The 'System of National Cooperation' hit factory: The aesthetic of Hungarian government-commissioned songs between 2010–2020

Abstract

This article addresses the relationship between popular music and populism through three government-commissioned songs produced for national commemorative occasions of national remembering during the post-2010 Orbán regime in Hungary, namely 'Barackfa' (2013), 'Egy szabad országért' (2016) and 'Hazám, hazám' (2020). All three songs are one-off collaborations of artists representing various music genres, and all convey a ceremonial atmosphere and the sense of uniting for a cause. We ask, firstly, what aesthetic forms make these songs potentially suitable for the performance of national unity, solidarity and the 'people'; secondly, what aesthetic forms become linked to national themes in populist politics; and thirdly, how the songs' structure, production, and dissemination can be interpreted as attempts by government commissioners and creators to gain popularity. Drawing on Ostiguy's (2017) performative approach to populism, combined with the application of the notion of collective speculation (Csigó 2016) and the performance of community through musical affordances (DeNora 2002), we identify three main strategies of constructing the 'people' in the songs: singing together as sound, legacy, and practice; the pop 'mega-event'; and the use of folk music aesthetic as 'mother tongue.'

Introduction

Our article explores the relationship between popular music, populism, and nationalism in Hungary through an examination of songs commissioned by the ruling party, Fidesz, in the post-2010 period, which were written or re-recorded for specific occasions of national remembrance. Our analysis is aimed at both the political and creative context of production and musical and genre aesthetics. First, we focus on how political leadership seeks to solidify its hegemonic status through a comprehensive cultural toolkit drawing on music culture's specific local and historical embeddedness. Second, we consider how the 'people' are defined and addressed as a national community as part of this process.

Populist politics is generally understood to be built on a constitutive dichotomy of the oppressed 'people' and an 'elite' that ignores their demands and needs. As part of populist politics, this dichotomy is imbued with specific cultural and social meanings, and populist actors strive towards creating a consensus regarding these meanings in the political arena. De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) argue for an analytical division between populism and nationalism based on the dominant mechanism of exclusion. In the case of nationalism, the 'outside' and 'inside' are located along a horizontal axis in the social space. Populism, in contrast, builds on the distinction between the 'oppressed people' and the 'oppressive elite' (the establishment), where the possession of power and social, economic or cultural positions can be placed on a vertical axis (ibid.). At the same time, Brubaker – disagreeing with De Cleen and Stavrakakis – argues that the two are 'analytically distinct but not analytically independent' (Brubaker 2019, p. 45) and demonstrates that populist demands may be articulated in nationalist narratives. He emphasizes that populist demands are located at the intersection of the politics of inequality and identity politics, where the question of who deserves and 'who gets what' becomes entwined with 'who is what' (Brubaker 2019, p. 57). In the case of post-2010 Hungary,

economic dependence globally and within the EU is articulated as the oppression of 'Hungarian people' and the 'Hungarian nation', as well as the lack of solidarity towards 'the people of Hungary', reinforced through images of being left behind and being looked down on. In other words, following Brubaker, we can argue that populist rhetoric makes claims regarding economic dependence not only, or primarily, in terms of the redistribution of resources or opportunities, but rather the distribution of respect and recognition.

In this article, we analyse three songs and their corresponding videos. Each was written, or re-recorded, for a historical anniversary, commissioned and coordinated by the government; each features a one-off collaboration of artists representing various music genres; and each exhibits a ceremonial atmosphere and the sense of uniting for a cause. First, we intend to find out what makes these songs potentially suitable for the performance of national unity, solidarity, and the 'people'. Secondly, what musical forms become linked to the theme of the nation and national community used in the populism of the government. And thirdly, how the songs' structure, production, and dissemination can be interpreted as attempts at achieving popularity.

In order to answer these questions, we rely on a theoretical and methodological framework that enables us to explore the relationship between popular music, populism, and nationalism by focusing on the construction of the audience as a 'people' through cultural forms linked to nationhood. We apply the notion of collective speculation (Csigó 2016) to understand the relations between the performance of community and musical affordances (DeNora 2002). Péter Csigó, drawing on Mair (2002), Ankersmit (2002), and Hall (1983), argues that the emerging system of late modern politics in 'developed countries' can be described as 'mediatized populist democracy', based on the fact that the primary reference point of this system is 'the people' 'who can be reached through popular media channels' as opposed to macro-groups such as class or ethnic or religious groups, 'which once could be reached through

mass party membership' (Csigó 2016, p. 2). In this system, political actors rely in their political strategies on a collective speculation about 'the people' and 'the popular', 'immersed in a self-referential speculative game, a "bubble" that retreats from reality and follows its self-justifying inner logic' (p. 4).

The second pillar of our analysis is Pierre Ostiguy's (2017) performative approach to populism. Similarly to Brubaker (2019) and De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017), Ostiguy demonstrates the operation of populist demands by a system of axes. Besides social-cultural hierarchies, he establishes his interpretative framework along right- and left-wing political demands. In this system of relations, the silenced majority is not only present in populist demands but also performatively and on the level of emotional or affective reactions. In populist rhetoric and practice, demands made on behalf of the majority and negative *ressentiment* may become manifest in language use, the rejection of 'political correctness', in sexism and a performative 'flaunting of the low' (Ostiguy 2017).

In our analysis, we link Csigó's theory of collective speculation about 'the people' and 'the popular' and Ostiguy's performative approach to processes of collective meaning-making in music through Tia DeNora's (2002) notion of musical affordances. DeNora's concept of affordances is an approach to musical meaning-making that emphasizes the flexibility of interpretation, which is nevertheless structured through its context and its materiality – the social situation of listening and the social and cultural embeddedness of listeners. The approach helps us to understand how musical aesthetics create affordances for the performance and experience of nationhood and national unity through affective means. We analyse the three selected songs, their accompanying videos, and their corresponding aesthetic strategies of constructing the 'people' in this conceptual framework. The three main strategies we identify are singing together as sound, legacy, and practice, the pop 'mega-event', and the use of folk music as 'mother tongue'. We conclude by discussing how these musical and visual aesthetics

can help to transmit Fidesz's identity and memory politics, enabling the spread of populism beyond party politics as part of cultural hegemony building.

The 'System of National Cooperation', memory politics, and popular culture

The 'System of National Cooperation', as the governing Fidesz party has called its post-2010 regime, has been analysed as a complex system permeating legal, economic, social and cultural fields, which directly impacts people's everyday lives (Antal 2019; Éber et al. 2019; Kovács and Trencsényi 2020; Müller 2016; Scheiring 2020). Scheiring has described it as 'authoritarian capitalism' and an 'accumulative state' in which '[a]uthoritarian practises are used to bolster the enrichment of the elite, while authoritarian populist discourses are used to make the redistribution of resources from the bottom to the top more palatable for the masses' (Scheiring 2020, p. 7). This 'accumulative state' is underpinned by both the active support of a domestic or national bourgeoisie (218) and transnational corporations, notably German car manufacturers (p. 7; see also Gerőcs 2021). Éber et al. (2019) have described the post-2010 governments as 'a new semi-peripheral regime of capital accumulation,' whose defining policies have been aimed at ensuring the smooth accumulation of 'external' fractions of capital in order to secure macro-stability, and the simultaneous rapid accumulation of 'internal' fractions of capital, establishing a new national bourgeoisie (Éber et al. 2019, p. 45). These policies have been accompanied by 'a complete political and ideological submission of social groups not favoured by the regime' through a so-called 'workfare regime' built on public work programmes embedded in local patron-client relations, along with the monopolization and incorporation of mass media, which contributed to the establishment of an ideological hegemony (p. 48). Fidesz's ideological mobilization among the national population – and beyond the borders – has not only included the constitution and representation of the 'people',

but also the construction of an enemy. This has taken various manifestations throughout the three terms, including an aggressive anti-migrant campaign from 2015, an anti-Semitic campaign against George Soros from 2017 (c.f. Uitz 2019, p. 17), and the seeds of an anti-Roma campaign planted in 2020.[1]

The reframing of memory politics has been a priority in the systematic establishment of the ideological foundations of the 'System of National Cooperation' from the first Orbán government (1998–2002) up until today, embodied partly in the institutionalization of the reinterpretation of history (Laczó 2020), the incorporation of successful memory political projects of the radical right (Feischmidt 2020, pp. 132–133; Scheiring 2020), and partly in utilizing new tools for national commemorations. This included replacing the cultural concept of a nation with the idea of a nation based on citizenship, which was linked to the political measure of a simplified process for acquiring Hungarian citizenship for ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries in 2010, later extended to include the right to vote (resulting in Hungary gaining 1.1 million additional citizens, more than 10% of the national population). It has also involved the reinforcement of a dominant narrative of Hungarian history through the institutions linked to Mária Schmidt, such as the House of Terror Museum in Budapest, the Memorial Year of the 1956 Revolution, the 20th Century Institute and the 21st Century Institute. A shift in terms of content can also be observed – as our examples will demonstrate – from the representation of the Hungarian nation as oppressed through its territorial losses to inimical external powers – symbolized by the Treaty of Trianon[2] – to an emphasis on national sovereignty and nation unifying (Feischmidt 2020), in parallel with the mentioned simplified naturalization process available for Hungarians living outside Hungary (Egry 2019). This

[1] This involved Prime Minister Viktor Orbán commenting on a ruling in a Roma school segregation court case, where Roma children from the village of Gyögyöspata were offered compensation for having experienced segregation. Orbán observed that he viewed the ruling as 'unfortunate' (Cseresnyés 2020).

[2] The Treaty of Trianon between Hungary and the Allied and Associated Powers was signed on 4 June 1920 in the Grand Trianon Palace situated at Versailles in Paris. Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and population as a result of the Treaty.

memory politics relied on several strategies. First, the removal of national remembering from the control of academia and emphasis on the organization of popular events, aided by (predominantly public service) media broadcasting and the involvement of well-known international figures with links to Hungary. Second, the linking of cultural production to national memory politics through the use of the (popular) cultural infrastructure (e.g., venues, festivals).

Popular culture has thus played a considerable role in crystallizing political ideology through memory politics. Looking at the popularity of radical right-wing ideas in the 2000s (that is, in the period preceding Fidesz's 'System of National Cooperation'), Feischmidt and Pulay (2017) found that in the mainstreaming of new forms of nationalism and political radicalism, the production and consumption of popular culture was paramount (Feischmidt and Pulay 2017, p. 9). The post-2010 regime, however, has not merely sought to connect music scenes (such as national rock, discussed by Feischmidt and Pulay) and political subculture. Rather, it has restructured the financing of the cultural sphere (Barna et al. 2019); centralized and increased control over the education system (Neumann and Mészáros 2019), paving the way for memory politics and a strengthening of national culture and identity through schools; and radically reduced the autonomy of public service media along while incorporating commercial media (Bátorfy and Urbán 2020). Also, in the popular music field, 'the post-2010 period can be characterized by increasing state control and incorporation' through cultural policy and funding – partly through the state grant system Cseh Tamás Programme (later Hangfoglaló), introduced in 2014, but also through state companies (such as MVM or Szerencsejáték Zrt.) funding certain pop artists through sponsorship (Barna et al. 2021).

Popular music and populism: collective speculation, musical affordances, and constructing 'the people'

In order to analyse government-commissioned songs that form part of the memory politics of this regime, we rely on a perspective on populism that is informed by and enables a cultural approach. The point of departure for such a perspective on populism is that populism is linked to the construction and articulation of collective identities (Ostiguy et al. 2021; Stavrakakis 2017). Answering the question of how new collective identities are mobilized through populism and how populism both constitutes a notion of the 'people' and enables identification with it, Ostiguy et al. (2021) analyse the distinctive form and content of populist discourses and leadership. The mediatized performances of populist leaders, their embodied behaviour and style constitute a definable way of connecting with their public. In this process, not only their rhetoric, the constitutive dichotomy-based discourses and the corresponding mobilization play a role but also the linked affective or emotional dimensions. The performative practises connected to populism construct and shape the representation of the 'people'. Within this process, political commitment and the feeling of belonging to a community are equally important elements. Emotional investment, mobilization, and commitment allow for the experience of collective identity and belonging to a camp, facilitated by the establishing of feelings of familiarity and a taken-for-granted 'sameness' (Ostiguy 2017, p. 80).

We complement perspectives on populism that focus on political performance with an understanding of the process of 'collective speculation' (Csigó 2016), informing cultural and political meaning-making, and a cultural understanding of the reception of these meanings. Csigó's social theory derives the phenomenon of populism from the mediatization of society and the logic of contemporary politics. In *The Neopopular Bubble*, he argues that politicians' contemporary fight for popularity is shaped not by the actual opinions or needs of the political community but by the indirect images and self-referential speculative discourses about these opinions and needs created by opinion leaders, political experts, think tanks or PR strategists.

He highlights how this struggle for popularity, which takes place in a mediatized environment, is mobilized and kept in constant campaign mode through stereotypes about the 'people' and general prejudices about public taste, as opposed to being organically rooted in social or structural needs. As one example, Csigó analyses what he calls Fidesz's 'celebratory' political performance during the last two years of their first government (2001–2002; Csigó 2016, pp. 267–312). This performance included avoiding the thematization of conflict while relying on newly established popular media channels, especially commercial television. The strategy was based on the idea 'that the key to political success in today's popular media environment lies in occupying the "center ground," in connecting and controlling the elusive, politically disloyal, middle-ground audience' (p. 267). He argues that the strategy failed – at that time, Fidesz lost the following elections – precisely because the party focused on this elusive notion of the public, as opposed to employing a deeper understanding of the needs of different social classes in Hungary.

Csigó introduces the concept of 'neopopular discourse' to describe this process:

> The 'neopopular discourse' is the common discourse of observers speculating on the new rules of mediatized society and politics in today's popular media-driven age. This 'new age' has been invented on the shared grounds of a two-centuries-old modernist discourse on 'popular classes,' 'popular tastes,' 'popular culture,' and 'the people.' (Csigó 2016, p. 15)

He links this shift to the increasing redefinition of 'the people' 'as sovereign consumers and citizens, whose affinities with popular media, culture, and commodities are prime capitalizable assets for industrial and political actors' (p. 16). 'In this configuration', he argues, 'the notion

of "the popular" has gradually lost its denunciatory taste and stood simply for what the people would support, or like, or listen to, or engage with' (ibid.).

Our analysis combines these two approaches to populism, namely the perspective focusing on (mediatized) political performance, most clearly represented by Ostiguy and Csigó's approach highlighting collective speculation. In our research, we seek to answer how a hegemonic populist regime attempts to create collective identities through performance, a form of collective speculation that involves ideas about cultural categories such as taste, genre conventions and traditions, and to examine the cultural tools it utilizes in this process. We also want to highlight how the process of collective speculation is, to an extent, an automatism embedded into culture, transcending conscious and rational strategy. The analysis reveals how certain images, taste worlds, cultural and social references are drawn upon and linked to collective identities in the political and cultural process of constructing 'the people'.

We look at three popular songs selected by the government, or governmental institutions, as 'anthems' for significant events regarding their memory politics. The selected songs are both prominent – the first two, 'Barackfa' and 'Egy szabad országért' especially received a lot of media attention – and representative of popular music projects directly facilitated by the government for the purposes of political propaganda. The analysis is based on the premise that musical features such as genre or stylistic aesthetics, sounds, instrumentation, melodic and rhythmic motifs or song lyrics can create particular affective spaces of reception and help to construct audiences. DeNora's concept of *affordance* helps to make sense of 'music's interpretive flexibility' (DeNora 2004, p. 43) and enables the uncovering of meaning-making through music. According to DeNora, music's affordances are constituted from within the social circumstances of use, enabling music to function as a resource for world building (pp. 43-44). Antoine Hennion, moreover, demonstrates how listening to music entails 'more than the actualization of a taste "already there," for [it is] redefined during the action, with a result

that is partly uncertain', hence music is able to 'both engage and form subjectivities' (Hennion 2001, p. 1).

In order to contribute to a better understanding of the connection between popular music – as sound, visible performance, lyrics – and the populist political goal of constructing the 'people', we make use of a methodology that enables us to model the process of reception as an aesthetic, affective, as well as reflective process. We used the method of *musicological group analysis* (MGA), developed by André Doehring (von Appen et al. 2015; see Doehring and Ginkel in this issue) to model and analyse this process, and ultimately to understand the relation between the song aesthetic, the afforded social meanings, the creation of (intended) subjectivities, and the characteristics of the 'collective speculation' behind the aesthetics. Musicological group analysis is a method of interpreting the relationship between meanings that listeners ascribe to a piece of music and its sonic characteristics and structure in a specific social and cultural setting. We organized a group analysis session for each of the three songs with the participation of music experts (a musicologist and a professional musician) as well as participating ourselves. The group sessions were transcribed verbatim, coded and analysed according to the conceptualized research questions. We wanted to find out the following: what could make these songs suitable for the performance of national unity and solidarity? In what ways do they attempt to achieve the addressing and affective involvement of different audiences? How can the structure, production, and dissemination of the songs, their aesthetic characteristics as well as the social and cultural position of the collaborating musicians be interpreted as attempts at achieving popularity? How do the songs afford collective identification, and how can we use them to identify the image of the audience – the public – of the creators and the commissioning political actors? The group session participants played a double role: as music listeners, they simulated a reception situation, and as analysts, they reflected on and interpreted the process of meaning-making. We completed the musicological

group analysis with an exploration of media content related to the songs, their production and reception.

In the following, we present three ways of performing and representing national unity and solidarity through three government-commissioned songs, which can be understood as populist strategies in the sense that they contribute, or at least attempt to contribute, to the creation of a ‘people’. These are the sound and represented practice of singing together; staging a pop ‘mega-event’ in the tradition of Live Aid; and drawing on folk tradition and the idea of folk music as a ‘mother tongue’.

Performing the ‘people’ through singing together

The first song exemplifies a strategy that relies on creating unity primarily – although not solely – through the theme of singing together. This is expressed in the performance of the song and is also encouraged as practice through a government programme accompanying the release of the song. This strategy is achieved through a strong individual creative vision and relies on talent-show stars for popularization.

The song ‘Barackfa’ (‘Peach tree’) was written by Bálint Bársony and Attila Rieger (the lyrics by Bársony, Rieger, and Ágnes Fenyvesi) for the album *Hangold újra!* (‘Tune it again’) (2013), which was released together with a songbook as, essentially, a music pedagogical project. In the same year, rebranded as ‘Barackfa – Az összetartozás dala’ (‘Peach tree – song of unity’), the song was selected from the album by the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice as an official song for the Anniversary of the Trianon Peace Treaty. The ministry commissioned the re-recording of the song with an accompanying music video financed by the state-owned Media and Services and Support Trust Fund (‘Barackfa – Az Összetartozás dala’ 2013; Pálfi 2013) and organized a communal singing event for 4 June 2013 (*Kormany.hu* 2013).

The re-recording involved singers known from television pop music talent contests (Timi Antal, Tamara Bencsik, András Kállay-Saunders and Gergő Baricz), as well as folk singer Anna Csizmadia (winner of a folk music talent show singing solo) and the Hungarian Radio Children's Choir.

One of the most important elements in reaction to the Treaty of Trianon has been the theme of injustice (Egry 2019), referring to the cultural and social loss suffered by the nation (Feischmidt 2020). The simplified naturalization process for Hungarians living abroad, along with the designation of 4 June as an official state memorial day, was among the first legislative acts of Fidesz after their supermajority win in 2010. The memorial day had been an important symbolic day of mourning for the radical right since the regime change, yet Fidesz made it official and simultaneously redefined it as a celebratory 'Day of National Unity', emphasizing the unity with ethnic Hungarians living outside of Hungary (Feischmidt 2020). This shift in meaning can thus be understood as a populist turn in the symbolic struggle for framing memory politics and Fidesz's distancing itself from the radical right discourse (associated with the party Jobbik, which had become a political rival to Fidesz). The choice of a song that, as we will show, is optimistic and happy in its tone, instead of a grave or mournful one, is a notable step in this process. In fact, several online commentators argued that a graver tone would have better suited the occasion of the remembrance (e.g. *Nyest.hu* 2013), which implies that the choice was understood as a statement on the government's part.[3] Correspondingly, a state secretary from the mentioned ministry explained in a public service media interview: 'There is no question that the day of the Trianon Treaty is a painful day of memory, but the relevant parliamentary

[3] A parodistic and revisionist radical right-wing version of the song, written as a strongly critical response to the cheerfulness of 'Barackfa' and entitled the 'A Visszarendezés Dala' ('Song of Revision') (2013), is available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/Ke4LBsPR3zo.

decision set a goal of promoting the ideals of unity and Hungarianness on this day' (*Kormany.hu* 2013).[4]

The main part of the song consists of an intro, a verse and what best resembles a bridge (there is no chorus) repeated twice (with different lyrics and a slightly modified bridge the second time) before returning to the intro. The same parts also return at the end of the song, but there is a new section in between sung by a children's choir. In the group analysis session (where the new version of the song was analysed), participants described the main part as a 'children's song', for some evoking associations with a 'cartoon soundtrack' as well as gospel music. The elements affording these associations include the fast tempo, the presence of the choir, a highlighted clap effect on the beats of 2 and 4, which combine to create a 'joyous', 'feel-good' atmosphere (MGA 2021). The lyrics are centred around joining hands and dancing together under the peach tree that appears to the lyrical 'I' in a dream ('Álmodtam egy barackfáról' ['I dreamt of a peach tree']).[5] The words emphasize tactile senses and the embodiment of togetherness ('Kezeink összeérnek / Talpaink egymásra lépnek' ['Our hands touch each other, our feet [literally: soles] step on each other']; 'Táncolj, ahogy hajt a véred' ['Dance as your blood drives you']) – but unity is also explicitly emphasized ('Mert mind egyek vagyunk' ['Because we are all one']). Togetherness is performed through the bodily acts of dancing and singing ('Állj be te is a körbe' ['Why don't you too step in the circle']). Notably, the original recording featured on the album begins with an instrumental, with multiple instruments playing the introductory motif. In contrast, in the re-recorded version, this main motif is sung by the children's choir (without words, 'la-la'-ing the melody line), and the clap effect was also only added to the new version. Besides these modifications, the only important change is the inclusion of star singers; otherwise, the tempo, structure, and most of the

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[4] Our own translation from the Hungarian original: 'Nem kérdés, hogy a trianoni békeszerződés napja egy fájdalmas emléknap, de az erről szóló parlamenti döntés azt jelölte meg célként, hogy az összetartozás és a magyarság eszményét kell ezen a napon hirdetni' (*Kormany.hu* 2013).

[5] The lyrics are publicly available at: https://www.nyest.hu/hirek/a-nemzeti-osszetartozas-br-es-a-barackfa

instrumentation remain the same. The children's choir – already one of the central features in the original – and embodied togetherness (clapping hands) thus stand out.

The main part of the song is followed by an entirely different section, which would be completely out of place in a regular pop song: a piano leads into a solo female singer introducing a new folk-like melody consisting of two lines ('Érik már a barack / Áldott föld gyümölcse' ['The peach is ripening / Fruit of a blessed land']). Next, the children's choir joins the solo voice, culminating in what participants of the analysis session identified as a classical choir composition (organized around the repetition of the same two lines), linking to 'the Hungarian choir tradition [associated with Lajos] Bárdos, [Béla] Bartók […]. I think this a very conscious play on this, the Hungarian children's choir literature is there behind this' (MGA 2021). It can also be heard as hymnic, associated with singing in a church. This choir part extends to a length of 1:24 minutes (between 01:48 and 03:12) before leading back to the main part through a 'cheesy saxophone' line (ibid.) played by the songwriter Bársony. The alternating verse-bridge and singalong melody culminate in a loud finale involving all instruments and voices. The unusual and complex song structure, which integrates pop, gospel, folk, as well as classical choir traditions, the rich instrumentation, and the complexity of the main melodic lines fit the work of Bársony, evidencing an individual artistic vision rather than a straight propaganda song.

The theme of singing together nevertheless appears to have played an important part in the song's selection for political purposes, specifically the representation and celebration of the nation and national unity. This is evidenced by the fact that the lyrics contain no direct reference to Hungarianness or the Hungarian nation (instead, togetherness is expressed in a general human sense, with reference to the Earth and nature: 'Érezd, ahogy a Föld szíve dobban veled' ['Feel the Earth's heart as it is beating along with you']). Singing together was strongly emphasized and also linked to the Hungarian choir tradition and to the notion of (ethno)national unity – a unity of Hungarians within and 'across' the borders – in the ministry's communication

about the song. The practice of singing the song together was directly facilitated through an adjoined programme aimed at schools both within the Hungarian borders and in Hungarian-language minority schools in neighbouring countries and through an attempt to actively engage audiences through online media. The ministry defined the aim of the song as 'for Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin and the diaspora to live the same experience for a moment' (*Hvg.hu* 2013).[6] The Carpathian Basin is a symbolic geographical reference that unites Hungarians within the present-day borders and those outside – in the memory politics propagated by the government, the nation is within the historical location of the Carpathian Basin as opposed to the country borders. The ministry encouraged 'everyone to sing the Song of Unity together' at a given time (6 pm on 4 June 2013) and to create recordings and upload them to the website of the Day of National Unity (*Hvg.hu* 2013). Anderson highlights the significance of singing national anthems together at national holidays, 'the echoed physical realisation of the imagined community' of the nation takes place through what he calls a 'unisonance' (Anderson 2006, p. 145). 'No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes', Anderson writes, 'there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody' (ibid.). Moreover, the digital media-assisted participatory aspect of the event may also be considered part of the populist strategy of creating the 'people' through inviting active and affective participation, an identification with the 'imagined community'.

The Hungarian music pedagogical tradition, the 'Kodály method,' associated with the composer, ethnomusicologist, and music pedagogue Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) and based on singing, physical movement, and choral practice, was universally applied in music education during the socialist period from 1948 onwards (as well as becoming internationally known).

[6] Our own translation from the Hungarian original: 'hogy a Kárpát-medencében és a diaszpórában élő magyarok egy pillanatra ugyanazt az élményt éljék át' (*Hvg.hu* 2013).

The method offered a logical referential framework for the purpose of facilitating singing together. The ministry itself made this connection explicit: 'At the heart of Zoltán Kodály's – still indisputable – music pedagogical ideas is the lived experience of singing-along in community. The above idea appears in a piece of music selected for the occasion of the Day of National Unity' (*Nyugat.hu* 2013).[7] The Kodály method is 'a pedagogical tool that uses folk songs reduced to basic tones to teach children familiarity with music' (Taylor 2021, p. 153), centralizing the use of the singing voice, and choir singing in particular. The method, developed by Kodály during the interwar period (Taylor 2021, p. 116), is strongly linked to ideas of music as a public good and 'national value' (p. 153). Under the socialist period, it served as a cultural policy tool, with a central goal of teaching children the language of music through singing folk songs.[8]

While today the method is primarily associated with socialist cultural policy, the practises of ethnographic collection in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in which it is rooted actively reinforced a view of villages and peasant culture as locations of authentic national culture (Taylor 2021). After the Treaty of Trianon (1920), ethnic Hungarian territories now outside of the Hungarian borders continued to be constructed as sources of 'authentic' folk culture in the interwar populist – or, literally, 'folk' (*népi*) — movement, which Kodály was part of (ibid.). 'Barackfa' explicitly draws on such associations, partly by including folk elements in the music (a folk-style melody as the basis of the middle choir part, as well as featuring a violin and a pipe connoting folk sounds; MGA 2021), and partly by including Hungarian children from outside of Hungary's borders in the choir – who thus directly signal folk culture-based populist authenticity and 'national value'.

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[7] Our own translation from the Hungarian original: 'Kodály Zoltán máig vitathatatlan zenepedagógiai elképzeléseinek középpontjában az éneklés közösségi élményének megélése áll. A fenti gondolat ihlette az idei Nemzeti Összetartozás Napja alkalmából született zeneművet' (*Nyugat.hu* 2013).

[8] It was, moreover, also used as a tool of cultural diplomacy (László 2019), while more recently, in 2016, it was added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2016, which has contributed to the rendering invisible its historical association with both interwar populism and socialist ideals.

The star singers involved in the production are highlighted in the music video, which depicts them along with the choir and the rest of the musicians in the studio environment in the process of singing and making music together. These stars similarly represent, through their places of origin, Hungarian territories 'across the border' (with singers Antal and Baricz originating from Romania, and Bencsik and Csizmadia from Serbia). Moreover, the involvement of the singers, and the 'pop' style of their voices, ensures an additional distinct mode of singing together within the sonic space of the song besides the choir, which the participants of the analysis session collectively associated with television 'gala' performances, as exemplified by the following quote:

> when the whole thing opens up [towards the end] and the band enters and the choir [also enters] again, that's like it used to be on [Hungarian music talent show] Megasztár when entrants sang together. This is the idea I had, that this is a feeling of unity, a sense that we are together. (MGA 2021)

Our second example, detailed in the following section, makes even stronger use of this 'pop gala' aesthetic of collective singing.

Staging the 'people' through a pop mega-event

The second song, 'Egy szabad országért' ('For a free land'), was commissioned for another day of remembrance, the sixtieth anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The government invited internationally renowned pop music producer Desmond Child[9] to produce it. We argue

[9] Child is responsible, for instance, for co-writing Kiss's 'I Was Made for Lovin' You' [1979] and several of Bon Jovi's and Aerosmith's hits.

that the song directly exhibits, through its production, a pop style and sound that follows the aesthetic tradition of Live Aid. Unity here is represented primarily by a collection of different styles and sounds through the inclusion of singers and musicians performing the song and lending their voices or musical skills to a common cause.

Like 'Barackfa,' 'Egy szabad országért' also forms part of Fidesz's memory politics and hegemony building through cultural policy. The song and its adjoining music video ('Egy szabad országért' 2016) were commissioned by the governmental institution '56 Memorial Committee in 2016 as part of a Memorial Year programme. The Committee is headed by Mária Schmidt, 'the crucial memory activist of the Hungarian Right' (Laczó 2019, p. 29). Schmidt identified addressing young people as a key goal and the concept behind the choice of this means of remembrance. As she argued, '[t]he youth of today have almost no personal memories of the communist dictatorship', hence the task of the Memorial Year is 'to evoke the elemental power felt by the youth of the time when they stood up to one of the biggest empires in the world at the time' (S*chmidtmaria.hu* 2016).[10] The Committee, similarly to the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice in the case of 'Barackfa', asked for the active participation of the public in collectively recreating the 'revolutionary experience' (ibid.), partly through listening to 'Egy szabad országért' – which was released via YouTube – online.

The Committee set aside a budget of 50 million HUF (114 thousand GBP) for the song. In an interview, Desmond Child 'recounted how he had the chance to meet Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Washington, DC. Mr. Orbán had apparently personally asked the American songwriter to produce a special song for the 1956 anniversary' (Adam 2016). As the media reported, Child, who has Hungarian ancestry, had reconnected with his Hungarian roots shortly before the commission and applied for Hungarian citizenship. Besides Child, Swedish pop

[10] Our own translation from the Hungarian original: '"*A jelenlegi fiataloknak szinte semmilyen személyes emléke nincs a kommunista diktatúráról"* ezért az Emlékév feladata felidézni azt az elementáris erőt, amit az akkori fiatalok éreztek, amikor 1956-ban szembefordultak a kor egyik legnagyobb világbirodalmával' (*Schmidtmaria.hu* 2013).

producer and songwriter Andreas Carlsson is credited as a songwriter. The Hungarian lyrics were written by Tamás Orbán, a pop music lyricist who has worked with many Hungarian pop and rock stars during the last twenty-five years.

Similarly to 'Barackfa', the music video depicts the process of recording the song in a studio of Magyar Rádió ('Hungarian Radio'). The video shows artists performing the song, Child himself giving instructions – visibly directing the creative process –, and images of the mixing desk and screen. In addition, spontaneous shots of collaborating artists are presented as they laugh, give thumbs up, hug each other and express joy and gratitude about the song and their collaboration. One of the differences between the two videos is the much better quality, the professional photography and editing of 'Egy szabad országért', reflecting the higher budget. Another is the presence of Mária Schmidt herself, sitting next to Child and applauding the performance (at 02:12), which, for a few seconds, renders visible the (memory) political context of the production.

The dynamic, manifestly joyful musical collaboration – the musicians are constantly seen smiling or laughing, or emotionally and bodily engaged with the music – evokes the atmosphere of a television pop gala. In the case of 'Barackfa', as we have seen, the choir has a central role, and even though it features well-known Hungarian pop stars, the emphasis is not on them individually, but rather on singing together. In contrast, the video of 'Egy szabad országért' highlights the individual faces alongside depicting the collective performance. In the music, this is paralleled by the star singers taking turns in singing verses showcasing their own unique styles, recognizable and familiar to a Hungarian pop music audience – rather than subordinating their voices to the demands of the composition. 'Egy szabad országért' – both the song and the video – thus draws upon the aesthetics represented by the Band Aid recordings of 'Do They Know It's Christmas' (1984) and 'We Are the World' (1985), which, along with

Live Aid, featured many of the biggest pop-rock stars of the time taking turns singing lines for a 'good' cause that supposedly unites them.

Garofalo (1993) describes musical events like Live Aid as 'mega-events'. These events were as much media spectacle and pop cultural products as political action: Garofalo argues that 'Live Aid demonstrated the full-blown integration of popular music into the "star-making machinery" of the international music industry' (p. 189). Although Band Aid and Live Aid advertise supranational solidarity and humanism (see also Cooper 2016), in the Hungarian case, the event serves as a demonstration of the unity of the nation and solidarity on a national level. We can identify two main aspects of the performing of the nation. Firstly, musicians representing various styles and music traditions join together for the national cause of remembrance, which is made audible in the musical text through an overarching stylistic eclecticism (which is structurally somewhat different from the collage-type eclecticism of 'Barackfa'); secondly, the representation of the unity of communities across and within the borders through the various geographical and ethnic origins of the musicians.

The stylistic eclecticism, the representative showcasing of various musical traditions, is placed, musically, within the framework of a 'bombastic' (MGA 2020) and up-tempo pop song evoking, in many ways, not only 'We Are the World,' but also the Eurovision Song Contest. As in the case of 'Barackfa', a choir sings throughout the song. The hymnic intro beginning with the lines 'Magyarország, halld szavunk / Te szabad ország, halld szavunk' ['Hungary, hear our word / You free land, hear our word'[11]] is jointly sung by the choir with the star singers before the first verse is introduced by musical/rock opera singer Sándor Sasvári's dramatic blasting out the line 'For a free land' (at 00:50) and an orchestral strings motif, which participants of the song analysis session compared to the well-known strings motif from

[11] The lyrics are publicly available at: https://www.zeneszoveg.hu/dalszoveg/101971/vastag-csaba/egy-szabad-orszagert-zeneszoveg.html

ABBA's 'Gimme Gimme Gimme' (1979) (MGA 2020). The rock band, The Hooligans, play their standard instruments, while pop, R'n'B, rock, musical, and folk singers take turns, sometimes singing individually, sometimes with two or more singers. According to the MGA participants, the composition and performance 'intentionally seeks to blur the boundaries between symphonic, folk and popular' (ibid.).

Each stylistic feature or sound that forms part of this unity evokes affordances rooted in the specific Hungarian historical and cultural context. The rock idiom is partly represented through the mentioned rock band, who provide a rock base to the song. Their masculine, 'hard' rocker appearance – the fully tattooed body and the drummer's vigorous gestures – are spotlighted in the video. Besides the band, punk rocker Feró Nagy is also present, a prominent figure of the underground music scene in the 1970s-80s. In a Hungarian and Eastern European context, rock music, especially underground rock, has been strongly associated with the regime change as well as resistance to the socialist regime (Szemere 2001). This imaginary of resistance, the possibility of social and political transformation through the power of rock music, parallels the official communication of the Memorial Year, specifically the 'elemental power' referred to by Schmidt and the 'collective creation of a revolutionary experience' (*Schmidtmaria.hu* 2016). Within the song and the music video, the rock music sound and the images of rock musicians' energetic playing and singing help to conjure an affective space in which this imaginary is activated.

Musicals and rock operas, represented in the song primarily by Sándor Sasvári's voice and passionate visually emphasized gestures, constitute a widely popular music tradition in Hungary. Sasvári's performance brings the legacy of historical themed rock operas into play. At the same time, the musical singing style can also be linked to the Hungarian operetta tradition, which is an important element of the country's image and is emphasized as a 'national value' in tourism (*Hungarikum.hu*).

R'n'B, in a Hungarian context, is primarily associated with singers of Roma cultural background. In 'Egy szabad országért', Ferenc Molnár (a.k.a. Caramel) and Gigi Radics represent this style. Both are stars who gained popularity through television talent contests (*Megasztár* and *A Dal,* respectively). Along with Kati Wolf, who became known through her participation in *X-Faktor* and then went on to represent Hungary at the Eurovision Song Contest in 2015 (the year preceding the recording of 'Egy szabad országért'), their participation can be interpreted as a strategy resulting from collective speculation on contemporary popular tastes and reaching a wider audience. At the same time, the prominent featuring of Radics and Molnár also performs a unity – a community of Hungarians – that transcends ethnic lines.

The inclusion, once again, as in 'Barackfa', of singers both from within and outside of the Hungarian borders, complements the construction of a national unity. Finally, the presence of folk singing (by Szilvia Péter Szabó), as in 'Barackfa', conjures the same associations of authenticity constructed through national tradition.

On the one hand, we argue that this eclectic collection of sounds and styles representing different Hungarian music traditions contributes to a populist construction of a people. Nevertheless, most of these styles, especially rock and R'n'B, are also part of the global pop music mainstream, and therefore a second, more commercial-oriented strategy is also at work, namely the aim of popularization through these global music sensitivities. Child and Carlsson, as internationally renowned star producer-writers, can be perceived as guarantors of professionality and adherence to international pop music standards, as well as lending their prestige to the project.

Embodying the 'people' through the folk mother tongue

The third song draws primarily on the Hungarian folk music tradition and can be interpreted as exemplifying a strategy that seeks to represent national unity through the idea of folk music as a mother tongue. At the same time, its video ('Csík Zenekar – Hazám, hazám' 2020) also utilizes a particular YouTube video aesthetic renewed during the COVID-19 lockdown. 'Hazám, hazám' ('My homeland, my homeland'; 2020) was commissioned by governmental organization Hungarofest National Event Management Ltd. for the one hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon.

The centenary arguably did not proceed the way one would expect from a populist-nationalist government (Egry 2020). The characteristic nationalist rhetoric of Fidesz and the preparations (including a planned memorial in Budapest, which, according to its critics, implied territorial revisionism) had predicted an anniversary that would surpass previous ones, perhaps even generate conflicts with neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the anniversary remained relatively quiet and mostly constricted to the media sphere.

Folk music, and even world music building on folk music elements, can be considered as a regular means of representing ethnic purity and national tradition in the Central and Eastern European region. In the socialist era, television and theatres granted space for folk music performances, while, from the 1970s, the dance house (*táncház*) movement put folk music into practice through communal dancing events (Taylor 2021). The dance house movement has been a symbol of Hungarian identity and national solidarity since the 1970s, in part by enabling Hungarians from Hungary and Transylvania to meet in Romania (Kürti 2001, p. 137). After the 1989–1990 regime change, however, these encounters, contexts and the various forms of preserving tradition were institutionalized with the help of the state. Encounters with communities 'across the border' took the shape of funded projects, while the representation of folk traditions came to be definitive elements of Hungarian identity politics. It is, therefore, no

accident that it was the folk music group Csík Zenekar (‘Csík Band’) who were commissioned to write a song for the centenary.

Founded in 1988 and recipients of multiple state awards, Csík Zenekar had established itself over the decades not only in Hungarian folk and world music but, more recently, from the second half of the 2000s, in the field of popular music. The latter includes attempts on the band’s part to disseminate and transfer the folk idiom to broader audiences, for instance, through collaborations with the most prominent bands in the alternative rock music sphere (Barna 2015). The musical and lyrical material of ‘Hazám, hazám’ was selected from various folk songs and nineteenth-century soldiers’ songs by violinist Attila Szabó and vocalist Marianna Majorosi. Although the arrangement combines folk instruments with instruments representing other styles, such as rock or jazz (including electric guitar), the track’s melody, harmony, and cyclical song structure follow the traditional folk aesthetic. The concept of the selection was based on the original location of the songs that served as a source for the composition: the parts were selected with the intention of inviting singers originating from the given region to sing the relevant lines (Ditzendy 2020). Thus, Hungarian singers from Romania (Bíborka Bocskor, Annamari Dancs, Levente Molnár), Slovakia (Tamás Szarka, Nikolas Takács, Katalin Szvorák), Ukraine (István Pál) and Serbia (Heni Dér) embody local Hungarian folk music traditions through their participation. In the music video, produced for and shared on YouTube, this organizing principle of locality is highlighted by the producers in two ways: firstly, by displaying, along with their names, the place of origin of each artist, who take turns singing lines or playing motifs on their instruments. Secondly, cutaway shots depict characteristic Hungarian – or former, historically Hungarian – rural, sacral (e.g. a church), and natural landscapes. Places of origin within the borders of Hungary are marked by the name of the city, town, or village. In contrast, for those beyond the borders, the name of the town or village along with the historical Hungarian name of the given region is displayed, which

corresponds to the depiction of the Carpathian Basin as a Hungarian national space in the conservative national tradition also articulated by Fidesz. The identification of artists with these regions evokes a unified nation through the national territory.

The encounter between the 'motherland' and the communities 'across the borders' is emphasized in public interviews by composer Szabó as well as the Roma singer Caramel – also singing on 'Egy szabad országért' – reinforcing this set of meanings. In his statement about the song, Caramel contrasts the taken-for-granted experience of Hungarian identity in Hungary with the difficulties of national identification of ethnic minority communities: 'As for everyone, my Hungarianness is important for me too, and I'm aware of how much more straightforward it is for us to experience this on this side of the border in comparison with Hungarians who were forced to live outside of the borders as a result of the decision a hundred years ago' (*Borsonline.hu* 2020).[12] Corresponding to populist discourse, the primary stated goal of the song is to remove the barriers from identification with Hungarianness by strengthening affective involvement and extending the narrative of the nation, and the possibility of identification with it, to those that had previously been excluded from it – among them those with Roma ethnic background.

Besides the origins of participating artists, the performing of national unity also takes place through the representation of various cultural worlds. As in the previous two examples, the recording dissolves genre boundaries by inviting singers representing various musical styles to sing lines of the folk-style song. Besides folk musicians and singers, we also hear and see artists from the world of opera and operetta; singers also known as actors and voice actors; once again, singers known from television talent shows; Roma artists from the pop music world; and singers involved in making music of a decidedly national character, such as national rock. At

[12] Our own translation from the Hungarian original: 'Mint mindenkinek, nekem is fontos a magyarságom, és tisztában vagyok vele, hogy nekünk a határon innen mennyivel magától értetődőbb megélni, mint a száz éve hozott döntés miatt határon túli életere készülő magyaroknak' (*Borsonline.hu* 2020).

the song's climax, we hear – and see – the guitar solo of a prominent representative of the Hungarian rock tradition, Tibor Tátrai, and an aria by Erika Miklósa (between 3:32 to 4:00).

Despite the multiplicity of the contributing musicians' social embeddedness, style, and cultural milieu, the recording is still woven into a coherent whole through the folk music qualities of the song structure and its sound. The structure consists of ten verses and is characterized by a plain melodic line (at certain points sung in unison by two singers and, at the end of the song, by all singers together) and rhythm that adapts to the natural emphases in the lyrics. The singers follow three main strategies in their approach to singing the lines. Artists from folk or world music tradition sing in their usual styles. Most artists from other genres attempt to emulate authentic folk singing with varying success, according to the participants of the song analysis session. Finally, some artists (the rock singer Attila Nyerges or opera singer Erika Miklósa) remain in their original idioms. Folk aesthetic qualities are also emphasized visually, for example, the characteristic way of holding the violin and the rigid, straight comportment of the body characteristic of folk singers – also emulated by some of the non-folk singers in the video.

These strategies and performative elements point to the centrality of the folk music aesthetic that the participants of the recording approach as an idiom. As Mary N. Taylor notes, in the Hungarian context, the idea of 'music as mother tongue' is most closely associated with Kodály, whose method also undergirded the main concept behind 'Barackfa'. In Kodály's pedagogy, the folk mother tongue is directly associated with the 'national value' in folk songs:

> Kodály appears to have made use of the concept of mother tongue in two ways. First, he 'wanted to make the folk song the mother tongue that is the natural musical expression closest to the child' (Dobszay 1972, 24). Second, Kodály asserted that the child should learn the folk songs of his native language first, just as he learns his mother

tongue before learning foreign languages (Choksy 1999, 2). Kodály's insistence on folk songs in the mother tongue was because they had 'national and aesthetic value' (Dobszay 1972). (Taylor 2021, p. 153)

At the very end of the song, the two final verses receive extra emphasis by all singers singing in unison. Visually, this unity is strengthened by the screen layout showing all singers and musicians side by side in the different locations. At this point, the lyrics also move away from the rural framework ('Minden falu édes hazám' ['All villages are my sweet homeland'][13]) and images of nature and family ('Minden asszony édesanyám' ['All women are my mother']) to evoke Hungarian national songs that form part of the official canon – such as the paraphrase of the national anthem ('Isten áldja meg a magyart' ['God bless the Hungarian']) or a well-known national military recruitment song associated with the 1848 Revolution ('Éljen a Magyar szabadság' ['Long live Hungarian freedom']).

Similarly to 'Egy szabad országért,' the song and the video employ the Live Aid-type mega-event aesthetic by inviting artists from different genres to contribute lines. However, the video places this in a specific YouTube aesthetic. While YouTube has facilitated various 'new modes of musicking' (Tan 2016, p. 335; see also Cayari 2011) since being launched in 2005, engaging in virtual music collaborations – whether recorded or live-streamed – gained renewed impetus during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown period (Van De Werff et al. 2021). Corresponding to a specific collective and participatory 'lockdown' aesthetic, in the video for 'Hazám, hazám' we see the musicians 'checking in' from various locations to sing their lines, and at the end, each singer is visible in the form of a grid screen for the last two verses sung in unison. Just as in 'Egy szabad országért', the invited musicians come together to sing in the

[13] The lyrics are publicly available at: https://zeneszoveg.hu/dalszoveg/113019/csik-zenekar/hazam-hazam-zeneszoveg.html

folk ‘mother tongue’ for a common cause and sing together in the finale. However, in this case, the cause is not a humanitarian and internationalist one but rather an ethnonationalist memory politics project.

Conclusions

The presented government-commissioned songs each mobilize a variety of strategies and affordances for the performing, staging, and embodiment of national solidarity and sameness. The composition, production, and editing processes relied on existing national music repertoires, using elements of cultural characteristics and traditions associated with the nation to suit the given memory political events. We examined the songs and corresponding videos regarding three aspects: firstly, what aesthetic forms potentially made them suitable for the performance of national unity, solidarity and the ‘people’; secondly, what aesthetic forms became linked to national themes in populist politics; and thirdly, how the structure, production, and dissemination of the songs can be interpreted as government commissioners’ and creators’ speculation on achieving popularity.

The analyses have shown that through their places of origin within and outside of Hungary’s borders, the singers and musicians participating in the songs embody and perform the idea of Hungarian national unity transcending borders as well as ethnic boundaries – an affordance that fits into Fidesz’s post-2010 nation-uniting political project. The participation of musicians from ‘across the borders’ communicates those regions’ successful political and cultural (re)integration into the ‘motherland,’ and thus the success of this politics. At the same time, it actively conceals Fidesz’s symbolic war waged against ‘enemies’ constructed along the lines of ethnic difference.

The three songs are also consistent in the representation of musicians and styles with a diverse cultural embeddedness: they include singers known from television talent show contests – who are also popular performers at free town or village fairs and therefore reach a broad audience in Hungary; rock musicians embodying resistance rooted in the socialist period and the regime change; musicians on the boundary of pop and folk music; actors and voice actors, whose voices, again, are familiar to wide and diverse audiences. This diversity enables a broad social embeddedness of the songs, which corresponds to the collective speculation of populist regimes: it creates affordances for addressing audiences from different cultural and social backgrounds as one 'people'. The stylistic eclecticism characterizing all three songs similarly contributes to this process through symbolic means: mainstream pop, R'n'B, rock, musical or folk music all support the performance of national unity, which is at the centre of the Orbán regime's populism.

Through the analyses, we have unravelled processes of collective speculation (Csigó 2016) that connect political goals with popular music production. In these processes, certain musical genres, styles, and traditions are not only associated with social, including ethnic, and cultural, backgrounds – and some, like the folk idiom, with the idea of the whole nation – but these associations are also mobilized through strategies of popularization, a key element of populist speculation. These strategies rely in part on familiarity: the use of television stars, familiar faces and voices, shared musical idioms that are believed to establish feelings of familiarity and a taken-for-granted 'sameness' (Ostiguy 2017, p. 80). Strategies of popularization also follow general culture industries logics. One example is the invitation of an internationally renowned producer to provide a pop aesthetic and professionalism that guarantees success. Another example is the use of online media – YouTube in particular – to invite participation in a shared experience.

Still, as the mentioned example of the unsuccessful 2001–2002 political strategy of Fidesz discussed by Csigó (2016) indicates, these strategies do not necessarily ensure actual success – in fact, none of the three songs can be considered to have achieved mainstream popularity. The reasons for this may be complex, and we can only speculate – but as a final note, we suggest some possible reasons. In general, the consumption spaces of songs written for special national occasions are not necessarily everyday spaces, regardless of attempts to utilize YouTube and other online channels. As part of Fidesz's increasing control over the educational sphere, the songs – at least 'Barackfa' and 'Hazám, hazám' – were also sung at schools at official ceremonies, which does not necessarily facilitate organic popularity. In the case of 'Barackfa', many listeners and commentators expressed disappointment, even anger, at such a light-hearted, happy take on what was supposed to be a day of mourning. Participants of the MGA also argued that the melody was complex and fairly difficult to sing despite its articulated goal of encouraging children to sing together. Moreover, the lyrics, especially the nonsensical line 'our feet step on each other', were widely ridiculed in the media (e.g. *Nyest.hu* 2013) and the creators of the song consequently criticized and discredited for their lack of professionalism. 'Egy szabad országért' suffered from a similar problem: one of the key lines, 'Magyarország, halld szavunk' ['Hungary, hear our word'] can easily be misheard – especially thanks to the dense instrumentation – as 'Magyarország halszagú' ['Hungary smells of fish'] – which, as in the case of 'Barackfa', resulted in wide media ridicule (this also partly explains the fairly high number of YouTube views compared to the other two videos, more than 11 million at the time of writing). Child came under severe criticism after it was revealed that while he claimed to have written an original song, the tune had, in fact, already existed as 'In the Steps of Champions', written in 2007 for his native Miami's football team (Adam 2016). Given the high budget of the 1956 Memorial Year, many were upset about this unacknowledged recycling of a previous work, which may also be understood as an offence to national pride. Finally,

‘Hazám, hazám’, as a folk music-based track, remains niche music and not something commercial radio would play.

However, even though the songs did not achieve the status of anthems despite the efforts of political actors and the creating artists, our analysis has demonstrated the processes of collective speculation that help pave the way for a particular aesthetic regime suitable for the performing of collective identity. It has also proven that there is a wide group of musicians and behind-the-scenes creative workers from various music genres that the government is able to mobilize for its propaganda cultural projects, showing the extent to which the ‘System of National Cooperation’ has managed to incorporate the sphere of popular music (c.f. Barna and Blaskó 2021; Barna et al. 2021).

On a more general level, our case study suggests that the relationship between populism and popular music can be defined by the linking of distinct audiences through musical affordances, aesthetics, genre conventions, as well as the incorporation of musicians representative of various genre worlds. A hegemonic populist political power is able to use the infrastructure of popular music in a way that these audiences with different traditions, tastes, cultural capital, and in different social positions are brought together on a common political platform. The central strategy of populist politics is targeting, through collective speculation, distinct social groups with a unified political message. In the Hungarian case, populist politics is closely intertwined with nationalism, and these various audiences are addressed as one national community. This conceals the highly divisive class politics and the oppression and control of the lower classes and ethnic minorities of the post-2010 governments.

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