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**Karl Brown**



**DANCE HALL DAYS**

**Jazz and Hooliganism in Communist Hungary  
1948–1956**

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**Karl Brown**

**Dance Hall Days: Jazz and Hooliganism in Communist Hungary, 1948-1956**

A curious letter to the editor appeared in an August 1953 issue of *Esti Budapest*, the evening leisure newspaper for Communist Hungary. Entitled “We want to dance properly,” it described one young reader’s unsettling experience from the previous weekend:

I’m young, I love life and I’m happy that I am living right at this moment. I also like to have a good time. Last Sunday something happened to me that I can find no explanation for. Three of us were walking around downtown looking for a good time...we heard music emanating from the Hungarian-Soviet fellowship club. We tried to get in, but were denied entry at the door. This surprised us, but we were even more surprised when we looked into the club. A jazz ensemble was playing in front of the young crowd—but in such a manner! There were four or five couples dancing . . . also outrageously! If we hadn’t been in the Hungarian-Soviet Fellowship club, we could’ve imagined that we were in some kind of American dancehall. . . . We want to dance properly and not in the American, hooligan [*jampec*] mode. We asked each other how it is possible that people dance in this manner in Budapest, and moreover how this could happen in such a place as the Hungarian-Soviet Friendship club.<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of any contextual evidence, it is impossible to determine this young correspondent’s ingenuousness: this letter to the editor can be read as either the honest dismay of a true believer or a particularly adept case of “speaking Bolshevik.”<sup>2</sup> What is certain, however, is that an underground jazz scene permeated communist Hungary despite the regime’s attempts to eradicate it. In the late 1940s and early 1950s — at the

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<sup>1</sup> “Mi rendesen akarunk táncolni,” *Esti Budapest* [Budapest at Night], 12 August 1953. All translations from Hungarian are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> It is tempting to read this letter in the latter light, demonstrating as it does that it is specifically the Soviet-Hungarian club that is the site of this illicit behavior, and occurring as it does in the wake of Stalin’s death and the advent of the New Course, when criticism of the Soviet presence was more likely. On ‘speaking Bolshevik,’ see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Chapter 5.

peak of the cold war, and before the advent of rock and roll — jazz was one of the more tempting cultural exports the USA had to offer. Scores of sources recount how Hungarians tuned in to jazz as well as political broadcasts from Western radio broadcasts on a regular basis, in villages as well as Budapest; moreover, musicians regularly flaunted the official proscriptions against playing jazz in bars, clubs, and cafes.

Worst of all — from the regime’s standpoint — jazz seemed to be the major culprit in the coalescence of a deviant youth subculture: the *jampec*, or hooligan. These young working-class males wore flashy clothes, danced the latest western dances late into the night, and mouthed off to officials; they epitomized the recrudescing threat of western influence, or ‘cosmopolitanism.’ To the communist regime, this hip debauchery threatened not only the transformation of society currently underway, but also — as it was the youth who took to it most ardently — the entire forthcoming generation of workers. Ironically, on the other side of the Iron Curtain, roughly the same assumptions were made about the subversive potential of jazz, and the significance of hooliganism: Eisenhower’s White House used jazz as a popular-cultural complement to its propaganda broadcasts,<sup>3</sup> and the analysts at Radio Free Europe (RFE) interpreted the *jampec* phenomenon as a sign of open resistance to communist rule.<sup>4</sup> Held in thrall as they were by the manichean logic of the Cold War, observers both east and west concluded that the

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<sup>3</sup> According to a December 1955 progress report on NSC 5505/1, the “Music USA” program, which consisted of one hour of popular music and one hour of jazz, was explicitly targeted at youthful listeners in an effort to undermine Communist authority. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (hereafter ‘DDEPL’), OSANSA Records, NSC Policy Papers, Box 14, pp. 15, 18. This report was finally declassified in February 2006 at the request of the author. See also Joanna Granville, *The Last Domino* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2004), pp. 158-164.

<sup>4</sup> Open Society Archives, Radio Free Europe Master Evaluation Items, HU-300-1-2 (hereafter ‘OSA/RFE Items’) 12594/52, microfilm (‘hereafter ‘mf’) 14, “Evaluation Comments.” The finding aid for the OSA/RFE Items is available online at <http://www.osa.ceu.hu/db/fa/300-1-2.htm> (viewed 7 November 2007).

intrusion of jazz into the Communist cultural sphere was a proximate cause of ideological subversion.

To date, only one scholar has investigated the *jampec* phenomenon in Hungary. Sándor Horváth argues that ‘hooliganism’ was a stereotype useful to the communist regime as a means of social control: “One important aim of the state was to control the socialization of the young. Full control over society could not be exercised, of course, and it was much less costly and more spectacular to single out a few youth groups and punish them.” Horváth also identifies a shift in the nature of the ‘moral panic’ built on this youth subculture by the communist media, arguing that their representation in the mass media shifted from overeager consumers of western culture in the 1950s to sex fiends and outright criminals in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Horváth’s basic argument is sound; herein I elaborate on the causes of hooliganism (as an actual social phenomenon), and define more precisely the nature and timing of the representational shift of ‘hooliganism’ (as a media construct). First, I find that this youth subculture occurred at the intersection of transnational and local influences: where globalized American culture, especially jazz, intruded on a local context characterized by both “passive” resistance against the regime and intergenerational conflict. Second, I find that the representational shift in regime propaganda — from deviant consumers to oversexed criminals — actually occurs well before the 1960s: in fact, before the revolution.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that *jampec* is often translated as ‘spiv,’ with an inflection on dandyism and extravagance rather than criminal or violent behavior. I will use ‘hooligan’ throughout. Sándor Horváth, “Hooligans, Spivs and Gangs: Youth Subcultures in the 1960s,” in János M. Rainer and György Péteri, eds., *Muddling Through in the Long 1960s: Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary* (Budapest: 1956 Institute, 2005), pp. 200, 220. See also Horváth, *A kapu és a határ: mindennapi Sztálinváros* [The Gate and the Border: everyday Stalintown] (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2004), pp. 172-185.

In the course of the 1950s, the party-state's relevant constituent elements — the press and other media, the police and legal administration, and the Organization of Working Youth (*Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége*, or DISz) — came to operate at cross purposes in dealing with youthful deviance. Initially, the *jampec* indeed served as a useful propaganda tool, an archetypical ‘folk devil.’<sup>6</sup> The communist press railed against these youthful deviants on a regular basis throughout the period. This moral entrepreneurship did not fall entirely on deaf ears, as it seems that many in the older generation, fed up with the perceived loose morals of the youth, were receptive to this message. At the same time, the DISz sought to convert the young to the communist cause while the police and legal administration closely monitored the most extreme manifestations of youthful deviance, in the form of juvenile crime. Despite this troika of control mechanisms — propaganda, proselytization, and policing — hooliganism persisted throughout the 1950s. By 1954, both DISz reports on working-class youth and the activities of the legal administration and Budapest police reveal a genuine and deep-seated anxiety about juvenile delinquency and the spread of hooliganism among young factory workers. It seems that the deviant *jampec* stereotype assumed a life of its own — in not only the popular imagination, but also the administrative transcript. In the end, this battle against western culture was lost by summer 1956. On the jazz front, the attempted cultural revolution was in retreat long before the actual shooting started in October.

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Although the impact of American culture in the postwar period has inspired a wealth of literature on the “coca-colonization” of Western Europe, its effects in Eastern

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<sup>6</sup> See Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), especially pp. 149-172.

Europe remain largely unexamined.<sup>7</sup> Analyses of the effects of western media in Eastern Europe have for the most part focused on the supposed political impact of broadcasts by stations such as RFE, Voice of America (VOA), and Armed Forces Network (AFN).<sup>8</sup> Hungary is no exception to this rule. Fifty years on, one of the central debates in the historiography of 1956 remains the issue of Radio Free Europe's complicity in inspiring or exacerbating the doomed rebellion.<sup>9</sup> This debate seems deadlocked until the actual listening practices of Hungarians are examined in more detail.<sup>10</sup> Leaving aside the indeterminate effects of western political broadcasts, it is clear that American and western European culture — in the form of literature, movies, and especially jazz — were quite popular on the other side of the Iron Curtain.<sup>11</sup> Hungarians avidly consumed the

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Richard Pells, *Not Like Us* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), Phil Melling and Jon Roper, eds., *Americanisation and the Transformation of World Cultures* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), and Richard Kuissel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For a recent analysis that discusses cultural consumption on both sides of the Iron Curtain, see David Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (New York: Berg, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> See Alan L. Heil, *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: the Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), Michael Nilson, *The War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting During the Cold War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), George Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Struggle for Democracy: My War Within the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Most recently, Charles Gati has argued that RFE should have supported Imre Nagy when he first assumed power, and that the station was guilty of unduly encouraging the rebels, while A. Ross Johnson has argued that it was, by and large, blameless. Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), p. 102, and Johnson, "Setting the Record Straight: Role of Radio Free Europe in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," HAPP Occasional paper No.3, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/happ.OP-3.pdf> (viewed 7 November 2007), pp. 1. 26.

<sup>10</sup> See Mark Pittaway's "The Education of Dissent: The Reception of the Voice of Free Hungary, 1951-1956," *Cold War History*, Volume IV, Number 1 (October 2003), pp. 97-116, for a promising first step in this direction.

<sup>11</sup> For the most part, scholars of Eastern Europe have focused on rock and roll rather than jazz. See, e.g., Anna Szemere, *Up From the Underground: The Culture of Rock Music in Postsocialist Hungary* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), Sabrina Ramet, ed., *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) Timothy Ryback, ed., *Rock around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The exception to this rule is Uta Poiger's excellent *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). On jazz in the USSR, see Michael May, "Swingin' Under Stalin: Russian Jazz During the Cold War and Beyond," in Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, eds., *Here, There, and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), pp. 179-191, S.

literature, movies, and music of the West — especially jazz, “the forbidden fruit” (“*a tiltott gyümölcs*”<sup>12</sup>) of decadent capitalist culture.

To the ideologues that ran the communist state, it was apparent that their political and economic centralization must be complemented with a social and cultural program that would recast everyman (and -woman) in the communist mold. The communist conception of leisure entailed lectures, closely-monitored group activities, and the importation of socialist-realist music, film, and theatre with a distinctly Russian flavor. Hungary had a long history with both Russia and communism, none of it good: it had been invaded twice by Russia in the last hundred years, and the short-lived 1919 radical communist regime under Béla Kun had left most Hungarians with a negative firsthand experience of communist rule. On the other hand, Hungary — and especially Budapest — enjoyed a long history of interaction with mainstream European culture and, especially since the early twentieth century, with Americanized global culture as well. This did not change when Mátyás Rákosi and his clique seized power. In reaction to the literature sanctioned by the regime,<sup>13</sup> Hungarians turned to banned western classics and popular western-style literature, primarily cowboy novels and whodunits.<sup>14</sup> Western

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Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (New York: Limelight, 1994), and William Minor, *Unzipped Souls* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Géza Gábor Simon, editor, *Fejezetek a magyar jazz történetéből 1961-ig* [Episodes in the History of Hungarian Jazz until 1961], (Budapest: Magyar Jazzkutató Társaság, 2001), p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> A November 1950 directive from the central office of the women’s organization on the formation of reading-circles in the countryside described the appropriate content: “The following must be included in the reading circle’s resources: some examples of Soviet belles-lettres (*szépirodalom*) that illustrate how Soviet men and women love their country, how they know how to work and understand how to fight. [They should include] such materials that delineate the Soviet Union’s peace politics and the imperialists’ warlike intentions. [They should include] such publications that illustrate how heroic women have struggled against oppression in the imperialist countries. We must ensure that the reading circle’s materials are not abstract, but comprehensively cover every topic, so that women learn about international solidarity, patriotism, and the remorseless struggle against the hatred of internal and external enemies.” Hungarian National Archive (Magyar Országos Levéltár, hereafter MOL) M-KS-276. f. 88 / 646 ö.e., p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> On the popularity and availability of western literature and pulp fiction, see OSA/RFE Items 6687/53, mf 25, OSA/RFE Items 2089/54, mf 35, OSA/RFE Items 7824/55, mf 58, and OSA/RFE Items 3133/56, mf



European films were periodically screened, and they were much more popular than their Soviet competitors: tickets to western movies had to be purchased well in advance, and according to some accounts, in some towns melees broke out when tickets ran out.<sup>15</sup> However, both of these vessels of western popular culture paled in comparison to the popularity of jazz in communist Hungary.

Hungarian jazz antedates the advent of the cold war by decades. During the interwar period, American and western European jazz bands toured Europe nonstop. They often swung through Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw, and these semi-peripheral cultural sites acted in turn as conduits to the USSR, fuelling the vibrant world of 1920s Soviet jazz. Recordings by Duke Ellington, the Dorsey Brothers, and the Andrews Sisters were snapped up by Hungarian listeners; movies like *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *Show Boat* (1929) provided further exposure to the hot new musical style. By the late 1920s, American and western European traveling jazz orchestras like ‘The Chocolate Kiddies’ and ‘Eddie South and his Orchestra’ regularly toured through Budapest and sometimes even the larger provincial towns, providing the opportunity to hear the real thing live. In their wake, Hungarian jazzmen like Orlay Jenő (who went by the nickname of “Chappy”) and Lajos Martiny (“Tiny Matton”) formed their own jazz orchestras and cut their chops in Budapest clubs before taking their shows on the road to Copenhagen, Paris, Berlin, and the other great European jazz centers. The local recording industry seems to have suffered only a brief setback during World War II: László Kazal recorded a competent

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66. One of the more popular writers of the time was Jenő Rejtő (1905-1943) who assumed the Americanized nom de plume of P. Howard. One of his books, *The 14-Karat Roadster*, is available online at <http://mek.oszk.hu/01000/01021/01021.htm> (translated by Patricia Boszó; viewed 7 November 2007). On the popularity of cowboy novels in the DDR see Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, pp. 40-42.

<sup>15</sup> Although American and British films were not screened in Hungary between 1948 and 1955, French and Italian movies seem to have occasionally found their way across the Iron Curtain. See OSA/RFE Items 4872/53, mf 23, OSA/RFE Items 7081/54, mf 41, and OSA/RFE Items 8686/54, mf 43.

version of Glenn Miller's "In the Mood" at the Pátria studio in 1945, even as most of Budapest still lay in ruins after the fierce siege of the previous winter. During the brief period of postwar coalition rule (1945-48), jazz swiftly resumed its preeminence in the popular-cultural sphere, ushering in a "golden age of jazz" (*a jazz-aranykor*) in Hungary.<sup>16</sup> Radio Budapest played jazz hits in an effort to lure younger listeners, the dance halls were packed with crowds, and hundreds of new jazz recordings were recorded and released on Odeon, Pátria, and other domestic labels.

All this changed in 1949. Taking its lead from Moscow, the Rákosi regime banned jazz from the airwaves.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter the communist press regularly excoriated the subversive threat posed by the debased imperialist cultural form, and called for closer monitoring of dance halls.<sup>18</sup> The regime did not stop at merely denouncing this so-called cosmopolitanism in popular culture: the sale of musical instruments (especially saxophones) was restricted, and musicians were required to register with the musician's union. Monitors from the union attended the performances in bars, cafes, and music halls. Penalties for playing jazz ranged from a two-week to a two-month suspension for a first offense, and more serious penalties for repeated offenses.<sup>19</sup> Instead of jazz, class-conscious musicians were expected to help the communist project along by serving up the classics (Beethoven, Brahms, etc.) but especially by popularizing the efforts of new Soviet and Hungarian composers. (One 18-year old amateur musician who escaped in

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<sup>16</sup> Simon, *Fejezetek*, pp.101, 105-145, 268, and 167-188.

<sup>17</sup> Pittaway, "The Education of Dissent," p. 104. See Starr, *Red and Hot*, pp. 210-217, on the jazz ban in the USSR.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., "Sok bába között elvész a gyerek [The child gets lost among too many midwives]" *Esti Budapest*, 2 October 1952.

<sup>19</sup> OSA/RFE Items 5462/55, mf 55, Interview with Géza Gábor Simon, Director, Jazz Oktatási és Kutatási Alapítvány [Jazz Instruction and Research Institute], October 2004.

1952 told his RFE interviewer that this was music “even a dog couldn’t like.”<sup>20</sup>) Not only was the Hungarian ear attuned to jazz, but the regime’s musical offerings were also tainted by its affiliation with the Soviets and the artificial nature of this imposed ‘popular’ culture.

Although the state effectively crushed open political dissent, it was unable to suppress this subversive cultural practice. A composer of popular music who escaped in 1956 recalled that jazz was played “all the time” in bars, “notwithstanding Communist propaganda and discriminatory measures,” throughout the 1950s; by 1955, songs were even being sung in English.<sup>21</sup> The musicians often knew who their monitors were, and could strike up jazz numbers as soon as he or she left for the night.<sup>22</sup> Even when the monitors were still present, intrepid jazzmen could get away with playing regime-sanctioned music with jazz-inflected tempo and phrasing.<sup>23</sup> One polemic in *Esti Budapest* was particularly indignant on this point, singling out a Pest music club where the house band played not only Soviet and modern Hungarian music with an American swing feel, but also Beethoven.<sup>24</sup> Although this western-style entertainment was probably more prevalent in the upscale bars frequented by foreign diplomats and businessmen (and party officials), jazz also flourished in the outlying working-class districts. According to one brash youth interviewed in early 1953, from the way they danced the rhumba at a bar

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<sup>20</sup> OSA/RFE Items 13388/52, mf 15.

<sup>21</sup> Columbia University Hungary Refugee Project, Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia Rare Books and Manuscript Library (hereafter ‘CUHRP’), Box 7, Interview 102, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Géza Gábor Simon, October 2004.

<sup>23</sup> OSA/RFE Items 13388/52, mf 15.

<sup>24</sup> “Tisztességes műsort, mai életünkhöz méltó hangulatot várnak a dolgozók a zenés szórakozóhelyektől [Workers are waiting for a proper program and an atmosphere appropriate to our lives today in music halls],” *Esti Budapest*, 19 June 1952. See also “Mégegyszer a zenés szórakozóhelyek műsoráról [On programs in music halls, revisited]” *Esti Budapest*, 19 August 1952.

called the Vince Vendéglő, “even Americans could learn a thing or two about dancing.”<sup>25</sup> Jazz was also popular in the provinces. One source recalled how at a firemen’s ball in the small town of Fertőszentmiklós, the attendees would only dance to jazz; an 18-year old unskilled laborer from Nagykáta (pop.17,000) who escaped in 1954 also declaimed the popularity of jazz concerts at the local youth club; and at the 1953 New Year’s Eve Party in Kapuvár, the band “played such a hot samba that the communists joined in as well.”<sup>26</sup> Communist cultural policy was singularly unsuccessful — and this, in turn, raised the specter that the regime’s successes might fall prey to cosmopolitan recidivism. As one *Esti Budapest* writer lamented, “everything disfigured and loathsome in the capitalist morality” could be found in the jazz bars and music halls of Budapest.<sup>27</sup> Western culture was contagious, and the communist regime’s immune system was sorely lacking the antibodies necessary to combat the western invasion.

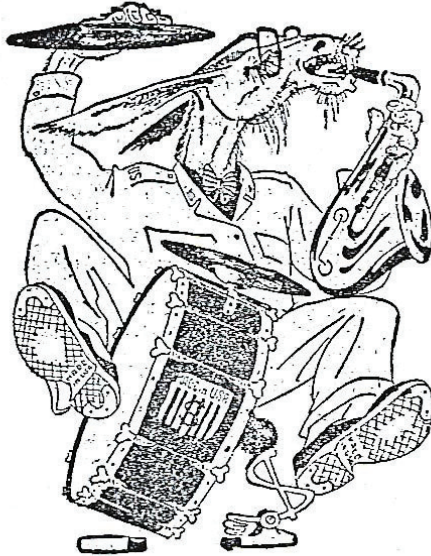
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<sup>25</sup> OSA/RFE Items 1896/53, mf 19.

<sup>26</sup> OSA/RFE Items 1896/53, mf 19, OSA/RFE Items 8853/54, mf 44, OSA/RFE Items 993/55, mf 49.

<sup>27</sup> “Amitől meg kell védeni a fiatalokat [What we must protect the young from],” *Esti Budapest*, 21 October 1954.

**Illustration 1: The Jazz Musician in the Communist Press<sup>28</sup>**



The social impact of jazz as a performative cultural practice in Communist Hungary, as anywhere, is difficult to gauge. In the United States, the history of jazz is inextricably entwined with the history of race relations. Since its invention by African Americans in the early twentieth century, it has been commodified and often appropriated by dominant white culture. Subsequent innovations in jazz, formulated as deliberate rebellions against the “square” mainstream, are themselves often eventually co-opted in turn.<sup>29</sup> Jazz has served both revolutionary and hegemonic ends: against the indictments of

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<sup>28</sup> *Színház és Mozi* [Theatre and Film], Volume III Number 37, 17 September 1950, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> David Meltzer puts it best: “imported African sacred/secular instrumental and vocal music that had disembarked in the exotic port of New Orleans, blended in that cosmopolitan city where European travelers and merchants infused Western martial and classical music into the polyrhythmic African mix, transformed, recirculated into a propulsively dynamic form called *Jazz*. A circular process where enslaved (or oppressed) peoples subvert and transform the master’s musics of definition (church, state) into one of defiance that, in turn, becomes a mystery to the master class who sets out to learn its secrets and, as with other property, own it, control its presence in ‘normative’ culture.” *Reading Jazz* (San Francisco: Mercury

American racism leveled by Louis Armstrong in the 1950s and Charles Mingus in the 1960s, we must balance the mobilization of swing music by the USA and the Soviet Union as the martial soundtrack for World War II.<sup>30</sup> Jazz in the USSR is particularly instructive in this regard, as it illustrates how political shifts redounded in that preexisting communist popular-cultural sphere: just as jazz had been subjected to Maksim Gorkii's puritanical rants in the late 1920s, so was it rescued in the early 1930s by the 'realization' that it was the music of the oppressed African American underclass and therefore ideologically sound (and, incidentally, anathema to the Nazi foe). Thereafter it was banned again in the late 1940s, but rehabilitated again in the mid-1950s.<sup>31</sup> Thus, 'jazz' is an unstable signifier: its meaning and effects are contingent on its political, social, and cultural context. In stalinist Hungary, however, this context is clear. Culturally, the music was coded as the barbaric yawp of western capital and debauchery; socially, its consumption entailed groups of people gathering surreptitiously for activities banned by the state.

By mid-1955, the Budapest jazz scene was clearly perceived as a threat. It surfaced as a major issue in a springtime meeting of the Budapest Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party:

Comrade B.: The trade unions and councils must drastically increase their

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House, 1993), p. 11. See also Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London: Routledge, 1979), pp. 46-47.

<sup>30</sup> On Louis Armstrong, see Penny M. Von Eschen, "'Satchmo Blows Up the World': Jazz, Race, and Empire during the Cold War," in Wagnleithner and May, eds., *Here, There, and Everywhere*, pp. 163-178; on Mingus, see Meltzer, *Reading Jazz*, pp. 264-265. On the Soviet mobilization of jazz during WW2, see Starr, *Red and Hot*, Ch. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Starr, *Red and Hot*, Chs. 4-6. Never one to understate his point, Gorkii (1868-1936) described his experience of jazz thus: "Listening for a few minutes to these wails, one involuntarily imagines an orchestra of sexually driven madmen conducted by a man-stallion brandishing a huge genital member." Quoted in Starr, *Red and Hot*, p. 90.

supervision in the dancing and music clubs. Last week in a music club I noted the musicians were playing imperialistic music in an inappropriate manner. We have also received a report that the Duna hotel orchestra plays only English numbers. Clearly, it's very important that we step up our monitoring of these places.

The other comrades chimed in with similar concerns, and the meeting closed with a slew of corrective resolutions: there would be an extravaganza of 'proper' music performed free that summer, thousands of movie tickets would be sold to youths at discounted prices, and the behavior of youths in the hostels and factories would be closely monitored.<sup>32</sup> This last point is central to our understanding of the regime's perception of the jazz scene. The stubborn persistence of jazz was annoying, but the regime's major concern was its pernicious effect on working-class youth. American music, the "product of a sick world,"<sup>33</sup> was the contagion vector responsible for the spread of a strange pandemic that seemed to strike only the young: hooliganism.

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As the following scene described to an RFE interviewer in 1954 indicates, perhaps the Budapest Central Committee was not overreacting. The informant, an unskilled laborer, frequented the Tripoli [*Tripolisz*], a dubious joint in a working-class neighborhood. Admission was an affordable five forints; a live jazz band played five nights a week. For these reasons it was popular among the younger generation: "kids"

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<sup>32</sup> Budapest Municipal Archive (Budapest Fővárosi Levéltár, hereafter BFL) XXXV. 95. a. / 124 ő.e., pp. 80, 100-101. Perhaps not surprisingly, Comrade B. failed to provide any explanation for how he had found himself in a jazz club in the first place.

<sup>33</sup> *Esti Budapest*, "A tánczene és a tömegzene kérdéseiről [On the problems of dance music and popular music]," 16 September 1953.

[*srácok*], some as young as 14, started at about 5 or 6 pm and stayed up until dawn, drinking, dancing, and raising hell — and on school nights, no less.

These young men always travel in packs, and if they see a woman alone with a man they make suggestive remarks and try to start something. ... They finish two glasses of beer and think they're the strongest men in the world. Fights break out on a regular basis. They don't respect their elders, they have no idea how to behave properly...

When the band plays jazz, one of the kids stands at the door. If a police car approaches, he signals and the band quickly switches to a Moscow-style waltz. The band always plays modern numbers, and the kids “dance as though they were in America.” Where they learn those dances is impossible to say. Nor can I explain where they get those drainpipe trousers, those patterned socks, or those gaudy neckties.

The police are perpetually on the prowl for these hooligans. ... when they stop one and ask for his papers, if he doesn't answer properly they take him downtown and beat him up — “not exactly because of the drainpipe trousers, but because of them nonetheless.”<sup>34</sup>

This Rabelaisian scene was probably not what one Radio Free Europe editor had in mind when he described the phenomenon in 1952:

In [sic] can however, be assumed that many ‘jampec’-s are courageous [sic] ‘die-hard’ youngsters who dare defy the Communists even risking the inevitable consequences which may go from a through [sic] beating up to jail.”<sup>35</sup>

Finally, one of the *jampec* (less frequently ‘*jampi*,’ plural, ‘*jampecek*’ or ‘*jampik*’) — a Yugoslav youth, who worked as a meatpacker in Debrecen and escaped in 1954 — explained the lifestyle a bit differently:

In his free time, he went to movies or out drinking somewhere. (It was difficult to get movie tickets, as there were only three theaters in Debrecen.) When there was good music coming out of some bar, he was unable to resist the temptation, and

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<sup>34</sup> OSA/RFE Items 8619/54, mf 43.

<sup>35</sup> OSA/RFE Items 12594/52, mf 14, “Evaluation Comments.”



would be inside within moments. By “good music” the source meant jazz, which reputedly was not policed too closely in Debrecen. However, at the same time dancing in the American manner was not permitted. One time a policeman told him: “Don’t dance like that!” “Well, sir, perhaps you might show me how I must dance?” — he answered, leaving the policeman speechless.

Another time it didn’t go off quite as smoothly. It seemed to a policeman that he was dressed in the *jampec* manner (he was wearing a checkered shirt with a zipper, grey trousers, and sandals). When the policeman asked to see his identity card, he refused, as the policeman had not yet shown him his ID either. . .

Not surprisingly, this second encounter went downhill from there; it ended with the youth being taken to the station and roughed up by the police. (He was eventually released without being charged.)<sup>36</sup> To an outsider, they were rude hooligans; to RFE, they epitomized youthful resistance to the communist system; to an insider, they were just out looking for a good time. What, then, are we to make of the *jampecek*? Were they rebels with, or without, causes?

The term *jampec* itself dates back to the interwar period. It was coined in the late 1920s, as a descriptor of effete upperclass youth; its prewar connotations were dandyism, rakishness, extravagance, and sloth. However, “*jampec* in common parlance also meant a worldly, independent, extravagant lifestyle” — one that could be “an attractive pattern for young skilled workers earning good wages after the Second World War.”<sup>37</sup> Such creatures existed in the 1950s, despite the regime’s deliberate pauperization of the working class; they could afford the drinks, cover charges, and above all the clothing that defined the oppositional lifestyle. These rebellious youths were overeager consumers of cosmopolitan culture, as detailed above, and therefore regularly flaunted regime

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<sup>36</sup> OSA/RFE Items 5270/55, mf 55. For other run-ins between *jampec* and police see OSA/RFE Items 7041/51, mf 3, OSA/RFE Items 8439/54, mf 43, and OSA/RFE Items 11584/55, mf 62.

<sup>37</sup> Horváth, “Hooligans, Spivs, and Gangs,” pp. 204-205. Note that the phenomenon of hooliganism in Soviet society has its pre-revolutionary precursor as well — see Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

proscriptions by listening and dancing to jazz. Although this was not necessarily something their elders would have disapproved of — they also, after all, found themselves in the dancehalls and clubs — there were two key sources of sublimated conflict between them and the younger generation.

As Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson argue, youth subcultures are doubly articulated: that is, they coalesce in reaction to both parent and dominant cultures<sup>38</sup> — in the case of Communist Hungary, to both working-class norms and state-imposed socialist ideals. Prior to World War II, young male workers had endured an extended period of apprenticeship, first as an *inas* (‘servant’ or ‘little serf’) and then as a *segéd* (‘apprentice,’ ‘helper’), before eventually joining the ranks of skilled workers. This labor hierarchy was mapped onto the cultural sphere: “Once promoted to a *segéd*, the life of the younger worker was closer to that of older workers: he could go out at night, drink with friends, visit girlfriends and smoke cigars or cigarettes.”<sup>39</sup> After 1948, the communist regime privileged young workers (as well as peasants and women) in an effort to break the prewar skilled labor hierarchy: the old *inas/segéd* system was abolished in favor of swifter training courses, the piece-rate system was adopted, and age- and gender-based quotas were introduced. Although these ‘reforms’ were successful in breaking the “solidaristic wage policy” of the prewar unions, the hectic demands of the centralized command economy forced management to rely heavily on the skilled elite of older male workers. These workers were therefore able to exert some informal bargaining

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<sup>38</sup> Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> László Kürti, *Youth and the State in Hungary: Capitalism, Communism and Class* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 60.

power, but this often occurred at the expense of their younger and female coworkers.<sup>40</sup> Albeit secondary to the overarching dynamic of worker-management conflict, generational tension between old and young workers also characterized shopfloor relations in the early 1950s. This was one of the two major socio-structural causes for the subculture's formation.

The other had to do with demographics. Breakneck communist industrialization resulted in a mass influx of workers, most of them young males, into the cities in search of work. The population of Budapest grew from 1 million in 1945 to 1.9 million in 1956; four-fifths of this explosive population growth was due to immigration rather than natural increase.<sup>41</sup> Although many of these young men retained ties to their rural homes (and many illegally left their factory jobs every autumn to help bring in the harvest), the gendered and familial social controls that shaped village life were largely absent in the big city. Alienated from the regime, their parents, and “the idiocy of rural life,” and unencumbered by the prohibitive costs of maintaining a household or family, young male workers sought autonomy and self-articulation in leisure and style.

Clothing was key. “The tyranny of overalls, loden coat, and cloth cap or beret”<sup>42</sup> was imposed by the regime, but it was also the sartorial norm of the prewar working class. As Hebdige notes, style in subculture “is pregnant with significance. Its

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<sup>40</sup> Pittaway, “The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation, and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Volume 12, Number 3 (September 1999), p. 287, and “Az állami ellenőrzés társadalmi korlátainak újraértékelése: az ipari dolgozók és a szocialista diktatúra Magyarországon, 1948-1953 [The Social Limits of State Control Revisited: Industrial Workers and the Socialist Dictatorship in Hungary, 1948-1953]” in Sándor Horváth, László Pethő, and Eszter Zsófia Tóth, eds., *Munkástörténet – Munkásantropológia* [Workers' History – Workers' Anthropology] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2003), especially pp. 79-80.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 35, and Tibor Valuch, “A Cultural and Social History of Hungary, 1948-1990,” in László Kósa, ed., *A Cultural History of Hungary in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Budapest: Corvina, 2000), p. 257.

<sup>42</sup> Horváth, p. 205, also Valuch, “A Cultural and Social History of Hungary,” p. 280.

transformations go ‘against nature,’ interrupting the process of ‘normalization.’ As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the ‘silent majority,’ which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus.”<sup>43</sup> The *jampec* solution was anything plaid, checkered, striped, or otherwise eye-catching; shoes with thick crepe soles (“three-story shoes,” in one account); loud ‘American’ ties.<sup>44</sup> Drainpipe trousers (*csőnadrág*) were definitely the norm, as were the crepe-soled shoes; above the waist, however, the descriptions vary wildly. The lack of consensus among the descriptions suggests that there was no specific *jampec* clothing style; instead it seems that the subculture’s visual character was defined primarily by the presence of jarring or discordant elements — a tie that clashed with the coat, stripes on plaid, and so forth. By 1950 at the latest, these flashy patterns and odd combinations of them had been coded as ‘American:’ the play “Wild West” (“*Vadnyugat*”), which ran from March to June of that year at the *Vidám* theater, saw a veritable explosion of plaids and loud ties on stage.<sup>45</sup> Before “Wild West” had even finished its run, it was followed by “Maypole” (“*Májusfa*”), a production put on at the oddly-named floating theater The Capital City Variety Peace Barge, that featured Árpád Latabár as a plaid-clothed, “America-struck” (*amerikaőrült*) hooligan.<sup>46</sup> It seems likely that the *jampec* seized upon anything that was flashy or distinctive; that these appropriations were labeled ‘American’

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<sup>43</sup> Hebdige, *Subculture*, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> On ‘three-story shoes,’ see OSA/RFE Items 6797/56, mf 71. Although a comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this article, it seems that *jampec* style was similar to that of the English Ted, or Teddy Boy. Oddly enough, the *jampec* subculture seems to have coalesced earlier than its English counterpart, which was not noted in the English press until 1953 (Hall and Ridgeway, p. 85).

<sup>45</sup> “Vadnyugat bemutató a Vidám Színházban [The performance of Wild West at the Vidám Theater],” *Színház és mozi* [Theatre and Film], Volume III, Number 13, 3 April 1950.

<sup>46</sup> “Májusfa: ‘Ki jól végezte dolgát, az vígan táncol polkát [Maypole: ‘One who completes his work well may then enjoy dancing the polka’],” *Színház és mozi*, 7 May 1950.

by the communist media; and, in turn, the *jampec* celebrated his ‘Americanness’ as a refusal of regime norms.

These aliens from a cosmopolitan planet also spoke their own language, danced wildly, and talked back to policemen.<sup>47</sup> In the *jampi* lexicon, Budapest was ‘the big village’ [‘*a nagyfalu*’], and money, ‘lard’ [‘*zsír*’]. Some of their slang terms — such as ‘massive’ [‘*masszív*’] denoting ‘good’ — were drawn from the preexisting criminal argot, or ‘*csibésznyelv*’.<sup>48</sup> Others were parodic riffs on life under communism: Zoltán Vas was known as “the thief of Baghdad,” Jászai Mari square as “ÁVÓ Maria square.”<sup>49</sup> Women were objectified with abandon: while ‘*krina*’ (also ‘*krinolin*’ — derived from ‘crinoline’) denoted women in general, prostitutes were referred to as “female athletes,” and pregnant women, “melons.”<sup>50</sup> Drinking, dancing, various criminal activities and the authorities each had three or four slang equivalents. Not surprisingly, the *jampi* argot was also known as *jassznyelv*, or “jazz-language.” The remaining elements of *jampec* identity centered on dancing ‘in the American style,’ trying to pick up girls, and mouthing off to authority figures, all of which are apparent in the accounts cited above.

These were young men the communist media loved to hate. These shifty, foppish, cosmopolitan louts provided a stark counterpoint to the fresh-faced young students, workers, and soldiers who served as the poster-boys for the communist future. All these deviant characteristics — not least the linkages between the *jampec* and western culture

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<sup>47</sup> See the 23-page slang dictionary appended to OSA/RFE Items 2619/55, mf 52; an article mocking their speech, “A nyelvrontókról [Concerning those who ruin the language],” appears in *Esti Budapest*, 28 June 1955.

<sup>48</sup> A much less extensive dictionary of prison slang is appended to OSA/RFE Items 3032/54, mf 36.

<sup>49</sup> Zoltán Vas (1903-1983) was a Muscovite communist who served as general secretary of the economic council and then as the president of the National Planning Office. The latter is confusing: although the headquarters of the Hungarian Communist Party were located on Jászai Mari square, the ÁVO/ÁVH (Államvédelmi Hatóság/Államvédelmi Osztály — the Hungarian secret police) offices were several blocks away, on Andrásy street.

<sup>50</sup> ‘*atlétanő*’ and ‘*dimnyés*,’ respectively.

— were repeatedly pilloried in the pages of *Esti Budapest* and other official media. In one *jampec* caricature, he is depicted carrying a cowboy novel.<sup>51</sup> In another the scalper of tickets to a popular movie was, predictably, “a young man in a corduroy coat and drainpipe trousers, swiftly turning to and fro in his thick-soled shoes.” (In the latter case, the author goes on to aver that this young deviant was also acting as the lookout man for a gang of thieves preying on moviegoers.)<sup>52</sup> The cinema also jumped on the *jampec*-bashing bandwagon. The archetypal film *jampec* is “Swing Toni,” played by Imre Pongrácz in Márton Keleti’s classic *Dalolva szép az élet* (“Singing Makes Life Beautiful,” 1950). Swing Toni is arrogant, a slacker at work, a dandy in his spare time, and a petty thief. He competes with the stalwart Feri Torma (Imre Sóos) for the attentions of the lovely Zsóka (Violetta Ferrari), a prim kindergarten teacher at the Vác factory crèche; one of the younger workers, Pisti, follows him around and is obviously in danger of succumbing to the temptations of hooliganism. At one point Zsóka seeks him out in a dancing school: inside, Toni and a disheveled crowd of youngsters are dancing like mad to a trio blowing hot jazz. Of course, in the end Zsóka chooses Feri Torma, and Pisti abandons Swing Toni when his thievery is revealed; neither crime nor jitterbugging paid in communist Hungary.

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<sup>51</sup> “Hát ilyen is van még? [Now it is like this here also?]” *Esti Budapest*, 4 August 1952.

<sup>52</sup> “Hány jegyet parancsolnak? [How many tickets do you want?],” *Esti Budapest*, 26 September 1953.

**Illustration 2. Two Couples at the Dancehall**



Accounts of hooliganism in the ‘popular’ press reveal just how closely cultural life in communist Hungary was monitored, and the significance of this deviant youth stereotype as a means of social control. Youths with *jampec* hairstyles or clothing were not allowed in the more class-conscious dancing schools (*tánciskolák*) feted in *Esti Budapest*; trying to sneak in one or two swing steps or other risqué moves were adequate grounds for getting kicked off the dance floor.<sup>53</sup> Factories, workers’ hostels, bars and dancehalls were also under regular and intrusive surveillance; this intimate policing of the social sphere extended to noting even the faintest transgressions in clothing, hairstyle, or

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<sup>53</sup> “Egy tánciskolában [In a dancing-school],” *Esti Budapest*, 6 September 1954; “Felbecsülhetetlen érdemek [Invaluable merits],” *Esti Budapest*, 10 May 1955. The illustration above accompanied the former article.

comportment. One 21-year old farmboy from Tiszapolgár who escaped in 1953 recalled how the local DISz secretary would level the charge of ‘hooliganism’ or ‘cosmopolitanism’ against anyone who “danced elegantly or made some new steps while dancing.”<sup>54</sup> Note, also, the clothing actually worn by the Debrecen *jampec* cited above: his sandals, checkered shirt, and regular trousers bear very little resemblance to *jampi* style: even the slightest transgression could be seized upon as evidence of hooliganism. As Horváth argues, the *jampec* stereotype was used by the regime to keep the majority of Hungarian youths in line. However, even as the communist press mobilized the *jampec* phenomenon for its own ends, the spectre of juvenile crime was haunting Hungary.

Communist Hungary was a police state by any standard. In the period 1948-1956, 1.7 million cases were investigated by the regular courts and police alone; 930,000, or slightly over half, resulted in convictions. These are some remarkable figures for a country with a total population of only 9.83 million in 1956. Although crime statistics can be difficult to interpret, the numbers for Hungary closely mirror the successive waves of repression: crimes peak in 1951-52, at the peak of pre-1956 collectivization and stalinist oppression; fall off significantly in 1953 and 1954, in accordance with destalinization under the Nagy regime; and then rise again in 1955 with Rákosi’s return to power before bottoming out in the post-1956 period.<sup>55</sup> The total numbers of juvenile crimes roughly mirrors this overall trend, constituting about 5%, or 1 in 20, of all crimes throughout the period (peaking at 11,700 cases in 1952). However, their disposition in the courts was significantly different. Once investigated, juveniles were both more likely to be brought

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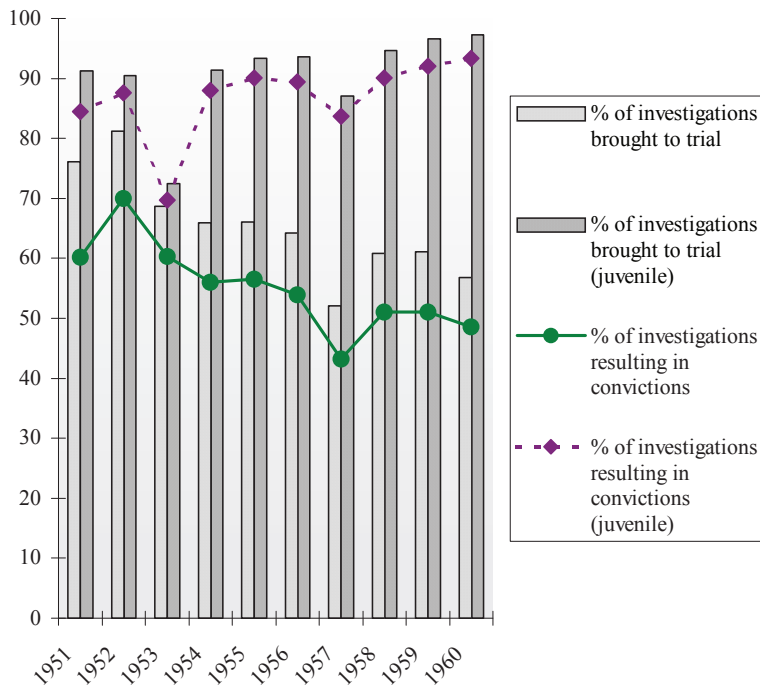
<sup>54</sup> OSA/RFE Items 1258/54, mf 34.

<sup>55</sup> Source data: 1949-55, 1957, and 1960 *Statisztikai Évkönyv* [Statistical Yearbook] (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1957, 1959, 1961), pp. 355-358, 343-346, and 357-363, respectively. For more detailed statistics on crime, see the MOL M-KS-276. f. 96(F) / 70 ö.e., passim.



to trial, and much more likely to be convicted. Whereas after 1952 conviction rates remain below 60% for the general population, for juveniles they return to 90% — and stay at that high level even after 1956 (see Chart 1). Although the penalties were not as severe for juveniles as for adults (roughly 40% of the guilty were let off with an admonition or probation) the courts proceeded more industriously against juveniles than against the population as a whole.

**Chart 1: Investigation and Conviction Rates in Hungary, 1951-1960**



A summer 1954 report from the Budapest Public Prosecutor’s office to the DISz leadership described youth crime in the capital city in greater detail. Of the 1324 juveniles convicted in the first half of 1954, the majority (70%) were guilty of economic crimes: 481 were guilty of theft and other direct economic crimes against the regime,

while 440 had stolen from other people instead of the state. (Theft was also the most common crime in the population at large, just as it is in most democratic and capitalist societies.) The next-largest group was guilty of *közveszélyes munkakerülés*, or “work-shirking in a manner dangerous to the public:” a broad category, in this case primarily vagrancy and prostitution. The remaining 20% were guilty of assault, speculation, and other crimes; 12 youths had been caught carrying a weapon (*fegyverrejtegetés*).<sup>56</sup> The XIII<sup>th</sup> district led Budapest in the number of youth crimes, followed by the IV<sup>th</sup> and X<sup>th</sup>. The public prosecutor went on to note that the XIII<sup>th</sup> was also the leader in incidences of teen prostitution, with almost three times as many cases as any other district. He acidly suggested the district DISz organization look into the matter.<sup>57</sup>

The DISz was already aware of the problem. The XIII<sup>th</sup> district (historically called Angyalföld, or “Angel’s field”), directly north of the city center, had been a working-class suburb since the middle of the nineteenth century. After World War II, Angyalföld became one of the epicenters of the industrializing project: it boasted the large Láng turbine factory as well as a number of mechanical and chemical plants, and the large United Electrical (*Egyesült Izzó*) works in neighboring Újpest employed thousands more. As these hordes converged on the XIII<sup>th</sup> district, it was DISz’s responsibility to educate the young workers; naturally, this task included monitoring their behavior in the factories and workers’ hostels. In May 1953, an *Esti Budapest* article, appropriately titled “Swing

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<sup>56</sup> This legal term is best rendered as “concealing of (unlawfully possessed) firearms”. Penalties for it were strict: in one 1951 Szeged case, a market vendor caught with a loaded revolver was sentenced to 2 ½ years in jail. MOL M-KS 276. f. 96 (Iü) / 8 ö.e., p. 72a.

<sup>57</sup> Although this disparity might simply be due to the fact that the XIII<sup>th</sup> was also the most populous district in Budapest, BFL XXXV. 95. e / 103 ö.e., Memorandum dated 9 August 1954.

Tony-s in the Culture Houses,” had already identified the XIII<sup>th</sup> as hooligan territory.<sup>58</sup>

By March 1954, the DISz concurred that something was rotten in Angel’s Field.

Almost every one of the youth organization’s confidential factory and hostel reports decried the *jampec* threat. According to a DISz report on the Láng factory, the young workers acted rudely to their elders, and generational strife in the workforce was apparent. However, this paled in comparison to how they spent their spare time:

After work most of the youths pass their time with their circle of friends. What are these circles like? Many of the Angyalföld youth are in gangs. ... many of the youth complain that they can’t really have a good time at the factory culture club. Lots of *jampi* go there, and their fights often put a stop to the fun. ...<sup>59</sup>

A DISz report from the Gheorghiu-Dei shipyard (in another district) noted the steady encroachment of hooliganism there as well. According to this report, the young workers at this factory regularly went around to Budapest bars where *jampecek* were known to hang out; young workers freshly arrived from the countryside, not knowing what to do in their spare time, were falling in with this bad crowd. According to this report, the numbers of vagrants and hooligans among the young workers was increasing despite the best efforts of the youth organization and factory committee. (Incidentally, this report also remarks on the high degree of animosity apparent between the older and younger workers.)<sup>60</sup> The *jampecek* were also portrayed as a threat to the virtue of their female companions. A DISz report on an Angyalföld girls’ hostel stressed that a number of the

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<sup>58</sup> “‘Szingtónik a kultúrotthonban,’ *Esti Budapest*, 5 May 1953.

<sup>59</sup> MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 849 ó.e., “Jelentés a Láng-gyárban végzett munkánk tapasztalatairól,” 2 March 1954.

<sup>60</sup> MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 849 ó.e., “Feljegyzés a Gheorghiu Dej Hajógyár DISz szervezetének munkájáról,” 10 June 1954.

girls had recently arrived there from a reformatory, where they had been doing time for vagrancy. Not surprisingly, these deviant girls were judged by the company they kept:

In the sphere of moral instruction there is a serious problem, as several of these morally debauched girls provide a bad example for the virtuous ones. These girls are acquainted with quite a large number of *jampec*; they meet them in the evenings in front of the hostel, and are often disorderly in the street.... a regular police watch should be posted in front of the hostel.<sup>61</sup>

These are much more menacing *jampec* than those pilloried in the pages of *Esti Budapest* earlier in the 1950s, and the fact that they now surface in the administrative transcript — as a real threat rather than a propagandized stereotype, and as the cause of the failure to convert the youth to communism — is significant. As Corey Ross argues for the *jampec*'s East German counterparts, “instead of recognizing this fascination with western culture ... as an *expression* of youthful rebelliousness or an iconoclastic disaffection with constant calls to ‘work, learn, and struggle’ for the glory of socialism, officials rather regarded it as the *source* of these problems.”<sup>62</sup> It is an open question what steps the regime could have taken to defuse the social and economic tensions resulting from its high-modernist scheme; that youthful deviance and juvenile crime were simply blamed on hooligans and Western contamination ensured that no such measures were even conceptualized.

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<sup>61</sup> MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 849 ö.e., “Jelentés a Huba utcai és Vág utcai MTH intézetekben folyó nevelő munkáról,” 2 March 1954.

<sup>62</sup> Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass Roots*, p. 140. The GDR was not the only Eastern European state to share a hooligan problem with Hungary: the unique fusion of jazz and youthful dissent contributed to very similar subcultures everywhere behind the Iron Curtain. For Czechoslovakia, see OSA/RFE Items 4510/53, mf 23, and OSA/RFE Items 11526/54, mf 47; for East Germany, see 10682/55, mf 76; for Poland, see OSA/RFE Items 1942/54, mf 35, OSA/RFE Items 7236/54, mf 42, OSA/RFE Items 9363/54, mf 43, OSA/RFE Items 654/55, mf 49, and OSA/RFE Items 955/55, mf 76, for Bulgaria, see OSA/RFE Items 5427/54, mf 39. See also Katharine Lebow, “Nowa Huta: Stalinism and the Transformation of Everyday Life in Poland’s ‘First Socialist City,’” PhD dissertation, Columbia University (2002), especially pp. 218-23, Starr, *Red and Hot*, Chapter 5, and Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, especially Chapter 2.

Perhaps the only success the regime enjoyed in combating hooliganism was that in this case its propaganda was not entirely unsuccessful. Over and above the economic threat the young generation coming of age under communism posed its elders, there seems to have been a widespread notion that it was morally corrupt. As a result, to some extent the regime succeeded in linking the supposed moral decay of the youth with this form of subcultural deviance. Hooligans became associated with this debauchery not only in regime propaganda but also in the popular imagination.

I had a friend in Budapest who was a big hooligan, a bus driver who made 2,000 to 3,000 [forints] a month. He said that if one appeared with a car one could choose between four and five terrific girls. They did it just for the entertainment, not for money.

Elsewhere this same respondent suggests the linkage between these loose women and prostitution: “The girls started out doing it just for fun and for gifts and as they got used to it they did it for money. I heard from friends that you could get a girl for 80 forints.”<sup>63</sup> It seems likely that girls who went out with hooligans would appear in the official transcript as prostitutes, regardless of whatever they might have been doing with them. The loose morality of the Magyar youth was obvious to the regime and their elders not only in the dancehalls and bars, but even on the street:

I felt like putting cotton in my little Ildikó’s and Elvirka’s ears when going on the street we would hear the following conversation: “*Szevasz* (hi!)” followed by a big slap on the shoulder, this slap coming from a boy toward a girl, mind you. “*Gyerünk csörögni*” (“Let’s hit the dancefloor”). “*Tudok egy klassz filmet*” (“I know a swell movie”). And then the young “gentleman” would start going with the young “lady” in a way that I could never figure out how they managed to walk, so much were they leaning on each other [sic].<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> CUHRP Interview 229, Box 12, pp. 32, 30.

<sup>64</sup> CUHRP Interview 411, Box 13, p. 14. Here I have taken the liberty of correcting the rough translation in the original text, which reads: “*Gyerünk csörögni*” (“Let’s go and rattle [our old bones]!”) and “*Tudok egy*

In light of these heightened cultural, social, and sexual concerns, it is not surprising that the hooligans in a later film are much more sinister than Swing Toni. In Félix Máriássy's *Egy pikoló világos* ("A Glass of Beer," 1955), hooliganism symbolizes not only the degenerative effects of cosmopolitanism but sexual danger as well. The plot runs as follows: Juli (Éva Ruttkai) and Marci (Tibor Bitskey) are a young couple in love. Marci goes off to the army; in his absence, Juli works in a factory but spends her evenings drinking and dancing with her promiscuous friend Gizus (Éva Schubert), in a dancehall also frequented by a trio of pouting and posturing *jampecek* who regularly ask her to dance.<sup>65</sup> When Marci returns on leave, he finds out what Juli has been up to; he forces her to take him to the dancehall, where everybody seems to know her name. He berates her for her behavior and, when one of the shifty young hooligans asks her to dance, ignores her entreaties to step in and claim her as his partner. The other *jampecek* crowd around the dancing couple and, when she tries to stop dancing, force her to continue. What ensues is nothing less than a stylized gang rape on the dance floor: the young toughs pass her back and forth, forcing her to dance faster all the while; Juli is helpless, and swoons. Marci finally rescues Juli, the *jampecek* are detained by the police, and the movie ends 'happily' (after briefly considering suicide, Juli decides to mend her ways and Marci takes her back). Despite its ideological bombast, the movie's narrative neatly frames the sexualized threat posed by cosmopolitan culture: the site of this debauchery is the dancehall, the vector of perversion dancing to western music, the actual

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klassz filmet" ("I know a classy, topping movie"). *Csörögni* and *klassz* both appear in the *jampec* lexicon in OSA/RFE Items 2619/55, mf 52.

<sup>65</sup> Close watchers of the communist silver screen would have noticed that Imre Pongrácz, the actor who had played Swing Toni in *Life is Beautiful When You Sing*, appeared in this movie in the minor role of an aging rake who also sought to lure Juli into a life of debauchery.

instrument thereof the *jampec*. Whereas hooliganism was initially mobilized by the communist regime for comedic effect, these later manifestations were distinctly more threatening — on film as well as in the factories, streets, and bars, and to the older generation as well as the regime.

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By early 1956, political tensions in Hungary were on the rise. News of Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in February reached Hungary in March. Soon after, the Petőfi circle — initially a small gathering of students and intellectuals, formed under the auspices of DISz itself — began its discussions on literature and other topics that soon snowballed into not-so-thinly-veiled critiques of the Rákosi regime.<sup>66</sup> It was closed down, but not before its last meetings had drawn crowds numbering in the thousands. By summer, tensions had reached the breaking-point: Rákosi himself was ousted in favor of the slightly-less-hated Ernő Gerő as the party scrambled to maintain its authority.

This retrenchment manifested immediately on the popular-cultural front. In June, dance teachers were allowed to teach western dances as well; in August, the DISz newspaper ran a front-page story entitled “Waltz, Rumba, Mambo, Without Hooliganism,” explaining that these dances are acceptable as long as they are danced with reserve and taste. Ten days later, Kossuth Radio (one of the regime mouthpieces) broadcast a three-hour program of the latest western dance and jazz music.<sup>67</sup> However,

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<sup>66</sup> György Litván, editor, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt, and Repression, 1953-1963* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 37, 39-41.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in OSA/RFE 6084/56, mf 70.

even as the proscriptions on youthful activities were relaxed, the demonization of the *jampec* subculture increased apace. In mid-August, a gang of four *jampec*, who went by the nicknames “Kiri,” “Guca,” “Csicsa,” and “Boci,” was catapulted into the limelight for their nefarious doings at the Harkányfürdő spa. According to the regional newspaper, the hooligans had lured a 15-year old girl into their room, where one of them raped her while the others stood guard; a few days later the rapist stabbed a man over the girl.<sup>68</sup> “Kiri,” the rapist, got eight years in prison; the others a year and a half or less. On the eve of the revolution, the *jampec* had transformed from a useful media joke into a real folk devil.

Communism never managed to kill jazz; rock and roll accomplished what the party ideologues could not. By the time the dust had settled after 1956, jazz was already old hat. The first rock and roll recording in Hungary, a cover of Bill Haley’s “Rock around the Clock,” was recorded in March 1957 — less than three years after its release in the USA — by none other than Lajos Martiny. Tiny Matton had weathered stalinism in Hungary better than many musicians; although his performing career was put on hold, 88 albums recorded during the period 1951-1956 bear his imprint as a composer, studio musician, or director. Chappy also managed to slip under the regime’s radar in the 1950s, playing a steady gig at the Budapest club in Nagymező street (formerly, and now once more, known as the “Moulin Rouge”)<sup>69</sup> and resuming his jazz career in the relaxed era of the 1960s. After 1956, the character of the *jampec* likewise modulated, taking on rock and roll as the musical idiom of their youthful dissent. Juvenile crime continued to be closely monitored; Angyalföld continued to be a thorn in the regime’s side, as evinced by

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<sup>68</sup> *Dunántúli Napló*, 16 August 1956.

<sup>69</sup> Nemes, “Martiny Lajos,” *Fejezetek*, pp. 172, 188. On Chappy at the Budapest club, see “Idegen nevek útvesztőjében [In a maze of strange names],” *Esti Budapest*, 14 October 1952.



its preeminence in a sweep of youth gangs in 1960-61.<sup>70</sup> By this time, however, the Communist regime had learned its lesson. Although it still demonized juvenile criminals as hooligans, it allowed a significant degree of independence and creativity to flourish in youth culture. In this less oppressive environment, jeans and Western-style rock and roll did not incur the same opprobrium that drainpipe trousers and the boogie-woogie had in the 1950s.

The persistence of the jazz subculture and the emergence of hooliganism in Communist Hungary provide stark evidence of the failure of the regime's program of cultural transformation. Both drew on transnational linkages with the West, thwarting a regime that sought to control its subjects' access to outside information and cultural production; both complicated — and, arguably, militated directly against — the regime's authoritarian intentions for its subjects. As such, it is tempting to interpret jazz and hooliganism in terms of resistance. In recent years, as Jocelyn Hollander and Rachael Einwohner note, a remarkably broad range of behaviors — ranging from strikes and demonstrations to hairstyles and sartorial choices, and even Beatlemania — have been construed as resistance by various scholars. Of these formulations, the more compelling are those that adequately explain how the *actions* taken by resisting groups, the *intent* underlying these actions, and the *recognition* of these actions combine to form some sort of alternate locus of agency, autonomy, or identity on the part of the resisters.<sup>71</sup> James C. Scott provides a more complex formulation of resistance, arguing that subjects in oppressive systems deploy a number of practices — “infrapolitics,” in his formulation —

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<sup>70</sup> Horváth, “Hooligans, spivs, and gangs,” pp. 209-210.

<sup>71</sup> Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachael L. Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance,” *Sociological Forum*, Volume 19, Number 4 (December 2004), pp. 533-554, pp. 534, 543. On Beatlemania, see Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs, “Beatlemania: A sexually defiant consumer subculture?,” in Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, *The Subcultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 523-536.

which serve as surrogates for politics-as-usual: factory workers steal from work and stage work stoppages instead of openly going on strike, peasants practice arson and wood theft in lieu of open rebellion, and so forth. If we are willing to accept Scott's dictum that "each of the forms of disguised resistance, of infrapolitics, is the silent partner of a loud form of public resistance,"<sup>72</sup> then jazz and hooliganism were indeed surreptitious attacks on the party-state's authority. However, this ostensible linkage between subculture and rebellion is complicated by the issue of intentionality: it is impossible to discern the intentions of these hooligans, or how they perceived their actions, with any certainty. Some might have indulged in this cosmopolitan form of deviance as a form of rebellion against the state; some were merely rebelling against their parents; most were probably just out looking for a good time. In the absence of any clear intent, I find it difficult to link hooliganism directly with resistance.

Comrade B. and his fellow apparatchiks would disagree. To some extent, the actual intentions of these youthful deviants are irrelevant. In an authoritarian state that aspired to not only regulate but also transform society, the jazz subculture and its youthful hangers-on were perceived as a threat.

It is the tragic irony of terror that by the expansion of regulation, less becomes enough for breaking the rule. Acts that do not have any political significance under more democratic conditions are labeled and treated as serious political actions in a centralized system. In this sense, the expansion of coercion creates more room for resistance.<sup>73</sup>

Whatever the *jampecek* thought they were doing, the state perceived their actions as

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<sup>72</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 199.

<sup>73</sup> István Rév, "The Advantages of Being Atomized: How Hungarian Peasants Coped With Collectivization," *Dissent*, Summer 1987, p. 347.

resistance and reacted accordingly. Initially, this was seen as a threat that could be contained, diminished through proselytization, and even mobilized for propaganda purposes. At the outset, the hooligans served the regime well as ideological whipping-boys; many of their elders, concerned about the low moral standards of the new generation, agreed with at least this component of the daily propaganda barrage to which they were subjected. It seems likely that this bad press, coupled with disapprobation from the older generation, might have actually *encouraged* more youthful deviance throughout the early 1950s. However, as the 1950s wore on and hooliganism showed no signs of disappearing, this manufactured moral panic spread to the administrative transcript, as evinced in the DISz and police reports. To whatever extent jazz and hooliganism actually posed a threat to communist rule, it was largely due to the regime's own overreaction.

All this happened prior to the open and armed resistance of October 1956, in which the vast majority of rebels were young, working-class males. In this connection we must note that a few of the Columbia interviewees suggested that 'hooligans' were among the most fearless of street fighters of 1956.<sup>74</sup> Bill Lomax sums up these observations as follows:

More prominent [than the students] amongst those who took up the fight against the Russian tanks were the rough, working-class youths of the Budapest slums, the tough-guys, leather-jacketed "yobos" and hooligans from Angyalfold and Ferencvaros. Uncultivated, rude, often anti-semitic, many of them joined for the adventure and sport of the fight.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., CUHRP Interview 100, Box 7, p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> Bill Lomax. *Hungary 1956*, p. 111. The charge of anti-Semitism does not seem well-founded. To date only David Irving, the infamous Holocaust denier, has argued this case in his tendentious *Uprising!* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981). Irving's account of 1956 stresses the Jewish background of many party members, and asserts that much revolutionary violence took on an anti-Semitic cast as a result. His argument therein suffers from his ideological bias, his lack of knowledge of Hungarian history (or language, for that matter), and his lack of scholarly objectivity. In 1994, András Mink discovered that Irving had essentially sold out to the Communist regime in order to gain preferential treatment and access to interviewees, promising not only to incorporate the regime's version of events but also to turn over

However, subsequent research into the social backgrounds of the 1956 revolutionaries does not suggest any disproportionate presence of hooligans.<sup>76</sup> What seems more likely is that signifier “hooligan” became destabilized during the revolution, framing both acts of bravery and whatever isolated instances of anti-Semitism may have occurred: whereas prior to the revolution it was a strictly pejorative label, it came to signify good as well in the revolutionary hurly-burly of late October and early November 1956. In any case, after the revolution was over the hooligan stereotype had modulated yet again as the regime blamed them, along with other “counterrevolutionary” elements, for causing the revolution. Already cast in regime propaganda as criminals, sexual predators, and deviant consumers of cosmopolitan culture, hooligans were now recast as an explicitly political threat.

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classified documents from American, English, and West German archives. Mink, “David Irving and the 1956 Revolution,” *Hungarian Quarterly*, Volume XLI, Number 160 (Winter 2000), available online at <http://hungarianquarterly.com/no160/117.html> (viewed 7 November 2007).

<sup>76</sup> At least, there is no significantly higher number of prior arrests among them than among the population at large. On this point see Gati, *Failed Illusions*, p. 157, and László Eörsi, *Corvinisták 1956* (Budapest: 1956 Institute, 2001), p. 13.

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