Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Political Science Department

THE PIED PIPER IN POWER: IDEOLOGICAL RESOURCES AND THE AUTHORITARIAN YOUTH GROUP

a thesis

by

ISAIAH ZACHARY STERRETT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

May 21, 2012
Abstract

“The Pied Piper in Power: Ideological Resources and the Authoritarian Youth Group”
Isaiah Zachary Sterrett
Advisor: Professor Gerald Easter

How do authoritarian states attempt to acquire ideological resources vis-à-vis their youth populations? This thesis demonstrates that one way in which these states attempt to do so is by way of an institution I call the authoritarian youth group (AYG). Examples of AYG treated in the paper include the Hitler Jugend in Nazi Germany; the VLKSM or Komsomol in the U.S.S.R.; and Nashi (“Ours”) in post-Communist Russia. Primarily on the basis of secondary-source material, I argue that, across cases, governors of authoritarian states create and maintain AYG primarily in order to curry ideological resources among young people. In particular, states use AYG principally in order to legitimate the nation-state by espousing particular national narratives and lionizing the state; to promote among young people a sense of national homogeneity; to propagate particular mores related to gender, family, sex, and sexuality; and to affect the formation of a loyal elite for the state’s future. The paper aims to contribute to the comparative-politics subfield by enhancing scholars’ knowledge of authoritarian governance, ideological resources in authoritarian contexts, and, most importantly, the relationship between the authoritarian state and young people.

Key terms:

authoritarianism
authoritarian youth group
ideological resources
youth politics
## Table of Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements..............................................................................................................ii  
Chapter I  Introduction: Bringing Youth In.................................................................1  
Chapter II  The Pied Piper Wears Black: Fascist AYG.................................26  
Chapter III  The Pied Piper Wears Red: Communist AYG.........................52  
Chapter IV  Nashi in Putin’s Russia.................................................................75  
Chapter V  Conclusions.................................................................94  
Bibliography......................................................................................................................98
In the summer of 2011, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned a California law which prohibited the sale of violent video games to minors. The lopsided majority took seriously California’s interest in shielding children from certain aspects of the adult world, but decided that the country’s most populous state had gone too far. The Court rejected the video-game law on the grounds that the First Amendment protects the free dissemination of—in the Court’s language—“ideas.” Unlike obscene materials, for which the Constitution offers no protection, video games were akin to “books, plays, and movies,” and therefore fell within the purview of free speech. Justice Scalia, who delivered the opinion of the Court, was characteristically terse: “No doubt a State possesses legitimate power to protect children from harm…but that does not include a free-floating power to restrict the ideas to which children may be exposed.”

The immediate ramifications of the Court’s decision are probably few. Nevertheless, it begs several important questions. Is it true that the First Amendment prohibits, or at least discourages, government from stifling certain “ideas”? Does the First Amendment also prohibit government from promoting certain ideas? When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the early nineteenth century, he famously discovered that Americans’ alacritous democratic impulses were not always accompanied by liberal values. This might have been especially true when it came to “the domain of conscience.” In his review of the first Europeans to settle New England in the early seventeenth century, Tocqueville

---

1 The Court wrote, in part: “Like the protected books, plays, and movies that preceded them, video games communicate ideas—and even social messages—through many familiar literary devices…and through features distinctive to the medium…. That suffices to confer First Amendment protection.” Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association, 559 S. Ct. 1448 (2010).
memorably discovered “more notions of rights, more principles of true freedom spread among them than in most of the peoples of Europe.” Yet this “true freedom” was hardly absolute; far from strident libertarians, these forebears of the American state governed with a heavy hand, according to Tocqueville, not least in order to shape and maintain ideas. If the author of *Democracy in America* is to be trusted, the Court’s video-game decision in 2011 deviated conspicuously from the approach of the first Americans. Indeed, it would seem that Tocqueville, far more than Scalia, recognized government’s ideological aims—and its tendency to pursue those aims.

The governments of these early Americans were surely not the first to demand a certain homogeneity of ideas, beliefs, “mores,” and so on among ordinary people, and certainly they were not the last, as I show in detail in the present study. But rather than focusing here on the United States and its democratic analogues in Europe and elsewhere, I turn instead to authoritarian states. While ideological resources are an essential element of power in all political contexts, and as such are neither incidental nor peripheral to state officials, I argue that this is especially so in authoritarian situations. In particular, I endeavor in this paper, like the Supreme Court in 2011, to consider the relationship between state ideological goals, on the one hand, and young people, on the other. I try to show that states’ attempts to inure their youth populations to the beliefs, convictions, and values of officialdom constitute a critical element of modern social life. As we will see in Chapter I, “bringing youth in” to the study of the modern state addresses a long-overlooked gap in the literature. The present paper is

---

2 According to Tocqueville’s latter-day account, “legislators…constantly penetrate into the domain of conscience,” he seethed, “and there is almost no sin that does not fall subject to the censure of the magistrate.” Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 29 and 38, respectively.
meant to begin what has the potential to be, and certainly deserves to be, a much bigger project.

To be clear, my focus on authoritarian states in the present paper should not be taken to mean that state-youth relations are unimportant in liberal democracies. But whereas liberal democracies, by definition, protect certain freedoms—freedoms of association, religion, speech, and so on—which militate against the ideological hegemony of the state itself, authoritarian states’ quest for ideological resources tends to go largely unchecked. States of the authoritarian sort are relatively free to pursue ideological hegemony legally, and indeed often go so far as to prohibit organized opposition. With regard to young people in particular, time and again authoritarian states have betrayed their fear of losing the loyalty and obedience of children, adolescents, and young adults. The authoritarian youth group, or AYG, whose contours I begin to sketch in this short study, is a manifestation of this fear.

My initial interest in young people and their relationship to the state was sparked a few years ago, when I was in high school. Only in graduate school, however, have I begun seriously to examine the political implications and significance of this relationship. I would certainly not have been able to do so, and would not have thought to do so, without the counsel of my able and enthusiastic adviser, Professor Gerald Easter. I thank Professor Easter for his good cheer and generosity, his intelligence, his patience, and for his trust. Many thanks are due also to Professor Jonathan Laurence, whose advice, erudition, and great kindness I appreciate very much.

I am forever indebted to Professor Kathleen Bailey, with whom I wrote my BA thesis and under whose tutelage I came to love comparative politics, and to Professor Robert Faulkner, whose generosity and kindness I will never forget. I thank also Professor Dana
Sajdi, a great intellectual, a wonderful teacher, and a dear friend, and my mentor, Dean Akua Sarr, for her years of friendship, encouragement, and support. In addition, and not incidentally, I wish to thank (in alphabetical order) Professors Ali Banuazizi, Tim Crawford, David Deese, Jytte Klausen, and Shep Melnick. Each has taught me a great deal about politics and scholarship. Thanks are also due to Dr. Elizabeth Vinton, from whose care and wisdom I have long benefited, and to Carol Fialksoky and Shirley Gee for their assistance over the years.

Finally, from the bottom of my heart, I thank my family. Without the constant encouragement and love of my parents, David and Terrilyn, I would scarcely have made it to Boston six years ago, much less Boston College. I thank also my sister, Emily, whose individualism, intelligence, and wit would make her a great source of irritation to any authoritarian regime. And I thank Braden Pate, my one and only, who gives me the stars and the moon every day.
Chapter I: Bringing Youth In

“[A] government knows only how to dictate precise rules; it imposes the sentiments and the ideas that it favors, and it is always hard to distinguish its counsels from its orders.”
—Alexis de Tocqueville

I. Introduction: Authoritarian Youth Groups and Ideology as a Power Resource

The present study rests on the theoretical premise that the modern state works hard to promote certain ideas among its citizens or subjects, precisely in order to promote itself and its objectives. State officials do so consciously, acting as competitors with actors at the civil-society level, who similarly seek to curry ideological support for themselves and for their own agendas. Stated broadly, this basic competition is the subject of this paper. Specifically, I train my focus on states’ ideological power vis-à-vis young people. The nexus between this population and state power is crucial, yet has gone all but unnoticed by comparativists. In the following pages, I offer a description of the project at hand and provide a short review of the relevant literature.

In particular, this study tries to examine the common but little-studied political institution that I call the authoritarian youth group (AYG). Authoritarian youth groups are cadres of youth which are constructed and maintained by authoritarian states for primarily (I will argue) ideological purposes. Examples of AYG include, from the former Soviet Union, the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League (VLKSM, or Komsomol); from Nazi Germany, the Hitler Youth (Hitler Jugend, or HJ); and various contemporary groups, such as Nashi.

---

(“Ours”) in Russia, to which we turn in Chapter IV. By elucidating the principal functions of these groups, the paper aims to shine light on a critical feature of the authoritarian state.

Although states construct authoritarian youth groups for myriad purposes, usually under the pressures of war or impending war, their most important function tends to be the ideological. More often than not, even if they perform other functions, AYG are intended by their creators to diffuse, and sometimes to enforce, the beliefs, customs, and values of the state. AYG are intended by states to “suck up the oxygen”: to drown out private youth associations and to counteract, or even silence, non-state sources of ideas and opinion to which young people might be attracted. I argue that all states, but especially authoritarian states, seek ideological resources, not least among young people, in order to undergird their infrastructural capacity, that is, their influence within—and over—society. Ultimately, a state is strong not merely by collecting revenue and wielding coercion, but also by conceiving and disseminating ideas, narratives, and counter-narratives.

Indeed, it is revealing that the great despotisms of the nineteenth century could far more readily advance a limited form of “social citizenship,” to borrow T.H. Marshall’s language, than “political citizenship.” Why? It would seem that whereas the former implied a certain narrow social-welfare regime (some degree of workers’ protection, for instance), the latter implied, at least in part, that ordinary people would be free to access and distribute ideas. Arguably, widespread political citizenship was slower to emerge because state officials

---

2 In a well-known formulation, Michael Mann differentiates “despotic power” from “infrastructural power,” and thereby assesses the relative ability of the state effectively to make policy—separate and apart from “civil society groups”—on the one hand, and then actually to implement that policy, on the other. Unlike despotic power, infrastructural power therefore implies that “the state actually…penetrate[s] civil society, [that it is able] to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm.” Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results,” in States in History, ed. John A. Hall, 109-136 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986).
believed they could ill-afford the competition that it would entail. That is, at least in some sense, governments clearly feared losing ideological resources more than they feared the monetary expenditures necessitated by the welfare state.\(^3\) Thus, for instance, the Soviet state could pride itself on the robustness of its social-welfare offerings even as it demanded ideological predominance.\(^4\)

The AYG phenomenon on which this paper focuses lends itself precisely to the sort of cross-case analysis that this study endeavors to provide. Even the Hitler Jugend, arguably the most ambitious AYG ever constructed, is in most ways quite similar to other authoritarian youth groups. To be sure, what made the HJ more ambitious than other AYG is that membership in it was mandatory for young Germans: in March 1939, on the eve of the war, the state decreed that every person aged between ten and eighteen was required to serve in the HJ.\(^5\) No other AYG that we will encounter in this study, including the Soviet Komsomol, required all of its young subjects to join. Nevertheless—and this is the most important point—the essential ideological goals of the HJ were remarkably consistent with the ideological goals of AYG in general. It would seem that states, across space and time,

\(^3\) “The sticking-point was over political citizenship,” writes Michael Mann of these states in his critique of Marshall. “Real parliaments could not be conceded; democrats could not be allowed absolute freedoms of the press, speech or assembly.” Mann, States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988), 197.


\(^5\) It is important to recognize that this was no small feat. As Sheri Berman has pointed out, civil society thrived under the transitory Weimar government, providing space to actors of many stripes in which to seek power. Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” World Politics 49, no. 3 (April 1997): 401-429, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054008. In this respect, youth groups were no exception. As Herbert Moller writes, “Even during the relatively prosperous years of the Weimar Republic, young people of the large youth cohorts were marching and rallying. Never before had German youth formed so many organizations, each of which combined comradeship among members with intense hatred of opponents.” Herbert Moller, “Youth as a Force in the Modern World,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 10, no. 3 (April 1968): 244, http://www.jstor.org/stable/177801.
tend to have four distinct but interrelated ideological objectives vis-à-vis their youth populations, and that these objectives are abundantly in evidence in the AYG that they erect. In the next section, we will turn to each of these objectives in turn.

It must be said that the authoritarian youth group is by no means the only tool with which states attempt to achieve ideological power over young people. Research has shown that public education, most importantly, is formative not only of youth identity by its very nature, but also that it has important political effects. It would seem, indeed, that V.I. Lenin’s famous characterization of “the state” as “a special kind of cudgel” is accurate, but only partially so; the Bolshevik leader might have added that the state is also, and not incidentally, a special kind of pedagogue. Certainly the public schoolroom, more than any other modern space, has become central to states’ ideological goals. Perhaps most notable in this regard is the French state, which has transformed the schoolhouse into a production center for young citoyens. As Eugen Weber demonstrated in his path-breaking study of state-building in nineteenth-century France, the late 1800s witnessed a dramatic push by the state to educate French youngsters not only in the French language (which was astonishingly

---

6 See, e.g., Bayat and Herrera, who write, “Mass schooling is instrumental in the production and prolongation of being young, because it sets youngsters apart from the world of work and responsibility, while at the same time generating some degree of self-reliance where the individual makes choices and expresses autonomous ideas.” Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera, “Introduction: Being Young and Muslim in Neoliberal Times,” in Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North, eds. Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

7 A recent study of schools in the UK and Germany, for example, illustrates the capacity of the school to mold students’ postures toward their own countries and to “Europe” as a whole. Whereas German schools tend to focus on “Europe,” rather than the German nation-state per se, British kids are much more exposed to British identity than to a European identity as such. The results are intuitive: schoolchildren in Germany, the study claims, are much more accustomed to the European identity than are their British counterparts. Daniel Faas, “Youth, Europe and the Nation: the Political Knowledge, Interests and Identities of the New Generation of European Youth,” Journal of Youth Studies 10, no. 2 (2007): 161-181, http://hdl.handle.net/2262/22299.

absent from the quotidian realities of many “French” citizens) but also in French nationalism.⁹ As Weber noted, education “had to teach children national and patriotic sentiments, explain what the state did for them and why it exacted taxes [capital] and military service [coercion], and show them their true interest in the fatherland.”¹⁰

And France was not alone: in Germany during World War I, the state turned to “war pedagogy,” or Kriegspädagogik, transforming the formerly apolitical classroom into a production center for young ideologues. As Andrew Donson shows in his recent study, this new approach to education was warmly embraced and enormously effective, ginning up youngsters as never before.¹¹ Clearly, then, in Germany as in France, the school became but one of various features of public life through which the state sought to influence young people. But whereas public education has long provoked the interest of scholars, the significance of the authoritarian youth group has been, if not disputed, generally ignored.

II. AYG and Ideology as a Total Culture

Scholars of comparative politics have spilt a great deal of ink in recent decades highlighting the prominent role of the state in the modern world. This reemergence of interest in the state can be traced to the late 1960s, when the erstwhile predominance of

---

⁹ Eugen Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 310-314 and 330-338. It should be noted also that the promulgators of the Revolution of 1789 had been keenly aware of the role education could play, and ought to play, in the promotion of national feelings, but they never lived to see their ambitions on this score realized. Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen, 334.

¹⁰ Ibid., 332. See also 336.

¹¹ It is important to note that the apolitical nature of the classroom was not a result merely of “custom” but also—and revealingly—of law. But a funny thing happened when war came in 1914. As one scholar notes, “Because of the Bürzelfrieden and the censorship of pacifists, officials and teachers no longer believed that the topic of German world power was political and violated custom and paragraph 17 of the Reich Law of Association. As a result, teachers now regularly discussed German military might with their pupils.” Andrew Donson, Youth in the Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism, and Authority in Germany, 1914-1918 (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 59.
behavioralist accounts waned as scholars rediscovered the explanatory power of official institutions as independent variables. By “bringing the state back in,” scholars dramatically reoriented comparative politics, such that today the autonomy of the state is practically axiomatic.12 This paper joins this tradition. Here I posit “the state…not as neutral, but as an actor in its own right and in competition with societal actors over power resources.”13 The state I describe is not a referee on the sidelines, as the liberal conception would imagine it, but a player on the field; it is neither a natural outgrowth of its population (or its “nation”), as a certain organic understanding implies, nor the tool of the capitalist bourgeoisie or international financial barons, as Marxists and neo-Marxists would have it. Instead, the state is an actor all its own, possessed of its own interests and its own set of tools with which to pursue those interests. Among states’ chief interests is ideological power, which it endeavors with particular avarice to attain among young people.

The term “ideological power” is bandied about in the academic literature, yet still seems to lack usable definitions. No attempt toward an exhaustive definition is made here, but some unpacking of the term is nevertheless necessary. A useful starting point comes from what is perhaps an unlikely source. In 1935, an astute observer of culture and politics, Herman Finer, published a lengthy exegesis on the Fascist state in Italy, then at the height of its power. In *Mussolini’s Italy*, Finer dissects, piece-by-piece, the world that the Duce created. Especially useful for our purposes here is a memorable passage in which Finer describes the totality of Mussolini’s ideological goals vis-à-vis youngsters:


The Fascist [Finer tells us] says, “Let us secure the young people before they have time to think; before other ideas are put into their heads by teaching or experience. Let us teach them the truth before they have learnt error. Let us take them when they are impressionable, and if they should never become entirely anyone else’s.” The theory is to strengthen some of the dispositions in the young, and to atrophy others; to make some reactions prompt, automatic, and pleasurable, and others painful. Reason will thus be excluded or attenuated, and an automatically uttered phrase will be the screen between reality and mind.\footnote{Herman Finer, \textit{Mussolini’s Italy}, rev. ed. (1935; repr., Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964), 426.}

Young people, then, were to be shaped by the state, in no insignificant way. They were to be fed beliefs and opinions, as a matter of course, but more than that they were to be \textit{conditioned}; their “reason” was to be taken from them and replaced with particular feelings and modes of thought. These feelings and modes of thought were to be determined from above and were—crucially—to be unfettered by society-level actors.

All states, as we have already said, whether liberal-democratic or “totalitarian,” aim to condition the populations they govern to some extent. In general, we might say that “ideological power” refers to the capacity of a state, and indeed any organization—a state, an agency within a state, a political party, a firm, or any organization of the sort—to produce within a given population dedication to and support for that organization. However, as we have already started to see, the \textit{competition} for ideological resources which takes place in liberal contexts prevents any one actor, public or private, from achieving ideological predominance. Only in authoritarian contexts, where such competition is, if not stamped out, severely curtailed, can the state achieve near-total ideological hegemony. Young people in general, and authoritarian youth groups in particular, are often critical in pursuing that goal.
To some extent, the processes by which this hegemony is achieved might be termed “socialization,” but that does not quite express the totality of the phenomenon in its most extreme form. Moreover, it is more than “ideology” as such that these states intend to propagate. What we actually mean when we speak of authoritarian states’ “ideological” aims is these states’ capacity (and their exploitation of that capacity) to produce and mandate no less than a total culture. Ideology of a peculiarly religious sort is indeed the DNA of this culture insofar as it informs its content, erects its demigods, and announces its sins and its sinners. But it is important to recognize that “ideological power,” at least in the authoritarian or totalitarian context, is not narrow or limited, but total. For these governments, not just any culture, but only an all-encompassing culture, is acceptable. These cultures are all-encompassing both in that they are intended to affect every aspect of life for those living within them and in that they seek to destroy any cultural marker which contradicts, or even subordinates, their omnipotence. As one historian notes of the Third Reich, “National Socialism was a religion; the depth of the ideology, the liturgy, the element of hope, all helped to give the movement the character of a new faith…. Nazism was a total world view which by its very nature excluded all others.”

The totality of these cultural-political ideologies is evident, for example, in the politicization of seemingly apolitical activities. What is more, this transformation of the apolitical into the deeply political, the private into the public, is often especially evident in

15 George L. Mosse, “Introduction,” in Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich, ed. George L. Mosse (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), xxxi. See also, for example, where Heinrich Himmler said this to some of his generals: “Whether nations live in prosperity or starve to death interests me only in so far as we need them as slaves for our Kultur: otherwise, it is of no interest to me.” Quoted in Robert Jervis, The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statescraft and the Prospect of Armageddon (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 127.
states’ treatment of young people in AYG. The political implications of long hikes through the woods, for example, might not at first be apparent to most of us, but to the Hitler Youth such hikes were entirely political. Baldur von Schirach, the chief of youth affairs in the Third Reich, said so explicitly:

If German youth today takes hikes, it does not do so with a false and gushing sentimentality intoxicated with Nature, but even here it subordinates its action to a political purpose. German youth roams the countryside in order to know its fatherland and, above all, comrades in other parts of the Reich. Anyone who has experienced the German Volk community and has learned to appreciate his fatherland in this way, in terms of the National Socialist ideology, will be able, if called upon to do so, to defend this state with his life.\(^{16}\)

Again: the transformation of a hike in the forest into an explicitly political venture is of course characteristic of Nazi Germany and its authoritarian brethren insofar as these states considered all behavior political to one degree or another. According to von Schirach, hiking in the woods—which had been, not incidentally, a standard activity of youth groups in the pre-Nazi era\(^ {17}\)—had profound nationalist implications, for young people and for the whole of the Volk. Hikes, then, like so many other activities of no obvious political value, clearly contributed to the ideological power of the state. Alternative youth groups, meanwhile, that is to say youth groups beyond the control of the state, had been banned by law in Germany, limiting youth associational life to the Hitler Jugend and the other Nazi AYG.

Sometimes, even basic behavioral norms and standards, which are on their face totally unrelated to political life, are intertwined by AYG with deeply political principles. Pioneers in early Communist China, for example, were told to live by several “rules of conduct”


which “required them to study well, work well, love the collective, struggle against bad people and bad deeds, and refrain from beating or scolding.” 18 The politicization of the putatively apolitical was also a major feature of the Soviet Union, and, in fact, as one excellent study of the Komsomol notes, some members of that AYG were actually most attracted to its seemingly apolitical activities, precisely because they lacked obvious political overtones. 19

Still—and this was the important point—politics could never be eluded:

“The literary, dramatic, dancing, and singing groups which the Komsomol sponsors provide some relief from the incessant and concentrated political bombardment to which youth is exposed, but even these forms of social-cultural activity are far from being apolitical. Komsomolites participating in a series of evenings devoted to Pushkin discuss papers on such themes as “Pushkin and the Decembrists,” “Pushkin on Capitalism,” “Pushkin-Patriot,” “Pushkin and the Present,” and “Pushkin’s Criticism of America.” The dramatic groups read and produce plays from the contemporary Soviet repertoire which are heavily saturated with doctrinal content. Even the dancing and singing are partly organized around political themes. In the Soviet state there is no real escape from the long arm of ideological control.” 20

But what did this “long arm” hope to achieve? With what beliefs, convictions, and values do authoritarian states wish to imbue their young people? To what influences do they wish to expose them, and from what influences do they wish to shield them? That is, what are states’ specific ideological aims vis-à-vis young people? I argue that they tend to be of four distinct but interrelated types. Subsequent chapters will try to demonstrate that these four basic goals, enumerated and described presently, are evident in the practices and pronouncements of AYG.

19 The state demanded that Komsomol members engage in “social-cultural activity” so as “to cultivate many-sided interests in order to make himself a ‘whole’ man. This is the area which the less fervid members find most attractive, because of its relative removal from the political realm.” Quoted in Merle Fainsod, “The Komsomols—A Study of Youth Under Dictatorship,” The American Political Science Review 45, no. 1 (March 1951): 34, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1950882.
20 Ibid. Emphasis added.
A. *State Raison d’être: National Mythology and the Necessity of the State*

In the classic sociological formulation, “stable authority” has two ingredients: power and legitimacy. But how is power maintained and legitimated in authoritarian states? The question is an old one, but it remains timely both for historians and for students of politics. For modern states, one well-worn path to legitimacy is “national” or statist mythology. Such mythology insists not only on the naturalness of the state but also on the necessity of the state for the continuation of the nation. This is clearly true not only in authoritarian, but also in liberal-democratic, contexts. The preservation of the Crown was essential to the preservation of the English people, e.g., in the same way that the rarefied stature of the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R. ensured the continuation of international, socialist revolution. I argue that promulgating this sense of the state’s necessity is a key objective of AYG.

Authoritarian states of revolutionary origin arguably work especially hard to impress upon their subjects, and maybe their youngest subjects in particular, these nationalist-statist *raisons d’être*. Exactly because they acquired power on the basis of revolution, governors in these states tend to be particularly bent on continually ensuring that the original revolutionary fervor which brought them to power is felt by every successive “generation.” Only by doing so can they (or so they seem to believe) maintain their authority. Because, in general, these states’ embryonic forms were “intolerant radical reformist movements” (the early Nazis in Germany and the Bol’sheviks in Communist Russia come to mind immediately), statesmen have little choice but “to generate waves of simulated permanent

---

revolution to harness the energies of new generations, lest genuine, ideologically independent and thus revisionist social movements displace the prevalent political order.”

In this sense, AYG are clearly meant to be bulwarks against counter-revolutionary forces. When Leonid Brezhnev, for example, worried aloud at the Komsomol Congress in 1966 that contemporary youngsters, far removed from the Revolution of 1917, would be unable to carry on the socialist revolution with the same gusto of their parents and grandparents, he expressed an anxiety common to revolutionary despots.

B. National Homogeneity

Part and parcel of national myth-making is an insistence on the homogeneity of the national population. The National Socialists in interwar Germany offer the most well-known and surely the most hideous example of this aspect of nationalism, but in fact the myth of national homogeneity of one sort or another—civic, ethnic, racial—is commonplace. Moreover, there is a clear connection between perceived national homogeneity among a populace and the amassment of the tangible power resources, money and coercive strength, by the state. As Anthony W. Marx notes, “People are usually willing to sacrifice their money, lives, or liberty”—all demanded by the modern state by way of taxation, war, and often substantial regulatory regimes—“only to those with whom they feel

---

22 As a result, as one scholar has put it, “one of the measures of totalitarianism [is] whether or not it manages to evolve a comprehensive youth organization. Such a youth organization is considered an indispensable agent for the socialization of maturing youth.” Daniel Kubat, “Totalitarian Youth Movement As a Career Mechanism: The Case in Czechoslovakia,” Social Forces 43, no. 3 (March 1965): 417-418, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2574772.

a bond of similarity.”²⁴ Likewise, and needless to say, the enemy nation’s putative
differences, real or imagined, are always ripe for exploitation and vilification by the
nationalist state.

If only as a short aside, it is worth noting that young people are very frequently
nationalism’s greatest adherents, its leaders as well as its most strident followers. This may
help explain the great lengths to which states go to ensure that youngsters are avid adherents
to the nationalist credo. As Herbert Moller points out in a far-reaching study, young people
were instrumental to the making of the French Revolution of 1789,²⁵ in which the great
puissance of nationalism first revealed itself, and, similarly, in the middle of the nineteenth
century the great Italian nationalists Mazzini and Garibaldi relied on the support of
youngsters, as they acknowledged. Mazzini, for instance, expected to discover among young
people “a host of apostles for the new religion,” as he put it²⁶—and, it would seem, his
prediction was right. By the dawn of the twentieth century, when Europe’s great empires
were (though their leaders may not have known it) on their last legs, young people were
often at the heart of resistance movements. As Moller notes, for instance, the greatest threat
to the Habsburgs came from nationalist Serbs and Croats in would-be Yugoslavia, precisely
where the population of Austria-Hungary was the youngest and precisely where Archduke
Ferdinand’s assassin was mobilized, by June 1914, as part of the Young Bosnia movement.²⁷

At the level of the authoritarian youth group, homogeneity among members is
consistently sought by state architects, particularly in order to sap individualism, promote

---
²⁵ Moller, “Youth as a Force,” 240.
²⁶ Quoted in ibid., 241.
²⁷ Ibid. 242-243.
esprit de corps, and heighten feelings of national fraternity. For example, Michael Kater attests the strict homogeneity demanded by the Hitler Youth. He also shows the blurry line between political ideology and culture:

The HJ’s idealized self-image was stiflingly uniform and militantly exclusive at the same time…. This uniformity was manifested not just by the required clothing—black shorts and trousers and khaki shirts for the boys, and long braids or rolls for the girls. Within specifically German frameworks, the ideologically racist Hitler Youth defined itself for practical purposes through folk songs, life in the outdoors, and physical exercise—said to be the opposite of international decadent Jewry, American-style films and jazz, and modern international art forms.28

C. Reproduction from Above: the Familial-Sexual Narrative

It is one of the paradoxes of authoritarian governance that the state must at once promote family life whilst seeking, if not the outright destruction of families, then certainly the transformation of the traditional family in light of its own power interests. Naturally, concerns about family life and the various tangential issues (abortion, adoption, marriage, and so on) are not unique to governors of authoritarian states. Reproduction, in particular, arouses unique concern among policymakers in states of all stripes. That states of all sorts require populations, and that procreation is the only way to maintain and develop populations, is intuitive enough. But the ideological imperatives of the authoritarian state, rather than merely the biological imperatives of population maintenance, tend to necessitate a particularly aggressive circumscription of familial autonomy. Man and woman must devote themselves to one another and produce children, but their devotion to the family as such must be rather less than total. Among the results is that the familial diversity common in certain liberal societies today—the presence and widespread toleration of one-parent

28 Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 27.
families, same-sex couples, and so on—has little or no place in the authoritarian state, where
governors have proved far more amenable to traditionalism than to the burgeoning customs
of freer societies around the world. Homosexuality, in particular, tends to be considered a
great sin by authoritarian orthodoxy.

Children, meanwhile, with whom we are most concerned here, are ideally far less
dependent on Mother and Father than on the State, which is frequently anthropomorphized
as maternal or paternal in state mythology, not incidentally. A poem featured in a Nazi
textbook, for example, depicted children loving Hitler as they loved their parents. The kids
were shown “offering to help, obey and make him happy,” just as they would their parents.29
In addition, and even more important than this, are efforts by states to drive children away
from their parents and toward the open arms of the state. As Finer noted in his study of life
in Fascist Italy, a sort of “moral kidnapping” was taking place there, such that children, led
from Mother and Father by “non-rational seductions,” rejected the home in favor of the
Fascist state.30

Sometimes authoritarian states succeed in one of their ghastliest goals: rendering parents
afraid of their children. It was precisely this phenomenon upon which the playwright Bertolt
Brecht put his finger in the 1930s when he wrote “The Spy,” a short scene in his play, Fear
and Misery of the Third Reich, to which we will turn in the next chapter.31 Revealingly, several
years later, well after the end of the Second World War and the collapse of Nazism, George

29 Lisa Pine, “The Dissemination of Nazi Ideology and Family Values through School Textbooks,” History of
30 Finer, Mussolini’s Italy, 441.
31 Bertolt Brecht, Fear and Misery of the Third Reich, in Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays, vol. 4, bk. 3, Bertolt Brecht: Plays,
Orwell would examine this theme, among others, in *1984*. One particular passage from the novel is worth quoting at length:

With Julia, everything came back to her own sexuality…. Unlike Winston, she had grasped the inner meaning of the Party’s sexual puritanism. It was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party’s control and which therefore had to be destroyed if possible. What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war-fever and leader-worship. The way she put it was:

“When you make love you’re using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don’t give a damn for anything. They can’t bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time. All this marching up and down and cheering and waving flags is simply sex gone sour. If you’re happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother and the Three-Year Plans and the Two Minutes Hate and all the rest of their bloody rot?”

That was very true, he thought. There was a direct, intimate connection between chastity and political orthodoxy. For how could the fear, the hatred, and the lunatic credulity which the Party needed in its members be kept at the right pitch except by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force? The sex impulse was dangerous to the Party, and the Party had turned it to account. They had played a similar trick with the instinct of parenthood. The family could not actually be abolished, and, indeed, people were encouraged to be fond of their children, in almost the old-fashioned way. The children, on the other hand, were systematically turned against their parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations. The family had become in effect an extension of the Thought Police. It was a device by means of which everyone could be surrounded night and day by informers who knew him intimately.32

In truly a marvel of contemporary prose, Orwell points to several essential aspects of authoritarian governance, each having to do, again, with what in liberal contexts is generally recognized as private. Authoritarian states, certainly including the “revolutionary” Fascist

---


> By the time the Soviet Union had matured into late Stalinism most of the optimism that had pervaded earlier periods with regard to the potential of love and sex as the building blocks of communism had vanished, leaving a brooding suspicion against emotions between individuals that were capable of rivaling official prescribed relations. Friendship, love, and sex, were perceived to pose a constant threat and danger lurking in the recesses of private intimacy and individual choice, un conquered by Soviet collectivity and control.

and Communist states, demand “sexual puritanism,” even as they also demand—for the same reason—procreation. The family, meanwhile, was most assuredly to be preserved, but its most vulnerable members, the children, were more useful to the state as its agents than as the loving disciples of their parents.

D. Planning for the Future: Building the Next State Elite

As Joseph Goebbels famously put it: “He who has the young has the future.”

States tend to use authoritarian youth groups not only to indoctrinate youngsters, inuring them to the norms and teachings of the official ideology, but also as training programs for the next generation of state leaders and bureaucrats. That is, authoritarian youth groups are both formative and productive: formative of state loyalists in the short term and productive of the next crop of apparatchiki in the long term. Again and again, young people are asked to accept state orthodoxy \textit{and} to prepare to contribute to its next leaders. This appears to be especially true in states of revolutionary origins, where, as we have already started to see, officials tend to fear the revolutionary fervor of young people.

III. Conceptualizing AYG and the Organization of the Paper

Conceptualizing authoritarian youth groups is challenging for two reasons. First, as we have started to see, comparativists have historically demonstrated relatively little interest in young people, in spite of their enormous political importance. Moreover, when scholars do

\begin{itemize}
\item Because authoritarian youth groups are not wholly unique social phenomena, we ought to be able to classify them theoretically. In thinking about AYG, we might think of Rosenau, who famously asks, “Of what is it an instance?” As he writes, “To think theoretically is to be at home with abstractions, to generalize, to discern the underlying order that links otherwise discrete incidents, and such a mode of thinking cannot be achieved and maintained unless every observed phenomenon is approached as merely one instance of a recurring sequence.” James N. Rosenau, \textit{The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy}, rev. and enlarged ed. (London: Frances Pinter (Publishers) Limited, 1980), 24 and 25, respectively.
\end{itemize}
examine youth politics, they tend to focus on the political behavior and beliefs of young people rather than the official institutions which seek to affect them. Second, while comparative politics has developed extensive literatures on various types of social organization (premodern clans and tribes, modern nations and nation-states, political parties, social movements, and so on), the authoritarian youth group seems not to fit the models of collective political action with which we are most familiar. AYG are neither political parties nor interest groups, and they are also not “youth movements,” despite claims to the contrary. In this section, I examine each of these challenges in turn. I then offer a short description of the study at hand and present its basic organizational scheme.

A. Youth and the Study of Politics

The seeming lack of interest in youth by comparativists is hard to square with the great significance of youngsters in politics. There is no question but that a host of major policy arenas—crime control, healthcare, housing, immigration, poverty, and others—involves youngsters to one degree or another, and certainly education, more than any other major policy arena, is wrapped up immutably with young people and their fate. Yet if comparativists have succeeded in “bringing the state back in,” we seem to have failed to bring in youth much at all. Traditionally, among scholars of politics, political psychologists have taken perhaps the greatest interest in youth, but this has resulted largely in a focus on structural-sociological phenomena rather than expressly political factors. That is, instead of focusing on the interests of the state vis-à-vis young people, scholars have tended to examine youngsters’ political beliefs and behavior.

Among the consequences of this focus on young people rather than the state as such has been the rise of the so-called “generational perspective.” For scholars in this school, “social
change” hinged on young people, whose lack of connectedness to the society around them permitted them to “question the conditions of the social order”—and to change it.\(^3\) This approach to youth politics has persevered. Scholars who claim, for example, that youths’ penchant for new social instruments, such as the Internet, will make them “participants in the making of the new political order” draw on this tradition.\(^4\) A major forerunner of the generational approach was Karl Mannheim’s canonical essay, “The Problem of Generations,” in which he argued that individuals come to make up a generation not merely by sharing a chronological age with their co-generationals, but also by sharing a particular experience with them.\(^5\) In comparative politics, perhaps the most famous iteration of this approach is Ronald Inglehart’s *The Silent Revolution*, in which Inglehart observed a major shift in the “values” of Western Europeans and attributed the shift, in part, to the experiential variance from one generation to the next.\(^6\) In shaping “value priorities,” Inglehart insisted that “the impact of a given generation unit’s formative experiences seems to be the most significant variable not only empirically but theoretically as well.” Maybe surprisingly, even the international-relations subfield has found a use for the “generational” approach.\(^7\)

Quite clearly, then, in the study of history as well as politics, “generations” have proved to be of enduring interest to scholars. In this paper, to highlight the pitfalls of this


generational orientation (and there are a few) is less important than to point out in explicit terms that this study takes a different approach. By avoiding the historicization and operationalization of “generations” and trying instead to “see like a state,” I set my goals apart from many others in the “youth studies” field. To put it crudely: I am less interested here in youngsters’ responses to the state than in states’ efforts to empower themselves over youngsters. The argument set out here is not that young people tend to be slaves to the state; recent studies compellingly demonstrate that that is not so. But it is equally true that young people, like all individuals, interact with one another within particular contexts and under the weight of certain institutionally-imposed constraints. Among the most prevalent of these institutions is the AYG, which I try to examine here from the perspective of its architects rather than its members.

B. Conceptualizing AYG

What, then, are authoritarian youth groups? As we have already said, AYG are not political parties or social movements, nor are they departments or ministries. Even analytic concepts which seem useful at first blush, such as neocorporatism, are in fact inappropriate for AYG (although it is true that AYG sometimes represent young people to state officialdom, and in this way they may act in a corporatist capacity). It turns out that the best starting point is the lesser-known concept of the “administered mass organization,” or

---


41 Some partial analog might at first seem to exist between AYG and the various corporatist associations that have been contrived, especially by governments in Western Europe, since corporatism’s debut at the end of the nineteenth century. First, like their corporatist confreres, AYG serve as interlocutors between one societal subpopulation (youth), on the one hand, and the state, on the other. In the same way that the first corporatist associations existed at the meta-level in order to link state and civil-society organizations more closely, AYG are intended in part to connect officials to the many youngsters in their charge. For an excellent review of corporatism’s history as well as one contemporary iteration of it, see Jonathan Laurence, “The Corporatist Antecedent of Contemporary State-Islam Relations,” European Political Science 8, no. 3 (September 2009): 305, doi:10.1057/eps.2009.15.
AMO, proposed and analyzed by Gregory J. Kasza in his slim but valuable study, *The Conscription Society*. Kasza argues that the first AMOs were developed by governments in response to the putative insufficiency of popular mobilization during the First World War. Having wrongly anticipated a relatively short period of fighting in the opening days of the war, and suffering from generally weak infrastructural power, states inadequately mobilized their civilian populations to support the war effort. In order to rectify this deficiency, Kasza argues, states commenced to create AMOs. Authoritarian youth groups (as I call them) are one type of AMO. Indeed, the world’s first AMO (by Kasza’s estimation), was designed to co-opt young people! The group was set up in Japan in 1915 by the Home and Education Ministries “to organize boys during the six years between the age most left school and the age they became eligible for the draft and the reserves.” The Great Japan Youth League got off to a slow start, as Kasza explains, but ultimately evolved “into a full-fledged AMO, and they complemented it with AMOs for women, local residents, and industrial producers.”

It is worth pausing here, if only briefly, to highlight the etiology that Kasza suggests. Not only the first AMO, but also the AMO as an institution, got its start because of war. The

---

42 Kasza is valuable on the neocorporatist point. As he writes, neocorporatist organizations may indeed enjoy unique access to governments, but this special relationship…results from negotiation between two distinct entities…. Officials create AMOs to avoid the two-way pushing and pulling that characterizes the state’s interaction with interest groups, even in a neocorporatist context. They seek instead a one-sided relationship that the regime will dominate from the outset. In short, neocorporatism refers to a special relationship between the state and an interest group in a democratic framework, whereas AMOs embody an attempt by nondemocratic regimes to replace interest groups with a different type of organization.


43 Ibid., especially 15-18.

44 Ibid., 18-19.

connection between AYG and war is similarly strong. In early Communist China, the Chinese Youth League was actually “under the general direction” of the General Political Department of the People’s Liberation Army,46 and even Nashi, the Russian group to which we turn in Chapter IV, has its origins in war—or, at least, the fear of war.

In addition, outside the bounds of established politics, war has significant implications for young people and their relationship to the state. World War I clearly drove many young Germans toward political radicalism, while World War II convinced many young Russians in Stalin’s Soviet Union of the frailty of the state and of Communism itself.47 Meanwhile, to the west in occupied Germany, thousands of young Jewish survivors of the Holocaust were forced to consider their futures—and, at least according to some of them, to consider the future of the Jewish people. This pushed many toward Zionism and toward what would become the State of Israel.48

In general terms, then, war can push young people to embrace the state, to rebel against the state, or to organize in support of a new state altogether. Authoritarian youth groups, as we have established, represent one way that states try to co-opt this population. But how best to characterize AYG remains to be shown. Again, Kasza’s study of AMOs, of which AYGs are one specific sort, provides the key. Kasza correctly argues that the AMO as a political organization is distinct from the political party, which aims to acquire power by becoming part of government (from within), and the interest group, which acts at the society

---

47 See Donson, Youth in the Fatherless Land and Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, respectively.
level to try to influence government (that is, from without). He does not note specifically that AMOs similarly cannot be classified as “movements,” but he scarcely needs to do.

Movements, like interest groups, exist below the level of official politics, quite unlike AMOs (and AYGs, by extension). AMOs are invented by states, by definition. Indeed, by a paradox, the fallacious “movement” label is actually useful to states precisely because it connotes a grassroots organization rather than an arm of officialdom. In the same way that officials might speak and act under the auspices of “war,” e.g., or “democratization,” in order to benefit from the specific connotations of such words, officials in authoritarian states may misuse the “movement” label for their own purposes. In general, while there are certainly cases in which actual social movements are handily coopted by states, as well as cases in which party-affiliated youth groups only become AYG upon their party’s seizure of power, AYG need not, as a rule, have society-level antecedents.

C. Objectives and Organization

49 In Kasza’s words, “The AMO’s assigned task is not to take control of the government, but to subordinate its members to a political elite that already controls the government. AMOs are not organized spontaneously in civil society by persons who seek political power. They are created by incumbent regime officials to augment their control over the rest of society.” Kasza, *Conscription Society*, 8; for his general discussion of the political party and the interest group, see 8-11.


51 Consider the words of the Führer in 1934, from an address he gave to some sixty-thousand Hitler Youth members, in which he absurdly treats Nazism—which had by then overtaken the state, as he explicitly notes—as a “movement.” “Twelve months ago,” he said, “the struggle for power granted us success. And since then our movement, whose young vanguard you are and whose standard bearers you will be, has repossessed one position after the other in this state….” Quoted in Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 68. Remarkably, even scholars sometimes fall into this trap. For example, in his intriguing study of primary-source literature from the Soviet Komsomol and the Hitler Jugend, Gould missteps when he describes these organizations as “movements.” Julius Gould, “The Komsomol and the Hitler Jugend,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 4 (December 1951): 305-314, http://www.jstor.org/stable/588084.

52 Moreover, sometimes former members of youth organizations actually transition to officialdom with ease. For example, several of the top Nazi bigwigs, including Heinrich Himmler and Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Hoess, were erstwhile members of the rightwing youth group *Artamanen*. Not surprisingly, *Artamanen* transitioned like night into day from a free group in the Weimar era to a subsidiary of the Hitler Youth. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 34.
Finally, it is necessary to state precisely what this paper is (and what it is not) and to present its basic organizational scheme. This study begins to develop an argument which, as I have tried to show in these opening pages, attempts in various ways to bolster and expand the academic literature on the modern state and youth. In short, I argue that strong infrastructural power is contingent in large part on strong ideological power. Ideological power therefore complements, rather than replaces, the state’s capacity to collect revenue and monopolize coercion. The authoritarian youth group, which is one type of administered mass organization, is set up by states primarily to serve their ideological-power interests. But the present paper is far from exhaustive. Most of its conclusions are tentative. More research on the cases examined here, and on other cases, is clearly necessary. My goal in the following pages is simply to sketch the contours of the authoritarian youth group: to reveal its objectives and its important role in authoritarian governance. The paper should be viewed as expository, but it is ultimately only a first step toward what ought to be a rich literature on the modern state and young people.

The book consists primarily of case studies. In Chapter II, I turn to the Fascists of the mid-twentieth century. I pay particular attention to Germany under the National Socialists and Italy under Benito Mussolini. In Chapter III I turn to the Communists. I lay particular focus on the Komsomol, the most important AYG in the Soviet Union and, by 1991, the world’s largest youth organization. In Chapter IV, I examine the contemporary case of the Russian Nashi organization. In my final chapter, I offer a short summary of the argument

---

and suggest future avenues of research for scholars of the modern state and of youth politics.
Chapter II: The Pied Piper Wears Black: Fascist AYG

I. Introduction: The Cult of Youth and the Origins of Fascist AYG

The Fascists who came to power in interwar Europe conceived of themselves as participants in a youth movement. Nationalists above all else, the Fascists consciously used youth and youthfulness as the centerpiece of their agenda in a way that previous nationalist movements had not. The Fascists rallied supporters by decrying the establishment and promising that young people would be at the helm of the new guard. If previous nationalisms had been “youth” movements only unconsciously and superficially, as we saw in the preceding chapter, the Fascists were explicit in their intentions: the young would inherit the earth, and this meant that total control of the state—and ultimately the society beneath it—was the first step.

Sometimes, of course, this Fascist claim to youthfulness and supposed dedication to youth interests was less than believable. One observer of Mussolini’s Italy, for instance, noted incredulously in 1935 that “the founder of the movement, only thirty-nine years of age when he arrived in Rome, is already fifty-one, and bald and grey”; meanwhile, wrote this astute onlooker, “many of the Fascist leaders [who] wore grey beards in the early days…are now either dead or doddering.” Nevertheless, the cause of “youth,” endlessly romanticized by Mussolini and subsequently by Fascists elsewhere, was trumpeted. Over time, “the Cult of Youth became a characteristic, and even the outstanding feature, of the Fascist movement.”

---

1 The quotations belong to Herman Finer, Mussolini’s Italy, rev. ed. (1935; repr., Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964), 413; see generally 413-414.
Fascism’s lust for youth was not, however, as simple as preferring one age cohort to another. In the Italian case, Mussolini sought youth figuratively no less than literally; the Duce sought young supporters, of course, but he also sought to take possession of the idea of youth. In 1935, Herman Finer cheekily described the state’s top brass thus: “They are all drunk with youth. All promises are made to youth, all praises are sung to youth, all the future is entrusted to youth, it would seem sincerely and with confidence.” But the Cult of Youth fetishized youngsters not for their creativity or capacity for innovation, but rather for their fungibility and malleability. Youngsters were cherished only insofar as they were useful to the state, and they were useful to the state only insofar as they could be trained to adhere to and defend the cultural-ideological universe which state officialdom aspired to create. As Finer put it, in the Duce’s world, young people were to be ready to fight and do their duty, [and] their duty was to be a precise one, defined by the leaders. They were not encouraged to become citizens with independent minds, to train themselves for responsibility, and to discover freely the duties they thought it right to perform…. Youth has all the qualities of energy, generosity, enthusiasm, readiness to follow decided leadership, plasticity, which tend to action; and none of the qualities of knowledge, balance, reflection, self-criticism, experience of the margin between the ideal and the real, promise and performance, which would cause it to ask inconvenient questions of its leaders.

Certainly, young people had been romanticized by political elites well before Mussolini’s day. In Germany, for example, where “a veritable cult of youth” had developed in the Wilhelmine era, the Kaiser “was presented as the young emperor at the head of a young nation, ready to provide the inspiration for the creation of the more healthy world of the future.” As one historian explains, a major effect of the Great War “was that people in

---

2 Ibid., 414.
3 Ibid., 415.
virtually all youth associations started to think that they were the saving force for the nation and held the key to the future; they thus adopted the ideas of the youth cult of the pre-war years.”4 But the central position that youth and the idea of youth came to assume in Fascist contexts in the twentieth century was indeed novel, and clearly adumbrated the zeal with which the Fascist parties, once in control of states, would seek to control young people in the form of authoritarian youth groups.

Thus, in Italy in 1926, under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior, the state created the Institute for the National Balilla; shortly thereafter, in 1929, it would come under the control of the Ministry of Education. In April 1928, six years after Mussolini’s ascension, the state legally eliminated all youth organizations other than its own, explicitly in order to gain ideological hegemony.5 As Finer points out, this constituted a major victory for the state in opposition to that most traditional source of ideological authority in Italy: the Vatican.6 The major AYG for males in Fascist Italy were the Balilla, for boys between the ages of eight and fourteen, and the Avanguardisti, for male adolescents and young adults between the ages of fourteen and eighteen.7 In November 1934, the Wolf Cubs organization was created for kids between the ages of six and eight.8 For little girls, there were the Piccole Italiane, for

---

5 Finer, Mussolini’s Italy, 427-428.
6 “For how does the Balilla organisation [sic] conceive the task that lies before it? Certainly in a religious spirit, but not in a Catholic Christian spirit. Certainly as one of a grade of hierarchies leading up to an infallible authority, but not to the Pope. Certainly as a progress in fidelity and sacrifice, but neither to Christ nor to Peace.” Ibid., 429.
7 Ibid., 428.
8 Ibid., 444 and 446.
those between the ages of six and fourteen, and Giovani Italiane, for those between fourteen- and eighteen-years.9

In the German case, the Hitler Jugend (HJ) as it would exist at the apex of its power had a somewhat more complicated path to hegemony. The affairs of young people had been of great significance to the German state since at least the turn of the century. Indeed, the newly-unified German state had flirted with the authoritarian youth group well before the ascendance of the National Socialists. A turning point in Wilhelmine Germany came in 1911 with the Prussian Jugendpflege Edict. The Edict provided various financial goodies to “patriotic youth associations” whilst denying comparable benefits to Social Democratic youth groups. The state’s aim was to instill patriotism in young people at the expense of “the secular, internationalist, and antimilitarist” agenda of the Social Democrats.10 Almost needless to say, the state’s objectives were to curry war-making prowess and—not incidentally—ideological resources.11 For example, the Jugendpflege created new bureaucrats tasked with establishing “military youth companies” for teenaged boys. As Andrew Donson notes, these groups were of “little military value” (and thus did little to increase the state’s coercive or war-making power per se), yet “played a key role in making male youths excited about becoming soldiers,” and in this sense clearly had a significant ideological, as opposed to coercive, function. The state-run “youth centers” that would

---

9 See ibid., 443-444. It should be noted that one observer, P.W.L. Cox, writes that boys between six- and fourteen-years, rather than eight- and fourteen-years (as Finer says), participated in the Balilla, but this appears to be a mistake. The two authors, Finer and Cox, seem to agree on the ages for the girls’ groups. It should be noted also that I rely on Cox for the Italian names of the girls’ organizations. P.W.L. Cox, “Opera Nazionale Balilla: An Aspect of Italian Education,” in “Integration,” Junior-Senior High School Clearing House 9, no. 5 (January 1935): 268, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30176386.
10 Andrew Donson, Youth in the Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism, and Authority in Germany, 1914-1918 (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 53.
11 Ibid., 54.
emerge during the war reflected the same goal\textsuperscript{12} and clearly prefigured the militaristic ideology of the National Socialists.

There is no question but that policies like the Jugendpflege Edict reflected the Prussian state’s interest in currying ideological favor among young people—and in denying ideological power to alternative voices. However, as we will see, an important theoretical and practical distinction separates such policies from the strategy Hitler would pursue twenty years later following the Weimar collapse. If, under the Kaiser, the state’s ideological efforts vis-à-vis young people had stopped short of eliminating civil society, the Third Reich knew no such boundary, especially after 1936, when all youth organizations other than the Hitler Youth were banned. While the Jugendpflege had existed alongside, rather than to the exclusion of, a variety of non-state groups—which “claim[ed],” in the words of one historian, “autonomy for the young generation”\textsuperscript{13}—the National Socialists’ quest for ideological uniformity demanded that civil-society checks on the power of the Nazi state be eliminated. Clearly enough, as we have already seen, Mussolini’s government in Italy took similar steps.

Especially in light of the HJ’s prominence in the collective memory of Nazism, it is noteworthy that young people as a population had not always been part of Hitler’s plan. Only on the eve of his ascension to the Chancellorship did Hitler’s astonishing aloofness to the utility of youth finally abate, reportedly after the Führer was counseled by such heavy-hitters as Goebbels and Strasser.\textsuperscript{14} True, young Nazi sympathizers had long mobilized

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 116 and 143-144, respectively.
\textsuperscript{13} Reulecke, “The Battle for the Young,” 101; see in general 99-101.
\textsuperscript{14} One scholar notes,

At first Hitler had been oblivious to the problems of youth, since adolescents were too young to vote or attain Party membership. Thus he could not understand why anyone among his followers would want to found, during the mid-1920s, a Nazi Students’ League. But once he had been persuaded by
behind the National Socialists, and certainly Hitler, like Mussolini, had always recognized the importance of young people in an abstract sense. Hitler was first and foremost an ideologue, and his ideology was based on a race “theory” which, as such, was in large part contingent on reproduction and (consequently) on children. But only well after his rise to power had begun did Hitler catch on to the immediate, political relevance of young people.

The first group of young Nazis to be affiliated with NSDAP emerged in 1925; the “Hitler-Jugend” appellation first appeared in 1926. In 1930, the HJ expanded, inaugurating the League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel, or BDM) as well as the Jungvolk for kids aged ten to fourteen. Still, however—and this point cannot be neglected—the HJ at that point faced a serious competitor. Still in 1930, the anti-Weimar and antisemitic Bundische Jugend enjoyed a far larger membership than the Nazis’ youth group, whose membership was only 20,000 compared to Bundische Jugend’s 50,000. 15 Only after Hitler became Chancellor could Baldur von Schirach, the Nazis’ chief of youth affairs since 1931, commence to bring together all young Germans under the banner of the Hitler Youth. Upon the Nazi seizure of power, as we saw above, all rival political parties and their affiliates, including their youth affiliates, were banned, and three years later, in February 1936, the Gestapo proscribed all non-Nazi youth groups. At this point, “[t]he annual enrolment of 10-year-olds became bureaucratic routine; only in the big cities and sometimes in rural districts was there any


15 Ibid., 15-16.
possibility of eluding” it. Still more aggressive was the Party’s decree in March 1939, on the eve of the war, mandating that every person between the ages of ten and eighteen serve in the HJ. *Bundische Jugend*, far more popular than the HJ less than a decade before, was a thing of the past.

For his part, von Schirach made no bones about the HJ’s central place in German life. He recognized, as he stated, that Nazi ideals required the total cooptation of young people. Moreover, it wasn’t enough that non-Nazi youth associations be destroyed to make way for the HJ; as von Schirach explained, the individual had similarly to be destroyed. “Thus the Jungvolk youngster who at the age of ten enters the movement...soon learns to subordinate his own petty will to the laws which have built states and made whole nations happy, but the violation of which results in the loss of freedom and the collapse of the Volk.” The logic was clear enough: participation outside of the Nazi institutional landscape, which was necessarily an outgrowth of the Nazi Weltanschauung and whose tenets more or less precluded individual autonomy or identity, amounted to an attack on the Volk itself. We will see presently that the Fascists in Italy used remarkably similar language to describe the intentions behind the Balilla and Avanguardisti.

**II. Legitimating the State-Nation**

The well-worn paradox of Fascism as it emerged in interwar Europe is this: while it was an essentially political project which sought, and for a limited time largely succeed in, institutionalizing an ideology, the content of that ideology is nearly impossible to pin down.

---

There were no great Fascist minds; like nationalists in general, the Fascists could never boast the ideological richness of, say, their Communist counterparts. Fascism had no Marx, no Engels, no Lenin. The astonishing ideological vagueness of the Fascist program is naturally reflected in the oppositional stance Fascists in Italy and Germany took toward education and intellectualism, and indeed toward the Enlightenment generally. When Hitler noted, presumably unembarrassed, “Knowledge is ruin to my young men,” he let the Fascist cat out of the bag perhaps more than he knew.

Still, certain Fascist tenets were more or less universal, even if the details varied from country to country, and these tenets were clearly evident in the ideologies taught to youngsters by way of the authoritarian youth group. First and most important, the Fascist regimes were aggressively nationalistic and claimed legitimacy on the basis of their supposed representation of the masses. These two features of Fascism, which naturally walked hand-in-glove, rested firmly at the top of the ideological agenda in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany and therefore at the top of the agenda of the Fascist AYG. It may be right, as Michael Kater points out, that the immediate impetus for mandating participation in the HJ, for instance, was the looming war, but viewing the Hitler Youth (or its Italian counterpart) solely as a repository for the military’s next crop of inductees requires that we ignore many of

---

20 As Kater writes, “With war in the offing, Hitler now thought it prudent to fashion the HJ more strictly as a training cadre for the Wehrmacht, and this could not be accomplished without coercion.” Kater, Hitler Youth, 23. See also where Kater notes that certain branches of the HJ facilitated, in large part, members’ matriculation into particular branches of the Wehrmacht. As he notes, members of the Fliers HJ were to become Luftwaffe pilots; members of Marine HJ, naturally popular in northern Germany, could transition with similar ease into the Navy; members of Equestrian HJ and Communications HJ had a place among the ground forces. Kater, Hitler Youth, 32.
organization’s most important activities. Ultimately, acquiring ideological resources, rather than merely ensuring coercive might, was at the core of the HJ’s goals, and among its most important ideological tasks was to legitimize the state-nation, the heart and indeed the raison d’être of Fascism.

Some of the HJ’s activities produced ideological effects as well as a more immediate service to the state, while other activities were more purely ideological. Athletics, for example, over which the HJ took total control in 1933, provided ideological as well as pre-military training. On the ideological front, the Fascist AYG tended to use sports, in part, to quell whatever sense of individualism a young German or Italian might have felt so that his group, and ultimately his nation, would come to be his ultimate concern. In addition, at the same time, organized sports reflected the Fascist cacoëthes for physical perfection. According to the Fascists themselves, sports in Italy were meant to teach youngsters “the sense of strength and of beauty” and to show them that “a healthy intellectual life” was contingent upon “a healthy and robust body.” Like their German counterparts, the Italians were particularly fond of gymnastic exercises, which they consciously used as a means by which to diminish the individual and to promote in his stead passion for the group and its goals.

Further, and perhaps more specifically, in Fascist Italy, the future of youngsters’ physical health was entrusted only to those who had managed to endure years of training in AYG. Only students at the Fascist Academy, who had chosen from the ranks of the Fascist Party

---

21 See especially ibid., 30-31.
22 Quoted in Finer, Mussolini’s Italy, 430.
23 Ibid.
(and who, before that, had of course been members of the *Avanguardisti*) could secure
“appointments as physical-education instructors in the public schools.” As P.W.L. Cox put
it in the middle-1930s, these well-bred pedagogues “are expected to be the future functional
leaders of Italian youth and their parents, and to affect the habits of life and patterns of
thought of the Italian people permanently for the safety and imperial welfare of the nation,
and especially for the acceptance of hierarchy and discipline in accordance with the basic
principle of *Fascismo*.” Here we clearly see the intimate connection between the
legitimation of the state and its values and the production of its future elites, to which we
will turn below.

In general, certainly beyond the athletic field, the desire to be the same as their peers—or,
maybe more accurately, the fear of sticking out among them—motivated many young people
to join the Italian AYG. “[C]hildren join because others join…. It is not so much that they
want to be the same as others,” Finer observed, “as that they do not wish to be different.”
This homogenization clearly subjugated the individual and empowered the group, and in this
way helped habituate youngsters to the nationalist ethos.

Even the word “Balilla,” the name of the Italian AYG for children aged eight to fourteen,
was intended to strike a nationalist chord. “*Balilla*” was the appellation of an eighteenth-
century boy in Genoa, Giovanni Batista Perasso, who, according to legend, commenced a
revolt in 1746 against the invading Austrian forces. Never mind that in 1746 Genoa had

---

24 For the description, see Cox, “Opera Nazionale Balilla,” 269-270; the quotation comes from 270.
25 Ibid., 270.
26 See ibid., where Cox notes that the Balilla organization “may serve as a model and a guide for ‘elites’ in other
countries.”
27 Ibid.
28 Cox, “Opera Nazionale Balilla,” 268; see also Finer, Mussolini’s Italy, 437.
little do with Rome or “Italy,” whose unification was still more than a century away; in the first half of the twentieth century, the point, clearly enough, was that Giovanni had braved the Austrian invaders for the good of the fatherland.29 Significantly, Giovanni had a rough German equivalent in one Herbert Norkus, a Weimar-era member of the HJ who achieved martyrdom upon his murder by Communists in 1932. Norkus thus became the great boy hero of the Hitler Youth. This was indicated, for example, by the film Hitlerjunge Quex, in which Norkus was eulogized and lionized for mass youth consumption.30

Adherence to and participation in groups tend, as a matter of course, to diminish individualism, but the Fascists, as we might expect, ratcheted up this natural process with peculiar resolve and temerity. Again, the subjugation of the individual to the nation, which was supposed to find its institutional voice in the state alone, was of the essence. Consider, for instance, the addendum to the Fascist Oath given to Balilla members. The little Black Shirt was instructed that he “no longer belongs to himself but to the Duce and to the cause of the Revolution, even as, for the Duce and the Revolution, died the three thousand Fascist Martyrs.”31 Members of the Avanguardisti, only slightly older than their Balilla brethren, were given an even more elaborate addendum informing them that their devotion to the state-nation was to be for life.32 In addition, every year, Avanguardisti members had the opportunity to stay for a week at Camp Dux in Rome, where they engage for in military and athletic activities and competitions and visit the monuments and other places of interest of the Eternal City—the Imperial City of Destiny. Here they meet Il Duce, dignified, friendly, but a bit aloof. They pledge to

---

29 On the latter point, see Finer, Mussolini’s Italy, 437.
30 See Kater, Hitler Youth, 18-19 and 33.
31 Quoted in Finer, Mussolini’s Italy, 441.
32 Ibid.
him and to Fascismo and to Italy their fealty. Here they are led to exalt the spirit of coöperation, subordination of self to group, athletic and military competence not for vainglory but for the welfare of Italy—calling for all-around abilities rather than specialized training. All is carefully staged; enthusiasm runs high; and atmosphere of religious devotion to the revolution prevails.  

In Chapter IV, in which we turn to the contemporary Russian AYG Nashi, the reader may note some degree of similarity between Camp Dux and the Nashi camp at Lake Seliger.

As in the Italian case, some HJ activities were, if tangentially related to the war’s military goals, animated almost exclusively by ideological goals. The agricultural branch of the Hitler Youth, HJ-Landdienst, is exemplary. At least on its face, the group’s origins were relatively innocent: members were assigned to rural farms where they were supposed to help peasants with their labors. But a funny thing happened on the way to world domination. After the beginning of the war, the Nazis commenced to transport these youngsters en masse to recently-acquired territories, first in Poland and soon thereafter in Austria, Belgium, and France (Alsace-Lorraine), where they were instructed to indoctrinate the so-called Volksdeutsche, ethnic Germans living outside the German borders. The Volksdeutsche were to be taught proper German (as determined by the Nazis), as well as Nazi culture. In 1942, participation in this part of the Hitler Youth was made compulsory.

34 However, even this was more sinister than it may at first appear. As Kater explains, From the beginning of organized agricultural service, around 1934, the Nazis targeted eastern territories in particular, first German ones adjoining the Polish border such as Pomerania and Silesia, with a view to occupying them in a sweep of conquest behind the German Wehrmacht. Thus helping on farms and in the fields…was complementary to the barely disguised imperialistic hikes by Hitler Youths to the coveted borders. When the time came, these youths would know those territories and how to exploit them…. [The project] was based on that of the racist Artamanen, a pre-1933 youth league on the extreme right of would-be eastern settlers, to which leading National Socialists had once belonged…. Kater, Hitler Youth, 34.
35 Ibid., 34-35.
Why undertake such a project? Obviously, as a practical matter, this endeavor to inure the Volksdeutsche to the Third Reich would have been impossible if the German military had failed to seize territory beyond its 1939 borders. But no military objective was served by this project; the attempt to inculcate systematically a foreign population (and indeed the Volksdeutsche were, notwithstanding nationalist claims, foreigners) was an entirely elective policy by the Nazis. Plenty of modern states, like their premodern antecedents, had conquered vast territories without ever undertaking to integrate whole populations into this or that culture. It is entirely conceivable that the Nazis could have overtaken the borderlands without bothering with ideological proselytization of ethnic Germans or any other group. Thus, especially in its wartime function, the HJ-Landdienst demonstrates that currying ideological power, not least in order to legitimate the hegemonic state-nation, was at the top of the agenda for the Hitler Youth.

To be sure, especially in the German case but also in Fascist Italy, nationalism was inseparable from racism. In these cases, nation was race and race was nation, and thus, in general, expressions of nationalism by Fascist AYG tended to be racist as a matter of course. The Nazi case alone offers innumerable demonstrative examples. Consider, for instance, one of the various nationalist-racist projects carried out by the girls and young women in the Bund Deutscher Mädel, the female branch of the HJ which had emerged in 1930 and by 1931 had absorbed the various other Nazi women’s groups.36 Following the Nazi seizure of Poland, the Third Reich resolved to distinguish the ethnic Germans living in Poland (who were therefore part of the Volksdeutsche) from the ethnic Poles. The ethnic Poles would then

36 Ibid., 77.
be transferred out of the Wartheland region, which the Germans had conveniently
determined was German territory. This would free the Wartheland of Poles and therefore
affect to “purify” the German nation-race. The plan was carried out with impunity: a
staggering one million ethnic Poles were ripped out of their homes and forced to relocate to
other parts of Poland. For its part, the BDM proved indispensable. Thousands of BDM
girls (19,000), along with their leaders, were shipped to 160 camps, where they lived for
several weeks, helping the ethnic Germans move in to their new homes whilst being
indoctrinated with—what else?—the racist orthodoxy of the Nazi Party. The historical
record indicates that these girls were constantly told of Poles’ racial inferiority (and, naturally
enough, came as a result to be despised by the native Poles).37 In the same way that the Nazi
state refused to relinquish its radical ideological objectives, even as war raged, neither would
the HJ give up its commitment to nationalist proselytism.

III. The Family, Gender, and Sex(uality)

Like Soviet Communism, to which we will turn in the next chapter, Fascism in Italy and
Germany promoted puritanical mores with regard to gender and sex, at least on the surface.
In truth, by a paradox, these regimes held up the family as a basic and inviolable social unit
while seeking at the same time to weaken the family relative to the state and, in particular, to
separate children from their parents. In pursuing these ends, AYG were often crucial.

A. Gender and Reproduction

In general, women were not considered equal to men in Nazi Germany, although it would
be incorrect to argue that women were neglected by Nazi ideological planners. Quite on the
contrary, women in the Third Reich were burdened not merely with rearing the next

37 Ibid., 88-91.
generation of Germans but with doing so in accordance with Nazi eugenics. Because of the centrality of “race theory” in Nazi ideology, sexual reproduction was viewed not just as a matter of maintaining the German population (which went without saying), but also, and more profoundly, as the essential task of producing little Aryans. In this sense, women were instrumentalized by the state explicitly for their capacity to reproduce. This led to a host of state measures, some related directly to the Hitler Youth. For example, in 1932, on the eve of his ascension, Hitler himself expressed great interest in the uniforms worn by HJ girls, which had to be attractive, he explained, presumably in order to attract men. Ensuring girls’ attractiveness would remain a major goal of the BDM for its whole existence.38

But the state’s efforts to prepare the young women of the BDM, who were aged ten to eighteen, to be mothers surely did not end with uniforms. As Kater points out, noting the somewhat more “feminine” posture taken toward the BDM girls (compared to the more militaristic posture toward the boys), the BDM tried “to emphasize the ideal of physical passivity…and lack of activism, which were commensurate with the hoped-for future eugenic role of girls as Nazi childbearers.”39 This biological intention was evident in a variety of ways, such as athletics. For girls, “rhythmical gymnastics took the place of athletic strain.” Meanwhile, for their BDM overseers, “the flow of gymnastic movements was closely related to the feminine anatomy and the future role of women as” mothers. “Where boys had to be forceful, girls had to show grace.”40 Even from our temporal remove, it is easy to imagine the alienation that would have befallen the little girl who failed to aspire to motherhood. In

38 Ibid., 78 and 82-83.
39 Ibid., 80.
40 Ibid., 82.
1936, Hitler announced that “woman’s supreme function” was to become a mother, and preferably one with “several children.”\textsuperscript{41} Heinrich Himmler put out a “Procreation Order” which stated that promotions in the SS would be granted exclusively to married officers with (hopefully male) children.\textsuperscript{42}

As Kater points out, the BDM was not, in general, an explicitly political organization—except when it came to race, the Nazi state’s central focus. As we started to see in the previous section, in matters of racist orthodoxy, the BDM girls were consistently well-schooled.\textsuperscript{43} BDM members went to talks entitled, for instance, “Race and Volk,” and heard, as all Germans did, about Jews’ infiltration into Germany and the various nefarious influences the Jewish people had brought to the Fatherland. In Nazi Germany, of course, antisemitism wore many guises and took many forms, and certainly one form was gendered. “The Nazi stereotypes of Jews abounded and were conspicuously directed at the core of German womanhood,” writes Kater.\textsuperscript{44} Among the most pervasive antisemitic lies peddled by the Nazi state insisted that Jewish men were sexual deviants who could not be trusted around German women. For example, the 1940 propaganda film \textit{Jud Süß}, which told the unhappy story of a German girl’s rape by a Jewish man, made its rounds among German youngsters.\textsuperscript{45}

Italian women were consigned to similar domesticity, and again the importance of reproduction (though with less emphasis on eugenics) was emphasized. The Italian Fascists also made no bones about mothers’ ideological function. According to one state document,\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{41} Quoted in ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{43} See Kater’s excellent summary, ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 101.
the ideal *donna fascista* was to be a mother and “a perfect mistress of the home, not only in the practical activities of everyday life, but also in the affirmation of a spirit profoundly Fascist,” presumably not least in order to acclimatize her children to the Fascist teachings to which they would be exposed at school and in the Balilla. In addition, the Italian woman was to help younger females achieve “charm and beauty” (recall Hitler’s interest in girls’ uniforms), and to promote motherhood: according to the document, a woman’s “regenerative powers” were essential “to the progress of the family, and thereby to the strengthening of the nation in the spiritual atmosphere”—that is, the dogmatic cultural-ideological universe—“of the régime.”

This document demonstrates clearly that the legitimation of the state was not considered distinct from, but in fact intimately tied up with, the state’s familial and reproductive objectives.

Meanwhile, non-procreative sex was clearly to be avoided, and certainly there was no room—not least among young people—for homosexual behavior. Nazi courts prosecuted and convicted approximately 50,000 men for homosexual behavior, sending some to concentration camps and castrating others. Certainly homosexuality among NSDAP members was taken particularly seriously by the Party, especially after the “Night of the Long Knives” in 1934, in which SA Chief of Staff Ernst Röhm was ostensibly (although probably not really) “liquidated” at least in part because he was gay. Thereafter, homosexuality was regarded as a danger to Germany and to the Nazi Party, and to the Hitler

---

46 Quoted in Finer, *Mussolini’s Italy*, 444.
48 While it is true that the Nazis claimed that Röhm was “liquidated” in 1934 (along with other gay SA members) at least in part as a result of his homosexuality, in truth the purge probably had little to do with sexuality and was instead a result of political considerations. Ibid., 189.
Jugend maybe most of all. Thus, for instance, in addition to other members of the Party and individuals in the army, certain members of the HJ were forced to undergo treatment at the Institute for Psychological Research and Psychotherapy, where their putative disorder was supposed to be remedied. Astonishingly, as late as 1943, almost a full decade after Röhm’s removal (and at a time when the German state seemingly had bigger fish to fry), the Reich Working Group for Youth (Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugendpflege) dispatched a directive to the HJ entitled, “Special Measures Combating Same-Sex Acts.”

Well before 1943, however, and indeed before the war had commenced, Himmler had announced his fear that the boys in the HJ (and the SS) promoted homosexuality. According to Himmler, what these boys needed was more time with women. In the words of one historian, Himmler feared “the too-powerful masculinization and militarization” of Nazism, “in which the male youth had too little opportunity to associate with the other sex in a relaxed atmosphere.” In light of this unfortunately reality, said Himmler, “the [Nazi] movement facilitated homosexuality, since under these circumstances masturbation circles and sexually tinged friendships could quickly spring up among youths.” Himmler neglected to divulge whether he spoke from experience.

Female sexuality seems to have provoked far less interest among Nazi officials than male sexuality, although women’s sexual interests were not totally ignored. Hitler, for example, was held up by the state as a sexual icon that women were meant to worship. “Hitler exuded

49 In the document, homosexuality was portrayed as rampant and dangerous. As one historian writes, the NSDAP “regarded all German males as susceptible to homosexual seduction to such a powerful degree. In fact, the consideration forced itself on them again and again that their own movement, which was based on male bonding, might evoke homosexuality, and that, as a fertile soil for a secret state within the state, it could undermine the National Socialist movement from the inside out.” Ibid., 195-196.

50 Ibid., 201.
a sexual magnetism for German females which today can only be compared with the mass appeal of an international rock star.\(^5^1\) Moreover, as Kater points out, the paternity with which the group manifestly imbued Hitler was, when considered along Freudian lines, sexual in the extreme. Certainly members of the BDM were highly sexualized. Hundreds of girls, for example, left the famous Nazi rally in Nuremberg in 1936 pregnant, while only about one of every two knew the identity of the father. In addition, over time and surely once the war was underway, Germans parodied the “BDM” acronym, insisting that it actually referred to “Bund Deutscher Matratzen” or “Bubi Drück Mich,” that is, “League of German Mattresses” or “Come on Boy, Press Me Hard,” respectively.\(^5^2\) Needless to say, such overt male chauvinism and coarse sexualization accorded less than ideally with the gender conventions eagerly promoted by Nazi propaganda.

\textbf{B. Parents and Children}

Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany therefore encouraged men and women to procreate.

This had various implications, some of which clearly related to these states’ AYG. Once their children had been born, however, Mother and Father had, if not completed their duty, completed the bulk of it. Certainly in the German case, the state derived its power in very large part from the separation it sought to affect between children and their parents. The Nazis could scarcely admit this objective, in part because of its obvious potential to alienate parents. But the Nazis knew that familial autonomy and cohesion had to be broken down

\(^{5^1}\) Kater continues, Hitler understood his intense appeal to women and used it strategically. His rationale for remaining a bachelor…was that of a seasoned demagogue: if he were married, he would be seen as having been spoken for and would lose the support of many German girls and women. He wanted to be indelibly imprinted in their hearts as an eligible bachelor and potential spouse. Not unlike a nun’s marriage to Christ, the female Aryan would always be joined to her Fuhrer.

Kater, 	extit{Hitler Youth}, 105.

\(^{5^2}\) Ibid., 105 and 108.
wherever it existed, just like the private sphere in general had to be broken down. As Harry Oosterhuis writes, “[a]lthough the authority of the father and the role of the mother were propagandized, the upbringing of youth, especially boys, was largely taken away from parents.”

To some degree, the wedge driven between parents and kids was a direct result of the fact that participation in the HJ demanded that its members spend an enormous amount of time outside of the home. Service in the Hitler Jugend “did take boys away from home, and if parents objected, in practice it was the family who lost out and not the organization.”53

Certainly this was true by November 1942, when, for the first time, the state’s major organs of domestic coercion could enforce HJ membership, issuing fines to parents as well as youngsters whose participation was found to be lacking. Parents and young people could even be imprisoned on the basis of nonparticipation.54 These measures alone surely went a long way in distancing kids from their parents, geographically, certainly, but also ideologically. There were, however, other, more blatant aspects of HJ participation which manifestly pushed families apart, effectively reassigning the duties of childrearing to the state. Many parents, whether supportive Nazis or not, had much to fear in their youngsters. One man, for example, reportedly called Hitler “a blood-crazed maniac,” only to be ratted out to the authorities by his son, an HJ member, and shipped off to his death at Dachau. In addition, male as well as female HJ leaders are known to have targeted the parents of their

---

53 Oosterhuis continues: “The same held for men in the army and other semi-military organizations like the SS and the SA. Close emotional ties with the family did not fit in with the role which the male in close alliance with other men was obliged to fulfil [sic] in nazi [sic] Germany.” Oosterhuis, “Medicine,” 199.

charges. For these young people, as for so many others, the ideology of the Hitler Youth overcame whatever loyalty to their parents they might once have felt.

In addition, beyond actual cases of children betraying their parents was, as one would predict, the fear of such betrayal. The playwright Bertolt Brecht shined light on fear of this sort (and its likely origins in the HJ) in “The Spy,” one scene in his Fear and Misery of the Third Reich. In the scene, a mother and father sit nervously at home on a rainy day worrying that their son, a member of the Hitler Youth called Klaus-Heinrich, will rat them out to the authorities. The father character has made several remarks criticizing Hitler and the Nazis in the presence of Klaus-Heinrich, who has just run off, ostensibly to buy sweets. Is he actually buying sweets, his parents wonder, or has he gone to betray them? “They’ve something against everyone,” the father says of young people. “Everyone’s suspect. Once the suspicion’s there, one’s suspect.” As we saw at some length in the previous chapter, Orwell would take up this theme in 1984, showcasing with particular acumen and verve the nexus between children, family, and sex in the authoritarian state.

Various other efforts similarly militated against the autonomous, cohesive family by throwing up barriers between children and their parents. Consider, for example, the Kinderlandverschickung program, established in 1940 for children as young as four and as old as teenaged. The program relocated urban kids for as long as six months to rural areas, in Germany and beyond, ostensibly in order to protect them from Allied bombs. Children

---

55 Ibid., 38-39.
between the ages of four- and ten-years were put up with families, while older kids went to HJ homes under the care of older HJ members. By 1945, a remarkable five million German kids had been relocated to 12,000 locations.\textsuperscript{58} Parents were permitted to visit their kids (although it was suggested by the HJ that they refrain from doing so), and although parents and children could correspond by post, children’s letters naturally arrived at the censor’s desk before being forwarded to their intended destination.\textsuperscript{59}

What ideological objective might this program, tied up immutably with Nazi AYG, have pursued? According to Kater, the Nazi state “purposely planted their youth”—again, under the auspices of protecting them from bombs—“in surroundings known to be hostile to them.” Why? As Kater notes,

This afforded the HJ ample opportunity to point out the difference between HJ children as heirs of the master race on the one side, and those slaves who had already been vanquished, on the other. This was not without danger to the youngsters, who in Occupied Poland and the Protectorate in particular were always regarded with unmitigated hostility in the streets, to the point where it was dangerous for them to be alone or in small groups without the protection of firearms held at the ready by accompanying senior Hitler Youths. Children were being taught to hate in the field, as it were; they would have to use this skill later at the extended fronts, to defend their status as members to the German rural caste.\textsuperscript{60}

On the one hand, the program separated children from their parents and, in the process, effectively cast the state as youngsters’ ultimate protector. At the same time, on the other hand, like the Nazi posture toward women and reproduction, it promoted the diffusion of

\textsuperscript{58} Kater, \textit{Hitler Youth}, 44-45.
\textsuperscript{59} It should be pointed out that these kids could, under some circumstances, go home: “[T]he regulations were...on the parents’ side; so if they really wanted to have their children back home, there was nothing that could be done to stop them. Usually it was sufficient for children to convince the HJ or their parents that they were quite ill, so that they could be brought home.” Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 48.
Nazi nationalist mythology and emphasized in particular the supposed homogeneity of the German race-nation.

IV. Ensuring the Fascist Future

In 1934, Adolf Hitler stood before some sixty-thousand HJ members and assured them of their power, not only in the new Third Reich as it then existed, but also as it would exist in the future. The Führer’s words that day were uncharacteristically rich. “Twelve months ago, the struggle for power granted us success,” he said. “And since then our movement, whose young vanguard you are and whose standard bearers you will be, has repossessed one position after the other in this state….”61 These young people were not merely favored by the new Nazi regime, Hitler said; they were the Nazi regime, its “young vanguard” and its future leaders. In addition to making absurd use of the “movement” trope, hinting at its effectiveness, Hitler handed over to his young audience nothing less than the future of Nazism. It is illuminating that the abovementioned film, a hagiography of the boy martyr Herbert Norkus called *Hitlerjunge Quex*, featured a song (“Our Flag Is Showing Us the Way”) in which young people were labeled, with typical heavy-handedness, “the soldiers of the future.”62

As we saw in the previous chapter, in general, authoritarian youth groups are meant to be both formative and productive. They are *formative* in that they are meant to impress upon young people particular beliefs, convictions, and values and, in so doing, to mold them into loyal and supportive subjects. They are also *productive*, in the sense that they are intended to produce a cadre of state bureaucrats and leaders for the future. Thus, in Nazi Germany, the

61 Quoted in ibid., 68.
62 Quoted in ibid., 33.
Hitler Youth played an essential role in the future that the Nazis envisaged, “in which many ruthless political fuhrers were needed for every government echelon.” In the same way, indeed, little Mussolinis were needed in Italy. As the Duce declared at the Young Fascist Congress in Rome in 1931, his young Black Shirts were “warriors in a great army, bearers and transmitters of a consecrate faith which finds in the young, the guarantee of its development and its permanence!” Mussolini’s Secretary of the Party, Achille Starace, had been even more explicit in 1930, when he wrote that with the Balilla and Avanguardisti the state “intend[ed] to prepare spiritually”—by which he manifestly meant ideologically—“all the youth of Italy, from whom…there must issue the ranks of the governing classes of Italy of to-morrow.…” As he added: “The totalitarian principle of the education of youth…responds to this supreme necessity of the Fascist revolution which intends to last, that is to say, exist continuously into the future.” Starace insisted on the necessity of youngsters’ self-sacrifice and emphasized their essential role as “the continuers in spirit and form of the Revolution of October 1922, a Revolution still in its ascending movement, because many its aims are yet to be attained.” With this remark, he not only gave to youth responsibility for the Fascist future, but also reiterated the state’s nationalist mythology, which young people were of course to uphold not only in their youth but as adults.

V. Conclusions

As many have pointed out, the Fascists, like the Soviet Communists, essentially conducted an experiment: they sought to remake the world in their own image, starting at

---

63 Ibid., 27.
64 Quoted in Finer, Mussolini’s Italy, 414.
65 Quoted in ibid., 416.
home, and they knew they would need youth on their side if their dreams were to come to fruition. But if the Communists had the inevitability of history’s progression on their side, the Fascists had to work for the future: to produce, through their inculcation of youngsters, the future they imagined. This is what they set out to do, and this is why the great Fascist dictatorships of twentieth-century Europe tested youngsters’ utility to their cause to a greater extent than any other.

As we began to see in theoretical terms in the previous chapter, ideology or, more accurately, ideological power, is one of the three major “power resources” for which actors compete in politics. All states, democracies and non-democracies alike, seek ideological resources, but only authoritarian states demand ideological hegemony. This implies, of necessity, a showdown between state and society. Whereas all states monopolize coercion, as we know from Weber, ideological resources are by definition more diffuse in liberal contexts than in illiberal ones. The liberal state seeks ideological power, but it also protects a host of freedoms which militate against any single actor achieving ideological monopoly. By contrast, the authoritarian state seeks total ideological control, and the authoritarian youth group is one important tool (although by no means the only tool) with which authoritarian states seek to gain the ideological upper-hand among young people. AYG are instruments of ideological cooptation and are meant to suppress, rather than to augment or even to exist alongside, civil society. In this chapter, I have endeavored to show (a) the high degree to which the Fascists of the interwar period felt compelled to coopt youth, and (b) how they used authoritarian youth groups in an effort to achieve certain ideological goals. In general,
these goals fall under one (or more) of the four broad categories described in the previous chapter.

Certainly in building the Hitler Youth, the Nazis did not start from scratch. As one scholar has pointed out, in the pre-Nazi Weimar era, youth activism was relatively common. “Never before had German youth formed so many organizations, each of which combined comradeship among members with intense hatred of opponents.”66 Unlike the failed Weimar government, however, the Nazi leadership that assumed power in 1933 refused to share ideological power. As we have seen, neither Hitler nor his Fascist confreres in Italy would stand for ideological competition. In the next chapters, we will see that, far from uniquely Fascist, this attempt to drown out ideological competitors, is a characteristic par excellence of authoritarian states. In addition, we will see that the ideological objectives which animated the Balilla, the Avanguardisti, and the Hitler Jugend are remarkably similar to those pursued by the Communists, and even by today’s Kremlin.

Chapter III: The Pied Piper Wears Red: Communist AYG

“We always mean to remain the Party for the youth of that class to which the future belongs.”
—Vladimir Il’yich Lenin¹

I. Introduction: Historical Origins of the Communist AYG

No less than their Fascist counterparts, the major Communist states of the twentieth century recognized the power of young people early on and attempted consequently to exploit that power in pursuit of their own ends. Also like the Fascists, the Communists meant not only to indoctrinate young people, leading them by their ears into the ideological fold, but also, with some notable exception, to drown out potential competitors.² This chapter shines light on the Communist AYG, especially the Soviet All-Union Leninist Communist Union of Youth (VLKSM, or Komsomol). Attention is also given to China’s Communist Youth League (CYL), although, as we will see, the Chinese case constitutes an outlier in this study for several reasons.

Unlike Hitler, who, as we saw in the preceding chapter, came to recognize the immediate utility of his young supporters only in the early 1930s, the Russian Communists were aware


² Of course, the Communists sought ideological hegemony not only among youngsters, but among all populations and indeed within all spheres of life. As Gabriel A. Almond noted in the 1980s, the Communists tended to worry in particular about non-state voices influencing their subjects:

Marxist-Leninist theory has well-articulated views on the agents and the processes of political socialization. All the agents of socialization treated in the Western socialization literature are to be found in the socialist literature. Family, church, school, work place, interest group, political party, the media of communication, local government, and government output and performance are all recognized as having some impact on political attitudes and culture. The principal distinction made in Leninist theory is between those agents of socialization that foster traditional patterns of political culture and those that foster rational and appropriate ones. Families, religious bodies, ethnic communities, professional groups, and face-to-face communication media outside the Communist party and related organizations tend to foster residual cultural tendencies, whereas schools, the Communist party and related organizations, and the mass media of communication are the principal agents of appropriate political socialization.

of youngsters’ significance to their cause well in advance of the Komsomol’s emergence and consolidation and indeed in advance of the Revolution of 1917. But what began as a mere ally of the Bol’sheviks in 1918, the year of the Komsomol’s debut Congress in Moscow, quickly became a full-fledged arm of the Soviet state. Thereafter, the state made short work of alternative, i.e., non-state, youth associations: between 1922 and 1926 all of the Komsomol’s competitors were banned in the USSR. As one scholar noted in 1951, “[t]he thirty-four years of the Soviet Youth Movement’s history have mirrored the transformation of the Bolshevik Party from a revolutionary conspiracy into a State Party wielding State-power.”

We will see in this chapter that, particularly after 1936, ideology was squarely at the top of the Komsomol agenda.

Three authoritarian youth groups existed in the Soviet Union: the Little Octobrists, for children between the ages of seven and ten; the Young Pioneers, for children and adolescents between ten and fourteen; and the Komsomol, for adolescents and young adults between fourteen and twenty-eight. The AYG of early Communist China followed this model closely: the membership of the Young Pioneers was made up of children between the ages of nine and fifteen, while Chinese between fifteen and twenty-five were eligible for the CYL. Both the Komsomol in the Soviet Union and the CYL in early Communist China were tasked with overseeing the Pioneers. Also in both cases, the Pioneers were intended to prepare members for participation in the Komsomol and the CYL. As one historian notes

---


of the Chinese Pioneers: “If the League was a ‘school for the study of Communism,’ then the Pioneers were the kindergarten.”6

In the Soviet Union, the VLKSM was not established until after the Revolution of 1917. Prior to that, like the Hitler Youth, which in the last days of the Weimar era was far from Germany’s only youth association (and was in fact far from its most popular youth association), the Bol’sheviks faced stiff competition in their quest to win the loyalties of young people. Before the Revolution, the Bol’sheviks tended to gain new supporters by infiltrating extant youth associations—that is, non-Bol’shevik youth associations—and convincing their members to join the ranks of the Bol’sheviks.7 The Komsomol finally arose in the fall of 1918, although still at that point it considered itself separate from the Communist Party. It took war, predictably enough, to change that: as one scholar notes, the “autonomy” that had characterized the organization in its original incarnation simply could not “last long under Civil War conditions.”8

---

7 In a noteworthy episode, for instance, Bol’shevik operatives were tasked with infiltrating meetings of Work and Light, a Petrograd group for proletariat youth, specifically “with the objective of attacking its program, winning support for their own views, discrediting” its founder, “and eventually taking over the direction of the young workers themselves.” Work and Light collapsed in August and the Bol’shevik-affiliated organization, the Socialist Association for Young Workers, took its place. Fainsod writes, “In Moscow and other large industrial centers, organizations of young workers developed more slowly though the same process of Bolshevik penetration and capture of leadership repeated itself. By identifying themselves with the specific economic grievances of the young workers and calling for such popular reforms as the outlaw of child labor, the six-hour working day for young workers, the establishment of minimum wages, the provision of social insurance benefits, compulsory education free of charge until the age of sixteen, and the right to vote at the age of eighteen, the Bolsheviks succeeded in mobilizing considerable support among the more politically active working class youths in the large cities and, indeed, relied heavily on such support in their successful bid for power in November, 1917.”
Like its Soviet forebear, the Communist Party of China (CCP) also had a youth wing (or wings) prior to its seizure of power in 1949. In April of that year, the New Democratic Youth League was created, and was subsequently renamed the Communist Youth League in the middle-1950s. In its origins and its early history, the CYL has much in common with the Soviet Komsomol. Nonetheless, the Chinese case ultimately presents an outlier, not only with regard to the Soviet AYG, but also, and perhaps more importantly, with regard to AYG in general. There is no question but that the chief objective of Communist China’s AYG is to curry ideological power vis-à-vis young Chinese. But in the late 1960s, the CYL met an impasse in the form of the Cultural Revolution (CR), which has no parallel in the Soviet case. In fact, for more than ten years after the CR began in 1966, the CYL ceased to exist at all. Moreover, in the same way that the Chinese state has gradually permitted an increasing degree of private enterprise to develop (and has in this way loosened its ties to socialist ideology), challenges of various sorts to the ideological hegemony of the CYL have been permitted over time, weakening the power of the organization ipso facto.

Upon its initiation nearly two decades after the Revolution of 1949, the CR was generally recognized as significant by Chinese youngsters, but their responses to it varied greatly. While to some it seemed to afford “a chance to accumulate political capital,” others used it as an excuse to rebel against authority in a variety of ways. It was this rebellion, whose most vociferous manifestation was the infamous Red Guard movement, which ultimately affected the undoing of the Communist Youth League. The Red Guards emerged in 1966 in the

---

9 As one historian writes, “The Communist Youth League from 1925-37, the National Salvation Youth Association and the Anti-Japanese Youth Vanguards in the wartime period of 1937-45, and the League of Democratic Youth and the New Democratic Youth Alliance in the years 1946-49 provided a broad front for the enlistment of youth in the Party’s cause, with their names reflecting the changes in Party tactics at different periods of its history.” Funnell, “The Chinese Communist Youth Movement,” 113.

10 See ibid., 113 and 114.
service, they said, of Mao Zedong, Mao Zedong Thought, and the Communist Party, and certainly, at least initially, Chairman Mao stood behind them. The rebels’ numbers and infrastructure expanded and strengthened with remarkable rapidity, and their extraordinary energy and force quickly became evident. In no time, first in Beijing and then throughout China, the Red Guards destroyed and pillaged, everywhere demanding radical, revolutionary reforms. In the process, however, the CYL was marginalized and quickly eliminated, and would in fact not reemerge for more than a decade, in 1978, and even since then, Beijing’s ideological control of Chinese youth has generally been relatively low. In large part, this has been a result of capitalist and foreign influence, which has slowly corroded the state’s former ideological predominance. Among other factors, the Special Economic Zones, the great many foreigners in China, and “the pervasive presence of Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan” on the Chinese mainland have exposed Chinese young people to voices well outside the purview of the Communist Party. To be sure, this does not mean that the state has given up on ideological power; as Gold notes, for example, in response to the events of

12 See especially, in general, ibid., 67-90.
14 As Gold put it in 1991, the Special Economic Zones such as Shenzhen occupied an extreme position, but foreign experts at schools and institutes in all major cities, resident foreign businessmen and technicians in enterprises, tourists traipsing throughout the country, foreign popular culture broadcast, published and performed live, and the excellent chance to study abroad all exerted powerful attraction to youths. In particular the pervasive presence of Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan dramatically proved that Chinese people, given a conducive system, were fully capable of modernizing their economy, social system and culture. Unrealistic as it may be, impressionable youths hold up these Chinese societies as well as the United States as standards by which to compare their own lives. This increases the sense of relative deprivation. It has also bred a strong sense of disliking everything Chinese as well as an inferiority complex, two serious problems which the CYL tries to combat, although with little more than cheerleading platitudes.

Gold, “Youth and the State,” 609.
1989, the state decided to accelerate its ideological efforts vis-à-vis young people.\textsuperscript{15} Nonetheless, clearly China’s relationship with its young people since the Cultural Revolution has contrasted sharply with that of the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the CYL is analogous to the Komsomol only prior to the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. It is therefore the period between 1949 and 1966 on which we will focus.

\textbf{II. Legitimating the Communist State}

Indeed, 1966, the first year of the CR in China and the year in which the Red Guards made their debut, Leonid Brezhnev had this to say to the Komsomol Congress:

\begin{quote}
The farther the great days of October recede into the past and the greater the number of youths and girls entering the Communist ranks who have not experienced severe trials in life, the more responsible become the tasks of ideological upbringing. We should give every young person an understanding of the general aims of our revolution, help him to find his concrete place in the revolutionary remaking of the world. This cannot be done in full measure without training youth in the glorious traditions of the older generations.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Far from worried about youth pseudo-vigilantism, Brezhnev concerned himself that day, and his young audience, with the Revolution of 1917, the central founding myth of the Soviet Union and the most formative element of its cultural-ideological goals.

As Brezhnev suggested, maintaining the Revolution required the energies of young people. This was entirely in keeping with Soviet rhetorical tradition. “The Revolution consumed its children as well as its makers,” wrote one scholar after the Second World War. “Like most revolutionary movements which attempt a sharp break with the past, the Communist leadership has placed its primary reliance on youth to generate the momentum

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 611.

of innovation.”17 This should remind us of the Fascists, whose power was similarly considered contingent upon the support of the young. In addition, alongside the Revolution, which had empowered the Communists in Russia and beyond, Marxism-Leninism was held up of necessity as the civic religion of the Soviet Union and of Communist states elsewhere. Thus the Komsomol always claimed to fight under the banner of the Revolution of 1917 in particular and the international socialist revolution in general. Sometimes the fight was quite literal, as during the Civil War,18 but other times less so; and although there were often tangible enemies against whom Komsomol members were told to struggle, other times the enemy was far less tangible and its connection to Communism was far vaguer.

There was nothing ambiguous, for example, about the Komsomol’s fight against religion. Religious beliefs, and certainly religious institutions, were problematic for the Soviet Union both because the state was atheistic and because, more basically, religion is necessarily a major contestant for ideological power. As we have seen, this was a problem for the Fascists, too, not least for Mussolini, whose ideological dominance rested in large part on his capacity to stem the influence of the Vatican. In the Soviet case, it is telling that one major reason that the Komsomol consistently had a harder time winning the hearts and minds of young people in rural areas (as opposed to their urban brethren) is that religious devotion tended to be relatively higher in the rural areas.19 Still, the Komsomol took seriously its opposition to religion from the start. As Peter Gooderham points out in his study of

18 During the Civil War between the Reds and the Whites, Komsomol members “were rushed to the front in successive mobilizations where they functioned as agitators, commissars, and shock troops, to provide leadership and inspiration for less dependable conscripts.” Ibid., 21.
19 See ibid., 36.
youngsters in Leningrad in the early 1920s, still during Lenin’s reign, “Red christenings” and “Komsomol weddings” emerged as state alternatives to traditional religious rituals, along with special Komsomol versions of Christmas and Easter.  

Certainly, such extreme manifestations of state atheism were neither embraced nor practiced by every young Soviet, but it is revealing nevertheless that the state pursued them at all.

But if the fight against religion is exemplary of the Soviet state’s efforts to counteract its competitors, it had, on the positive side, its own ideology to promote at the same time. The ideological instruction of the Young Pioneers as well as the older members of the Komsomol tended to be straightforward. Pioneers listened to stories about Lenin and Stalin as little boys, for example, while their Komsomol elders learned about Lenin and Stalin as revolutionaries. As always, legitimating the Revolution of 1917 in particular and Communist teachings in general was the chief objective. Similarly, in early Communist China, while the Pioneers had many duties, “[t]he essential purpose” of everything they did “was the inculcation of Communist principles and organizational techniques.” As one historian explains, “the Pioneers, under the leadership of the League, and both under the leadership of the Party, harnessed the energies and aspirations of youth to the needs of the apparatus, and did their best to ensure that young people would always be Chairman Mao’s ‘good children.’”

In the Soviet and Chinese cases alike, mass publications were crucial instruments in the
state’s efforts to propagate its ideological goals. In early Communist China, the “systematic aim” of the CYL’s journal, *Chung-kuo ch'ing-nien*, “was the education of the younger generation in Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao-Tse-tung.” As one historian notes, “It was also a convenient channel for conveying the League’s instructions and policies to branches throughout the country.”\(^{24}\) Likewise, in the USSR, the Komsomol’s contributions to Soviet publishing were substantial almost from the get-go, and it aimed, as a matter of course, not only to disseminate its own message(s), but also, and no less importantly, to silence alternative voices. Thus, in the early 1920s, just as it was establishing a “publishing house” for itself (*Molodaya gvardiya*, or the Young Guard), the Komsomol was also “calling for the establishment of censorship over all published material aimed at youth.” Not only did the Komsomol have its own narrative to promote, it had to promote the only narrative. The Leningrad Komsomol started producing its newspaper, *Smena*, on a daily basis in October 1924, and *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, “the central Komsomol newspaper” appeared shortly thereafter.\(^{25}\) The Komsomol also published books—and lots of them;\(^{26}\) as early as 1927, the Young Guard “had established a monopoly of youth literature in the Russian language, and in terms of size it came second only to *Gosizdat RSFSR*.”\(^{27}\)

In the USSR, then, every Komsomol member was obligated not only “to study Marxism-Leninism”—surely a significant chore in and of itself—but also, as Merle Fainsod points out, to devote himself entirely to a sweeping ideological agenda. This agenda demanded of each Komsomol member “constant efforts” to improve his knowledge of the Party program, and, moreover, that he espouse it to non-members. Members were to be human

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 121.
\(^{25}\) Gooderham, “The Komsomol and Worker Youth,” 511.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 511-512.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 521.
shields against attacks on socialism and to hone their “cultural, scientific and technical knowledge.” They were to be ready at all times to protect, maybe with their lives, the “Socialist Fatherland,” and to be bulwarks against a host of antisocial behaviors, including “drunkenness, hooliganism, the remains of backward religious prejudices, and uncomradely attitudes toward women.” The work of a Komsomol member, it seemed, was never done.28

In China, members’ responsibilities, at least prior to 1966, were similar.29

Finally, it must be noted that nationalism, though supposedly antithetical to Marxist-Leninist thought, has often come to the fore in Communist AYG. In the Soviet case, World War II played a major role in the emergence of a Soviet nationalism entirely distinct from the teachings of Marx and Lenin. “Hatred of the Nazis unleashed a genuine upsurge of feeling, which the Party leadership was shrewd enough both to stimulate and exploit. Communist slogans were muted,” one historian tells us, “and the wellsprings of national sentiment were tapped to the full.” Naturally, the Komsomol was not left out of the loop: the organization’s membership restrictions were eased for military men and women, who, as the fighting waged, “responded primarily to patriotic appeals.”30

After the war, the Moscow-published Young Communists in the USSR noted that the Komsomol’s “most important task”

---

28 As Fainsod notes puts it, each Komsomol member was expected to make constant efforts to raise his political literacy, to explain the political line of the Party to the broad masses of youth, to fulfill the decisions of the Party and the Komsomol organizations, to participate actively in the political life of the country, to provide an example of socialist attitudes toward work and study, to protect socialist property, to struggle decisively against all breaches of socialist legality and order, to demonstrate political vigilance by guarding war and state secrets, to master the cultural, scientific and technical knowledge which will enable him to perfect his qualifications, to study military affairs, to be always ready to give all his strength and if necessary his life for the defense of his Socialist Fatherland, to seek to stamp out drunkenness, hooliganism, the remains of backward religious prejudices, and uncomradely attitudes toward women, to participate actively in the work of his Komsomol organization, to attend all meetings, and to fulfill all decisions swiftly and accurately.


consisted in “maintain[ing] in all the youth Soviet patriotism, Soviet national pride, the aspiration to make our Socialist state ever stronger.”\textsuperscript{31} These were hardly sentiments Marx or his closest followers could have supported. Meanwhile, in the Chinese case, one study shows that even young Red Guards who became disillusioned by Communism and by the state itself nevertheless “retained a sense of obligation to serve the nation and of patriotism.”\textsuperscript{32} And in China today, conventional Communist themes like “class struggle” are being deemphasized in school books, whilst as nationalist themes, meant “to foster love of the motherland,” are being showcased.\textsuperscript{33}

In the next section, we will encounter young Pavlik Morozov, whose story, as we will see, became in the Stalin era a fixture of Soviet propaganda. Pavlik was quickly transformed into a martyr by Soviet officialdom, largely in order to advance a wedge between parents and their children. Another martyr, however, this time from Maoist China, belongs in the present section. Lei Feng died in 1962 when he was 22-years-old, only to be heralded in short order as “industrious, generous and irresistibly impish, China’s most endearing soldier, the sort of fellow who would darn his comrades’ socks and skip a meal so others might eat.” Mao tried to use Lei Feng’s celebrated story to stir among Chinese youngsters feelings of “self-sacrifice and patriotism,” as a recent report in \textit{The New York Times} recalls. What is

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in Fainsod, “The Komsomols,” 34. See also, in general, where Fürst notes that the Second World War gave the USSR “a second lifeline. It provided the Soviet Union with a second founding myth, a shared memory of commonly overcome danger and a renewed guard against enemies from within and without,” as well as a new set of heroes—heroes who were contemporary, close to the people, and utterly irresistible in virtue of their self-sacrifice in defence [sic] of the socialist motherland. They rebuilt the link between regime and people by demonstrating that ordinary people were united with authority in fighting for the same values at the same time. Unlike the distant images of Lenin, Stalin, and the Soviet political and cultural elite, the war hero came in all shapes and sizes.

Fürst, \textit{Stalin’s Last Generation}, 137.

\textsuperscript{32} Gold, “Youth and the State,” 603.

\end{quote}
particularly noteworthy is that Lei Feng, despite his enduring heroic status among officials, in fact seems to awaken in many ordinary Chinese opposition, rather than support, for their government. This may be but one small indication of a larger problem for officials in Beijing.³⁴

III. All in the Family: Children, Parents, Gender and Sex

Volumes have been written on relationships of all sorts in the Soviet Union, including relationships between parents and their children and between women and men. No attempt even to synopsize this literature is made here. Instead, the following few words are intended only to introduce the reader to the complex nexus that connected the Soviet individual to her family and to her fellow citizen.

A. Families, Parents, and Children

As we have seen at some length, among the various extra-state institutions that authoritarian states attempt to influence, the family may be the toughest nut to crack.³⁵ In general, however, the Komsomol demonstrated a great propensity to insert itself into families, and especially (as we should now expect) between parents and their children. It is revealing that, in addition to the religion factor noted above, one of the greatest obstacles to the Komsomol’s penetration of the rural Soviet Union was the salience of family ties there.³⁶ At the same time, noted Fainsod in 1951,

the relative weakness of the Communist apparatus in the villages contributes to the strength of family influences. As the youth are drained away from the villages for

---

³⁵ Thus, for example, the early Komsomol in Leningrad “was…prepared to sanction those young people who were forced by their parents to attend religious ceremonies leaving home and becoming independent,” only to back down quickly for fear of “undermining the importance of family life for working class youth.” Gooderham, “The Komsomol and Worker Youth,” 509.
military service or industrial work, they are, of course, removed from family pressures and are subjected to more intensive Communist indoctrination. In the process, new converts are won for Komsomol and Party, but how genuinely and profoundly fundamental attitudes shift is by no means clear.³⁷

For the Communist Party of China, religion and family were similarly impedimentary to state ideological power, and indeed the two may have been even more intimately connected in China than in the USSR. As Thomas B. Gold notes, historically in China, the family has been “not only the basic production, consumption, and socialization unit,” but “also [is] invested with quasi-religious significance through the practice of ancestor worship.” The individual in Chinese tradition achieves his individuality only by virtue of his family, whose power relative to the state is significant, and only in adulthood.³⁸ What is more, historically, the Chinese state in large measure “reinforced the family system,” such that youngsters tended to be tied for good to the fate of their families. But all of this had to change once the Revolution came. After 1949, while the Communists “continued to rely on the family to perform key functions, particularly in the rural areas,” Beijing’s goals demanded that it circumscribe the family’s traditional hegemony and clamp down tightly on the individual. “Much of the family’s power shifted to the Party, and the newly-‘liberated’ individual’s sphere of autonomy was kept from expanding.”³⁹

³⁸ As Gold writes,

The Chinese family traditionally was not only the basic production, consumption and socialization unit, it was also invested with quasi-religious significance through the practice of ancestor worship. The family enjoyed a great deal of scope to manage its own affairs independently of the state. Its members literally belonged to the family whose head determined their life course. Males learned that their primary allegiance was to the family and its continuance, and that they had to submit unquestioningly to its authority. The head assigned members to various roles to implement a family strategy to achieve wealth and status. Chinese related to the outside world as members of a family, not as individuals. The family was rigorously age and gender stratified. In the Confucian view, one did not establish oneself until the age of 30.

Gold, “Youth and the State,” 597.
³⁹ Ibid., 598. Emphasis mine.
Certainly for the governors of the Soviet Union, undercutting the traditional influence of the family by pushing parents and children apart consistently constituted a priority. And while there were instances in which such a separation was affected without the aid of the Soviet AYG, often authoritarian youth groups were clearly intended to drive a wedge between children and their родители. There were instances, for example, of children betraying their parents to the authorities, as in Nazi Germany. True, only in the most extreme situations did sons actually rat out their parents for being insufficiently devoted to, e.g., collectivization and the new колхози life, but this did occur, and often such betrayal was linked to participation in AYG and earned kids AYG rewards.

By far the most important act of betrayal by a Soviet son was that of Pavlik Morozov, a fifteen-year-old living in the rural Siberian village of Gerasimovka. According to legend, little Pavlik, a member of the Pioneers, was savagely murdered by his own family after he had ratted out his “kulak” father, Trofim Morozov. Thus Pavlik was a martyr in official eyes, a great hero because he had put the interest of the state before even that of his own father. In truth, contrary to the propaganda, Pavlik was not a Pioneer at all and his father

40 Neither the Komсsomol alone, nor any other single institution, can be blamed, for example, for the various features of early Soviet life which ripped children from their mothers and fathers. The collectivization of the peasant economy under Stalin, for instance, “divided families, setting sons against their fathers, over whether to embrace the Soviet way of life.” Orlando Figes, The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin’s Russia (New York: Picador, 2007), 128.

41 As Figes writes,

   How many sons actually denounced their own fathers is hard to say. There were certainly a few, if not quite as many as one might believe from the Soviet press…. The press reported that a Pioneer called Sorokin had caught his father stealing колхоз grain and had him arrested by the police; that a schoolboy called Seryozha Fadeyev had told his headmaster where his father had concealed a store of potatoes; and that a thirteen-year-old boy called Pronia Kolbin had denounced his own mother for stealing grain from колхоз fields (he was rewarded with a trip to Artek, the famous Pioneer holiday camp in the Crimea, while his mother was sent to a labor camp).

Ibid., 128-129.
had fought for the Red Army.\textsuperscript{42} Less important than the sordid details of Pavlik’s story, however, is the degree to which it was embraced by Soviet officialdom. Pavlik Morozov, supposedly a model Pioneer, quickly became a staple of Soviet propaganda, especially propaganda intended for young people. As Orlando Figes explains,

The cult was everywhere. Stories, films, poems, plays, biographies and songs all portrayed Pavlik as a perfect Pioneer, a loyal vigilante of the Party in the home. His selfless courage…was promoted as an example for all Soviet schoolchildren. The cult had a huge impact on the moral norms and sensibilities of a whole generation of children, who learned from Pavlik that loyalty to the state was a higher virtue than family love and other personal ties. Through the cult the idea was sown in millions of minds that snitching on one’s friends and relatives was not shameful but public-spirited. It was indeed expected of the Soviet citizen.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus, with almost unthinkable hubris—and largely by way of its authoritarian youth groups—the Soviet state instructed its children to serve the Kremlin before their own parents. Meanwhile, mothers and fathers, as in Nazi Germany, were to be on the lookout; any criticism or questioning of official orthodoxy could spell their doom, potentially at the hands of their own kids.

\textbf{B. Gender and Relationships}

With some notable exceptions, Communism in practice tends to treat gender and sex much as Fascism does. The most important distinction is related to gender equality. Whereas the Fascists, as we have seen, seemed little interested in progressing toward parity between men and women, the Communists took gender equality seriously and have historically sought to institutionalize it. Often this institutionalization affects, or affected by,

\textsuperscript{42} Still, it may be true that Pavlik denounced his father for aiding kulaks. Apparently, as one historian explains, Pavlik was “active in agitation work, which brought him close to the police.” Pavlik first denounced his father, who was later executed, and then commenced his own small-scale reign of terror on the village, reporting anybody “who concealed grain or spoke out against the kolkhoz.” Pavlik and his accomplice, his nine-year-old brother Fyodor, were killed in short order, although not likely by their own family. The quotations appear in ibid., 123 and 124; for Figes' summary of the story, see ibid., 122-124.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 125.
AYG. In the Soviet case, the creation of the Pioneers in 1922, for example, for which little boys and little girls alike were eligible, was considered exemplary of the USSR's successful establishment of gender equality.⁴⁴ But the road to gender equality in the Soviet Union was not always sunshine and song, as the history of the Komsomol, especially in its early years, indicates.

As Ann Livschiz notes, while the 1920s in Russia had been “associated with sexual freedom and experimentation, as well as a relatively open discussion of sexuality and relations between men and women,” things changed in the 1930s. Primarily in response to widespread anxiety about the sexual behavior of young Soviet subjects, this new era would witness “an escape into Puritanism,” with different results for girls and boys.⁴⁵ What is more, this new conservatism persisted well after the Second World War, such that sex was often publicly discussed only “via its most negative consequences: extra-marital affairs, teenage pregnancies, widespread venereal disease, and illegal abortions.”⁴⁶ At any rate, in general, the state endeavored to change significantly the ways that ordinary people viewed gender and sex, and naturally the Komsomol was expected to play a major role in helping the state realize its new goals.⁴⁷

For example, in a remarkable show of state authority, in the post-Stalin USSR, “Komsomol patrols” reportedly “broke up couples in amorous embraces on fields, chastised youngsters kissing in the street, and strictly observed the decency of movements on the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 399 and 402, respectively.
⁴⁶ Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, 285.
⁴⁷ See, e.g., ibid., 261-262, 266, 268, and 280-283.
dance floor.” At the risk of belaboring the obvious: kissing has nothing (or so it would seem) to do with Marxism-Leninism. But the cultural conservatism of the Soviet state demanded that romance and sex be, if not vilified, certainly viewed with suspicion. Even friendship was sometimes worrisome given its purported potential to engender solidarities outside the purview of the state. For instance, after World War II, a group of young people in Moscow calling itself Close Friendship aroused Komsomol antennae, and in short order its members were barred from joining the VLKSM and attending university. What is interesting is that, over time, and not least in the era of *destalinizatsiia*, such informal groups came to be permitted by the state in what amounted to a surprising (but perhaps necessary) concession. As Juliane Fürst notes,

> Close Friendship was a herald of things to come. So-called *kompanii*, groups of friends, who assembled in private spaces in order to drink, dance, and exchange literature, political opinions, art, and any other cultural artifact, became a fixture on the youth scene in the Khrushchev years, when a more liberal climate allowed them to flourish in the semi-open. Friendship became not only a stubborn defence [sic] mechanism for a private sphere, increasingly it pushed into the public realm, claiming functions hitherto reserved for the organs of the state. The radicalism of these *kompanii* is thus hard to overstate. As Fürst points out, seen in this light, “Friendship was thus not only a potential competitor to Komsomol comradeship, but both encouraged the collective breaking of norms and constituted a private challenge to the system’s monopoly on the public sphere.”

### IV. Building the Next Nomenklatura

Like authoritarian youth groups generally, the Komsomol was clearly meant to facilitate the matriculation of the (apparently) best and the brightest into the annals of the state machinery. It is worth remembering that throughout the Soviet Union’s vast territory

---

48 Ibid., 266.
49 Ibid., 259.
and for a variety of purposes, the creation of cultural-political elites was a project almost from the get-go. In Central Asia, for example, which the Russians clearly viewed as the most culturally-backward part of the Soviet Union, “Korenizatsiia” was the project of inventing a local Soviet elite, attaching indigenes to the larger USSR, and thereby providing those local elites with “roots” (koreni) by which they would be tied to the central state. Ultimately, Korenizatsiia required enormous efforts and produced only modest results. But young people, in Russia and beyond, naturally presented an even greater, and ultimately a far more important, challenge. From youngsters, of necessity, the next Soviet generation would be drawn, and that meant that the next generation of apparatchiki would also come from among the youth. Writing in 1951, Julius Gould clearly recognized the elite-formation function of the Komsomol and, moreover, correctly linked it to Stalin’s Purges in the 1920s and 1930s. As he put it, the Komsomol’s

significance was recognized as the reserve from which would be selected the future leaders of the Bolshevik Party and the expert functionaries of the one-party State. In the “purge-years”...it was shorn of many of its leaders...the rank and file were likewise thinned by denunciations leading to mass-expulsions. Soviet Youth was given in its own flesh a demonstration that the “purge” was an institutional and not an accidental feature of life in the one-party State.50

This paper is of course focused primarily on the ambitions and interests of states, but it is valuable here, if only briefly, to note the dissonance between the aspirations of the state, on the hand, and the aspirations of parents and children, on the other, with regard to the elite-formation function of AYG. While states try to use their authoritarian youth groups to find their most loyal supporters, many youngsters, along with many parents, are motivated to join AYG less by ideological sentiments than by pragmatic, and especially careerist, goals. We

---

will see in the next chapter that, in today’s Russia, Nashi affords major benefits to its members, among them valuable educational and internship opportunities. Likewise, in the Soviet Union, careerist ambitions drove many a young Soviet to join the Komsomol. Beyond the organization’s true believers, on whose steely devotion to officialdom the state relied in its efforts to build up the Party and the secret police, many more members simply, and understandably, wanted good jobs.\textsuperscript{51} In China, certainly some would-be members of the post-CR iteration of the CYL have been motivated by similar ambitions.\textsuperscript{52}

Meanwhile, from the perspective of the state, two opposing ambitions have historically given way to what may at times seem like inconsistent policies. To the extent that Communist states seek young people to carry on the socialist revolution, governors look in earnest for those worthy of the task. Thus, in early Communist China, for example, “Party-led organizations in schools, worksites, recreational associations and neighbourhoods [sic] were charged with inculcating the official values in youths and closely monitoring their behaviour [sic] and thoughts, testing their suitability as revolutionary successors.”\textsuperscript{53} Yet, while in may seek the best and the brightest “revolutionary successors,” on the one hand, the state also seeks, on the other, to influence as many young people as possible.

In general terms, the tension is between quality and quantity. The Hitler Jugend, of course, never faced this tension because, as we have seen, membership in the HJ became mandatory for all young Germans just before the war began (and by 1942 was enforceable by Himmler). But the Communist cases are clearly different. Well into the 1930s, the

\textsuperscript{51} Fainsod, “The Komsomols,” 38 and 39.
\textsuperscript{52} Gold, “Youth and the State,” 607.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 599. The same was true in the Soviet case. As Fainsod explains, “The Komsomol is the reservoir from which Party members will be recruited; and in the eyes of the Party leadership at least, this is the period of tutelage when qualifications can be sifted and political ardor tested.” Fainsod, “The Komsomols,” 29.
VLKSM in the Soviet Union was “regarded as a relatively exclusive class organization with membership primarily recruited from proletarian elements in the cities and the poorer peasantry in the villages.” Only in 1936 were the rules changed so that membership would thereafter be granted simply to those who supported the regime, regardless of their class status. We will see below that the Chinese took the same step in the middle-1960s.

Suddenly, as Victor C. Funnell writes, “[e]ven youths from landlord, rich peasant and capitalist backgrounds were eligible to join.”54

Why did the Komsomol change its policy in 1936, opting, as it were, for quantity over quality? In short, as this paper’s central argument would anticipate, the Komsomol expanded in order to improve its capacity to advance Soviet ideology. As Fainsod argues, whereas the Komsomol had focused mainly on the economic sphere upon the commencement of the Five Year Plan,55 by 1936 its “main task” became “Communist indoctrination of youth.” Fainsod explains,

The Komsomols were not to participate in economic questions as actively as they had done before; their major attention was to be turned to the educational task. Programs were also to be developed to appeal more widely to youth. The Komsomol leadership was called upon to emphasize “cultural” as well as political work, to organize athletic competitions, ski excursions, musicales, dramatics, dances, and evening literary discussions in order to minister to the many-sided interests of youth and to attract its support. Under the impetus of these measures, membership grew sharply. By October, 1939, it had climbed to 9,000,000.56

Remarkably, the Chinese made a similar move in 1955, when “it was decided to expand the membership, particularly in rural areas.” Maybe even more than their Soviet

---

54 Funnell, “The Chinese Communist Youth Movement,” 117; see also 129.
55 “With the initiation of the Five Year Plan, the whole weight of Komsomol activity had been turned in the direction of emergency economic activity—the construction of new industrial plants, the organization of Kolkhozes, and the whipping up of enthusiasm for the manifold enterprises embraced in the Plan.” Fainsod, “The Komsomols,” 24.
56 Ibid., 25.
counterparts, the Chinese leadership was essentially seeking to find and institutionalize a functional equilibrium between quality and quantity. As Funnell noted in 1970, by the middle-1950s, the CCP had come to see “that too much stress on the League’s elitist character tended to make it a ‘second Party,’ while concentration on mass youth work alone, without an advanced nucleus of leadership such as the League, led to loose and ineffective control over the movement.”\textsuperscript{57} In the middle-1960s, once again, the leadership put major emphasis on increasing membership, again with particular focus on gaining rural recruits.\textsuperscript{58} By this point, becoming a member of the CYL seemed to some far too easy.\textsuperscript{59}

In the Soviet case, one noteworthy effect of this turn toward quantity (as opposed to quality) was that Komsomol elites were constantly looking for ways both to bring members to their ranks and to maintain the support of those who had already joined. Because young Soviets were not required to join the organization, the Komsomol had to woo them (and, at the same time, keep current Komsomol members from quitting). This meant that the Komsomol had to be at least moderately responsive to the desires and interests of its constituents. In this way, as a sort of vaguely representative body for young Soviets, the

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{59} As Funnell writes,

Mass recruitment…may have altered the character of the League to something less than “an organization of advanced youth.” Even youths from landlord, rich peasant and capitalist backgrounds were eligible to join. The recruitment plans handed down to League branches may, therefore, have caused them some embarrassment. Some complained that there were insufficient youths in their locality holding the requisite qualifications. The official answer of the League was not that there were too few eligible youths but that the qualifications demanded were too high. The League mirrored the Party in every respect. In recruitment policy it, too, could lower the political and other requirements where necessary, in the interests of expansion, or where class back-ground seemed to offer an alternative guarantee of political reliability.

Ibid., 117.
Komsomol took on a certain corporatist hue, especially once destalinizatsiia set in under Khrushchev and the participatory features of the Komsomol were emphasized.\textsuperscript{60}

\section*{V. Conclusions}

One scholar, Neil Robinson, goes so far as to argue that the Soviets’ ultimate incapacity to maintain ideological predominance spelled the USSR’s demise: once the state’s stranglehold on ideological power ceased in the Gorbachev era, the regime was sent into a (predictable) tailspin.\textsuperscript{61} Does Communist China—which, as of this writing, has endured nearly as long as the Soviet Union did—avoid a similar fate by its governors’ reluctant acceptance of limited ideological freedom, not least for its youth? Certainly Beijing’s ideological power vis-à-vis Chinese youngsters pales in comparison to the ideological power for which Moscow once hungered vis-à-vis its own youth population, but this might be precisely in the state’s interest. Just as China’s erstwhile socialism has largely eroded in the face of economic necessity, so has the state gradually conceded ideological power. As Gold wrote in 1991, even some measure of extra-state associational life for youth has developed—that is, has been permitted to develop—in Communist China.\textsuperscript{62} If Robinson’s theory of the

\textsuperscript{60} For short descriptions of the putatively participatory elements of the Komsomol at the level of the kollektiv and the various benefits of membership, see especially Hahn, “The Komsomol Kollektiv,” 230-233; see also where Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod allude to this pseudo-corporatist feature: On the one hand, the organization surely was established to help promote party values among the younger generation and to mobilize the energies of youth into activities that further party goals…. On the other hand, in trying to achieve these goals, Komsomol officials inevitably find that the acceptance of regime values by young people and their willingness to participate in socially useful activities depends not only on propaganda activities but also on concrete conditions and policies which are specifically relevant to their lives. As a consequence, Komsomol officials cannot inculcate a Marxist-Leninist world view unless they attempt to represent youth interests in the policy process at least to some extent. Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, \textit{How the Soviet Union is Governed}, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 404.


\textsuperscript{62} Gold, “Youth and the State,” 611.
Soviet collapse is right, then presumably these steps have been the right ones. In the next chapter, in which we turn to the present-day Russian Federation, we will ask to what extent V.V. Putin’s youth organization, Nashi, has mimicked the Komsomol—and to what extent it has avoided the Komsomol’s mistakes.
Chapter IV: Nashi in Putin’s Russia

“We don’t want a revolution here. We want to make the country stronger.”
—Ksenia, Moscow teenager and Nashi member, in 2005

I. Introduction: Putin Moves Forward—and Looks Back

The fall of the Soviet Union brought nearly eighty years of dogged authoritarianism to an end and gave way to Russia’s brief encounter with democracy. But if, under the dissident-cum-president Boris Yel’tsin, the Russian state was for the first time exposed to democracy, it was also exposed to great instability and faced, in quite short order, a significant reduction of its power. This, to be sure, was out of step with the historical norm in Russia, where “power tends to be concentrated at the very top of the state hierarchy and personalized in a chief executive.” It was perhaps little surprise, then, that restoring the power of the central state became the chief objective of Yel’tsin’s enormously capable successor, V.V. Putin. In particular, Putin would be tasked with (re)consolidating political power which had been largely dispersed among regional actors during the Yel’tsin years. His grasp on power routinely insecure, Yel’tsin’s ascendance in the 1990s had largely depended on his willingness to trade the authority of the central state to “regional governors”—who, in turn, wasted no time putting it to use. It would fall to Putin, then, to stop the bleeding. Only under Putin

---

1 This chapter is based heavily on a term paper I wrote for a graduate seminar (PO80901) at Boston College with Professor Easter in Fall 2010.
2 Quoted in Julian Evans, “How Putin Youth is Indoctrinated to Foil Revolution,” The Times (London), July 18, 2005, 28. I accessed this newspaper article, and all other newspaper and magazine articles cited here unless otherwise noted, in the LexisNexis database, accessed via Boston College. I have also capitalized titles of articles where appropriate in the interest of uniformity.
4 With remarkable speed, as Easter explains, “regional governors effectively became autonomous political actors, elected from below instead of appointed from above.” The suddenly-empowered regional governors then found themselves well-positioned to demand yet more power, necessarily threatening the central state. “Yel’tsin’s strategy to hold it all together through ad hoc negotiations produced an uneven and contradictory federal structure.” Ibid.
would the hyper-regionalism of the transitional 1990s be replaced by the hyper-centralized state of Russian tradition.

Part and parcel of Putin's nationalization efforts was his government’s creation of authoritarian youth groups. The most important, Nashi (“Ours”), is the subject of this chapter. The group, which emerged in 2005, succeeded another Russian AYG called Walking Together. In the summer of 2008, Nashi boasted well over 100,000 members between the ages of 17 and 25 years. As we will see, Nashi members are not revolutionaries, but counterrevolutionaries, and they serve not “the proletariat,” “socialism,” or “the Party,” but the state, and especially Putin himself. In the following pages, we will look first at Nashi’s origins, and then, as in previous chapters, turn to each of its major ideological goals. We will see that, like AYG across time and space, Nashi aims to legitimate the nation-state and to demonstrate at the same time the homogeneity of the Russian nation; to promote a certain set of moral standards and, most of all, to promote specific norms related to gender and/or sex; and to affect the formation of a new nomenklatura whose members will support the state and its aims. In addition, we will see in the following pages that the creators of Nashi seem clearly to have based Nashi in very large part on the most important of the Soviet-era authoritarian youth groups, the Komsomol. Indeed, the

---

5 Nashi, which we examine here, was said to be one of many “political tools” dreamed up by Kremlin bigwig Vladislav Y. Surkov in support of Putin’s agenda. According to one newspaper report, Surkov “created an array of political tools—the youth movement Nashi, the United Russia party and the overwhelming force of fully controlled television—that helped Vladimir V. Putin consolidate his authority during his first two presidential terms.” Ellen Barry, “Architect of Russia’s Centralized Political System under Putin Is Reassigned,” The New York Times, December 28, 2011 (Late Edition—Final), 4.

6 See, e.g., Adrian Blomfield, “Party Girl Pawns Her Own Diamonds to Take on Putin at Politics,” The Daily Telegraph (London), June 1, 2006, 17.

question seems to be less whether the Komsomol has helped to inform Nashi, but rather to what extent it has provided Nashi a positive example and, on the other hand, to what extent it has demonstrated to Nashi’s planners what to avoid.

II. The “Orange” Threat and the Origins of Nashi

A. Revolution in the Neighborhood

The first and most immediate objective that Nashi was meant to address upon its founding in 2005 was counterrevolutionary in the most prosaic and literal sense. The Kremlin feared the emergence of a Russian “color revolution” of the sort that had appeared in other post-Communist states—Serbia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine—and thus constructed an ostensible “youth movement” to guard against anti-regime upheaval.

Particularly worrisome to Moscow was the so-called Orange Revolution in next-door Ukraine, where local activists had risen up en masse against presidential candidate and Kremlin-ally Viktor Yanukovych in favor of his Western-looking opponent, Viktor Yuschenko. In preparation for the election, Putin had gone to Ukraine to offer his endorsement to Yanukovych, and Russia had even bankrolled Yanukovych’s campaign, but these steps had clearly been insufficient. In what was manifestly a victory for Ukraine’s independence from Russia, Yuschenko won the election and was inaugurated shortly thereafter. In short order, Nashi appeared. The new authoritarian youth group was to serve as a bulwark against the great Orange threat, not unlike the way the Komsomol had served the Reds against the Whites a century before.

---


9 On the well-known origins of Nashi, see, e.g., Andrew Osborn, “Putin Sets Up Youth Group to Stop Orange Revolution’ [sic],” *The Independent* (London), March 1, 2005 (First Edition), 23; Peter Finn, “Another Russian
It has been suggested that Putin was in fact little concerned about the potential for revolt in Russia, fearing instead decreased sway in his near-abroad.\textsuperscript{10} But the president’s actions as well as his words call into question the veracity of that claim. If indeed Putin’s interest in the Orange Revolution was rooted in his regional power objectives, to what do we attribute Putin’s \textit{domestic} response? Why, in answer to the Orange Revolution, should Putin have instigated “classic Soviet measures” at home\textsuperscript{11} if his major concern was Russia’s regional power? By late 2005, even the president himself had to admit that he was “afraid” of the events in Ukraine. He feared, he said, “a banana republic where the one who shouts loudest is the one who wins.”\textsuperscript{12}

In addition to the natural fear of internal opposition, two other, perhaps less obvious triggers of Putin’s Orange anxiety deserve to be noted. First, Putin’s early stint in Communist Germany, where at the end of the Cold War he witnessed, with the rest of the world, the bottom-up destruction of the Communist state, clearly impacted his outlook in general,\textsuperscript{13} and may have been particularly salient in his mind as he watched the events in Ukraine unfold. Second, at least in one sense, Putin came by his paranoia honestly; the fear of a “Fifth Column” such as he exhibited in this period has a long tradition in twentieth-century Russian history, even pre-dating Stalin. Well before the Purges of the prewar years,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11} As one scholar noted at the time, “Putin’s response to the Orange Revolution…was a return to classic Soviet measures—more repression but also more social care and state paternalism.” Ivan Krastev, “Democracy’s ‘Doubles’” \textit{Journal of Democracy} 17, no. 2 (April 2006): 60, doi: 10.1353/jod.2006.0030.
\textsuperscript{13} As Easter points out, “Putin witnessed the explosive results of mixing spontaneous social movement with tentative state coercion in East Germany in 1989. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Putin’s German experience, in which a seemingly stable political regime hesitant to use force was suddenly toppled from below, might explain his heavy-handed reaction to opposition protests in Russia.” Easter, “The Russian State,” 205.
\end{footnotesize}
the Bol’sheviks’ fear of being undermined from within was intense, perhaps because of their own experience. Some have argued that Lenin’s quick defeat of the tsar’ and the rapid seizure of power by the Bol’sheviks’ induced them to worry that a coup of similar swiftness would dethrone them.14 It would seem, then, that, at least in some narrow sense, when Putin feared the upheaval of his government, he followed in the footsteps of his (Communist) forefathers.

B. Nashi Makes its Debut
Nashi’s architects as well as its members were similarly explicit about Nashi’s origins. As early as March 2005, unnamed Nashi higher-ups asserted their opposition to “orange revolution,”15 and in April Nashi spokesman Ivan Mostovich explained that “everything that happened in Ukraine shook Russia.”16 Shortly thereafter, in July, Kremlin heavy-hitter and former Yanukovych adviser Gleb Pavlovksy prevailed upon an audience of three-thousand Nashi members, who had gathered at Lake Seliger as they would every year thereafter, “to defend” (in his words) “the constitutional order if and when the coup comes.”17 Any initial uncertainty as to Nashi’s primary objective would not last long.

Remarkably, even in April 2007, well after Yuschenko’s inauguration in Ukraine, 15,000 Nashi members were loitering around Moscow, distributing 10,000 SIM cards and informing those who received them precisely how to use them. As a report at the time explained,

The cards allowed users to send text messages to the Kremlin—to be answered promptly by Nashi volunteers. Recipients were also instructed to use the cards to report any signs of an incipient Orange revolution. In that event, the cards would instantly relay text-message instructions on what to do and where to rally. “We explained to Muscovites that we should all be prepared for the pro-Western

16 Quoted in Finn, “Another Russian Revolution?” A17.

79
revolution, funded by America,” says Nashi activist Tatyana Matiash, 22. “People must know what to do to save their motherland in case their radio and TV stop working.”

Similarly, in late 2007, Nashi members could again be seen in Moscow, this time with the local police, with whom the group had struck a friendship. Hundreds of Nashi members were said to “have undergone training and donned red armbands as druzhniki, reviving a term from Soviet times to describe the volunteer corps.” Moreover, Nashi insisted that there were many more of its members where those had come from: the group claimed that thousands of its acolytes would be “patrolling” the capital “during the elections, with more in other cities,” an obvious warning to anyone contemplating anti-regime activity. To the surprise of no one, right on cue, in late 2011, Nashi announced that thousands of its representatives would be in Moscow to keep an eye on the casting and counting of ballots.

III. Legitimating the post-Communist State

Nashi, then, at least in its initial iteration, was intended to serve the Russian government, and especially V.V. Putin himself, as a counterrevolutionary force. But beyond preventing Orange rebellion in particular and intimidating anti-Putin forces in general, what did Nashi do—and what does it do today? Following the 2007-2008 electoral season, some analysts argued that Nashi would soon disappear, its services no longer required. But this was a short-sided view. Just as the Komsomol did not disappear after the Civil War, neither did

---

18 Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova, “Young Russia Rises; the Kremlin Has a New Weapon in its War on Real or Imagined Enemies, From Opponents at Home to Foreign Revolutionaries,” Newsweek, May 28, 2007 (International Edition), 0.
Nashi dissipate after the Orange threat had faded. Indeed, perhaps in the same way that the Komsomol refocused its energies on ideological power following the first Five Year Plan, as we saw in the last chapter, so did Nashi reorient itself toward the acquisition of ideological resources after the Orange threat had been effectively countered.

Among Nashi’s chief long-term, ideological objectives is the promulgation of a particular brand of nationalism. State and nation are one in the Nashi narrative, as in other nationalisms, and naturally this coalesces perfectly with the “cult of the state” that Putin has sought to advance.22 Still, the content of Nashi’s nationalism is less than clear. The organization claims to support a host of genial abstractions (“modernization, democracy, and patriotism,” according to Nashi front man Ivan Mostovich23), yet one is conspicuously hard-pressed to find concrete descriptions of what Nashi is actually for (other than Putin) and actually against (other than “fascism,” as we will see presently). In general, Nashi is a “nationalist” organization in that it lionizes the Russian state, usually by lionizing Putin himself, and in that it has systematically sought to “otherize” those whom it perceives as unfriendly to the regime. Certainly in so doing—in attempting to push certain unfriendly elements outside the perceived nation—Nashi tries not only to protect the regime from those who might wish it harm, but also reinforces the mythological homogeneity of the nation. As one Nashi member nonchalantly explained at Lake Seliger in 2007, “The main thing here is to make us one family with the same ideas.”24

As its name manifestly suggests, Nashi is for “our” people, the Russian people, the people who support the president and his agenda. In contradistinction, putative opponents

23 Quoted in Finn, “Another Russian Revolution?” A17.
of Putin and his agenda are, in Nashi parlance, “Fascists.” Consider, for instance, an episode that took place in 2007. That year, the Bronze Soldier statue in the capital city of Tallinn, Estonia, a tribute to the Soviet Army, was taken out of Tallinn and moved “to a military cemetery.” The event went almost entirely unnoticed in the West. But what may have seemed relatively insignificant to most of us was viewed with horror in Russia. Wasting no time, Russian Railways cut off oil shipments to Estonian ports, while Nashi members, yelled, among other things, “Fascism will not be allowed” at a press conference held by the Estonian ambassador in Moscow. Meanwhile, other Nashi members erected a sign on the highway between Russia and Estonia emblazoned with the words: “YOU ARE DRIVING TOWARD FASCIST ESTONIA.” The next year, in 2008, the Lake Seliger event featured a pig named for the Estonian president, over whose pen flew the Estonian flag.

Another, earlier episode is similarly revealing. The Brenton affair, as we might call it, started when Anthony Brenton, the British ambassador to Russia, met with a group of anti-regime activists in July 2006 but neglected to meet with representatives of Nashi. To this perceived insult, the group responded with celerity, undertaking a “campaign of harassment and intimidation” aimed squarely at Brenton. No surprise, then, when, in the summer of 2008, Nashi’s then-leader noted that Brenton “supports fascists and extremists.”

---

26 Matthew and Nemtsova, “Young Russia Rises,” 0.
29 Quoted in Harding, “G2: Welcome to Putin’s Summer Camp,” 12.
was senseless, but characteristic. In Nashi-speak, “Fascist” is a pre-loaded label for opponents—even putative opponents—of the state.

Of course, far from an odd throwback to a bygone era, Nashi’s infatuation with “fascism” is pure nationalist mimesis. The constant invocation of the fascist whipping-boy—almost seven decades after the collapse of the Third Reich—constitutes a concerted (and transparent) attempt to gin up nationalist pride on the coattails of the Great Patriotic War. Soviet state-nationalism made great and adroit use of War memories in the second half of the twentieth century—not least, as we have seen, to promote the Komsomol. Nashi’s use of the “fascist” epithet is manifestly an attempt to appropriate one of the key elements of Soviet nationalism. Below, we will suggest one reason that such selective appropriation seems to provide, and may continue to provide, the mainstay of post-Soviet nationalism in Russia. In any case, as we have seen throughout this study, the rhetoric and tactics employed by authoritarian youth groups to advance nationalist sentiments tend to reflect the narratives and symbols that states wish to promote in general. Putin, meanwhile, is the messianic leader in the Nashi narrative, as in contemporary Russian nationalism generally. As Boris Yakemenko, the brother of Nashi’s first leader, Vasily Yakemenko, put it in 2005: “Many enemies are gathering inside and outside Russia. That’s why we should help Putin.”

One of the most revealing examples of Nashi’s nationalist-statist-Putinist agenda is a scene from the propaganda film “Lessons in Courage,” showed by Nashi members to

---

30 For brief comments on this, see, e.g., Nick Paton Walsh, “Russian Youth Group Vows to Name Fascists in Schools: Kremlin Backs Activists in Attempt to Harness Anger,” The Guardian (London), April 27, 2005 (Final Edition), 18.


32 Quoted in Evans, “How Putin Youth is Indoctrinated,” 28.
schoolchildren in 2007. The scene portrays Putin as “a lonely wolf surrounded by rats,” as Commissar Nikolai Panchenko described it. Clearly enough, Putin's role in the metaphor is dual: he is at once himself, the beleaguered leader who could get his job done if only the “rats” would let him, and he is Russia, a great country (noble if still fearsome, like a wolf) surrounded by parasites. No doubt these parasites can be interpreted as problematic actors at home (one report noted that they stood for “corrupt government bureaucrats”), as well as certain of the smaller countries surrounding Russia, such as Orange Ukraine, for example, or even Japan. In 2011, Nashi announced a new campaign, this one against the Japanese, whose claim to the disputed Kuril Islands (or Northern Territories) has of late irked the Russians, who also claim them. In an obviously provocative act, Medvedev visited one of the Islands late in 2010, earning the furor of the Japanese government—and the great support, just in time, of Nashi.

The “rat” imagery is familiar to us. Indeed, given Nashi’s obsessive anti-“fascist” rhetoric, it is darkly ironic that that the group steals so brazenly from the well-known Nazi propaganda which transformed Jews into rats in its own statist mythology, the results of which need not be reviewed. Thus, although Nashi primarily promotes a sort of étatist nationalism, it may be testing the waters of ethnic nationalism. One Nashi member recently turned to antisemitism outright. In a typically tawdry incident, in 2009 Nashi was furious with one Alexander Podrabinek and his supporters for attacking the memory of their beloved Soviet Union. This prompted one Nashi stooge to suggest that (in his words) “60%

33 Quoted in Matthews and Nemtsova, “Young Russia Rises,” 0.
34 Ibid.
of those who signed a letter in support of Podrabinek have Jewish names.”36 The remark was obviously antisemitic and perhaps hinted at a reemerging feature of Russian nationalism. It should of course go without saying that antisemitism in particular, and the promotion of a national “other” in general, is central to the propagation of many nationalisms, in Russia as elsewhere. Certainly in the old Soviet Union, members of the Komsomol were well-acquainted with antisemitism. To provide but one example, after the Second World War, the U.S.S.R. announced that it would take on something called “rootless cosmopolitanism,” which plainly, if not explicitly, amounted to renewed opposition to Jews. As a result, as one historian notes, many Jews lost their jobs, and many Jewish Komsomolites “found themselves dismissed on flimsy pretexts and trumped-up charges.”37 The well-known plight of Soviet Jewry was not distinct from, but seems to have been partly a product of, the major Soviet AYG.

With regard to Nashi, the point is simply this: even if the antisemitic remark was anomalous as far as antisemitism per se is concerned, it may still be representative of a larger project. Certainly well before 2009, Nashi higher-ups were flirting with ethnonationalism. For example, in 2007, Nashi’s then-head, Nikita Borovikov, insisted that “ethnic” commonalities between Ukraine and Russia, coupled with their geographic proximity, meant that “Ukraine and Russia belong much more closely together than Ukraine and the US.” Borovikov then wondered aloud whether “one day” Russians and Ukrainians would “live in a single nation once again.”38 His suggestion was not hard to understand.

36 Quoted in “Soviet Words and Deeds; Russia,” The Economist, October 17, 2009 (U.S. Edition).
37 Juliane Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 79; see, in general, 78-86 as well as 343.
IV. Sex and Morality

Like its various AYG analogues, including the Komsomol, Nashi aims to affect not only political opinions and outcomes, but also Russian morality and standards of behavior. Gender and (especially) sex are particularly important to Nashi. In some instances, Nashi draws no distinction between political opposition and what it views as immoral sex. At its Lake Seliger event in 2007, for instance, pictures were featured in which various opponents of Putin, such as Garry Kasparov, were depicted “as lingerie-clad prostitutes who sell out their country for US dollars.”

The point was clear: with typical heavy-handedness, opposition to the Russian state-nation was equated with prostitution. Similarly, also at Lake Seliger, Nashi members have handed out pictures of “Kremlin critics portrayed as Nazis or prostitutes,” clearly in an effort to equate opponents of Putin’s government with Fascism and/or depraved sexual behavior.

Often, however, the political ramifications of Nashi’s pronouncements on gender and sex are less apparent. Reproduction is among Nashi’s chief goals, as its events at Lake Seliger have made clear. In the summer of 2007, for example, campers could visit the “Love Oasis,” which consisted of tents “arranged in a heart-shape.” Couples were encouraged to visit the Love Oasis and—what else?—procreate. As an incredulous article in London’s Daily Mail noted at the time, at the camp, “sex is encouraged, and condoms are nowhere on sale.” Meanwhile, women at the camp were “encouraged to hand in thongs and other

---

40 Shaun Walker, “WILD IN THE COUNTRY: PUTIN’S OPPOSITION PREPARES FOR BATTLE; It Has the Feel of a Festival—but Thousands are Flocking to a Camp in Khimki Forest Not to Party but to Mobilise [sic],” The Independent (London), June 20, 2011 (First Edition), 28.
skimpy underwear *supposedly a cause of sterility* and given more wholesome and substantial undergarments.”  

Also on Nashi’s agenda at Lake Seliger was marriage—and lots of it. In 2007, dozens of couples exchanged vows in “the ultimate expression of devotion to the motherland,” as one article put it.  

The encouragement of sex and marriage seem to be normal features of the Lake Seliger affair, and quite effective ones. On this score, the words of a 22-year-old woman who got married there in 2008 are revealing. “Nashi means patriotism for us. That’s why we wanted to get married here,” she explained, apparently discerning no distinction between her family life, on the one hand, and her country, on the other. Moreover, the woman, called Yuliya, promised that procreation would soon be in the works. “We want three children because the first two are for the parents and the third is for growth of the country,” she said.  

Can the permanence of Nashi’s impact on Yuliya’s life, and on the life of her husband and the children they have presumably had, be overstated? At least for these individuals, Nashi’s effect has been great.

Beyond urging young people to marry and procreate (though not necessarily in that order), Nashi has taken positions on other social matters, such as drinking and smoking. Nashi members have, for example, protested “shops accused of selling alcohol and tobacco to underage children,” and has prohibited drinking at its Lake Seliger camp. The group’s quarrel with drinking might be a subtle tribute to the various (and always ill-fated) Soviet

---

42 Ibid.
43 Quoted in Halpin, “Putin’s Youth Army,” 35.
campaigns against alcohol, or it might simply reflect a genuine aversion to alcohol use among Russia’s youngsters. In either case, Nashi’s opposition to alcohol is clearly reminiscent of the Soviet-era tension between the Komsomol, on the one hand, and rebel youth culture, on the other. As Juliane Fürst explains, in the 1940s and 1950s, opposition to officialdom was widespread among young Soviet workers, and this opposition often manifested itself in heavy drinking (which, in turn, was often accompanied with violence).

For many of these individuals,

all authority—state, factory, Party, and Komsomol—were responsible for the appalling living conditions prevailing in almost all factories and factory schools during and after the war…. The frequent brawls and mass disturbances that took place in the workers’ quarters represented a stubborn refusal to submit to efforts to streamline young workers’ identities into Komsomol cells, working brigades, and lecture circles. Young workers everywhere in the Soviet Union insisted on getting drunk on pay-day, honouring [sic] Soviet holidays with even more alcohol, and getting into brawls and knife-fights on both occasions. Reports noted the habit of young workers of showing up drunk at their Komsomol assembly and getting involved in fights with officials such as the warden of their dormitories…. It was often only a dead body which caused officials to look closer at life in the country’s dormitories and revealed to the central authorities the extent to which collective and individual violence, rather than Komsomol lectures and community work, characterized young workers’ life. Alcohol and disorderly behaviour [sic] were not part of free time. With the offers of the Komsomol consisting almost entirely of study or additional work, alcohol and disorderly behaviour had become the definition of free time.46

Clearly, then, by firmly opposing alcohol use, Nashi is, not surprisingly, carrying on the Komsomol convention. What is interesting is that in so doing, Nashi also seems to be driving a wedge between itself, on one side, and ordinary Russian youth, on the other, just as the VLKSM did in the Soviet era. Clearly, over time, this could sap Nashi’s influence.

46 Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, 184-185; see also 327.
V. Toward a New Elite

In 2005, the then-head of Nashi, Vasili Yakemenko, explained how that year’s Lake Seliger camp was funded. “We ask” businessmen “to support the creation of a new political and managerial elite for the country,” he said. “If they refuse, it’s considered unpatriotic.” In that brief statement, Yakemenko not only began to offer some indication of Nashi’s tactics, but also, and far more importantly, disclosed one of Nashi’s most important goals, i.e., the cultivation of a new nomenklatura. Like AYG generally, Nashi is intended by the Putin Kremlin to produce an elite body of state loyalists. For their part, Nashi members ought to be well aware of this objective. A reporter for the London Times in 2007, for example, could not help but poke fun at a display at Lake Seliger that provided participants “the privilege of choosing where they will conduct their national service.” Not surprisingly, Nashisti were “encouraged” to choose the armed forces.

In pursuit of this elite-formation objective, and no doubt also in order to attract young Russians to the organization, Nashi members are invited to attend “various schools of management,” where they pay no tuition, and some even intern at state-run firms like Gazprom and Rosneft. Here again, the Komsomol parallel could hardly be clearer. As we started to see in the previous chapter, the Komsomol offered its members great career advantages and, in so doing, sought to attract to its ranks the most ambitious Soviet subjects. As Fainsod suggested, already in 1951, among the most effective of the Soviet state’s tools was its “power…to control the career expectancies of youth, to reward achievement which fits in with the goals of the leadership, and to punish deviant conduct with the most severe

47 Quoted in Evans, “How Putin Youth is Indoctrinated,” 28.
49 Matthews and Nemtsova, “Young Russia Rises,” 0; see also Halpin, “Winning Young Hearts and Minds,” 29.
punishments.” In Nashi’s case, there are several examples of individuals transitioning from Nashi into official positions of power. Maybe most notably, Yakamenko, the first head of Nashi, went on to hold the top position at the State Committee on Youth Affairs.

To be sure, Nashi has acquired neither the hegemony of the VLKSM nor the reach, nor does it seem to have sought that degree of power. But clearly it means to play upon the ambitions of young people, precisely as its Communist antecedent did. Indeed, it may be worth asking whether, to the extent that Nashi members constitute at least a part of the state “vanguard,” these young people constitute a sort of “surrogate proletariat” (to borrow a phrase from another context) for post-Soviet Russia. As for Nashi members themselves, at least some of them seem to be well aware of their vanguard role. As Commissar Nikolai Panchenko put it to a group of Russian schoolchildren: “Russia has become too corrupt—it is time to change things, time for stronger leaders, like us.”

VI. Conclusions

Even before assuming the presidency, Putin admitted that he stood, in his words, for “strong state power.” As a result, during his tenure, Putin undertook to increase

---

50 Fainsod goes on, The system of incentives offers the highest prizes to those who manage to incorporate themselves into the leadership stratum of Party, secret police, army, and administration; it provides attractive emoluments for the intellectuals who are willing to sing the tunes of the regime; and it gives special bonuses to the managers, the engineers, and the shock brigadiers who distinguish themselves in production. It buttresses financial awards with a system of honorifics designed to be particularly attractive to the less sophisticated.
Fainsod, “The Komsomols,” 39. See also Matthews and Nemtsova, “Young Russia Rises,” 0.
51 Atwal, “Evaluating Nashi’s Sustainability,” 749 and 752.
52 Ibid., 749n16.
55 Quoted in Easter, “The Russian State,” 199.
dramatically the state’s coercive resources and to contain private capital. Nashi, which emerged in 2005, was but another manifestation of Putin’s power agenda, but in this case, acquiring ideological power was the primary goal. Initially, as we have seen, Nashi was meant to be a counterrevolutionary force, a bulwark against the sort of uprisings which, by the middle-2000s, were exploding across the post-Communist landscape. Certainly Nashi still counts counterrevolution among its objectives, although the sort of counterrevolution it supports requires some qualification. In practice, for Nashi, counterrevolution is likely also counter-democratic; the group clearly has little interest in any democratic process which would alter the status quo, and indeed its members seem not to trust democracy. As a Duma member and former Nashi bigwig, Robert Schlegel, scoffed recently: “Only 20 years ago we had a totalitarian regime in Russia. If we let people decide who they want to rule them, the majority would choose Stalin.”

But beyond preventing an Orange uprising and seeking to affect electoral outcomes, Nashi has other objectives, and today it is clear that currying ideological power among young people is chief among them. On this score, Putin and Nashi’s puppet masters in the Kremlin seem to have learned a great deal from the Soviet-era Komsomol. This is hardly surprising; as Juliane Fürst points out, “[m]ost of the brains behind Nashi lived through the organization of youth in Soviet times and experienced the stagnating, but still awe-inspiring force of the Komsomol at first hand.” What remains to be seen is the extent to which Nashi is merely a post-Soviet iteration of the Komsomol, and to what extent, by contrast, its

---

56 See especially ibid., 214-215.
57 Quoted in Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova, “Back to the U.S.S.R.; Vladimir Putin’s Intention to Return to the Kremlin Has Opposition Critics Warning that the Country is Reverting to Soviet Times. But is That What Russia Secretly Wants?” Newsweek, October 27, 2011 (International Edition), 0.
58 Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, 364; see in general 364-365.
planners seem to have learned from, and sought to avoid, the Komsomol’s mistakes. The question is worth some consideration.

In addition to the career enhancement formerly offered by the Komsomol and today offered by Nashi, we have seen some degree of similarity between the two organizations in terms of rhetoric. In particular, Nashi seems to have had no trouble appropriating key elements of postwar Soviet nationalism. Thus, for example, Nashi could respond to the removal of the Bronze Soldier statue in Tallinn with what was presumably genuine indignation. Never mind that the Soviet Army, to which the statue paid tribute, no longer exists; for Nashi, even in the middle-2000s, tampering with a symbol of Soviet war prowess, and of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, easily constituted an affront. Perhaps we could have foreseen this. Unable to legitimate their rule on the basis of the Revolution of 1917 in particular and Marxism-Leninism in general, today’s Russian leadership seems to have little choice but to construct post-Soviet nationalism on the basis of the non-Communist features of Soviet history. The Soviet victory against the Nazis in the middle of the twentieth century clearly fits the bill. At the same time, more broadly, the presence of the “fascist” charge in Nashi’s discursive arsenal is likely indicative of a wide-ranging effort by the state to stir up patriotism on the basis of World War II.

On the other hand, Nashi’s designers seem to have learned from some of the Komsomol’s missteps. Most importantly, Nashi has retained its elite status by maintaining a (relatively) small membership. The reader will remember from the previous chapter that the elitist nature of the VLKSM was attenuated in the middle-1930s, quite by design, and that the Chinese Communist Youth League would take similar steps only a few years after the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949. Both organizations sought to increase
membership numbers, opting, as we saw, for quantity over quality. Nashi, at least so far, has maintained a commitment to quality. True, it offers great incentives to join its ranks, but it does not appear that Nashi is trying to cast its net nearly as wide as its Communist analogues have. Nashi’s place in Russian life is surely much less prominent than was the Komsomol’s place in Soviet life, especially after the 1936 reforms. But this may prove beneficial to Nashi in the long term if it means that its members will be devoted and motivated.

What, then, are Nashi’s prospects? Nashi’s future is far from certain. It may be telling that Vladislav Y. Surkov, who more or less invented Nashi in the middle-2000s, was recently removed from Putin’s inner-circle. Surkov’s departure has led some to wonder if Nashi “could be living on borrowed time.” But it is unlikely in any case that Moscow will cease its efforts to gain ideological power among young Russians. “If Nashi is closed down,” one London paper euphemistically suggests, “it cannot be assumed that the Kremlin will stop nurturing young activists.” This is surely right. This chapter and those preceding it demonstrate beyond question that authoritarian states expend great efforts in pursuit of ideological power vis-à-vis their young subjects. In post-Soviet Russia, Nashi emerged and has endured in order not only to curb potential youth uprisings, but also, and perhaps no less, to bolster the infrastructural power of the central state in the aftermath of the Yel’tsin years. In the immediate future, we should expect that Putin’s efforts to achieve ideological power at the expense of civil society (not least among youth) will correlate positively with parallel efforts to consolidate further the power of the Russian state—and to reduce, consequently, the power of private actors.

---

60 Ibid.
Chapter V: Conclusions

In *A Man’s a Man*, the playwright Bertolt Brecht depicts man’s tragic, but fundamental, pliability. In the play, an ordinary man sets out one day intending no more than to buy a fish, but he is changed along the way—“transformed, nay transfigured”—into “a soldier,” the ultimate servant of the state and its power. ¹ We are frail and fungible, Brecht tells us; we can be molded and re-molded easily, quickly, and without warning. Is Brecht right? The architects and governors of authoritarian states seem to think so. In the preceding pages, I have attempted to show that states of all sorts, but especially authoritarian states, take great pains to try to affect the beliefs, convictions, and values of their citizens or subjects. They do so via ideological resources, for which they compete with society-level actors. All states have their own motives, I have argued, and all states employ their own tools with which to achieve those motives, one of which is ideological power.

More specifically, this study has tried to show how authoritarian states try to affect children and young adults, taking advantage for their own gain of that essential human pliability to which Brecht points. More often than not, officials in authoritarian states recognize that the success of their political program in the short term, and its perseverance in the long term, are largely contingent on the loyal support of youngsters, whom they try to coopt through various means. One tool of cooptation is the authoritarian youth group, or AYG. I have argued here that authoritarian states build and maintain AYG primarily in order to shape youngsters’ beliefs and convictions, to supply them with certain values, and to deprive them of others. In so doing, states aim increase their infrastructural power. As

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *A Man’s a Man*, in *Baal, a Man’s a Man, and the Elephant Calf: Early Plays*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), 121; the play is 117-198.
Merle Fainsod wrote in 1951 in his study of the Soviet Komsomol: “Each new generation as it grows to maturity offers Party leadership a fresh opportunity to imprint its stamp on it. The capacity of the totalitarian régime to mold the minds of the young while they are still plastic and malleable is a formidable weapon, the power of which should never be underrated.” In this short paper, I have attempted only to begin what is surely a long-overdue conversation. Further study of the cases examined here, as well as authoritarian youth groups not treated here, ought to be undertaken. Scholars should also try to understand how liberal-democratic states try to acquire ideological power vis-à-vis young people, especially beyond the classroom.

To be sure, states’ efforts on this score are not always successful. Another scholar of Soviet youth, Juliane Fürst, argues persuasively that, for most of its members, the Komsomol was ultimately an artifact of public life whose influence, although considerable, could be eluded in a host of ways. Indeed, the artifactual character of the Komsomol clearly contributed to its terminability. As Fürst notes, sporadic instances of genuine accord between the Komsomol (that is, the state) and its members failed in the end to make up for the fact that real youth culture happened far away from the spaces occupied by the authorities. It is thus not surprising that when in 1991 the Komsomol collapsed, the biggest youth organization in the world seemed to crumble without leaving as much as a trace. The wealth of the Komsomol vanished as mysteriously as its devoted members…. The enormous superstructure that had made up the youth organization was broken up, its underbelly revealing just a big void. One day the Komsomol existed for its members, the next they shrugged their shoulders when they realized they no longer had to pay membership fees…. Some were left with a feeling of melancholy, most just returned to their everyday lives and the youth cultures they had constructed for themselves.\footnote{Merle Fainsod, “The Komsomols—A Study of Youth Under Dictatorship,” The American Political Science Review 45, no. 1 (March 1951): 27-28, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1950882.}

\footnote{Juliane Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 363.}
Nevertheless, the Komsomol lasted for nearly a century in a state whose victory in the Second World War gave it, as Fürst writes, “a second lifeline.”\(^4\) How the Hitler Jugend, by contrast, would have fared had the tables been turned and the Third Reich been victorious is of course not knowable.

On the basis of the Komsomol’s example, Fürst predicts that Nashi, to which we turned in the previous chapter, will fail similarly. “At the moment Nashi is cool—but there is a good chance it will be only lukewarm in a generation’s time,” she argues, perhaps correctly.\(^5\) Still, it may be revealing that, as we have seen, Nashi seems to have learned a great deal from its Soviet-era analogue and may, as a result, avoid some of its mistakes. At least for now, Nashi’s elite character and small membership, which clearly recalls the early days of the Komsomol, as well as the Communist Youth League in China, may point to the future of the authoritarian youth group. Alternatively, if Fürst is right, a new model may arise, though whether it will come first to Russia is not easy to know. What is certain is that states of all sorts will continue to seek ideological power among their citizens or subjects, and especially among young people. States may not always succeed, but they will always try. As for Nashi, while it has certainly faced its detractors, no society-level association seems poised even to serve as a counterweight to it, much less to question its supremacy. As I concluded in the previous chapter, continuing efforts by Putin’s government in today’s Russian Federation to amass ideological resources will likely happen alongside other measures intended to increase the power of the central state relative to society.

\(^4\) Ibid., 137.
\(^5\) Ibid., 365.
Ultimately, Brecht’s claim in *A Man’s a Man* may be simplistic. Perhaps we are not always as mutable as he implies. Fürst demonstrates that even the house that Stalin built was bedeviled by certain edificial flaws. Especially after the Second World War, cracks in the walls and rifts in the foundation began to appear as young Soviets increasingly found ways, albeit often small ways, to resist the state. Even the Hitler Youth failed to achieve total membership.⁶ But state efforts to achieve ideological power endured nevertheless, in these cases and in others. The man (or the child) who steps outside one day to buy a fish still has cause to beware, especially where state power dwarfs that of societal counterforces.

Bibliography

Books


**Chapters in Edited Books**


**Articles**


Other Sources
