

Paper prepared for the
6th Euroacademia International Conference
The European Union and the Politicization of Europe

11 – 12 December 2017

Florence, Italy

This paper is a draft

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“Paris, as a scenery of rebelliousness, during the Inter-war period. 1918-1933”

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Abstract:

Between 1914 and 1918, the Great War took place. Several writers analyzed the European society as “decadent and sick”, being that World War I meant a breaking point when it comes to the political and social systems that were considered representative of the European society. The democratic and capitalistic systems, main elements of the liberal society were left behind, and as a consequence, they hit a crisis.

The decades after the War saw the development of a new society that was different from the bourgeois society, that took place from the XIX century until the break of the War.

The Great War symbolised the crystallization of the social, economical and political changes and these changes were known by writers as the crisis of the middle class consciousness, or crisis of the bourgeois society.

At the same time, Paris became the meeting point of different artistic and literary movements that represented new perspectives. To a new generation of young men, the war meant the beginning of an era, signed by the deception of the liberal society that were the origine of that war. This Generation of writers, such as Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and Francis Scott Fitzgerald give a portrait in their work of a new way to see the European Society, and so Paris became the scenery where this new Generation of writers give a main role to the rebelliousness, as an ethos that becomes the heart of the literary production of the decade.

In this work, our goal is to travel through the hurted city of Paris during the '20s, a city represented by a writers, for whom Gertrude Stein's house, the cafes, the Quartier Latin and Les Jardines du Luxembourg became characters of their novels.

Key words: Great War, Crisis, Lost Generation, Ethos, Paris.

Introduction:

Between 1914 and 1918, a phenomena would change the way European citizens value the political and economic systems. The destruction, the death and the crisis of the market, as well as the disappointment of the political decisions were some of the consequences of the Great War in Europe.

These social changes were described as a crisis by the contemporary society and they took place from the end of the War to the following decade. At the same time, a group of writers, known as “The Lost Generation” was living in Paris at the time, and they represented in their works all these social changes. This group was by Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell, among others. These writers find themselves socializing in Paris, since the development of the Great War and during the the 1920's. Also they will get in touch with Gertrude Stein, a prominent figure among this group, who was a big influence on them, specially on Ernest Hemingway.

This Lost Generation had many things in common. They used to portrait social changes, discuss politics, they share the same values, they were rebellious, anti establishment, individualistic in the way they saw the world, they would hang out on the same bars and cafes.

The main goal of this work is to show that the relation of this group of writers can be named a "Cultural Formation", concept provided by Raymond Williams. In this work we are going to apply this concept to the analysis of traditions, places, forms of sociability and values, the ethos of this group, The Lost Generation. In this work, we are going to focus specifically on Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Gertrude Steinⁱ.

Also we are going to relate the values that these writers portrayed in their works with the city of Paris. La Cité Lumière becomes the main scenery where these written stories take place. And is this through the description of the city that we can fully comprehend the social changes and the crisis that the Great War meant.

In order to achieve this, first of all we will analyze the concept of "Cultural Formation" by Raymond Williams, taken from his works "*Marxism and Literature*" and "*Culture*", and we will apply this concept to the relation that these writers had with each other, analyzing fragments of their work. We will finalize this work mentioning the city of Paris, where this development took place.

The Lost Generation as a Cultural Formation.

To begin with, the context of the writing production of the Lost Generation is within the framework of the end of the Great War, and the posterior decade. This context of crisis will become a deep influence in the origin and formation of this group, being that this context is related to the social values that this group portray in their work.

That Great War brought along many consequences, such as destruction of the Belle Époque cultureⁱⁱ, therefore, the trust that the European society had in their own civilization and the trust in the values that were their foundation was destroyed. Many historians describe this process as a crisis of the bourgeois societyⁱⁱⁱ.

This crisis also hits the intellectual and artistic activity during those same years and the whole cultural activity depicts a "culture of pessimism" (Fusi 1991, 328). This atmosphere of decadence is visible during the 20's, when writers particularly became obsessed with the idea of a decadent Europe, a European disease.

In these decades, we observe the publication of works such as "*Ulysses*" by James Joyce, "*Demian*" by Herman Hesse, "*A Farewell to Arms*" and "*The Sun Also Rises*" by Ernest Hemingway, "*The Magic Mountain*" by Thomas Mann, "*The Waste Land*", by T. S. Eliot, "*The Process*" by Franz Kafka, "*U.S.A. Trilogy*" by John Dos Passos y "*The Great Gatsby*", by Francis Scott Fitzgerald.

The Great War and the cultural context of the city of Paris became a common ground among this group of writers. They also shared the same nationality, most of them had been born in the U.S.A, and some of them participated in the great War, like Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, who were ambulance drivers during the War. This group rejected the idea and the goals of the War, and their literary works portrayed these social changes,

Among this group of writers we can name Hemingway, Dos Passos, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell and Ezra Pound. They would socialize with each other, and more important, with Gertrude Stein. According to José María Castellet, Gertrude Stein was the first exiled American writer of the century. Since 1918, these young American writers that didn't want to go back to United States, took her as the leader and the patron of the group. (Castellet 1957, 7)

Rolando Costa Picazo explains that Stein's house was the center of Paris to the exiled writers of the decade. Besides Pound and Hemingway, also Fitzgerald, Paul Bowles, William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane would meet there (Costa Picazo 2008, 50).

The meetings in Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas' house were famous among artists. This is where painters and writers used to gather to discuss arts with their patron that was Stein herself. Gertrude Stein organized these gatherings in her salon, where these young expatriate artists would get to know each other. This is the place where Hemingway got to know other fellow writers and painters.

Historians have mentioned Stein as a great influence in the work of these artists, specially Hemingway's work, who would take her advice and shaped the way he wrote, avoiding the use of many adjectives and using short sentences, and she would recommend the use of repetitions as a way to emphasize the intention of the writer. Also, many years later Stein would be known as the main promoter of the Cubism, buying and promoting the work of artists like Picasso, and George Braque.

Another sociability place of this group were the meetings in Sylvia Beach's books store Shakespeare and Co. (Hemingway 2003, 9). Sylvia Beach was another prominent figure among writers in those years. She was also an American expatriate, and she set up the bookstore in 1919. Sylvia Beach was also a publisher of unknown English speaking writers, introducing them to the French readers, like James Joyce's books. Sylvia Beach was one of the first expatriates whom Hemingway met when he went to Paris with his family in 1921.

Some other sociability places were the bars and cafes, such as The Dome, the bar of the Ritz Hotel where Hemingway and Francis Scott Fitzgerald used to meet. Also, La Closerie las Lilas, Cafe de Flore and les Deux Magots are also mentioned in their works. Most of these places are located near Le Quartier Latin where Hemingway used to live, and it was also near Saint Germain des Pres and Montparnasse, those 3 neighbourhoods were the most frequently mentioned in the Lost Generation works.

The Jardines du Luxembourg is another place mentioned in their works, where Hemingway and Stein used to take long walks, and it is also very close to 27 Rue de Fleurus, Gertrude Stein's house.

The first person to call this group by the name "The Lost Generation" was probably Gertrude Stein herself, calling a "Lost Generation" to all those who went to the War (Costa Picazo 2008, 53).

The type of relationship among these writers can be connected to what Raymond Williams calls a Cultural Formation. In his books "*Marxism and Literature*" and "*Culture*". According to this author, a Cultural Formation is a group of artists that don't organized themselves around a public collective manifestation or on a formal membership, but there is a group identification related to their work or to general relations among them (Williams 1981, 64).

In this way, we could apply this concept Cultural Formation to the Lost Generation, since this group weren't identified with any formal institution or public manifestation. The relationship among them can be described like a group of friends or mates, who would share activities, such as writing, journalism and painting. The members of the Generation shared this main activity, literary writing, and they were also journalists, like Hemingway who had worked as a war correspondent for the *Toronto Star* (Hemingway 2005), between 1920 and 1924, and John dos Passos who had published articles in *New Masses*, *The Dial*, *The Nation* y *The New Republic* (Dos Passos 2006, 9).

Besides, Williams explains that the Cultural Formation may have external relations which can be oppositional, when the Formation shows an active opposition to established institutions or they are opposed to the conditions within these exist (Williams 1981, 65). Taking into account this definition, we can affirm that The Lost Generation was a Cultural Formation with an oppositional external relations, since in their works, these writers express a defense of individual values, rejecting the capitalism, the war and its consequences, the democracy and the liberal society as whole, and at the same time, we can observe how this writers exalt the individualism and the hedonism of the characters from their written works.

In relation to this, Castellet states that these men had participated in the War, and by the end of it, they were completely different people, because they had known the violence and the death, and as a consequence they couldn't trust in traditional values any longer (Castellet 1957, 9). The scepticism was the logical consequence, and this people showed an extreme individualism, as a result of the lack of trust in social projects.

This elements in common which express a rejection to the social condiciones de existencia are related to the ethos of the cultural formation.

The ethos of the Cultural Formation.

The concept "Ethos" is mentioned in the article about "*The Bloomsbury fraction*", in which Raymond Williams analyzes a cultural formation of a group of writers and intellectuals settled in London at the beginning of the 20th century. The author explains that the Ethos is shaped by values and habits that are shared by the group and they become relevant to the internal functioning of the group", so this ethos is a binding element among the members of the formation (Williams 1982, 6).

When it comes to the Lost Generation, we can see that the ethos is related to the sociability practices that we have already described, and at the same time, the ethos is based upon the rejection of the society, the war, the political institutions and in some cases, they would also reject the capitalistic system. We can also find that these writers portray a feeling of disappointment and negativism, and in relation to this, we find descriptions of a European disease. As a consequence, values like the individualism, the hedonism and a bohemian life style are exalted.

These values and sociability practices that characterize the group are also represented in their literary works. As an example, we will analyze fragments of their works from Ernest Hemingway and Francis Scott Fitzgerald, so we can give examples of their values and the rejection of the liberal society.

When it comes to **Ernest Hemingway**, the best example of the ethos of the group and the rebelliousness of the writer can be found in the novel "*The Sun Also Rises*". This book is about a group of young people living in Paris after the Great War, and it tells a frustrated love relationship between the two main characters, Jake and Brett and some other young friends. Reading this novel, we can observe through the eyes of the characters a rejection to the war and its consequences. The characters argue about the war, and they can't agree about the purpose of it^{iv}. Also we can see that these group of young people refuse to lead a socially accepted life, according to the bourgeois values, that were accepted before the war.

The characters represent an individualistic and hedonistic way of life, not willing to get married^v, and refusing to remain faithful to their partners^{vi}. We can also see how they reject the traditional family values^{vii}.

We can find another example of the hedonism in the descriptions of this young group who seems prone to being promiscuous and drinking plenty of alcohol^{viii}, that is another example of a new moral sexuality that represent a rejection of the traditional values.

In several fragments of the book there are references to a climate of decadence in Europe after the War, that pushes people to behave in a depraved way^{ix}, being the main character Jake, the one who better represents the rejections of the traditional morality^x.

The whole city is described as decadent and smelly^{xi}. This is telling since the common image of Paris is that this is a city related to the refinement and the culture. But by reading the literary productions of the 20's, the representations of Paris that we would obtain is completely different. This city would represent the pessimism, the negativity and a climate of moral decadence, when it comes to the private and public life of the society.

We can also observe a similar ethos in the case of **Francis Scott Fitzgerald**, we can find a rejection of the liberal system, but in his case, the literary production remarks the hedonism as the main way to fight against the traditional values and at the same time, we can see that the characters in their novels and short stories, are hedonistic as a way to counteract the pessimism of the society. We can find a permanent pursuit of happiness, a pursuit of material wealth, and also we can see the impact of the war. There is a gap between a world that existed before 1914 and the interwar period. Those who have witnessed the war, now belonged to an entire different generation from those who haven't seen it^{xii}.

His stories take place in United States as well as in Europe, in places like New York, Paris and the South of France. But overall, the type of social changes and values that he portrays in his works, are very similar to the works of other writers of the Lost Generation.

Conclusion

In this work, we have tried to prove that the concept of Cultural Formation can be applied to the type of relationship that existed among the members of the Lost Generation.

This Lost Generation shared values, an ethos that can be distinguished from other Cultural Formations, and this ethos is related to the way the Great War caused an impact in Europe during the 20's. In this way, their literary works are related to a place and a time that was marked by the consequences of the Great War

The War, with the destruction, the following economic and political crisis and the rising of new political systems like the fascism and the totalitarian system, casted doubts on a whole system of morals and values, the bourgeoisie values, that prevailed until the beginning of the War.

The ethos of these writers with their rejection to the traditional society, become a truthful representation of this crisis and of the fall of the bourgeoisie morality during the 20's in Europe.

Thanks to these literary sources we can deepen our understanding of this process that gave rise to new political and economical phenomenon, therefore new ways to see the world.

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Notes:

ⁱ In this work we will analyze briefly the main characteristics of the crisis of the bourgeois morality, using literary sources, in order to try to understand the type of relationship among the chosen group of writers, (The Lost Generation) and how they portrayed the city of Paris during the 20's. This work is a very short fragment of the Masters's thesis by the author, and as a reference we will take the period between 1918 and 1933, and we will take into consideration the American writers that lived in Paris during those years.

ⁱⁱ According to José Luis Romero, from 1850 until the Great War in Europe we can see the rise and development of the Belle Epoque, also known as bourgeois society.

ⁱⁱⁱ We can define the bourgeois morality as a values, ideas and rules that regulate the behaviour of individuals, particularly the bourgeois class from the French Revolution. The values that backed up the bourgeois morality were the liberalism (both political and economic liberalism) the social darwinism, the traditional family values, the pursuit of progress, the anticlericalism, and the trust in science.

^{iv} "*Posiblemente hubiéramos continuado con el tema, discutiendo sobre la guerra hasta estar de acuerdo en que se trataba realmente de una calamidad para la civilización, y que quizá hubiera sido mejor evitarla.*" Hemingway, Ernest. (2003) *Fiesta*. Buenos Aires. De bolsillo. 41

^v "*Esa es la razón por la que no quiere casarse. Quiere tener un gran éxito este otoño y disfrutarlo solo*". Ibid. 74

^{vi} "*¿No podríamos vivir juntos, Brett? ¿Solamente vivir juntos?*

-No, no lo creo. Te engañaría con todo el mundo. No podrías resistirlo". Ibid, 82.

^{vii} "*¿Por qué no se casan?*

- Queremos vivir nuestras propias vidas – dije yo

-Tenemos nuestras carreras". Ibid. 89.

^{viii} "*precisamente porque he vivido mucho, ahora puedo disfrutar tanto de las cosas... Siempre. Siempre estoy enamorado... el amor figura entre mis prioridades*" Ibid. 88.

^{ix} *el estilo de vida europeo te ha llevado a la ruina moral. Te matas bebiendo. Estas obsesionado por el sexo*" Ibid. 143.

^x : "*esa era la moralidad. Un sentimiento que hace que uno este disgustado después. No, eso no podía ser la moralidad, sino la inmoralidad ¡Vaya una afirmación!*" Ibid. 179.

^{xi} "*¿Lleva mucho tiempo en esta apesadumada ciudad?*" Ibid. 101.

^{xii} "*Yo pertenecía a la guerra. Parece absurdo, pero creo que siempre recordaré esos días como los más felices de mi vida.*

- Sé lo que quieres decir- dijo ella lentamente- A nuestra generación no volverá a sucederle nada tan intenso ni tan dramático". Fitzgerald, Francis Scott. 2010. *El precio era alto*. Buenos Aires: eterna Cadencia Editora. 93