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# The Political Religion of Communism in Hungarian Children's Choir Compositions between 1958–1989<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** Like all cultures, totalitarian regimes develop their own symbols and rituals. As such symbols, music and music making play an important role in expressing values, norms of the community, as well as in providing models for living in it (Geertz, 1973). They are especially valuable tools for educating children. This paper summarizes the result of a pilot study in the lyrics of choral pieces for children, that were distributed along with the state-published methodological journal, *Énektanítás* [*Teaching Singing*] and its continuation, *Az ének-zene tanítása* [*Teaching Singing-Music*] between 1958–1989. Using political religion (Gentile, 2006) as conceptual framework for content analysis, the study presents: 1) how different characteristics of the communist doctrine appeared in the lyrics of choral pieces and 2) how they changed over time, outlining the life-cycle of the regime itself from militant mass movements to giving place to expressions of individualism and alternative faiths until it would dissolve in the end.

**Keywords** communism, Hungary, political religion, music education, choral music

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## Introduction

All human societies consider music as a powerful means to convey feelings and messages. Every community finds or creates music that expresses and shapes the values that unite them. Similarly, totalitarian regimes, such as communism<sup>2</sup>, which strived to create a distinct culture<sup>3</sup>, developed their own musical expressions. Recognizing the “emotionally effective, indirectly agitating power”<sup>4</sup> of music (Horváth, 1960), the Hungarian Working People’s Party [Magyar Dolgozók Pártja] (Hungarian Communist Party until 1948) aimed to use it in order to support the laying and consolidating the foundation of socialism and the creation of a “new man”. It also turned school music lessons and choir activities into modes of political indoctrination for children soon after it came to power in 1948/49. After over thirty years of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist state in Hungary, it worth observing the “musical relics” of the era in order to understand this segment of the totalitarian mission for a communist utopia.

As first installment of a broader research into Hungarian music education journals using political religion (Gentile, 2005, 2006) as a conceptual framework for content analysis, as well as testing the concept’s utility for such research, this paper summarizes the results of a pilot study that focused on the youth choral movement and choral works that were published as supplements to the Ministry of Education’s methodological journal for school music teachers and conductors.

## Communist Political Religion

The concept of political religion (PR) and its connection to totalitarianism dates back to the 1930s, and its origin is most often associated

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2 In this paper, we use socialist and communist interchangeably, but during the observed period, it was often seen as a continuum from socialism to communism according to Marx’s stages of development.

3 “If I were to choose to provide a mediocre *socialist culture* or a very high but antisocialist [...] if I must choose [...] I will vote for the mediocre one,” said János Kádár, General Secretary of the Hungarian Working People’s Party in 1959 (quoted by Péteri, 2013, p. 124 – italics by Zs. P.).

4 All translations from Hungarian were made by Zs. P.

with Eric Voegelin's work, *The political religions* (1938/1999). Although Voegelin later abandoned the term, it was taken up and further developed by scholars such as Gurian (1953/2013) or Koenker (1965).

Inspired by the work of Emilio Gentile, the PR concept gained renewed prominence around the turn of the 21st century as a framework and analytical tool "to explain the character and function of the major new ideologies in a largely secular era" (Payne, 2005, p. 172). Despite some criticism of both Gentile's framework or the PR concept in itself (cf. Gray, 2014, pp. 524–526), Gentile's work remains the cornerstone of most scholarship on political religions.

According to Gentile (2005, p. 29), "sacralisation of politics occurs all the time by virtue of the fact that a political entity, for instance, the nation, the state, race, class, the party, assume the characteristics of a sacred entity". Secular religions can be described by their: 1) definition of the meaning of life and human existence; 2) their commandments of a public ethic for its followers; 3) political liturgy: sacred texts, dogmas, and also myths, symbols, rituals as representation of their "sacred history"; and 4) "chosen people".

In this definition, political religion is the totalitarian form of secular religions, which is characterized by 1) unchallengeable monopoly of power; 2) ideological monism; 3) the obligatory and unconditional subordination of the individual and the collectivity to its code of commandments. It is intolerant, invasive, fundamentalist, and "it wishes to permeate every aspect of an individual's life and of a society's collective life" (Gentile, 2006, p. XV).

This all-encompassing nature of the communist doctrine, and the regime based on it, makes it possible to interpret it as a distinct culture, understood as defined by Clifford Geertz: "It denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (1973, p. 89).

The inclusion of symbolic and interpretive anthropological lens (following Geertz and Turner) offers a deeper understanding the function of the symbols – in our case, the musical pieces and the rituals

of choral celebrations – within the system. Following Geertz’s (1973) definition of religion<sup>5</sup>, these choral works and songs, as symbols, transmitted ideals of the society and guidelines for living in it – models *of* and *for* a cultural life.

In Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the ultimate goal is salvation and communist utopia (Ehlen, 2007), a world without oppression and exploitation, a classless society of a community formed by “new [type of] men”. The development of the “new man” became a central issue in Communist regimes: “One of the important conditions for the realization of socialism is the transformation of people’s consciousness and behavior, the formation of a socialist person” (Radnai & Tóth, 1961, p. 296).

This quest for a “new man” is a shared trope with the new religious movements of the late 19th – early 20th century that envisioned a joyous, just society. The difference lies mainly in the way they aimed to achieve it: through peaceful self-development or as a forced result of a revolution (Németh & Skiera, 2018, p. 22).

Communist/socialist totalitarian regimes come with totalitarian pedagogy (Gentile, 2006, p. 47) that builds and maintains the new order by educating “the socialist man to tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands” (Földes, 1970, p. 237). Music teachers were no exceptions from it.<sup>6</sup> Their means were music lessons and choir activities, their tools were the music pieces they taught.

## **Youth Choral Movements before and after the Communist Takeover**

Socialist youth choral movement in Hungary built upon the traditions of the Singing Youth Movement of the previous two decades

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5 “Religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz, 1973, p. 92).

6 It would go beyond the aim and scope of this paper to discuss how the constant declarations of commitment and impact of their work may also be interpreted as advocacy for music lessons – a generally marginalized subject, in the curriculum.

(Pethő, 2018). Inspired and led by founders<sup>7</sup> of the Hungarian Chorus Publishing House [Magyar Kórus Zenemű-és Lapkiadó], this grassroots movement of youth choirs attracted many followers countrywide. The Publishing House's music pedagogical journal, *Énekszó* [Singing] (1933–1950) included pieces for children's choirs, and served as the main platform of the youth choral movement.

Singing Youth also had a culture- and society-changing mission, following Zoltán Kodály's vision of a "network of choral societies founded with serious artistic ends would thread our social life together" (Kodály, 1929/1974, pp. 122–123). However, he and his followers hoped to achieve this change by the effect of making and enjoying music of "intrinsic value". As Losonczi (1974, p. 142) concluded, in this case, the music developed its movement, not the other way around, where music was born out of the ideological crusade.

Besides the adult workers' choirs, workers' youth choirs also existed, but their full history is yet to be written. Literature from the socialist era, following the principle of creating a "sacred heroic history", often describes the early musical movements of young workers' during the interwar period in terms of tribulations and oppression: "They were politically or culturally restricted in forming circles or communities [...] on one hand by the terrorist actions of the Horthy-police [...] and by manipulations of church workers' organizations which aimed to dismantle political movements" (Losonczi, 1974, pp. 46–47). Only the most "forward-thinking", "socially conscious" avant-garde were brave and dedicated to undertake a different cultural activity that supports their political goals: for them, community music making was not only self-expression but also served as a cover for their social agenda.

After World War II, choirs were regarded as important tools of political propaganda: they were needed for election campaigns, village tours, business life, political and street rallies, and May Day celebrations. "Public participation in the country's blood circulation was

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7 Composers Gyula Kertész (1900–1967), Lajos Bárdos (1899–1986) and György Kerényi (1902–1986).

clearly a political activity. The way of this participation determined its content. In other words, if a choir stood in front of an audience, according to what they sang, they were saying ‘I want to take part in building the country’ [...] It is almost self-evident that workers’ choirs were at the forefront of work” (Révész, 1975, p. 22, p. 25).

The Communist takeover in 1948 institutionalized and centralized the choir movement as well. The Party established the Bartók Béla Association [Bartók Béla Szövetség] (1949–1950), but soon the Music Department of the National Art Institute [Népművészeti Intézet] took over its duties in developing formation, operation, and repertoire guidelines for choirs and the companies that founded them.

Likewise, most school choir events were also organized by local educational offices and they expected (but not explicitly mandated) all schools under their supervision to take part. This was in a sharp contrast to the voluntary participation of the Singing Youth movement (Szabó, 1989, pp. 104–106).

In 1957, the Hungarian Communist Youth Alliance<sup>8</sup> [Kommunisták Ifjúsági Szövetsége] took control of the Hungarian Pioneer Association [Magyar Úttörők Szövetsége], and together they started a series of annual cultural events, competitions and celebrations to motivate pioneers to join cultural activities all year round. Each year had a specific theme, often commemorating important historical events such as the “Liberation”<sup>9</sup>, the 1848 revolution (March 15)<sup>10</sup>, or the 100th anniversary of Lenin’s birth.

In 1971, the first meeting of the Singing Squads [Éneklő rajok] (smaller pioneer groups) was organized, and, in the same year, the Singing Youth movement was also revived, led by one of its original founders,

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8 Kommunisták Ifjúsági Szövetsége or KISZ (1957–1989) – the youth organization of the Party, modelled after the Soviet Komsomol.

9 A common term used for the Red Army “liberating” Hungary from the German occupation at the end of WWII. April 4 was a national holiday dedicated to celebrate the event.

10 Commemoration day of the 1848/49 Hungarian revolution and freedom war against the Habsburg Empire.



Lajos Bárdos, creating first a radio program that renewed the country-wide mass choir festivals.

Youths did not and could not have their own musical expressions in the first decade of the new social order (Losonczy, 1974, p. 154). A totalitarian ideology and rule did not permit conflicts and separations between generations within the community, everyone had their own role to play in the united work for the “holy cause”: “[T]here is an urging demand from more and more directions: *common songs for the people*: the youth, the military, the masses competing and fighting in work, so they can move more effectively on the path laid down by progress<sup>11</sup>” (Jankovich, 1949, p. 1, italics by Zs. P.).

Many of the songs and choral works that were taught for children conveyed the obligations of the youth in building socialism, and remained in them throughout the era, even though with varying intensity. In the following part of the paper we will summarize the outcomes of a content analysis of lyrics that were distributed by the official musical pedagogical journal between 1958 and 1989.

### ***Énektanítás [Teaching Singing] and Az ének-zene tanítása [Teaching Singing-music]***

*Énektanítás [Teaching Singing]* was a methodological journal for school music teachers. Published by the Ministry of Education between 1958–1989, it aimed to address theoretical, ideological and practical issues in music education. The first issue opened with a greeting from Zoltán Kodály: “we should rejoice that after a decade-long break, a music pedagogical journal has been started” (1958, p. 3). While it was not a full decade-long break, school music educators were without any professional periodical since the previous journal, *Énekszó [Singing]* (1933–1950) folded after the socialization (and consequently, the termination) of its publisher, the Hungarian Chorus Publishing House.<sup>12</sup>

11 According to the Marxist interpretation of history.

12 In the interim, school music education was occasionally discussed in the *Köznevelés [Public Education]*, or in short-lived journals dedicated to instrumental music

*Énektanítás* was published in six issues during a year,<sup>13</sup> and each issue came with one or more score supplements for children's choirs. Besides publishing music from established composers, the editors also encouraged aspiring songwriters to send in their work. Occasionally, the journal issued a call for compositions (Editorial board, 1959, p. 17), however, like the one in 1959, sometimes it resulted in a failure because of the poor quality in both music and lyrics.

In 1963, the journal was renamed to *Az ének-zene tanítása* [*Teaching Singing-music*] because the new curriculum (1962 – implemented in 1963) changed the subject's name from "Singing" to "Singing-music"<sup>14</sup>. Starting from 1964, the National Pedagogical Institute [Országos Pedagógiai Intézet] (under the Ministry of Education) published the journal until it folded at the end of 1989.

During its 31 year-long run the journal published over 300 choral compositions or unison songs with or without piano accompaniment, and selections of Hungarian and foreign folksongs. From the second half of the 1970s, the number of musical scores gradually decreased, reduced to 1–3 per year by the 1980s, and in certain years (1972, 1975, 1978, 1983, 1987) there were no such appendices at all.

The Editorial Board, in agreement with the Ministry, explicitly recommended the teaching of these pieces, first in 1959, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic [Tanácsköztársaság]<sup>15</sup>:

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education or the choral movement, such as the *Zenepedagógia* [*Music Pedagogy*] and *Éneklő nép* [*Singing People*].

13 Also, in four issues during the 1970s.

14 In Hungary, elementary music education has two institutions: 1) *public schools*, where the subject of music is called "Singing" or "Singing-music" (short form of "singing and music"), highlighting that general music education is vocal-based; and 2) mostly state-financed, *afternoon music schools* [zeneiskola] for instrumental teaching. *Parlando*, the dedicated journal for afternoon music schools, was established in 1959.

15 A short-lived communist regime between March 21 and August 1, 1919. Its commemoration day was March 21.

“1. Besides the compulsory material, every month all classes countrywide (at least from 4th grade and above) should learn a pioneer song or mass movement song from the score supplements or recommendations of *Énektanítás*. This way, they can develop a common musical literature of the country’s studying youth<sup>16</sup>.

2. Besides the choir’s performance, the school’s entire studying youth should sing these songs together during celebrations” (*Felhívás*, 1958, p. 1).

We would need to explore concert programs to determinate how well-known and widely-used these pieces were in practice. Some of them, like the workers’ movement songs of the first half of the 20th century, were also included in choral and pioneer song collections, school textbooks and teacher handbooks, even prior to the beginning of the journal, and many of the newly composed ones made their way into these publications over the decades. Therefore, it is safe to assume that many students learnt or heard them during their studies, school and public celebrations and pioneer activities.

### Methods<sup>17</sup>

The sample of 247 compositions comprised choral and accompanied unison pieces (most often for children’s choir and not for solo singers), excluding unison, unaccompanied folksongs cycles, and textbook supplement songs. We analyzed the lyrics of 200 compositions for youth choir and accompanied unison songs from 84 issues<sup>18</sup> in this pilot study as the score of 45 compositions were missing and were unavailable from other sources, and 2 pieces were without text. Using words as units of observation, we searched instances of political religion via semi-automatic content analysis (Krippendorf, 2004).

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16 The “studying youth” turn of phrase imitates the “working adults”. As the lyrics of a pioneer song says: “Our work is studying, knowledge is a treasure trove” (Lyrics from: Song about the school [Dal az iskoláról]).

17 We wish to acknowledge the ideas and remarks provided by László Galántai.

18 11 issues were not accessible with unknown number of compositions in them.

The categories were predetermined by the communist PR conceptual framework: such as “moral commandments/virtues” and disposition of the ideal communist person; “pioneers” as future builders of communism, “enemies”; “holy battle”; “heroic history”, “heroes” and their “celebrations”; “liberation/freedom”; “worker’s class” as the chosen people and their leaders, the “Party”.

After that, we took an inductive approach to build subordinated code groups and the related dictionaries for the semi-automatic coding, using the text data (lyrics) as the starting point (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2018, pp. 47–48). The poetic nature of the sample necessitated that we double-check the software’s coding in order to eliminate potential false positive results. We found that the number of false results were not high enough to significantly change the outcome, however, this technique slightly reduced the reliability of the process compared to a fully automatic coding (cf. Janis, 1965).<sup>19</sup>

In order to see how the different aspects of the political religion changed over the course of the era, we grouped the compositions to four periods according to the implementation of new elementary school curricula.

During the communist era between 1948 and 1989, four national curricula were introduced (1950, 1956, 1962, 1978). In 1985, the government implemented a new law on education (*1985. évi I. törvény az oktatásról*, 1985) that fundamentally changed the role of the national curriculum. Its § 14 allowed schools to deviate from the national curriculum and develop their own local curricula, which indicated a decline in the power and totalitarian aspirations of the regime. Therefore, we regarded 1985 as a beginning of a new period with the introduction of not a new central but several local curricula.

Besides musical skills (singing, musical reading and writing, music appreciation), the overall aims and tasks of Singing lessons and choir activities also emphasized the ideological aspects of music education:

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19 Due to limited space, we do not indicate all details of the coding process (e.g. elements of the dictionary). For more information, please contact the authors.

the development of socialist disposition with the help of music teaching (1950), political-ideological education and patriotism (1956), facilitate the building of socialist community, instill the love of parents, working people, homeland, pioneer life, and celebrations (1962)<sup>20</sup> (Györgyiné Koncz, 2007).

The journal itself offers the first clear caesura as the publishers changed the title from the 1963/1 issue in response to the new curriculum. While the 1962 curriculum was introduced in schools from September 1963, the journal made the change from the first issue of that year. We followed this practice for the rest of the periods and regarded the beginning of the year in which the curriculum or the new law on educational in 1985 were implemented the start of a new period (1963, 1978, 1985).

As curricula reflects the requirements and aims of the socio-political environment, these periods also correspond with changing trends within the so-called “Kádár era” (1956–1988)<sup>21</sup> – named after János Kádár, General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party [Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP] and Chairman of the Council of Ministers between 1956–1958 and 1961–1965.

1) 1958–1962: János Kádár and the Party consolidated its power after the revolution in 1956. In November 1962, the VIII. Congress of the MSZMP declared that they had laid the foundations of socialism, therefore, the construction of a socialist system came to the fore, which was

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20 The explicit ideological phrases (such as socialist society, communist man, etc.) are missing from the Music chapter in 1978, but “developing the socialist man” is mentioned in the overall aims of the curriculum. Socialist celebrations, for example November 7 (commemoration day of the Great October Socialist Revolution), March 21, etc. and the inspiring aspect of movement and pioneer songs is emphasized in the Instructions published along with the curriculum.

21 Historians generally agree that 1962/63 marks the beginning of a new period, however, there is no widely accepted consensus about the rest of the era. For example, Bihari (2005, pp. 300–301) identifies seven main periods of the “Kádár era” (1956–1962; 1963–1968; 1968–1972/73; 1973–1978; 1979–1981; 1981–1985; 1985–1988) based on political and economical changes.

to be marked not by continuous class struggles, but a peaceful and prosperous period.

2) 1963–1977: The era of social compromise, symbolized by the iconic slogan, “who is not against us is with us”<sup>22</sup>, as opposed to the “who is not with us is against us”, which was used to describe the rule of the previous Hungarian Communist Party General Secretary and former prime minister, Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971) between 1948 and 1953.<sup>23</sup> The compromise meant that if society relinquished its demand for freedom, democracy and independence, agreed to three main axioms (alliance with the Soviet Union, one-party rule, and that ‘56 was a counter-revolution<sup>24</sup> and not a revolution), the regime guaranteed a continuous improvement of living conditions. “The essence of ‘Kádárism’ [...] was ‘compromise for standard of living’, *depoliticizing public and private life*, pragmatic politicking, and *de-ideologizing society*” (Szabó, 2006, p. 307, italics – Zs. P.).

3) 1978–1984: The period is marked by latent economic and political crisis, rapidly accelerated by the 1979 Oil Shock.

4) 1985–1989: Open crisis both in Hungary and the entire Soviet Bloc that led to the regime’s fall in 1989.

### **Instances of Political Religion in Choral Pieces**

The most common genre (60%, see Table 1) in the sample were of the regime’s typical one: political mass movement songs and its children’s version, pioneer songs. In order to suit for agitation purposes, these songs were to be easily disseminated with a direct emotional effect, conveying ideas that move and captivate the entire nation (Losonczi, 1974, pp. 168–170). Pioneer songs were expected to express

22 In full: “Yes, we take it: whoever is not against the Hungarian People’s Republic is with her; who is not against the MSZMP is with it; and who is not against the people’s front is with them” (*Aki nincs ellenünk [...]*, 2012).

23 In fact, both statements originate from the Bible (Cf. The Bible, Matthew 12:30 and Luke 9:50).

24 In the official rhetoric of the Kádár era, the events of October–November 1956 were a counter-revolution against the (in Marxist-Leninist sense) revolutionary communist regime.

joys of pioneer life, ideological-political dispositions of pioneers, and the building of socialism/communism. As mentioned, the songs as symbols transmitted the ideals, morals of the community and showed the virtuous way to live in it. Performing them also intended to consolidate this effect via communal declaration of values and messages in choral celebrations (Szécsényi, 1975).

Due to the all-pervading nature of totalitarian political religions, the rest of the genres also gained new, communists interpretations: Hungarian folksongs and historical songs came to represent emotions and aspirations of poor people, memories of heroes, and desire for freedom; music of communist allies (“friendly nations”) showed that themes were common in the socialist world order, thus strengthened the idea of unity of socialist nations.

Table 1. Number of choral pieces in each era by themes and genre

Genre	1958–1962	1963–1977	1978–1984	1985–1989	TOTAL
pioneer song	54	41	0	0	95
mass movement song	25	28	1	0	54
children song arr.	3	22	3	1	29
folksong arr.	4	12	5	1	22
folksong-like arr.	1	3	2	0	6
non-political	0	13	1	0	14
art song/opera aria	1	4	0	3	8
Mother’s Day	2	3	0	0	5
religious	0	0	0	1	1
unknown*	2	0	0	0	2
other	3	7	1	0	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>247</b>

\* The scores were missing and we could not determinate the genre and theme from the titles.

Contemporary Hungarian composers were the majority (221 pieces) among the authors, seven composers were from other socialist countries (Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Vietnam), the rest of them represented France, Italy, Austria, Greece, and the United States<sup>25</sup>.

The recommended themes for choral pieces were friendship among people, ideals of international labor movements, their struggles and victories; honor of work, examples of heroes, and “the serene optimism of our lives” (Szécsényi, 1975).

One of the most conspicuous qualities of mass movement and pioneer songs is the lack of tropes, especially in comparison with the highly symbolic character of Hungarian folksongs and folk poetry. Deprived of potential symbolic/metaphoric interpretations, repeated descriptions of natural phenomena (green meadows and trees, colorful flowers, fluttering butterflies, singing little birds, sunlight that “kisses” pioneers, etc.) soon became trite phrases in pioneer songs, expressing nothing beyond the joys of camping, and maybe aiming to instill a love for nature into children. This was most likely the result of the general requirement to make the message of mass songs clear and easy to receive.

Even the scarce number of tropes were only allowed to be interpreted according to Party lines. For example, spring<sup>26</sup>, an ancient metaphor of renewal, came to represent “liberation” and “revolution” within this context, especially since in Hungary, most officially celebrated

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25 George Gershwin: Excerpts from *Porgy and Bess* and Jerome Kern: *Ol' man river*, and a missing spiritual. The opinion on jazz and spirituals underwent a change by the mid-1960s: from decadent entertainment of the “rotten capitalist West” to expressions of oppression and suffering of black people.

26 An interesting exchange took place in the 1962/4 issue between the editors and György Kerényi about a youth spring festival. In his review of the event, Kerényi quoted a line from a poem by Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849), and used it to illustrate that spring may not come, and the season may change directly from winter to summer referring to the unusually cold springs in those years. He was harshly reprimanded by the editors: “The ‘youth of today’ knows spring! The spring of liberation! [...] In our opinion, Petőfi’s quote should not be used and updated in this way. Even a school child knows that Petőfi’s waiting for spring symbolizes the freedom expectation of the people of the world!”



historical events – March 15 (1848 revolution), March 21 (1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic), April 4 (“liberation” by the Soviet Red Army in 1945) – happened in spring. Because of this dual meaning, and the additional spring celebration of May 1, spring was mentioned in the lyrics more often than all the other seasons combined.

The other obvious lack was a missing humor. Funny, playful songs appeared only from the second half of the 1960s in greater number. The explanation lies with the purpose of the genre of mass and pioneer songs. As an author (Nemcsik, 1963) complained about a worrying trend of parodies: revolutionary songs and movement songs were inherently unsuitable for parody and humorous lyrics, since it destroyed their intended emotional effect.

#### “Holy Battle” for the Inner-Worldly Heaven

Reaching Heaven on the earth, the communist utopia required continuous work and never-ending battle against its enemies. According to Hoffer (1951/2019, p. 113), “mass movements can rise and spread without belief in the God, but never without belief in a devil”. The ever-present threat of an enemy also made unity and subordination necessary. Enemies that were named in the lyrics, in the order of their frequency: capitalists, nobles, church (clerical reaction), all instigators against the Communist cause. They are especially dangerous if they join forces:

“Thousands are the burdens, problems of people.  
Ignorant and shackled; the priest dulls, capital oppresses:  
Brothers are the church and the factory.”

(Hungarian verses for the Marseillaise from 1919, published in the journal in 1969)

Similar to Jobst’s (2009) and Baska’s (2015) findings from their analysis of journals and newspapers from the Stalinist era in Hungary (1948–1956), almost all metaphors in mass movement and pioneer songs were war-related, commonly expressed in Hungarian as “battle” or “fight” [harc] against enemies of the regime. The emblematic

catchphrase of the “holy battle” was “peace-war” [békeharc]: fighting for and defending peace, which immediately declared the “warriors” righteous in their actions. Children and youth were expected to be worthy successors of previous generations in this fight, and had to be prepared to continue it:

“Led by the victorious Party, come, proclaim its power loudly.  
[...] The young hearts and hands are ready to fight and win  
if we rush to battle together.”

(Defend the Peace, Youth [Védde a békét, ifjúság], 1959)

Their weapons included “studying”, “song”, “science”, “work”, “diligence”, “attention”, and “unity”, their slogan was an old battle-cry: “Forward!” [Előre!], which appeared on the pioneer flag, and 19 times within this sample.

The recruitment into this “happy and peaceful army” was always present in the form of calls to “join”, “come with us”, “go together”. The constant voicing of unity (chums, brothers with one heart and soul, shoulder to shoulder) implicitly also meant the suppression of independent will and action, and the subordination of these to aspirations of the community.

As peculiar late successors of soldier recruitment songs<sup>27</sup>, the joyful life of pioneers was the third common theme in the lyrics, making life within the socialist order more attractive to children:

“Come, the gardens are blooming, come, the meadow is green.  
Chum<sup>28</sup>, children are happy here, we sing, life is beautiful.  
Come to our ranks, we will step together.”

(Pioneer call [Úttörőhívogató], 1958)

27 For example: “*The life of a good cavalry soldier is very fine, He eats and drinks in the tent, he has nothing to worry about. Hey life, such golden life, it cannot be more beautiful, Become a soldier only if you love such a life!*” (A good cavalry soldier [A jó lovas katonának], folksong).

28 Chum [pajtás]: member of a pioneer group.

### Moral Commandments

Following the expressions of war, virtues and dispositions of children and good subjects of the State were the second most common theme in the songs. The 1950 curriculum summarized the characteristics of ideal children as self-conscious, disciplined citizens of the People's Republic; faithful sons of the working people; builders of socialism; selfless in their service of the community, people, and homeland; who love and respect work. These principles changed little over the four decades of socialism (Györgyiné Koncz, 2007).

Pioneer songs deepened the commitment to the pioneer moral and behavioral commandments expressed in the "12 laws of pioneers" (Úttörő fogadalomtétel, 2007) that were formulated according to the Party's expectations of children. As builders of socialism, being aware of their duties to the future is also prominent. Children are to be cheerful, peaceful, enthusiastic, hard-working, patriotic, brave, honest, diligent in their studies, and respectful of their parents and teachers (obedient to authority!):

"To live worthy of man, intellect, clear eyes,  
two hands are not enough,  
it needs heart, spine and resilience, and what chases  
troubles away: merry laughter."

(The land is full of colors [Csupa szín ez a táj], 1970)

### Rituals, Celebrations

Rituals are fundamental to human societies as practices that connects members of a cultural group together by establishing social connections, organize human relations and give meaning to them. They reinforce the sense of continuity by connecting past, present and future. Communist political religion also had its celebrations and rituals: processions, mass celebrations heroes and revolutionary events, and worship of the supreme leader and its apostles (Kula, 2005, p. 379).

The classic Stalinism in Hungary ended by the time the *Énektanítás* journal appeared. Denouncing the personality cult of previous leader,

Mátyás Rákosi<sup>29</sup> and all of the mistakes and terror of that period was an important element in the Kádár era. Therefore, typical instances of personality cults were few in the lyrics, except for Lenin (20 mentions) in songs commemorating the 90th and 100th anniversaries of his birth:

“A new Christ has come. But he is still so close today,  
this generation is yet to see,  
and no one whispers in minutes of holy passion:  
Lenin! Lenin!”

(Árpád Pásztor: Lenin! 1917, set to music in 1969)

However, many pieces commemorated the exemplary fight of named and unnamed heroes and martyrs: György Dózsa’s peasant war (1514), the revolutionaries of 1848 and 1919, members of Hungarian and foreign illegal Communist movements:

“In trouble that comes to us, the rich never helps,  
but helps, supports the Red Aid: the dark hides  
its brave ambassadors from view.”

(Lullaby about Flóra Martos<sup>30</sup> [Bölcsódal Martos Flóráról], 1961)

Kula (2005, p. 372) argued that “Stalinist thought held that our lives were predetermined, but that the progression of historical phases had to be helped along. Hence the concept of the need for revolution to carry out this progression of formations. [...] it was necessary to identify historic revolutionary movements that had allegedly carried out these transformations”. Creating a historical lineage by treating and celebrating past events as antecedents of the current regime aimed to prove

29 On the leader cult built around Mátyás Rákosi, General Secretary of Party (1945–1956), see for example Apor (2004) and Klimó (2004).

30 Flóra Martos (1897–1938): chemist, member of the communist movement and the illegal Communist Workers’ Party. She was imprisoned twice and died from an incurable illness she caught in prison (*Martos Flóra*, 2001).

its legitimacy as a natural step in the progress to the ultimate emancipation of humanity.

Rituals of state celebrations also served this purpose. March 15, March 21, April 4, May 1, November 7 all had their dedicated musical pieces to complement ritual festivities. Teachers emphasized the educational power and value of these celebratory events (Horváth, 1960), and how communal music-making was a powerful way to create emotional connections between heroes and events of the past, invoking feeling of belonging to the community, and sense of mission to carry on the work for communism:

“Kuruc<sup>31</sup> army and old-old dance, Kossuth’s<sup>32</sup> word,  
which is still flying,  
and what Petőfi said here about sword and chain  
are alive and will live in our hearts!  
The song is about our sweet homeland today  
and about freedom, which is the song itself.”  
(Vow proudly, pioneers! [ Fogadjuk büszkén, úttörők!], 1971)

### Timeline

Table 2 shows the most common themes as code-groups organized according to their corresponding PR characteristics. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of these codes in time. Since the number of musical pieces varied between the periods, we adjusted the table to show code occurrences per 1000 words. The number of words in each group were: 1958–1962: 5,177; 1963–1977: 6,892; 1978–1984: 572; 1985–1989: 610. As much less scores appeared in the last decade than in the previous two eras, the results have limited validity. However, they still outline some trends.

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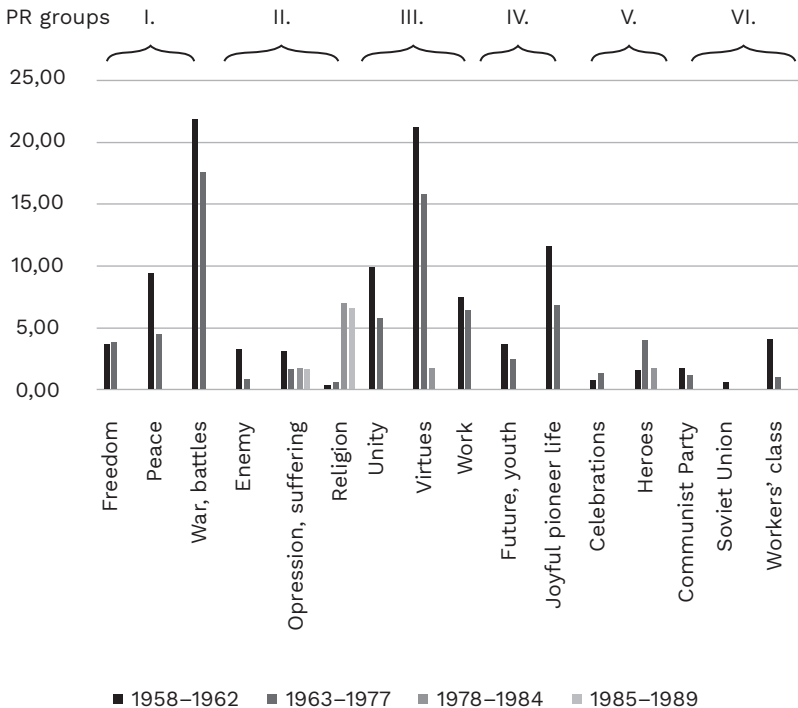
31 Ferenc Rákóczi’s army in the Freedom war (1703–1711).

32 Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) and Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849): iconic personalities of the 1848/1849 revolution and freedom war.

Table 2. Code-groups according to characteristics of a PR

I. "Holy battles"	Freedom, Peace, War, battles (incl. revolution)
II. Enemy	Enemy, Oppression, suffering, Religion
III. Moral commandments	Unity, Virtues, Work
IV. Pioneers	Future & youth, Joyful pioneer life
V. "Heroic history" and celebrations	Celebrations, Heroes
VI. "Chosen people"	Communist Party, Workers' class, Soviet Union

Figure 1. Distribution of the most frequent code groups



Changes in themes and genres of songs (Table 1) show the effect of de-ideologization and “social compromise” starting from 1963: agitation, propaganda and mobilization of masses became less prominent over time, and the movement songs almost completely disappeared by the early 1970s.<sup>33</sup> Pioneer songs lasted longer, they published the last ones in 1977.

Playful, humorous children song and folksong arrangements started to appear from the mid-1960s. Love and romance (at first, in folksong arrangements), a very personal emotion in contrast with the communal feeling of united mission, also became more and more frequent from the late 1960s. We may interpret this as a sign of turn from matters of community to the matter of individual.

While mentions of the God and Jesus were not missing completely in the previous periods, albeit only in historical texts such as poems by Sándor Petőfi, they appeared more often in the 1980s. The first explicitly Christian religious content (an original poem for a melody by Franz Liszt) appeared in 1985, the year from which the crisis of the regime became widely apparent to the general public. The journal featured a newly composed religious song in 1988, thus, signaling the end of the hegemony of the religion of communism.

## Conclusion

As every society develops its own cultural symbols and practices to unite and guide its members, the values of communism were transmitted in the songs that were taught to children. The communist totalitarian regime could not bypass the emotional and educational impact of music making, so mass singing events and the children’s choral movement itself became useful in its quest for creating a new socialist man and society, and in setting children’s roles in this system.

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33 The only two that were published in the 1970s were pieces to commemorate April 4 (1977) and May 1 (1979).

The results of the pilot study showed how changes in the political climate reflected in musical pieces that a music pedagogical journal published and distributed with the intention to educate children.

It also revealed the utility of PR as a conceptual framework for content analysis in historical and educational research to understand the characteristics and life-cycle of a totalitarian regime: changing from militant mass movements to giving place to expressions of private life and individualism, and alternative worldviews until it loses its totalitarian rule, and becomes one of many possible co-existing civil religions.

With such a small sample, the validity of these results is, of course, limited. In order to fully understand their function in the totalitarian system, we should place and observe them in a wider historical-social-political, professional, and maybe also international context.

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