

Final Report. Alexander Solzhenitsyn between East and West.

My two-month scholarship at OSA has been a superb professional experience. The structure of the Open Society Archives permits an approach that one can hardly find in other archives, which in topics such as mine was especially useful. My initial objective was to investigate the reception of Alexander Solzhenitsyn abroad. I wanted to focus on the liberal dissidents of the Eastern Block from the 1970s onwards, for I thought there was a fundamental difference that might cause controversies, as Solzhenitsyn stemmed from ambiguous appellations to humanism and anti-communism to a neat anti-liberal and nationalist layout. Though, what I found by investigating the personal files of Jacek Kuron, Adan Michnik or Vaclav Havel was nothing but worshiping of the Russian writer. But not finding what one expects to find is also a finding and forces one to reconsider the starting points and the approaches one looks at history with. But when working with the personal files of the Eastern Bloc dissidents, I found out that some new gates opened, as they, even not questioning his figure, quarreled with other intellectuals, from East and West, on aspects that derived from Solzhenitsyn. Humanism, liberalism, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, détente, or peaceful coexistence, were concepts revolving around Solzhenitsyn painstakingly discussed. Thanks to the triangulation of sources that the OSA encourages, I could bridge Italy, Portugal, or Spain with Yugoslavia or Poland, a transnational scope that yet praised has rarely been put into practice.

If in terms of territories and countries the project broadened, in the chronological span I had to narrow it down. Drawing on an extensive consult of files, both biographical units, and Radio Free Europe, I could conclude that there was a specific period where Solzhenitsyn as a public intellectual, and the debates he sparked, shined with particular intensity. In my initial take on the topic I had thought of a longer chronology, starting in the 1970s but stretching to the period after 1989. Though, it would have meant embarking on an undoable project and, based on what I was finding, I instead opted for concentrating on the period 1974-1977, with the ultimate goal of providing a thick description, with Solzhenitsyn in the center, of a very broad political-intellectual in that very specific years.

Solzhenitsyn opposed détente, which provoked the criticism of both right and left on both sides of the European continent. During these years, from Poland to Czechoslovakia, he was not criticized for being an anti-communist, but for he became a threat to the peaceful coexistence that détente guaranteed.

On the other hand, looking into Solzhenitsyn's friends and foes made me rethink the very intellectual history of Germany, the country I specialized in as a historian. This was possible thanks to the files by Heinrich Böll, a personal friend of Solzhenitsyn and the one hosting him when the soviet authorities ousted him in February 1974. Böll embodied in those years a radical critique of the Western democracies, as the other side of the coin of the Soviet system, but almost equally evil. Regarding the USSR, both Solzhenitsyn and Böll shared spirit and focus. Nevertheless, in the West, their reserves were similar in form but different in content. Solzhenitsyn highlighted how western capitalism and liberalism had turned out to be almost as inhuman as the Soviet-type systems. Böll, instead, resorted to a leftist critique pointing out the repressive effects of the system, how the alleged integration of others -immigrants- was not a reality and the political freedom of the system was a mere masquerade. Though, he took advantage of the moral critique triggered by Solzhenitsyn and attacked western advocates who only wanted to instrumentalize one of the layers of Solzhenitsyn and neglected his 'warnings to the west'. In this sense, Heinrich Böll utilized Solzhenitsyn too but presented himself as a sort of Solzhenitsyn in negative, which shows how in those years the broad presence and scope of the Russian writer permitted diverse and rather opposed readings. It might help us rethink how intellectual processes work, and whether or not the straightforward associations that historians often make by grouping anticommunists or pro-communists in sealed-off compartments. The case of Böll was not, I believe, a far-fetched example. By triangulating sources and relating them to previous research I conducted, I could call for opening a research line on 1970s anti-western (capitalism-liberalism) heterodox intellectual history. If Böll represents, if I may, a leftist reading of Solzhenitsyn, in Spain Francoist hard-liners in 1975 and 1976 also utilized the writer to hit the western values that, according to them, were haunting Spain and menaced to erase the fascist-like legacy that Franco had bequeathed the country with.

This research line might well be expanded to other countries' heterodox thinkers and politicians. The OSA pointed out a possible future development but did not provide the

whole set of answers, which is at the same time one of its inherent limitations. Notwithstanding the archive is an excellent starting point, for topics such as mine the number of sources does not suffice to build a consistent work solely based on the OSA files. Rather, it gives you hints that permit a more encompassing vision and point the way where to further look at. To put it simply, for a topic such as the one I investigated, the OSA is a source *necessary* but not *sufficient*.

In terms of logistics and personnel, I felt fully assisted and advised the whole time. The coordination between the different departments is excellent and the disposition of the members to help, both in empirical and practical issues, has been more than remarkable. The diversity of skills of each of the OSA workers helped me not only better squeeze the resources of the archive but also, in terms of content, rethink my research topic and explore angles I had not considered. In addition, I appreciated and enjoyed very much the will of the workers to connect me with other Visegrad scholars thanks to informal talks and lunches and the presentations each of us had to do at the end of the stay. This has had a remarkable human dimension, too, given the richness of approaches and topics of each of the researchers, I also found food for thought that made me improve my research topic as well. When working at the Galeria Centralis, the delivery of boxes was faster and more effective; once we moved to the CEU library, it was slower, but I understand that it is by no means the fault of the workers, but a temporary situation out of necessary reform in the Goldenberger building. Though despite the difficulties, the archive kept working diligently and I did not see my working process hindered at all.

I have to thank you all for your kind and warm support; hopefully, I will come shortly, as the archive still offers many research avenues I did not have time to explore. I hope, too, that the Visegrad scholarship continues its existence for a long time, and I will gladly recommend other researchers to apply.

Files consulted (a list)

300-10-4:29/10

300-80-8:16/8

300-80-8:17/1

300-85-13:322/14

300-85-13:320

300-120-2:140/2

300-120-7:82/2

300-50-15:22/1

300-120-2:195/2

300-50-15:25/4

300:10:4/56-57

300:85:47/7

300:85:9:44/35

300-85-9:48/26

300-85-13:29/7

300-120-7:210/6

300-120-2:38/1

300-120-7:15/8

300-10-4:8/21

300-85-9:48/26

300-10-4, 56

300-120-7/210

300-1-1. 20

300-120-6/76