Hungarian Nationalism and Youth Movements in the 20th Century

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Abstract

The majority of societies endorse their own nationalist values within their various youth organizations. Many countries such as America or Hungary have Scout movements. Other countries like Greece or Germany have student organizations. Regardless of its title, each youth movement reflects the political agenda of its organizing government. This paper examines three Hungarian youth organizations within the concept of their visual expressions of nationalism in the 20th century. These groups include the Hungarian Scouts of 1912, the Young Pioneers of 1948, and The Freedom Fighters of the revolution of 1956. This paper argues that all three organizations mirror Hungary’s changing notion of Nationalism depending on what government held sway over the politics during their time of operation. Each organization reflects its own brand of nationalism revealed in the identity of youth movements. Means of expression include illustrations found in magazines, postcards, photographs, badges, architecture, and statues. Each group constructs its identity through visual language parallel to the group’s particular doctrine.

Objectives

This research discusses and compares the Youth movements of Hungary during the 20th century. Its intent is to document the changing identity of children during this period, and emphasize how youth movements reflected the political agenda of the government in power during their operation. This paper examines a linear timeline focusing on the construction and destruction of three specific youth movements through their visual identity in Hungary: The Hungarian Scouts, The Young Pioneers, and the Freedom Fighters.

Hungarian Scout postcard

Young Pioneers propaganda

A Brief Overview of Youth Movements in Hungary

Hungarian Scouts 1907

Scouting was established in 1907 by a Lieutenant General in the British Army, Robert Baden-Powell. Since then, scouting has been adopted by many countries, becoming culturally assimilated within each nation it resided. Scouting proved its flexibility by adapting to reflect the values of the culture it embraced. For Hungary, the Scouts echoed the spiritual revival of a nation: a high priority for Hungarian leaders at the time. Both religiously as well as culturally, the Scouts represented the renewal of Hungarian tradition. Although officially abolished by the Communist regime in 1948, the scouts stayed alive underground. Throughout the Russian occupation of Hungary, they maintained secret operation. Delivering letters and scouting for those few still loyal to Hungary’s previous identity before the Russians and Germans, the troops of boy scouts maintained a secret alternative nationalism. According to a diary written by an active boy scout in the 1970’s, the primary mission of the scouts was to usurp the Red Menace that threatened the Free World. Their salient undertaking to restore the millennial of Hungarian culture of the Old Country remained their most important task.

Young Pioneers 1948

The communists set up the Young Pioneers in order to replace the Hungarian Scouts. By washing away old traditions of nationalism present within the Scout troops, they erased the old Hungarian values and replaced them with communist propaganda. Primarily in the ten to fourteen year old age group, these young boys and girls embodied the seedlings of communist doctrine. The structure of the organization closely paralleled the class-awareness and needs of the communist state. Nevertheless, many of the Young Pioneer’s mentors were previous Scout troop leaders. This ensured a certain amount of similar practices as the previous boy scouts such as the rudimentary structure of detachments and troops along with scout oaths and some strictrues. Joining the Young Pioneers was advertised as strictly voluntary. However, most children joined out of obligation or out of fear of censure from their classmates. Therefore, a new identity of the upcoming generation of Hungarians was constructed rooted in the teachings of Lenin rather than the old tradition of Hungary.

The Freedom Fighters 1956

The identity of Hungarian children was divided. On one hand, there were the Scouts: boys and girls who adhered to the traditions of the old country. On the other, there was the Young Pioneers: appropriated scouts with a secular Communist twist. With the scout suppression in 1948, the public identity of children was left to the Young Pioneers. However, in 1956 a dynamic revolution occurred, giving rise to a new breed of child. Dubbed the Freedom Fighters, young boys and girls assisted in a citywide revolt against the Communist regime. This gave rise to a briefly lived identity for the younger generation of Hungary. Aggressive and ready for action, the Freedom Fighters were originally part of a student protest that marched in Budapest on the twenty-third of October. Turning violent after the Soviets failed to return members of the protest who entered the radio building to broadcast their requests, the protest quickly turned into a violent mob. In the chaos of the following thirteen days, the Freedom Fighters gained a sense of self through violence and a visual identity documented through photography.

Conclusions

In the end, the Revolution was suppressed by Soviet power, and the Freedom Fighters were put to rest either by execution, exile, or conformity. The identity of the children shifted back to the Young Pioneers, Little Octoberists, and Kosmosol. It was not until 1989 when Communism fell in Hungary that the Boy Scouts were permitted to form again. Although no longer mandatory, the Young Pioneers remained an organization. No longer mandated by heavy underlying messages of Nationalism and political agenda, these two organizations dissolved into regular children’s camps and scouting societies. Nevertheless, the history of Hungary remembers the tradition of the Scouts, the Socialist values of the Young Pioneers, and the bravery of The Freedom Fighters as pivotal parts of Hungary’s shifting identity during the 20th century.

References


http://www.whitestag.org/history/history.html.

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