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The Reception of the American Counterculture in Communist Romania (1960-1975)

The Rebels with a Cause

ABSTRACT

In my research I want to shed light on a marginal phenomenon that emerged in Eastern Europe in 1960s. I will focus on the reception of the American counterculture and, more specifically, I will explain which ideas were imported. Through a multidisciplinary approach, I will try to show how the political and social context determined some variations of the American original phenomenon. Therefore, in the first part I will present the birth of the Romanian counterculture. I will ask myself which concepts were assimilated by the Romanian artists (Marxism, nationalism and mysticism). I will use two cases as examples: Dorin Liviu Zaharia and Phoenix.

KEYWORDS

Phoenix; Counterculture; Dorin Liviu Zaharia; Romanian Hippies; Nicolae Ceausescu.

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1. Introduction

In the Eastern Europe of the 1960s, an interesting youth phenomenon emerged. Influenced by the American counterculture, the youngsters from the Communist countries rioted against the Communist authority through music and literature. The new cultural wave was widely received behind the Iron Curtain. In Romania, the reception of the American counterculture had some particularities. The *hippies* refused Marxism, insisting rather on the mystic and nationalist dimensions. Therefore, the American “orthodox” counterculture suffers a form of hybridization with other ideas and with the local mentalities. The political context played an essential role in this equation.

1.1. What Do We Understand through Counterculture? The Definition of the Main Concepts

We understand through the concept of counterculture the social, literary and aesthetic movement that started in 1950s in the USA. In our research, we will follow the definition suggested by Theodore Roszak, the first American scholar that dealt with the subject, as a reaction to excessive technology¹. The movement was born in the late 1950s



and continued during the 1960s as a strong reaction against the state, which is seen as the oppressor. The literary and philosophical sources are very eclectic: psychoanalysis, Zen Buddhism, Henry David Thoreau, Hermann Hesse, Friedrich Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler. One may ask oneself what may unite all these authors. We consider that on the cultural level, all the sources of the American counterculture deal with the theme of modernity, being against the industry and technology². The argument is taken further, by proposing different types of spiritual, cultural, spiritual and even urban alternatives. We have to take into account that the counterculture has a powerful Leftist dimension, influenced by the writings of the Frankfurt School of philosophy, particularly Herbert Marcuse (*Eros and Civilization* and *The One-dimensional Man*). In his writings, he is interested in mixing Freud's conception referring to oppression with Marx's view on the state. To resume, he insists that the State in general creates a frustrated individual, through two main mechanisms: "surplus repression" and "basic repression"³. This large phenomenon is present on three levels: in music, in literature and on a social scale.

When we are talking about the literary counterculture, we take into consideration the works of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and, partly, William Seward Burroughs. They are known as *The Beat Generation*. The literary dimension of counterculture refuses rational thinking, which, according to them, belongs to the Modern State. For them, the solution was to be found in alternative religious movements, new for the time in USA: Zen Buddhism and Hinduism. More specifically, Allen Ginsberg uses a mixture between Hinduism, Buddhism and the Christian heritage, in poems like *Sunflower Sutra*, *Kaddish* and *Howl*⁴. Jack Kerouac will explore the Zen Buddhist movement mixed with the passion

for travelling in novels like *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums*⁵. William Seward Burroughs is another key writer of this generation, even though his aesthetic line is different than the Beat Generation one. He writes about his own experience with hard drugs (heroin particularly), in novels like *Junky* and *The Naked Lunch*.

However, the biggest revolution was brought by the counterculture movement in music, not in literature. Influenced by jazz and blues, rock music determined a revolution in the popular culture. This movement was started in late 1950s, being influenced by the American blues and jazz. In the early 1960s already many groups emerged. The rock revolution was accomplished by iconic groups like The Mamas & The Papas, Jefferson Airplane, The Doors, Led Zeppelin, The Beatles or individual musicians like Joan Baez, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Carlos Santana and others. Moreover, these new music trends influenced the masses. Therefore, the last aspect of the counterculture we discuss is the social aspect, namely the big movements that occurred from 1965 to 1970 in big cities like San Francisco or New York. The street movements had a strong Leftist position and soon they influenced similar movements from Europe, especially in the Netherlands, France and Germany. James Dean from the movie *The Rebel without a Cause* could be considered an emblematic figure of the American counterculture. He is the ultimate insubordinate against an invisible authority. In our research, we will discuss only about the literary, social and musical phenomenon that emerged in America and later found unexpected roots in Eastern Europe. For this reason, we will try to understand how this cultural and social phenomenon modifies its content when it is assimilated in Eastern Europe.

Therefore, the subject of our research is the reception and the hybridization of



counterculture in Communist Romania. Through the analogy with the '*rebel without a cause*', we will try to explain that counterculture can be understood in a different way. We suggest the term '*rebel with a cause*', in order to explain why practicing counterculture was a risky act in Eastern Europe. Moreover, we will reveal how counterculture was assimilated with nationalism, through force. In other words, our question is the following one: how the cohabitation (or even the synthesis) between the American counterculture and the National Communism of Nicolae Ceaușescu was possible? Other questions equally rise: what determines this odd mixture between nationalism, Marxism and counterculture in Romania? Lastly, we have to be honest and question ourselves to what extent practicing counterculture was a phenomenon of escape from the communist routine.

1.2. The Historiography of the Theme and the Scientific Position

The issue of the marginal youth groups from communist societies was not debated until the early 2000. The explanation is a very simple one. After the fall of the Communist regimes, the academic research focused on the repression of the individuals⁶. Only after this strong, emotional aspect was clarified, the investigation of the social mutations done by communist regimes began. Only after 2000, were studies broadened, treating themes like childhood in communism, the architectural mutations or the Roma communities⁷. The new inquiries used a larger variety of sources, not only archives: interviews, photos and literary texts⁸. In Romania, the issue of the counterculture was treated by Ștefan Borbély⁹ and Adi Dohotaru¹⁰. After 2010, even some academic journals published articles that focused on the reception of the American

counterculture in the Eastern Europe¹¹. For the Romanian case, Caius Dobrescu and Madigan Fichter presented the issue in contemporary journals. Dobrescu analyzed the case of the Phoenix band¹² and Madigan Fichter offered a synthetic approach of the Romanian counterculture¹³.

In order to understand the dynamics of this phenomenon, we will use methods from different fields of study. Our approach is clearly an historical one, but at the same time we use literary and musical references. In order to understand the dynamics of this phenomenon, we are interested more in the social and cultural structures than in the richness of the archives. In other words, we will be interested in the methodology promoted by the Annales School of History. We are interested in re-creating the micro-history shaped by the outsiders, who were not conscripted into official papers. Likewise, we consider that the phrase of Jim Sharpe "the history from below" can explain our path. We are interested in explaining how the outsiders from a specific society can reflect the real image of a society. Therefore, we will start from the following theoretical assumption: the members of an excluded group of society do not obey unconditionally the dominant group. In contrast, there is always a negotiation and a dialectic dynamic between the two¹⁴.



2. The Establishment

2.1. The Political and Cultural Context

After Stalin's death, one may see a weakening of political control from the USSR. The countries from the Eastern bloc started to have their own distinctive position. In 1956, riots against the system emerged in Poland, Hungary and Eastern Germany. In this context, Romania played a double role: on one hand, the country wanted to gain more independence, but at the same time, it had to prove that it was still a faithful partner of Moscow. Therefore, during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Romania strongly accused the *counter-revolution*. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the leader of the country, was aware that the ideas could spread in the nearby region of Transylvania, due to the large community of the Hungarians that lived there. Some street movements arose in larger Transylvanian cities, like Cluj-Napoca or Timișoara. However, the *Securitate* brought the workers from the nearby factories to control the people. The riot ended in a general fight and the leaders were punished. Consequently, the Soviet army retreated from the Romanian territory in 1958, considering this country as a faithful and loyal ally.

We consider that 1958 was the starting point for the nationalist direction in the Romanian communist ideology. At that moment, it could be seen only at diplomatic and international level, but gradually it could be spotted also in culture and ideology. For instance, the Leninist-Marxist dogma was modified. This aspect is widely explained by Mihai Retegan: for the historian, the moment of 1958 was a turning point for Romanian Communism¹⁵. When Khrushchev accused the Stalinist cult, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej saw this maneuver as a menace to his own position. Even though he was not

actually a member of the Stalinist faction (like Vasile Luca, Ana Pauker or Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu), he was strongly influenced by the Stalinist heritage. A double tactic was used by Dej: he accused Stalinism only to reinforce his own power inside the Party. Other two aspects may also explain the birth of the nationalist direction. Stelian Tănase, Romanian writer and political analyst, in *Elite și societate. Guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej*¹⁶ [Elites and Society. Gherghiu-Dej's Government] states that the collectivization ended in 1962 – therefore, and at that point an ideology was needed that could be more appealing for the peasants. Moreover, Ștefan Borbely¹⁷ suggests that through freeing the political right-wing prisoners (known as *legionari*), the system had to anticipate the radical nationalist trend that could have been set, through a more controlled line. By taking into consideration all these aspects and the fact that other communist countries had a similar interest (for instance, China and Yugoslavia), we may observe that the roots of the nationalist version of Communism were more profound than those visible in 1971¹⁸.

When Nicolae Ceaușescu took power in 1965, he wanted to enforce his domination on the national and international levels. His first interest was to legitimate his power with regard to the Soviet Union¹⁹. At the same time, his arguments of autonomy were melted in an appealing form for the public. In order to understand the emergence of the Romanian counterculture, we have to see how the Romanian leader created, for a few years, the impression of being a *rebel with a political cause*. Adam Burakowski's study on the Romanian leader proposes four arguments upon which the personality of Nicolae Ceaușescu becomes appealing: *nationalism, directed economy, international recognition and anti-Soviet attitude*²⁰. First of all, financially the new leader wanted to separate



his country from the Valev plan. This plan had as a purpose to subdue the national production to the supervision of Moscow. Basically, in the 1960s, Nicolae Ceaușescu was interested in creating an autonomous and viable economy. Secondly, the Romanian leader legitimized his power through destroying some of his main enemies, such as Alexandru Drăghici, the head of the Secret Services. At the same time, he surrounded himself by faithful and intelligent leaders, like Ion Maurer and Paul Nicolescu-Mizil.

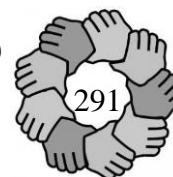
The third aspect that gave credibility to Nicolae Ceaușescu was his anti-Soviet attitude. Even though his position was not as radical as that of Tito, it was still present. The double game was justified by the proximity of the USSR. Ceaușescu wanted to avoid an open position against the Soviets. Yet, when the Romanian leader had the opportunity to challenge the Soviet actions, he did it only in discourse, never through engaged conflicts. His main tactic was to maintain good relationships with as many states as possible. He saw himself as a mediator, but he always knew where his ideological camp was²¹. When Charles de Gaulle came in Romania (14-18 May 1968), the French president proposed to the communist leader to create a specific alliance between the two countries. However, Ceaușescu was cautious and he declined the proposition of the French president. At the same time, he maintained good commercial and even cultural relationships with the French state.

2.2. Oddly Mixing Nationalism with Marxism

We consider that the last aspect, the nationalistic approach, was one of the most important pillars on which Ceaușescu managed to control effectively the country. Still today, the traces of the nationalistic program are still highly visible in the Romanian culture²². Where may we spot the germs of this ideology?

The main aim of all totalitarian regimes is to control the cultural discourse through which the masses can be more easily corrupted. The artistic act is by definition individual and difficult to manipulate. However, the Communist regime was interested in controlling the writers, painters and, broadly, all the artists, in order to promote the desired message. Therefore, the Party had to be a messenger between socialism and the proletariat²³. We may easily observe that, beyond the Hegelian dialectics, we are dealing with a phenomenon which borrows many religious aspects. For instance, the individual has the duty to obey to the instance that has the ultimate version of truth: the Party. That is the reason why Lucian Boia considers Communism as a religion without transcendence²⁴.

Hence, the concept of the *hybridization of ideology* by Katherine Verdery may explain how nationalism and Marxism were mixed up together in the cultural sphere²⁵. For the American historian Katherine Verdery, between 1947 and 1989 through the *wooden language*²⁶ we may see a constant battle between the Marxist speech and the nationalist one. The fight was won by the nationalist terminology, starting from 1970s, when the new political culture promoted by Ceaușescu emerged. In other words, the role of the Party (in discourse) was slowly reduced. The concept of the nation became more appealing²⁷.



How was this particular form of Marxism implemented in the Romanian cultural system? This was accomplished through the *illusory liberalization* – a clever politics of manipulation done by Nicolae Ceaușescu. From 1965 until 1971, the contacts with the foreign culture were permitted, as long as they were not too harmful for the existence of the system. At the same time, we have to take into consideration the fact that during 1948-1958, culture had another pattern, totally different than the situation before the war. However, starting from 1963, Western foreign cultural products were translated more and more in Romanian. This was the moment when American counterculture started to be adapted and practiced by the youth. Nonetheless, in the 1970s another cultural approach appeared. In some documents from 1970 (*Protocolul nr. 2 al Ședinței Secretariatului din 10.02.1970* [Minutes No.2 of the Office Meeting from 10.02.1970]) the final decision of changing the movie themes was stated²⁸. The participants discussed about the new cinematographic direction. This was the first stage in implementing the nationalistic approach. The cultural intervention was far more intrusive starting from the following year, 1971, after the visit of the Romanian leader in China and North Korea.

3. The Rebels with a Cause

Even though some scholars argue that the access to the American counterculture was too restricted to create hybrid forms²⁹, the biographies and the existent research show that the situation is more complex.

3.1. The Making of the Romanian Counterculture

Acknowledging the phenomenon that was just happening across the Atlantic Ocean was the first step in shaping the Romanian counterculture. As we stated before, after 1953, the Stalinist cult was slowly becoming past. In consequence, there was a permission of approaching more delicate subjects, like the issue of the outsiders of the Western societies. However, the first article that promoted the Beat Generation literature was very acid regarding this phenomenon. It was published in the revue *Secolul 20* [20th Century], with the title *Ce este The Beat Generation?* [What is the Beat Generation?] in the 2nd issue of 1961. The author, named Horia Bratu (a freshly converted Communist, who became a ‘specialist’ in Communist dogma, particularly on the works of Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea)³⁰, wanted to offer a broad explanation about this literary trend. Meanwhile, we notice a more subtle way in which the wooden language is being implemented. After he presents the main writers of the movement (Ginsberg, Kerouac, Ferlinghetti), the author offers a sociological explanation for the name of this literary group. For Horia Bratu, the Beat Generation means the “*beaten Generation*”, those who did not manage to impose themselves in the literary canon of the 1950s and started to live on the edge of society as compensation. This



argument is partly valid, but reductionist. We may also explain the name *Beat* from Kerouac's version: *Beat* can equally mean *Beatified*. In a conversation with John Clellon Holmes, Jack Kerouac proposed for the first time the word "beat", with the meaning of 'exhausted', 'tired'. However, during 1950s, the whole poetic generation understood through the word *Beat* a shorter form of the word *Beatified*³¹.

This aspect was not taken into account by the Romanian journalist. For him, the poetic generation comes from "*the middle bourgeoisie (...), has graduated at small provincial universities (...) and from an early age, they experience the falling of their high ideals*"³². We may see that his interpretation is always given from a radical, moral perspective. The conclusion of the author is that the Romanian system cannot create these odd hybrids, because a better system is emerging: Communism. We may spot the wooden language in a structure like:

first of all, we don't have the golden youth, the rich children who don't do anything, or the aesthetic bohemians, who have failed in fascist bands³³.

The structure "*tinerețe aurită*" [golden youth] is an archaic form that reflects a stereotypical way of thinking. Therefore, the phrase is not credible for the intellectuals of the 1960s.

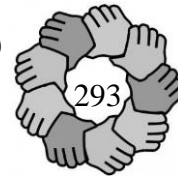
However, a more delicate aspect was the integration of nationalism into the Romanian counterculture, mainly through the musical dimension of the Romanian counterculture. The quick assimilation of counterculture in music can be explained very easily. It came, practically, on an empty ground. Moreover, from 1965, strong voices that promoted the new musical trends emerged. The most famous cultural journalist was Cornel Chiriac, who was popularizing

the European jazz and other trends on his weekly radio show called *Metronom*, started in July 1967. From 1969, when he noticed that the cultural direction was changing, he moved to Western Germany. He died in suspect conditions in 1975.

Besides Bucharest, other powerful centers for the Romanian counterculture were Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca, and to a lesser extent, Iași. Timișoara, for instance, had the advantage of the proximity with the Yugoslavian border. Due to a more relaxed policy of border circulation in Tito's country, a powerful traffic of discs and blue-jeans arose in this region. Soon, the musicians from Timișoara imitated the new songs that they heard on the radio or on pick-ups. They were strongly influenced by the mystical, Oriental songs of the Beatles. Among them, the most famous band is Phoenix, a group which passed through all the periods of the Romanian counterculture and had a huge musical impact.

3.2. The Main Particularities of the Romanian Counterculture: Nationalism and Interest in Mysticism. The High-Counterculture

During the period 1960-1970, counterculture was mainly an elitist phenomenon. We suggest seeing this period by naming it *the high-counterculture* period, opposed to the following period, after 1971, which we will name "low-counterculture". Through "high-counterculture", I understand the period which gathered intellectuals and artists around the personalities of Dorin Liviu Zaharia and Ioan Petru Culianu. It was an elitist, *high* movement. Before the Phoenix mass-phenomenon, some small intellectual groups were already using some of the countercultural patterns and elements. They were highly educated and had already read carefully the literary sources of the American counterculture. They were synchronized



with this phenomenon, when it was imported in Romania. Ioan Petru Culianu, the future historian of religions, was the main intellectual of the group, and Dorin Liviu Zaharia was seen by all as a strong spiritual force³⁴. The second was known to all as *Chubby* and he was strongly interested in mixing the theatrical act with music. His intention was to mingle folklore with the new musical trends. However, the projects were strongly conceptual and elitist. For instance, Andrei Oişteanu remembers Dorin Liviu Zaharia's odd, shamanic appearances on the stages:

he was a lonely hermit, with a fragile silhouette, who was wearing a big traditional blouse, long to his ankles, with his irregular hair and beard. He was singing unbelievable, tall, intense sounds, with an acute pitch.³⁵

In the history of the Romanian counterculture in music, he is seen as a Socratic figure. Actually, he did not record many of his live performances. It was only in the following decades that he created some soundtracks for a few national movies. This does not mean that his presence was not vital. All the testimonies about the Romanian counterculture mention his role as a mentor³⁶. For the first time in the Romanian culture, Dorin Liviu Zaharia managed to mix Romanian mysticism with the American psychedelic trend. This may be easily observed in the song *Cantic de Haiduc*, which was recorded in this first period of the Romanian counterculture (1960-1970). The Oriental music is already integrated into the melodic line, but the song is first of all a reinterpretation of a traditional song. *Chubby* was interested not in interpreting traditional songs already present in the official cultural discourse but in exploring the mythical and mystical parts of traditions. Before the Phoenix group, Dorin Liviu Zaharia promoted

a specific kind of revivalism.

The artist was interested in exploring the cultures that existed before modernity (for instance, shamanism). A first influence may come from the albums of *The Beatles*, but he also had some other sources of inspiration.

He chose the songs upon their poetic and aesthetic meaning. The interest towards tradition and folklore can be explained through the influence of Culianu and their common interest in reading Nietzsche, Spengler, Mircea Eliade and Hermann Hesse. They belonged to an elitist Bucharest group whose members were interested in reading these authors. We have to mention that these names were highly read also by the intellectuals of the American counterculture. Partly, they read these authors influenced by counterculture, but they knew about their ideas from the 1950s, particularly Culianu, as Mircea Florian, a famous underground musician of the period, stated in an interview:

We were reading Nietzsche, equally we were interested by the writings of Far Right orientation, like the poems of Radu Gyr. We were devouring almost everything.³⁷

Of course, the cultural debates were organized in secret and with discretion. As a small observation, the first years of the Romanian counterculture had many similarities with the Czechoslovakian counterculture after *Charta 77* (with common aspects like the underground movement, highly intellectual themes and interest for mysticism)³⁸.

We may ask ourselves what determined this interest for mysticism and for the exploration of the mythological features in the Romanian counterculture. This may appear as a paradox in a society which was apparently atheist (during the Communist regime). In order to fully understand this



phenomenon, we have to go back to the definition of counterculture as a reaction against the *Establishment*. One of the key aspects of the Romanian communist Establishment was that it wanted to create a society less influenced by religion. However, before 1945, Romania had a powerful religious tradition, through the Orthodox Church and in Transylvania also through the Greek-Catholic Church, Roman-Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations (particularly for the national minorities)³⁹. Also, the Romanian mentality was strongly determined by religiousness. The facts are multiple: a rural population, strong religious centers and a sense of cohesion that was given by the Church⁴⁰. Therefore, when the Communist regime discouraged practicing the religion, many compensatory acts emerged. Some of the Romanians practiced their own traditional beliefs in secret, but others forgot the old customs. However, we consider that a psychological need for a religious system⁴¹ was present in the post-war Romania. In other words, by having a strongly religious mentality, the atheist “feature” could not be imposed during only one generation. The interest in a religious form of knowledge was still present to the youth of the 1960s.

That is why many religious marginal groups that had existed since the interwar period became highly appealing when Communism arrived (Rugul Aprins, Oastea Domnului, etc.). This may be one possible explanation for the fascination with mysticism. This was determined by a mentality which was focused on the religious phenomenon. However, the intellectuals could not return to the old beliefs that were present in pre-war Romania due to two main causes: the Christian religion was not tolerated in the public discourse (schools, newspapers, books) and moreover, the laicism promoted by modernity, as a paradigm, had emerged⁴². Therefore, when the American

counterculture was imported, they also took the spiritual aspect of this phenomenon (Buddhism, interest in Oriental religions, etc.). Finally, we have to make one essential observation: this interest could only be found in some elitist, highly-educated students and artists, who were meeting in bigger cities. Nonetheless, the nationalistic dimension was strongly integrated into the Romanian counterculture, starting gently from 1965, but with force from 1971 through the Party directed youth movement called *Cenaclul Flacăra* [The Flame Literary Society].

3.3. The Low-Counterculture

We consider that a bigger permeability of ideas arose when Nicolae Ceaușescu took power. Therefore, counterculture and its adjacent topics were available at a larger scale. During the period of the “*low-counterculture*”, the American counterculture was strongly received by the Romanian public. As we have stated before, this was also partly due to the activity of Cornel Chiriac, through his radio show *Metronom*. He was also engaged in coordinating the local and regional music festivals. He saw at a National Music Festival held in Iași (*Festivalul național Studențesc de la Iași*) a band which he considered representative for the Romanian counterculture. The musical group was Phoenix and it came from Timisoara. At the beginning, they were influenced by The Beatles and The Shadows⁴³. In 1968, when their first album was edited, 120.000 discs were sold. One interesting aspect about the Romanian counterculture is the presence of censorship. The counterculture in USA and Western Europe could be openly against the dominant system, but this attitude was not possible in Romania. Therefore, we have to specify a particularity that emerged in all the countries of the Eastern European bloc that were affected by interdiction. The



lyrics were expressing hidden messages, only known by some keen listeners. For instance, the album *Floarea stâncilor* [The Flower of the Rocks], which appeared in 1969, had some subversive allusions against the Communist system. For instance, the song *Nebunul cu ochii închiși* [The Fool with Closed Eyes] created a myth of contestation around it⁴⁴. The title may refer to the Romanian leader, who ruled the country without any judgment. However, the text passed the censorship due to the lack of a specific reference. In other words, the lyrics describe an old man, who is holding a speech that no one listens to. Therefore, the situation may be read in different ways: a critique to Nicolae Ceaușescu or simply a reference to a mythical tale.

However, the first lyricist of the group, Paul Șuvagău, admitted that not all the texts were against the system, even though they were understood like that⁴⁵. In order for their texts to be allowed by censorship, the composers used a double-tactic. Their texts were always ambiguous enough in order to have multiple interpretations and justifications. For instance, the lyrics : *The whole world/ Is not stopping to listen to him/ they see him as a fool/ who talks only nonsense*⁴⁶ can have multiple ways of reading. The text can refer to various situations, not only to the Romanian leader. Moreover, when the musicians proposed the lyrics, they said that it was a Romanian interpretation of the song *The Fool on a Hill* by The Beatles.

Due to their spirit of contestation and their innovative line, the Phoenix became very popular. However, at the end of 1969, the vocalist Moni Bordeianu emigrated, and the aesthetic approach of the band changed. In 1970s, the group became more and more engaged in the local theatre scene, with projects such as *36:80*. At the same time, they influenced similar projects in the other main Romanian cities, with groups like

Cromatic (in Cluj-Napoca), Roșu și Negru (in Iași) and Sideral Modal Quartet (in Bucharest).

However, at the same time, a new political direction was indicated. Nicolae Ceaușescu wanted a larger control of the population, and this had to be done also through culture. Therefore, the degenerate, Western products had to be severely controlled. This aspect was clearly stipulated in official documents regarding the development of the culture:

the need not to remain behind the latest trends and fads gets to a sort of ideological snobbism, to attitudes that lack discipline and to the uncritical assimilation of the most odd ideas from different philosophical, political and aesthetical sources⁴⁷.

Behind the strong wooden language, an external enemy of the system was shaped: American capitalism. Therefore, the Romanian leader imposed new directions of approach, through the famous speech called *Tezele din Iulie 1971* [July Theses]. However, as we stated before, this was not an unexpected maneuver, but its roots could be found in the evolution of the country on the international relations scene in the 1960s.

In this context, Phoenix tried to adjust to the new cultural context. From this point, the subversive aspect was far more sophisticated. For instance, in the album *Mugur de Fluier* [Whistle Bud] from 1974, the musicians mixed the folkloric patterns with the new instrumentation. At this point, they were highly influenced by Jethro Tull and other Western bands who were themselves exploring the traditional elements. However, we have to mention the difference between Phoenix and *Chubby*: while in the first years of counterculture the interest was to explore the mythical aspects, from 1971,



the national and folk references were present due to an imposition from the Party.

For instance, the album *Mugur de Fluier* [Whistle Bud] has some interesting lyrics, which were written by two poets: Andrei Ujică and Șerban Foarță. They were highly-prepared to play along the official line, but by subverting it. For instance, the song *Andrii Popa* from the mentioned album refers to an outlaw from the south of Romania, who recovers stolen girls by the Turks⁴⁸. The idea of a Romanian rebel may be interpreted in various ways, depending on the needed context. For instance, the structure “seven years with bravery/ he mocked on the lords”⁴⁹ may be read as a depiction of the brave Romanian who always fought against the foreigners (ideal for passing through censorship) or as the rebel who fought against the system (possible interpretation of the public). However, the reference against the Communist system became more and more sophisticated throughout time. Concerning the instrumentation, the declared aim of the musicians was to explore the traditional patterns, starting from pastoral songs to fast rhythms.

For instance, in one of these tracks, the rhythm is heavily influenced by the Balcanic beats. Initially, this song was played in private parties, but the fans insisted heavily to be included on the recording. We are talking about the song *Mica Țiganiadă* [Little Roma Epic], where we may spot a very subtle reference to the countercultural hippies, through the comparison with the Roma. For Ujică, the author of the lyrics, the Roma population was, just like the hippies, a Dionysian community that was enjoying the moment (“*Ei se duc la pas/ Spre un alt popas,/ șatra de pripas*”)[“*They go by step/ To another stop/ The refugee caravane*”] and living without any calendar (“*fără niciun șfanț*” [“without any money”], “*fără cer și ani*”

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[“without any sky and any years”]). In other words, the authors translated the ideals of the *hippies* to a community that could be referred to without any problems in Communist Romania. A text about hippies was highly improbable to pass the censorship due to the radical ‘heritage’ that this cultural current promoted: rebellion against the World of adults, sexual promiscuity and most important, challenging the system. The references for the hippies were few and they were mostly admitted in journals, just to depict the decadence of the Western world. The Communist Youth Party leaders, like Virgil Trofin and Ion Iliescu (the future President of Romania) forbade these references in 1971.

We agree with Caius Dobrescu’s observation: the most important album was *Cantofabule* from 1975. The subversion against the system was coded to the extent that the censors could not do anything about it, since they did not understand it. It was written in an 18th-century version of Romanian, with sophisticated cultural references (European mysticism, Gnosticism and esoteric symbols). The aim of the authors of the lyrics (Andrei Ujică and Șerban Foarță, two poets from Timișoara) was to revive old Romanian literature, through rock music. The title refers to a Medieval literary genre, *fabula* that used to criticize specific public characters. Moreover, the author creates a vast system of mythical creatures, which shape a spiritual universal hierarchy⁵⁰. We may again see the fascination of the Romanian counterculture towards myths and foreign mythologies. However, the poets mix, adjust and mingle symbols that come from totally different backgrounds: Medieval France, Byzantine Empire, Romanian folklore and Classical mythology. This method was specific to the American counterculture itself: Allen Ginsberg mixed references from Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism, in poems like *Kaddish*. Equally, Jack Kerouac



explored different religions in his novel *Dharma Bums*.

Therefore, in this album we may spot the two dimensions of the Romanian counterculture: the fascination with mysticism and the exploration of the nationalist pattern. In other words, the heritage of Dorin Liviu Zaharia is mixed with the nationalist approach proposed by Nicolae Ceaușescu. For instance, the song *Nunta* [The Wedding] refers to a rural episode, but at the same time includes other sources. At this point, the group was influenced by Jethro Tull, a British rock band that included folk elements. However, the band's increasing popularity was not seen with good eyes by the Romanian secret police. The Communists accused the group of being 'mystics'. Moreover, they were repeatedly menaced by the agents. In this situation, the band fled the country, hidden in guitar stations, in 1977. Phoenix reunited in Western Germany, but they never reached the same success as in Romania. The explanations are multiple: the market laws were different, the competition was much more intense and in 1970s other trends were emerging (punk, hardcore, etc.).

3.4. Two Explanations for the Refusal of Marxism in the Romanian Counterculture

When talking about Romanian counterculture, we have to notice some interesting aspects. Normally, American counterculture had a strong Leftist dimension, through the New Left movement. The first particularity of Romanian counterculture is that from its starting point, the Marxist dimension was absent. Therefore, a question occurs: what generated the refusal of this essential aspect from the original phenomenon? Two possible explanations may arise. The first answer comes from a psychological perspective. The youth from this period (1965-1970) was the first generation who was born, raised

and educated in the Communist spirit by the state. Certainly, the nostalgia for the past was transmitted through the older generation, in their private lives, in their own families. However, at this point, the existing, dominant discourse (in the written press, media and culture) at that time was the Marxist-Leninist one. On the other hand, the youth period was strongly determined by a sense of rebellion against the existing dominant discourse. In other words, the essence of the counterculture is rebelling against the world of the adults. Many studies from different psychological schools prove that the teenage period can be inherently stressful and that teenagers can be aggressive against the world of the adults (particularly between the age of 12 to 17 years)⁵¹. Long story short, we consider that rebellion is an inherent psychological behavior. As well, upon this psychological existing pattern, a cultural layer can appear⁵².

This psychological explanation may offer us a clue why the youth from 1965-1970 were not interested into the Marxist-Leninist ideas, which were highly present in counterculture. The *Establishment* and implicitly, the society of the adults were dominated by a strong Communist discourse. Even the Marxist iconic personalities were used by the Communist state in order to enforce its own power. For example, the figure of Che Guevara was always presented in a good way. His ideals were useful for the ideological frame of the Communist state. For instance, his figure is strongly glorified in the newspaper *Contemporanul* from 1968:

I have met Che Guevara during one night; he was wearing a kaki blouse and aviator boots. He was wearing the liberty at his belt and the red star on his black beret. His thoughts were covering his figure as the globe pushed the shoulders of Atlas⁵³



We may notice in this fragment the use of the wooden language, especially in the structures “*libertatea la cingătoare*” [the liberty to his belt] and “*steaua roșie la bereta neagră*” [the red star at his black beret]. The words used are from an archaic register. Therefore, while trying to promote Marxist iconic figures, the Romanian ideology managed to do the contrary. The articles about Che Guevara were abundant: in the revue *Secolul 20* [20th Century], poems by Mario Benedetti, Cesare Zavattini, Silva Herzog or Abelardo Castillo about him were translated⁵⁴. However, they were not appealing for the youth, because they were not subversive.

On the other hand, this psychological explanation is not complete. If we cross the borders of Romania, we may see some real Marxist interests in the other countries from the Communist bloc. For instance, in the Czechoslovakian counterculture, a significant part used Leftist concepts with fluency and pertinence⁵⁵. Equal interests can be found in Poland or in Hungary. The interest was to reform the Stalinist-type of Communism, with new refreshing ideas (for instance, the project of the “*Communism with a human face*”). How may we understand this regional paradox? One of the explanations for an interest in Marxism in these countries can be found in regional history. Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary belonged, before 1918, to the Austro-Hungarian Empire or to Germany. In contrast with Romania, Bulgaria or URSS, these parts were significantly more industrialized. Even though Transylvania also was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, its economy was significantly more influenced by agriculture than industry. This region was one of the poorest from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Moreover, the culture was formed, to a certain extent, in the other regions of Romania (Wallachia and Moldavia)⁵⁶. The industrialization

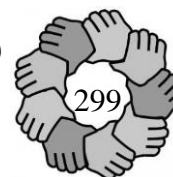
created a new class, that of the workers. Therefore, the socialist movements were more present in Central Europe than in Romania. Moreover, the intelligentsia ignored the socialist dimension.

4. Final Aspects

4.1. Conclusions: Can We Spot the Rebel with a Cause?

We saw what the main aspects of the Romanian counterculture were determined by. After clarifying the key-terms, like counterculture, we tried to argue that in Eastern Europe another type of rebel emerged: *the rebel with a cause*. In order to demonstrate the thesis, we tried to explain why the issue of the outsiders from the Communist societies was not properly researched until early 2000s. We defined our methodological approach through which we can access to the “history of below”. In our first part, we argued that the nationalistic discourse was already present in 1960s. It began as a form of protection against the Khrushchev’s accusations of Stalin’s crimes. When Ceausescu came to power, the concept of “*national direction*” already existed. We have seen the four points upon which he became famous: directed economy, international recognition, anti-Soviet attitude and nationalism. We have seen how this mechanism emerged and how it was cleverly spread in the whole public speech.

In our second part, we explored two of the key figures of the Romanian counterculture: Dorin Liviu Zaharia and the group Phoenix. While Dorin Liviu Zaharia was using sophisticated mythical references, the group Phoenix managed to mix the rock music with the nationalistic pattern. We saw how the double-game with the censorship was won: through proposing texts with multiple lines of interpretations.



To sum up, we may see that the nationalist discourse was strongly present in the Romanian music counterculture. This case was not singular in Eastern Europe: similar cases can be spotted in Poland and Hungary. The Romanian case is interesting because we may spot a clear difference between the elitist movement (named *high-counterculture*) and the mass movement (named *low-counterculture*). The *high-counterculture* was visible through the happenings done by Dorin Liviu Zaharia. The *low-counterculture* is represented by the mixture between nationalism and American counterculture. In order to be allowed by the censorship, in the lyrics was always played a double-game through proposing texts with multiple interpretations.

4.2. Limits and Further Research

The first limit of our research is the fact that we did not focus on the latter decades (1970s and 1980s). It would have been interesting to see the evolution of nationalism through Cenaclul Flacăra [The Flame Literary Circle] and in the last decade of the communist regime. Moreover, we did not focus on the literary dimension of the Romanian counterculture, represented by G80 movement (or, in Romanian, *optzeciștii*). In future, some interviews and testimonies about this period would be helpful in understanding better the dynamics of this phenomenon. A research on the relationship between the counterculture and the state-directed Cenaclul Flacăra would help us understand how the Communist state tried to control its youth. Finally, the literary aspect of the Romanian counterculture has to be further examined. More exactly, it would be interesting to see to what extent the G80 movement may be called “late-counterculture”.

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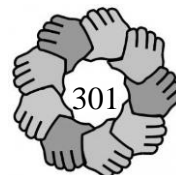
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