominated by the communists, suffered the effects of the Soviet occupation of a major part of the continent. The common programme of the left that had brought François Mitterrand to the Presidency in France was very quickly broken down. Despite that, the second "French" left [that of Pierre Mendès France, Michel Rocard and Jacques Delors], which sought to reconcile a policy of social reforms with a strong desire for economic modernization, did not come to power.

The May Movement has appeared retrospectively to many observers as the central element of this historical sequence that stretches from decolonization to the victory of the left in France.

Faced with such complex events, public opinion remained confused at the time, to the point of simply talking about "the events", but the representation of this brief but intense and creative period remained dominated by the condemnation to which it was subjected in almost all the important sectors of political life, particularly after part of the far left in France, as in Germany and especially in Italy, had fallen over during the lead years. Yet such a judgment misses the point with regard to the student movement. Demands and willingness to change shifted from economic issues to cultural issues, particularly those related to the status of women, sexuality and the problems of the decolonized world.

This description of the "May Movement" had already been applied four years earlier to the *Free Speech Movement at Berkeley* but it was possible to recognize a deeper and lasting influence of the student movement on American youth culture – perhaps because it was shaken by the long American war in Vietnam. The reactions of French public opinion were more confused because they remained more political than cultural, and because France in the 1960s had been silenced by the Algerian war.

I refused to make of the student and trade union movement of May 1968 a character extending its action in a variety of fields, because the importance of this movement does not come from its ability to unite the past and the future but, on the contrary, from its propensity to live – in contradiction as much as in a common uprising – the heritage of industrial civilization and its social conflicts and the discovery [by young people, especially students] of new forms of claims and self-awareness. The May movement was not merely at the center of the period, but it was the turning point through which the transition from one century to another – from one civilization to another [more precisely, from an industrial society to a communication society] and just as much from a world dominated by national states to the globalization of the economy – took place.

It is in such a complex situation that our most important principle of analysis must be applied today: *Think Global*. This requires us to recognize that there are no actors at the heart of the events who hold the full meaning of collective action and that the real nature of action is often revealed in the conflicts between these various orientations. It is above all the predominance of global clashes over the internal political problems of each country that has most distanced the main meaning of such a movement from the meaning given to it by its actors themselves. That is especially the case in France, where, as in Great Britain, strong deindustrialization was accepted, as opposed to the German desire to maintain the country's basic industries.

The traditional left, dominated ideologically by the Communist Party since 1936 and especially after the War, could no longer fight against the decline and even the decomposition of the situation in which it had always acted. The student movement and just as much the trade union movement were deeply divided as to the aims and methods of their action and, therefore, could not propose political responses to the social crisis they had triggered.

All the demonstrations and protests that broke out at the beginning of May paralyzed the whole of French society. Yet, without resorting

to extreme violence, they even threatened General de Gaulle's power for a long day. The mobilized forces were swept away in a few hours by a massive reaction from the defenders of the Gaullist regime, which led to its crushing victory in the elections decided by the President of the French Republic.

If I have given priority to this brief historical review over the description of the protagonists themselves, their intentions and methods of action, it is because the most complete misinterpretation that can be made of what has long been called "events" would be to believe that this movement had a unity and a project. On the contrary, it is best defined by the historical coverage of the last fires of industrial society and the emergence of a society of new actors still poorly identified but defined by a double mutation: by the passage of labour conflicts into more cultural conflicts and, at the same time, by the creation of a globalized capitalism simultaneously challenged by unsettled nationalisms that are turning into nationalist populisms in the United States as well as in France, Poland or the United Kingdom.

To these general contradictions France added a more particular one: all the demonstrators of May 1968 manifested their hostility to General de Gaulle, who had just stopped the military coup in Algiers and had imposed on France, despite the victory on its territory, Algeria's independence, to which the previous socialist government had been firmly opposed.

Let us, therefore, start with the most visible. In May 1968, the Communist Party and the General Confederation of Labour (especially their leaders) were hostile to the student movement, which an official Communist Party singer even openly accused of being in the service of the police. Students, many of whom also had anti-communist sentiments, especially when they belong to Trotskyist or anarchist groups, were themselves divided into two tendencies that need to be distinguished. The students of the Sorbonne, the main venue for the student movement's demonstrations, were strongly organized by Trotskyist or Maoist splinter groups, while the strength of the Nanterre group was in the anarchist-inspired Movement of 22 March, whose main leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit made no secret of its anti-communism nourished by a long political memory. It should be added that the cultural personalities who spoke, particularly at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris, had in fact little contact with students at the Sorbonne and even less with those at Nanterre whose Faculty had been closed since the beginning of May.

A second observation is also important but less obvious than the one concerning the diversity of political orientations. In Nanterre and less clearly at the Sorbonne, there was no major conflict between students and teachers, as there would be eight years later, for example, in the new student strike that would leave the Amiens campus and that a group of sociologists, on my initiative, studied at length in a "sociological intervention" to be published in 1978.

At the time of May 1968, I knew quite well the students of Nanterre to whom my teaching had been addressed since the autumn of 1966 and some of whom, such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit himself, also attended my seminars at the Hautes Études. This may explain why when they were summoned by the Disciplinary Council of the Faculty of Nanterre where they could ask a teacher to defend them, Cohn-Bendit and several of his comrades of 22 March chose me as their defender, as others chose Paul Ricœur. The readers of my book will easily understand the reasons why I have always maintained a very positive judgment on these students, some of whom have become very well-known personalities and who seem to me to have made good use of their sociology studies, which enabled them to hear teachers as diverse as Henri Lefebvre, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Crozier, François Bourricaud, Marshall Sahlins or Fernando Henrique Cardoso. A number of them had already been influenced by the situationist movement that had emerged at the University of Strasbourg, where Lefebvre and Baudrillard were then teaching.

I spent whole days and nights at the Sorbonne but I remain convinced that it was in Nanterre that the most important and newest themes of the May Movement were launched and that Daniel Cohn-Bendit was the most representative student personality. This three-year experience has been of considerable importance to me, both in my work as a general sociologist and in my study of social movements. It reinforced my conviction that the logic of the people involved can never be reduced to the interests of the systems in which they are placed and to those who dominate them.

I had been prepared for the study of student movements by a good knowledge of the Free Speech Movement, the protest movement, which appeared in 1964 at the University of Berkeley, the heart of the famous Californian university system [public] which had been created by a distinguished American colleague and friend, Clark Kerr, a well-known specialist in Labor Economics – a field to which I myself devoted to the sociology of work, I felt very close.

At that time, I was already trying to show that in society, which was becoming post-industrial, the purely social movements that had occupied the central place were giving way to movements that were both more cultural than social and even more directly ethical and democratic, associating the defense of fundamental human rights with the submission of the institutions and political actors themselves to these rights defined in universalist terms. I shared this confidence in the transformation process of the most important social actors with Michel Rocard, the political activists of the United Socialist Party (PSU) and the trade unionists of the new French Democratic Confederation of Labour, with whom I remain always close. In Paris, the rupture between the main trade union organization, the General Confederation of Labour and the student movement, which strongly united international themes and themes related to personal life and in particular to sex life with more traditional social demands, was more visible than elsewhere. Moreover, it was not difficult, in Berlin or Trento as much as in Paris, to see the importance that students attached to conflicts such as the Vietnam War or the uprising against the Shah of Iran.

My central preoccupation in studying the May Movement was to define as precisely as possible the common elements and the elements of opposition observable in the action of students and in that of trade unions, whose action was much more visible for more than a month but was much less charged with new meanings. As we know, the student movement finally gave way to a purely political movement, that of what the French called the "splinter groups" (*groupuscules*), which were much more visible in Italy and which broke out into several fractions of the extreme left, many of which manifested themselves in violence that had not broken out during the central weeks of the "events".

I quickly understood, even before the closure of the Faculty of Nanterre at the beginning of May 68, that the social actors in the middle of whom I lived did not feel represented by their governments, nor by the Communist Party, nor by the Trotskyist and Maoist groups themselves. Their dominant orientations were international rather than national, and cultural rather than economic. But as much as I was suspicious of the small Trotskyist and Maoist groups (while finding many of my closest friends among former Trotskyists), I understood that the movement that carried the demands of young people, students or not, put into action their entire personality. It was easy to understand this transformation, because at the same time as a great student movement was forming, a women's liberation movement was also forming, which broke away from the institutional objectives of old feminism (mainly oriented towards

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The May Movement has appeared retrospectively to many observers as the central element of this historical sequence that stretches from decolonization to the victory of the left in France.

the struggle to obtain the right to vote], now acquired, to devote itself to women's rights to control their bodies. This trend was strongly led by both the Family Planning group and Antoinette Fouque and her friends from the Women's Liberation Movement [MLF]. As early as in May 1968, I was convinced that the social movements that would mark the emerging society, once rebuilt after the War, would bring into play both a more fundamental conception of democracy and a much more complete vision of the forms of suffered domination and the necessary revolts.

Moreover, by that time I had already acquired a strong experience in Latin America, where I then had the opportunity to take positions quite similar to those I was taking in France, keeping away from the anti-American and pro-Cuban guerrillas, but recognizing the fundamentally democratic nature of Chilean Popular Unity and Salvador Allende's action. The examples of the Budapest and Poznań uprisings in 1956 and of the Prague uprising, a contemporary of the May 1968 movement, had already prepared me for the major experience that was for me later on a long and strong association with the Polish movement Solidarność.

At the end of this second academic year in Nanterre, I became convinced that the movement, despite its contradictions and failures, was a founding moment of new social movements that corresponded to a new stage in the development of modern societies and went beyond the field of economics and production to reach and set in motion all aspects and domains of the personality. Certainly, the experience of Solidarność throughout Poland (and, for me, in particular in Warsaw and Wrocław) was historically and personally as moving and meaningful as that of the student movements – including later the Arab Spring and the Chilean student uprising – but the students of Berkeley and Nanterre had created a newer experience, both personal and collective – and one that had global impact. It is this richness of meaning that also explains the "practical" failures of these movements. Half a century later, the symbolic importance of this movement remains immeasurable.

Following the student and trade union movement of May 1968, we saw the last great fires of the workers' movement illuminate the sky of Besançon with the strike and the occupation of the Lip factory. We felt, at the same time as we saw the failure of other student movements less loaded with new meanings, that there was an irreversible dissociation between social actors and political leaders in democratic industrial countries.

Between May 1968 and the presidential and legislative elections of 2017, in the French case, I see no presence of new social actors (whether they

are negotiators or revolutionaries, whether they announce the formation of a new ruling class or on the contrary new working classes). France has always remained a nation driven by a political rather than a social conscience. In the midst of industrialization, on the eve of the First World War, she was even more passionate about the struggle of the laity against the Catholic Church at the time of the Dreyfus affair than about the formation of direct-action unionism. It was only for half a century, tragically cut in half by the First World War, that France thought of itself and acted as a nation that was first and foremost an industrial nation. And now it is capable of becoming a post-industrial nation, that is, one dominated by communication activities that lead to other forms of power and also to a decline of national states whose future has been so closely linked to that of industrialization in Europe over the past two centuries. Will France – and even more so the countries that have more recently come to be industrialized – will they be able, without having lived their industrial life completely, to rethink and reform themselves as nations or regions in which the stakes and conflicts are more and more global? Will they operate against ever more total (rather than totalitarian) powers in which social movements must form? Will they call into question all forms of consciousness, of self and will, to fight and liberate human subjects?

I myself had the great opportunity to experience the Liberation of Paris and the May Movement, and I have the duty to show that these were moments of creation and – the word is right – of liberation; but I also experienced the long duration of sadness that saw the breakdown of both the chances of modernity and social conflicts and the struggles for fundamental human rights.

Many of us, especially the youngest ones, have even lived part of our lives without any presence of what we have called social movements or even without periods dominated by the frightening presence of anti-social movements, of which jihadi attacks have struck us with the most extreme force. Consequently, when we talk about collective action, we think more spontaneously of debates on the suppression of violence than of the growing of new forms of demands and liberation. This is a sufficient argument to look again to the 1944 and 1968 liberation movements for reasons to live.

If the memory of the first great student movement has not disappeared half a century after its original emergence, and if it has not disrupted the lives of the population as the colonial wars or, just after the student movements, the "Years of Lead" did, it is because we are still seeking a desire for liberation and searching a definition of new fundamental

human rights in them. We would have to be unable to understand our own history to see in these memories, both distant and close, only the dream of unrest and worry, when they were unique manifestations of the creativity and liberation drive of a society and its youth.

Just as the conquest of political rights was the great objective of the century of the Revolutions (the Glorious English Revolution of 1688, the American Independence of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789) and as, from the great strikes of the late 19th century to the creation of the welfare state in industrialized Europe, the workers movement managed to conquer very broad social rights at the heart of an industrial society that was at the same time threatened and ravaged by world wars, totalitarian regimes and community struggles, I hope that, after half a century, the commemoration of the "events" of 1968 – which were in fact constitutive of a powerful social movement – will encourage us to seek out the actors, ideas and needs that are now struggling to express themselves. The slogans launched by American, French and other students in the 1960s have not been forgotten; they will not be forgotten because they are to be complemented with other ethical and political requirements of societies that are experiencing other forms of activity and domination. But like all our predecessors, we can only understand the new struggles we must wage, and the new hopes we must conceive by making critical judgments – that is, by making active judgments about our past struggles and hopes. Among the most appropriate experiences to help us choose a future for ourselves are the student movements that have brought protest to the cultural field and the movements of the European countries occupied by the Soviet Union, which have been social movements, national movements and democratic movements at the same time.

What prevented these important historical movements from rising to greatness in history is that these students (or here and there these trade unionists) did not find political "representatives" to transform them into electoral platforms and laws to be voted on by a democratically elected Parliament. They poured "new wine into old wineskins". They read the works of Sartre or Camus in the language of Marx. They condemned themselves more often than they were able to name their opponents. Let us no longer misunderstand ourselves in this way; let us find new bridges as soon as possible to move from social movements to political action, let us give clear priority to the quest for that which unites cultural objectives with political will and social innovations.

Today, this priority must be given to the creation of what I would no longer call new education systems but new fields of subjectification – that

is, the recognition of the fundamental human rights of all beings in all aspects of their thinking, conscience and action on themselves and their environment. We must avoid the collapse of student movements and the transition to brutal violence that followed the 1968 liberation moments. Which forces us to choose. A social movement can only exist if it supports the most creative aspects and the most vibrant hopes for a new society. A social movement is not only critical and destructive, it is also an affirmation of a *modernity* that must and can be put at the service of all. There can be no creative social movement without liberating universalism and, at the same time, without the recognition of the diversity of historical experiences. After a long period in which our world has been dominated almost exclusively by the enrichment of the richest and the triumph of the most powerful and violent, we must above all create and sustain new actors who take charge of all areas of individual or collective life where the need to fight increasingly total dominations everywhere and in all areas is most pronounced.

*Translated from French by Marlena Duda*



May 1968  
— The Cunning  
of Capitalism

# May 1968 – The Cunning of Capitalism

Mikołaj Rakusa-Suszczewski

In many important French interpretations, May 1968 had an anti-capitalist character. Capitalism or anti-capitalism were not only subjects of leftist criticism, which initiated a global wave of protests, but also created a kind of *Zeitgeist* for this social revolt. To use the language of social movements, they offered a “master frame” for the events. Capitalism was the source of all other problems and concerns, and even became a pop-culture figure of absolute evil: a system based on violence, hegemony, exploitation, alienation, repression, imperialism, technocracy and bureaucracy, on the fall of morality and culture, on the destruction of spirituality, etc. In brief, it was the most important reason for what the chroniclers of the May events, Hamon and Rotman, described in their *Génération* as a “complex of wickedness” – that is, a common sense of injustice among the rebellious youth. Only an anti-capitalist revolution could bring such a discomfort to an end. In accordance with the slogan, “l’humanité ne sera vraiment heureuse que lorsque le dernier des capitalistes aura été pendu avec les tripes du dernier des bureaucrates” (“Humanity will be truly happy only when the last of the capitalists has been hanged on the guts of the last of the bureaucrats”).

One of the fundamental questions that divides contemporary critics is about the inspiration behind and the real subjects of the May 1968 revolution. Who were these various actors (students, intellectuals, workers) with their demands and interests? Or were these perhaps anonymous modernization forces, especially capitalism itself, reaching the limits of its own development? An answer to this question may be either rational or quasi-esoteric. You either can recognize the power of human actions and the agility of social actors, or believe in fate or historical logic. The latter approach involves a surprising assertion that the forces of capitalism have made a kind of "interception" [*detournement*] of claims of the 1968 revolution. The results of these events were therefore counterproductive, and the criticism of capitalism only led to the strengthening of it. I shall try to present several arguments for this strange thesis formulated over the last decades.

Let us start with the fact that the criticism of capitalism was by no means associated with its crisis at the time. May 1968 crowned an economic recovery that lasted for over 30 years. Between 1957 and 1973, the purchasing power doubled [while since 1980 it has increased by only 14%]. Until 1967 unemployment in France remained at the level of 2% [today it remains at the level of 8–10%]. At the same time, the development of social welfare was also evident. The economic situation in France was good enough to talk about the so-called "Glorious Thirty Years" [*Les Trente Glorieuses*]. Although there were some indicators of the weakening of the welfare state and of growing unemployment among young people, it is difficult to see any economic causes for major dissatisfaction. The lack of a convincing economic justification for this social crisis often resulted in the trivializing of these events or even in various conspiracy theories. It was the case with the statements made by the Minister of Internal Affairs of France, Raymond Marcellin. Claims about the alleged Soviet intrigue or suspicions about Mossad and CIA were formulated to convince the public opinion that May 1968 was the result of extremists' actions, and France paid for the support for the Arab states in the Six-Day War of 1967 and for the country's withdrawal from NATO in 1966.

Let us go back to capitalism. The criticism of it usually had a twofold character: socio-political and counter-cultural. In the first case, it particularly concerned labour relations. Marxists from the Parti Communiste Français officially upheld the theses of Ernest Mandel and Charles Bettelheim on capitalism that was entering the imperialist phase, leading to the fusion of the state institutions and large capitalist monopolies. They foretold the advent of recessions and crises as well as the strengthening of the exploitation system. Mandel wrote:

"Labor under neo-capitalism is more than ever alienated labor, forced labor, labor under command of a hierarchy which dictates to the worker what he has to produce and how he has to produce it. And this same hierarchy imposes upon him what to consume and when to consume it, what to think and when to think it, what to dream and when to dream it, giving alienation new and dreadful dimensions. It tries to alienate the worker even from his consciousness of being alienated, of being exploited". (1968)

Industrialization processes, which developed at the expense of small and native businesses, received harsh criticism. This problem was particularly evident in the countryside, as Bernard Lambert claimed (1970).

In addition, the issue of power relations was also criticized. There was a protest against the imperial consequences of the functioning of capitalism, which resulted in the Vietnam War or the in the pitiable fate of the French colony in Algeria. For the Trotskyist and Maoist groups, the notion of so-called "Third World" as a victim of imperialist capitalism became popular. Such issues as domination, hierarchy or bureaucracy also concerned the workplace, and thus emerged the postulates of a more democratic and representative organization of a capitalist enterprise. Parti Socialiste Unifié called for a strengthening of the state control functions as well as for the "socialization of capitalism" by strengthening the participation of workers' self-governments in the functioning of enterprises. In this spirit, Cornelius Castoriadis developed his project of democratic self-control [*Autogestion*], outside the system of oppressive control of the so-called "competent specialists". The avant-garde social projects attracted the attention of Kristin Ross, who – in her important and widely discussed book – regretted that these projects are often forgotten in the somewhat apologetic and nostalgic interpretations of May 1968 (Ross 2008).

Countercultural criticism was concerned with other issues. Firstly, its aim was to observe the widespread culture of consumerism and the related social consequences of economic rationality. The latter was perceived as a source of dehumanization, of a repression of desires and of artificiality. These features are embodied in the main characters of George Perec's novel *Things: A Story of the Sixties* (1965), which features numbness, superficiality and some extremely hedonistic approaches to life. We find these threads in a slightly different form in the countercultural performances of those situationists who stigmatized fetishism. Raoul Vaneigem claims:

"Capitalism has demystified survival. It has made the poverty of daily life intolerable in view of the increasing wealth of technical possibilities. Survival has become an economizing on life. The civilization of collective survival increases the dead time in individual lives to the point where the death forces are liable to carry the day over collective survival itself. The only hope is that the passion for destruction may be reconverted into a passion for life". [2012: 138]

The second element of this criticism was the modernization model. Alain Touraine pointed out that the basic problem is not so much capitalist exploitation as the technocratic and bureaucratic nature of industrial societies growing on the soil of capitalism. The rigid corset of modern culture met with the resistance of critical awareness and free expression, which Touraine identified with the so-called "Utopian Communism". It was a new, post-industrial form of the class conflict, the subject of which was not so much the economic exploitation but the cultural domination and the conflict of values. In the end, the criticism was related to the so called "socialization model", which – as argued – brought exclusion, inequality, apathy, indifference and alienation – the key word needed on our way towards understanding May events [Trebitsch 2000: 77].

In this vast context of problems, it was particularly important to reflect on youth as a new generational social actor, who not only was most exposed to the destructive impact of capitalism, but also created a more perfect model of social life. Castoriadis writes:

"Since the beginning of the 1960s", "the involvement and the unrest of the young in general, and more particularly of students, have been the main unsettling factors in Western societies. At the same time, traditional family relationships and the place and role of women in society have been increasingly questioned, as have the capitalist ideologies of growth and consumerism and the capitalist view of the relation between man and nature". [1988: 327]

The criticism of capitalism was so extensive that it would be extremely difficult to map it in such a short article. I am limiting myself here to a few comments from beyond the "official history", which – contrary to the so expressive anti-capitalist moods of May 1968 – claim the surprising triumph of capital. The 1968 revolution is in this sense only a fruit of the cunning action of capitalism, a moment of self-regulation, the announcement of the spring orders coordinated by the "neoliberal Leviathan". Wojciech Burszta comments: "The sixties were crucified for the fact that the alternative values promoted by them were described as destructive

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We can even claim that capitalism actually appeared in the counterculture mask of May 1968. As a result, the actors of these events in France (and in other countries) were subject to pragmatic evolution in the spirit of reformism. As a result, the anti-capitalist critic turned himself into the ammunition capitalism used.

to the form of life called the West" [2013: 83]. However, the criticism of these events goes much further, while the alternative values mentioned in the book by the Polish thinker met not only with neoliberal and neo-conservative reactions, but – according to the authors quoted below – actually gave rise to them.

The French Marxist Régis Debray in his *Modeste contribution aux discours et cérémonies officielles du dixième anniversaire* [1978] claims that May 1968 was an explosion of "lyrical illusions" which in reality did not contribute to the weakening of the capitalist order. On the contrary, they became the midwife and the cradle of a new bourgeois society. May 1968 was therefore not a revolution, but a leaven of reform aimed at a new division of capital. Post-war France – Debray argues – split into two parts: a modernized and progressive, technologically and industrially developed France on the one hand, and a Gaullist, catholic and patriarchal France on the other. This second, conservative and backward France was not interested in progress and modernization. Therefore, May 1968 crisis expressed the need to harmonize these two increasingly explosive worlds. The further development of capitalism required a cultural revolution that would untie the corsets of traditional mentality and the patterns of economic activity [Debray 1978].

In the spirit of Tocqueville, Gilles Lipovetsky formulated a more general thesis, claiming that the events of May 1968 fit into the wider stream of general modernization. The social movements, as he suggests, fought for extremely individualistic values. The emancipation of subjectivity required the movements to question the hierarchical order and the dominant position of traditional institutions (especially the state). In this interpretation, the revolution was conducted to weaken social ties, and to express private needs and interests; as a result, it removed all socio-political subject matters – in short, it depoliticized the public sphere. National mobilization and sincere acts of solidarity concealed an explosion of individualist claims and egocentric aspirations, in accordance with the slogan "Ni maître, ni Dieu, Dieu c'est Moi" [Neither master nor God, God is Me].

In May 1968 the equality and autonomy postulates were spreading – the ideals of the absolute, unlimited, moral and sexual freedom. Anti-bureaucratic, anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian slogans were raised: against universities, educational system, the police, trade unions, etc. The value of life itself, imagination, spontaneity, pleasure, self-governance, criticism and general contestation were proclaimed. The role of psychoanalysis was growing. The so far marginal social movement had turned into an authentic national culture. It brought an enormous number of the-

rapists and educational guides. Psychoanalysis became popular in medical schools, and among the students of psychiatry, in avant-garde literary movements, and in courses of social criticism (feminism), economics and mathematics. Jacques Lacan became a national hero. As a result – as Lipovetsky argues – the 1968 revolution was a manifestation of neoliberal passions. The emphasis on satisfaction and hedonistic needs was in fact a demonstration of the powers of consumerism and mass culture that stimulate capitalism. And conversely, capitalism enabled a polymorphic explosion of desires. This was the bitter paradox of 1968.

Elsewhere, Lipovetsky goes even further and claims that these events were the expression of superficial fashions devoid of any significance but so characteristic of mass and consumerist societies. He writes:

"May 1968 in this respect constitutes an unprecedented moment: without any definite goal or program, the movement was an insurrection without a future, a revolution in the present tense attesting simultaneously to the decline of eschatologies and to the protesters' inability to offer a clear view of the society to come. Without an explicit project, subtended by a spontaneous ideology, May 1968 was just a short-lived parenthesis, a frivolous revolution, an infatuation with Revolution rather than a fundamental mobilization. It offered the spectacle of revolution, a joyous affirmation of revolutionary signs, not revolutionary stakes and confrontations. Unlike the bloody revolutions that had focused on the deliberate construction of a different future, May 1968 was organized around the temporal axis of fashion – the present – in a 'happening' that looked more like a big party than like the days that shook the world". [Lipovetsky 2002: 208]

This paradox was captured in the most unambiguous way by Luc Boltanski and Éva Chiapello in *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* [1999]. The authors show that the countercultural critique of capitalism, which they call an "artistic critique", has been integrated and utilized by capitalism. They talk about the so-called "new spirit of capitalism", which refers to such ideals of May 1968 as autonomy, flexibility, spontaneity and creativity, instead of traditional values of discipline, order and diligence. The economic crisis of 1965–1975 led to the abandonment of the Fordist labour and production system. Traditional ways of resolving employee conflicts based on wage negotiations and forms of security were abandoned. Capitalism also began to develop networks of organizations based on the initiative of the employed, as well as on relative independence that enabled self-fulfilment. As the authors write, "autonomy was exchanged for security, opening the way for a new spirit of capitalism extolling the virtues of

mobility and adaptability, whereas the previous spirit was unquestionably more concerned with security than with liberty" (1999: 199). The production system introduced multitasking to limit narrow specializations in the oppressive and rigid division of labour. The new spirit introduced alternative principles to corporate philosophy, including the principle of kindness, sensitivity to differences and openness to unconventional forms of action. Boltansky and Chiapello write:

"The new spirit was receptive to the critiques of the period that denounced the mechanization of the world [post-industrial society against industrial society] – the destruction of forms of life conducive to the fulfilment of specifically human potential and, in particular, creativity – and stressed the intolerable character of the modes of oppression which, without necessarily deriving directly from historical capitalism, had been exploited by capitalist mechanisms for organizing work. [...] The new spirit could be conceived in the initial stages of its formulation as transcending capitalism, thereby transcending anti-capitalism as well". (1999: 201)

In the brief interpretations of May 1968 events presented here, we can perhaps talk about the "cunning of capitalism" – about its extraordinary energy and adaptive abilities. We can even claim that capitalism actually appeared in the counterculture mask of May 1968. As a result, the actors of these events in France (and in other countries) were subject to pragmatic evolution in the spirit of reformism. As a result, the anti-capitalist critic turned himself into the ammunition capitalism used. On the other hand, it can be equally well said that changes within the world of capital testify, in fact, to the long-term effectiveness and the impact of the ideals of May 1968, which still radiate into the culture of entrepreneurship and into modern forms of capitalism. The arguments of French intellectuals mentioned here go against the "official history" – the widespread myths and the idealized visions of contestation. Regardless of whether we are talking about the flexibility of capitalism and the ultimate dusk of the leftist spirit, or – for a change – of the strength and effectiveness of revolutionary aspirations, May 1968 initiated changes that have permanently become a part of the landscape of social life in the West.

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# Events of March 1968 in Poland

# Events of March 1968 in Poland

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## INTRODUCTION

1968 had a different trajectory in Poland than in other countries around the world, and at the same time it shared some similarities, too. It is mostly remembered as the emergence of a youth opposition to the communist party, as numerous key figures of the pro-democratic opposition in communist Poland began their activities precisely in March 1968. The period is remembered mostly because of student protests that broke out after the communist authorities had cancelled further screenings of a theatre play, *Dziady*, a Polish romantic literature classic staged in an avant-garde way by Kazimierz Dejmek. The public claim to revoke the decision regarding the play was soon followed by other demands: for the communist regime to be liberalized, for freedom of speech and expression to be guaranteed, and so on. What is also remembered now is the brutal pacification of the protests and – most importantly – the anti-Semitic campaign launched by the authorities in the aftermath of this wave of protests.

A feature the global protests of 1968 all shared was the active role young people played in the events. While majority of the protests were staged by university students, the youth became an empowered subject of the political struggles. In 1968, key figures of the events – and of what later formed as the pro-democratic opposition in Poland – were expelled from universities. The expulsion created a generational caesura [and to some extent a generational trauma].

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH MOVEMENTS IN COMMUNIST POLAND

The youth were very important for political propaganda in the Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa – PRL). It was young people that were supposed to ignite and carry on the flame of the socialist revolution; it was precisely them who were not 'spoiled' by the memories of pre-war Poland. Therefore, special attention was paid to the functioning of youth organizations: youth sections of the communist party, scouting groups, and organizations engaging young people from the countryside. A special paramilitary entity coordinated the work of 'volunteers' that helped to rebuild Polish cities or to build new ones. Membership in this organization – Organizacja "Służba Polsce" – was only claimed to be voluntary; as a matter of fact, people were recruited in the same manner as in the army, were often forcefully conscripted, and sent down for either manifesting 'immoral behaviour' or being a 'suspicious element'.

At the same time – acknowledging the rebellious potential – the communist authorities paid special attention to any forms of youth activism, in particular the ones growing outside of controlled structures. As a result, subcultures in Poland under communism were much more politicized than in the West; belonging to one was not only a lifestyle choice, but also a political statement. Starting from the 1950s, communist authorities were heavily suspicious of anything that offered an alternative to the immediate reality – to literally anything that they could not control (even fashion trends).

By mid-1960s, the reality of communist Poland became the only one many youngsters knew. When reading manifestos of the first independent and politicized youth groups, one can see how deeply the language of communist propaganda was rooted in the young people's expression. A majority of these statements did not call for national independence, but rather opted for a revisionist approach.

#### CONTEXT OF THE EVENTS

One of the key contexts of March 1968 in Poland was the outbreak of the "Six-Day War" in 1967. Polish communist authorities were allied with Arab countries, backed up, in turn, by the Soviet Union. The conflict in June 1967 was presented in Polish media (completely controlled by the authorities through the censorship office) as an act of aggression of Israel onto the neighbouring countries allied with the Soviet Union. The conflict between Israel and the Arab states was very important specifically because it was used in a propaganda campaign in Poland in March 1968. Relations between Israel and the People's Republic of Poland were amicable until 1967. The Communist Party of Israel was financed by the PZPR, and both countries had their embassies established. In the sixties a faction called "Partisans" appeared on the Polish political scene. They were a group of quite loosely connected activists, who shared not only a common military past (especially in the communist underground during World War II) but also great ambitions, a specific worldview, and an undisputed leader – Mieczysław Moczar. Moczar skilfully used the veteran community. Their worldview can be described as a national communism, especially in relationship to Germans, Ukrainians, Jews and also Russians. The influence of this group developed along with the use of national slogans by the Polish authorities.

The second external context for the events of 1968 was the beginning of Prague Spring. Attempts to liberalize socialism and give it a 'human face' were not entirely unnoticed in Poland and were discussed among intellectuals and some of the students. Prior to March 1968 some key figures of those events – such as Jacek Kuroń or Adam Michnik – initiated a discussion club, where they debated possible modifications within the socialist doctrine. This group also began attending the meetings of the Association of Socialist Youth of Poland (Związek Socjalistycznej Młodzieży Polski) where they asked uncomfortable questions, criticizing the communist party from a perspective essentially rooted in Marxism. Echoes of these discussions and events could be seen in Leszek Kołakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism*. Because these interventions were neither planned nor wanted by the organizers of the events and the rank-and-file members of the youth socialist organizations, the critical group of young people was soon dubbed "commandos".

The third context is connected with internal politics. The thaw of 1956 resulted in cultural liberalization (that soon was withdrawn), a relative loosening of the strict communist regime and a withdrawal from the Stalinist political and economic model. One of the effects was also the

rise of Władysław Gomułka to power. His release from prison [where he was did time for his 'nationalist deviation'] and subsequent promotion to the position of the first secretary of the Polish United Workers Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – PZPR) substantially changed the ways socialism in Poland developed. In 1968 Gomułka had already been in power for 12 years; currently, this era is called a 'small stabilization', with a limited number of major political shifts and with economic development focused on industrialization rather than consumerism. This does not mean that these times were free of internal political struggles. One of the environments that was becoming particularly active within the PZPR were the 'Partisans' mentioned above. Their anti-Semitic approach was partly an echo of the pre-War Polish anti-Semitism, and to some extent – a result of competition against high-ranked members of the secret police that were of Jewish descent.

On 19 May 1967, at the Congress of Trade Unions, Gomułka transferred the Israeli-Arab conflict to the internal grounds for the first time. His speech pointed to the anti-Semitic "partisans" campaign; it was a warning against "people who, in the face of the threat to world peace, and therefore also to Poland's security [...] are in favour of the aggressor". Gomułka called the Jews living in Poland the "fifth column" and added that "every Polish citizen should have only one homeland: the of People's Poland". He also used the term Zionism, which he attributed to Jews living in Poland. Under the influence of Edward Ochab, Gomułka at some point changed the text of his speech and deleted the passage concerning the fifth column. However, the audience of the talk – broadcast on the radio – was large.

When writing about the March events, one should also mention the so-called "Prague Spring". It was a period of political liberalization in Czechoslovakia. The first secretary was then Alexander Dubček, who announced reforms under the slogan of "socialism with a human face" or "Czechoslovak road to socialism". The programme announced, among other things, the abolition of censorship, the introduction of multi-party system and of free elections, and a beginning of economic reform. The PZPR leadership was particularly concerned about these events – Gomułka treated them as very harmful, even dangerous. Students belonging to the opposition coined a slogan adequate to the occasion: "Poland is waiting for its Dubček". Gomułka also rejected Dubček's proposals to build "socialism with a human face" together with Hungary. These slogans evoked hope among the communist opposition and were used in student resolutions written after the events at Warsaw's colleges.

#### THE SPARK: TAKING DOWN THE THEATRE PLAY OF DZIADY

According to research on protest campaigns and social movements, several things are needed for a massive social mobilization to emerge (Moley 1990). There is a need for internal tensions and cleavages within the society, occasionally reinforced by internal or external contexts, and a spark that triggers publicly visible protest events. The context and structural tensions were presented above: it was on one hand the growing discontent among (some of) young people with the developments of the communist party (and socialist state). Critics pointed to the rapidly growing bureaucracy, too, and to the development of the privileged ruling class. The conflict in the Middle East provided an external, international context, and the internal party tensions and struggles among different factions provided a political opening that could be used by numerous actors to follow their goals. The spark came after a theatre play – Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (Forefather's Eve), directed by Kazimierz Dejmek – was taken off stage. *Dziady* is a text that belongs to the Polish national canon, a play written by a romantic poet that deals with numerous national traumas connected to the Polish independence struggles. The opening took place on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1967. The party leadership reacted hysterically to the performance that, in their opinion, was to honour the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution. As early as on 28<sup>th</sup> November Jan Alfred Szczepański published a critical review of *Dziady* in "Trybuna Ludu". He asked, among other things: "Why would a director as outstanding and as aware of the ideas of the Grand Theatre as Dejmek, could not cope with *Dziady* and allowed himself to be led towards a road than does not follow the right purpose?".

The play contained anti-Russian elements. On 21<sup>st</sup> November 21 Dejmek was summoned to the Culture Department of the Central Committee of PZPR. He was accused of an anti-Russian approach and of anti-Sovietism. There were voices about limiting the number of performances. Władysław Gomułka himself claimed that "*Dziady* stabbed a knife in the back of the Polish-Soviet friendship". Groups of provocateurs came to the show, raised demonstrative cries, applauded the play but did not look at all at the students. Gustaw Holoubek, an actor in the role of Gustav-Konrad, described the events in the following way:

Already in the first few performances we could sense strange reactions of some parts of the audience – they were too noisy, too ostentatious. Usually, the actors says words, then there is this fraction of time, and only then – possibly, the first reaction. This is how ordinary viewers behave. Here, before the words were over, they were already clapping. The actors felt what that was...<sup>1</sup>.



1.  
J. Zawieyski, *Kartki z dziennika 1955–1969*, Warszawa 1983, p. 313.

## THE EVENTS: PROTESTS, PACIFICATIONS, INTERNAL PARTY STRUGGLES AND LAY-OFFS

The student rally organized in the courtyard of the University of Warsaw on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1968 is considered to be the starting point for the "March events". The students gathered to protest against the unlawful decision to relegate two of their colleagues from the university: Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer<sup>2</sup>. At the rally, civilian militia officers and groups of workers appeared. Special militia and ORMO troops entered the university. The youth were brutally attacked, and many people were beaten and battered. The next day there was a rally at the Polytechnic, expressing solidarity with the University. The brutal action of the militia was condemned. After the end of the meeting, a march of students started, but was suppressed by the militia, too. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, there were further rallies at the University of Warsaw, the Polytechnic, and a list of resolutions was prepared that condemned the brutal actions of the militia and demanded truth in the newspapers. In the following days and weeks, similar incidents occurred in many other academic campuses across Poland. It became almost a rule that peaceful rallies and student demonstrations were attacked by militiamen and the volunteer reserve of the Citizens' Militia. In total, tens of thousands of young people across all civilian higher education institutions in Poland entered the libertarian movement. The most dramatic events took place in Warsaw, Gdańsk, Kraków, Łódź, Poznań and Wrocław. The Security Service and the militia made communication difficult for students of various universities. On 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> March, occupational strikes took place at the two largest Warsaw universities: the University and the Polytechnic. Especially the second strike had a dangerous course, because the authorities were willing to break it with force almost at any cost.

The Declaration of the Student Movement adopted on 28 March 1968 in the University of Warsaw during the last March rally proved to be a permanent achievement of the student movement. The document went beyond the narrowly understood sphere of student affairs. The authors called for a new youth organization, demanded the abolition of censorship, and economic reform that on the self-government of enterprises. They were in favour of creating independent trade unions, full independence of the judiciary and the appointment of the Constitutional Tribunal. The Declaration was not only one of the most important documents of the March student movement, but above an ideological testament to it, and a legacy that successive generations of students party subscribed to.

Authorities responded to the rally of 28<sup>th</sup> March and the resolution with another wave of arrests. Members of the Student Committee of Depart-

mental Delegates were arrested. The Rector of the University of Warsaw, Stanisław Turski, removed 34 students from the student list, and suspended 11 in their student rights. On 30<sup>th</sup> March, the dissolution of the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Philosophy, the course of psychology at the Faculty of Pedagogy and the third-year courses at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics was announced. By that decision, 1616 persons ceased to be students of the University of Warsaw. Many of them were soon drafted into the army<sup>3</sup>.

The "24 hours around the country" column in "Nowiny" informed readers about the dismissal of professors from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Warsaw – of Bronisław Baczkó, Leszek Kołakowski, Stefan Morawski, and of associates of the faculty: Zygmunt Bauman, Maria Hirschowicz and Włodzimierz Brus. The President of the Council of Ministers blamed the dismissed lecturers:

The above-mentioned research and teaching staff bear high moral and practical responsibility for recent events at the University of Warsaw. They gave long-term support and protection to the group of Kuroń and Modzelewski, and then to Michnik, Szlajfer, Blumsztajn, Dojczewand and others. It was part of the campaign to "unmask the real inspirers" and their contractors<sup>4</sup>.

On 11th March 1968, a new trend appeared in March events only seemingly related to student protests. On this day, anti-Semitic commentaries appeared in the press and in the statements of some party activists. The "Partisans" attacked mostly people of Jewish origin, whose children were then at the university. Even if the children of these people did not participate in student protest, the principle of parents' responsibility for the activities of their adult children was applied large scale. It is difficult to determine exactly how many people lost their jobs in the next few months of 1968, and how many were thrown out of the PZPR, but there is no doubt that the scale of this phenomenon was enormous. One of the participants in these purges – the 1st Secretary of the PZPR Warsaw Committee Józef Kępa, at the Warsaw party conference in October 1968 informed the assembly that while in 1965–1967 "over 600 changes were made to managerial positions in companies, institutions and enterprises under the supervision of district committees and the Warsaw Committee, there were nearly 800 such changes in the period from March to September 1968".

What followed was an unprecedented wave of anti-Semitism or "anti-Zionist" in press publications. The press reported the "hostile activities" and "real goals" of the organizers and instigators of student speeches,

 2.  
M. Mazur, *Polityczne kampanie prasowe w okresie rządów Władysława Gomułki, Lublin 2004*, p. 102.

 3.  
W. Roszkowski,  
op. cit.,  
p. 290-291.

 4.  
"Nowości",  
23/03/1968.

and claimed a coup of “commandos” and their “patrons” was being prepared. Young “troublemakers” were to support “old political bankrupts” like Stefan Staszewski or Roman Zambrowski and the “irresponsible” academic teachers: Bronisław Baczkó, Zygmunt Bauman, Włodzimierz Brus, Maria Hirschowicz, Leszek Kołakowski, Stefan Morawski, Janina Zakrzewska and others. The anti-Semitic campaign was intertwined with the parallel anti-integrative fight. Both of these campaigns in the mass media were accompanied by a wave of rallies organized in large industrial plants during working hours, during which the “troublemakers” were condemned, and in time, resolutions supporting Gomułka and the leadership of the PZPR were also passed. In the second half of March, large official rallies were held in all provincial cities.

#### METHODOLOGY: SELECTION OF NEWSPAPERS ETC.

We based our argumentation on the analysis of officially published newspapers. In communist Poland, all publications needed to be submitted for approval at the Central Office of Control of Publications and Spectacles, active until 1990. The procedure guaranteed all publications to reflect the policies of the communist party. For the analysis, we focused on locally published newspapers, “Gazeta Pomorska”, “Ilustrowany Kurier Polski” and “Nowości”. We have done so in order to be able to extract recurring themes and propaganda tools, assuming that those, which are repeated or even directly reprinted reflect not only the official but also actual policy of the communist party. We included issues from the period immediately preceding the Six-Day War up till June 1968. We searched for articles that included keywords from our list and discussed matters related to Six-Day War, the protests in Warsaw and in other cities. After identifying numerous names of the officials involved in the events [who were either fired from their workplaces or were in position to fire other officials], we included these names in our list of keywords. In total, we identified 174 articles that qualified into the scope of our research. We concluded that the events in Warsaw were described in a way that was strikingly similar to the official statements of the Polish Press Agency.

Political press campaigns that we described all confirm the model official propaganda campaigns employed. The indoctrination of the readers of “Gazeta Pomorska” was the fiercest. It is understandable, too: it was the official body of the Provincial Committee of the PZPR. In addition to the information published by PAP, and reprints from other newspapers [most often from the capital], the editorial staff included articles, information,

columns, letters, resolutions, and appeals by local editors. In “Gazeta Pomorska”, there are comments related to a specific campaign, which cannot be found in “IKP” or “Nowości”. The situation with “IKP” seems a little different. The editors of this newspaper published a lot of propaganda information, but they never went as far as “Gazeta Pomorska”. At one point, however, they had an advantage over it: “IKP” presented more information on the Party – one could learn a lot about its activities: congresses, meetings, and plenary meetings. The propaganda practiced by the editorial staff of “IKP” was fierce, but never reached the point that “Gazeta Pomorska” presented. The least information reached the readers of “Nowości”. It should be noted, however, that during the press campaign connected with March 1968 events, the Toruń newspaper did not differ much from the level of propaganda from “IKP” or “Gazeta Pomorska”. There was much less information, but the propaganda campaign was conducted with the same emphasis as in other newspapers. It was connected with the fact that “Nowości” until June 1969 remained a press body of the Provincial Committee of the PZPR.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE PROPAGANDA LANGUAGE AND PRESENTATION OF KEY PROPAGANDA TOOLS

The campaign’s communication motifs were equally charged. The enemy figure played the role of a “scapegoat”: was discredited because of origin, biography, actions, and acquaintances. The society as such should be “cut off” from such a person as much as possible. It did not matter whether he was a student, a politician, a priest, a professor, or a worker; the scapegoat has always been a component of one group – the enemy of Poland, socialism, nation, culture, and of world peace. The enemy was described with several distinctive features, all of which had negative connotations and allowed the press to separate the enemy from the rest of society. The most common features of the enemy were: cunning, betrayal, selling, selfishness. Often, the descriptions in the press were contradictory: the enemy could at the same time be a dunce or a person with higher education, could be a cosmopolitan and a Zionist, a communist dogmatist and an anti-communist, could simultaneously strive to restore Stalinism and liberalize the system. In a word, everything could be blamed on the “scapegoat”.

The enemy never acted alone. His activity must have been a result of actions of his allies from abroad. The recurring question – of who stands behind him – made it possible to connect the external and internal enemy

into one entity. The external enemy most often inspired allies in Poland, manipulated them and incited them to act. The enemy that was repeatedly mentioned in the press campaigns was West Germany. The stereotype of Germany used there was that of a partitioning country, a militaristic aggressor seeking hegemony in this part of Europe. The negative image was also given to imperialism and Zionism. They were ideologically grounded, but they were not an instrument of widespread fear in society because of too great abstractness and remoteness from Poland. According to communist propaganda, Zionism was:

the ideology of Jewish bourgeois nationalists [...]. The main goal of the Zionist movement was to create a Jewish state and concentrate all Jews there [...]; to put these slogans into life Jewish nationalists sought to [...] remove Arabs from Palestine and deepen the separateness of people of Jewish origin in societies inhabited by the Jewish minority<sup>5</sup>.

#### 5.

"Nowości",  
18/03/1968.

The enemy was also located within the Western culture, especially within the Polish community connected with Radio Free Europe and the Parisian emigre journal "Kultura". These groups were accused of lying, espionage, and harming both Poland and socialism.

Manipulation allegedly performed by the enemy was therefore claimed to be international and even world-wide. The enemy was to strive in all ways to cause dissatisfaction, anxiety, riots, and poverty. The main goal was to bring about a coup and to take over. The final stage was to restore capitalism with all its negative qualities. In 1968, it was suggested, the goal itself was hooliganism and destruction. At the same time, propaganda proved that the only power able to stop the threatening danger of Poland is the people's power.

Another element of the template was the conspiracy theories related to history. Conspiracies were claimed to act against Polish culture, foreign policy, the working class, social peace, proper relations between the party and the youth, etc. Their plots were also directed against the first secretary Władysław Gomułka himself.

The last element of the scheme was to defend against the conspiracy and show the norms of conduct in accordance with the requirements of the government. In this case, an attempt was made to activate the population, and to present it as a spontaneous outbreak of social recovery. Most often, these were demonstrations and rallies condemning recent events and supporting the popular authorities. Letters, resolutions, and messages of other sorts appeared in the newspapers. The basic factor of the Polish *raison d'état* was acclaimed as intensifying work, dedication, discipline and order.

The special type of language – a novelty in itself – played a great role in the propaganda of the press campaigns. It had always been a useful tool of verbal communication in People's Republic of Poland, but during the campaign of 1968 its importance increased, and the language brutalized. People were manipulated with the meanings of words, the content of entire messages. With the assumption that what is not mentioned – does not exist, some concepts were excluded. The language was to unmask, stigmatize, perpetuate the divisions as well as to persuade and convince. Thanks to this, indoctrination could be faster, fuller, more effective and unnoticeable.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

The described examples of mass indoctrination attempt to reconstruct the motivations and logic the creators of propaganda employed during the Gomułka rule. They allow to recreate some aspects of the mentality of the authorities at the time and shed light on the mechanisms of communist propaganda.

The goal of the campaign was to manipulate the society. This was done with the help of a whole set of psychological tricks – myths, camouflage, stereotypes, rumours, and lies. Propaganda was based on the emotions associated with the message. The strongest human feelings were used – hatred and fear. The contents were then more suggestive and easier for the recipient to process .

To summarize, the 1968 events in Poland had a twofold nature. On the one hand, they were an example of how old prejudices (in particular anti-Semitism) were used in an internal party struggle between the more nationalist-oriented "Partisans" and other factions. The developments in international geo-political situation allowed the authorities to frame the conflict in a broader manner and link it to local conflicts, one of which was the moments of contention orchestrated by the youth. This brings us to the other variant of the story. The events of 1968 were a pivotal moment in the history of Polish pro-democratic opposition. Although there had been other networks of dissidents before – as well as moments of contention (with an uprising in Poznań in June 1956) – March 1968 remained a genuine milestone for the Polish opposition. Firstly, unlike in previous protests, the group of contestants was much more homogeneous than in previous cases. Primarily, these were young people that took part in the events, subscribing to the global wave of protests. Secondly, their

demands went far beyond economic claims, and also beyond *ad hoc* claims of independence and sovereignty. The milieu of *commandos* formulated their program not only through numerous meetings, but also through their involvement in other organizations (mostly scout) and interactions with officials during their discussions in the youth section of the communist party. Class-wise, they were also more or less unified; the relegation from the university of hundreds of students, closing down faculties, and a mass exodus of people of Jewish origins (in which approximately 10,000 people left Poland, including Leszek Kołakowski and Zygmunt Bauman) created a generational experience. Networks established during the 1968 events and campaign have remained for many years and many students in those days became prominent figures in the dissident sector (interestingly often located in different ideological currents). Finally, the spark that ignited the protests – taking down the theatre play – shows another similarity between the events of March 1968 in Poland and in the global wave of protests: the importance of culture in political struggle, both as a topic as well as a means to reach political ends.

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# Political Journey of Turkey's 1968: From Privileged Youth to Political Defeat

# Political Journey of Turkey's 1968: From Privileged Youth to Political Defeat

Demet Lüküslü

With an increasing population as well as high urbanization and industrialization rates, Turkey underwent a big transformation in the 1960s. Additionally, as the Soviet Union's neighbour during the Cold War era, it strongly supported NATO. Therefore, the following analysis of the 1968 student movement in Turkey might offer an important case study. By 1968 Turkey had experienced numerous "extremes", leading to the political polarization and violence in late sixties and seventies. "The establishment" responded with a military intervention: the coup of 12th March 1971. By the end of the military regime, almost all leaders of the 1968 student movement had died either in executions, operations or torture cells. With the end of the military regime of 12th March and the declaration of amnesty in 1974, the surviving members of the '68 generation were all released from prisons. Since the movement leaders were killed, it was the time of "apostles", to borrow Gün Zileli's words [2002], and the movement fragmented, continuing the "struggle", joined by the members of the 1978 generation. Thus, "social movements continued to rise, parallel to its reactionary opponents. The surmounting clashes between leftist revolutionary movements and its reactionary-fascist opponents determined the political fate of the country" [Alper 2009: IX]. All of this resulted in the military coup of 12 September 1980, which, in turn, led to the establishment of authoritarian military regime in Turkey.

Interestingly enough, despite quite a number of biographies, memoires, and interviews with the members of the 60s generation in Turkey written *a posteriori*, the original documentation of the period is still an unresearched area. The existent literature in social sciences on the generation '68 in Turkey aims to contribute to the discussions on the history of the left wing in Turkey and to the social movements literature. In this paper, however, I aim to make reference to the existent literature as well as to focus on the original documentation of the period based on my research on books and brochures, personal archives, periodicals and audio-visual material present at the International Institute of Social History [IISH] in Amsterdam<sup>1</sup> and utilize the concepts of the sociology of youth and generations to examine "generation 1968" in Turkey.

1. I would like to thank International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam for providing me the opportunity to do research in the institute with a five-month postdoctoral research fellowship between September 2011 and February 2012. For details of this research, see Lüküslü 2015.

#### BORN AND SOCIALIZED IN A CHANGING SOCIETY DURING THE COLD WAR ERA

Karl Mannheim, in his classic work "The Problem of Generations" [1952], argues that it is the big historical events that create the actual generations; thus, he underlines the importance of socio-historical context for the analysis of generations. A generation is not a homogeneous category, however, and it consists of various units reacting differently to the same socio-historical context and significant historical events of the time. Inspired by Mannheim's generational theory, I suggest that in order to understand the characteristics of the 1968 generation in Turkey, one has to analyse the society and capture the spirit of the time.

Politically speaking, Turkey entered 1960s with a military coup of 27<sup>th</sup> May 1960. In the 1950s, the Democratic Party [Demokrat Parti – DP] was in power after winning the elections over the political party founding the Republic, the People's Republican Party [Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP]. Paradoxically, the military coup was not only synonymous with the political execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and of two of his ministers, but also adopted a liberal constitution [The Constitution of 1961], which opened up the political sphere to unions and leftist organizations. It is important to underline here that Turkey in 1960s was dominated by the hegemony of the left. On the other hand, a neighbour of the USSR, Turkey strongly supported the United States during the Cold War era – one could really taste the heavy anti-communist propaganda in the air.

The 1960s in Turkey also meant significant social transformations. The population of 16.2 million citizens in 1935 grew to 35.6 million in late

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1960s and early 1970. High-speed urbanization accompanied the increase in population. For example, the population of Istanbul, one of the biggest cities in Turkey, which was 1,166,477 in 1950 rose to 3,019,032 in 1970 [TC Başbakanlık Devlet Enstitüsü 2002: 42]. The urbanization rate exceeded the rate of industrialization and the cities could not respond to the problems of the Turkish society [Sunar 1975: 96–97]. The number of university students during this era also increased. From 1960 to 1968, the number grew at the rate of 123% from 63,051 to 146,299 [Kışlalı 1974: 111].

#### BEING A STUDENT IN 1968 AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

The 1968 generation in Turkey was born and raised in the setting described above. The first occupation of an academia began at the Ankara University, in the Language-History-Geography Faculty on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1968 and spread to the Faculty of Law and Sciences on 11<sup>th</sup> June and to the Faculty of Law at the Istanbul University on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1968. It all started as a student movement demanding university reform. Later on, it transformed into a revolutionary movement. The student movement, just like its counterparts all around the world, used the tools of occupations and boycotts.

An in-depth study of the profile of university students of the period shows that only a minority of young people had the "privilege" to study at the university. As of 1968, there were eight public universities in Turkey: Istanbul University [Istanbul], Ankara University [Ankara], Karadeniz Technical University [Trabzon], Atatürk University [Erzurum], Ege University [İzmir], Hacettepe University [Ankara], Istanbul Technical University [Istanbul] and Ortadoğu Technical University [Ankara]. In the academic year of 1968, for example, the percentage of university students in the same age category was only 6.5%. In terms of gender, male dominance was evident: 81% of university students were male, and only 19% were female. This makes the research on the '68 generation appear to be strikingly male-dominated. However, it is important to stress that recently the research on the '68 generation began to focus also on the women of 1968. Female members of the generation began to share their stories of 1968 in Turkey and to create their own social memories. University students mostly came from civil or military bureaucrat middle-class families. Nevertheless, one has to note that the education system of the period was not elitist, but mass [Roos, Roos and Field 1969: 276]. In short, examining the characteristics of the university student profile, we see the dominance of males mostly belonging to civil or military bureaucrat families.

Thus, being a university student in the late 1960s was a privilege and it offered a prestigious social status. Furthermore, the "myth of youth" that had existed in the political culture since the 19<sup>th</sup> century also contributed to the status and the role attributed to students. If youth, as a social category, is indeed a construct of industrialization, urbanization, and modernity, then the emergence of youth as a social category in the history of modern Turkey dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century modernization movements of the Ottoman Empire. That era witnessed the emergence of "modern" Western style schools, where youngsters underwent a "modern" form of socialization. Interestingly, this modernization process constructed youth as a political category whose ultimate objective was to save the Ottoman Empire from collapse and to restore its glory. I refer to this definition of youth as a political category as the "myth of youth" [Lüküslü 2009] and argue that it has been a key component of Turkish political culture since the 19th century. Although the empire's young generation accepted its political mission, it also believed that to save the empire they should rebel against the Sultan and his oppressive regime. Hence, the Young Turk movement and the revolution of 1908 were in fact products of the modernization process. Likewise, those who founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923 were all members of the last generation of the empire and had inherited this myth of youth, which thus became the symbol of the young republic as such. The Republic's first generation (1923–1950), a restricted group of those privileged enough to have received education, was constructed according to the principles of the Republic and Kemalist ideology and is seen as the "vanguard" of the Republic [Neyzi 2001]. We can observe that, in the sixties, youth acted in line with this myth, and felt mobilized to save the state and honour of the nation.

To reject the economic and political role assigned to Turkey was one of the dominant discourses of the 1968 generation in Turkey. It consisted in an anti-imperialist approach combined with an anti-Americanism characteristic for the spirit of the Cold War era. The ideal of saving the nation added to an anti-imperialist discourse during the Cold War, and reached an anti-American momentum on a number of occasions – especially during the demonstrations against the Sixth Fleet of the US navy in Istanbul in mid-July 1968, and the protests against the US Ambassador to Turkey, Robert Kommer [known to be a CIA agent who had worked in Vietnam] during his visit at the Middle Eastern Technical University in Ankara on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1969. In line with the anti-imperialist discourse, a dominance of a modernist and developmentalist approaches could be observed in the brochures of the 1968 generation in Turkey. It was argued that imperialism was an important obstacle for the development of the country and that in order for the country to develop, Turkey needed

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to be totally "independent". Indeed, the Turkish '68 shares some characteristics of the Third World student movements of the period. Emin Alper, discussing the 1960s student movement in a global perspective, argues that unlike the anti-nationalist, anti-modernization Western student movements, movements of the Third World were strongly nationalist [nationalism understood in a leftist way] and supported modernization, development and industrialization discourses [Alper 2009: 92].

Thus, the student movement also started to make alliances with workers and peasants movements. The students began to argue that problems of education could only be solved if Turkey systematically addressed the challenges and became an independent country. That is how the student movement began to feel the burden of the entire country's difficulties. The myth of youth present in the political culture also justified that role. On the one hand, the myth empowered the student movement and students were assigned a political role, but on the other hand it placed the burden of the country's problems on youth's shoulders. In fact, the political cleavages in the society also empowered the young generation; as a result, since the 1950s, the youth had been seen as an opposing force to the Democratic Party government and with the military regime of 27 May 1960, the youth found themselves among the "vigorous forces" (*zinde kuvvetler-güçler*) along with the intelligentsia and the military. However, that also turned the youth into a target of the Justice Party politicians and intellectuals, who saw themselves in continuity with the Democratic Party principles.

#### THE DEFEAT AND CONSTRUCTION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE GENERATION

With the death of Vedat Demircioğlu that followed the demonstrations against the Sixth Fleet, and the raid of the police onto the Istanbul Technical University dormitory, the 1968 generation in Turkey received its first "martyr" and began an era marked by "martyrdom". The student movement in late 1960s and early 1970s was radicalized, transformed into a revolutionary movement that employed political violence. As the movement got radical, the large coalition of students began to leave it. It became riskier to be a member, and the movement was depleted; it is those risks that played an important role in shaping the present as well as the future of the 1968 generation [on the role of risks see McAdam 1986, McAdam 1989]. It was in fact a generation going through a radicalization

process. Not only did they remain a minority – a minuscule generation unit within their actual generation – but they also experienced a “rupture” with the leftist intellectuals and politicians as well.

With the military intervention of 12th March 1971, the number of “martyrs” of the 1968 generation rose: the movement’s leaders were either killed in operations, political executions or in torture cells. These deaths as well as the torture endured in prisons during the military regime should rather be analysed as “pursuing the politics of certainty, in which death is the mysterious but unambiguous point of reference upon which to build a moral word and a sense of community” [Spencer 2000: 134]. It is in fact through these martyrs – and through martyrdom discourse – that the state violence and the political bravery of the victims were transferred into political imagery. In the brochures published in this period, as well as in the literature produced afterwards, it is possible to see this transfer of the martyrs into the political imagery. The names of the martyrs are continuously stated and commemorated and the number of hymns for the martyrs continuously grows.

All these discourses were masculine and the nation’s honour became “men’s honour”. The country’s young men felt obliged to change the situation. That is why the concept of “masculinity” can be used as a key word to understand the merging of the theme of the nation’s honour with a masculine and anti-imperialist, modernist and developmentalist discourse; it may also serve as a tool to comprehend the dominant discussions in the Turkish political culture of the period. One sees, however, the construction of a collective memory of the generation through bravery, which acts as, to borrow James C. Scott’s phrase, “weapon of the weak” [Scott 1985], which did not end with the period, but continues even today. We see once again that “[m]emory is [...] productive of social relations by managing identities and helping individuals and groups to come to terms with the suppressed or commemorated traumas of the past” [Özyürek 2007: 11].

## CONCLUSION

In the absence of in-depth research into documentation of the period, it might be daunting to read 1968 from today’s perspective, and to deal with an essentially polarized analysis of its generation. We can observe two tendencies in this polarized approach: one that mystifies the 1968 generation and the other that criticizes it, blaming its members for the anarchy and political violence of the period. This phenomenon was also observed during the Gezi protests in Turkey in 2013. The martyrs of the 1968 generation were represented during the protests with a huge poster of Deniz Gezmiş (a mythical figure of the generation executed on 6th May 1972 at the age of 25) hanging on the walls of Atatürk Cultural Centre in Taksim, Istanbul. For the protesters, such figures marked the continuity of the Gezi Park protests with the history of resistance in Turkey. However, for those representing the status quo, the presence of these figures during the protests was the very sign that the Gezi protests were dangerous, thus leading Turkey to chaos. One can hope that a non-polarized analysis of the generation will be possible on this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, one which focuses on the characteristics of the socio-historical context: the characteristics of the generation and the society.

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# 1968 in Hungary: Half a Century Later

# 1968 in Hungary: Half a Century Later

Máté Szabó

Many researchers and thinkers agree that the 1968 movements changed the civil society, the movement sector and the protest culture of Western welfare democracies. The five decades that followed the events of the time have justified such an argument quite well. Just as the 1789 tradition has affected the uprisings and revolutions (as well as research about them) of the entire succeeding century in Europe, the happenings of 1968 are also related to the subsequent development of the movements (and the research on the movements) in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Thus, alternative movements of the 1980s, anti-globalization and critical movements at the turn of the millennium, as well as the campaigns against austerity policies after 2011, complex as they are, somehow relate to the 1968 tradition – to the “primal source”.

The “memorial policy” that transforms into a “memorial object”, the history of the multiple movements that emerged in very different countries in Europe and in the world (from Mexico to Japan) in 1968 (as well as in 1967 and 1969), is now half a century long. The fiftieth anniversary will offer space for a wide variety of discourses and of framing processes, which will increasingly often be carried out by researchers and analysts who have no personal experience of the period; this fact seems to dimi-

nish the seriousness of commemoration, as well as draws attention to the proportion of research that was influenced by the generational experience. Today, a wide range of studies coming from different fields [including art, science or political history], and written in different languages and with different methodological orientations, deal with these issues in a variety of often conflicting manners.

These discourses are not exclusively, but strongly related to the ten-year anniversaries that have been celebrated so far. 2008 was a very fertile anniversary in this respect, partly because of the perceptible diminishing of personal involvement of participants, and partly due to the fact that the subject had become acknowledged and institutionalized. "The Sixties", a periodical on the history and analysis of the eponymous decade, was launched on that occasion, and many comparative and monographic volumes appeared in many world languages. There was a multitude of discussions, conferences and thematic journals addressing the subject area.

At the fiftieth anniversary, a new series of debates will emerge on the global and European levels, which will be influenced by both the "here and now", the state of the *Zeitgeist* in 2018, the social and political constellations of today, as well as by whatever role the movements, the protests and the civil society play in different regions and territories of the globe. Of course, for us here, in Hungary, there is an "Eastern view" [to put it simply]. Nevertheless, we still have to deal with the Western perceptions of the same subject. In this attempt at understanding, a hermeneutic "merging of horizons" takes place, in which the movement's past tradition [very complex itself], and the state of the present movements [which does not follow a simple formula either] form a relationship that merges the opinions, interpretations and recollections on 1968 into an interrelated and multi-levelled picture – or into a framing process of sorts.

The Moscow-led Eastern Bloc challenged Western democracies and effectively suppressed autonomous social movements and the civil society. However, with different profiles and intensity, waves of anti-systemic protest and countercultures challenged the ruling Communist elite. Their actions found themselves in an international context as the dissent movements used institutions and groupings of Western democracies as resources for networking processes with similar citizen initiatives from other Communist countries spreading beyond borders. The uniform and rather homogeneous character of Communist political systems on the one hand, and the waves of protests of the Western world on the other, helped to develop diffusion processes among the opponents of the

Communist systems establishing networking vis-à-vis each other with Western democratic movements and actors. The authoritarian character of the Communist system imposed serious constraints upon the mobilisation processes, but social networks and institutions of contestation and of dissidence functioning beyond the borders of the respective Communist states were effectively established and preserved. The impact of the 1968 movement wave on Eastern Europe was strong [Klimke and Scharloth 2008: 163–229].

For the countries of the former "Eastern bloc", however, the modernization and democratization shock is not the primary result of 1968. On the contrary, 1968 is the end of the alternative experiences and a start of an era of stagnation [Pollack and Wielghos 2004: 238–239]. The change of regime, the democratization and liberation of civil society, together with the emergence of the movement sector and of protest culture, took place in Eastern Europe in 1989. Research has repeatedly dealt with the interdependence and mutual relationship of 1968 and 1989. Since both protest waves have broad, global importance – and are at the same time inter-regional, regional and intra-regional – their affinities and interactions appear to be very complex.

The best example is the case of the two Germanies, the former West, Federal Republic of Germany, and the German Democratic Republic integrated into the Eastern Bloc [Klimke and Scharloth 2008: 97–111, 189–199]. While 1968 was a democratic and social revolution for the West Germans, 1989 was an emancipating, modernizing and democratizing turning point for East Germany. But what happened after unification? How were these two turning points characterized? 1989 has been perceived as a nonviolent, peaceful and, above all, very successful turning point – it ended the Cold War, and made the reunified Germany the leading economic and political power of the EU and of Europe as a whole. In contrast, 1968 was associated with Communist or New Left revolutionary action, with terrorist violence, and with an overall crisis. The Left and the Green political elites were, in fact, globalists, anti-nationalists, and not even true supporters of unification. So for many Germans after the unification, 1989 was the shining sun, and 1968 a desert moon, a dead end and a time of crisis. For Left and Green radicals and for the conservative public, 1968 is two completely different worlds, the Revolution for some, and the Disaster for others. 1989, in turn, is seen by the Left as the end of the idea of the Third Way between the fronts of the Cold War and Utopia; for the Right it is the End of History, the victory of the realm of Capitalism and a success of the well-established Liberal Democracy.

The protest tradition we had in Hungary before 1989 was the one of the younger, urban, professional, white collar workers, especially of students, artists, scientists, clerks, social workers, educators, the “dissenters”, and the “opposition” [Pollack and Wielghos 2004: 51–73.]. Such a social structure allowed some identification with the Western tradition of 1968 [though without its Marxist, or utopian Socialist character]. Hungarian opposition followed the patterns of market economy and parliamentary democracy, and rejected the New Left’s criticism of capitalism. The diffusion of protest was concentrated on the capital city of Budapest, and some bigger university towns such as Pécs, Szeged, and Miskolc. These protests of “intellectuals” grew as a parallel to the opening up of the systems; they became internationally networked – especially with Polish and Czech dissidents, as well as with the protesting groups of ethnic Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, and of course with the Hungarian emigrants in the Western countries. Small scale as they were, compared to Poland of the 80’s, the protests established skills and courage for self-organization and articulation in a certain segment of the population; thus, a new “protest culture” emerged, which became part of the new political elite in the regime change.

In his famous essay “The Anatomy of Reticence” [1986], Václav Havel analysed the contribution of the East-West dialogue of underground movements [of the difference between the Eastern dissent and Western social movements] as related to peace, feminism and ecology. The Eastern dissident movement had to act under political suppression and economic scarcity. In this way, new post-material social movements and their predecessors, Leftist 1968 movements, did not have much influence on Eastern dissent after the Soviet intervention against the Prague Spring [Tismaneanu 1988: 160–183.]. The historian Tony Judt, in his book on the post-war European history, emphasized the dual, contradictory, almost schizophrenic meaning of 1968 for the West [perceiving it as experiences with new forms of life and culture – Judt 2005: 436–474] and for the East [that saw it as the end of the Communist-Socialist Utopia – Judt 2005: 474–507]. He emphasized the 1968 Prague Spring and its sober end in invasion as the terminal point of the socialist alternative utopia, and the beginning of a new stagnation period in the Eastern Bloc.

For Hungary, the 1956 revolution was the main point of no return to Socialist experience; for Czechs, it was the Prague Spring of 1968. Hungarian dissent focused on the tradition of 1956 as its main point of reference, and the Czech dissent on 1968 and the Soviet takeover. Polish dissent used the large reservoir of national and social uprisings against foreign domination. To support peace movements against the super-

power was uneasy for Czechs with Soviet military occupation, as well as for Poles under home-made military dictatorship. Still, some of the Hungarian dissent promoted Western-type peace and ecology initiatives [Tismaneanu 1990: 71–118]. In Czechoslovakia, the 1968-bound anti-communist dissent played a major role in the transition of 1989; in Hungary, in turn, the peace and ecology movement was never a part of the mainstream transformation of 1989. The tradition of the 1956 anti-communist revolution was the moving force: it worked as a positive reference in the Hungarian tradition of the transformation for both the Third-Way-oriented national (“népi”, populist) and the Western liberal (“Urbanist”, *urbanus*, city-bound) political forces.

#### 1968: THE DISSENT OF EASTERN EUROPE IN HUNGARY

In Hungarian dissident movements, a form of “hidden pluralism” formed: a heterogeneous spectrum of critical intellectuals ranging from reform-oriented economists to artistic avant-gardists, who predominantly adhered to the ideas of a democratic socialism and who were also able to express these ideas in various literary and other artistic forms, as well as in scientific and cultural journals. A “culture of debate” in the frame of repressive tolerance was established; the party did not maintain the right to the only opinion any more but it preserved its right to the final decision. There were not, however, any great public protests in this period, a time which brought the Hungarian population considerable social improvements and a distinct increase in personal freedoms.

The year of 1968, in Hungary as elsewhere, was one of drastic changes that would strongly influence the later development of dissidence and opposition. The reform wing within the Hungarian Communist Party leadership succeeded in implementing relatively extensive economic reforms through the so-called New Economic Mechanism (*Új Gazdasági Mechanizmus*). The sector of the centralized state-planned economy was limited considerably in favour of supporting a “second economy” to be regulated by market mechanisms. There were also further steps towards liberalization in the political sector – steps which clearly improved the structural conditions for critical political engagement. At the same time, the defeat of the Prague Spring and the participation of Hungarian troops in the Soviet intervention led to the loss of faith by many critical intellectuals who no more hoped for the Kádár regime to show any willingness towards democratization; instead, the regime sought more and more public

dissent. The turning point was a call by the members of the Budapest School [the Hungarian pupils surrounding the internationally-known philosopher Georg Lukács living in Budapest after the Second World War after his emigration to Moscow] for solidarity with the Czechoslovakian democracy movement. "This was the first public protest by Hungarian intellectuals since 1956" [Dalos 1986: 19]. With the declaration in the island of Korcula, in former Yugoslavia, where some of the Hungarian philosophers showed up, the history of Hungarian dissent started. The supporters did not emigrate, but returned to Budapest, with what to contemporary eyes might seem naïve faith; they hoped that they could still change the course of history, which despite of the signs of preserving the reform course, inevitably pushed Hungary as a satellite of Moscow into the anti-reformist course of Brezhnev.

Communism, established by state terrorism after 1947, was the dominating ideology in Hungary, but different counter-currents emerged under the "repressive tolerance" of the Kádár-regime after 1968. While conflicts continued within the Party leadership between orthodox Leninists, Kádárist and the economically liberal Reform Communists, a new movement of dissidence and opposition formed outside the establishment after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, within which the following currents may be distinguished:

[I] After 1968, a current of liberal-democratic orientation emerged from the milieu of the Reform Communists. It consisted primarily of Budapest intellectuals who turned to liberal and communitarian ideas after the Prague Spring. Among its most prominent representatives were György Lukács' students Ágnes Heller, János Kis and György Bence. From this current, also known as the "Urbanists", emerged the Hungarian samizdat of the 1970s, and later, in 1988, the Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége – SZDSZ*).

[II] A second source of dissidence was formed by the nationally-oriented Populism, which has influenced Hungarian literature and art until now, and which developed in its own direction within the opposition and dissent after 1968. The Populist opposition, whose most important representatives were the writers Sándor Csoóri and István Csurka as well as the historians József Antall, Csaba Kiss, György Szabad and Lajos Für [all prominent politicians of the post-Communist era], led to the founding in 1988 of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum – MDF*), a party that won the first free elections in 1990.

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Thus, alternative movements of the 1980s, anti-globalization and critical movements at the turn of the millennium, as well as the campaigns against austerity policies after 2011, complex as they are, somehow relate to the 1968 tradition – to the "primal source".

[III] Following the revolution of counter cultures in 1968 a youth protest scene developed among students and young intellectuals in Budapest [including the writers György Dalos and Miklós Haraszti]. Several youth subcultures sought expression in rock music and other forms of non-conventional, but a-political collective behaviour. A reform-oriented student movement was not formed in 1968, but in connection with the "cultural Revolution" of China, individuals and groups engaged in a democratization of the Communist youth organizations joined the youth protest milieu of the young artists and students.

Although there were latent differences between liberal-democratic and national-conservative oppositional currents in other countries, in Poland in particular, the rivalry between Populists and Urbanists reached a great intensity in Hungary and formed a trademark of the Hungarian opposition. The roots of this rivalry may be traced back to the Hungarian national movement against the Habsburg monarchy, within which similar conflicts continued for decades [resembling those between the *Narodniki* and the *Zapadniki* in Russian history]. The Populists [*népies*] advocated the idea of a particular national path between East and West, an "organic" alternative beyond Western modernism. Their central terms were nation, identity and community. Developing in parallel, emerging from the milieu of the urban bourgeoisie, was a current that felt itself indebted to the liberal and universalist values and the orientation towards progress of the Western European Enlightenment and which oriented itself along the lines of Western conceptions of market economy and parliamentary democracy. The cleavage between the Urbanists and the Populists from the 1960s onward formed the dominant principle structuring the latter development of Hungarian opposition. The Communist party leadership likewise differentiated its political strategy towards opposition along the lines of the two currents, identifying the former as "the bourgeois" (*polgári*) and the latter as the "radical Nationalists" (*nemzeti radikális*) [Csizmadia 2001: 71].

Further in this paper, I will refer to the ideas of some of the dissidents in the pre-1989 Hungary, members of the former Budapest School of Georg Lukács, and to their interpretations of 1968. The revisionist Marxist transformed into social liberal thinkers during the crisis of Eastern Bloc and its transformation. They changed their minds on 1968, too [Falk 2003: 257–313.]. Lukács himself kept distance to the student movement and the Western New Left. He compared them to the "luddites" of the nineteenth-century English working class, and called a "pure negation" of the capitalist system, a product of the crisis tendencies of capitalism. He denied the existence of similar tendencies in the Socialist system [Lukács 1988: 57–58]. His younger students like Ágnes Heller, or János Kis or

György Dalos were inspired by the 1968 movements, and followed certain tendencies of the everyday cultural revolution [Heller 1999: 220–234], the theory of the new working class, or even Maoism [Kovács 2004]. Disillusion with the Brezhnev era brought members of the Budapest School closer to a new type of social liberalism, which was embodied in the Alliance of the Free Democrats [Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége – SZDSZ], which in the period of 1988–2010 served as an important actor in Hungarian politics.

I will now refer to those of their ideas that I think are important for us today, at the 50th anniversary, in order to show a Hungarian/Eastern standpoint of dissident thinkers. In his essay "1968: End and Beginning" (2008), the philosopher Mihály Vajda interprets the 1968 movements as a termination of an era and as an introduction to a new one. Ágnes Heller, also a member of the Budapest School describes the 1968 movements as a wave closing up modernity and introducing post-modernity (1998). As the ultimate utopian movements, with the great ideologies and universalist ideals, they were followed by pragmatic, project-bound movements that transformed the everyday life. Heller believes that the '68 movements are of a dual nature: they connect the traditional Left-wing elements of ideology (such as the revolutionary class, the antagonistic conflict, the myths of the conquest of the party and of the state) with the new ideas of the cultural revolution of everyday life, of all social relationships, images of the representation of human body, family relationships, and building new type of anti-authoritarian relationships within politics, economy and the cultural systems.

Vajda expressed the above thesis in the following way:

In the movements of 1968, we can see something other than the last great wave of 'modernist' movements wishing to make a rational-minded society as a project of modernity. Movements of 1968 [...] carry a new kind of, if you like, germs of 'postmodern' movements. Movements that do not reject the 'existing' forms of socioeconomic and political organization: freedom of individual initiative, economy and production based on this 'alienated' social relations, and 'alienated' representative forms of political democracy. Within this framework of the existing system and organization, they want to change the everyday life, publicity and culture – in the narrower sense of the word – the basics of the existing society and culture. I am thinking here of ecological movements, women's movements, movements of sexual and racial minorities, etc. Movements that not only present a singular – though complex – goal, but put forward these singular issues [...] and assume that they can be implemented without a total transformation of the existing society. [24]

András Kovács, a philosopher and sociologist, a younger member of the dissident Budapest School, published a study titled "Did Hungarians Have 1968 at All?" (2008) in a conference volume of 10 years ago, and took into account the different attempts to interpret the 1968 movements. He identified seven types of arguments in the existing interpretations:

1. "Enforcing and completing the modernization process [...] abolished the modernization deficit and created the possibility of creating a new middle class"
2. "Its function was actually to overcome democratic deficiencies arising from the normal functioning of the institutional system of liberal parliamentary democracy, but in order to overcome this, the institutional system of parliamentary democracy itself is not suitable".
3. "It was a radical criticism of modernity [...] it elaborated the post-industrial values and set them in the centre of economy, of society and of politics".
4. "Basically, the norms of everyday life and the way of life changed in a radical way: the life forms that had already existed (but were rather deviant and marginal) became generally accepted".
5. "Creating a new social sensitivity [...]. The creation of a sensitivity to the problems of the poor, the migrant minorities, the patients of psychiatry, the people with disabilities and the other stigmatized or marginalized groups, and making all these to political matters was the most important achievement of 1968".
6. "1968 resulted from the development of tolerance for ethnic and cultural diversity, the development of political aspirations and methods for the understanding and full recognition of minority cultures, the establishment of institutional forms within the great institutional system of politics which enable the cultural presence of minorities, collective and enforcing your individual rights. All of this required a complete change in attitude towards cultural, racial and ethnic minorities".
7. "1968 was nothing more than a serious breach of generation conflict" (198–201).

Slavoj Žižek, a Slovenian philosopher and sociologist, a critical thinker on both Capitalism and Socialism, who left Budapest for Ljubljana, emphasizes the ideological-political conflicts of the interpretations and memories of 1968, and the aspirations to hegemony in their conflicts (1988: 113). At the same time, he compares 1968 and 1989 as the turning points of different social and political perceptions and interpretations:

The protest wave in May 1968 was a political failure (capitalism was victoriously returned) and at the same time the capitalism was socially

reformed by different social innovations (capitalism was expropriating a significant part of the social 'gains' of the transformations: the sexual revolution, the new individual freedoms, the improving of women's position within the society, etc. At the same time, there were new emerging post-patriarchal forms of the authority and the domination). The anti-communist revolution of 1989 was politically successful (communism failed) but lost the social battle (the new post-communist societies are not structured by the ideas of the former anti-communist opposition and dissent). Those who are a kind of "bridging" between the two opposite movements [of 1968 and of 1989 – Sz. M.] (1968 was anti-capitalist and criticized the parliamentary democracy, while 1989 stood for them), they usually point out that both share the commitment to the liberal values of individual freedom and they were both engaged against all the forms of social restraint and repression. [...] (1968 was quickly overthrown by the ruling ideology, so its ultimate aftermath was not the overthrow of capitalism, but the fall of the enemy of the capitalist "free world" of the "existing socialism"). (124)

New issues and themes emerged with the movements of 1968. The protracted wave of protests was also embodied in a new civil society and the movement mobilizations in Hungary and in Eastern Europe. Vajda and Heller speak of the "postmodern movements" that replace the "modern" movements, the traditional civil, liberal, and socialist movements, in such a way as to preserve the traditions of social and liberal values, but with new thematic, organizational form and values, as ecological, feminist, counter-cultural, etc. movements as well as within the opposition and dissent of Eastern Europe with a different emphasis and interpretation. We may thus speak of a combination of the 1968 Western and Eastern traditions of a new type of Social Liberalism emerging within the 1989 democratic transformation in Hungary and elsewhere.

The critical currents of Western and of non-European Marxism (represented by the German-American Herbert Marcuse) condemned and criticised the Soviet Union for its bureaucratic despotism as well as for the betrayal of real Marxism, the revolutionary prophecy and the Utopian path. However, for many observers in Hungary as well in other countries of the Bloc, until the invasion in Czechoslovakia the Soviet Union embodied an attractive alternative to the U.S. – or rather the lesser evil. The military invasion against the Prague Spring (which Hungarian troops participated in) triggered some protest against this decision, but much more disillusion and passive resistance towards Communism/Marxism/Soviet Union in Hungary. Some dedicated Communists committed suicide, and a group of activists took the initiative to protest publicly against

the intervention of the Soviet Union, but they did not receive as much support as latter protest actions of the 1970s. The military intervention had much in common with the painful recollections of 1956, which for the majority of the Hungarian society had a rather preventive and disciplinary effect. Another reason why Hungarians distanced themselves from anti-Soviet protest as well as from pro-Czechoslovakian or pro-Polish activities was the prospect of economic and social reforms. These potential developments enjoyed support among intellectuals. The reforms went further on until the dictum of Brezhnev for more loyalty to the roots of Socialism; soon after, in 1973, János Kádár stopped the reforms himself.

Protest groups and the counter culture of 1968 as such did not yet observe the alternative models of European order [except for some isolated thinkers, perhaps, such as István Bibó or the Czech Jan Patocka, who investigated the meaning of European history and the prospects of Europe in a new world order beyond Cold War. Hungarian dissent at the time generally imagined to be positioned in the best of political camps, and exerted some self-control to avoid excessive criticism of the Soviet Union and to secure further prospects for Hungarian reform. The non-European alternative movements of 1968 – such as those developed in the revolutionary Cuba and in the cultural revolution of Mao – as well as the Western protest of the New Left seemed in Hungary to be very distant, both in geographical and cultural-intellectual terms. They seemed nothing but an intellectual and symbolic challenge. In 1968, the Cold War system in Hungary remained unchallenged. The leading alternative Marxist thinker, Georg Lukács, on the occasion of his rehabilitation by the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party, claimed that the "worst Communism is better than any type of Capitalism". The confrontational logic of the Cold War was deep in the minds of critical intellectuals of that time, intertwined with some hope for an alternative Communism; meanwhile, masses experienced a joyful a-theoretical convergence of expectations, hoping that the generations of parents and of teenage children who were so used to searching a point of reference in the West, would finally see themselves similar to their virtual counterparts.

This honeymoon period lasted until 1973, when under the pressure of the Soviet Union and the internal opposition, the experiment of the New Economic Mechanism was abolished, leading politicians lost their positions, and a defensive policy [more cruel than that of 1968] towards the established intellectual dissent was formulated and implemented. The period between 1968–1973 legitimized the reformist character of the Kádár regime, which was able to utilise it during the 1980's, in establishing new cooperation with the West and opening up the regime for economic and cultural experiences. Tolerance towards dissent constituted an important preparatory step for the systemic transition of 1989.

Thus, 1968 has never played that eminent role in historical consciousness, neither before nor after 1989 [as it has in the history of Czechoslovakia that might serve as a useful point of reference]. 1968 stands for a victory of Kádár and of "Kádárism", which was characterised by Ágnes Heller as the "dictatorship over the needs" or by the Western publicists as "Goulash-Communism". The regime itself registered it as a silent victory, which resulted in very strong, indisputable and long-lasting legitimacy.

After 1989, 1968 could not be established for an alternative Hungarian historical consciousness. In Hungary, 1956 the ant-Stalinist revolution and freedom fight against the Russians and the Soviet Union become a new source of legitimacy and of republicanism. One might even state that 1956, being the main and genuine contribution of Hungarians to the history the anti-socialist fights, overshadowed 1968 in its meaning within the international and internal discussions on the 20<sup>th</sup> century post-war history of Hungary.

An irony of history, 1968 – an emblem for the radicalism and revolution in Western hemisphere and certain extent in the Eastern bloc too – for Hungary is associated with a "good bargaining" that gave autonomy in foreign policy to the Soviets in exchange for temporary internal autonomy in economic and social affairs. A moment of radicalism in world history of radicalism is a moment of reformism and of clever opportunism in the history of Hungary. It is by no means surprising, then, that 1968 has never served as a useful point of reference for contemporary historical research in Hungary.

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1968: The  
Primitive  
Democrats.  
Fifty ye-  
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exists

# 1968: The Primitive Democrats. Fifty years later, what has changed and what still exists

Sergio Zermeño

Recalling the images of the Mexican student movement of 1968 half a century later leads us to protest against the poverty of the present time. We experience the memories as a necessary snub that forces us to recall the joyous, libertarian celebration of this democratic explosion drowned in blood. Fifty years later, we also need to think soberly and realize that, beyond the fact that we were free then, we aspired to a more just society by employing the vehemence of youth. The utopia has vanished – and we sink into corruption, poverty and violence, not only the violence of power against people, but also the violence of people against each other.

Why did the changes in Mexico deviate from the direction we were following five decades ago? We could ask the Spanish whether, despite their separatist and real estate crises, the country they were aiming for when they emerged from the dictatorship looks like the one they have today. Most of them would probably answer in the affirmative, even if, according to economists, Spain and Mexico had similar development indicators at the time. Would we be prepared to admit that our blind opening to the global world has been devastating (when, across the ocean, the developed Europe has shown greater solidarity with the countries of the South)? Would we be prepared to say that this is also due to our civil society being too weak to curb megalomania and corruption of

the powerful when, at the same time, the withdrawal of the state has opened the way to drug trafficking and violence? There is no doubt that we, Mexicans, are in overwhelming agreement on this. But would we also unanimously acknowledge that – while we are certainly victims of globalization and the Empire, of corruption and violence – our failure is also largely due to the fact that we, the young people of that time, were victims of ourselves, of our state culture, of our fascination with the high spheres and of our thirst for power?

That autumn of 1968, we were amazed to see an almighty state, the product of the chaotic and deadly conflagration of the Mexican Revolution, defeated by a youth uprising. The beginning of the Olympic Games was imminent, for the first time a weakly-developed country had the honour of hosting this event and, even if both the State and civil society saw it as an opportunity to show the country's modernity, we were unable to put an end to the intransigence of the government and to our eagerness to overthrow it. The ogre's reaction was fierce, and despite misinformation, once we woke up from the Olympic euphoria, we discovered with horror the spectacle of dozens of young people being massacred. The bloodshed committed by the army remained an open wound forever: we had failed, we were not fertile ground for democracy. Once again, as in previous social struggles, the event ended in prisons, in hospitals, in cemeteries – in a word, in persecution. Saturn devouring his children, the Tlatoani ordering the sacrifice.

Until 1968, there seems to have remained among Mexicans a matrix of social struggle and action that we have synthesized under the expression "the logic of the suicidal and the murderer". I will explain it later. I should also wonder if we Mexicans have gone beyond this logic of action or if we are still paying it a tribute.

#### WHO WERE WE? WHAT DID WE WANT? WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

It is essential to recall the identity of the actors who took part in the 1968 student movement – in this struggle "for democratic freedoms" [as we called it then], in which several conceptions of democracy coexisted, ideas very different from each other as to the forces and methods to achieve it. At least five trends can be distinguished. Let us start by looking at the initiators of the movement.

#### LIBERTARIAN DEMOCRATS

1968 began with the occupation of the streets of downtown Mexico City by students of the vocational, pre-vocational and preparatory schools; they were hit in the first line by police repression. Far from calming the situation, the police were throwing fuel on the fire in a surprising series of violent provocations. These young people were the architects of the great Mexican awakening. They had planned to resist, but also to attack, to set fire to buses and to set up barricades, to the point that even the garbage cans in the neighbourhood were magically full of stones. The clashes led to the intervention of the army, which fired bazookas and destroyed the gate of San Ildefonso College, the headquarters of the National Preparatory School and the historic building that housed the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico during the colonial era.

Very quickly, this enraged revolt turned into a struggle for basic rights and civil rights: for freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression of ideas, beliefs and cultural preferences; freedom to gather in the streets and to march to Zócalo, the main square, then forbidden to demonstrators; freedom of the press, and of anti-authoritarian publication. This libertarian and playful revolt that characterized the first phase of the conflict was the one in which the Mexican movement most closely followed those of the rest of the world; images of the French *Mai* abounded.

#### THE "CULTURAL REVOLT"

This first demonstration was quickly rallied by what can be called the "cultural revolt" against the lifestyles imposed on us, by the young people of the 1960s. At that time, the University Campus was a booming space where avant-garde artistic and humanist movements as well as national and international political struggles came together. We were all aware of what was happening in France at the time, of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, of the youth demonstrations against the Vietnam War in the United States, of the black power and ideas of Martin Luther King, of the situationist movement, of the anti-colonialist struggles of Frantz Fanon and his *The Wretched of the Earth*. Before the provocation in July, a hunger strike had begun at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences for the liberation of the leader of the railway union Demeterio Vallejo and other political prisoners; the film clubs of several faculties presented us with the latest achievements of the French New Wave, Italian neo-realism,

and Bergman, while in the auditoriums we heard the music of the Chilean band Parra, the Argentinian singer Atahualpa, as well as of Pete Seeger, Joan Baez and many others.

### REFORM DEMOCRATS

The currents I have just described will soon be joined by the contingents that gathered around what can be called “the rector’s revolt”. This began to everyone’s surprise with the lowering of the national flag to half-mast as a sign of mourning for the violation of the university’s autonomy, after the destruction of the college gate. Then, the rector himself led a demonstration in the vicinity of the university. The government establishment fulminated, resulting in the rallying of the vast majority of teachers and students from less politicized curricula, as well as a large part of public opinion. 1968 turned into a middle-class revolt against the authoritarianism of the state. It was “dialogue”, “respect for the Constitution”, “freedom of expression, assembly and demonstration” that became the watchwords of the coalition of secondary and higher education teachers in favour of democratic freedoms. We have not asked ourselves much about the weight of such a current in the mobilization, while half of the participating forces came from these reformists with the complicity of the middle classes.

Nevertheless, it is well known that the enthusiasm of a reformist ally of this nature is always short-lived. On 9<sup>th</sup> September, less than two months after the outbreak of hostilities, Rector Javier Barros Sierra said: “Our institutional demands have essentially been met by the President of the Republic... It is necessary and urgent to return to normality”. It must be said that a week earlier, during his annual address to the nation, President Díaz Ordaz had declared:

“Once the means dictated by common sense and experience have been exhausted, I will exercise, as soon as strictly necessary, [my] right [under the Constitution], to ‘dispose of the entire armed forces’ [...]. We would not want to be led to take measures that repel us, but we will take them if necessary; we will go as far as the situation requires[...].”

The rector’s attitude, together with his call to resume classes, was certainly despised by the student movement and by a large intellectual and professional core of professors in the coalition of professors, but it also highlights the weaknesses inherent in excessively heterogeneous alliances.

### REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRATS

It should be noted that the negotiating, or reformist, current was not the most visible face of the 1968 mobilization, probably because both the authoritarian government and the movement itself and its leaders were not used to negotiating. Thus, the main leading and organizational apparatus of the movement was undoubtedly the National Strike Council (Consejo nacional de huelga, CNH), the organ of the students themselves, which quickly acquired a pyramidal configuration, more like the Supreme Soviet than the liberal parliament. This is certainly due to the two major cultural influences of the time: first, Marxism-Leninism, the predominant ideology among the most politically trained students, and second, the political culture specific to Mexicans, which, through an “understandable” phenomenon of mimicry, encouraged the less politicized (but in fact everyone) to reproduce the same vertical and authoritarian structure of their opponent: the Mexican State.

At the same time, the government did not favour discussion with the negotiating currents, the insubordination of the rector and university authorities having aroused real hatred in the president. It was only on 22nd September, three weeks before the Olympics, that the Minister of the Interior, Luís Echeverría, without providing any details, declared himself “in the best possible mood to receive the representatives of professors and students [to start] a frank and calm dialogue that could lead to the clarification [...] of this regrettable problem”. Thus, the CNH became the sole interlocutor of a government closed to dialogue. These two actors were very ill-prepared to reach any agreement. In the midst of the approximately one hundred or two hundred representatives of schools and universities, a more restricted directional nucleus emerged over the weeks, which was quite natural (“in case the repression would disperse us”), and the CNH gradually created information, propaganda, surveillance, finance, brigade committees and what not.

In the absence of a liberal-democratic space for the exchange of ideas and consensus building, the so-called “hard wing”, the most politicized sector of the Mexican left, overtook all other components. The movement then chose to broaden its alliances and to accumulate forces – a logical reaction when facing an enemy as powerful as the Mexican state. In one of its latest and most virulent announcements, the CNH stated:

The support of the popular sectors forces us to question the foundation of injustice and exploitation on which the regime is based, and to expose to the popular masses our views on how to transform it and on the line of action that students, workers, peasants and employees, in

a word the people as a whole, must take to rid our country once and for all of exploitation, poverty, abuse and repression[...]. It is urgent to start a widespread battle with all workers [...].

The spirit of this quotation would give rise, during the 1970s, to the most violent and warring factions [guerrillas of the Revolutionary Action Movement [MAR]; the "Sick" [los "Enfermos"], in Sinaloa, League of 23rd September], but also to the currents that aspired to the independence of Mexican trade unionism, both within the working class (electricians, nuclear workers, etc.) and among university officials, starting with those of the National Autonomous University of Mexico [UNAM] in 1973 and ending with the experience of the popular university in the State of Guerrero. This type of formulation would also feed into the more serious and consistent political organizations that emerged in the 1970s: the revolutionary organization Critical Point, the Mexican Party of the Proletariat, the Internationalist Group [Trotskyist] and the Mexican Workers' Party of Heriberto Castillo.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that even if several of these currents were part of the culture of revolutionary confrontation and rupture, some – the most Leninist of them – went to meet the working classes (in factories, in the suburbs of the capital), bearing in mind the construction of the party and the class avant-garde – while others – rather Maoist and in the background – thought of giving power to the popular sectors themselves and not only to their vanguards, in order to solve problems where they arose, in neighbourhoods and suburbs, in communes and small regions. A quest for power was concerned with social matters and not with the accumulation of forces to take over the Winter Palace: the groups aimed at solving problems collectively, in an organized way, in areas circumscribed by consistent entities. They gave up their position in the heart of the Republic and in the epicentre of power. These more social, less vertical and centralist orientations converged towards the currents of liberation theology and its basic ecclesial communities.

#### THE AUTHORITARIAN FRAMEWORK

It appears that the 1968 movement in Mexico did not have an ideology or even a common strategy that could bring the various participants together: the umbrella of democratic freedoms housed plural, if not opposing, points of view. During the process, the libertarian and playful

demonstrations gradually gave way to the more vertical, politicized and dramatic ones that concluded this active period.

One wonders then why ideological referents have never unified the great mobilizations of our country (except perhaps in the case of the war of the Cristeros, Catholic peasants who, between 1926 and 1929, rose up against the anticlerical government of Plutarco Elías Calle), and even why these dogmatic elements, when they exist, persist so little. The explanation must undoubtedly be found in the supremacy of the State throughout our history: any movement or uprising of a social actor, no matter how defined is its origin, no matter how elaborate the claims are, quickly ends up meeting the irremovability of the pyramid and the intransigence of its top, the powerful authority that controls everything and whose characteristic feature is systematically to have destroyed all dissidence and all alternative options.

Those who mobilize quickly find themselves isolated, disadvantaged, and generally the story ends there. But it can also happen that insurgents receive, as in 1968, the support of an ally such as the rector, teachers and the middle classes, which takes the conflict to a higher level. Each newcomer to the alliance blurs the initial demands and proposals, but in return reinforces the uprising. This expansion cycle can be repeated once or several times: in our example, until it came to declaring: "We will wait for the president here, on the Zócalo, until he accedes to our demands", before reaching the point of calling on the workers, peasants and the people in general to join the fight. Logically, well-defined and elaborated ideologies disappear in this dynamic, weakening the cohesion or unity of the rapidly expanding alliance.

A radical wing and a negotiating or reformist wing then emerged. This immediately led to an acceleration and a fight against time, with unity depending more on the common state adversary who oppressed than on shared strategies or principles. All of these are characteristic of any break in order in general. The changes led Mexican authoritarianism to grotesque paroxysms that can be summed up in the expression "the logic of the suicidal and the assassin": condemned to die because of the heterogeneity of their members, broad alliances sought an immediate result before the divisions weakened them in confrontation ("all or nothing", "I overthrow the government or I get killed" and, on the despot side: "I'm done with these insurgents or they'll hit me").

There was inevitably a confrontation, and with it the fragmentation, discontinuity and demobilization of those who had recognized them-

selves as equal, as allies in their general demands. Prison, death, and persecution followed. They were then pulverized in facts and minds, but some of their claims would be recovered by the dominant order and, as time passed, the gates of the forbidden city would open for many defeated; their intelligence and courage would become new blood in Behemoth's veins.

We thus discover that the matrix of the socio-political functioning of our Mexicanity is characterized by at least two mechanisms that can be described as the logic of the suicidal and the murderous on the one hand and the "fascination for the summit" on the other. Both can be observed in the conduct outlined in the very action of the student body when it was acquiring an organization that transformed the National Strike Council into a pyramid as vertical and powerful as that of the opponent it claimed to fight by displaying the flag of democratic freedoms. The fascination for the summit is the obsession to occupy the place of power, the place of Tlatoani.

#### THE 1980S AND 1990S: THE TRIUMPH OF REFORMISM

The repression was brutal and the wound as deep as the radicalization that spread to a part of the Mexican youth throughout the 1970s. That was when the painful experience of urban and rural guerrillas began, and their crushing with fire and blood made the state seem even more grotesque. However, it should be noted that, at the same time, huge sums were being paid to universities, without solving the problem. President José López Portillo was elected in 1976 without any other candidate or political force participating in the elections. To break out of the vicious circle, the regime enacted a political reform that legalized opposition political parties, particularly the highly persecuted Communist Party. Parliamentary spaces, party financing and the electoral game [the Chamber of Deputies increased from 300 to 500 seats] grew exponentially.

In the 1970s, the powerful independent trade unionist movement, including academic, professorial as well as labour, communist, Trotskyist, Maoist and Hébertist organizations, gradually converged, first within the Mexican Socialist Party, then within the United Socialist Party of Mexico, and finally joined forces within Cardenism and formed the Party of the Democratic Revolution [PRD] in the early 1990s. When, over the course of these two decades, this coincided with the democratic transition and the end of authoritarian regimes in the countries of Eastern Euro-

pe, Mediterranean Europe and South America, the liberal-democratic or negotiating current of 1968 became the triumphant position of the insurgents of the 1960s.

#### A NEW AFFRONT

The fertile space of political and partisan intermediation, relatively active in social problems and forces [the best example of which was provided by the collaboration between individuals, civil society organizations and left-wing movements that assisted the victims of the 1985 earthquake] was gradually infected with the Mexicanity virus. Indeed, between the electoral fraud of 1988 and the end of the century, a horrible gap opened up between politicians of all stripes and the civil society, which was facing increasing insecurity. The PRD's electoral triumph in the capital of the Republic did nothing to strengthen the links between society and politics; on the contrary, the most prominent democratic leaders broke out at the top of the bureaucratic scaffolding while at the bottom, clientelist manipulation intensified, leading to a clash of interests for positions of influence and the management of public money.

The law on citizen participation promised during the campaign and passed in 1998, one year after Cuauhtemoc came to power, is a clear case in point. This law provided for the renewal of the more than 1,200 citizen committees in the federal district every three years, but the committees were not elected until thirteen years later, at a time when they were already under the clientelist control of *perrédisme* [the ideology and modus operandi of the PRD]. In the face of citizen disapproval, some deputies argued that organizing elections was tantamount to throwing money away, without worrying that the internal elections of their party had cost them much more.

In 1994, the "Enough is enough!" of the Zapatista Army and of a hooded Marcos [spokesman for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation] targeted this void to a large extent. From there, a radical rejection of parties, parliamentary spaces and electoral systems by social movements and social struggles developed. This resentment unfortunately added to the disorder and poverty caused by unbridled globalization everywhere, especially in view of our status as a subcontracting country. Instead of strengthening our transition to democracy, it was the desperate desire to radically change everything that was strengthened; social mobilizations returned to the radicalism of the 1960s.

From Seattle to Porto Alegre, from Cancún to the Indignés, the alterglobalist movements ostensibly highlighted injustice on the entire planet. This raised a huge wave of hatred. The students of the National University refused to hear that their request for free education had been met, continuing the strike throughout 1999, desperately calling on the people to join them. In 2006, the People's Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca waged a real civil war without even worrying about finding a space for dialogue, until the day its fighters were dispersed in a bloodbath. On the high plateau, the inhabitants of Atenco opposed the construction of an airport on their territory and, even if they eventually won, the reaction was as vehement and the outcome as dramatic as in Oaxaca. Primary school teachers were beginning their trial run of what, from 2013, would become violent civil disobedience across the country. For its part, the EZLN radicalized its rhetoric, focusing on its national campaign to gather anti-system forces here and now. "It's enough to stay at home", Marcos harangued a few days before the terrible repression of Atenco. "When we grab our machetes, we'll see if these bastards still want to come steal from us. Let's gather instead and face them!". Zapatism thus muted and overshadowed its most remarkable successes, namely the "Snails" (Carcos), those multi-ethnic territories governed by the "Good Government Committees" that patiently worked to improve the quality of life in their regions by tackling the root of the problem. This frustration and despair obstructed the social and solidarity paths that, elsewhere in the world, are gradually rebuilding local and regional spaces.

It therefore appears that the deadlock to which neo-liberalism has led us has in no way helped us to overcome the flaws of our socio-political system, to abandon our innate propensity for confrontation, disaster and rupture. In the specific case of our country, there was also a deep crisis of our political-institutional order. It was first expressed on the side of the intermediary bodies, where we saw that both the parties and the parliamentary spaces and the electoral system were discredited (which was aggravated by the clumsiness of the reactions during the 2017 earthquakes). Then there was the atrophy of the agencies that deliver justice – less than five out of 100 crimes and none of the major government corruption are punished today, while prisoner mafia groups control the prisons. Moreover, institutions are in decline and we see that public health, education and anti-poverty services are shrinking at the same time as police forces and military institutions are being strengthened. Yet the latter are losing the war against narco-power while attacking citizen movements. Finally, the institutional weakening is evident, too: we see that our governments remain in place thanks to the increasingly cynical use of the mass media, the dozens of murders of journalists who have

gone unpunished, the use of grotesque arguments to silence criticism and analysis [those of journalists Carmen Aristegui and Leonardo Curzio, among many others].

With fifty years' hindsight, we can ask ourselves if this is what we were aiming for when we mobilized, if these are the means of communication we imagined to replace the "corrupted press", if we have come even a little closer to what was so important to us: a quality education, a predominant place in the technological and scientific field. Or should we not recognize once and for all that we are a country of outcasts? To do so, we should also admit that we, whose responsibility is great in this disaster, were part of this movement and this generation, sometimes occupying privileged places in it: we were defeated by the thirst for power and, with the decline of our ideals, we stopped being interested in improving the lives of Mexicans.

It is a good thing that we are taking stock of 1968; it is an opportunity to imagine the strategies for national reconstruction, which should undoubtedly be based more on progressive paths of densification and social power, closer to the local and territorial level, closer to people and their problems. Such a reconstruction would be for the younger generations to carry out; we, those of 1968, have come out through the back door.

*Translated from French by Marlena Duda*



The Japanese  
Global  
Sixties  
in Isolation:  
Toward  
a Global  
Historical  
Sociology of  
the Sixties

# The Japanese Global Sixties in Isolation: Toward a Global Historical Sociology of the Sixties

Kei Takata

Why did the mass uprisings occur simultaneously during the late 1960s across the world? How did the movements become transnational? These are the questions often been discussed since the inception of the global sixties research as the simultaneity and the transnationality are the significant aspects that characterize this tumultuous event. There are certainly various ways to explain the formation of the global sixties. Yet, one answer often observed in the literature on the subject is the progression of globalization during this period. It was especially the technological developments in mobility, such as aircrafts, telecommunication, and satellites, that opened up opportunities for transnational interactions.

To be sure, the late 1950s to the 1960s was the time of the innovation and diffusion of technological bases of contemporary globalization. In the case of aviation, flying hours were reduced extensively during this period of time; In October 1960, Scandinavian Airlines' new fleet of DC-8s cut by one-third the travel time from Copenhagen to Tokyo. Japanese Airlines initiated a competing service in June 1961. Transatlantic jet flights were inaugurated by the British Airways and Pan Am two years earlier, in October 1958 (Spence 2011: 555–56). It was also the case for satellites. In 1962, the first telecommunication satellite equipped with a relay, Tel-

-star 1 was launched and people across Europe and the US began to watch the news events simultaneously. Satellite television soon expanded and about a year later, the newly launched Relay 1 satellite enabled television to transmit signals from the US to Japan. Similarly, telecommunication has also shown significant technological progress; About ten years after the first transatlantic telephone cable was established in 1956, a new trans-Pacific submarine cable that vastly sped up telecommunication between Japan and the US was inaugurated in the year 1964.

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, social movements are by no means affected by the macro societal changes of the time they take place. Thereby, all these technological advancements certainly were a crucial factor for the global movements to emerge during the sixties. Nevertheless, what tends to be overlooked in the discussion is the other side of the coin i.e. the remaining restrictions that prohibited and hindered transnational movements to develop. It would certainly be a misconstrue to assume that the sixties movements travelled freely across the globe and effortlessly united with the movements in everywhere in the world. On the contrary, there were still more restrictions than opportunities for transnational activism; it was only possible by overcoming various hurdles and obstacles. Besides, those opportunities for transnational activisms were not equally distributed either; each countries' policies, economic strength as well as geopolitical condition had a profound effect on the (im)possibilities of transnational activism. In this light, this paper focus on the restrictions and impediments of the global sixties rather than the opportunities; What were the obstacles that the movements had to overcome? What prevented them from uniting with the movements from other countries? In order to depict a more comprehensive picture of the global sixties, it requires us to combine the perspective that hindered transnational movements to arise.

I consider that the Japanese sixties is in fact a suitable case to explore the global sixties from this direction of inquiry as it shows more restrictions on transnational mobility than of actual possibilities; face-to-face interactions of the movements between Japan and other countries were, in fact, limited. Thus, despite the increasing global awareness among the citizens, Japanese sixties were rather isolated from the rest of the movements, especially in comparison to those in Western Europe and North America.

Admittedly, some Japanese movements were keen on global activism from the early phase of the sixties movement. However, they were only able to engage with it until later. For example, the primary goal of Bund, one of the Japanese New Left organizations, when it was formed in the

late 1950s, was global revolution. Such an ideology was certainly one of the main distinguishing factors with the Old Left, which had followed the Socialism in the One Country theory. Nevertheless, in practice, their global vision was only achieved after the 1970s, when the later members flew to North Korea (the so-called Yodogo group) and the Middle East (the Japanese Red Army) to pursue a global revolution. On the side of the civic publics, Beheiren's transnational actions, which started in 1965, were a very rare and early exception that required the organizers to overcome various obstacles<sup>1</sup>. Thus, it is essential to explore what exactly were the structural challenges that the Japanese sixties movements had to face for transnational activism at that time. This paper argues that two structural factors – firstly, the political and economic aspects that prohibited transnational mobility of the Japanese citizens and, secondly, geopolitical factors in East Asia that constrained the transnational movements between the Japanese and the East Asian countries – were particularly significant in shaping the Japan's relative isolationism within the global sixties.

#### GLOBAL HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF JAPAN'S GLOBAL SIXTIES

In addition to exploring the structural constraints for the transnational activism in the Japanese global sixties, this paper also has another aim, which is to propose an alternative approach to the mechanism in which the global sixties were formed and developed. Until today, the global sixties have been discussed from two contrasting perspectives: the macro-historical sociological one from the World-Systems theorists on the one hand and the historical one that focused on the micro transnational linkage between the movements in different parts of the world. What was lacking, however, is an approach that would be in between the two and would capture both the general and the specific of the global sixties.

In theory, social scientific inquiry tends to emphasize the understanding of general mechanism and patterns of the social and political phenomena; the historical studies, in turn, focus more on the unique narrative of each historical event. Of course, both approaches have strengths and weaknesses in their own light, but their divergent perspectives occasionally create blind spots in research. I believe that the research literature on the global sixties constitutes one such gap. The world systems analysts proposed that the 1968 movement was a world-scale simultaneous uprising against the modern world system (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1989, 1992). While this immensely macro-scale perspective provi-

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Transnational elements were not completely absent even in the early phase of the sixties movement. The Anpo movement, for instance, mobilized Japanese citizens to write letters to the US citizens for solidarity [Tsurumi S, Zinn et al. 1966: 243]. Nonetheless, direct face-to-face interactions were limited.

ded a meaningful characterization of the overall global sixties, it lacked narratives about the actual transnational linkage of the movements that emerged at the time. In contrast, we have also seen significant developments from the field of global history that explore empirically the various movements that transcended national boundaries (e.g. Klimke 2009, Young 2006, Slobodian 2012). Historians of the global sixties certainly contributed greatly to the field by providing narratives from across different parts of the world. Nevertheless, because of the nature of historical studies that emphasize narratives over patterns, they do not provide answers about the larger mechanism in which the transnational movements in the sixties emerged, developed and generated their political and social impact.

Thus, as one way to fill in the research gap, I suggest approaching it from the perspective of global historical sociology – an emerging paradigm that combines global and transnational perspectives in the field of historical sociology (Go and Lawson 2017, Ascione and Chambers 2016, Magubane 2005). Global historical sociology on the one hand is an attempt to overcome the methodological nationalism of historical sociology that largely neglected phenomena in between the nation-state boundaries. On the other, this approach also differs from the proposals of global history; according to its proponents, global historical sociology engages “fully with transnational and global histories, while occupying a register at one remove from such studies through the overt deployment of conceptual abstractions, analytic schemas, and theoretical frames” (Go and Lawson 2017: 5). The strength of global historical sociology, therefore, is to incorporate a theoretical-analytical framework and analyse the patterns of those transnational phenomena which in general prone to be less emphasized in the global history paradigm. In terms of its analytical scope, global historical sociology could be construed as a meso-approach that would fill in the methodological gap between the macro- and microanalysis present in the existing global sixties research. This paper is an initial attempt to do precisely that: to examine the approach and explore the relative transnational mobility and geopolitical constraints that shaped Japan’s global sixties.

One theoretical guide to approach the Japanese sixties from a perspective of global historical sociology would be the concept of “network capital”. According to John Urry, network capital is “the capacity to engender and sustain social relations with those people who are not necessarily proximate and which generates emotional, financial and practical benefits” (Urry 2007: 197). In other words, it is a concept that “bring out how co-presence and trust can be generated at a distance” (*ibid.* 200). Based

on this notion we can further conceptualize the capacity to engender and sustain social relations, particularly with people overseas as “transnational network capital”. If applying this idea to transnational activism, transnational network capital is also a prerequisite for the transnational alliance to be attained.

This paper shows that in general, transnational network capital was rather scarce among the Japanese activists in the sixties. Especially, transnational mobility constrained by state regulation, isolated geographical location as well as scarcity of economic resources in the face of the high cost of transportation was a crucial hindrance for the Japanese activists to travel and cultivate trust with foreign activists. At the same time, geopolitical condition of East Asia also affected the transnational network capital for the Japanese sixties. While Urry’s original concept focus rather on the individual’s capability for mobility, if considering “the capacity to engender trust and social relations in distance” in a more broader scale in the context of transnational activism, we should also ponder various political boundaries that enables and hinders transnational network building to generate. In case of Japanese sixties, remaining political boundaries between Japan and East Asian countries, and the authoritarian regimes in East Asian countries impeded by having Japanese activists to cultivate transnational network capital for alliances with movements in East Asia. Hence, despite the fact Japanese sixties was a significant part of the global sixties, I assert that in a macro view such relative isolationism is a characteristic that requires special attention while discerning the case of Japan.

#### TRANSNATIONAL IMMOBILITY IN THE JAPANESE SIXTIES

Overall, 1960s was the time when Japan began to open-up after a long period of closed wartime regime followed by severe economic devastation. Global mega-events held in Japan at the time, including the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and the World Exposition in Osaka in 1970, were some of the symbolic events that enhanced the awareness toward the outside world among the Japanese citizens. The Tokyo Olympics were not only the first Olympics held in Asia, but also the first to be televised via satellite and viewed by people from forty-five countries across the globe. Thus, through the development of the media infrastructure, the Japanese were exposed to events happening across the world significantly more than before. The general enhancement toward the outside world via media also had an impact on the public sphere. Information about the overseas social move-

ments emerging in tandem with the Japanese movements were imported and disseminated widely. In consequence, Japanese activists managed to generate a global imagination that their movements in Japan were part of the revolt simultaneously taking place world-wide.

Despite the growing imagination for global solidarity, transnational activism based on face-to-face bases was confined, especially compared to those sixties movements in the Western First World countries. The first and most definitive hindrance was the state regulation on foreign travel. From the end of the Second World War until the mid-1960s, Japanese citizens were isolated, without the freedom to leave the country. Under the US occupation (1945–1952), the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers implemented strict regulation for the Japanese citizens to travel abroad. And even after Japan regained its autonomy in 1952, travel control continued (with the exception of diplomatic, academic, business, and sports travel), yet this time, the restrictions were imposed by the Japanese government, for the purpose of keeping the foreign currency at home to help the country recover from the economic devastation of the war. Hence, at least in the early sixties, Japanese citizens were deprived of the opportunity to have first-hand experience outside of the country.

Comparatively speaking, this situation differed from the transnational mobility in many North American and Western European countries that also experienced the sixties movements. In 1961, the Council of Europe agreed to relax passport controls for anyone under the age of twenty-one as a way to facilitate travel by young people between the countries of Western Europe (Jobs 2009: 379). In the US, technological developments had enhanced foreign travel greatly for its citizens around the same period. An article entitled "New Travel Trend is to Asia", for instance (printed in the November 6, 1960 edition of *The New York Times*), presented Japan as an attractive tourist destination, especially at a time when "New York to Tokyo by jet takes no more time than New York to Chicago by train" [42].

It was only in 1964 that the Japanese government lifted the foreign travel ban on its citizens for tourism. While the government was initially reluctant to lift the limitations and remained concerned about the outflow of foreign currency, as a result of external pressures from the International Monetary Fund, in 1964 the country decided to deregulate the restrictions. As a compromise, however, the government imposed a regulation on travellers prohibiting them from taking more than five hundred US dollars out of Japan. The Japanese international airport was also developed the same year, as part of the preparation for the Tokyo Olympics,

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which increased the number of international flights. Consequently, approximately 0.2 million Japanese travelled outside the country in 1964. The figure had increased about seven times in comparison to the same period a decade earlier.

Nevertheless, traveling overseas was still exclusively available to those privileged; the high cost of foreign travel (resulting from Japan's distant geographical location) remained an obstacle for the majority of Japanese citizens [Yamaguchi 2010: 58, 89]. As an archipelago located in the east of Asia, Japan must rely on costly means of international transport such as airplanes and ships, instead of the less expensive forms of land travel. Considering that a round-trip flight from Tokyo to the US in the mid-1960s cost approximately 450,000 Japanese Yen (which was twenty times more than the median monthly starting salary of recent college graduates at that time), it remained strikingly expensive for citizens to travel abroad. Moreover, despite the rapid economic growth that the society was experiencing during the 1960s, the disparity in commodity prices between Japan and the Western First World countries remained significant, in part due to the fixed currency legislation with 360 Japanese Yen per one US dollar until it changed to a floating exchange rate system in 1973.

Thus, comparing it with many of the other First World counties, Japanese citizens' opportunity for foreign visit was still very closed. For example, citizens of West Germany, a country that followed a path similar to Japan's through defeat in the war and subsequent economic development, enjoyed foreign travel much earlier than those in Japan. A historian described "[i]n the 1960s, foreign travel made the transition from the social privilege of the few to a common consumer good of the middle-class [Kopper 2009: 82]" in West Germany. A figure shows that in the year 1970 US citizens spent twenty times more and West Germans ten times more than the Japanese on foreign travel [Yokoyama 1971: 72].

It was only in the 1970s that the situation changed. The first discount airline ticket service was introduced in 1969, and the cost of airfare was reduced by up to sixty percent. The first Jumbo Jet, Boeing 747 landed in Japan in 1970, the same year that the World Exposition was held in Osaka, which also led to the expansion of foreign travel. As a result, Japan experienced its first boom in overseas tourism in the early 1970s. The number of Japanese foreign travellers quadrupled in four years from 0.5 million in 1969 to over two million in 1973<sup>2</sup>. If we divide the Japanese long sixties into two phases, the first half beginning from the late 1950s to mid 1960s and the latter half between the mid 1960s to the

 2.  
The figure excludes travel to Okinawa, although the region remained a territory of the US until its return to Japan in 1972.

mid 1970s, the latter phase of the Japanese sixties movement occurred alongside the global turn of the Japanese society. Those Japanese who took part in the uprising in the late 1960s were also embedded in the macro-societal transformation. Nevertheless, from various remaining obstacles for foreign travel that has just been discussed, actual transnational alliances on face-to-face basis were not easily attained between Japanese and foreign activists. Although foreign travel had been liberalized, it remained accessible only to those with high economic capital. Thus, in general the movements still required to mobilize substantial amounts of resources in order to travel abroad and develop ties with foreign counterparts. In other words, despite their aspiration, young student activists from the Japanese New Left organizations generally lacked the resources to engage collectively in transnational activism at a large scale (with the exception of a few capable and courageous groups). However, on the contrary we should not ignore the fact that Japan attracted many activists from the West, especially from the US. By the late 1960s, the country had become one of the most popular destinations for observing and experiencing non-Western activism. Many American activists visited Japan to engage in anti-Vietnam-War movements operating in Japan [Takata 2017]. When the foreign activists arrived, their Japanese hosts introduced them to various "hot spots" of social movements in Japan, including Okinawa and Sanrizuka, as well as the cities where protests against the US military bases were taking place. To be specific, Japan was the destination of the Black Panther Party's first international trip in 1968, when the leaders Eldridge Cleaver and Early Anthony were invited by Beheiren to visit Okinawa. During the following year, another two members of the BPP visited Sanrizuka to speak at a rally against the construction of Narita International Airport [Clemons and Jones 1999: 194 - 195].

## GEOPOLITICAL CONSTRAINTS FOR THE JAPANESE AND EAST ASIAN GLOBAL SIXTIES

What constrained the transnational activism in the Sixties was not limited to opportunity for transnational

In addition to the openness and closeness in transnational mobility, another macrostructure that was crucial for shaping Japan's global sixties were the geopolitical conditions. First of all, a Cold War divide was obviously a significant factor that structured the transnational characteristics of the entire global sixties. While there were always exceptions and a degree of restrictions from country to country, yet in general, travelling

through different regimes during the 1960s was challenging without official permission from the governments or the political parties. In case of Japan, an activist later mentioned that the Japanese New Left were not able to visit Vietnam during the early phase of the Vietnam War period because the Japanese Communist Party had monopolized relations with the North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam [Muto and Inoue 1985: 61]. Travel to the People's Republic of China was similarly restricted. Despite the liberalization of foreign travel in 1964 that enabled Japanese citizens to visit China independently without the full control of either government, various trivial bureaucratic procedures remained in force, and Japanese travellers still required approval from a host in China to visit the country. In addition, the total number of travellers allowed to enter China in a year was controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. Moreover, those Japanese who applied for visas to travel to China frequently experienced harassment from the Japanese authorities. For instance, young women were occasionally told that traveling to China would prevent them from getting married, and male students traveling to China were told that it would affect their job prospects in the future [Fukuoka 2014: 248]. To be sure, we also observed various examples of transnational alliances between the movements from the capitalist and communist blocs during the sixties, most notably the alliance between the US New Left and the Republic of Cuba [e.g. Young 2006]. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that the strategies for transnational network building differed from the formation of coalition within the same regimes.

Another and even more crucial factor for the Japanese sixties was the geopolitical one. The critical geopolitical situation in East Asia at that time complicated the transnational movements in Japan, particularly in terms of their relationships with movements in neighbouring Asian countries. Transnational alliances at the regional level were an especially crucial aspect of the global sixties movement. In the case of Europe, for example, a historian had argued that “[t]he ease and frequency with which middle-class youth in the 1960s travelled to cities such as Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Paris, and Prague created an interpersonal solidarity which was crucial to the formation of movements that challenged national demarcations of power [...]. The experience of travel within the emergent youth culture helped to shape a politicized European identity among the young protesters of 1968” [Jobs 2009: 376]. Thus, in Europe, the transnational sixties was a product of, and at the same time contributed to, European integration [Jobs 2017].

This was not the case in the East Asian region, though. The transnational connections among the Japanese and Asian grass-roots movements

remained sparse at least until the 1970s in any profound way. There were several critical reasons for such constraints. Firstly, the transnational immobility in the region. Although, comparing with the West, Japanese citizens' transnational mobility was restricted during the sixties, the situation of the Japanese was relatively better than of the residents of other countries in the region. The Korean peninsula remained politically strained throughout the 1960s, almost a decade after the civil war between North and South Korea ended in 1953. Taiwan was also under an authoritarian regime, and Mainland China was experiencing turmoil from the Great Leap Forward followed by the Cultural Revolution. Countries in Southeast Asia were still politically and economically unstable under the newly decolonized regimes. One way or another, these precarious political and economic conditions negatively affected the citizens' transnational mobility in many Asian countries. It was only in 1979 when the Taiwanese government allowed its citizens to travel abroad for tourism, except to Communist countries and excluding men between the ages of sixteen and thirty who had not completed their compulsory military service. In the case of South Korea, it was in the 1980s that the government gradually lifted the foreign travel ban, first for citizens over the age of fifty in 1983, and finally in 1989 for citizens of all ages. China had been implementing even stricter limits on transnational travel, both inbound and outbound. It was only in 1978 when the government opened the country to foreign tourists, and it maintained tight control over mobility within the country. As for outbound travel, the government allowed Chinese citizens to visit some Southeast Asian countries in 1991 and then Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea in 1998 [Mak 2004].

Secondly, the relationship between Japan and the rest of Asia was troubled because of the difficult past; the unresolved memory of colonialism had left both Japan and many Asian countries reluctant to create direct communications among their citizens. Japan promoted reconciliation by reinstating diplomatic relationships with Taiwan in 1952 (however officially ended in 1972), South Korea in 1965, China in 1972, as well as other Asian countries through war reparations based on the Treaty of Peace with Japan signed in 1952.<sup>2</sup> However, the treaties between Japan and Asian countries tended to prioritize economic benefits for both parties, and to evade genuine reconciliation by failing to confront directly the problems of the colonial period. The Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea signed in 1965, for instance, did not discuss Japan's colonial rule, despite the fact that many agreements included in the treaty were related to the past colonial relationship [Yoshizawa 2005]. At the same time, various delicate issues related to colonialism were resolved by Japan transferring financial resources to South

◀ 2. The diplomatic relationship with Taiwan only lasted until 1972 when Japan signed treaty with the People's Republic of China. However, informal exchange continued and relationship has improved especially after the 1990s.

Korea under the name of “economic cooperation”. More problematically, this economic cooperation, which reached a total of \$800 million US dollars, was not officially described as a compensation for colonial aggression; this made the treaty all the more ambiguous in terms of Japan’s responsibility toward Korea. Thus, in many cases, the relationships between Japan and Asian countries were confined to diplomatic relations or economic activities between the governments and large corporations; opportunities for exchange within civil society were severely sparse.

Thirdly, the characteristics of the social movements in Japan during the 1960s and those in other parts of Asia did not coincide. Many other East Asian countries experienced mass eruptions of citizens and students from the 1970s onwards. Also, even in those countries that experienced social unrest during the 1960s, the nature of that unrest was different than in the Japanese movements because of the disparities in the macro-political and social conditions in respective countries. In Taiwan, authoritarian social surveillance and the uncertain political future of the region precluded it from experiencing mass unrest during the 1960s (Hsiau 2010). Defending Diaoyutai Movement, which was first initiated by students studying in the US and then launched by college students in northern Taiwan in the spring of 1971 was part of the turning point of mass unrest in post-war Taiwan (Hsiau 2013, Jinxing 2009). However, as the movement asserted sovereignty over Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands against Japan, the nature of the movement was anti-Japanese rather than building solidarity with them. Likewise, from the Japanese side the movement was generally undebated within the public sphere and the tendency to form transnational solidarity with Taiwanese activists was largely absent. While in South Korea protests did emerge in the 1960s; the mass uprising in April 1960 led by students and public intellectuals forced the resignation of president Syngman Rhee; the students also stood up against the normalization of the South Korea-Japan relationship in 1965. Yet, in general, the social movements in South Korea in the 1960s were suppressed by strong authoritarian surveillance; it was after 1972 that the democratization movement became fully vibrant, and it reached its peak in the June Democratic Uprising of 1987. More importantly, the characteristics of the movements in South Korea in the sixties were generally different from those of the Japanese sixties. For instance, the anti-Vietnam War movement, which united the sixties movements in the First World countries in the West and Japan, was absent in South Korea due to South Koreans’ strong sympathy for South Vietnam, based on their experience of a similar Cold-War divide approximately a decade earlier (Kim 2006: 630). Instead, the national democratization movement against the military dictatorship, based on liberal democracy, however

without strong communist ideology and anti-American sentiment, was prominent in the South Korean social movements of the 1960s. Also, the outcome was considerably different. Whereas in North America, Western Europe as well as in Japan “new social movement” (e.g. minority politics and environmental politics) emerged out of the sixties movement, in the case of South Korea the development of new social movement was rather after the military dictatorship had been removed in the late 1980s (ibid. 629).

In a nutshell, majority of social movements in Asia in the sixties were post-colonial or democratization movements against military dictatorships and in case of Taiwan and South Korea they became most active after the 1970s and especially in the 1980s. For Japan, however, the largest uprisings in the post-war period occurred in the 1960s, first in the year 1960 against the US-Japan military treaty (Anpo) and then the anti-Vietnam War and campus struggles in the late 1960s. Also, in terms of the characteristics of the movements, especially among those youth movements in the latter half of the sixties, the main issue was not about overthrowing the authoritarian regime but rather about challenging modern values and particularly the various social and political problems of the post-war society that embodies the negative effect of Japan’s modern project.



**3.**  
However, willingness towards transnational solidarity was not completely absent. For example, when the South Korean government declared a state of emergency to suppress student protest against the treaty, young activists in Japan showed their solidarity by organizing protests in front of the South Korean Embassy in Tokyo [Mikami 2000: 16]. Yet, fruitful collaboration between the two sides did not fulfil.

### DISJUNCTURE BETWEEN THE JAPANESE AND THE EAST ASIAN SIXTIES

From these acute political divides prevailed in East Asia and the different characteristics of social movements between the Japanese and other East Asian countries, the political opportunity for transnational solidarity for the Japanese movements to form alliance within East Asia was extremely small during the 1960s. Between South Korea, for example, there was a chance in 1965 where both the Japanese and South Korean students fought against the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (Japan-South Korea Treaty) in their respective countries. Nevertheless, the publics that emerged in both countries to protest the treaty remained predominantly national and failed to cultivate dialogue to form a transnational alliance<sup>3</sup>. Whereas student protesters in South Korea primarily opposed the government’s decision to normalize relations with Japan without solving the problem of the colonial past, Japanese citizens and activists opposed the treaty for two different reasons. Firstly, they fought against the treaty because they believed that it might strengthen Japan’s involvement in the Cold War. Secondly, it

## 4.

**This does not mean, however, that reflection on the colonial past was completely absent from this movement. In fact, movements against the Japan-Korea treaty enhanced awareness among Japanese citizens of Japan's responsibility for its colonization of Korea through the efforts of Japanese scholars in Korean studies [Yoshizawa 2005: 312]. Nevertheless, the resonance of such voices was not only limited, but also covered by the dominant discourse that understood the treaty within the Cold War paradigm.**

was feared, especially by the Japanese New Left activists, that the treaty would lead to a resurgence of the Japanese empire through economic aggression against Asia [Mikami 2000: 22–23]. However, as I have discussed earlier, in contrast to the South Korean public, reflection on the history of Japan's colonial experience in Korea was largely invisible<sup>4</sup>. The lack of communication between the Japanese and South Korean movements hindered them from forming common ground for collective action. Behind the cleavage between the two sides, we can observe, on the one hand a remaining anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans and the other hand a lack of knowledge about Korea among the Japanese. For the Japanese side, Oda Makoto, the leader of the civic anti-Vietnam War movement Beheiren, adequately described Japanese perspectives on the protest against the Japan-Korea treaty.

For the Japanese, protesting the Japan-South Korea Treaty was for our own country and not for the people of South Korea... Notwithstanding that we [Japanese] were debating about and protesting against the treaty at the time, we did not know and were not willing to know about Korea, whether the "North" or the "South." In short, how many Japanese knew about the students who were going against the treaty from across the sea? Of course, we knew about the student protests in South Korea through news reports, yet how many of us interpreted the news as something that was directly related to ourselves? [Oda 1977: 106–107]

Another example would be the relationship with the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Yet, the linkage between the Japanese sixties with this massive upsurge in China, was quite unique as it was a very distinct kind of political movement that differed significantly from the one in Japan and elsewhere. The Red Guard uprising became a strong source of empowerment and radicalism for the Japanese New Left in 1966: it became especially well known when the Japanese student movement Zenkyōtō painted the Red Guards' renowned slogan “造反有理” (“Zao fan you li”, meaning “to rebel is justified”) on the main entrance gate of the university campus. Despite its substantial influence, however, information on the Chinese Cultural Revolution was predominantly through the media; Japanese activists' personal ties with the Red Guards were exceptional.

In a very macro view, the lack of direct ties between the two parties is certainly coming from the Cold War divide as discussed earlier. Yet, it also derived from a specific relationship between the two countries at that time. The decade of the Cultural Revolution was a period when the flow of information between Japan and China was exceedingly restrained, without much exchange of people or goods. In part, this was because the Cultural

Revolution began before diplomatic relations between the two countries were restored in 1972. At the same time, the severe antagonism between the JCP and the CCP that emerged in 1966 reduced the exchange of information between the two countries even more. A small number of Japanese Communist Party members, journalists, scholars, and exchange students who were residing in China at the time were an invaluable source of information for the Japanese side [Fukuoka 2014]. Yet still, their information was mostly limited to official announcements from the CCP and big-character posters, which were a form of propaganda designed to mobilize people to take part in the Cultural Revolution.

The scarcity of uncontrolled and raw information fuelled the imagination of Japanese intellectuals and activists; For those Japanese lefts who were discouraged by the Soviet Communism became strongly sympathetic to the Cultural Revolution and viewed it as an alternative to Stalinist Communism that the Japan should follow. Such influence of the Cultural Revolution certainly resonates with its impact toward the New Lefts in the West [e.g. for France, Wolin 2010]. However, arguably it was even more substantial in Japan. By September 1967, the so-called "Little Red Book" by Mao Tse-tung sold 150,000 copies in Japan and this was more than double in Germany and much more than the circulation in the US [Baba 2018: 137].

Despite the strong influence of the Cultural Revolution to the Japanese sixties through the media, opportunities for building transnational trust networks based on face-to-face were still very scarce even among those modest numbers of people who were able to travel to China. According to Muto Ichijo, a member of Beheiren who visited China in 1973, the general goal of developing solidarity with Chinese movements during the 1960s and 1970s was simply unattainable. From his perspective, the Red Guards did not consider overseas movements taking place simultaneously share the same goal with their movements in China. Cultivating transnational ties anything fruitful were only possible when he met with Chinese intellectuals, including those former Red Guards, who were independent from the Chinese authority in the US in the 1980s [Baba 2010: 526 – 530].

East Asia during the sixties was divided by severe and intricate political boundaries of the Cold War and the remnant of the Second World War. From the examples given here, we can argue that the social movements in Japan in the 1960s lacked opportunities to develop transnational solidarity with the movements in the neighbouring countries. This absence of regional level ties was one significant difference if comparing with the sixties in the Western First World countries. The situation gradually began

to change from the early 1970s, when the Japanese movements shifted their focus more toward non-west. However, by the time, the momentum of the Japanese sixties has already faded having movements turning extreme internal conflict involving brutal violence. Conclusion From a macro structural perspective, this paper elucidated the limited transnational network capital of the Japanese activists in the sixties to generate ties beyond the nation-state. Such macro constraints for transnational mobility as well as geopolitical divide within East Asia caused relative isolationism of the Japanese sixties. Thus, especially in the case of Japan, it is essential to begin with constraints and existing boundaries rather than the narratives of smooth success of the transnational activisms. In this sense, we will be able to comprehend more profoundly why certain Japanese movements were eager to engage in transnational activism and why that was possible. In fact, despite of the restrictions, movements such as Beheiren and the Japanese Red Army did conduct transnational activisms by overcoming various obstacles in different ways. Nevertheless, their "success" can only be fully discerned with the conjuncture of both the remaining structural challenges and emerging opportunities existed during the time.

Global historical sociology, proposed in this paper is just one way to examine the structural dynamics of the global sixties, particularly intended for understanding the case of Japan. However, capacity, opportunity and boundary discussed here remains useful components while understanding (im)possibilities of transnational activism in other place or even other period of time, especially in those regions where the transnational network capital was rather scarce and strong national and regional boundaries prevails.

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