

State Oppression, Fear, and Helplessness in Hungarian Political Jokes, 1963–1989

Lili Zách, Eötvös Lóránd University (ELTE), Budapest, Hungary, zach.lili@btk.elte.hu

This study explores the social and psychological functions of humour in totalitarian societies, and traces how political jokes in Hungary between 1963 and 1989 may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the link between state oppression and human rights. By analysing jokes that mocked the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, János Kádár (1956–1988), or addressed the violence and fear in Hungary and the Eastern bloc, this study highlights the changing functions of political jokes in the aftermath of the 1956 Revolution. It analyses the tone, subject, and main aims of the jokes after the 1963 General Amnesty that aimed to serve as a compromise between the Communist state and Hungarian society. The abundance of jokes revealing human rights concerns in the collections of ethnographer Imre Katona illustrates how laughter flourished in repressive societies given the everyday need to navigate through the absurdity of the system.

The main goal of the present study is to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of humour, with special attention to how individuals' freedom of opinion remained restricted even after the Stalinist terror of Mátyás Rákosi (1948–1956) had been replaced by Kádár's 'soft dictatorship' in the mid-1960s. Despite this shift, the civil population in Communist Hungary could still not openly criticise its leaders or their policies. Fear and helplessness proved to be central features of the Hungarian People's Republic that remained a dictatorship until 1989 and continued to limit individuals' human rights. This study emphasises how despite these circumstances, sharing jokes could be linked to resilience due to their potential to provide a sense of control and agency.



Introduction

Despite the clear differences between Mátyás Rákosi's Stalinist rule in the 1950s and János Kádár's 'soft dictatorship' after the General Amnesty of 1963, the restriction of individuals' freedoms remained inseparable from State Socialism. The present study argues that political jokes under Kádár may provide insights into how the restriction of human rights impacted the humour of the oppressed, and what concerns they had in their specific political context. Due to 'the constraints on serious political speech' in totalitarian regimes, joking came to play a crucial role as it evaded 'externally imposed restraints on speech' (Davies, 2008: 170). By making up and sharing jokes, joke-tellers did more than simply entertain. The process fulfilled complex psychological and social functions; it gave people a sense of control in a totalitarian system where fear was a central component.¹ As Oring highlights, what really mattered was 'less the nature of the joke texts than the circumstances of their telling' (2004: 212). Yurchak (1997: 175) also notes the importance of 'reeling out' political jokes (*anekdoty*) in late Soviet Socialism, emphasising how the process was almost a ritual and hence a 'ubiquitous part of everyday life' in Brezhnev's time (1964–1982). And while Yurchak connects the higher number of political jokes with the fact that the Brezhnev period was not as repressive as Stalinist rule, jokes under Kádár in the same decades demonstrated that fear, resignation, pessimism, apathy and helplessness did not disappear after the 1956 Revolution and the subsequent retaliations.² Even though the years between 1963 and 1989 did not feature the random acts of terror and violence elemental in Stalinist rule, the negative feelings noted above resulted in a very unique set of political jokes (even in the case of recycled ones).

After providing a brief outline of the historical context and establishing the theoretical framework for this study, ethnographer Imre Katona's Joke Collection will be introduced³ and then analysed, divided into three thematic sections. Katona (1980:

¹ Although the presence of fear was not limited to totalitarian and authoritarian systems, exploring the ties connecting humour, fear, and power in democracies is beyond the scope of the present study.

² Isaac Prilleltensky and Lev Gonick (1996: 134) emphasise that 'learned helplessness, which refers to the state of passivity developed in response to repeated experiences of failure, helps solidify apathy toward adverse living circumstances'. Although the term has not been researched in a comprehensive humour studies research to date, its potential in totalitarian contexts is noteworthy. In the case of Kádárist Hungary, the failed revolution of 1956 appears to have resulted in a society-wide trauma that manifested in individual and collective behaviour that could indeed fall under the category of 'learned helplessness' as the population seemed to be convinced that opposition to the system was futile (which was confirmed by the events of the Prague Spring). Nevertheless, Ferge (2008) advises to practice caution when assessing the term in the context of post-Communist welfare culture.

³ When quoting the jokes from the corpus that is analysed, the following format will be applied in lieu of page numbers: (Katona 1994/19xx) – where 1994 refers to the date of publication and 19xx to the year the actual joke is from. When referencing Katona's manuscripts, the following format will be used: (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 1–21), depending on the folder/location, as the records are not dated and thus are not organised based on the date of creation.

53) labelled the jokes in his collection ‘public life jokes’ as they addressed different areas of State Socialism in Hungary including culture, politics, and economy. This study, in contrast, will refer to them as ‘political jokes’ since in totalitarian regimes every issue eventually became political (Lauchlan, 2009: 12–13).

Firstly, in order to trace how humour addressed state oppression, the focus will be on jokes criticising the absurdity and pointlessness of Communism/State Socialism in general, as well as the incompetence of the political elite in particular. As Davies points out, jokes that emphasised the stupidity of not only individuals and groups but also that of the entire system were the most popular type of humour in Russia and East-Central Europe (2008: 168). For instance, mocking politicians was beneficial psychologically by processing frustration, and also socially by strengthening one’s sense of belonging and sharing a common sense of suffering. And although this activity was not limited to totalitarian societies, the difference in the context is crucial. In a democratic setting, political jokes are not illegal and as such, joke-telling does not bear the same consequences. For instance, democratic societies allow their citizens the freedom to express their opinions and dissatisfaction by voting for other parties and politicians – this was not a possibility in State Socialist Hungary. Thus the incompetence of the Hungarian Communist political leadership provided plenty of ammunition for the jokers throughout the period:

What’s the difference between the circus and the government?

It’s the smart people who fool around in the circus and fools who pretend to be smart in the government (Katona, 1994/1965).

This section will demonstrate that Hungarian jokes addressed the absurdities of the oppressive regime either in direct or indirect references to fear and violence. The frustration and lack of hope were also visible in recurring jokes about exploitation, poverty, and corruption; these jokes certainly contradicted the image of Kádárist Hungary as ‘the jolliest barrack of the Eastern Bloc’. For instance, they often addressed the continuous reinterpretation of Socialism and Communism (Katona 1994/1970), highlighting the contrast between the theoretical ideology and how ridiculous this was when implemented into practice:

What’s the best thing in the world?

Communism.

And the worst?

Living in it (Katona 1994/1972).

Secondly, the study will analyse jokes about Kádár, who represented power and oppression, together with the leadership of the post-Stalinist party-state. Although Kádár placed a great emphasis on publicly rejecting the personality cults of Stalin and Rákosi, the majority of jokes in which he featured portrayed him in a negative light. Most of the personality cult jokes in Hungary were recycled and not created during the rule of dictators but had either existed before as prototype jokes, or came into existence after the fall or death of dictators, appealing to people's sense of justice (Bényei, 1989: 7). It is crucial to note that recycling jokes from a different time period or another part of the Eastern Bloc did not necessarily signal a lack of creativity; rather, it showed that problems persisted and that citizens had no other alternative to process the hopelessness of their situation.

Helplessness and pessimism can be traced in both recycled and original jokes before 1989. For instance, even when not labelled openly as a dictator, Kádár personified the violent crushing of the 1956 Revolution and served as a reminder of the hopelessness of challenging the State Socialist system. The following joke about his death may be one of the best examples to illustrate how after more than 30 years in power, he could not overcome his Soviet connections:

How did Kádár die?

He was hit by the perestroika! (Katona 1994/1989).

Thirdly, jokes also looked beyond Hungary and addressed civil rights violations elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc. Therefore, this study will assess how Hungarian joke(r)s reflected on the suppression of the Prague Spring of 1968, or the Hungarian view of well-known Communist figures. Special attention is given to Hungarian perceptions of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, whose rule followed Stalinist patterns between 1965 and 1989, albeit with decades-long delay (when compared to either the Soviet Union or Hungary). Gallows humour was a common feature in these jokes in order to process the cruelty and violence ubiquitous under Ceaușescu:

What's the new name of Bucharest?

Tschau-schwitz (Katona 1994/1986).

Historical Context: Hungarian State Socialism under János Kádár (1956–1988)

The General Amnesty of March 1963 was meant to signal the end of retaliations following the failed revolution of 1956 and thus had an important psychological impact as it put an end to political trials and released political prisoners (Romsics, 2004: 421). János Kádár, the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, acknowledged

that in order to consolidate the power of the new government and establish the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers Party's authority [*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP*], Rákosi's totalitarian-style government was not feasible in the long term (Gough, 2006: 104). As Kádár needed society-wide support, noticeable changes occurred from the mid-1960s, resulting in a 'consensus-seeking behaviour' both in Hungary and abroad (Tótkés, 1998: 11). The 'so-called "consolidated" Kádár regime preferred the hidden means of dictatorship to naked state violence' and claimed that unlike that of Rákosi, it was not the enemy of Hungarian society (Kiss, 2022: 155). Therefore, after 1956, the 'Communist Party increasingly withdrew from policing private life and casual interactions in the workplace', and in the late Socialist period some party members were known to 'tell jokes at the expense of the party/state, creating a temporary bond with those who had not joined party organizations' (Lampland and Nadkarni, 2016: 458). The 'consolidation' became a cornerstone of Hungarian State Socialism until 1989, also illustrated by the Kádárist motto 'Those who are not against us are with us.'⁴

Historiography has been divided on whether Kádár should be labelled a dictator with a personality cult.⁵ Kádár's cult, which promoted an image of the highest-ranking Hungarian official as a puritanical, hard-working and modest man, was built more cunningly and imaginatively (Horváth, 2013: 71) than Rákosi's. As it was meant to stand in stark contrast to the personality cult of Stalin or Rákosi, its main purpose was to legitimise Kádár's more human-faced Communism after the period of reprisals (1956–1963), during which he 'made calculated use of terror to secure his leadership' (Gough, 2006: 250). And while Kádár's cult differed in aim, character, and intensity, it was a cult, nonetheless, despite Kádár's efforts to distance himself from Rákosi's regime. Majtényi (2012) argues that it was exactly the apparent absence of a cult in the traditional sense that helped create it. When assessed within the context of political jokes, it appears that due to the ubiquity of fear, Kádár's 'soft dictatorship' was unquestionably a dictatorship, even if the physical manifestations of totalitarian terror were not present anymore. Instead, Kádárism was inseparable from 'whisper propaganda', intimidation, blackmailing and manipulation that relied on an extensive network of informers and secret agents (Rainer, 2011; Horváth, 2013: 71–72; Kiss, 2022: 161). What was euphemistically described as 'everyday collaboration' (Majtényi, 2015: 108) contributed to the resentment of the population, not only in the immediate aftermath of the failed revolution of 1956 but in the long-term. The feeling of helplessness (that is, the absence of a sense of control) and the fact that there was no

⁴ Contrary to popular belief, the slogan was not invented by Kádár but by émigré writer and editor, Tibor Méray (Szenes, 1997: 177).

⁵ Among others, János M. Rainer argues that Kádár made a conscious decision against establishing a cult around him (2011).

room left for individual or collective action or resistance contributed to what Majtényi describes as resentment fuelled by collective anger and envy (Nova, 2019: 7; Majtényi, 2015: 99). Interestingly, during the Kádárist consolidation, blame and anger were directed towards invisible enemies, foreign powers, or civilian members of society (Majtényi, 2015: 99–100). The Kádár-cult emerged as a result of this process, once people had no alternative to imagine their lives outside the realities of the totalitarian system. Joking, as illustrated below, provided an alternative to face the limitation of their human rights, address these feelings, and take back a sense of control.

Theoretical Framework and Primary Sources

Similarly to what Waterlow (2018) notes in relation to Stalinist Russia in the 1930s, humour fulfilled important psychological and social functions in Hungarian society under State Socialism. These functions are visible in jokes from the period of Kádár's 'soft dictatorship'.⁶ Fear did not disappear with the Stalinist 'time of terror' and appeared to be ubiquitous even in the post-1956 period, 'the time of routine oppression' in the Soviet Union and its satellite states (Davies, 2007: 293). By analysing Hungarian political jokes between 1963 and 1989, the present study demonstrates that state oppression, aggression, and fear remained traceable in political humour under Kádár, just like human rights – or the lack thereof. Overall, repressed humour provides us with an insight into the fears, concerns, and tastes of ordinary people as they were 'a true spontaneous product' of their imaginations (Davies, 2008: 157).

Notably, state oppression could not prevent the emergence of jokes; on the contrary, as Katona (1989: 18) argues, the bigger the pressure, the more safety valves opened, echoing the main claims of relief theories that described laughter and humour act 'as a release of the tensions and inhibitions generated by societal constraints' (Carrell, 2008: 313). Therefore, humour could be viewed in relation to resilience, which was not open resistance, but rather a daily struggle and a process of forced adaptation within the framework of the system (Majtényi, 2015: 105). On the one hand, Stefanescu (2016: 21) claims that this process was a paradox of 'a schizoid coexistence of sincerity and hypocrisy in the psyche of communist subjects'. Thus, he echoes Yurchak's argument that political jokes in the late Socialist era resulted from cognitive dissonance as they 'exposed the coexistence of incongruous spheres, official and parallel, and the subject's simultaneous participation in both' (Yurchak, 1997: 180). Similarly,

⁶ Also described as 'welfare dictatorship' (Bartha, 2011) or 'the welfare system of goulash communism' (Kiss, 2022), the Kádárist consolidation was characterised by a relative increase in living standards. As a result of the market-oriented reforms associated with the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) launched in 1968, Hungarian economy became 'the most liberal and market-oriented in the Soviet bloc' (Kemp, 2016: 69). Nonetheless, as Saxonberg (2003: 190) points out, Kádár's 'Goulash Communism' was more 'technocratic' than Dubček's 'human-faced' Socialism.

according to Klicperová, this ‘double standard of morality’ put a considerable mental strain on the individual, using humour to address this dissonance was a crucial psychological benefit (1997: 40). On the other hand, when assessing Stalinist Russia in the 1930s, Waterlow rejects the idea that citizens in a totalitarian society developed a ‘permanently schizophrenic vision’ of the world whereby ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres were incompatible and ‘hermetically sealed from each other’ (2018: 264). Instead he urged to consider that criticism and conformity were ‘mutually constitutive of each other’ and could exist simultaneously and even shape each other (Waterlow, 2018: 263). Indeed, the jokes from State Socialist Hungary may offer an insight into how the population processed the overlap of official ideology and the reality of everyday life as part of their above-mentioned ‘everyday collaboration’ (Majtényi, 2015: 108).

Recent scholarship has not only explored illicit humour, jokes and laughter in dictatorships but has also highlighted the importance of considering humour that was ‘sponsored, tolerated and encouraged by the regime in question’ (Caplan and Feldman, 2015: 179).⁷ The significance of context when it comes to jokes, therefore, is crucial.⁸ And while approaching humour as a weapon against oppression is not to be completely dismissed, the relationship between power and humour was much more nuanced within the framework of totalitarian societies and did not function merely in opposition to power. For instance, Davies draws attention to the fact that jokes and political protest were not substitutes for one other, but rather that external circumstances dictated which one was more suitable (2007: 302). Alternatively, Waterlow proposes that humour had the potential to operate like a shield and not a weapon, blocking or diminishing ‘the force of the ideological barrage’ (2013: 224). Therefore, as long as the circumstances that allowed for the creation of these jokes remained unchallenged, humour did more than just entertain (Bényei, 1989: 14). While jokes undoubtedly made the population’s life easier, on a larger scale they also reflected public opinion and functioned as ‘thermometers of morale’⁹ (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 8). Their importance was thus more crucial in terms of social bonds; laughter associated with sharing jokes could contribute to creating or stabilising relationships between people (‘trust-groups’)

⁷ Besides Jonathan Waterlow’s research into humour and laughter in Stalinist Russia, Patrick Merziger’s assessment of totalitarian humour in Nazi Germany and Stephen Gundle’s study on laughter under Italian fascism mark a significant watershed in historiography as part of the *Historical Workshop Journal* 79 (2015), together with the book entitled *The Politics of Humour* edited by Martina Kessel and Patrick Merziger (2012).

⁸ Soviet language theorist Valentin Voloshinov, for instance, emphasises that language is a contextual, socially-constructed sign system that is an inseparable part of ideologies, explaining how jokes as speech acts, together with their meaning, constantly evolved depending on the author’s context (Voloshinov, 1986: 121).

⁹ Similarly, Erőss (1982: 116) argues that jokes could function as social indicators and were thus crucial social thermometers and not military weapons.

who shared a sense of camaraderie (Waterlow, 2013: 218; Waterlow, 2018: 231). This was crucial given the potential of fear in repressive societies to erode one's 'sense of solidarity and capacity for empathy' (Nova, 2019: 7).

The manuscripts in the Katona Imre Joke Collection (*Katona Imre Viccgyűjtemény*) at the Library of the Institute of Ethnography, ELTE BTK, Budapest, Hungary, provide valuable context to the jokes the notable ethnographer collected in Budapest throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The corpus in his printed collections such as the comprehensive anthology entitled *The situation is hopeless but not serious* (1994) and his thematic volume dedicated to dictators, *Jokes about Stalin, Rákosi and Ceaușescu* (1989), form the basis of analysis for the present study.¹⁰ Katona was a thorough researcher; he also addressed the fluctuation and recurrence of certain joke types, the challenging data collection process, and thus the potential shortcomings of his methodology (Katona, 1980: 91–92). More specifically, he highlighted that under State Socialism collecting political jokes was a 'delicate matter', hence only passive and non-verbatim recording was possible as the process was illegal (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 8).¹¹ In the Socialist states of the Eastern Bloc there was no freedom of speech and there was a constant danger that critical talk might be reported by an informer; as a result, anti-regime humour 'was always told with the greatest circumspection' (Davies, 2008: 170; Oring, 2004: 212). As Lauchlan (2009: 8) points out in relation to everyday humour under Stalin, one of the main advantages of jokes was that 'you can't raid a house and seize a joke, you can't put it in prison or shoot it, it is compact (jokes can be stored in abundance in one's head)'. Jokes were the products of urban folklore and their authors could remain anonymous; nevertheless, they still attracted the attention of the authorities and the secret police, as Apor (2017: 222) points out with regard to jokes in the Rákosi era.

Jokes and Human Rights: State Oppression, Violence, and Fear

As Katona noted in his introduction to *The situation is hopeless but not serious* (1994), the jokes missing from the collection could be just as telling as the ones we analyse. Similarly, if certain figures or issues were not addressed by name, they could still have been of concern. For instance, even though the terms 'human rights', 'freedom of opinion', or 'freedom of speech' cannot be found in the text of jokes recorded between 1963 and 1989, it does not mean that jokes failed to reveal relevant information about individuals and communities living in repressive regimes – quite the contrary. State oppression and aggression appeared to have been a common theme among many jokes.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of the jokes are my own.

¹¹ Katona's experience was contradicted by the claim of Erőss, according to whom joke-tellers had nothing to fear anymore in the 1960s and 1970s (1982: 108).

The first category of analysis focuses on examples that addressed the limitation of human rights linked to fear and helplessness. Consequently, these were often indirect in highlighting the lack of freedom of speech.

First, jokes frequently addressed the apparent absurdity of Marxist ideology (Katona 1994/1963, 1964). These did not only intend to mock abstract ideologies but also pointed to much bigger fears, such as the uncertainty about every sphere of life:

In Socialism, what are people most afraid of?

That you can never know what the past brings (Katona 1995/1969).¹²

The unfeasibility of Socialism continued to attract criticism in the late 1970s and 1980s as well, when the economic and political failures of the system could not be hidden:

What's the aim of Socialism?

Overcoming the difficulties that otherwise would not have arisen (Katona 1994/1979).

Interestingly, the criticism in the jokes was not linked to a proactive attitude but instead revealed a sense of resignation and lack of hope people felt about changing the system due to both internal and external factors:

How long will we keep building Socialism?

So long as the West keeps loaning us money (Katona 1994/1987).

Therefore, certain jokes illustrate that despite the faults and absurdity of Socialism, democracy and Capitalism were not seen as the solutions to Hungary's problems either (Katona 1994/1988).

Second, the humour in political jokes addressed not only the theoretical shortcomings of Socialism but also the system's practical faults, ranging from mocking the ubiquity of double standards such as the illusion of elections (Katona 1994/1963) to making self-deprecatory and pessimistic jokes about poverty, the lack of food, or the living crisis in Hungary and elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc throughout the entire period. Moreover, another noteworthy concern of joke(r)s was the corruption and/or inequality that seemed to be inseparable from the system (not unlike what George Orwell described in *Animal Farm* as 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others'). This was also illustrated by a joke from 1979:

¹² A variant of this joke from 1988 shows the complexity of recycled jokes. While acknowledging the original premise (that the Communist Soviet Union was built upon lies), at the same time it expresses concern for the long-awaited fall of Communism in Hungary: 'What's even more uncertain than Hungarian future? Soviet past'.

How does one's attitude to Socialism change based on one's pay grade?

Those earning between HUF 2–4,000 build Socialism.

Those earning between HUF 4–10,000 promote Socialism.

Those with over HUF 10,000 enjoy Socialism.

A large number of jokes including riddles, puns (13 in 1979 and 5 in 1980) exposed a similar sense of resignation, lack of hope, and social injustice about the huge gap between the income and standard of living of the privileged and the rest of society. Out of these, two were different from the pessimistic tone of the rest; while these were also negative and critical, they produced visible signs of anger:

July: Food prices rise

August: car prices rise

September: price of petrol rises

October: barricades will rise (Katona 1994/1979 and again 1984, with a minor adjustment).

The themes of poverty and starvation continued to recur throughout the 1980s (1984, 1986, and 1987), with some practically identical jokes. As Katona notes (n.d.: Vicc 15), the main reason behind the recycling of jokes was that they addressed problems that were not fixed. The ubiquity of gallows humour about starving to death was a notable indicator; a dark joke was inseparable from feeling a 'strong sense of futility' about something that was outside their control. By inventing and telling a self-deprecating joke, people could 'escape from the unalterable' (Hart, 2007: 6; Glăvan, 2019: 165). The 'illusion of control' that gallows humour provided was a powerful one with real psychological and social effects (Waterlow, 2018: 191–192). When feeling 'helpless about their inability to affect their world', joke-tellers could demonstrate their agency,¹³ which was undeniably beneficial for them (Adams, 2005: 5). Joke-telling presented a way to survive and adapt, even if people recognised the falsity of the official representation of reality (Yurchak, 1997: 175). This is why such a large number of Hungarian jokes dealt with helplessness either directly or indirectly. Through these, the population demonstrated resilience and asserted their personal agency, even if the impact of their actions were limited when facing the violation of their human rights (Majtényi, 2015: 105; Waterlow. 2018: 198, 262). Thanks to self-detachment and to creating a mental distance from their perceived hopelessness, joke-tellers did manage to maintain a sense of control by choosing how to react to their set of unchangeable circumstances (Frankl 1984: 120; Morreall, 1997: 72–74).

¹³ For detailed reflections on the agency of individuals in the Eastern bloc in relation to cultural dissent, see *The Handbook of COURAGE* (Apor et al., 2018).

Third, one of the most damaging impacts of totalitarian and authoritarian states on the individual and the community was the destruction of interpersonal and intercommunal relationships and the creation of mistrust among them (de Vries, 2006: 209). The constant paranoia and the need for self-censorship were exhausting in the long run and caused visible concern. The next joke from 1977 highlights the motivation behind self-censorship and the possibly devastating consequences of its absence:

Updated manual for writers and journalists:

If you're thinking about a sensitive topic, at least don't tell anyone!

If you've already told it, at least don't write it down!

If you've already written it down, don't sign it!

If you have already signed it, then don't be surprised at anything! (1977).

The extensive system of informers and the fear of when one might be reported by a neighbour, acquaintance, co-worker, friend, or even family member, remained a constant cause of worry under Kádár (Katona 1994/1972). One alternative to living under Socialism with limited personal freedom was emigrating (and this was not limited to the immediate aftermath of the 1956 Revolution). While émigrés were often the subject of jokes in the period of retaliations (1956–1962), there were examples of humorous approaches to emigration under the 'soft dictatorship' as well (1965, 1966, 1974, 1980, 1983, 1987), among which the next one could be the most telling in terms of the resilience of the population:

Why aren't young people leaving in bigger numbers?

Because most of them are adventurous (Katona 1994/1983).

Despite Kádár's (officially declared) break with Stalinist policies and approaches, the population's frustration and fear regarding the limitation or lack of human rights was traceable in jokes addressing the dangers of not shutting up (hence the popularity of puns about ordering one to shut up [*Kuss!*], e.g. Katona 1994/1965). Freedom of speech was also explored from an international angle, either by comparing the difference between the Swiss and Hungarian freedom of speech (Katona 1994/1975), or in a more general manner, by creating a contrast between the human rights norms in the West and the Eastern Bloc (Katona 1994/1977). For instance, there is a remarkable example of spoonerism under this category, which cannot be directly translated but deserves special attention due to the contrast between the whimsical nature of the pun and the darkness of the implied fear, violence, and death. It is based on the wordplay around food/élelem versus fear/*félelem* on the one hand, and dreading/*fél* versus living/*él* on the other:

What's the difference between the West and the East?

In the West they live without fear while in the East they dread without food' [*Nyugaton félelem nélkül élnek, Keleten élelem nélkül félnek*] (Katona 1994/1977).

Fear was possibly one of the most versatile elements of political jokes in the Kádárist era. As seen above, the fear of starvation was a valid concern in Hungarian society, together with the fear of being reported for either a valid or imagined reason. Moreover, even decades after the Soviet-aided crushing of the revolution on 4 November 1956, references to Soviet exploitation, military strength, and violence were often traceable in jokes as well (Katona 1994/1970, 1975, 1976):

Good news and bad news.

Good news: next year the Soviet Union will be 60 and will finally retire.

Bad news: we will still have to pay for it (Katona 1994/1976)

As for the threat of violence in Hungary, curiously, it was jokes in the 1970s and 1980s that hinted to the fear of violence traditionally associated with Stalinism, ranging from references to deportation to Siberia (Katona 1994/1973), visits of the secret police (Katona 1994/1973) and police surveillance (Katona 1994/1986), among others.

Central concerns from the year of transformation (Katona 1994/1989) included jokes about democracy, which still revealed pessimism and a lack of perspective:

What's the transition from Capitalism to Communism?

Alcoholism.

Therefore, some joke(r)s did not dismiss the possibility of a change in the system either by peaceful or violent means:

What's the difference between a doormat and a revolution?

Both are right on the doorstep (Katona 1994/1988).

These jokes thus carried notable fears of possible repercussions, which luckily did not materialise.

Jokes and Human Rights: Kádár and Hungarian State Socialism

Kádár was undoubtedly the most frequently recurring character in political jokes due to his constant presence in the public eye as the leader of the party-state (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 15). Jokes that depicted Kádár as a puppet of the Soviets and/or a traitor appear to

have been the most often recycled. For instance, the quip ‘We only have one Kádár and even this one is working for the Russians’ was recorded in 6 variants between 1957 and 1987 (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 15 and Vicc 21). In other words, while it may not be surprising to note its popularity under the years of retaliations (1956–1962), this remained a popular joke type even under the ‘soft dictatorship’. These jokes either mocked Kádár’s weakness and lack of legitimacy (Katona 1994/1963, 1965, 1971, 1976) or emphasised his subservience to Moscow.

This perceived lack of control was often inseparable from Kádár’s betrayal (his role in the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November 1956) and thus from his image as a traitor who sold out to the Soviets (Katona 1994/1964). And while Kádár’s reliance on Soviet military power (Katona 1994/1964, 1975, 1976) was still notable in the mid-1970s, the threat of Soviet violence was also visible in references to economic pressure, as illustrated by the following joke:

János Kádár and Brezhnev, the Soviet General Secretary, are saying goodbye at the airport outside Moscow. Kádár looks back from the plane’s door, waves and at the same time thinks: ‘There’s no way we will meet the target!’

Brezhnev is standing below, smiling and waving with clasped hands, thinking: ‘We will force it out of you anyway!’ (Katona 1994/1975).

This joke appears to back up Majtényi’s claim that in the aftermath of 1956 (and most likely Prague 1968) people gave up the idea of real resistance and sought to identify their enemy either in invisible forces, each other, or the Soviet Union – but not the leader of the regime (2015: 99–100). The perceived incompetence and buffoonery of Brezhnev proved to be an easy target of ridicule, which demonstrated that Communism ‘gradually became a joke in itself’ (Waterlow, 2018: 208):

Comrade Kovács is called into the company manager’s office and is informed that he has been dismissed with immediate effect. Kovács asks in amazement:

‘But there’ve never been any objections to my work. Why am I fired then?’

‘For more information, contact the factory party secretary!’

Kovács calls him immediately; then the secretary asks Kovács:

‘You really don’t know why we’re firing you?’

‘I haven’t the faintest idea about it.’

‘Well, let me help you. Just think: what did you carry in your hands at the May Day parade?’

‘Brezhnev’s picture.’

‘And in the other one?’

‘My sausage dog; I couldn’t leave it at home because I live alone.’

‘And when I told you to get rid of that bitch, which one did you throw away?’ (Katona 1994/1970).

As for jokes about Kádár’s perceived incompetence, stinginess, pettiness, and corruption (Katona 1994/1976), these reflected the public’s concern about the ever-so-rising cost of living after the reforms of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) had halted the year before. By creating and telling these jokes, people could rationalise the economic crisis and their subsequent hardships since no other criticism against the party was acceptable. Importantly so, joking contributed to the resilience of the population who thus asserted their agency.

From the mid-1980s, Kádár’s seemingly never-ending rule inspired several jokes about his old age and long-awaited retirement and occasionally his death, although nowhere near as often or in such a cruel way as in the case of Rákosi in the 1950s (Katona 1994/1985, 1987, 1988, 1989). The following joke illustrated people’s frustrations, while at the same time mocking the politician:

Why was Kádár General Secretary for so long?

Because he forgot to resign (Katona 1994/1987).

Similarly to jokes that portrayed him as an incompetent lackey or a traitor, this could also be interpreted within the context of superiority or disparagement theories (Carrell, 2008: 313) as the emphasis was on the relationship between the joke teller and the target of the joke – in this case, how the public felt about Kádár.

In comparison with Stalin, Rákosi, and Ceaușescu, the number of Kádár jokes was considerably higher and recurred more often than the former three (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 15). It is noteworthy, however, that Kádár appeared less frequently on his own than the other three dictators; in other words, he mostly featured in multi-character jokes. Moreover, Katona draws attention to the fact that Kádár was not the villain in approximately one-fourth of the jokes he featured in, because he could still be considered the most ‘liberal’ and ‘likeable’ post-Stalinist leader in comparison with his Socialist counterparts (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 15). Nevertheless, the hostile tone and attitude were particularly noteworthy during the post-revolutionary repercussions and violence (1956–1962), as well as in the late 1980s, due to Kádár’s vice-like grip on power. It is crucial to remember that Kádárist concessions—such as the comparative freedom of information and travel—were presented to the population as the ‘gifts’

provided by the state-party in return for loyalty, instead of what they actually were: basic human rights (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 15). Coercion, therefore, remained omnipresent in Kádár's 'Goulash Communism', even if its manifestations differed from those of Rákosi's Stalinist rule.

Jokes and Human Rights: Violations in the Eastern Bloc

Alexander Dubček's attempted political and economic reforms during the Prague Spring (1968) and the invasion of the Soviet Union and the members of the Warsaw Pact constituted a notable milestone in Hungarian State Socialist joke history. The comparison with Hungary's 1956 Revolution was a given; how the events of 1968 were approached in a humorous framework provides a valuable insight into the workings of the collective Hungarian psyche and how it processed 1956 and the subsequent retaliations. It is noteworthy that 'the signs of social dissatisfaction' that resurfaced in Hungary after the Prague Spring were suppressed, leading to spontaneous anti-regime student actions, arrests and lawsuits (Kiss, 2022: 156). Except for one joke that addressed the violence and police brutality given in response to the Warsaw student protests, all foreign jokes (12) dealt with the Prague Spring that year. This was approximately half of the jokes Katona selected for this chapter (from a total of 24). A couple of them addressed Dubček's reforms but the invasion carried out by the Soviets and 'the friendly neighbouring states' dominated the narrative. Puns were common weapons of choice, the silliness of which was incongruous with the severity and violence of the events:

How do Czechs pay?

With a Dub-checkue! (Katona 1994/1968).

References to tanks, Siberia, and Russian soldiers remained a notable feature in 1969 as well (7 jokes). The numbers decreased by 1970, but it is worth noting that although only 2 out of 4 jokes named the invasion of Czechoslovakia directly. The other two focused on fear and Soviet-style violence inseparable from the long-term psychological impact of the subsequent conservative backlash and the process of 'normalisation' (Kopeček, 2019: 271). Crucially, the Soviet invasion led to 'a state of collective learned helplessness' in Czechoslovakia, forcing conformity and resulting in fear, increased apathy, and widespread mistrust among the general public (Klicperová et al., 1997: 40):

On the occasion of the Lenin centenary, competitors were also allowed to enter the contest with political jokes. The prizes were the following:

3rd prize: five years in Siberia
 2nd prize: ten years in Siberia
 1st prize: meeting Lenin (Katona 1994/1970).¹⁴

In terms of violations of human rights outside Hungary, the invasion of Prague was undoubtedly at the centre of attention together with jokes about the Romanian Communist dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena.¹⁵ On the whole, dictator or tyrant jokes were one of the most efficient ways to examine how the population reacted to human rights violations in repressive regimes. Between 1963 and 1989, it was Ceaușescu's dictatorship in neighbouring Romania that showcased the characteristics of totalitarian terror formerly associated with Stalin and then Rákosi (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 15). The first Ceaușescu joke appeared in Katona's collection in 1970 and concentrated on the issue of corruption, followed by the theme of fear and intimidation, just like joke-telling under Stalin. The similarities did not escape the attention of Hungarian joke-tellers, which is visible in the following example:

Nixon visits Bucharest, and after the official negotiations, he has a relaxed conversation with Ceaușescu. The latter starts the conversation:
 'What is Mr. President's hobby?'
 'I collect jokes about me. And you?'
 'I collect those who tell jokes about me' (Katona 1994/1973).

In general, Romanian-themed jokes in Hungary tended to be so rough and cruel that Katona deemed only a few publishable. Nevertheless, the ethnographer emphasised that the ruthlessness in these jokes was not the manifestation of extreme Hungarian nationalism or xenophobia, quite the contrary. He compared their function to a boomerang, holding up a mirror to Hungarian society (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 15). Indeed, these jokes did not aim to mock the Romanian people with the use of hateful stereotypes but used gallows humour to highlight the catastrophic consequences of Ceaușescu's policies. As gallows humour was used 'in the face of inevitability', it was inseparable from the sense of powerlessness people experienced under each of these Stalinist-style regimes (Waterlow, 2013: 2014).

When analysing these jokes within a social framework and in terms of group dynamics and belonging, we get a different sense of 'Us' and 'Them' to what traditional

¹⁴ This is an example for one of the most travelled jokes not only in the Eastern Bloc but beyond: it illustrated how jokes had been exported to the West even before the fall of Communism. The title of Alan Dundes's 1985 book, *First Prize – Fifteen Years*, was a notable variation (Glăvan, 2019: 163). Interestingly, the Hungarian version appears to be the one with the darker tone as it implies murder in comparison with a 'mere' sentence of 15 years.

¹⁵ As Glăvan (2019: 160) points out, the Romanian collective imagination could not separate the dictator and 'his influential spouse' and perceived them as 'an indissoluble unit, supporting and empowering one other'.

Hungarian ethnic jokes about Romanians tend to suggest. In these jokes, there is a sense of comradery between the general population of the two countries and a visibly heartfelt sympathy towards the Romanian victims of Ceaușescu's terror and his blatant violation of human rights. This included sympathy for overworked factory workers in Romania (Katona 1994/1974), and for the starving population that faced severe food shortages and lacked access to basic goods and services (Katona 1994/1983, 1987, 1988, 1989). The chronic deprivation led to constant public dissatisfaction and desperation (Dragoș, 2022: 173), as demonstrated by the following joke:

When does a Romanian dog get to see a bone?
When it has an open fracture (Katona 1994/1989).

Consequently, graphic jokes and black humour successfully emphasised the severity of the human rights crisis in Romania. These utilised the incongruity very efficiently between the lived reality of the Romanian population and the outlandishness and absurdity of Ceaușescu's personality cult, which intensified in parallel with the deepening internal economic crisis (Marin, 2013: 174):

Ceaușescu's oldest son, Nicu, the golden boy, says to his parents one day:
'Let me establish a sex magazine like *Playboy* in Romania as well; let's keep up with the times!'
Ceaușescu replies: 'But son, how would your mother and I look like on the cover, naked, at the age of 70!' (Katona 1994/1988).

Joking about Ceaușescu's personality cult was not merely a Hungarian pastime but, as recent historiography has emphasised, was an inseparable feature of Romanian totalitarianism as well.¹⁶ The transnational nature of these jokes is to be highlighted, given that jokes had travelled across borders in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc (Davies, 2007: 296; Apor, 2017: 224). Notably, the question of blind faith and different elements of the personality cult dominated jokes about Stalin throughout the Eastern Bloc (Katona, 1989: 8–9). A lot of these Stalin jokes were recycled in the form of Rákosi jokes and also gained yet another life as Ceaușescu jokes in the 1970s–80s due to the shared experience of the totalitarian terror.¹⁷ The most common themes in dictator jokes across borders explored the absurdity of propaganda, the questionable morality

¹⁶ For detailed analyses on Ceaușescu jokes and their political context in Romania, see Stefanescu (2016), Glăvan (2019), and Marin (2013).

¹⁷ As for the timing of Rákosi jokes, Katona (1989, 14) highlights that in contrast to Stalin jokes that came back to life in 1956 and again in 1961, Rákosi practically disappeared into obscurity.

of the leadership, the inhumanity of terror, as well as unescapable expressions of *schadenfreude* after the deaths of dictators (Katona, n.d.: Vicc 8). Therefore, the combination of fear and resignation about the present and the future under Ceaușescu was occasionally contradicted by wishful thinking, fantasising about the dictator's death even in Hungary, closely resembling a popular trope in former Rákosi jokes (Katona 1994/1975, 1977, 1981, 1982; Katona, 1989: 15).

Although these jokes did not openly challenge Ceaușescu's leadership, according to Marin, these jokes 'gradually weakened his authority and legitimacy in front of the people' (2013: 170, 174). For instance, a considerable portion of Hungarian Ceaușescu jokes ridiculed the 'intellectual pretence' (Glăvan, 2019; 172) of the infamous couple and highlighting the contrast between their leading position and their capabilities (or the lack thereof):

A Romanian astronaut participated in the joint space flight with the Soviets. After his successful return, Ceaușescu asks him:

'Tell me, what were you thinking about, up there in space?'

'About the law of gravity...'

Ceaușescu asks his wife at home:

'Elena, can you recall when we passed the law of Gravity?'

'Nicu, legislation is your department; mine is science' (Katona 1994/1983).¹⁸

Thus the Romanian people were not the butts of these jokes; either the general absurdity of Communism was targeted or the Ceaușescus in particular. Still, there were a handful of Hungarian jokes with an irredentist agenda (Katona 1994/1974, 1977, 1984) alluding to the Hungarian minority population¹⁹ and territories that were lost to Romania (such as Transylvania) after the Treaty of Trianon in 1920:

An old *Székely*²⁰ man wakes up overjoyed:

'Listen, to the beautiful dream I had, my dear! I've been to Bucharest!'

'And what's so beautiful about that?'

'Well, I needed a passport!' (Katona 1994/1977 and 1985).

¹⁸ See Bonta and Galița (2011: 89) for an (almost identical) Romanian version of the joke.

¹⁹ It is important to note that Ceaușescu's so-called 'settlement planning scheme' in the late 1980s (Katona 1994/1988) caused huge international outrage and led to protests in Budapest since the plans for the demolition of traditional villages were to be catastrophic for the Hungarian minority in Transylvania (Kiss, 2022: 164; Demeter, 2020: 124). As a result, official relations between the two states deteriorated but this did not lead to general anti-Romanian sentiments as the anger was directed at Ceaușescu and the political leadership.

²⁰ *Székelys* [Szekler] are a Hungarian community in eastern Transylvania in Romania. Traditionally, *Székely* jokes tend to focus on their quiet wisdom and patience.

Jokes and Resilience

This paper aims to demonstrate that jokes served complex psychological and social functions in the lives of Hungarian citizens even when their autonomy and personal freedom were restricted under state oppression. It is crucial to emphasise the significance of joke-telling, since, based on the examples above, the process appears to have been one of the main manifestations of resilience in the period. It helped the population maintain a ‘flexible approach to the system,’ (Majtényi, 2015: 105, 109) and thus guide them between (the otherwise overlapping) official and the unofficial realities (Waterlow, 2028: 262–263). Mental flexibility is inseparable from humour; as Morreall highlights, ‘one way we can maintain our sense of control and reduce the stress in any situation is to look for the humour in it. With a sense of humour we view problems from a distance – in the big picture instead of with the incapacitating tunnel vision of fear and anger’ (Morreall, 1997:74).

When tracing the manifestations of individuals’ right to freedom of opinion and expression, or the lack thereof, jokes provide valuable insights into the fears that kept the population under the control of repressive regimes. Even under the years of Kádár’s ‘soft dictatorship’ (1963–1989), jokes abounded, with direct references to dictators as well as indirect signs of discontent, fear, and helplessness. Since expressing dissatisfaction with official policies or figures in public was still not an option, jokes implicitly critiqued the violation of human rights in the period and reflected the main concerns of the man in the street (or in the case of Katona’s collection, the average Budapest resident). As argued above, fear did not disappear during the years of the ‘soft dictatorship’ and jokes reveal how the population processed the limitation of human rights that was somewhere between confrontation and conformity. The psychological impact of the failed 1956 Revolution, which marked the beginning of Kádárism, could be traced in political jokes throughout the period, with many of them revealing a lingering sense of helplessness and a lack of hope. The fear in these jokes often connected the Hungarian past, present, and future, providing unique insights into how the denial of human rights was perceived in this specific historical context. As this final joke illustrates, (gallows) humour proved to be a powerful way of finding agency in the face of fear and uncertainty even in the year of the regime change:

What did people wish each other for 15 March?
As good as petrol – Lead-free (Katona 1994/1989).

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Ildikó Kopaszné Szincsek and the staff of the Library of the Institute of Ethnography at ELTE, Budapest, Hungary, for their assistance and for granting me access to Katona's manuscripts.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

Primary Sources

Bényei, J. 1989 *A személyi kultusz humora* [*The humour of the age of personality cult*]. Debrecen: Csokonai.

Katona, I. n.d. *Viccgűjtemény* [Imre Katona Joke Collection – Manuscript], *Vicc* [Joke] 1–21. ELTE BTK Néprajzi Intézet Könyvtára [Library of the Institute of Ethnography, ELTE], Budapest, Hungary.

Katona, I. (ed.) 1989 *Viccek Sztálinról, Rákosiról és Ceaușescuról* [*Jokes about Stalin, Rákosi and Ceaușescu*]. Budapest: Új Aurora Könyvek.

Katona, I. (ed.) 1994 *A helyzet reménytelen, de nem komoly. Politikai vicceink 1945-től máig* [*The situation is hopeless but not serious. Political jokes from 1945 till today*]. Budapest: Móra Könyvkiadó. Available at: <https://mek.oszk.hu/00100/00137/html/index.htm> [Last Accessed: 31 October 2019].

Szenes, I. (ed.) 1997 *Történelmünk humorban. A szabadságharctól – a rendszerváltásig. Politikai viccek, anekdoták, karikatúrák (1848–1994)* [*Our history in humour. From the War of Independence to the Fall of Communism. Political jokes, anecdotes, caricatures (1848–1994)*]. Budapest: Cascade Kiadó.

Secondary Sources

Adams, B 2005 *Tiny Revolutions in Russia: Twentieth-century Soviet and Russian history in anecdotes*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203023327>

Apor, B 2017 *The Invisible Shining: The Cult of Mátyás Rákosi in Stalinist Hungary, 1945–1956*. Budapest: Central European University Press.

Apor, B, Apor, P, and Horváth, S 2018 *The Handbook of COURAGE: Cultural Opposition and its Heritage in Eastern Europe*. Budapest: Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.24389/handbook>

Bartha, E 2011 Welfare Dictatorship, the Working Class and the Change of Regimes in East Germany and Hungary. *Europe-Asia Studies* 63(9): 1591–1610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2011.611647>

Bonta, E and Galița, R 2011 Joking as a semiotic practice and means of spiritual survival. A pragma-linguistic and stylistic approach. *Respectus Philologicus* 20(25): 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.15388/Respectus.2011.25>

Caplan, J and Feldman, D 2015 Laughing Out Loud: “Official” Humour in Three Dictatorships, Introduction. *History Workshop Journal* 79: 177–180.

- Carrell, A** 2008 Historical Views of Humor in Raskin, V. (ed.) *The Primer of Humor Research*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. pp. 303–332. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110198492.303>
- Davies, C** 2007 Humour and Protest: Jokes under Communism. *IRSH* 52: 291–305. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859007003252>
- Davies, C** 2008 Undertaking the comparative study of humour. In Raskin, V. (ed.) *The Primer of Humor Research*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. pp. 157–182. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110198492.157>
- Demeter, L** 2020 Transnational activism against heritage destruction as a human rights violation in Romania before and after 1989. *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest* 2–3(2): 121–150. <https://doi.org/10.3917/receo1.512.0121>
- De Vries, M.F.K** 2006 The spirit of despotism: Understanding the tyrant within. *Human Relations*, 59(2): 195–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726706062732>
- Dragoş, P** 2022 Revisiting the revolution of 1989: The end of the communist rule in Romania. In: Tyszkiewicz, J. (ed.) *Human Rights and Political Dissent in Central Europe. Between the Helsinki Accords and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*. New York: Routledge. pp. 172–186. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003187646-12>
- Erőss, L** 1982 *A Pesti Vicc [Budapest Jokes]*. Budapest: Gondolat.
- Ferge, Zs** 2008 Is there a specific Est-Central European welfare culture? In: Hermann, P. (ed.) *Governance and Social Professions: How Much Openness is Needed and How Much Openness is Possible?* New York: Nova Science Publishers. pp. 161–179. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781848440234.00015>
- Frankl, Viktor E** 1984 [1946] *Man's Search for Meaning*. Washington: Washington Square Press.
- Glăvan, G** 2019 The Life and Times of Ceauşescu Jokes. *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 5(1): 157–176. <https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcst.2019.7.09>
- Gough, R** 2006 *A Good Comrade. János Kádár, Communism and Hungary*. London: I. B. Tauris. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755618750>
- Hart, M. C** 2007 Humour and social protest: an introduction. In: Hart, M. C. and Bos, D. (eds.) *Humour and social protest*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859007003094>
- Horváth, A** 2013 *A magyar sajtó története a szovjet típusú diktatúra idején [The History of Hungarian Press during the Soviet-Style Dictatorship]*. Budapest: Médiatudományi Intézet.
- Katona, I** 1980 *Mi a különbség? Közéleti vicceinkről. [What's the difference? About our public life jokes.]* Budapest: Gyorsuló idő.
- Kemp, S** 2016 *Was Communism Doomed? Human Nature, Psychology and the Communist Economy*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32780-8>
- Kessel, M. and Merziger, P** 2012 *The Politics of Humour: Laughter, Inclusion, and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442695122>
- Kiss, R** 2022 Resistance, dissent, and opposition movements. Antecedents of the Hungarian regime change. In: Tyszkiewicz, J. (ed.) *Human Rights and Political Dissent in Central Europe. Between the Helsinki Accords and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*. New York: Routledge. pp. 152–171. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003187646-11>

- Klicperová, M., Feierabend, I. K., and Hofstetter, R. C** 1997 In the Search for a Post-Communist Syndrome: A Theoretical Framework and Empirical Assessment. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 7: 39–52. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1298\(199702\)7:1<39::AID-CASP398>3.0.CO;2-1](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1298(199702)7:1<39::AID-CASP398>3.0.CO;2-1)
- Kopeček, M** 2019 The Socialist Conception of Human Rights and Its Dissident Critique Hungary and Czechoslovakia, 1960s–1980s. *East Central Europe* 46: 261–289. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763308-04602006>
- Lampland, M. and Nadkarni, M** 2016 “What Happened to Jokes?” The Shifting Landscape of Humour in Hungary. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 30(2): 449–471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325415608436>
- Majtényi, Gy** 2012 *Vezércsel. Kádár János mindennapjai [King’s Gambit. The Everyday Life of János Kádár]*. Budapest: Libri Kiadó.
- Majtényi, Gy** 2015 De elmehet a Kádár Jani a picsába! [Johnny Kádár can fuck right off!]. *Replika*, 94(5): 95–112.
- Marin, M** 2013 Laughing about Nicolae Ceausescu. Humour and Everyday Resistance in Communist Romania. *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica* 10: 169–180.
- Morreall, John** 1997 *Humor Works*. Amherst: HRD Press.
- Nova, E** 2019 The Role of Fear and Helplessness in Authoritarian Thinking. Interdisciplinary reinterpretation of the underlying thinking patterns of authoritarianism. *International Relations Quarterly* 10(3–4): 1–26.
- Oring, E** 2004 Risky Business: Political Jokes under Repressive Regimes. *Western Folklore* 63(3): 209–236.
- Prilleltensky, I. and Gonick, L** 1996 Politics Change, Oppression Remains: On the Psychology and Politics of Oppression. *Political Psychology* 17(1): 127–148. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791946>
- Rainer, J. M** 2011 *Bevezetés a kádárizmusba [Introduction to Kádárism]*. Budapest: 1956-os Intézet.
- Saxonberg, S** 2003 *The Fall. A Comparative Study of the End of Communism in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland*. London: Routledge.
- Stefanescu, B** 2016 The Joke Is on You: Humor, Resistance through Culture, and Paradoxical Forms of Dissent in Communist Romania. *Miscellanea Posttotalitariană Wratislaviensia* 1(5): 17–24. [https://doi.org/10.19195/2353-8546.1\(5\).2](https://doi.org/10.19195/2353-8546.1(5).2)
- Yurchak, A** 1997 The cynical reason of late socialism: power, pretense, and the anecdote. *Public culture* 9(2): 161–188. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-9-2-161>
- Voloshinov, V** 1986 *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Waterlow, J** 2013 Intimating Trust: Popular Humour in Stalin’s 1930s. *Cultural and Social History* 10(2): 211–229. <https://doi.org/10.2752/147800413x13591373275286>
- Waterlow, J** 2018 *It’s Only a Joke, Comrade! Humour, Trust and everyday Life under Stalin*. Oxford.

