

SELF-IMMOLATION OF THE SOVIET OPPONENTS IN CENTRAL EUROPE : SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR OR POLITICAL PROTEST?

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Introduction: Around thirty of cases of public self-immolation occurred in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Lithuania between 1968 and 1972 in the background of protest movement against the Soviet led-invasion. Rather than an act of a political protest, in a moment of absurdity of the existence, or a rational solution aimed to finish a desperate life situation, could a self-immolation also testify a suicidal behaviour and a failure of adaptation mechanisms of the victims concomitant a mental disorder?

Method: We have selected and studied four most mediated cases of this period. Press articles available in English, French and Czech, biographical writings and czech archived data concerning Palach J. R. Kalanta, J. Zajic and R. Siwiec allowed us to retrospectively analyse the circumstances of the acting out, their apparent or hidden motivations and identify their suicidal risk factors.

Results: All the four victims were men, young single students, aged between 18 and 21 years, excepted from R. Siwiec, aged 60 years. None had a psychiatric history or abuse of alcohol. All four, in the opposition of the communist system, were surrounded by a supporting family background. The public character of their act highlights the opposition against a totalitarian system and is questioning the possible intentionality of their behavior or the identification process of the young adults in post-adolescence.

Conclusion: Immolation by fire of Soviet opponents in Central Europe should be revised in the light of the likely depression and narcissistic vulnerabilities of these subjects.