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HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CEREMONY AS A »RITE DE PASSAGE«

Summary

The subject of this article is the traditional high school graduation ceremony in the city of Zagreb. Starting with a general theory of the ritual, more specifically initiation rituals (rites de passage), the author proceeds to describe the actual ceremony and finally analyze and interpret the given data in the light of the general theory. This theory views the ritual in its communicative and functional aspects, i. e. both as a means of conveying a nonverbal message (expressive aspect) and as a means of producing certain affects in the domain of the psyche and of the social relations of its participants (instrumental aspect). Applying this theory to the described ritual, the author draws the conclusion that the implicit (i. e. operating on the level of the unconscious) message of the ritual is about the psychological conflict produced by the authoritarian pedagogical and educational system resulting in the pupils' suppressed aggression towards the teachers, school and society in general. The instrumental function of the ritual is to release, by means of a catharsis, the suppressed aggression and establish a new relationship of equality between the former teachers and the former pupils, now members of the same adult society. This catharsis is brought about by an impressive display of »status reversal« behaviour on the part of the »maturanti« — high school graduates, and followed by a rite of incorporation.