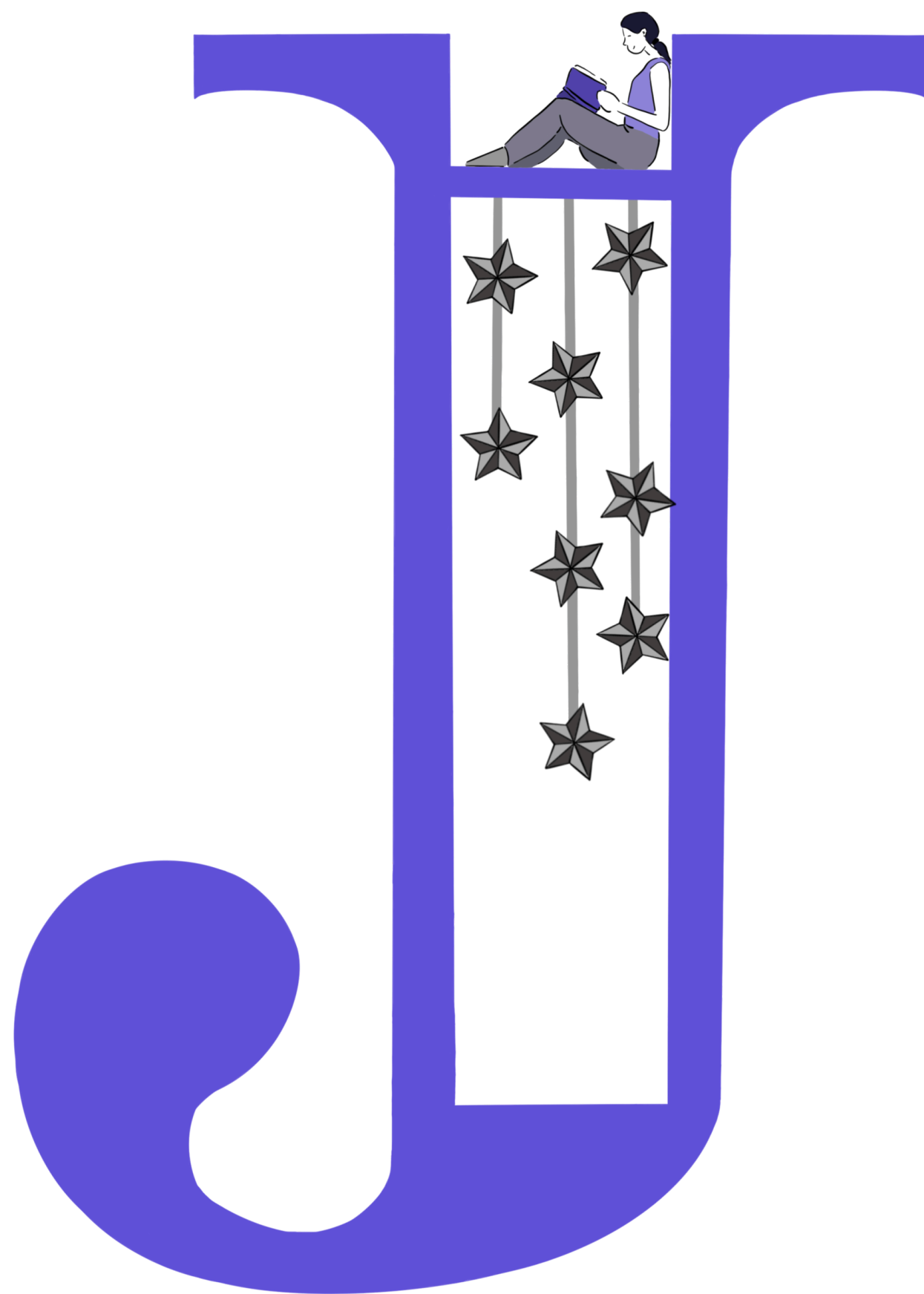


JAKOBSLEITER



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Budapest, Wesselényi utca 17, 1077
Felelős vezető: Palasics Péter

Szerkesztette: Kelenhegyi Andor és Semashyna Masha
Tervezés és nyomdai előkészítés: Lévai András
Borítóterv: Turcsik Anna

Nyomtatta: Érdi Rózsa Nyomda,
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Why not?



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Editors' Foreword

Why does one do research? There are many possible motivations. Some hope to cure disease, increase the quality of life for others, avert disaster, or call attention to injustice in order to prevent it in the future. In some (but not all) areas of research, one can be additionally motivated by money and prestige. Those familiar with the workings of academic grants and professorial appointments would also know that scholars are almost always asked about the relevance and future utility of their work. Facing such a question, they have to prove the importance of their research, arguing that it would yield great results, that it would be the next major thing.

This may all be true in certain cases, but in fact, it is rarely something that the scholar should care about, let alone something that they can tell in advance. Here, in the Editorial Team of *Jakobsleiter*, we would venture that next to the pursuit of knowledge aimed at improving the present conditions, scholarly inquiry is just as justified when it is not based on expectations from society at large, nor on the hope or promise of finding a premeditated answer.

It can just as well be based on an exciting question, the joy of pondering on something. When someone asks why we are engaging with such a question, "Why not?" is just as good a response as any other. In fact, it is better: it is closer to the truth than many others. It often leads to unprecedented results and success. "Why not?" is powerful: it can lead us to spending dozens of days burrowing down a rabbit hole to study a niche topic. And rabbit holes are many and very spread out. Regardless of how respectable a given topic is in the outside world, secretly we know the importance of dabbling, tinkering, and pottering about without a clear goal in sight, for the sheer love of the process;

or of setting sail without a map and a clear destination in mind. “Why not?” is a friend of the quiet joys of a bookworm and of the defiant daring of an explorer alike. We, the editors of *Jakobsleiter*, believe in such cases of fascination. We believe in students who engage with a question for no better reason than that they find joy in dealing with it. This is why we dedicate this third issue of *Jakobsleiter* to the prompt “Why not?”

The beauty of this approach is that it leads to outstanding results. The articles in this volume, while originally responding to this prompt, are far from self-absorbed dabbings unconcerned with the real world. This year, we have a selection of contributions across several disciplines and methodological approaches, from psychology to political science and ancient history.

Lili Bajzát’s article tackles mental toughness, the character trait that allows one to persevere in the face of adversity and succeed despite it, and the techniques employed to increase mental toughness, especially in professional sports, as the author conducted a survey among young Hungarian athletes and non-athletes about their awareness of the concept. The article by Alexandra Sipos focuses on the impact that gendered “girly” TikTok trends have on how Hungarian teenage girls experience, think of, and perform girlhood based on the author’s interviews with several respondents. Áron Szabó presents the findings of an important study on discrimination in customer service, where he tested for the variation in customer service responses across several Hungarian companies depending on whether an account that messaged them had a stereotypically Roma name or used vocabulary associated with Roma people.

Another cluster of articles is focused on contemporary politics in Hungary and abroad. Marcell Pap compares the political discourses about Japanese imperialism in Taiwan and China, especially during the Second World War, and discusses the extent to which these discourses allow space for future reconciliation after the wartime atrocities, as well as how these discourses on Japan are used in Taiwanese and Chinese nation-building. Gergely Hernádi is also looking at public discourse but approaches different sources: in light of the Chinese-Hungarian rapprochement, he compares reports on the same news items about China or Chinese-Hungarian relations from different Hungarian media to identify the minor differences in tone that set publications critical of the Hungarian government apart from those that support it. Bálint Weiszbart focuses entirely on Hungarian politics in an article aiming to refine the definition of Orbán’s political system by identifying the key characteristics of the contemporary Hungarian state.

Moving back in time to ancient politics, Anna Szabó looks at the law that extended Athenian citizenship to women in the 5th century BCE and explores the likely political, social, and economic considerations behind it as well as its influence on women's social position and representation in culture. Another article in premodern history, by Szonja Végvári, unpacks the significance of an unusual figure responsible for lunar and solar eclipses that was depicted on a mortar found in modern-day Iran and used between 12th and 13th centuries to prepare medicine, which allows the author to offer her readers a glimpse into the rich world of mediaeval Islamic astrology. Bridging the past and the present, Liza Bajkó-Istvánfy presents in her article a brief history of fore-edge painting, a rare art form where the unbound side of the book is painted, and shows the reasons behind the sudden rise of renewed interest in fore-edge painting on social media, with a new vibrant community around it, especially during and after the pandemic. Finally, Blanka Pillár analyses two Hungarian films about young people, *Fejlövés* (1968) and *Moszkva tér* (2001), showing how particular filmmaking techniques were used to convey the sense of hopelessness in the 1960s and the open and uncertain horizons of 1989.

In their work on the articles, the authors relied on help from many sources. First of all, we would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their kind and critical guidance. We also extend our gratitude to everyone who supported the authors in this journey: their mentors and advisors who helped the students work on their drafts and prepare the articles for publication, including Erdost Akin, Miklós Dürr, Mária Elekes, Dávid Komáromy, Gitta Markó, Adrian Matus, Rudolf Paksa, Derya Şahin İpek, and Dalma Szentpály, as well as Emese Bálint, Eszter Szép, and Emőke Nagy-Takács, who served as both advisors and editors. Finally, we are very grateful to our proofreader, Lara Strong, and would like to use this opportunity to take full responsibility for any remaining (or added) mistakes, including some unorthodox choices around quotation marks.

As we are stepping into the new year, we hope that the stubborn spirit of “Why not?” will guide our current and future authors further into new rabbit holes, as well as projects aimed at analysing and improving the present conditions in tangible ways.

Masha Semashyna and Andor Kelenhegyi

LILI BAJZÁTH

Awareness of Mental Toughness among Hungarian Students and Young Athletes

What is Mental Toughness?

The term “mental toughness” is probably one of the most used and yet least understood terms in sports psychology even though athletes, coaches, and sports psychologists have long recognized its importance and potential relationship with successful performance. Over the last 20 years, substantial research has been conducted on understanding mental toughness mainly within sports, as the high-pressure nature of elite sports provides an ideal setting for collecting insights and getting a deeper understanding of this concept. The study of mental toughness in other areas of life, such as education and work, has only begun to be explored in the last decade.

Despite the lack of a commonly accepted, precise definition of mental toughness, there is general agreement that mental toughness is a multidimensional umbrella term consisting of many psychological variables that are essential to the attainment and sustainment of high performance, despite stress, challenge, or adversity (Eklund and Tenenbaum, 2014). Although there were previous attempts to define mental toughness, Loehr (1982, 1986 cited in Crampton, 2015), a leading sports psychologist, was the first to popularize it. His extensive work argued that mental toughness is what separates the few who achieve ultimate success from the thousands who do not. According to Loehr, mentally

tough performers respond to problems and pressure in a way that enables them to remain relaxed, calm, and energized simply because of an ability to sustain positive energy flow despite adversity (Loehr, 1982, 1986, cited in Crampton, 2015).

The first to offer a conceptualization and definition of mental toughness in sports were Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2002). Based on insights from 10 elite international athletes, they defined mental toughness as “having the natural and psychological edge that enables you to generally cope better than your opponents with the many demands (competition, training, lifestyle) that sport places on a performer; specifically, to be more consistent and better than your opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure” (Jones, 2010, p.208). Participants in Jones’ research also defined 12 key attributes of mentally tough performers, which covered self-belief, desire/motivation, dealing with pressure and anxiety, performance-related focus, lifestyle-related focus, and pain/hardship factors (Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton, 2002).

A few years later, Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2007) conducted a study using a sample of super-elite sports performers (i.e., Olympic/World Champions) to expand the mental toughness knowledge base and verify their earlier definition of mental toughness, as well as extend the list of attributes considered essential to the make-up of mental toughness. These were subsequently categorized into 13 sub-components, which were then organized into a framework of mental toughness comprising four dimensions: a general Attitude/mindset dimension and three time-specific dimensions, Training, Competition, and Post-competition (see Figure 1; Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton, 2007).

The construction of Jones’ (2007) sport-specific framework represented a significant development in the area of mental toughness research, as it offered several practical applications for coaches, athletes, and researchers.

The latest and currently used definition of mental toughness was developed by Professor Peter Clough, a sports and occupational psychologist. According to him, mental toughness is a personality trait that determines, in large part, how people respond to challenge, stress, and pressure irrespective of their circumstances (Clough and Strycharczyk, 2012). His approach is thus independent of sport and can be applied in other areas of life, like education or work.

sports settings. An academic setting is one of the areas in which researchers have determined that mental toughness is highly relevant. A study in the UK in 2014 examining mental toughness by using the MTQ48 (Mental Toughness Questionnaire 48) questionnaire in 161 first-year sports students demonstrated a significant positive correlation between total mental toughness, grades, and school progression. Students with high levels of mental toughness were more likely to pass than fail and achieve higher grades than students with low mental toughness. It was an important milestone in understanding mental toughness in educational settings (Clough et al., 2015).

Nowadays studies are showing that around 25% of the variation in a person's performance in exams is explained by their mental toughness. This supports the argument that academic performance benefits from higher levels of mental toughness among students (Clough et al., 2015).

Developing Mental Toughness

As mental toughness shows a direct relationship to performance, individuals with higher mental toughness perform more effectively not only in sports but also in education or work. Therefore, developing psychological and emotional mental toughness is a very important life skill. It not only enhances a person's performance but also has a positive impact on everything the person does in life. People with a higher level of mental toughness are shown to demonstrate more positive behaviors: they are more competitive and ambitious than the average and more likely to volunteer for things, welcome change, and accept responsibilities (Clough, Strycharczyk, Czerwienko, and Rybak, 2015).

Attempts to understand mental toughness often lead to discussions regarding nature versus nurture. Although aspects of mental toughness may be considered heritable, significant aspects remain unexplained by nature, which suggests the role of environment and social support in its development. Research has demonstrated that individuals appear to develop a certain level of mental resilience influenced by their family during their upbringing (e.g. their parents' role as positive role models, social support, etc.) (Eklund and Tenenbaum, 2014). Crust and Clough (2011) also found that experiential learning plays a significant role in mental toughness de-

velopment. In particular, parents and coaches are likely to be crucial in cultivating the correct environment for athletes to flourish and instilling a strong work ethic and a competitive attitude. Athletes must be exposed to challenging situations in training and competitions that allow personal resources such as coping skills to develop through problem-solving. Occasional failures and setbacks should be viewed as important opportunities to reflect and grow. Furthermore, as young athletes progress towards more structured and formal competition, techniques such as goal setting and imagination are likely to be beneficial (Crust and Clough, 2011).

It appears that mental toughness can be both developed indirectly through experience and taught directly via coaching and skill training. However, skill training alone is not enough to develop mental toughness (Eklund and Tenenbaum, 2014).

One example of skill training is a method called Psychological Skill Training (PST). There is a wide variety of Psychological Skill Training techniques that can be employed to improve mental toughness. The most popular ones are the following (Thomas, Murphy, and Hardy, 1999):

- 1) Focus training develops attention control, helping people to focus better and for longer.
- 2) Relaxation techniques (e.g. autogenic training) are used to reduce anxiety and manage arousal levels. Common techniques are centered on breathing, progressive muscular relaxation, listening to music, and mental relaxation.
- 3) Visualization is the practice of mentally imagining oneself performing various tasks or actions the way one would like to perform them in real life.
- 4) Positive self-talk is the replacement of negative self-talk with positive messages.
- 5) Goal setting is scoping what one wants to achieve and creating a feasible plan.

As there are a significant number of studies examining mental toughness in the context of sports and quite a few in academic settings, my research focuses on exploring and comparing mental toughness in sports and academic settings among Hungarian students. My special interest lies in students' awareness and self-evaluation of mental toughness. In addition, I aimed to explore whether youth athletes have higher levels of

mental toughness compared to non-athletes, what mental toughness-enhancement techniques they are aware of and use, and what impact these techniques have either on their sport or academic performance.

Current study

My main research goal was to understand the awareness of mental toughness (MT) among Hungarian high school students, as well as explore the differences between the MT of young athletes and non-athletes to discover what the relationship is between playing sports and MT. Another goal was to discover what effect mental enhancement techniques have on students' sports and academic performance: what techniques they are aware of and use.

My hypotheses were the followings:

Hypothesis 1: Athletes present higher levels of mental toughness than non-athletes.

Hypothesis 2: People who use mental toughness enhancement techniques have higher levels of mental toughness.

Hypothesis 3: Athletes who use mental toughness enhancement techniques more often have higher levels of mental toughness.

Methods

Participants

My participants were 59 Hungarian high-school students: 48 girls and 11 boys, 23 non-athletes and 36 athletes. Twenty-two athletes had experience in competing on an international level, as they were part of the Hungarian National Team for their age group. The majority of the athletes ($n=34$) played team sports, mainly basketball. There were five students under 15 years old, 39 students aged between 16–17, 13 students between 18–19, and two over 20 years old. The average age of the athletes was 17.8 years, while the non-athletes average age was 17.7 years.

Procedures

Participants were recruited through social media and selected sports clubs in Hungary. The data was collected anonymously, online and the participation was voluntary.

For this research study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in a short 5-8-minute questionnaire including both closed- and open-ended questions. The survey started with an open-ended question about how respondents would define mental toughness in their own words. They were then given a definition and asked to evaluate their mental toughness on a 0–100 scale. This was followed by questions about the extent to which they agree with the predefined mental toughness attributes and what mental toughness-enhancing techniques they know of and use. Respondents were also asked whether they consider themselves athletes, what sports they do, if they compete only on a national or an international level too, and whether they consider themselves successful in the area of sport. In addition, they were asked about their age and gender and to evaluate how successful they are in their academics.

Measures

Mental Toughness Questionnaire 48 (MTQ48; Clough et al., 2015)

Mental toughness attributes were measured by the shortened version of the MTQ48 questionnaire developed by Clough. MTQ48 is based on Clough's 4C Model and measures mental toughness across the four main components, containing 48 items that require responses to statements on a 5-point Linkert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree*, to (5) *strongly agree*, with an average completion time between 10 and 15 minutes (Crust, 2007). Today, MTQ48 is the most valid, reliable, widely recognized, and used psychological assessment tool to measure an individual's mental toughness (Clough, Strycharczyk, Czwerenko, and Rybak, 2015).

In my survey for measuring mental toughness, I used the shortened version of the MTQ48 questionnaire developed by a group of Hungarian psychologists (Mészáros et al., 2022). The shortened version of MTQ48 consists of 10 items. I analyzed the average scores on the item level, on the 4C component level, and also the average score of all 10 items.

Analysis

The data obtained was analyzed by using simple statistical analytical analysis and comparing means.

Results and Discussion

When I asked high school students about what they mean by mental toughness, the range of answers varied focusing on mainly one dimension: ... being strong, stable, balanced, focused, not giving up but being persistent, and being able to cope with difficulties, stress, and failures. These are the words and phrases the target audience associated with mental toughness. Young athletes were very much focused on persistence and being able to perform under pressure, and only very few of them (1–2%) were able to understand and summarize the complexity of mental toughness:

For me, it means that you don't give up until you reach your goal even in the face of any big obstacle. Furthermore, you can overcome the difficulties caused by external factors and you always find a solution to solve any difficult situation. Even if you think of giving up, there is still a mental barrier that does not allow this (17-year-old girl athlete).

Comparing mental toughness of athletes and non-athletes

Research data did not support my hypothesis that athletes evaluate their mental toughness higher than non-athletes. They perceive themselves on the same level. I discovered that overall boys ranked their mental toughness higher than girls did (75 vs 58 on a 0–100 scale).

Athletes	Non-Athletes
63	65

Table 2. Perceived Mental Toughness score of the participants on a 0–100 scale

Taking a deeper look at the dimension of mental toughness, overall, we do not see that athletes would overperform non-athletes in most of the dimensions. Athletes and non-athletes are very similar in terms of confidence. The differences are that athletes seem to react more quickly and worry less after making mistakes or about things that might happen in the future. On the other hand, they tend to underperform in the area of both life and emotional control compared to non-athletes. The numbers in bold in Table 3 represent significant statistical differences between the two groups.

MTOIO -Average		ATHLETES	NON-ATHLETES
CONTROL	Even when under considerable pressure I usually remain calm.	3.23	3.65
	I tend to worry about things well before they actually happen.	3.14	3.83
	I generally feel in control.	3.44	3.83
CONFIDENCE	I generally look on the bright side of life.	3.25	3.57
	I generally feel that I am a worthwhile person.	3.75	3.83
COMMITMENT	I just don't know where to begin' is a feeling I usually have when presented with several things to do at once	3.11	3.17
	I usually find it hard to summon enthusiasm for the tasks I have to do.	2.56	2.65
CHALLENGE	I am generally able to react quickly when something unexpected happens.	4.11	3.91
	I generally cope well with any problems that occur.	3.83	4.00
	When I make mistakes I usually let it worry me for days after.	3.75	3.87
	TOTAL MENTAL TOUGHNESS MEAN	3.42	3.63

Table 3. Evaluation of mental toughness components between athletes and non-athletes

Awareness of mental enhancement techniques

There are a variety of Psychological Skills Training (PST) programs that can be applied to improve performance by cultivating mental toughness. In my survey, I measured the awareness and usage of the most common techniques used for developing mental toughness.

The most well-known technique among both athletes and non-athletes is goal setting (78% and 74% respectively are aware of it). It is followed by positive self-talk and evaluation of previous performance. Visualization is also known by approximately half of both groups. Focus training, autogenic training, muscle relaxation, and mind control are less known in each group.

	Athletes	Non-Athletes
Goal Setting	83%	75%
Focus Training	28%	29%
Autogenic Training	42%	29%
Muscle Relaxation	33%	29%
Imaginary/Visualization	44%	54%
Evaluation of Previous Performance	67%	56%
Positive Self-talk	58%	60%
The Silva Mind Control Method	31%	33%

Table 4. Awareness of mental toughness enhancement techniques among athletes and non-athletes

Impact of mental enhancement technique usage on mental toughness

Seventy-five percent of the students used at least one mental toughness enhancement technique. More than half of each group uses goal setting regularly while approximately one-third of them use visualization, positive self-talk, and evaluation of previous performance. On average, athletes use 3.33 while non-athletes use 2.15 of the techniques.

The more techniques students use the higher both their perceived MT score and their MTQ10 average too.

	Perceived MT Score	MTQ10
Do not or rarely use any techniques	58.5	3.29
Use 1-2 techniques	60.1	3.45
Use 3-4 techniques	70.7	3.57

Table 5. Mental toughness score based on mental toughness enhancement technique usage

Use of external support on mental toughness

Athletes tend to get external help to a greater extent than non-athletes: 20% of them get help from psychologists, coaches, or other professionals, while only 8% of non-athletes do. Those who get help evaluate their MT higher vs those who do not get help (68 vs. 62 on a 100-point scale). Only 38% of the athletes get any direct support from their coaches for improving their MT, while only 5% mentioned that their coaches support them actively in this area. Direct support addresses immediate needs and focuses on the here and now, while active support takes a long-term perspective, aiming to build the recipient's independence and abilities.

	Perceived Mental Toughness Score on a 1–100 scale		
	Total	Athletes	Non-Athletes
Getting professional support	71.1	68.8	80.5
No professional support	62.0	60.9	63.7

Table 6. Mental toughness score according to professional support among athletes and non-athletes

	Perceived MT score on 0–100 scale
Coach Support	68.6
Do not feel coach support	60.6

Table 7. Mental toughness score among athletes according to coach support

Limitations

My study was limited by its focus on a selective group of students: 28 out of the 59 students study at one of the top ten high schools in Hungary, mainly girls (81%), while the majority play basketball (20 out of the 36 athletes).

Conclusion

Overall, young athletes do not seem to be significantly stronger and more prepared to face mental toughness-related challenges compared to non-athletes.

Awareness and usage of different techniques and getting external professional support correlated with having higher mental toughness across the groups. Raising awareness of the techniques and helping students to find the best fit for them could potentially help them to consciously improve their mental toughness. In the case of athletes, emotional control is an area that would benefit from more attention: providing them with more practical tools would enable them to become more successful young athletes.

Based on this, I assume that other external factors like family background and support might also have a significant impact on high school students' mental toughness. It is also worth mentioning that about half the participants attend one of the top 10 high schools in the country; therefore, these students may face more challenges and have a more competitive attitude. In my next study, I would put more focus on these aspects as well.

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ALEXANDRA SIPOS

The Effect of Gender-Specific TikTok Categorization on Hungarian Adolescents

Introduction

In recent decades, social media platforms have become influential in the contemporary digital landscape. As a consequence, trends are set, significantly shaping the identity and experiences of individuals, particularly teenage girls (Chen, 2023). As boundaries between online and offline experiences blur, understanding the complex dynamics of social media trends is essential. That is why this article aims to explore this intricate link. Early forms of trends and subcultures have existed as trends were formed in the 1980s (punk, hip-hop) but only later became excessively more popular and influential as technology enabled accessibility to unlimited content consumption. One of the most significant catalysts for these trends is TikTok, a social media platform containing short-form videos that enable users to engage with diverse content, making it possible for trends to emerge and disappear at lightning speed, a phenomenon not seen before. In this article, I aim to delve into the profound impact of social-media-generated categories on the identity and the experience of girlhood among teenage girls. Girlhood is understood as a shared social experience of being a female adolescent (Bettis and Adams, 2005, p.9). Phrases such as “girl dinner,” “girl maths,” “that girl,” and “girlboss” are currently popular trends that do not necessarily convey the most representative picture of being a girl (Golden, 2023). The research aims to explore how these Western gender-specific

trends alter the mindset of young girls and redefine their understanding of their identity as girls. Is there a correlation between the media content they consume and their behaviour? Recent papers on the hyperconnectivity of the self (Brubaker, 2020) have explored the link between the identity of the individual and the consumed content, revealing that the self is now highly constructed by the internalized trends occurring on social media platforms. However, the specialization on gender-specific trends on TikTok and its effects on the identity of girls remain conspicuously scarce. With the increased acceleration of this process owing to platforms like TikTok, it is crucial to investigate these dynamics, in particular to identify in what ways the perception of girlhood has been changing among teenagers. The specific question I would like to answer is how Western gender-specific trends contribute to the perception of girlhood among those female adolescent TikTok users in Hungary who follow these trends.

Literature review

The theoretical framework of my research builds on two key concepts: 1) gender identity as social construction; 2) modern digital media consumption.

Identity is described as the distinguishing qualities, beliefs, values, actions, and experiences that identify and distinguish a person or a group from others. It includes a feeling of self-awareness and continuity, giving people a framework to comprehend who they are in connection to others and the environment around them (Munley, 1975). According to Ian Hacking (1999), identity is actively formed and impacted by social conventions, classifications, and discourse rather than being defined by static, pre-existing categories. He contends that how society classifies people influences how they view themselves and act, modifying their understanding of themselves on a personal, societal and, in this case, on a gender level. The formation of identity among adolescents (the period beginning at puberty and ending with the start of adulthood, mainly between 10 and 19) is highly influenced by pre-existing categories (e.g. the category of “beautiful,” “ugly,” “cool,” etc.) and external feedback from peers, as recent studies have shown. This period is characterized as a “sensitive window of development” (Sisk and Gee, 2022).

The identity and the gender of the individual are strongly related. Sex is strictly a biological matter; it does not define how men or women should act, whereas gender encompasses the socially constructed aspect of our identity with respect to sex. It determines how men and women perceive themselves and others in their gender-specific context (West and Zimmerman, 1987). In this case, this gender-specific context occurs when talking about girlhood and femininity. The definition of femininity is the characteristics, attitudes, and roles that are commonly associated with how women and girls should behave (Hollows, 2000, p.10). In a Western context in the 21st century, femininity means avoiding baggy clothes that do not show the female body, being polite, never outspoken, and submissive, etc. As West and Zimmerman (1987) define gender, it is “an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means” (p.125). If something is socially constructed, it means that it is not predetermined, it is manufactured through the interaction of people in a cultural setting. Therefore, the idea of gender can be manipulated and shaped. TikTok contributes to this moulding of gender by its one-sided female representation when it comes to gender-specific trends.

When talking about external feedback in the age of the internet, it is necessary to include the influence of social media on the formation of identity among adolescents. Brubaker (2020) described how digital hyperconnectivity (the state in which every user is linked to other social media users at all times in this digital environment) has profoundly transformed the self by creating new ways of being and constructing the self. In the online sphere, it is mainly the result of algorithms—recommendation systems (e.g. the TikTok’s For You page is maintained by an algorithm) that use machine learning to keep the social media platform tailored to its user and mostly relevant to the user’s personal preferences. Users with similar interests may develop a sense of community and belonging as a result of this (Hurwitz, 2023). However, it has the potential to create echo chambers in which users are only exposed to material that promotes their pre-existing opinions and values (Montag et al., 2021). Furthermore, recent research has shown that the identity of users can be estimated based on their likes and shares on social media platforms, such as Facebook (Kosinski et al., 2013). Thus, the borders of the online and offline identity are blurring continuously. Therefore, what one encounters in the online sphere will manifest in their offline

life. This is a significant observation because social media conveys a vast amount of information and impulses that shape the individual's self-perception, especially with trends and categorisations.

TikTok is one of the main accelerators of trends, as short videos can easily “go viral” with only a few hashtags, and is capable of reaching millions of people. TikTok has sparked many trends that contributed to the categorisation of young women and girls in the online sphere. Some of the trends are the Clean Girl/That Girl, the Girlboss, Girl-dinner, and Girl-maths. That Girl epitomises independence, as seen by curated fashion choices, an enthusiasm towards art and culture and wellness, manifesting in frequent exercise and following a diet, most importantly skin-care (Figure 1). Similarly, the concept of Girlboss honours powerful women who are ambitious, confident, and unabashedly outspoken in their ambitions (Atir, 2022). After the analysis of the That Girl content, Golden (2023) highlights the accessories required to be “perfect”: for example, Apple devices and certain make-up products (The Ordinary and Glossier). Another widely known trend is the Girl-maths, which encourages girls to consume more goods with false logical support. For example: “If I don’t spend enough to get free shipping, I am losing money” (Caviness, 2024). All these categories present a one-dimensional feminine behaviour defined by specific accessories, attitudes and a prescribed worldview, thereby contributing to a scheme of behaviour associated with being a girl.

In this paper, I study whether Hungarian adolescent females identify themselves according to these trends. Do they base their behaviour and mindset to some extent on these trends? If yes, how does it contribute to their perception of girlhood? If not, what shapes their perception of girlhood in the Hungarian

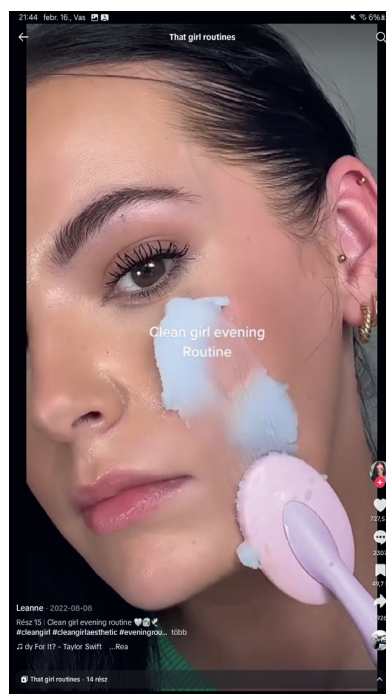


Figure 1. Clean Girl content focusing on skin-care. Source: @leanne_page

context? Gender-specific trends are a new phenomenon in the social media sphere; the topic is under-researched, especially in Hungary. The already existing literature about the link between girlhood and TikTok trends is mainly descriptive, meaning that it analyses content, rather than including the individual experience of TikTok categorisation (Atir, 2022; Golden, 2023; Hurwitz, 2023; Rechdan, 2022; Roivainen, 2023). This paper aims to add to this analysis of content by interviewing participants. Although relying on the answers of just five participants, this paper still provides crucial information in understanding how their definition of girlhood changed while they were active TikTok users. My research aims to contribute to the conversation of categorisation within girlhood and its presence on TikTok and start a discourse that could give rise to further research in this topic.

Methodology

For the study of this topic, the constructivist philosophical worldview is adopted as this research acknowledges that reality and identity are socially constructed, emphasizing the importance of social context in shaping individual experiences and perceptions (Heller et al., 1986). To explore the subjective reality of the participants in this complex landscape, qualitative methodology is the most efficient (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

Semi-structured interviews are used to explore individuals' personal experiences with TikTok trends extensively. This method offers flexibility, allowing individuals to express their ideas, feelings, and motives. The interview questions were developed around three major concepts: 1) self-concept, which refers to how individuals perceive themselves in relation to the digital sphere created by TikTok and its trends; 2) the adoption of habits into their everyday lives, which involves identifying the effects of gender-specific trends on their everyday offline lives and actions (e.g. gestures, phrases, adopted habits); 3) mindset, which concerns the worldview of the individuals who engage with these trends, in particular whether gender-specific trends alter their view on general topics such as life, success, spending, etc., with an emphasis on mental changes.

Purposive sampling (Moser and Korstjens, 2018) is used to identify individuals between the ages of 16 and 19. This age group is critical because they actively shape and participate in TikTok subcultures. Because adoles-

cence is a time of identity, development and experimentation, this population is especially important to the research (Rodrigues, 2017). I sought participants in my social circle as they were easy to reach (through social media and school network) and satisfy the requirements (female, age between 16 and 19, frequent TikTok user, study/live in Budapest).

Results

As part of this research, I interviewed five adolescent female participants between the ages of 18 and 19. Even though the sample size was low, the five participants' answers still provide a basis for further Hungarian studies focusing on this topic thanks to the insights we gain into the participants' perceptions of girlhood. All five girls are actively present (more than two times daily) on the TikTok Four You page. As mentioned above, the questions were categorised into three parts: self-perception, adoption of habits, and mindset. Hence, the results will be discussed within the respective categories.

1) Self-Perception

Self-perception refers to the way in which participants view themselves in the TikTok sphere. The participants had similar views of themselves and of femininity in the TikTok sphere. The common answer was that they use the platform consciously and do not let their self-esteem be dependent on whatever type of girl is currently trending. However, on “weaker” days they feel that the girls belonging to the most commonly mentioned trend—the Clean Girl aesthetic—are “better” than they are because they can maintain a seemingly perfect life in which they prioritize their appearance in the form of skin-care or working out. These girls are perceived as attractive, feminine and put-together.

One participant explained:

I feel like the way I am doing my make-up is not right [in a sense that it is not the style presented by the Clean Girl] even though I do not even identify with this [Clean Girl] type of make-up [She uses a bolder, darker style]. But a few weeks later the Mob Wife aesthetic came, and I didn't care about it anymore so I guess it [the way she feels about herself] is constantly changing.

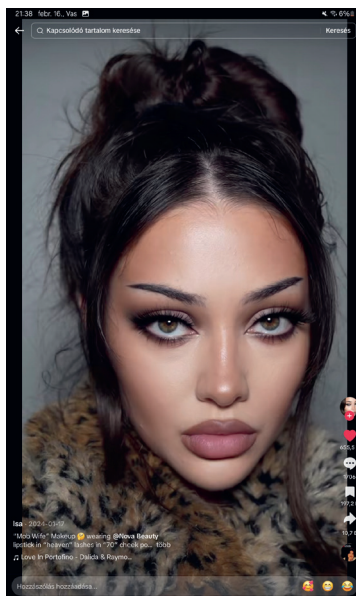


Figure 2. Example of the Mob Wife make-up. Source: @isabellrose

(Mob Wife (Figure 2) is a newly introduced trend depicting women with a style that resembles the wife of a mafia boss. It is characterized by red lips and smoky eyes along with a fur coat and high heels.)

The issue of exercise appeared in many cases. As one respondent said:

I like to exercise, but I feel like I have to do an unhealthy amount to catch up with the Clean Girl. And I don't have time for that. I have to remind myself that it is her job to look neat all the time, that's why she can prioritise it. The same goes for skincare, I don't have the motivation nor the time to do my 50-step skin-care routine. So at the end of the day, I think, I am not a Clean Girl then.

The respondent acknowledged that this sometimes made her feel bad about herself.

Workout videos are an essential part of the Clean Girl trend and a very popular content on TikTok. Studies suggest that female users of TikTok who engage with such content are six times more likely to participate in unhealthy weight loss practices (Liu, 2021). This is the result of the “perfect” body images constantly portrayed on TikTok, causing the participant to feel bad about herself.

On the other hand, another participant took the opposite view, in which she elaborated on how empowered she feels when she sees other women showing off their insecurities. Her algorithm is different from the other participants. She is also shown women who work out quite often, but their pages are filled with body-positive and motivational content. For this participant, working out has a positive connotation that is not paired with being perfect all the time.

I like that it is a trend to look however you want to look. I think this is the true meaning of feminism. Women can choose to use make-up or completely neglect it, they are beautiful either way, and they receive reassurance from their peers. I feel more confident because of other gorgeous women showing off their cellulite or imperfect skin.

All five participants said they use TikTok consciously, which is why their self-esteem is not dependent on the consumed media; however, three of them, later in the discussion, spoke in-depth and even provided examples of how they struggled at some point aligning their self-perception with the Clean Girl image. Only two of them went into detail about how their perception of femininity is influenced by the trends. They see the Clean Girl as the epitome of female beauty and elegance. If there were a scale from 1 to 10 on which femininity could be measured, 10 would be the Clean Girl. When I asked who would be 1 on the femininity scale if Clean Girl is 10, one said: “Those emo girls who use dark make-up around their eyes and black lipstick.”

2) *Adoption of habits*

The adoption of habit means the identification of the effects of gender-specific trends as they manifest in their everyday offline life and actions (e.g. gestures, phrases, adopted habits). It occurs in three ways: 1) choice of words—linguistic style; 2) everyday habits; 3) consumer habits.

All five participants use words learnt from trends such as “slay,” “coquette,” or “girlboss.” “Slay” and “girlboss” are often used as a compliment, while coquette serves as the feminization of a certain situation/object paired with the colour pink or a bow. Coquette also serves as a “girly” way to cope with difficulties. For example, even a cucumber with a bow tied around it can be coquette, feminine, and associated with a touch of high fashion (Figure 3): “elevating a pickle to the level of Prada. From pets to cigarettes, add a touch of whimsy to your dreary day. Dumped by your boyfriend? Just stick a bow on him!” (Dazed, 2023). The respondents use the “coquette” method to make certain scenarios less serious by saying “I am just a girl” or actively showcasing bows in their texting style when talking about negative topics that affect them. Three of the respondents also use this linguistic style to connect with other girls with whom they share the same online reality. Further in the discussion, they mentioned how it is easier for them to talk with



Figure 3. Making things coquette.
Source: Dazed (2023)

fairly new female acquaintances if they adopt this TikTok “language” and style. “It is very awkward if I use TikTok terminology and the other person doesn’t understand it.” It shows that there must be a shared reality, otherwise this sense of connectedness is not present. If the other girl in the discussion does not understand the context of these phrases, it might not strengthen the feeling of girlhood as she does not pair the words with “girlyness” presented on TikTok.

The same three girls frequently buy skincare and make-up products recommended by the Clean Girl influencers. The five participants all engaged in activities that were influenced by some trend. Three of them exercise, which is reinforced by the media content they consume (Gym Girl, Clean Girl) or apply a skin-care routine similar to the one they saw on social media. One girl shared how important it is for her to get the typical “girly girl” experience: “I like to go drink some cocktails with my girlfriends and just gossip and laugh.” Their answers show that they frequently adopt habits and certain kinds of actions they see in TikTok trends, including the consumption of skin-care products.

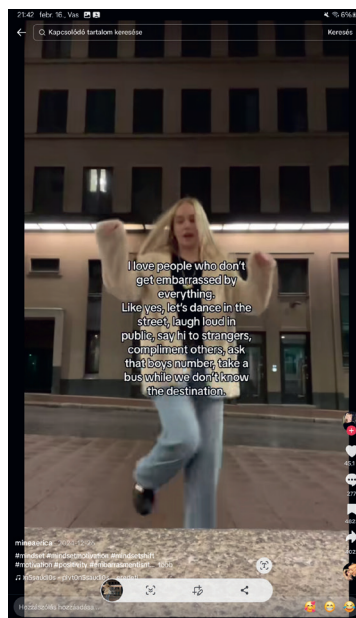


Figure 4. Content portraying the YOLO (You only live once) mindset.
Source: @svenyi

3) Mindset

TikTok’s impact on the respondents was evident in the adoption of mottos like “It is basically free” and “You only live once” (YOLO) (Lee and Hancock, 2023). While the former fostered excessive consumption and explanations for irresponsible spending, the latter, along with other carefree mottos, improved participants’ attitudes. For example, the YOLO philosophy became a recurring motif, encouraging a sense of independence and adventurous living, which relieved anxiety and reduced overthinking (Figure 4).

A new motto appeared under the trend “girl maths” which encourages girls to justify their spending: “It is basically free.” It manifests in the five participants’ mindset too, as they tend to spend more while sup-

porting their spending by some false calculations (e.g. if you pay with cash it is basically free; or if you exchange a piece of clothing and you get the price back, it is profit which you can spend on something else). These mentality modifications, both good and possibly destructive, highlight TikTok's significance in influencing its users' cognitive frameworks.

I also asked whether the respondents can recognise people in their social circle who are influenced by any of the trends. All of them could name at least one person in this regard. They recognized their use of language, consumer habits and online behaviour. To summarize, the mindset of the individuals was affected by the trends, shaping their view on life.

Discussion

The study examined the multidimensional influence of TikTok gender-specific trends on young women's self-perception, everyday behaviours, and mentality. While participants demonstrated agency in consuming TikTok content, the impact of gender-specific trends remained unconsciously ingrained into the minds of young girls, as the self-perception part of the interview showed. The effects of gender-specific trends on the formation of identity can be divided into three categories: 1) self-esteem, 2) adoption of habits, and 3) mindset. TikTok trends set an example not only for what one should buy, i.e. the accessories essential to embodying the trends (thus demonstrating the powerful role capitalism plays in identity building), or how one should talk, but also the mindset one should adopt, which eventually encourages girls to act in a certain way, even if it would have a negative impact on their lives. Their gender identity is constantly formed by the trending "typical female"; they recognize feminine norms, and evaluate others—and themselves—based on these norms. The definition and characteristics of typical Western femininity in the 21st century are reconstructed by the Clean Girl appearance and the respondents can identify what is objectively seen as attractive. This influences their self-esteem, even though they try to be conscious of the potential influence. The most frequently mentioned trend is the Clean Girl, which has the greatest impact on the behaviour of the participants, most specifically on their relationship to food, exercise, and skincare. Their participation in these trends contributes to the formation of their social identity. The participants could identify other girls

influenced by gender-specific trends in their social circle. It means they see the effects of trends, but as the interview shows, the participants might not always be conscious of how trends impact their own situation.

The gender-specific trends reinforce a sense of community among girls. This community can be described by the phrase “girl’s girl,” which refers to those girls who support other girls. This means that girlhood is not only about appearance and behaving in a feminine manner (using make-up, having a skincare routine, or always carrying lip-gloss in their purse), it is also about the cooperation and support for other girls. However, girlhood can be exclusive as it might not be welcoming to those girls who differ from the typical feminine image (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Limitations

Because of the small sample size, the findings cannot be generalised. Furthermore, due to the special nature of the algorithm that determines one’s For You page, not every adolescent girl consumes the same media content. Thus, the study focuses only on those five participants who watch similar content.

Several contextual factors affect TikTok categorisation, such as culture, language, and local uniqueness. However, since this research only involved Hungarian adolescents, findings may not be directly applicable to or comparable with research conducted in the United States. Some of these factors are specific to consumerism and the cultural heritage and context of Hungary. Consequently, some American TikTok-generated categories may not be as relatable for Hungarian teenage girls, such as the trailer park aesthetic romanticised by Lana Del Rey, or the Sad Girl Core originating from Sylvia Plath’s works.

TikTok is distinguished from other social media platforms by its fast-changing trends. What is trendy today may become outdated tomorrow. New categories may emerge or replace the It Girl aesthetic. My research focuses on a single point in time, yet the volatility of TikTok’s terrain means continual observation and analysis are needed.

Conclusion

The study sought to explore how gender-specific TikTok patterns impact young girls' identities and conceptions of girlhood. Employing semi-structured interviews, this research delved deeply into the experiences of young girls, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of their interactions with these trends. The results highlighted TikTok's complex influence on self-perception, everyday behaviours, and mindset, demonstrating an unconscious incorporation of gender-specific tendencies into their identities. To gain further understanding, future studies should use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate the wider implications of these findings.

Appendix

The interview questions were conducted in Hungarian.

1. How old are you?
2. How often do you use TikTok?
3. What kind of gender-specific trends can you think of that you've seen on TikTok?

Self-perception

1. What do you think about these trends?
2. Do you think it influenced you in how you think about yourself?— Why/why not? How?
3. Do these trends describe you in any way? Why/why not? How?
4. Have these trends impacted your understanding of femininity? If so, how?
5. Do you think that these trends have shaped your confidence or self-esteem? Why/why not? How?
6. Can you recall a specific instance where following these trends affected your perception of your own femininity or womanhood positively or negatively?
7. Do you have a sense of connectedness to other girls because of these gender-specific trends? Does it give you some sense of community? Why/why not? How?

8. Do you know people from your social circle who you think are influenced by the trends? Why/why not? How?

Adoption of habits in their everyday life

1. Do you think that this kind of media content you consume has an effect on your offline behaviour? Why/why not? How?
2. Do you find yourself using phrases or adopting gestures from these trends in offline conversations or interactions? Can you provide an example?
3. Has participating in these trends influenced your leisure activities or how you spend your free time? If so, how?
4. Have you integrated elements from these trends into your living space, hobbies, or other aspects of your offline life? Why/why not? How?
5. Have these trends influenced your consumer habits? Why/why not? How?
6. Do you think any of the gender-specific trends gave you a connection point with other female adolescents in your offline life? If so, how?
7. Can you share an instance when following these trends impacted your behavior or choices in your everyday life?
8. Do you know people from your social circle who you think integrated any part of the gender-specific trends into their everyday life?

Mindset

1. Do you think engaging with these trends has influenced your overall outlook on life as a young woman? Why/Why not? How?
2. Can you recall an instance where participating in these trends shifted your perspective on a particular aspect of womanhood or gender roles?
3. Have you encountered any challenges or conflicts in aligning your personal beliefs with the projected mindset by gender-specific trends? Why/why not? How?
4. Have any of these trends encouraged you to act in a certain way based on a “worldview”? (“Do it for the plot,” “girlboss, gatekeep, gaslight,” “it’s basically free,” “I’m just a girl.”) If so, How?
5. Do you know people from your social circle who you think employed a mindset? Did it change their actions? If so, how?

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ÁRON SZABÓ

Unveiling Everyday Bias: Testing for Discrimination Against Roma in Hungarian Customer Service

Introduction

Many people can go into a grocery store, ask a question, and receive a kind answer. Many people who find the shoes they purchased were the wrong size can return them without difficulty. Many people can ask without hesitation if the restaurant where they are planning to dine has allergy-free food. However, are these basic courtesies available to everyone equally? Existing literature finds extensive discrimination against Roma in multiple countries, including Hungary. Discrimination was found in interpersonal interactions during simple conversations, as well as in the actions of numerous public and some private institutions (Scharle and Erős, 2022; McGarry, 2017; Keresztes-Takács et al., 2016; Cretan et al., 2021; Buda et al., 2022; Tyaklar, 2023; Váradi et al., 2023). An article by Scharle and Erős (2022) employs the same methodology I have used to test for discrimination: constructing avatars that write emails to certain organizations (Scharle and Erős examined primarily educational institutions). An example of discrimination found by their study was the lower response rate to inquiries made by the Roma avatars, the lower likelihood of complete information being provided in the responses, and the lower level of kindness exhibited. This is a vital issue because, as anti-Roma discrimination is still accepted in European society (McGarry, 2017), racist interactions can lead to shame and anger in Roma people and eventually to

the segregation of Roma communities (Cretan et al., 2021). Roma can initiate positive interactions and often face rejection, resulting in negative emotions. It has been shown when looked at in broader cases, that racist, discriminatory behavior can even lead to the exclusion of Roma from the labor market (Cretan et al., 2021). We can see the importance of identifying where this discrimination takes place in order to eliminate it. Discrimination against the Roma has been explored multiple times, such as in a study by Scharle and Erős (2022), which examined discrimination by creating profiles and looking for discrimination against Roma in public education and some private areas. However, there have been very few academic studies specifically targeting customer service in Hungary (except for car registration, Airbnbs, and ride-sharing), even though countless people interact with customer services every day. There are, however, many research projects about anti-Roma discrimination and discrimination in customer service outside of Hungary.

Literature Review

When discussing the topic of discrimination against Roma, it is important to consider the different ways of defining who is considered a Roma person. Ladányi and Szelényi (2000) explore definitions and categorizations of Roma. They have found that the categorization of who is and is not Roma ultimately says more about the categorizer than the categorized. Upon summarizing multiple studies, they found that when Roma are asked to self-identify as Roma, there are far fewer Roma identified in a population than when non-Roma people attempt to identify who is Roma. The lower rate of identifying oneself as Roma can be explained by factors such as the disadvantages Roma face because of their identity, making it less beneficial for them to identify as Roma. For government institutions, trying to identify Roma can be difficult. This is because, for example, wealthier Roma families may not choose to be identified as Roma due to the stigma against their ethnicity (Ladányi and Szelényi, 2000). Keeping in mind the difficulty of defining who is Roma, we will, in this study, consider non-Roma people's perception of Roma. Therefore, this study will focus on people who are perceived by others as Roma. Finding discrimination would prove that this definition is problematic and could show us some qualities that make people perceive one another as Roma.

Bias is understood as an unfair inclination against a certain group of people, and discrimination is defined as the unfair treatment of a group of people. Discrimination is a result of bias—when bias manifests in action, it becomes discrimination.

McGarry (2017) identifies Romaphobia as the “Last Acceptable Form of Racism” —identical to Islamophobia and antisemitism and yet still accepted in many societies as the norm. McGarry’s research combines evidence from history, policy, and modern-day pride conventions to show that Romaphobia is still accepted and prevalent in several countries, including Hungary. The continued acceptance of discrimination against Roma people is a serious issue, since extreme forms of Romaphobia are still present today. For example, anti-Roma attacks in Hungary between January 2008 and September 2012 have resulted in the loss of six lives and dozens of injuries. According to the list of attacks against Roma assembled by the European Roma Rights Center, some of these attacks were committed by members of extremist right-wing political groups. It is clear that certain forms of extremism have resulted in events as serious as murder. Therefore, both institutions and individuals should act to identify and stop extremism against Roma in Hungary as effectively as possible.

Keresztes-Takács et al. (2016) surveyed individuals throughout different Hungarian towns and cities and found that, based on the opinions people expressed on a Likert Scale, anti-Roma attitudes are common. They found that demographics and political orientation do not influence the attitudes of Hungarians towards Roma, and they concluded that anti-Roma attitudes are not only common but a societal norm. In fact, there is a societal consensus that Roma are discriminated against. This shows that regardless of changes in multiple factors, anti-Roma attitudes are common, and it suggests this study is likely to find more discrimination. It also shows why it is important to test within the sectors people might engage with daily.

An article by Cretan et al. (2021), based on interviews with Roma and non-Roma individuals in the Czech Republic and Romania, looks into urban encounters. The authors find that encounters involving discrimination result in shame, anger, exclusion from the labor market, and disruption of urban orientation. They also find that contrary to popular belief, Roma do not distance themselves from the general population and do not want to be segregated, meaning that their segregation is the result of discrimina-

tion by society. In other words, everyday experiences that happen “on the street” are very likely to have an impact. Therefore, it is important to test for discrimination in the private sector, as it plays a significant role in people’s common, everyday experiences.

In addition to everyday encounters, an article by Buda et al. (2022) found that discrimination against Roma individuals was present in local Hungarian government offices. The article relied on machine learning analysis of the responses to Roma and non-Roma clients. The authors focused on the linguistic elements of the responses to look for patterns and found attention discrimination, meaning email responses to the Roma clients were shorter and different in tone.

A meta-analysis of discrimination experiments in labor markets can be found in Zschirnt and Ruedin, 2016 (as cited in Luca Váradi et al., 2023). In Quillian et al., 2020 (as cited in Luca Váradi et al., 2023), after examining sixteen field experiments and nineteen observational studies, they found a decrease in housing discrimination in United States markets. Simonovits, Zách, and Kondorosy (2021) conducted interviews about the Airbnb platform in Hungary. While the interviewed individuals did not recall discrimination, some of their remarks indicate some digital discrimination was present. While the article was about a platform involving customers in Hungary, this study focuses on more elements of customer service using a different methodology from the previous studies mentioned. The article by Simonovits, Zách, and Kondorosy does show that discrimination might be present in Hungarian customer-related situations, meaning it might be worth further investigation. Massey and Lundy 2001 (as cited in Luca Váradi et al., 2023) researched discrimination in American housing markets by testing phone calls using African American Vernacular English and White Middle-Class English and found that it occurred. Simonovits, Zách, and Kondorosy also experimented with language elements as a possible basis for discrimination, but in the context of different customer service platforms and using Hungarian Roma words in emails.

Scharle and Erős (2022) conducted a discrimination test in Bulgaria, Czechia, and Hungary on anti-Roma discrimination in public services. The study was conducted in the form of inquiries on school enrolment in all three countries, car de-registration in Hungary, renting municipal premises in Czechia, and access to municipal social housing in Bulgaria. With

respect to Hungary, the study found there is discrimination against Roma individuals in public school enrolment emails, but none for car de-registration. Replies to school inquiries in Hungary were found to be more scarce, less informative, and “less likely to be ‘nice’ and more likely to be neutral or rude” (Scharle and Erős 2022, p.13), as per their qualitative analyses. Since discrimination was shown in the responses to email inquiries in the public sector, it is reasonable to assume something similar in the private sector. Public-sector interactions, such as school applications, are less common than private-sector interactions, such as grocery shopping. This is why I suggest testing for private-sector interactions. Apart from discrimination against Roma, Scharle and Erős also looked at avatars of educated and uneducated Roma and non-Roma, using markers such as writing style. The study was conducted through email, and for the car de-registration in person. The study found various results across the countries and tests, and discrimination against Roma was not always present. Scharle and Erős used the same methodology used in this present study, but they focused on education and only the car rental aspect of customer service.

An American study tested discrimination against Black and Hispanic customers asking for a loan for their computer-based businesses (Bone et al., 2022). The researchers visited banks in person and found that Black and Hispanic customers were treated with less respect. They were less likely to receive a formal greeting and were given brochures as a way to conclude the conversation faster. Testers also analyzed videos showing discrimination, and it was found that Black and Hispanic viewers had a different perception than white viewers of how negative a conversation was, likely an indication of their lived experiences of discrimination. This is important because observations of discrimination in simple interactive customer service situations justify further studies on similar discrimination in different situations. It cannot be predicted whether Hungarian Roma would have similar experiences, but the evidence from a study by Bone et al. indicates that customer service can be a setting that allows discrimination to occur. Previous studies on discrimination in customer service worldwide suggest that this environment is likely to facilitate such behavior, emphasizing the importance of testing for it in similar situations.

Simonovits and Simonovits (2022) analyzed discrimination in a Hungarian ride-sharing platform. In the intervention part of the study, people

were asked to choose one person out of four passengers, one of whom was Roma. The authors made an anti-discrimination intervention video with the aim of decreasing discrimination when drivers choose passengers. This decreased the rate of discrimination against Roma significantly. In the audit part of the study, drivers were asked directly by constructed profiles if the constructed individual could ride with them. The profiles had Roma names, fake reviews, and graphic-designed photos. Discrimination was found. This part of Simonovits and Simonovits employs a methodology and focus that are very similar to mine. My study, however, explores email responses and investigates more broadly the customer service practices of multiple companies, ranging from restaurants to hardware stores. Finding discrimination in the ride-sharing platform gives reason to test for more discrimination in other sectors.

In conclusion, studies have found evidence of everyday Roma discrimination in urban environments (Cretan et al., 2021) and that anti-Roma attitudes are common in Hungary (Keresztes-Takács et al., 2016; McGarry, 2017). There is also significant evidence of attention discrimination in emails (Buda et al., 2022; Scharle and Erős, 2022). Furthermore, there is evidence of discrimination against minorities as customers (Bone et al., 2022) as well as against Roma passengers using a ride-sharing platform in Hungary (Simonovits and Simonovits, 2022). Still, there is little research on Roma as customers in the private sector in Hungary, and discrimination testing has not been used to test discrimination against Roma as customers. It is this gap that the present study ventures to examine in more detail. The topic and methodology are significant because, as I have previously shown, interactions can lead to long-term negative consequences and customer service is an interaction type that everyone engages in. I will investigate the relationship between stereotypical Roma characteristics and the quality of customer service through a comparison of Roma and non-Roma experiences in Hungarian online customer service. I hypothesize that when looking at the differences in email responses to Roma and non-Roma avatars, responses from customer service workers will be disproportionately absent, less descriptive, or less polite towards Roma avatars.

Methodology

The methodology used was racial discrimination testing, an experimental method (National Research Council et al., 2004, Ch. 6) for testing racial discrimination in a given situation. Using this method, which was also used in Scharle and Erős (2022), I created three separate profiles: a stereotypically Roma one, a stereotypically non-Roma one, and a semi-Roma one—these categories will be defined shortly. Emails were sent using these profiles to the customer service departments of companies in different sectors people might encounter every day. The emails sent by the Roma profile had stereotypical Roma elements, such as a Roma name and slang words originating in the Roma language. The slang words included in this study were all words that were checked in a Hungarian-Romani dictionary: *sukár*, *halózás*, *more*, *gádzsi*, *lówé*. These words were used only by the Roma profile, while the semi-Roma profile only had a Roma name. The non-Roma profile had neither.

The names used in my research came from Váradi's (2012) list of names that participants believed to be family names of Roma people. The study asked 1033 adults, of whom 4.2% were Roma, about what names they believed were Roma. Since it is important in this study to test what people perceive, I used two family names that were believed to be Roma in Váradi's study: *Lakatos* and *Kolompár*. This also explains the need to create a semi-Roma profile that only tests name discrimination. The given names were taken from an article analyzing stereotypical Roma names in Hungarian jokes (Takác, 2021): *Gazsi* and *Zsiga*. There was a non-Roma profile who had a stereotypically non-Roma name, asking the same companies the same or very similar questions. The questions were chosen based on the following principle: every question was the same throughout all profiles, except if doing so would reveal the nature of the experiment. If it would, a very similar question was asked. After the online interactions, the answers were analyzed to look for differences in responses and to find out whether there was a correlation between perceived race and responses.

The stereotypical Roma identity used in the experiment was constructed using the elements listed in this methodology section. By that definition, a stereotypical Roma in this study is someone who is perceived as Roma by other people who, in this case, were the customer service representatives.

The customer service departments of 17 companies popular in Hungary were contacted through their Hungarian email addresses. The sectors involved in the study included restaurants, grocery stores, home appliances, banks, and clothing stores. The selected companies interact with a varied number of customers on average, but each of them is large enough to interact with multiple customers every hour. The selection of different industries was to ensure a diverse set of tests. The sporting goods, clothing, and appliance stores were asked about their return policies by all three profiles. The grocery stores were asked about their policies concerning the approaching expiration date of their products, their opening times, and whether they offered a delivery service. Restaurants were asked if they had vegan or allergy-free options. Banks were asked if one could open a savings account over the phone.

Ethical Dilemmas

Ethical considerations had an important role in this study. Ensuring the anonymity and privacy of the companies involved was essential to maintaining the ethical integrity of the study. Given that concealment from companies was necessary for the study, several measures were implemented to uphold ethical standards. Data confidentiality was ensured by the researcher having exclusive access to the received responses, which were stored in a password-protected document. Furthermore, email addresses were promptly deleted after the study. The names of the companies will not be disclosed in this paper or anywhere else. The identities of all involved will be anonymous. Given that the respondents were companies rather than individuals, no personal data was stored. As a non-Roma researcher, I have continuously reflected on my position in the research process. While this methodology was the most reliable and accurate way to gather data, I had to construct the Roma profile exclusively from objective scientific data on perceived characteristics to ensure that my identity did not interfere with the research. The ethical soundness of this methodology allowed for valid results.

Results and Analysis

Emails were sent out three times by the three profiles at random times during March 2024, and the relevant data was received eight days following the last group of emails, since that was the longest wait time for the first profile. Nonetheless, responses were not analyzed until it was confirmed that no more emails would be received, which was two weeks after the last emails were sent out.

At least one response was received from all of the 17 companies. Numerical results in this study were analyzed in Microsoft Excel. The first way of measuring discrimination was the word count of the responses. Ten out of 17 times (58%), the responses to the non-Roma profile had the highest word count, possibly indicating more details. Nine out of 17 times, the answer to the Roma profile with only the Roma name had the lowest word count. This is possibly because the emails from this avatar were the last to be sent out, and so the companies were answering that question for the third time, making it repetitive and causing them to respond with fewer words. Two scales were made to measure discrimination in this study: politeness and informativeness.

Level of politeness	Description
0	No response
1	Condescending tone (no responses with this value)
2	Reasonably polite
3	Very polite

Table 1. Levels of politeness in the response emails.

Since interacting with customer service is inherently subjective, some level of subjectivity was necessary in determining what qualified as polite or informative. On a scale of 0–3, the politeness of the answers received by the non-Roma profile averaged 2.94. The answers received by the Roma profile with the name and slang had an average of 2.64. The Roma profile with just the name had an average of 2.76. This score was influenced by the instances of receiving no response at all.

Level of Informativeness	Description
0	No response
1	Incomplete or partial answer to question
2	Complete answer to the question
3	Extra information was provided

Table 2. Levels of informativeness in the response emails.

For informativeness, the responses received by the non-Roma profile scored an average of 2.705 on a scale of 0–3. The responses received by the two Roma profiles both received an average of 2.412. However, I believe the lower informativeness of the responses to the Roma profile with just a Roma-sounding name may be attributed to it being sent out last, leading to less engagement due to the repetitiveness of the inquiries. If that factor is taken into account, the Roma profile with the slang would have received the least informative response.

There was one instance where a bank had three separate solutions in the responses. The non-Roma profile received a response saying that opening an account by phone is possible, the Roma profile with slang received a response saying it is not possible, and the Roma profile with just the name received a response asking for more information. In an appliance store, the Roma profile using slang was the only one that was told a return was not possible, while the other two profiles were allowed to return the item. These instances likely point to some discrimination. There was one case in a clothing store where only the non-Roma profile received a response, which was received after two days, so it is safe to assume the other two profiles will not receive responses. This also probably points to discrimination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the scale of politeness in the responses was slightly higher for the non-Roma. The scale of informativeness was moderately better for the non-Roma. The results for the two Roma profiles were the same in informativeness, and the Roma profile with just the name was discriminated against to a lesser degree. It is important to note that the results for

the Roma profile with just the name might have been influenced by its being sent out last. The special instances of different responses and the case of the Roma profiles not receiving a response were very likely evidence of discrimination in at least three out of the 17 cases. My hypothesis has therefore been proved correct for the most part. There was an instance of only the non-Roma profile receiving a response, showing a difference in the number of responses the Roma profiles received. The politeness scale was only slightly worse for the Roma profiles, with the Roma name being the second worst simply because no response was received. The informativeness scale shows a difference of 0.293 for both Roma profiles compared to the non-Roma.

There are a few limitations to this study. Firstly, we can only examine the first interaction in a customer service situation to avoid technical as well as ethical concerns (Scharle and Erős 2022). These experiences exclusively pertain to Roma individuals using online customer service in Hungary. Lastly, emails cannot completely model in-person interactions but can indicate how they might transpire (Nathan et al. 2021). Testing in-person experiences in customer service could give more information about the experiences of Roma individuals in their daily lives. The information found in this study shows that it is crucial to find solutions to eliminate discrimination in customer service in Hungary and find ways to improve the lives of Roma.

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MARCELL PAP

Remembering Japan: A Comparative Case Study of Nation-Building in KMT and CCP Presidential Rhetoric

Introduction

Despite the Chinese Civil War concluding over 75 years ago with the expulsion of the nationalist-led Republic of China (ROC) to the island of Taiwan, the Taiwan Strait has remained a point of global contention. On the mainland side is the People's Republic of China (PRC) led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), who champion a Chinese nationalist position and assert that Taiwan and its people constitute an inalienable part of China (He, 2010). While this is a controversial issue in the ROC on the Taiwanese side, the Republic's oldest party, which once ruled the mainland, the Chinese Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), has historically shared this sentiment, advocated for reconciliation and eventual unification with the mainland, and in recent years, strengthened its ties with the CCP (Cooper, 2020). However, for the KMT's proposal for eventual peaceful reunification to succeed, firm common ground must first be established to serve as a basis for reconciliation and diplomatic negotiations.

Among the most important points of contention standing in the way of reconciliation is collective memory of Japanese imperialism. In China, Japan has been arguably the most important "other" against which the Chinese national identity is constructed (Atanassova-Cornelis, 2012; Suzuki,

2007), whereas in Taiwan, this role was largely filled by the old authoritarian KMT regime (He, 2010; Rigger, 2011; Vickers, 2017), and the state enjoys cordial relations with Japan (Dreyer, 2019).

Since national identity construction is especially apparent in the case of national collective memorialisation in presidential rhetoric (Bruner, 2011), we can expect presidential speeches commemorating the Second World War to reveal the differences in how the memory of Japanese imperialism is used in the two countries for national identity construction. For this reason, my research examines and compares the rhetoric used by Ma Ying-jeou's KMT and Xi Jinping's CCP when discussing Imperial Japanese history in the two presidents' 2015 speeches commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The research questions I aim to address are: how collective memory of Japanese imperialism is used in official discourse for national identity construction by the KMT compared to the CCP, and what sociopolitical implications potential differences in the construction of these nations might have.

In order to answer these questions, I compare two commemorative speeches from 2015 delivered by the two countries' leaders at the time, Ma and Xi. By using the toolset of thematic analysis and several conceptual frameworks, I come to the conclusion that while both presidents use historic opposition to Japanese imperialism as a tool for nation-building, their specific means of doing so and the types of national identities constructed are highly dissimilar. Ma leaves space for ambiguity in constructing the Taiwanese-Japanese opposition, which allows for reconciliation. Furthermore, he emphasises the Taiwanese "national body" and the need to defend the island against foreign invaders, whereas Xi defines the Chinese nation using its political virtue of being the global suppressor of fascism.

These findings support Karl Gustafsson's (2023) thesis—that Taiwanese political memory allows for more anxiety and ambiguity than its largely unequivocal Chinese counterpart—and indicate that it even applies to the KMT. It suggests that the ideological closeness of the KMT and CCP, identified by studies analysing older material (Chang, 2001; He, 2010; Kushner, 2007), may no longer hold true to the same extent in modern times.

Since, as Yinan He writes, "the cross-Strait relationship has transformed from a struggle for power and control to a national-identity contestation, [the] biggest challenge for the two sides to address is: Should Taiwan be

considered Chinese?” (He, 2010, p.79). This makes the ways in which Chinese Communist and KMT leadership construct national identities, and the potential discrepancies between them, carry geopolitical significance. The research findings shed light on a deep fault line between the KMT and the CCP, which, given the importance of the question of identity in cross-Strait relations, may be a substantial obstacle to the KMT’s plans for reconciliation.

Literature review

While the Second Sino-Japanese War’s impact on Chinese national identity construction has been the subject of much scholarly research (Atanassova-Cornelis, 2012; He, 2006; He, 2007a; He, 2007b; He, 2017; Suzuki, 2007; Yuan, 2008), Taiwan’s history and relationship with Japan has been relatively overlooked, with comparisons between the two countries’ perceptions of Japan even more scarce. Although some such works do exist (Chang, 2001; Gustafsson, 2023; He, 2010; Kushner, 2007; Vickers, 2017; Ye, 2016), most of them are either based on data that has since become outdated or analyse Taiwanese society as a whole without distinguishing between parties. Furthermore, very few works to date have analysed such political speeches with the intent of understanding the politics of the memory of Japanese occupation with regard to nation-building in Taiwan and China. My research contributes to filling these gaps in the literature by comparatively analysing national identity construction in two 2015 commemorative speeches.

Methodology

I selected these two specific addresses because they were speeches of national importance delivered the same year by the two heads of the parties examined, both of whom were leaders of their respective countries at the time. The English-language translations of the transcripts were provided by the Office of the President of the Republic of China and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, respectively (Ma 2015; Xi 2015).

I used thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) with the codes constructed using the abductive method. Following a preliminary reading of the transcripts, an initial set of codes was created based directly on the conceptu-

al frameworks detailed below and was then tailored through several re-codings to better match the examined materials. This approach allows us to develop codes that are uniquely adapted to the examined speeches, while also remaining compatible with the theory. These codes were then used as temporary scaffolding to identify the overarching main themes of the speeches themselves, which serve as the corpus of this analysis. Since they are not integral to the analysis, the precise codes are not detailed here explicitly.

For conceptualising the nation, I use the framework developed by Benedict Anderson (1983), which conceives of nations as “imagined communities.” I am working under the assumptions that not only do these imagined communities exist only within the minds of individuals as social constructs, but that they are created discursively, such as through the various rhetorical devices found in presidential speeches.

The two theoretical frameworks used for the analysis of these tools in the speeches are one developed by Gustafsson (2023) to account for anxiety in national history discourses and another outlined by Rudolf de Cillia et al. (1999) to describe the linguistic devices used for the construction of national identity. The latter was modified to exclude areas irrelevant to commemorative speeches, such as sports and everyday culture, leaving the following semantic areas within which to interpret the findings:

1. the idea of a “homo nationalis” and a “homo externus,”
2. the narrative of a collective political history,
3. the discursive construction of a collective present and future, and
4. the discursive construction of a “national body.”

It is important to emphasise that unlike some previous research (Gustafsson, 2023; Kushner, 2007; Ye, 2016), this study does not analyse the views of the wider Chinese and Taiwanese public. Its aim is merely to examine two prominent parties in these countries and the narratives they endorse, without attaching moral judgement to either one.

Findings

While the opposition to and resistance against Japanese imperialism are key to how both presidents define their own nations, there is some divergence in their specific means of doing so. Two national identity construction methods that are used in a complementary fashion in both speeches

are the definition of national mentality and the outlining of political aims and virtues. However, this strategy is used to envisage radically different roles for the two nations in equally dissimilar political futures.

The Japanese “other”

The concept of the Japanese “other” plays a key role in the speeches of both Xi and Ma, as it is in opposition to this “other” that the national self is constructed. Since this approach relies heavily on the vilification of Japan, both presidents use rhetoric throughout their speeches that positions the Japanese as the indisputable aggressors of the war, which they both emphasise cost the lives of millions of Chinese.

Ma achieves this by recounting the course of the war in great detail, affirming Japanese aggression as the source of the conflict, and giving accounts of the atrocities committed by the Japanese. Xi, on the other hand, rarely refers to specific historical events, instead relying on the invocation of intense emotional attachment, patriotism, and an overwhelming sense of triumph to achieve this distinction.

Xi refers to Japanese expansion as “the scourge of the evil” (Xi, 2015, para. 9), describes the war itself as “the thicket of that most arduous and bitter war against aggressors, [...] the critical juncture when the survival of the nation was at stake” (Xi, 2015, para. 7), and summarises its outcome as “justice [having] prevailed over evil, light over darkness and progress over reaction” (Xi, 2015, para. 3). He also frequently evokes intense patriotism, focusing on national triumph and emotional attachment. He exclaims: “Rallying under the banner of national united front against Japanese aggression as championed by the Chinese Communist Party, China’s 400 million people fought courageously with one heart and one mind” (Xi, 2015, para. 7), omitting the KMT’s vital role in the resistance against Japan (Gauss, 1944; Mitter and Moore, 2011; Mitter, 2013). Eight of the 10 times the word “Japan” appears throughout Xi’s speech, it is followed directly by some version of the word “aggression.”

The political purpose of these passages relates to the discursive construction of the “homo nationalis” through the “homo externus” (De Cillia et al., 1999). The unequivocal portrayal of the evil Japanese and their crimes against the Chinese nation conceptualises the Japanese to the Chi-

nese listener as not only inherently alien but inherently hostile, creating a more pronounced in-group versus out-group distinction and a more cohesive sense of national identity. As people are united by their shared vulnerability to the threat of a common enemy, this construction of the Japanese “other” forms a Chinese community of interest. In the presence of an existential threat, such as when “the survival of the nation was at stake” (Xi, 2015, para. 7), the cohesive force of this community grows proportionally stronger. The fact that these utterances refer to bloody warfare between the nations further feeds into this by evoking actual wartime sentiments, which offer similarly emotionally fuelled and univocal interpretations of history.

Furthermore, this act of fending off Japanese occupation of the motherland through risking one’s own life, which the speech repeatedly invokes, involves displaying devotion to one’s nation through opposition to Japan. The same phenomenon is present in the speech of President Ma, who arrives at the (debatable) conclusion that “the Taiwanese people repeatedly exhibited a strong feeling of Taiwan identity in their efforts to resist Japan, and showed that their allegiance was to Taiwan and definitely not Japan” (Ma, 2015, para. 7). All these constitute ways in which anti-Japanese rhetoric and evocation of wartime memory and patriotism reaffirm the Chinese and Taiwanese identities through a strong unity in opposition to the Japanese “other.”

But even though Ma also employs this broad strategy, he does so very differently from Xi. While he recounts Japanese crimes against Republican troops, Taiwanese rebels, and common citizens of both Taiwan and mainland China, his account of the war involves nuance. He emphasises losses on both sides, laments the lasting hostility between the Chinese and Japanese, and calls for recognition of infrastructure developments undertaken by the Japanese during the colonial period to improve the island. His speech culminates in him calling for reconciliation between China and Japan, urging them to follow “fact-based objectivity, showing humane empathy and clarity about historical events, both positive and negative” (Ma, 2015, para. 13). Perhaps most illustrative, however, is what I consider the thesis statement of his commemoration: “While the mistakes of expansionist aggression may be forgiven, the history of blood and tears cannot be forgotten” (Ma, 2015, para. 13).

To use the terminology of Gustafsson (2023), what Ma does amounts to embracing the anxiety that the recognition of ambiguity in narratives of the war entails by remembering the Japanese as both aggressors and victims and incorporating it into his construction of Taiwanese and Chinese identities. This is contrary to most historical narratives that tend to forget details that introduce intermediary hues in the otherwise black-and-white portrayals of the history they perpetuate.

The appeal of the unambiguous strategy lies in its ability to provide ontological security by allowing us to categorise events, people, and nations into discrete categories of good and evil, minimising the discomfort of the anxiety caused by ambiguity. However, it also blinds us to facts that may contradict our pre-established views of history. This is not to say that ambiguous narratives are necessarily “better” or “more objective.” Ambiguity is an essential means for understanding our complex reality, but it provides no immunity against ideological biases and distorted narratives.

Ma makes the politically motivated decision to adopt this anxiety into his definition of the Taiwanese nation, in which the Taiwanese, while mourning the brutality of Japanese imperialism, do not conceptualise the Japanese as an inexorable evil and are thus open to reconciliation. The slogan “We can forgive, but we shall never forget” (Gustafsson, 2023, p.356) captures this very sentiment.

Taiwan’s modern history and ethnic relations help explain this decision. The brutal Nationalist repression following the February 28 massacre (also known as the 228 massacre) of 1947 exceeded what most native Taiwanese (benshengren) experienced under Japanese rule (Brown, 2010), causing Taiwanese national identity to be defined mainly through opposition to the KMT rather than Japan (Brown, 2004, p.237; Rigger, 2011; Vickers, 2017). Moreover, since expressing sympathies or nostalgia for Japan was a widespread form of passive resistance among benshengren, it has retroactively engendered nostalgia for the colonial era and erased some of Japanese repression from public memory (Brown, 2010).

This stands in stark contrast to the experiences of mainlanders (waishengren) who endured brutal treatment by Japanese troops before fleeing to Taiwan. This demographic used to be the ruling minority under the KMT party state and typically harbours stronger Chinese nationalist and anti-Japanese sentiment, which stoked opposition between them and the native

Taiwanese (Phillips, 1999; Rigger, 2011; Vickers 2017). Ma, a waishengren, incorporates ambiguity into his narrative due to the need to acknowledge this diversity of views among the Taiwanese, though his own political biases remain visible.

Crucially, these elements of ambiguity seldom occur in Xi's speech, which takes the opposite path, narrating history as a battle between unambiguous, absolute heroes and villains, thereby constructing common memory in a way that leaves little room for reinterpretation. As he bluntly declares: "the victorious outcome of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War must not be challenged" (Xi, 2015, para. 19).

In summary, both Xi and Ma make extensive use of the conceptualisation of the "homo externus" for national identity construction. However, whereas Xi pairs this with emotional attachment and patriotism to construct a more cohesive Chinese unity against the indisputably and unambiguously evil Japanese, Ma embraces ambiguity by remembering the details that may not conform to the conventional narrative of his Chinese counterpart, thereby creating the Taiwanese identity in a way that is accommodating of such nuances.

These findings strongly affirm Gustafsson's general thesis that Chinese historical narratives of Japanese imperialism are generally unambiguous, whereas Taiwanese ones tolerate greater nuance. This study indicates that his general thesis holds true beyond the few illustrative cases he lists, extending even to the top levels of government in both countries. While Gustafsson places rightful emphasis on the KMT as the main source of the "other" against which the Taiwanese self was constructed, this research illustrates that the modern-day KMT has also adopted some characteristically Taiwanese discourses.

Chinese and Taiwanese self

The other major area of divergence is the way the presidents define their own nations' identities based on their political purpose. While Xi ascribes to the Chinese nation the moral obligation to wage a global war against fascism, Ma places greater emphasis on the territorial integrity of Taiwan and the heroic historical efforts to defend it.

The importance of Taiwan's territorial sovereignty is among the most prevalent themes throughout Ma's address. The longest section of his speech delineates the list of treaties and documents that secured the island of Taiwan within the hands of the ROC, starting with the Cairo Declaration. He details the precise circumstances of the ratifications of most of these treaties, concluding by asserting that they "[confirm] that Taiwan and Penghu [are] part of the ROC's territory, once again reaffirming that the Republic of China recovered Taiwan" (Ma, 2015, para. 12). Furthermore, he provides a lengthy elaboration of those he calls "Taiwan's Anti-Japanese crusaders" and recounts an anecdote by the ROC diplomat Wang Chonghui, whose efforts he emphasises all "contributed greatly to Taiwan's Retrocession" (Ma, 2015, para. 10).

Using the works of de Cillia et al. (1999), I analyse these themes as the construction of the national body, which includes both the physical and metaphorical features that constitute the nation itself. From this perspective, these excerpts serve a dual purpose as not only proof of a Taiwanese identity distinct from Japan, as demonstrated above, but also of a Taiwanese national body both willing and capable of defending itself. This includes both the territories mentioned in the speech—most importantly the island of Taiwan—as well as the national populace, which includes "all the heroes, martyrs, and valiant soldiers of the War of Resistance" (Ma, 2015, para. 16) towards whom Ma expresses gratitude in the closing of his speech.

The difference between the construction of a national body and the Japanese "other" is that whereas the latter defines the nation in opposition to one specific external entity, the national body can be used to evoke patriotism to rally against any type of foreign threat, potentially including the PRC. While Ma was conciliatory towards China, the sinking of his approval rating below 20% (TVBS, 2016) and his poor performance in local elections the year prior (Huang, 2014; Vitello and Glaser, 2014) likely provided him with an incentive to move towards the political centre and appeal to moderates distressed by his administration's efforts to bring Taiwan economically and politically closer to China.

While Xi similarly advocates for peace in his speech, his approach focuses more on international relations rather than domestic defence. He frames the Sino-Japanese War as the most pivotal in a larger "World Anti-Fascist War," and thus ascribes to the Chinese people the destiny to carry on the

global fight against fascism. He claims, “The victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War once again speaks eloquently that the tide of history with justice prevailing over evil is irresistible” (Xi, 2015, para. 14). He proposes a heightened Chinese presence in the region based on the Chinese people’s commitment to peaceful cooperation, and reiterates that a “stronger and more developed China will mean a stronger force for world peace” (Xi, 2015, para. 22).

According to the same framework, I analyse this as the construction of both national mentality and a common political present and future. In essence, by attributing a moral purpose to the Chinese people, Xi assigns them a key position in his vision of the world. This creates a common aim for the Chinese people to work towards, further strengthening the previously established community of shared interest. His heavy reliance on historicism and the notion that the tide of history inevitably favours the aspirations of the anti-fascists with the Chinese nation at the forefront serves as the foundation of this narrative; hence, he warns that “forgetting history is tantamount to betrayal” (Xi, 2015, para. 19). The reassuring faith in the inevitability of a Chinese triumph is a seductive belief that goes hand-in-hand with the erasure of ambiguity and the easing of anxieties discussed above. By abating concerns over potential Chinese decline, this narrative is a great source of confidence in the nation for those who subscribe to it, and a great motivation to never sympathise with its opponents, whom history is bound to punish.

Additionally, the noble aim of anti-fascism provides a political virtue to Chinese foreign policy, providing it with a clear and commendable justification. With the framing of all interactions between China and its foreign partners as motivated by the desire for mutually beneficial partnerships, they create a presupposition of an inexorably benevolent China. This could be used to obscure instances of asymmetrical international agreements and legitimise them domestically.

Combined with the findings of earlier studies that have found striking similarities between the rhetoric of the CCP and the KMT of the time (Chang, 2001, Kushner, 2007), the present research is further indication of a gradual “Taiwanisation” of the KMT. He (2010), for instance, relies mainly on material from the 1980s to contrast Chinese and Taiwanese historiographies and their diverging narratives on chapters of Taiwan’s history.

While she also warns of ideological disjunctures standing in the way of reconciliation, she treats the KMT as a CCP ally in the promotion of reunification, as the two have “gradually dropped their previous ideological contention and Cold War mentality” (He, 2010, p.79). However, the present study shows that some narrative elements and rhetoric on national identity still place the KMT firmly on the Taiwanese side.

Conclusion

This article examines two speeches by Presidents Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT and Xi Jinping of the CCP, both given in 2015 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The conclusion is that while both presidents position themselves and their nations in opposition to Japanese imperialism, Xi’s nationalist rhetoric presents a significantly more pronounced “self” versus “other” distinction. Ma, in contrast, incorporates anxiety into his construction of the nation, dulling the opposition to Japan, and encouraging compromise and reconciliation instead. He complements this with a strong reliance on the national body and the importance of defending the island nation’s territorial sovereignty, thereby expanding the scope to all foreign threats and placing less individual emphasis on Imperial Japan. Xi, meanwhile, defines a common destiny for the Chinese nation, from which stems a unique political virtue to justify a more active Chinese presence in international affairs.

The most important implications of these findings relate to cross-Strait diplomatic relations. They indicate an important obstacle to the KMT’s intended reconciliation, as the KMT must simultaneously appease the Taiwanese public to succeed politically and the CCP to succeed diplomatically—two goals that appear irreconcilable with one another. The efficacy of ambiguous narratives in finding a middle ground remains unclear.

Further research should explore the validity and potential implications of these observations, as well as address the limitations of this study, including its limited scope of only two speeches, both nearly a decade old, and its reliance on translations instead of original Mandarin-language transcriptions. Though there have been no KMT presidents since Ma, analysing up-to-date statements and addresses by high-ranking KMT politicians could provide more valuable insights for modern-day political affairs.

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GERGELY HERNÁDI

How is China presented in the Hungarian media?

Since the beginning of the second Orbán administration in 2010, spectacular changes have been observable in both the domestic and foreign policy of the Hungarian state. Compared to previous leadership in Hungary, the Orbán government has opened up to the East much more, which is easily traceable by examining the development of diplomatic relations and collaboration between the People's Republic of China and Hungary. As the two countries have grown closer, China's representation has also changed in the Hungarian media, creating differences between the pro-government and the government-critical press. After briefly summarising China-Hungary relations, this paper will analyse how five different news websites reported on Chinese investments in Hungary, the economic crisis of the Chinese real estate development corporation Evergrande, and the 2024 election in Taiwan, which is also closely related to China's domestic and foreign policy. These articles were all published between December 2023 and February 2024. Overall, one can say that although the pro-government media reports on China in a friendlier tone, the main differences occur in the tone and keywords of the articles rather than in their content. This provides a good example of how the different sides of the Hungarian media report on the diplomatic partners of Hungary.

In 1949, Hungary was among the first countries to recognise the newly formed People's Republic of China, and diplomatic relations between the two countries were established at that time. During the socialist era of Hungary,

although it was strongly dependent on the Soviet Union's China policy, Chinese-Hungarian relations developed in many ways, and this tendency did not stop significantly with the Hungarian regime change of 1989. During the 2000s, with the EU accession of Hungary, relations between the parties were given a new political qualification in line with the strategic economic partnership between the EU and China. Thanks to the newly signed "friendly cooperative partnership," not only did partnership become self-evident, but high-level diplomatic contact between the two sides also became regular. In 2010, the newly elected government, led by Viktor Orbán as prime minister, announced the "Eastern Opening" policy, which paid special attention to the economic and trade relations between Hungary and the leading countries of the Eastern region, including China. Since then, the parties have started several projects together within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, such as the modernisation of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line. To conclude, one can say that Chinese-Hungarian relations are experiencing the best period in their history (Embassy of Hungary Beijing, no date).

In recent years, the rapprochement between the two countries has also provided an excellent topic of discussion in the press and among the public. Key points of contention include the previously mentioned Budapest-Belgrade railway line, the ordering of a large number of ventilators and the preference for Chinese vaccines during the Covid-19-pandemic, the planned campus of the Fudan University in Budapest, and the construction of Chinese battery factories across Hungary. These issues have been widely discussed in the Hungarian press, regardless of whether the given publication supported the government or was critical of it.

This paper will analyse five different well-known Hungarian news websites from the most relevant political spheres of Hungary (government-critical, centrist, pro-government) to see how China is presented in the Hungarian press in 2024. Specifically, this paper will examine how the news sources report on the diplomatic and economic relations between China and Hungary, the economic situation of China, and the 2024 Taiwan elections. The time frame is December 2023 to February 2024.

This paper will also analyse which keywords and frames the articles use. As József Andor writes, "Items which have a central role in representing frames in the mind and which have sets of bodies of lexis under their control, conceptually related to them under the dominance of a frame, have a

key status in the textual representation of their understanding frame. Such words are keywords” (Andor, 2019, p.2). The words that this paper defines as keywords are the ones that draw attention to the main message of the articles. Framing in the media operates by strategically using keywords and narrative structures to shape audience perceptions and opinions.

Framing refers to the use by the media of keywords and narratives to shape the audience’s opinion and perception of certain events and issues (D’Angelo and Kuypers, 2010). In this case, pro-government outlets tend to favour positive terms to make China appear in a good light, while reinforcing Hungary’s pro-China foreign policy. In contrast, government-critical media aim to minimise the issue’s significance by avoiding such terms. During China’s housing market crisis, contrasting frames emerged: government-critical media highlighted keywords like “crisis” and “bankruptcy” to emphasise the severity of the problem, while pro-government sources used softer terms like “problems” and “struggle” to downplay the situation. Similarly, when discussing Taiwan, pro-government outlets used the potential for a conflict to justify a pro-China stance. In contrast, government-critical media maintained a more neutral tone. These framing strategies reveal how news websites influence public opinion by tailoring their narratives to their political positions and intended messages.

Starting with the government-critical press, the first news website to be scrutinised is *444.hu*, which is an independent, government-critical website founded in 2013.¹ The next news website to be analysed is *Telex.hu*, which is among the 10 most-read newspapers in Hungary (BP Digital, 2023). *Telex* is also a government-critical news website that covers a great number of topics in its articles and videos, including Hungarian and world politics, meaning they reported on China in numerous cases.² It is important to mention that neither *444* nor *Telex* support any oppositional parties openly

¹ Since its foundation, *444* has focused mainly on Hungarian domestic policy, but it has also released several analyses and reports on world politics as well as on social issues. Magyar Jeti Zrt., which publishes *444*, is majority-owned by the management of the editorial office, and the minority owner is an investment fund called MDIF, which invests in independent newspapers like *444*. The news website is also strongly dependent on readers’ support, as most of the independent publications are in Hungary (*444*, 2020, [Everything you need to know about the 444]).

² *Telex* was founded in 2020 by former employees of *Index.hu*, another well-read Hungarian news website, which came under government-aligned influence in 2020, resulting in most of their journalists resigning and creating a new independent newspaper, which started with public donations and is still financed 100% by donations. It is published by Van Másik Zrt., which is 25% owned by the leadership of the news website and 75% by the other employees (*Telex*, 2023, [Telex has reached the end of a unique story]).

and that in many cases, they are at least as critical of the Hungarian opposition as they are of the government. The next news website to be analysed is *Portfolio.hu*, which is among the biggest Hungarian economic newspapers. *Portfolio* focuses its articles mainly on economic and financial issues, but on occasion, it releases analyses of world politics questions too. *Portfolio* was founded in 1999, and since then, a complete newspaper group has been built around it, consisting mainly of economic and financial publications. Portfolio is the property of two people: Gabriella Balogh—known from the organisations³ led by Sándor Csányi, a Hungarian billionaire⁴ close to the government—and Zoltán Bán, the editor-in-chief (Bódis, 2021). Although the news website has some connections to companies close to the government, it does not influence the articles' stances. They remain independent when it comes to world politics. The fourth news website, *Magyar Nemzet* (*magyarnemzet.hu*), is the first of the two pro-government newspapers that will be examined. The news website, which reports mainly on political issues both in Hungary and abroad, promotes a conservative-right ideology, largely representing the government's position in all cases. *Magyar Nemzet* can be considered a government mouthpiece, as in many cases, the politicians of the governing party (even Viktor Orbán) frequently give statements to this newspaper or publish their publications there.⁵ Last but not least, the fifth newspaper to be studied is *Origo.hu*, which is also the second pro-government news website. Similarly to *Magyar Nemzet*, *Origo* functions as a vehicle of communication for the government, but it targets a broader audience with its content.⁶ Below is a table to help clarify the background of these news websites.

The first topic analysed, in terms of how it was presented by the different sides of the Hungarian media, is economic cooperation between Hungary and China. This paper will analyse short, everyday articles that deal with the two countries' economic relationship. Still, before that, it is

³ For example, presidency of the Hungarian Football Association.

⁴ Known for being the chairman of OTP Bank Group.

⁵ *Magyar Nemzet* has been operating in its current form since 2019, when it became the rebrand of *Magyar Idők*, which had been proclaimed in 2015 "The government newspaper" (Tarnayk, 2015 [The successor to *Napi Gazdaság* advertises itself as the government party newspaper]). The news website is owned by KESMA (*Central European Press and Media Foundation*), a foundation of national strategic importance according to the government's classification, and in practice, it owns most of the pro-government press outlets in Hungary (HVG, 2018).

⁶ *Origo* was founded in 1998 and became part of the pro-government media empire around 2014. Later, it also became the property of KESMA. The newspaper published articles on many topics, from politics and economics to culture, sports and gossip.

News websites	<i>444</i>	<i>Telex</i>	<i>Portfolio</i>	<i>Magyar Nemzet</i>	<i>Origo</i>
Year of foundation	2013	2020	1999	2019 (between 2015 and 2019, it operated as <i>Magyar Idők</i>)	1998 (pro-government ownership since 2014)
Ownership	majority-owned by the management of the editorial office, and minority-owned by an investment fund called MDIF	financed by public donations; 25% owned by the leadership, 75% owned by the other employees	Gabriella Balogh (close to Sándor Csányi), Zoltán Bán (editor-in-chief)	KESMA (owner of most of the pro-government publications in Hungary)	KESMA
Content	Hungarian politics and public life, world politics and social issues	Hungarian politics and public life, world politics issues and social issues, other popular topics	Mainly economic and financial issues, analyses of world politics	Political issues, both in Hungary and abroad	Hungarian politics and public life, world politics issues and social issues, other popular topics
Attitude towards the government	government-critical	government-critical	neutral	pro-government	pro-government
Articles analysed in this paper	3	5	3	4	5

important to specify the aspects of the articles that this paper analyses: the title, the length, the wording and keywords, the frames, the sources, and the message of the articles. Of course, this paper will not refer to these aspects for each article—they will mostly serve as reference points during the analyses.

Firstly, this article will examine how *Telex* and *Origo* reported on the statement of the Hungarian Minister of Economic Development Márton Nagy on a joint event with the Chinese ambassador. The *Telex* article, with the title “The proportion of Eastern investments in Hungary exceeded one third,”⁷ reports only on the most important part of the minister’s statement, which is that the role of Chinese investments has greatly grown in Hungary since 2014, and that according to him, the centre of gravity of the global economy is shifting to Asia. The article also reports the presence of Chinese companies in Hungary in figures. One difference between the two articles is that *Origo*’s article is much longer (Halász, 2024). Also, the *Origo* article, titled “Márton Nagy: China is an important economic partner of Hungary,” not only reports the most important details of Nagy’s statement, but also quotes more details about the cooperation between the countries, illustrating with more data and concrete common projects (such as the Budapest-Belgrade railway line). It quotes the Chinese ambassador too, unlike *Telex* (Origo, 2024d). The *Origo* article has a much more optimistic choice of keywords. For example, it uses expressions such as “successful,” “important partner,” and “favourable geographical conditions,” and it emphasizes the positive progress in China-Hungary relations. Meanwhile, *Telex* delivers simply the most basic information about the statement, without using any emotional expressions, relying instead on short and straightforward sentences. It is also interesting to see that even though both of the websites wrote their articles referencing the MTI (Hungarian Telegraph Office), the *Origo* article contains several links to articles from their site with similar content, whereas the *Telex* article does not contain any. This could mean that the pro-government press would like to compel the reader to read more on the topic, which is positive for them, while the government-critical press does not want the reader to spend a long time reading about such happenings. These articles are good examples of how the pro-government

⁷ All article titles and quotes are translated by the author.

press tries to put a lot of emphasis on the successes of the two countries' relations, while the government-critical press does not.

Another example of this phenomenon is a *Magyar Nemzet* article about the Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó's press conference following the EU-India-Pacific Ministerial Forum in February 2024. Interestingly, none of the other four analysed newspapers have reported on this case, which is a good example of how *Magyar Nemzet* is the government's mouthpiece, even in situations when other publications do not report on one of the government members' statements. In this particular case, the article with the title "A completely new world economic era has started" quotes Szijjártó verbatim almost all the way through, highlighting his statements that a new world order is emerging with an Eastern centre of gravity.⁸ The article reports in detail the minister's statement, with the video capture also linked to the article, and uses critical frames on the European Union's Asia policy. This is manifested in the fact that they use expressions such as "the EU's ideologically based approach is against European interests" and "if the EU wants to conclude these free trade agreements with the intention of political and ideological indoctrination, then the partners will obviously not agree." Meanwhile, the article emphasises that "there is a need for closer East-West economic cooperation than ever before" and "Europe is in great need of the Eastern investments," suggesting that the government's foreign policy position appears crystal clear (*Magyar Nemzet*, 2024b).

These articles are examples of the government's communication strategy regarding China, the point of which is to emphasise every governmental statement on this topic and present the two countries' good relationship as positive without any doubt, while the government-critical press treat this phenomenon with detachment.

The second case whose coverage is examined, is the bankruptcy proceeding order by the Hong Kong Court in January 2024 against China Evergrande Group, which is the most indebted real estate development corporation in the world. Articles from *Telex*, *444*, *Origo*, and *Portfolio*

⁸ Szijjártó also mentioned that the European Union should open more to the Asian markets because of its large unused capital, even though there are some ideological differences between the West and the East. He noted that Hungary works well with the region, and the upcoming Hungarian EU Presidency could make some progress in the EU-Far-East cooperation.

that reported on the court judgment, plus *Magyar Nemzet's* reaction to the case, will be analysed. Firstly, similar to the last example, *Telex* wrote a short article titled “The liquidation of the Chinese real estate giant Evergrande has been ordered” (Mizsur, 2024), which summarises the most important details of the case. The article informs readers about the court judgement and its background. *Telex* also wrote that former Evergrande president Hui Ka Yan was arrested and referred to the situation as “the symbol of China’s real estate crisis” (Mizsur, 2024). The article, which referenced CNN, uses overall informative but slightly pessimistic frames, as seen in the last paragraph too, which states, “hundreds of thousands of buyers are still waiting for the handover of their already paid-for apartments, the completion of which is highly uncertain in the event of bankruptcy” (Mizsur, 2024). *444's* article, which is based on a Reuters article, has the title “Chinese real estate giant Evergrande ordered into liquidation, buried under \$300 billion in debt” (Haász, 2024). It is a bit longer and differs from the *Telex* article mainly in that it mentions Evergrande’s failed restructuring ambitions, its promise to customers that their homes will be built, and the nature of the crisis as both political and national-economic in China. *444* also quotes a judge and a scholar, both of whom have a pessimistic tone, saying, for example, “The bankruptcy proceeding is not the end, but the beginning of a protracted process that will make Evergrande’s day-to-day operations even more difficult” and “the situation can become even worse for the shareholders” (Haász, 2024), which fundamentally sets the mood of the article. The *Origo* article with the title “One of the world’s largest real estate development companies is being liquidated” (2024c) is shorter in length than *444's*, but longer than *Telex's*; however, in content, it is not different from the previous ones. The article, which references CNBC and BBC, mentions the failed restructuring plan, or, as it says, an “unsuccessful resuscitation attempt,” and states that the reason for the crisis is the stricter funding rules introduced in 2020. Although there are no big differences in its content, *Origo's* framing is much less pessimistic. Instead of “bankruptcy” and “crisis,” it uses the terms “close to bankruptcy” and “problems” (Origo, 2024c). *Portfolio's* article “The liquidation of the world’s most indebted real estate developer has begun” (2024b) is the longest, as one would expect from an economy-focused newspaper, and mentions everything that appears in the pre-

vious three. It also quotes scholars, for example, the one quoted in 444, as they both reference Reuters. Apart from the basic details, the article also dives deeper into the financial effects of the situation, detailing the effects on the stock market and the situation that the Evergrande shareholders are in at the moment. In regard to keywords, *Portfolio* puts it cautiously, similar to *Origo*, using terms like “underperforming economy” and “struggling housing market” (Portfolio, 2024b). Overall, the article has a slightly pessimistic framing, but this is more due to its approach to the issue from an economic point of view than because of the wording of the article.

Up to this point, there may not seem to be much difference between government-critical and pro-government newspaper reports, but the *Magyar Nemzet*’s response, titled “How many more times can the Chinese real estate industry collapse?,” takes an interesting turn, as it differs in many ways from the previous publications. In its relatively short article, *Magyar Nemzet* refers to the Századvég Alapítvány, which is an analytical institute that has traditionally fostered good relations with the government. The article quotes Olivér Hortay, one of Századvég’s leaders, who is strongly critical of the Western media. He criticises the fact that Western media often herald a crisis in the Chinese economy, even though Evergrande’s CEO stressed that the decision will not affect day-to-day operations, which could potentially cause economic difficulties worldwide if investors take these rumours seriously and withdraw their capital from the Chinese market. The article warns of a crisis similar to the 2008 US housing crisis and instructs the media to be more careful with “wish-driven fantasy” and “cold war psychosis,” as these are unlikely to offset the discontent of unemployed Western citizens who lost their jobs because of the crisis (Magyar Nemzet, 2024c). Overall, the reaction is very aggressive and offensive towards the economic experts who say the real estate crisis in China is a serious problem.

The last article highlights the fact that although there is not much difference between the pro-government and government-critical press on economic news about China, the government has been much more critical of the press and experts who do not fully agree with it. The government is also using this news for its political campaigning purposes, as it claims that those who disagree with it are potentially dangerous.

The third, and geopolitically most important, topic is the 2024 elections in Taiwan. In the election, Lai Ching-te, the anti-China leftist DPP candidate; Hou Yu-ih, the rightist Kuomintang candidate supporting the rapprochement with China; and Ko Wen-je, the TPP candidate offering an alternative to traditional parties, showcased their strengths. It was a hot topic in the Hungarian newspapers too, so several articles from each news website will be analysed.

Firstly, *Telex* provided a long analysis with the title “According to China, it is war or peace, but Taiwanese people are more driven by their wallets in the election” (Mészáros, 2024). It was published a few days before the election, on January 12, and cites several sources, including its own earlier articles as well as Western⁹ and Taiwanese ones.¹⁰ *Telex* reports on the aspects that must be understood to assess the situation, so the article discusses how Taiwanese detachment and democracy came into existence in history, how the Taiwan-China relationship developed over the years, and what China’s goal with the island is. The article also mentions the Taiwanese domestic and foreign political situation, what the different candidates promise, and which ideas are the most popular among voters. Following a summary of the island’s economy and demography, the article analyses the odds of the election and China’s possible reactions to it. Overall, the article gives a great overview of the situation and mostly stays neutral, for example, when it comes to introducing the candidates and their programmes. However, regarding China, *Telex* strikes a more critical tone, of which a good example is that the article highlights the corruption cases and recent changes in the leadership of the Chinese army, and even accuses China of sabotaging the 2024 elections in Taiwan. For instance, the news website uses expressions such as “As usual, China is trying to manipulate the election again this year” and “The Chinese authorities crushed the protests in Hong Kong and eroded the city’s autonomy” (Mészáros, 2024). Regarding the possible Chinese occupation of Taiwan, the article mentions analyses that predict the conflict in different years, but overall, the news website gives the impression that a military conflict is not likely in the coming years (Mészáros, 2024).

⁹ For example, CNN and Reuters.

¹⁰ For example, the National Taiwan University of Political Science.

Portfolio also published a pre-election analysis titled “The eyes of half the world are now focused on a single island: the relationship between the super-powers may shake it to its foundations this weekend” (Vara, 2024). The analysis is shorter than *Telex*’s, but the sources are similar; *Portfolio* also quotes mainly Western newspapers. In its content, it is similar to *Telex*’s article, but it includes slightly more about the recent China-Taiwan diplomatic distancing and the role of the USA in the election. It is also much more specific about the conclusion: the article states that “whichever candidate wins the presidency, the island will not (yet) be part of China in the foreseeable future, nor will it (yet) be unilaterally declared independent” (Vara, 2024). Regarding *Portfolio*’s frames, it is not more pessimistic about a possible war between China and Taiwan than *Telex*, but it is less critical of China¹¹ (Vara, 2024).

In the end, the presidential election was won by the DPP candidate, so right after the announcement of the results, a harsh exchange of messages started between China and Taiwan, about which, of course, the Hungarian press also reported. No significant difference occurs in the content of these articles, perhaps with the exception that the pro-government news website *Origo* highlights the Chinese messages about their reunification goals better. At the same time, the government-critical newspapers reported at greater length on the Taiwanese messages (Horváth, 2024; Aradi, 2024; *Portfolio*, 2024b; *Origo*, 2024b).

What is more interesting is how the *Magyar Nemzet* articles contradict each other on certain points, which raises questions about the government’s communication strategy. After the election, *Magyar Nemzet* released two articles: a report on the exchange of messages between China and Taiwan and an interview with Viktor Buzna, a researcher at the Hungarian Institute of Foreign Affairs. The first one was entitled “This will be a war,” but unlike the title, the article itself was not ominous; it simply reported briefly on the exchange of messages between China and Taiwan. The controversy in this article could cause confusion too, but the longer interview that was released on the same day, titled “The choice between war and peace: what could happen next in Taiwan?,” added to it. Despite the title’s suggestion of a more radical position, the researcher stays in a neutral position throughout the interview. He explains that, in the current situation, China does

¹¹ For example, China’s attempts to manipulate the Taiwanese elections are not mentioned.

not want to occupy Taiwan with aggression and would not even have the strength to do so, which, based on the titles of these articles, is a surprising message. The language and frames of the articles are also not more radical than those of the other news websites; the strongest statement of the interview is that “If an armed conflict is unlikely in the near future, it is difficult to avoid in the long term” (László, 2024).

Articles from *Origo* also add to the confusion of how and what the government is trying to communicate about the Taiwan situation in the press. Before the election, the news website reported briefly on Chinese President Xi Jinping’s statement that “The motherland must and inevitably will be reunited” and “China must resolutely prevent anyone from separating Taiwan from China in any way” (Origo, 2023). The title of this article was “Everyone was afraid of this, the terrifying Chinese threat, the third world war could break out.” The article that refers to MTI is not this dramatic in its frames; it clearly states that “In his speech, Xi Jinping did not indicate that the island would be recaptured by military force,” but also draws attention to the Chinese military presence in the Taiwan Strait (Origo, 2023). But this was not the only time the newspaper treated the outbreak of war almost as a fact in the title. Another good example is a short article about a Chinese military demonstration of force and USA-China discussions that had a positive outcome, titled “The Chinese army has moved towards Taiwan, another war may break out,” while the text itself does not even mention war and has a positive message about the discussion between the two global powers. The article refers to US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan’s X¹² post and uses expressions such as “The meeting between Sullivan and Wang demonstrates the commitment of both parties” (Origo, 2024b), but also “Taiwan is part of unified China, according to the Chinese foreign minister, and China has sent terrifying threats to the country” (Origo, 2024b). The second article also referred to earlier *Origo* articles, suggesting that the news website wants people to read more about this topic. Overall, regarding the China-Taiwan situation, the pro-government media reports in a slightly friendlier tone towards China. The main differences are in the tones of the articles rather than their content, with the titles predicting the outbreak of war in the pro-government press serving as good examples.

¹² Formerly Twitter.

To convey the point effectively, this paper will further analyse how the different news websites use keywords and frames in their articles. Firstly, this paper will summarise the keywords used in the topic of China-Hungary relations. Here, the pro-government and government-critical press can easily be separated, as the first uses some expressions that can be defined as keywords, while the second does not. More specifically, the keywords that are present in both articles are “new centre of gravity,” “new world economic era,” and “important partner” (Halász, 2024; Origo, 2024d); of course, these expressions are used in regard to China. It is interesting to see, however, that the government-critical press does not use such words of special importance. The reason is that it does not want the reader to spend a long time dealing with this issue.

In the second case, regarding the Chinese housing market crisis, a more diverse picture is presented. Both sides use keywords that, in some cases, are complete opposites to each other. For example, the term “crisis” is only used in *Telex*’s and *444*’s articles (Mizsur, 2024; Haász, 2024), while the other news websites use “problems” and “struggle” (Portfolio, 2024b; Origo, 2024c). It is also interesting that the government-critical press uses “bankruptcy” much more often than *Portfolio* (whose language, in this case, is closer to the pro-government press) and the pro-government press, which uses “close to bankruptcy” instead. Where the two sides contradict each other is when *444* writes that the crisis will “make Evergrande’s day-to-day operations even more difficult,” while *Origo* and *Magyar Nemzet* emphasise that it “will not affect” them. The reason for this is that the government-critical press wants to emphasise the seriousness of the crisis. In contrast, the pro-government press wants to give the impression that the crisis is not to be taken seriously. This is presented clearly in *Magyar Nemzet*, which also uses so-called Western media a lot to portray an enemy (Magyar Nemzet, 2024c).

Regarding the Taiwan case, the use of keywords is the most complicated, as there is no clear pattern between the two sides, since they all use the same keywords at some point. For example, the term “choice between war and peace” is used in both *Telex*’s and *Magyar Nemzet*’s articles (Mészáros, 2024; László, 2024), but the question of whether there will be a war between China and Taiwan is raised by both sides, and none of the articles give a clear answer. The difference here between the pro-government and the government-critical press is that the first emphasises the probability of war somewhat more,

while the second emphasises it a bit less. However, they both use terms such as “military conflict is not really realistic in the coming years” (Vara, 2024) and “If an armed conflict is unlikely in the near future, it is difficult to avoid in the long term” (László, 2024). The real difference here can be seen in the issue of Chinese sabotage of the elections, which is only emphasised by *Tel-ex*, and the threat of war, which is more present in pro-government articles. Overall, these articles cannot easily be separated based on keywords; however, when they are put in context, a clearer picture emerges.

One conclusion we can draw from the differences between the pro-government and government-critical newspapers is that these media outlets try to illuminate their worldviews and opinions on Hungary’s diplomatic partners for the readers with subtle and less subtle methods. In other words, while the government-critical news websites form fewer specific opinions and maintain a less sharp yet still critical position on China, the pro-government ones openly express their opinions on particular issues in many cases. Another conclusion is that the pro-government media tries to justify the foreign policy of the Hungarian government, in which China plays a big role; it is therefore a logical goal of the pro-government press to impress a pro-China stance upon the voters. How they try to achieve this is much more interesting, as in some cases¹³ they try to emphasise the positive changes in cooperation between the countries. In contrast, in other cases¹⁴ they consistently warn of the potential danger of war. The reason for this is that, by emphasising the size and power of the Chinese army, they hope to persuade readers to think that it is better for Hungary if it has a good relationship with China. In the meantime, the government-critical press does not emphasise the Chinese army that much, and overall, it remains in a neutral position, which can make the reader think that China is not a huge threat, and that Hungary must not strengthen its partnership with China.

In conclusion, compared to previous leadership in Hungary, the Orbán government has opened up to the East much more and has strengthened its relationship with China in diplomatic relations and cooperation projects too. Hungarian media, both pro-government and government-critical, react to this change differently, which can be experienced mainly in their reporting. Although there are differences in the frames of the news

¹³ For example, when it comes to the Hungary-China economic relations.

¹⁴ For instance, in the case of Taiwan.

websites, both categories of sites cover similar content. Pro-government newspapers mostly emphasise the positive developments in China-Hungary economic relations, while government-critical news websites are more critical of them. In addition, recent events, such as the China Evergrande Group bankruptcy and the 2024 Taiwan elections, have also contributed to the debate in the media. While there are differences in reporting, especially on China's economic challenges and Taiwan's geopolitical tensions, in most cases, the articles do not differ as much in content as they do in the framing. In terms of keywords in the articles, it is also obvious how the news websites want to draw attention to their messages. In the end, Hungary's Eastern policy and the view of China will continue to be subjects of debate in the Hungarian media.

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BÁLINT WEISZBART

Orbánist Illiberalism: Analysing Orbán's Illiberal State

Introduction

Consecutively in office since 2010, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán introduced his vision for the establishment of an "illiberal work-based" state nearly 10 years ago at his annual speech in Băile Tuşnad (Tusványos) in Romania. Since then, the concept of illiberalism has gained international recognition. For instance, Viktor Orbán is one of the few politicians outside of the US whom Donald Trump speaks highly of (Leonhardt, 2024; Scheirgin, 2024). Additionally, other political parties, such as the Polish Law and Justice Party, have tried to copy Orbán's method of governing (Wiseman, 2020). Moreover, research about illiberalism has been gaining more attention from academics recently (Sajó, Uitz and Holmes, 2021; Krekó, 2022; Radó and Mikola, 2023; Laruelle, 2024).

It is essential to distinguish between "illiberal" and "illiberalism." In her writing, Marlène Laruelle (2022) clarifies that there has been a shift from using the term "illiberal" as an adjective to using it as a noun to create a new ideology (illiberalism). This article's goal is not to directly contribute to the debate revolving around the general definitions of "illiberal" and "illiberalism." Rather, the article will characterise and create a precise description of *Orbánist illiberalism*, built by one of the first politicians in the 21st century to claim that they are illiberal (Plattner, 2019; Laruelle, 2022). The reason why it is uniquely essential to analyse Orbán's illiberal state is

because studying him enables us to discover how illiberalism is developing and deviating from one of its original forms. Further, he has been consecutively in power for the last 14 years, therefore everything that he has done is a direct effect of his illiberal governing.

As Viktor Orbán said in 2011: “Do not pay attention to what I say, pay attention to only one thing, what I do” (Origo, 2011).¹ Therefore, the definition of Orbán’s illiberal politics will be based on how the actions of the openly illiberal Prime Minister have manifested into reality. First, the paper will examine the work of Fareed Zakaria, who coined the term “illiberal.” It will then be compared to Wolfgang Merkel’s definition of a democracy. This will be followed by the introduction of Marlène Laruelle’s definition of illiberalism as an ideology. The second part of the paper will focus on what Viktor Orbán said in his 2014 speech, where he pioneered the term “illiberal” as a politician. In the third part, the paper will conceptualise *Orbánist illiberalism* by relying on the literature review and expanding the analysis with the writings of András Körösenyi and Benjamin Moffitt.

Part 1. Literature review

Fareed Zakaria was the first to use the term “illiberal” in his 1997 article. He defines liberal democracy as a state with free and fair elections, rule of law, separation of powers, and protection of the basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property rights (Zakaria, 1997, p.26). Zakaria uses the definition of democracy also employed by Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* and articulated by scholars ranging from Alexis de Tocqueville to Robert Dahl (Zakaria, 1997, pp.24–25). They define democracy as solely the process of electing the government. According to them, constitutional liberalism, which embodies the rule of law and the emphasis on individual liberty, should therefore be separated from their definition of democracy. According to Zakaria, constitutional liberalism is about controlling the power of the government, while democracy is about accumulating it (Zakaria, 1997, p.30). Zakaria uses this argument to highlight how liberalism and democracy should come hand in hand because if one of the two is missing, then

¹ All quotes from Hungarian articles were translated by the author.

people's interests will be replaced by the pure interest of the politicians. Therefore, we can summarise Zakaria's definition of illiberalism as a democracy without liberalism.

In contrast to the previously mentioned scholars, Wolfgang Merkel (2004) argues that there are five partial regimes embedded within a democracy: a democratic electoral regime (elected officials, inclusive suffrage, right to candidacy, free and fair elections), political rights (freedom of speech and press, freedom of association), civil rights (equality before the law), horizontal accountability (division of power), and the guarantee that the effective power to govern lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives. Merkel argues that Zakaria's definition of democracy is insufficient because it only defines democracy as an electoral regime (one out of the five partial regimes introduced). If the other four partial regimes are absent, an electoral regime cannot achieve the self-governing of the people (Merkel, 2004, p.52). On the other hand, Zakaria argues that if a definition such as Merkel's is employed, then the term democracy loses its descriptive value (Zakaria, 1997, p.25). However, Merkel claims that the subdivision of democracies into partial regimes enables a more precise analysis and can help determine which elements of democracy are missing exactly. Nevertheless, Merkel and Zakaria use the term "illiberal" (as an adjective). By contrast, one of the most recent definitions of illiberalism, created by Marlène Laruelle, aims to define "illiberalism" as an ideology instead of an attribute that a state or politician may have. The author defines illiberalism the following way:

- (1) Illiberalism is a new ideological universe that, even if doctrinally fluid and context based, is to some degree coherent.
- (2) It represents a backlash against today's liberalism in all its varied scripts—political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational—often in the name of democratic principles and by winning popular support.
- (3) It proposes solutions that are majoritarian, nation-centric or sovereigntist, favouring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity. It proposes to restore national sovereignty in various spheres: internationally, by rejecting supranational and multilateral institutions in favour of the sovereign nation-state; economically, by denouncing neoliberal orthodoxy and promoting protectionism at the nation-state level (while at the same time, when in power, sometimes implementing neoliberal reforms); and culturally, by rejecting multiculturalism and minority rights in favour of majoritarianism. This majoritarianism advances a "traditional" vision of gender relations (what is defined as "traditional" covering a vast range of practices depending on the local context) and a vision of

the nation that—whether essentialist and nativist or assimilationist—takes from nationalism the division between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and sees the latter only as the product of the former.

(4) Last but not least, it calls for a shift from politics to culture and is post-post-modern in its claims of rootedness in an age of globalisation (Laruelle, 2022, p.309).

Even Laruelle recognises that illiberalism can only “be classified as a thin ideology” since it is still “in its infancy and few philosophical figures have so far emerged to give it conceptual depth” (Laruelle, 2022, p.309). Nevertheless, we may observe a shift from talking about illiberalism as an adjective used to describe the tendencies of politicians to an ideology based on which politicians operate. Furthermore, another difference between the two approaches is that the earlier definitions cannot be easily applied to politicians not in power. Definitions such as Zakaria’s rely on analysing the state of institutions, the rule of law, and the constitution. Therefore, a politician who does not hold any power cannot be classified as illiberal based on these definitions, since it is hard to prove and predict how a politician would change the country’s institutions before they have had a chance to do so. On the other hand, Laruelle’s definition outlines the ideological traits of illiberal politicians and, therefore, is possible to apply to any public figure who matches the definition.

Part 2. What Orbán said

On the 26th of July 2014, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was the first head of government to publicly declare “the end of liberal democracies” and introduced the illiberal state (Orbán, 2014).² The speech was held in Băile Tuşnad³ (Tusványos) in Romania, where Viktor Orbán has shared his worldview and talked about the future of Hungary, Europe, and the world every year since.

In his 2014 speech, Viktor Orbán stated that “We want to organise a work-based society that, as I have just mentioned, undertakes the odium of stating that it is not liberal in character.” He referred to this vision both

² In this part of the paper, all further quotations or discussions of what Orbán said are based on this reference.

³ The Bálványos Free Summer University and Student Camp was founded in 1989 by David Campanale (a journalist of the BBC), Zsolt Németh (a politician of Orbán’s party), and several vice-presidents of the Romanian Hungarian Council. In 1997, the festival was moved to the neighboring town of Băile Tuşnad.

as an “illiberal state” and as a so-called “work-based state.” Furthermore, he clarified that a democracy does not necessarily have to be liberal. It is important to note that Orbán himself did not use the noun “illiberalism” as a reference to the ideology, but as an adjective to describe the state which he wanted to build. In the following paragraphs, the arguments Viktor Orbán used to justify creating an illiberal state will be analysed. Moreover, we will utilise his approach to illiberalism to help us define *Orbánist illiberalism*. To legitimise the need for the creation of the illiberal state, the Prime Minister, in the beginning, explained that, although the global competitiveness of a state is important, “there is a more important race underway.” According to him, developing a state that is most capable of “making a nation successful” will be the most important thing. Therefore, it is crucial to highlight the arguments the Prime Minister made as to why the illiberal state is most capable of “making the nation successful.” The reason why analysing this is important is that it can help us understand why Orbán believes that illiberalism may be a better alternative to liberalism.

The first argument highlighted Singapore, China, India, Russia, and Turkey as examples of how “not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies and perhaps not even democracies, can nevertheless make their nations successful.” The main shortcoming of this argument is that while these states mentioned by Orbán are not liberal and not Western, he did not prove why they would necessarily be illiberal. Analysing whether these states would fit into the definitions of being illiberal is outside of the scope of this paper; however, it can be concluded from this that Orbán used the term “illiberalism” as an *ex-negativo*, in other words, as what is not liberal. This is also proved by the fact that Orbán directly stated that “the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state.” In her paper about illiberalism, Laruelle (2022) also acknowledges this phenomenon; however, she claims that starting as an *ex-negativo* does not stop illiberalism from developing into an ideology with a unique doctrine.

Another line of argumentation Orbán used to prove how illiberalism can render the nation successful was not by focusing on why illiberalism is good, but rather on why liberalism is undesirable. In this part of his speech, the Prime Minister blamed liberalism for not being capable of “committing the prevailing government... to serving the interests of the nation.” Moreover, he also talked about liberalism not being able to protect fami-

lies from foreign currency loans, not being able to protect national assets, and letting the country fall into debt as a direct shortcoming of liberalism. This is a textbook example of political scapegoating (Cochrane and Nevitte, 2012), by blaming the political and social issues in Hungary on liberalism. Perhaps, this is once again an example of approaching illiberalism as an *ex-negativo*.

The final argument made by Orbán in favour of an illiberal state is likely the most important in terms of being able to define the doctrine of *Orbánist illiberalism*. Using the terminology of the Prime Minister, “the liberal organisation of society is based on the idea that we have the right to do anything that does not infringe on the freedom of the other party.” However, according to him, this leads to it being “unclear who is going to decide the limits beyond which someone is infringing on our freedom.” One could argue that the judicial system is responsible for determining these boundaries; however, according to the Prime Minister: “what we experienced continuously in everyday life was that the strongest decided.” Orbán reassured the audience by explaining that his new illiberal state would be organised along the idea that “one should not do unto others what one does not want others to do unto you.” While Orbán recognised that this new ideology “cannot be entered into law,” he clarified that the new state will continue to respect the values of Christianity, freedom, and human rights.

Part 3. Orbánist illiberalism

In this final part of the paper, the definitions discussed in the literature review and the speech of 2014 will be cross-examined with how Orbán’s plans manifested into reality over the past 10 years. This enables us to characterise and understand the key elements of *Orbánist illiberalism*. It is important to note that we are not only going to define the ideological aspects of *Orbánist illiberalism* but will also analyse the state of democracy of a state built upon *Orbánist illiberalism* and key characteristics of Orbán’s leadership.

Characteristics of the Institutions and Democracy

For understanding how *Orbánist illiberalism* manifested into reality, it is key to analyse how his decisions have affected the different democratic institutions in the country. Since he has been in power for 14 years, if he had

wanted to change the way the discussed issues are happening in Hungary, then he would have most likely had the chance to do so.

Being able to bypass the legislative procedure

In Hungary, the legislative branch (the parliament) is controlled by the executive branch (the government), causing the parliament to become a tool of the executive branch. A prime example of this was in 2011, when Viktor Orbán, the head of the government, with the exclusive votes of his party (FIDESZ), made the legislative branch adopt a new constitution, without any public, professional, or even parliamentary consultation. The adoption of the new constitution, called the “Fundamental Law,” aimed to eliminate checks and balances as well as institutional guarantees of rights (Halmai, 2024). After such an instance, it is hard to argue that the legislative branch can remain independent from what the head of the executive branch is saying. This is due to the Hungarian constitution enabling parties with a 2/3 majority in the parliament to pass any bill they want or amend the constitution without having to make political compromises or debate with the opposition. Since adopting the new constitution, the parliament has amended it 13 times without needing the support of the opposition parties (Mizsur, 2024).

This process also fits into what Zakaria describes as an illiberal state. Zakaria (1997, p.23) highlighted that democratically elected politicians (Boris Yeltsin in Russia and Carlos Menem in Argentina) bypassing the parliament by using different loopholes is an example of an illiberal state. Twenty-four years after Zakaria’s article, Orbán’s Hungary fits this description perfectly, due to the law allowing FIDESZ to pass laws and rewrite the constitution on their own. This degree of monopoly in the legislature is what constitutes *Orbánist illiberalism* being a perfect example of Zakaria’s description.

Furthermore, since 2010, Orbán introduced several reforms aimed at reducing the autonomy of the judicial branch. In their research, Attila Juhász and Róbert László (2016) prove that Orbán restricted the power of the Constitutional Court, promoted FIDESZ sympathisers to important positions such as the Chief Prosecutor or the President of the Court of Auditors, and limited the Ombudsman institution. Therefore, in theory, both the legislative and the judicial branches could control the executive branch; however, in reality, it is the other way around.

Not a full democracy—lacking fair elections

As it was highlighted in the literature review, there are several ways in which one can define democracy. Therefore, we are going to employ the definition with the least criteria in order to most accurately assess the situation. Zakaria and Huntington define democracy as having free and fair elections, accompanied by universal suffrage. Applying these metrics to Orbán's state in 2024, it becomes clear that the state does not meet the requirements of holding fair elections.

In the checklist for election assessment made by Jørgen Elklit and Palle Svensson (1997, p.37), they highlight “impartial allotment of public funds to political parties” and “no misuse of government facilities for campaign purposes” as requirements for holding fair elections. Another paper about the topic by Sylvia Bishop and Anke Hoeffler (2016, p.612) also lists “prohibition on the use of government resources other than that provided to all candidates” and not having “massive financial advantages for the incumbents” as requirements.

During the last parliamentary elections of 2022, according to an investigative journalist report, Orbán's FIDESZ party spent 21 billion Hungarian forints (58 million US dollars) on campaigning over three months, while the opposition parties combined only spent 2 billion Hungarian forints (5.5 million US dollars) (Bucsky, 2022). This alone highlights the disparity in funds that the governing party had at its disposal to convey its message to voters. For context, during the 2020 US presidential election, Republicans spent 781 million dollars on the campaign, while the Democrats spent around 3.8 times more (nearly 3 billion dollars) (OpenSecrets, 2021). However, this inequality does not even come close to FIDESZ spending over 10 times more money than all the opposition parties combined in 2022.

Furthermore, not being a full democracy is also confirmed by three reputable democracy indices, none of which claim that Hungary meets the requirement to be considered a functioning democracy. Therefore, it can be concluded that one of the main characteristics of Orbán's illiberal state is that it is not a full democracy.

	State of Hungarian democracy
Economist Intelligence Unit (2023)	Flawed democracy (overall score: 6.72)
V-Dem Institute (2024)	Electoral Autocracy
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2023)	Representation: 0.55 (mid) Rights: 0.63 (mid) Rule of law: 0.53 (mid) Participation: 0.44 (mid)

Characteristic of the Leader

Analysing how Orbán fits into the category of a plebiscite leader democracy was done by András Körösényi (2017; Körösényi, Illés and Gyulai, 2020). The main ideas will be summarised in this paragraph.

1. Charismatic and revolutionary feel

Orbán has a heroic aspect to him due to having reignited right-wing politics in Hungary after the Hungarian Democratic Forum-led coalition lost the election in 1994. Moreover, he has managed to market his election victory in 2010 as a “revolution in the voting booth” against the leftist-liberal governments (of Bajnai, Gyurcsány, and Medgyessy) that preceded it. During his time as Prime Minister, he has fought various “freedom fights,” against the IMF, Brussels, immigrants, and regaining “national sovereignty” at all costs (Körösényi, 2017, p.8). Furthermore, Körösényi (2017, p.9) also explains how Orbán’s charisma is caused in part by his visionary speeches at Tüszványos and by asserting that “...people, rather than institutions and principles, should govern...” Orbán uses this mechanism to weaken his personal political responsibility (Körösényi, 2017, p.9).

2. Always resolving a crisis

Körösényi (2017, p.11) explains that Orbán came to power in 2010 during a crisis that was aggravated by the global financial crisis of 2008. However, Orbán manifested these crisis situations into governmental decrees, which enabled him to govern with expanded rights and authorisations. There is currently a “crisis induced by mass migration” and a “war danger situation” in effect in Hungary. Orbán first declared a crisis induced by mass migration in 2016, which gave special legal authorisations for the governments. How-

ever, Orbán has been prolonging the crisis continuously since. He did the same with the “war danger situation” (with regards to the war in Ukraine), which has been in effect since 2022, right after the “COVID danger situation” that ended in 2022 (Fazekas, 2024; Portfolio, 2024). Evidence of how Orbán could use crisis situations to his advantage can also be found by analysing polls leading up to the 2022 parliamentary elections. As of February 1, there was only a difference of 4 percentage points between FIDESZ and the opposition parties. However, two months later, after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the difference grew to 16%. This was possibly due to the centralised political messaging of FIDESZ, which revolved around the opposition parties “wanting to involve” Hungary in the war and wanting to send civilians to fight on the frontline (Krekó, 2022).

3. Plebiscite legitimisation

Since the autumn of 2006, Orbán and his party have won all the elections (parliamentary, municipal, and European ones). It is only logical for Orbán to constantly remind everyone of the legitimacy that these election victories give him. However, a unique component that Körösenyi (2017, p.10) highlights is how Orbán uses referendums and direct communication in the form of so-called “national consultations” with citizens. The reason why using “national consultation” instead of referendums is beneficial for Orbán is because there is a lack of formal legal regulation, transparency, and control behind it. Moreover, they are in no way binding for the government. According to Körösenyi, “This is a plebiscitary tool that the premier can freely apply and may arbitrarily use for legitimating his politics and public policy” (Körösenyi, 2017, p.10). Previous “national consultations” had titles such as “Let’s stop Brussels” and “STOP Soros” in 2017 (referring to George Soros, who has been targeted as one of the main enemies of the state by Orbán). Even though these national consultations were on average only filled out by 17% (based on the consultations up to 2021) of those who received the consultation, Orbán used the results of these consultations to advertise how high percentages of the responses agreed with what the government was doing (Lengyel, 2021).

Characteristics of the Ideology

We acknowledge that, for the reasons discussed by Laruelle (2022), liberalism as an ideology is a new concept that is still in need of further academic and philosophical backing. Therefore, in this section, the paper will briefly outline some of the ideological concepts that Orbán talks about; moreover, examples will be provided as to how the definition of illiberalism introduced by Laruelle (2022) can be applied to Orbán's state.

1. One should not do unto others what one does not want others to do unto you

According to Orbán, he attempts to organise Hungarian society around this guiding principle. However, it is difficult to identify direct correlations between this principle and his educational, cultural, and social policy, as he did not refer to this ideological concept in his future speeches.

2. Work-based

The “work-based” aspect of Orbán's illiberal state (introduced in his 2014 Tusványos speech) most likely refers to the reformation of the public work program by Orbán in 2011. The program aimed to reduce the unemployment rate in the country and, over time, transition people to the private sector, by creating below-minimum-wage jobs, most often in construction at public infrastructure projects (Molnár et al., 2014). However, the program did not seem efficient, as in 2014, only 12.6% of those who left the public work program joined the private sector, while in 2022, this number decreased to 11.9% (Kovács, 2023). Furthermore, in parliamentary elections, there was a direct correlation between Orbán's party's success and the rate of people participating in the public work program in a given town (Stubnya and Hajdú, 2022; Reizer and Gáspár, 2022). The articles cited claim that one of the main reasons behind the correlation could be that the job offerings of the program were distributed based on how well the mayor of a town could mobilise FIDESZ voters (Orbán's party) in the previous national elections. The second reason behind the correlation could be that, due to the program being a part of the government's campaign, it created a dependency between the participants and the ruling party. Therefore, they were more likely to vote for FIDESZ. Although the public-work program does not directly relate to an “illiberal tendency,”

it highlights a unique characteristic of how Orbán implements populist economic programs, regardless of their efficacy rate, only to benefit his reelection rates.

3. Politically fluid

Orbán (2014) himself, in his Tüsványos speech, says that “[the state] does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organisation.” Therefore, it is likely that he rejects and embraces certain principles of liberalism based on how he can build a campaign around them. This phenomenon is explored by Benjamin Moffitt (2017), who examined several Northern European PRR (Populist Radical Right) parties to support his argument about the usage of selective liberal elements to defend an ultimately illiberal position. According to Moffitt, the PRR parties “tend to selectively pick-and-choose the most appropriate and useful parts of their own illiberal means” (Moffitt, 2017, p.117). As an example, he highlights their defense of gender equality and LGBTQ rights, which only serve to demonise Islam and immigrants.

4. Backlash

Included in the definition of illiberalism by Laruelle (2022), the ideology represents a backlash against the current liberal societal norms. In Orbán’s 2014 speech, which was previously analysed, the Prime Minister does this by how much of his argumentation for illiberalism is about why liberal values are inferior. Moreover, in Hungary, slogans associated with Orbán’s version of illiberalism are often used with the prefix “anti.” For example, “anti-IMF,” “anti-gender,” or anti-Soros” are frequently at the center of public discourse (Kürti, 2020).

5. National sovereignty

Continuing to employ Laruelle’s definition, Orbán also proposes to restore national sovereignty by, for example, rejecting supranational organisations. In the case of Orbán, the way he manifests this part of illiberalism into reality is by constantly opposing narratives of the European Union. He, for example, portrays the “bureaucrats of Brussels” as people

actively trying to undermine Hungary. It is perhaps no surprise that Ursula von der Leyen was at the forefront of being portrayed as one of the enemies of the state during the last parliamentary elections.

6. Majoritarianism—cultural homogeneity

In her definition, Laruelle also highlights rejecting multiculturalism and minority rights in favour of majoritarianism as characteristics of illiberalism. In the Prime Minister's 2022 Băile Tuşnad speech, he highlighted the importance of "cultural homogeneity." Orbán first explained that "There is a world in which European peoples are mixed together with those arriving from outside Europe. Now that is a mixed-race world." Shortly thereafter, he reassured his voters by saying, "We are willing to mix with one another, but we do not want to become peoples of mixed race" (Orbán, 2022).

Summary

To summarise, the main contributions made to the discourse about illiberalism were by providing a detailed definition of how *Orbánist illiberalism* manifested into reality, or, in other words, what the actions of the first openly illiberal leader resulted in. *Orbánist illiberalism* lacks several prerequisites to be considered a full democracy due to bypassing the legislative procedure and not conducting fair elections. Moreover, *Orbánist illiberalism* relies on a charismatic leader and continuous crisis situations to appear strong and gather legitimacy through the results of so-called "national consultations," with which only a fraction of the population engages. Although the ideology of illiberalism is still under development, in the case of Orbán, it represents a backlash against the Western-liberal status quo, affirms cultural homogeneity, national sovereignty, and, in the case of *Orbánist illiberalism*, it also includes building a so-called "work-based society" (Orbán, 2014).

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ANNA SZABÓ

The Periclean Citizenship Law: A Ripple in The Wave of Female Emancipation?

This article puts forth an analysis of the Periclean Citizenship Law. Firstly, based on the hypothesis that, in Pericles's time, there existed a spirit, a desire to uplift women and challenge the thought of the natural inferiority of their gender, it examines whether the law confirms this assumed *Zeitgeist*. Recognising Pericles' indisputable excellence as a politician, it takes into consideration the numerous economic and political factors that might have played a role in the design and implementation of the law. Secondly, the article unveils the speculated impact the law had on contemporary Athenian identity perception and the social position of women. Lastly, relying on Aristotle's writings as an interpreter of his times succeeding Pericles's Golden Age, the article debates whether the citizenship law had any actual, sustained positive effects on the recognition of women.

However, before commencing, the nature of this article's focus calls for laying down a fundamental base for the lens through which its content is to be seen. Researching ancient gender roles and dynamics proposes several obstacles, one of the most substantial ones being the lack of credible resources from the examined time period that would provide an objective picture of society. There exist no accessible records available from the women of Periclean Athens, and the literature available is the work of male authors, presumably written for a predominantly male audience. Writings of philosophers, dramatists, and orators may contain fictitious, exaggerat-

ed, and biased ideology-based elements, motivated by reasonable incentives, such as getting a point across more clearly, inducing a comical effect, or shifting the existing social and gender dynamics to conform to the ideas they stood for. Furthermore, even if fully objective resources existed, the perspectives of gender and criteria of academic ancient gender research have evidently changed throughout the past century as well, let alone over the more than two millennia separating the 21st century from Periclean Athens. A contemporary cannot and could not fully grasp the complexity of underlying cultural, political, social, and even economic dynamics of ancient gender. Therefore, all the conclusions drawn, regardless of my striving to illustrate a realistic picture to the extent to which it is possible, and present it embellished with the intriguing arguments of this article, are to be taken by the reader as fascinating hypotheses of a curious author born in this day and age.

That said, the Periclean Citizenship Law, introduced in 451/450 BCE, is deemed one of the defining elements of the Age of Pericles, an era abundant in perplexing dichotomies. Pericles' rule, as asserted by Plutarch (*Per.* 9-14; Sealey, 1956, p.234), underwent a transformation from fostering a flourishing Athenian democracy in its earlier stages to promoting an oligarchic system favouring aristocrats. The contextualisations of the Periclean Citizenship Law highlight the duality of his character. He comes across on the one hand as a "demagogue catering to a selfish demos which wants its privileges protected" (Patterson, 1981, p.3), and on the other hand, as a "democrat concerned with preventing aristocratic foreign connections from influencing public decisions or policies" (Patterson, 1981, p.3). Numerous academic interpretations of the law's implementation can be found.

Although the original text of the Periclean Citizenship Law has been lost, references and paraphrases remain. Plutarch (*Per.* 37.3) quoted its contents in *Pericles* as: "Perikles [...] drew up a law that only those who were born from two Athenians, would be Athenians." It appears referenced in Aristotle's *Politics* and *Athenian Constitution* (26.3-4) as well: "in the archonship of Antidotos, on account of the large number of citizens and on the proposal of Pericles, they [the Athenians] decided that anyone not born from both citizen parents would not have a share in the city."

In this rendering, we can observe two central clues: firstly, the law dealt with citizenship, which held an unparalleled symbolic connotation for the

Greeks (Blok, 2011, p.147; Osborne, 1997, p.11), and secondly, it intended to limit the number of citizens. To understand what conditions Pericles introduced to prohibit unwanted people from acquiring citizenship status, what citizenship meant must first be explored.

In the ancient Greek polis, citizenship was twofold. On the one hand, in the social context, it meant having a share in the polis and participating in its religious and political spheres. While both women and men were entitled to polis priesthoods and expected to fulfil religious duties symbolising the connections both the individual and the polis shared with the gods (Samons II, 2007; Blok, 2011), only men could take on political offices. Prior to the Periclean Citizenship Law, the *archai*¹ available to them had depended on the wealth of their *oikos*.²

On the other hand, citizenship in the political context was defined precisely a century later by Aristotle in *Politics*:

What constitutes a citizen is therefore clear from these considerations: we now declare that one who has the right to participate in deliberative or judicial office is a citizen of the state in which he has that right, and a state is a collection of such persons sufficiently numerous, speaking broadly, to secure independence of life (1275b).

Citizenship was also required to ensure that family property and wealth could be passed on from generation to generation.

In Pericles' time, as the influence of Athens continued to expand, numerous desirable entitlements became associated with being a recognised citizen in the Aristotelian definition. Citizenship granted its holders power to monopolise not only the economic privileges of Athens by being the only recognised owners of property and land, but also political influence, for they were the ones to vote in the Assembly and participate in court. Their status was further embellished by socio-economic benefits in material goods and handouts from the state. This included receiving "regular or windfall distributions of money or corn" (Davies, 1977, p.106). As elite members of the Delian League, through participation in the direct decision-making of the polis, they could regulate areas as far away as the Black

¹ *Archai* is an abstract term for power often used with the meaning "sphere of authority," i.e. power which is wielded by someone in a position of political, social, or economic authority, such as a public official (Aune, no date).

² *Oikos* is a term primarily referring to the house and the household (Oxford reference, no date; see also Foxhall, 2016).

Sea, as well as the shores of Italy (Kapparis, 2003). Taking this into consideration, the value of being an Athenian citizen indubitably increased.

That said, there exist three possible economics-centered approaches for Pericles' implementation of the Citizenship Law. Firstly, the state held interest in conserving its finite resources and allocating them responsibly. Analysing the excerpt from Plutarch's *Pericles* (37.2-5), we find that the state was obligated to distribute gifts of grains from the king of Egypt among the citizens. As a result of the Greco-Persian wars, the ethnic constitution of Athens had greatly changed: a large number of foreigners had become involved in the demos. Having had no clear definition of who counted as a properly recognised Athenian citizen participating adequately in the polis, serious issues arose when distributing such favours. Who were the ones who rightfully merited it, and who were the ones who had minimal connection to the Athenian polis, taking on the title merely for the advantages? Providing a clear definition of the citizen body served as a baseline for resolving the matter.

During the Greco-Persian wars, several men serving in the military had had the opportunity to form liaisons with non-Athenian elite families. The Citizenship Law prevented these families from acquiring political significance and lowered their chances of tapping Athenian resources through the children of their daughters who had married Athenian officials. Secondly, the aforementioned protective step served the interests of the middle class, who made up the basis of the Greek polis (Osborne, 1997, p.9). Thus, Pericles intended to secure their interests in order to maintain the inner stability of the polis. Thirdly, as Aristotle declared in *Politics* (26.4), the number of citizens, with their demographic composition significantly altered after the Greco-Persian Wars, had become too large for the city-state to adequately manage, which called for the implementation of a law drawing limits on who could count as a citizen (Nadareishvili, 2015). There exists a parallel between Aristotle's explanation and Diogenes Laertius explaining the future relaxation of the citizenship law by Athens needing to increase its population.

Regardless of precise motivation, the law bestowed newfound exclusivity on being an Athenian citizen. Those who remained citizens after the law was implemented had their sense of belonging strongly reinforced. It seems that a social consequence of the limitation of the citizen body was

that those considered citizens became part of a newly formed elite, a privileged circle of formally recognised Athenians. Citizenship in Athens was inseparable from and centered around the individual's connection to the polis, which was defined by Aristotle as a “partnership finally composed of several villages is the city-state; it has, at last, attained the limit of virtually complete self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*³), and thus, while it comes into existence for the sake of life, it exists for the good life” (1935, 1252b). Alongside the *autarkeia*, the philosopher also attributed a certain *energeia*, meaning actuality and activity, to the polis, as if he conceived of it as a living organism (Downey, 1976). This *energeia* is facilitated by human proactivity: through association, humans produce material goods, which generates thought. The thought develops inquiry and education, enabling knowledge to become energy, and setting the base of the polis.

The human association between the individual and the polis was deemed particularly noteworthy, for Aristotle employed a specific term for it: *koinonia*. Its English equivalent is “the purposeful association of citizens directed towards a good end” (Downey, 1976, p.24), which aligns with how the purpose of the polis was a good life. This desirable life is manifested through complementary elements: the good life produces the polis, and the polis produces the good life. The true potential of both the citizens and the polis must be recognised for the association to flourish. Thus, the best form of government and social structure must be employed. If the city nurtures the citizens, the citizens will, in turn, act responsibly—for this responsibility to come into fruition, the bond between the citizen and the polis must be unbreakable.

The Periclean Citizenship Law consolidated the citizen's connection to the polis through scarcity and exclusivity: for the group of citizens became limited, and a higher consciousness of identity emerged (Blok, 2009, p.169), as did the feeling of pride paired with being a part of this elite group. Thus, with the citizen body becoming solidified, Pericles ensured that it would cater to the polis and ultimately fulfil its purpose: producing a good life. There exists a parallel between this expectation and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which states that humans will treasure and cherish more

³ The Greek term *autarkeia* means self-reliance or the ability to be self-sufficient, as practiced by individuals and groups in a personal as well as economic sense, and is closely linked to the idea of *autonomia* (αὐτονομία; *autonomia*) (Osborne, 2022).

what they have put more effort into achieving or acquiring. From this point of view, the philosopher's thoughts can be paralleled with the widespread scarcity principle commonly utilised in modern social psychology. Exclusivity creates an illusion of requisite effort, thereby consequently calling for responsibility. With strengthened *koinonia*, the responsible actions of individuals born out of feelings of cherishment will feed into the *energeia* of *autarkeia*. The fact that Aristotle, as an analytical observer of his time a hundred years after the Citizenship Law, asserted this, leads me to assume that in this rendering, the law indeed had long-lasting consequences on how proactively Athenians nurtured their polis.

The law did not only highlight the value of individual citizens theoretically. Before the Periclean Citizenship Law, the political participation of men and the offices available to them had depended on the wealth of their household. However, by defining who counts as an Athenian citizen, further strengthened by other democratic reforms,⁴ Pericles enhanced the equality of all citizens regardless of wealth, as they all counted in an equivalent measure as members of an Athenian family. This falls in line with how, during his rule, Pericles replaced the previous dominant position of the ancient Areopagus with the citizen-run jury-courts, within which each citizen's vote carried the same weight without consideration for their wealth (Abbott, 1892). Demolishing inequalities in this field further fed into the union of the citizen body.

To summarise, through limiting the group of recognised citizens and attributing to them expanding political power, among other actions defining his rule, which was presumably due to the state's economic interests, Pericles "gentrified the demos to the same status" (Blok, 2009, p.169). As a masterful politician, Pericles thus catered to the interests of a limited group of elites and privileged ones, while consequently creating a stable supporter base for himself.

Because of the newly emergent exclusivity associated with being an Athenian citizen, the bond, the purposeful association between the inhabitants and the polis, gained novel, developed meaning. With the statement being supported adequately by Aristotle's philosophy in *Nicomachean Ethics* and his conceptualisation of *koinonia*, the heightened pride one began to take

⁴ See McWhorther, 1951, p.295.

in being an Athenian citizen resulted in responsible and nurturing actions towards the polis in a way that had a persisting effect even a hundred years later. This allowed the city-state to strive even more progressively towards its Aristotelian purpose: ensuring a good life for the contributing citizens.

In the age of Pericles, Athens flourished not only politically, with a more unified, yet more controlled citizen group taking imperative power into its hands, but also in architectural advancement—rebuilding and fortifying the city-state from the ruins the Greco-Persian Wars left it in, embellishing it with enhancements to the Acropolis and the Parthenon, among numerous cultural masterpieces—and in terms of literature and philosophy. The refinement of the latter two fields began prior to Pericles' rule: the liberality of Cimon impelled it, and the liberality of Pericles allowed it to continue reaching its full potential (Abbott, 1892). Relevant to the research question of this article, in philosophical and literary works proximate enough in time, yet prior to Pericles' Age, we can observe a wave of rather provocative thinkers and poets putting some of contemporary society's deeply ingrained assumptions to the test.

One of the most characteristic representatives of this phenomenon, among other dramatists such as Aristophanes, is Euripides, who challenged three fundamental beliefs: firstly, that God reveals his purposes to man; secondly, that war has an ennobling effect on nations and their individuals; and thirdly, and most pertinently, that women are by nature inferior to men (Wright, 1923). Regarding the last dilemma, the dramatist expressed his idealist condemnation of injustice using the weaponry of irony. To point out the unacceptable inferiority women were regarded with, in his dramas, he presented how married love proved itself to be impossible under the circumstances of his time. In 14 out of his 17 plays, he comprised the choruses—and therefore the transmitter of the poet's most intimate message towards the audience—of women, who gave voice to the unfair and unjust assumptions held against their gender, fostered by the “perversity of writ-

ers”⁵ (Wright, 1923, p.103). Euripides’s contribution to the wave provoking the idea of the uplifting of women can be summarised by the notion that women are by nature indeed different from men, but that the difference does not make them inferior, for all arguments used against women could be used equally well against men (Wright, 1923, p.104).

The acknowledging sentiments held by Socrates concerning women⁶ were further developed by his disciple, Plato, to whom we can attribute rather revolutionary revelations of his time. Influenced by Spartan teachings, Plato, in Book V of *Republic*, stated that, given the appropriate training, both women and men would be equally capable of fulfilling the role of guardians. He proposed the idea of granting women the same military education and treatment provided to men if they were to be employed in the same duties. He further acknowledged how there are more important factors than biological sex to consider who is capable of serving as a guardian of the state:

“Then it is likewise true that one woman has the qualities of a guardian and another not. Were not these the natural qualities of the men also whom we selected for guardians?”

“They were.”

“The women and the men, then, have the same nature in respect to the guardianship of the state, save in so far as the one is weaker, the other stronger.”

“Apparently.”

⁵ See the chorus in *Ion*:

Ye scandal-masters of the lyre,
That harping still upon the lust
Of losel women never tire,
Her lewdness ever, now be just.
How doth her faith superior show
Beside the lust of losel man!
See it, and change your music. Go
Another way than once ye ran,
Ye lyric libels, go, and vex
The faithless found, the elder sex (quoted from Wright, 1923, 104).

And a dialogue given to Medea: “It is men now that are crafty in counsel, and keep not their pledges by the gods; the scandal will turn and honour come to a woman’s life. ’Tis coming—respect for womankind. No longer will pestilent scandal attack women, and women alone. The music of ancient bards will die away, harping ever on woman’s perfidy. Phoebus is the guide of melody and in my heart he never set the wondrous music of his lyre. Else I would soon have raised a song that would have stayed the brood of male singers. The long years have many a tale to tell, of men as well as of women” (quoted from Wright, 1923, 104).

⁶ The philosopher regarded women as men’s natural friends, not their natural enemies. He did not hesitate to acknowledge beautiful women as benefactors of mankind, and encouraged that husbands give the opportunity to learn to their wives by advising them to teach the mistresses of the household to the best of their abilities—this view appears in Xenophon’s Socratic dialogue *Oeconomicus*, discussing the ideal partnership between husband and wife (Wright, 1923).

“Women of this kind, then, must be selected to cohabit with men of this kind and to serve with them as guardians since they are capable of it and akin by nature” (Plato, Republic, Book V, 456a-456b).

He held the view that in determining whether a person is capable of a certain pursuit or not, what we must examine is the individual nature of their soul, which relates just as much to their sex as “the presence or absence of hair” (Okin, 1977, p.349). Therefore, there exist both men and women skilled in military arts, possessing virtues such as courage and critical assessment, and both men and women lacking said qualifications.

While one observing the ancient records from a 21st-century point of view can only hypothesise about the underlying intention behind them, this is further complicated by how no first-hand records from Athenian women are available, and how the authors mentioned likely wrote for a predominantly male audience, concurrently possibly distorting the reality of gender dynamics in Periclean Athens’ society to get their point across more clearly. Nevertheless, from the recurring pattern of key figures of contemporary literature and philosophy challenging the commonly accepted notion of women being by nature inferior to men, I do hypothesise that there existed a spirit of the age that potentially opened doorways for empowering women. The question this article proposes, then, is whether the Periclean Citizenship Law fits into this context or not.

As I argued, there are clear economic reasons behind the enactment of the law. One should, however, also acknowledge that successful politicians consciously make thought-out and multifaceted decisions. So it stands to reason that Pericles could have used a law driven by economic considerations as a tool for emancipating women too. Let us take into consideration that before the Periclean Citizenship Law was implemented, there had existed only an unwritten rule defining a citizen as someone with at least one Athenian parent. Most often, and in the example illustrated above where non-Athenian noble families had attempted to benefit from Athenian resources, just the father of the child being Athenian had made the child eligible for citizenship. In contrast to this situation, the Periclean Citizenship Law induced two fundamental changes.

Firstly, since one’s citizenship now depended on both parents, the role of mothers and wives became more valuable, which encouraged the public recognition of Athenian women. For the Greeks, ensuring citizenship,

primarily of their male children, was crucial for gaining inheritance rights and political influence once they came of age. For the family's legacy to continue in the Athenian system, citizen-children were crucial.⁷ However, back in classical Athens, the biological relationship between a child and their parents could only be ascertained in the case of the mother. Lacking biological proof, patrilinear roots could only be confirmed by a man's claim of fatherhood and the mother's validation of this claim. Consequently, the Periclean Citizenship Law also ensured the legitimacy of the citizen-children: parents could not simply deny their biological relationship to a child they wished to abandon.

With this in mind, the law, which required both parents to be Athenian, sanctioned the behaviour of women instead of that of men. In my view, rather than primarily intending to uplift women, Pericles's intention was to adequately limit the citizen body in a long-lasting way, which complemented the reforms of his system. If citizenship depended only on the fathers, the number of citizens could skyrocket due to the male biological reproductive nature, whereas if it depended on the mothers as well, there would be more regulation over the size of the citizen body because of the time it takes for a mother to bear a child. The goal of maintaining a stably reduced citizen group could be attained by tying the citizen identity of the child just to their mother. However, this would have deeply and rightfully hurt the pride of the fathers, who, as a result of the law, had started taking increased pride in being Athenian.

As opposed to the argued spirit of the age that sought to challenge the idea that women are by nature inferior to men, the Periclean Citizenship Law made political use of the less privileged situation of women. It imposed further limits on their already restricted influence over choosing their marriage partners,⁸ aware of the fact that women were easier to control due to a lack of education and political influence. Neither the Citizenship Law, nor any other Periclean Law, took a step towards the political emancipation of women, and the reconstructed text of the Citizenship Law does not even bring women into the picture.

⁷ Even though I argue that citizenship was invaluable primarily for the male children, there exists an interesting exception in the case of *genos* families elaborated precisely by Blok (2009, p.163).

⁸ Gould (1980, pp.43–44) illustrates the marriage procedures facilitated by their legal guardians, their *kyrioi*, in great detail, which can help the readers establish a clear picture.

On the contrary, what we can rightfully assume is that Pericles consciously selected women as tools, as a means to his end of achieving a more unified citizen body. I argue, therefore, that despite the significant social consequences it had on the position of women, the law *intended* neither to emancipate nor to further oppress them—as an outstanding politician, Pericles merely saw the most effective way of defining the citizen body to control the behaviour of women. Although I claim that the Periclean Citizenship Law itself does not fit into the context of uplifting women as the intention behind the decreeing, a part of its after-effects certainly reflects the spirit of the age. How its consequences showed in the society of Periclean and post-Periclean Athens is what the second research question of this article enquires into.

With the Periclean Citizenship Law, the state formally recognised Athenian women as citizens in their own right. The law sanctioned the role of women in the continuation of the citizen body and further affirmed how they were acknowledged shareholders of the state—a view also accepted by Aristotle, the main interpreter used in this article, who, as a sharp observer of his time a century after the implementation of the Periclean Citizenship Law, wrote: “For it is true that not all the persons indispensable for the existence of a state are to be deemed citizens” (Aristotle, 1935, 1278a).

This can be evidenced by examining the laws referenced in Demosthenes’ Manuscript (59.87). Until then, in the case of a married person seducing a free individual, only the male party would have been punished. However, the new law held the woman personally accountable too: she would be stripped of her privileges in public life. The husband of an adulteress was to divorce her, and he was met with a penalty of disenfranchisement if he disobeyed this legal obligation (Kapparis, 2003).⁹ The law severely penalised the adulteress herself by removing her from all public temples and allowing any free people to beat her if she was caught breaking the order. Furthermore, she could not wear any ornaments—this part of the law intended to tarnish her reputation (Carey, 1995).

⁹ “Law Regarding Adultery: When he has caught the adulterer, it shall not be lawful for the one who has caught him to continue living with his wife, and if he does so, he shall lose his civic rights and it shall not be lawful for the woman who is taken in adultery to attend public sacrifices; and if she does attend them, she may be made to suffer any punishment whatsoever, short of death, and that with impunity” (Dem. 59.87).

Women being personally held accountable by law in this context is of paramount importance, for, by default, the Athenian law treated them as “hereditary minors” (Gould, 1980), making their legal existence entirely dependent on their male guardian (be it husband, brother, or father). The personhood of women was annulled to the extent of them being referred to only by their familial relations to the male parties involved in the courtroom (Just, 1989). This can be observed in Isaeus’ (9) *Apollodoros*: “he [Apollodoros] made a will in case anything happened to him and devised his property to Archedamos’ daughter, his own sister and my mother, providing for her marriage with Lakratides who has now become hierophant.” In several other orators’ courtroom speeches written 50–80 years after the Periclean Citizenship Law, we can still observe the lack of personification given to women, stemming from their names¹⁰ not being used in a legal context. This is further affirmed by Aristotle’s *Politics*, where, by tying citizenship to participation in political offices, he excludes women from its definition in the political sense. There exists, therefore, a perplexing duality: laws connected to the institution of marriage or the family recognised women as citizens in the legal sense, while they still existed as hereditary minors in the context of inheritance or public crime. This leads me to the conclusion that the Periclean Citizenship Law did indeed successfully raise the value of women as mothers and wives; however, it did not cause a lasting impact, nor did it start a wave in the field of political or legal emancipation of women. In addition to this, as the last main point of this article, I would like to demonstrate how the law further contributed to a prominent development concerning women in arts as well.

Due to the fact that being an Athenian citizen started to emit a symbolic privilege, a significant shift arose in how Athenians began to symbolise their identities. Because it now depended on both parents, Athenians acquired the encouraging incentive to further show respect to and commemorate the women of the household as well.

The pre-existing abundance of female figures in mythology and religion cannot be dismissed: let us take into consideration how the guardian deity of Athens, Pallas Athena, was a woman. Women, as shareholders in the polis, were expected to participate in religious festivals such as

¹⁰ See Schaps, 1977, pp.323-330.

the Panathenaia (McLure, 2018) or sacred rites¹¹ and take on the roles of priestesses or dedicators. In spite of their significance in religious representation, we can observe how there barely existed any representation of women in symbolic language in which the loss of human life was marked up until 500 BCE (Osborne, 1997).¹²

However, from the mid-5th century onwards, an interesting shift occurred in symbolic language related to death. The imagery of women began to appear on both funerary monuments¹³ and *lekythoi*,¹⁴ flasks used for funerary offerings. How do we then explain the sudden change that corresponds in time to the imposition of the Periclean Citizenship Law?

When it comes to the symbolic representation of death in a community, the purpose behind it always has to do with society intending to commemorate something it values. Prior to the Periclean Citizenship Law, the noteworthy aspects were focused on the individual: what achievements and successes characterised the glory a person basked in? Whether it be military accomplishments, financial affluence, material novelties in the fields of architecture, or scientific and philosophical innovations, all celebrated a single person who stood out from the crowd. In a society that eulogises personal triumphs, public life must be the source where the feats gain prominence. Because governing the polis and taking on political offices were the responsibilities of men, they were bound to be the focus of at-

¹¹ “A section of the Parthenon frieze appears to depict a portion of this ceremony. At the left, two girls, possibly the Arrhephori, carry objects on their heads, and two men at the right handle the sacred peplos (marble relief, slab V from the East Frieze of the Parthenon, c. 480 BCE, British Museum 1816,0610.19). To mark the end of their service, the girls performed a secret nocturnal rite. The priestess placed items ‘unknown to the girls and to herself’ on their heads (Paus. 1.27.3). They then descended through an underground passage to a shrine, possibly that of Aphrodite. There they left whatever they were carrying and returned with other covered objects to the Acropolis” (McLure, 2018, p.4).

¹² “G. M. A. Richter cataloged, 45 figure men and 3 figure a man and a woman; none figure just a woman (31 currently figure neither man nor woman). Similarly, according to the epigraphic data collected by L. H. Jeffery, 54 archaic Athenian grave inscriptions commemorate men, 1 commemorates a man and a woman, 6 commemorate women, and in 8 cases the sex is unclear. [...] Of figured monuments to the dead, only painted funerary plaques, depicting actual scenes of mourning and parts of the funerary ritual, regularly show women” (Osborne, 1997, p.12).

¹³ “Among the monuments depicting adults in C. W. Clairmont’s recent catalogue of classical Athenian tombstones, there are 628 monuments figuring women, 468 figuring men and 1136 figuring both men and women” (Osborne, 1997, p.14) [The funerary monuments mentioned are assumed to date back to the third quarter of the 5th century].

¹⁴ Robin Osborne (1997, p.16) precisely analyses the data on *lekythoi* by drawing attention to two domineering painter figures, the Achilles Painter and the Phiale Painter with his contemporaries, who embellish their *lekythoi* with considerably more figures of women than men. All of the works were created shortly after 450 BCE; therefore, we can assume that enough time had passed for the effects of the Periclean Citizenship Law to have had a visible impact on society.

tention, thereby solemnised more frequently after death, which came as a force taking the individual away (Osborne, 1997).

However, the institution of the Periclean Citizenship Law established a much more unified bond between the members of society, highlighting the value of each individual citizen in the light of what they could contribute to the *autarkeia* of the polis. The privilege became being able to consider oneself an Athenian, and consequently, what people sought after shifted from personal achievements to having a share in the polis—precisely the social definition of a citizen mentioned above.

Although Aristotle (Pol., 1253a) affirmed that “It is clear therefore that the state is also prior by nature to the individual [and the oikos]; for if each individual when separate is not self-sufficient, he must be related to the whole state as other parts are to their whole,” it is also true that “The goodness of every part must be considered with reference to the goodness of the whole” (Pol., 1323a). If, in the latter quote, under “the goodness of every part,” we include the *oikia* as a block which constitutes the polis, then contribution to the *oikos* indirectly results in contribution to the polis as a whole. Without the excellence of the *oikia*, the city-state cannot fulfil its purpose of a “good life.”

From numerous literary sources, such as Aristophanes’ dramas or Xenophon’s Socratic dialogue *Oeconomicus*, we can observe how the *oikos* was closely tied to and governed by the mistress of the household, although still subjugated to the master’s instructions. As the woman of the household diligently managed her responsibilities, she brought about the fulfilment of the daily needs of the members of the household, the men taking on the *archai* of the polis included. This made possible the political participation of the Aristotelian citizens; therefore, the role of women in the *oikos* was reaffirmed as an indispensable element to the societal structure of the polis.

In the eyes of a community founded on the emergent unity prompted by the Periclean Citizenship Law, such forms of contribution gained enhanced value, as did family groups as a whole. The community-focused benefaction of women became something to celebrate and honour in the form of funerary representation too. Furthermore, as the sanctity of family groups became acknowledged and increasingly cherished—such a shift can be observed in Aristotle’s *Politics* as well, with the philosopher equally protecting the roles of both parents regardless of gender in the following

excerpt: “Defamation, accidental or intentional homicide, fighting, insult; none of these is permitted by religious belief against father, mother or close blood relatives” (Aristotle, *Pol.*, 2)—the meaning of death shifted as well. From a force destroying the individual, it became a force disrupting the unbreakable, sacrosanct bond of the family, within which men and women were equally respected.

In this society based on unity, the motifs honoured with commemoration through symbolic language related to death expanded beyond individual achievements. Death no longer only ended the life of a flourishing individual, but destroyed family groups: units which were irreplaceable for the wholeness of the polis. Because within the family, sanctity encompassed the characters of both parents regardless of gender, it naturally occurred that women should be just as prominently grieved and commemorated. In my view, if we take into consideration the sharing of roles between the master and mistress of the household, with the man fulfilling military duties, and the wife and daughters suffering his loss and becoming symbols of his grieving, the reason why women came to dominate artistic representation on funerary monuments from the mid-5th century onwards can be explained by deep sympathy for their agony.

The Periclean Citizenship law raised the respect enjoyed by women as wives and mothers, for their role gained official significance in the continuation of the citizen body. This was proven by the increased recognition of women in the previously mentioned new law instituted shortly after the Periclean Citizenship Law, which personally reprimanded an adulteress—one of the first examples where women were recognised as individual legal entities. Appearing with the Periclean Citizenship Law was a transformation in the values of society. As Pericles managed to gentrify the citizen body, the *koinonia* between the polis and its inhabitants deepened symbolically. Shifting the focus from individual achievements, people’s contributions to the polis and its *autarkeia* took the spotlight. Consequently, as the household was a fundamental building block of the polis and was closely tied to the personas of women, with the mistress of the household managing it herself, the position of women was emphasised as part of the polis. Still, the indispensability of women largely depended on the family unit she was a part of, as well as the responsibilities she undertook within the *oikos*; therefore, individual recognition surrounding women in this area

still thoroughly lacked. Citizenship being tied to Athenian identity more closely now more than ever naturally brought about Athenian women being more coveted within the society as well. For citizen-children to be born, men could only select their marriage partners from the group of Athenian women, encouraging endogamy within the polis too.¹⁵

In summary, this article conducted on the Periclean Citizenship Law intended to reach a conclusion on two closely connected research questions. Keeping the disclaimers stated in the beginning about researching ancient gender in mind, and assessing the following statements based on the directives it provides, I claimed that due to the regularity with which we can observe the tendency in the field of literature and philosophy to challenge the predominant ideas of society that women are the inferior gender, during the time of the Periclean Citizenship Law, there existed a *Zeitgeist*, a ripple which could potentially start a new wave of emancipation of women.

Firstly, hypothesising that this is true, I analysed how the law fits into this context, with all of the economics- and politics-centered motivations Pericles might have had in drawing it up. As a summary, this article established that even though the law consciously selected women as the means to achieve a unified, limited citizen body that would remain that way long-lastingly, it did so simply because controlling Athenian women, at their current, relatively subjugated state, was the most politically efficient option available to Pericles. He did not intend to further oppress women; however, the law does not reflect any primary motive to emancipate them. The economic and political interests that might have motivated Pericles are the following three: the political worth of expanding influence from the ancient Areopagus to the citizen-led jury-courts comprised of a now unified citizen body, consequently guaranteeing Pericles political support by affirming their favouredness; the material value of distributing resources between a lower number of citizens; and the benefits of asserting and fortifying Athens' national spirit after the wars she had endured by limiting the privileged circumstances non-Athenian noble families could enjoy.

¹⁵ As a further research question, it would be incredibly fascinating to analyse how this newfound coveted state and valuableness show up in the artistic portrayal of women, comparing pieces predating and postdating the Periclean Citizenship Law.

Through the unification of the citizen body, Pericles raised each Athenian citizen to equal value, and fed into the abolition of wealth-based inequalities when it came to political participation. Within this gentrified demos, a novel, strengthened sense of belonging emerged, in parallel with an increased pride people started feeling purely by being Athenian. Aristotle, in *Politics*, conceived of the purposeful association of the citizens forming the polis as *koinonia*, which I affirmed has been reinforced as a result of the Citizenship Law. Supporting my assumption are writings from Aristotle, from which we can draw the conclusion that Athenians who took pride in being recognised citizens would act with due care and responsibility to nurture the polis, and in turn, the polis and its inhabitants would flourish under its *autarkeia*. Closely tied to this, I examined the shifting societal values of Athens, which were characterised by people beginning to favour celebrating contribution to the polis over individual achievements and success.

Even though I drew the findings that the law itself is not a part of the presupposed spirit of the age, some of its secondary societal consequences and societal processes it fostered left a lasting impact on Athenian society, which is what my second research question examined. In this area, I arrived at an interesting duality: the Periclean Citizenship Law indubitably and long-lastingly raised the value of women as wives and mothers while sanctifying the family unit; however, no progress can be observed in the recognition of women as individual identities before the law outside of a familial context—such as in inheritance or public crime. This dichotomy is illustrated by how, for the first time, slightly after the Periclean Citizenship Law, a law was drawn up that individually penalised an adulteress, recognising women as independent individuals within the family unit; however, Aristotle, almost a century later, still excluded women from the political definition of citizens.

Regarding the representation of women, because proud Athenians wished to symbolise their identity, which now depended on both parents, the presence of women in the arts and in the religious sphere increased. As an interesting phenomenon to put in parallel with the shifting values of the society, they came to dominate the field of funerary art from 450 BCE. This article's explanation for this comes down to the people wishing to commemorate people's contribution to the polis—of which the *oikos*,

the realm of women, is a fundamental building block. The change leading to death now being perceived as a force destroying the sacred family units instead of taking away individuals called for the honouring of women who were grieving the losses of the men of the household fulfilling their military duties, and thus becoming symbols of grieving.

As it can be observed, the answer to my second research question concludes this article with perplexingly two-fold findings: the value of women lastingly increased only as a—well-respected and honourable—part of the family unit, whereas no political or legal recognition emerged either as a result of the Periclean Citizenship Law, or throughout the existence of the Empire of Athens.

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SZONJA VÉGVÁRI

Between the Celestial and the Terrestrial: The Astrological Significance of a Medieval Islamic Mortar

Introduction

Not so long ago I discovered an intriguing object—a mortar adorned with symbols that initially seemed out of place on such an everyday item (Figure 1). Upon closer examination I discovered a blend of elements that span different realms, connecting the celestial with the terrestrial, prompting me to ask: why does an ordinary mortar feature symbols from different realms on its sides? This question serves as the starting point of my investigation. The mortar itself is housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, under the accession number 91.1.527a, b, from the Edward C. Moore collection. It was crafted between the late 12th and early 13th centuries and was most likely used for medicinal purposes. It bears the name of its original owner, Abu Bakr ibn ‘Ali ibn Malik Dad al-Tabrizi, and geographically, it is attributed to Iran. To understand the significance of this, it is crucial to situate it within the broader historical and cultural context of the time. Pre-Islamic Iran was part of the first world empire, ruled by the Achaemenids. After the Hellenistic age, the ruling empires were the Parthians and Sasanians. The Achaemenid period was renowned for its scientific achievements and artistic innovations as the region functioned as a melting pot, blending Greek, Persian, Jewish, Bactrian, Armenian, Sogdian, and Aramaean cultures. Added

to the mix was an interplay of three religions: Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and developing Christianity.

The fall of the Sasanian Empire in the 7th century marked the end of the pre-Islamic period, and the arrival of Islam with the Rashidun Caliphate marked the beginning of a new era. Iran became a key intellectual and artistic hub of the Islamic Golden Age under the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258). During the period in which the mortar was crafted, the Seljuq dynasty was on the rise, which fostered a vibrant fusion of Islamic and Persian traditions. This era saw advances in science, astronomy, and the arts, heavily influenced by earlier Persian, Greek, and Indian knowledge (MacDonald, 2020; Sardar, 2011; Yalman and Komaroff, 2001).

The mortar's decorative programme reflects the era's deep interest in the cosmos and features symbols such as four figures on horseback, two holding a severed head, one a bow, and one a falcon. The main image is present on two sides, a figure sitting on a throne surrounded by snakes with dragon heads (Figure 2) (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, no date). While these symbols all have astronomical/astrological relevance, their meanings differ, and therefore their presence may seem random at first.

I aim to prove in this essay there was a deliberate thought process and reasoning behind the combination of these exact symbols rooted in the mortar's use for medicinal purposes and the belief system that characterised the Islam-



Figure 1. The mortar

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/444529>



Figure 2. The main image of the mortar

ic Golden Ages, which spanned from the 8th to the 12th century. To support my thesis and answer the research question, I will delve into the significance of astrology during the Islamic Golden Age, examining how celestial symbols were intertwined with daily life and medicine. I will then analyse the specific symbols on the mortar, exploring their talismanic and symbolic meanings. Finally, I will investigate the unique depiction of Jawzahr, the invisible planet, and its cultural and astronomical relevance. Through this analysis, I aim to uncover the deeper connections between art, astronomy, and medicine in Islamic culture, shedding light on the mortar's multifaceted symbolism.

Astrology

The “science of the stars” in the Islamic Golden Ages covered a wide range of subjects. Both astronomy and astrology were a crucial part of life, shaping the habits, superstitions, and artworks of the culture. Understandably, Islam, the religion itself, made specific demands upon astronomers, such as setting the time for prayer, determining the lengths of a lunar month, or calculating the exact time of sunset for fasting during Ramadan (Hoskin, 2003, p.23). However, there was more to it than the mere observation of celestial bodies, as the practice of interpreting the stars, also known as astrology, was considered science and determined the way people of the past thought about the universe (Carboni, 1997, p.3).

The science of astrology in the mediaeval Islamic world was based on a knowledge of astronomy from the Greeks, especially Ptolemy's *Almagest*, which found its way into Constantinople through emissaries (Hoskin, 2003, p.23). With the consequent translations from Greek to Arab, supported by the ruling caliphate, the Abbasids, Muslim culture awoke to the surviving treasures of the antique world. In Iran—where the mortar was found—there was a particularly interesting fusion of astronomical knowledge as Zoroastrian astrological writings reaching far back into history are noted to have been gathered. Early Islamic astrologers used numerous Indian works, which reached them through Middle Persian texts and were translated directly from Sanskrit with the support of the Abbasid dynasty (Kuehn, 2019, pp.2-4). This combination of texts and beliefs rooted in Indian, Zoroastrian, Persian, and Islamic culture gave rise to a vibrant intellectual landscape, and astronomy flourished on every level of society. Astrology also became

a huge business: fortune tellers filled the streets, planetary tables were made for predicting the future, rulers employed court astrologers, and at acute phases of the constellations, political crises were regarded inevitable (Carboni, 1997, p.3; Hoskin, 2003, p.24; Kuehn, 2019, p.3; Sardar, 2011; Yalman and Komaroff, 2001). However, shifts occurred in attitudes toward practice of studying anything celestial, as many believed that according to the Qu'ran it was against the tenets of Islam to suggest that forces other than God could determine human events. Astronomical observations often met their ends if they aroused the hostility of religious authorities as they would destroy observatories and ruthlessly kill astronomers and their patrons. Nevertheless, these practices continued to develop slowly, and Islamic astronomers eventually arrived at a composition of the universe (Hoskin, 2003, p.24). They conceived of the Cosmos as a series of concentric circles with the Earth at its centre. Attached to these circles were seven spheres, which stood for the known celestial bodies: the Moon, the Sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The eighth sphere was that of the so-called "fixed stars," which consisted of the 48 known constellations, including the twelve zodiacs. According to some, such as al-Quazvini, the outermost sphere, the "Greatest Sphere," contained angels and the Throne of God, and regulated the movements of all the other spheres (Carboni, 1997, p.3).

Based on Greek traditions, all planets were assigned a colour, a day of the week, a geographical area, an occupation, and even a personality. The personification of the planets, as opposed to the constellations, had few iconographic precedents, so imagery for each, based on their characteristics, evolved from Islamic astrological writings. For example, Mars took on the appearance of a warrior holding a sword or a severed head in his hands, and Venus was a female musician playing various instruments (Carboni, 1997, p.6). Understanding the attributes of celestial elements is key to unravelling why all the symbols are depicted on the mortar, as tangible manifestations of celestial symbolism. This is especially important because astrological symbols on artworks not only served decorative purposes but endowed the object with a powerful talismanic significance.

In Islam, any religious narratives or astrological signs portrayed on an object imbued it with protective powers. These amulets were used not only for protection but for guidance too, as owners turned to their objects for advice. Stars and talismanic objects became interconnected, as the celestial

bodies were believed to guide a person on their journey in this and the afterlife. This belief was especially important in medicine. For any condition, the stars were consulted, their talismanic powers becoming tools for scientists, and on some occasions even serving as remedies prescribed by physicians. Talismanic powers were evoked to ward off evil and were in active service whenever a symbol was depicted on an object (Al-Saleh, 2010).

These objects reflect a worldview in which the terrestrial and the celestial were intricately intertwined. To understand the symbols my research deals with, I explored the most frequently used celestial signs with talismanic/symbolic meanings that characterised Islamic belief.

The symbolism of the mortar

Based on the attributes of the figures on the mortar, it is possible to determine what kind of talismanic powers are evoked and for what purposes.

The mortar is an octagonal object; two of its sides feature a central hole that protrudes from the body of the mortar and once functioned as a socket for a handle (Figure 3). On the other six sides, the central images vary,



Figure 3. Socket for handle



Figure 4. The archer

but all consist of a lobed medallion with four harpies in the corners. The main images show figures on horseback: an archer, a falconer, and two warriors each holding a severed head (Figures 4, 5, 6). The imagery on the remaining two sides is the same: a figure sitting on a throne flanked by snakes with dragon heads—a representation of the pseudo-planet Jawzahr (Figure 7).



Figure 5. Swordsman with a severed head



Figure 6. The falconer

With the knowledge I acquired reading Carboni's *Following the Stars: Images of the Zodiac in Islamic Art*, I was able to match the figures to known depictions of attributes commonly belonging to planets and constellations in Islamic culture. As I briefly mentioned before, Mars was depicted as a warrior holding a sword and a severed head, and on the mortar the two figures are similarly portrayed. Mars, the God of War symbolises brute force. However,

he is not known only as the "Killer" and "Guardian" of homes and young people but also as the "Avenger" of all crimes, especially oath-breaking (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1994, p.185). This aspect carries significant importance when paired with the medicinal function of the mortar. It could serve as a reminder to the owner that he swore an oath to help people, and if he were to break that, Mars would fulfil his role as the punisher of crimes. The archer on the next side probably refers to Sagittarius, although the bow and arrow are not pointed upwards as is standard in the zodiac sign. Assuming it is Sagittarius, it would fit with the multiple astronomical symbols depicted on the mortar, evoking talismanic powers such as boldness and freedom (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1994, p.660). One side, however, contains a figure that does not resemble a known astrological figure: the



Figure 7. Jawzahr

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/444529>



Figure 8. Harpies in the four corners
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/444529>

falconer. Therefore, I researched the symbolic meanings a falconer could have that would make sense in this context and further elevate the mortar's symbolism.

The falcon was associated with pride and faith, and thus a symbol connected to rulers (Rodrigues, 2006, p.112). According to Williams (2014), it was used as a metaphor for the spirit returning to God. With respect to the medical purpose of the mortar, this would make sense, as it

symbolises a peaceful death, the best-case scenario for people who passed away during rudimentary medical treatment.

Based on Chevalier's *Dictionary of Symbols*, the falcon serves as a symbol of the celestial. It embodies superiority and conquest and is also the emblem of kingship in Asia and the Far East. It represents a victory of the male, solar, bright principle over the female, lunar, dark principle. This could simply reflect a superstitious belief, as the Sun has been associated with ruling powers. This is why solar eclipses signify misfortune in many cultures. Depicting a symbol associated with the falcon possibly expressed the hope of avoiding negative events. Furthermore, ensuring the mortar contained the power of the Sun would increase its medical efficacy.

On every side of the mortar, four harpies are positioned in the corners (Figure 8). There is no theory concerning the purpose of incorporating an element that contrasts completely with the main figures. However, my research uncovered some possible explanations for the decision to include these creatures on the mortar. Harpies come from Hellenistic mythology, and since the mortar was made during a period when Greek works were highly influential, these elements show how Islamic traditions inserted the mythologies of other cultures into their belief system. Harpies were evil spirits, snatching the dead; they were believed to be diabolical particles of cosmic energy, supplying the Underworld with the souls of those who died before their time (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1994, pp.1103-1104; Hoskin,

2003, pp.23-31; Al-Saleh, 2010). Like the falcon(er), harpies too are associated with the spirits of the dead and were thus inevitably connected with medicine and superstition, fundamental components of healing.

The talismanic significance of the mortar's decorations is evident, as objects adorned with celestial imagery were believed to possess cosmic power. However, they evoke a handful of talismanic powers which might seem unnecessary.

The depiction of different symbols inspired by different cultures and connected to different meanings could simply be due to the desire for safety. With more protective and diverse powers awoken, the chance they will serve their purpose increases. The belief in the talismanic properties of astrological symbols shows the connection between medicine and astrology in Islamic culture, in which celestial beings were consulted for both guidance and healing purposes.

One figure still remains in my examination of the fascinating intricacies of the mortar's symbolism, and it serves as further proof of the interconnectedness between the terrestrial and the celestial in Islamic culture: the personification of Jawzahr, the eighth, invisible planet. An investigation of the symbolism of Jawzahr provides compelling insight into the complicated symbolism of the mortar and is crucial to discovering the connection between the figures, the function of the mortar, and the integration of celestial phenomena into Islamic artistic traditions. In the next section, I will discuss Jawzahr's symbolic importance on the mortar and its place in Islamic astronomy.

Jawzahr and its importance

Islamic cosmology had one component that highly differed from everything we know: the concept of Jawzahr, the invisible planet responsible for eclipses—a dragon-like figure rooted in pre-Islamic mythology. To understand why Jawzahr's appearance on the mortar is such a unique occurrence, I will elaborate on its symbolism, cultural, and astronomical relevance. Jawzahr served as both an omen and a talisman because it was said to cause and reverse eclipses. The concept of Jawzahr was most likely rooted in Indian culture, from the demon Rahu who devoured the Sun and the Moon from time to time, causing eclipses (Azarpay and Kilmer, 1978, pp.363-374). Eclipses were traditionally viewed as bad omens, as punishments by God;

the celestial beings responsible for them were consequently seen as hostile creatures (Hoskin, 2003). The idea that solar and lunar eclipses were caused by some kind of “eclipse monster” was widely held throughout the Eurasian continent, its origins found in remote antiquity (Kuehn, 2019, p.5). The dragon served as the depiction of the eighth planet but was divided into two parts, the Head and the Tail; it thus was incorporated into two constellations symbolising dualism. The Head was the male, the diurnal, and the Tail was the female, the nocturnal. It is worth mentioning that according to Kuehn, Abu Ma’shar al-Balkhi, who was thought to be the greatest astrologer of the Abbasid court, referred to the points of exaltation for the nodes of the Moon, which for the dragon’s tail is in Sagittarius. This connection serves as an additional meaning for depicting these symbols; they are more closely connected than it would seem at first.

Although Jawzahr was based on the astronomical observations of the lunar nodes, it had a strong talismanic significance. For this reason it was often omitted from planetary iconographies focused purely on depicting the solar system. Its invisibleness also made it harder to represent, but it almost always took the form of a dragon with a knot in the middle of its body (Azarpay and Kilmer, 1978, pp.363-374; Carboni, 1997, p.23).

Based on Chevalier’s *Dictionary of Symbols*, the dragon is seen as a symbol of diabolical tendencies. In Far Eastern mythologies it is a creature of water, earth, and sky. In China, the dragon is also thought of as the bringer of eclipses; this too can be traced back to the fact that in astronomy the head and the tail of the Dragon constellation are the lunar nodes, the points in the Moon’s orbit at which eclipses occur. Zoroastrian cosmological dualism probably played the greatest role in the view of the dragon as both a threat and a protective force. According to Zoroastrian cosmology, the contents of the world derive from two entities: one good, causing light and life, and the other bad, causing darkness and death (Kuehn, 2019, p.6).

Despite not being a direct part of Islamic religious doctrine, this symbolism demonstrates how pre-Islamic celestial ideas were adapted and transformed within Islamic artistic traditions. The dragon’s association with celestial occurrences and bodies underscores the broader theme of celestial influence on earthly affairs.

Let me reflect on the mortar again, focusing on the side showing Jawzahr, and explain, based on my previous research, why its depiction is unique and how it is connected to the other symbols and the mortar itself.

The personification of Jawzahr, the dragon, is a rare occurrence, as I mentioned. It usually took the form of the knotted dragon and not a person. However, on the mortar a sitting figure can be seen on a throne surrounded by serpents (Figure 9). At first glance, the symbols featured on this side of the mortar might seem messy, but I analysed every decorative item to make sense of Jawzahr's depiction. Dragon-headed snakes rise on both sides of the figure, serving as proof that it is Jawzahr in human form, sitting on the throne (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, no date). Just as many of the other symbols on the mortar are associated with its medicinal purposes, so too are Jawzahr and the surrounding snakes. The heavens were used to explain terrestrial occurrences, and snakes played a role in that. According to Azarpay and Kilmer (1978), the venom of different types of snakes and their antidotes were systematised in correspondence with the zodiac and the planets. It is not a rare occurrence for heavenly bodies to be associated with healing purposes. The mortar's decorative programme does not include the kind of literal correlation that would pair antidotes to different zodiacs; nevertheless, the snake symbols and their medicinal function signal the connection between astronomy, art, and medicine.

The purpose of depicting Jawzahr can be medicinal(ly superstitious) as its dual nature can be interpreted as symbolizing both life and death. It also has strong astrological significance as it is associated with eclipses. Because the stars and their talismanic powers were believed to guide people in both the real and the afterlife, the dragon's duality could symbolise that guidance in both realms. I could not, however, discover the reason for using a symbol associated with negative occurrences—with the disappearance of the Sun.



Figure 9. Jawzahr surrounded by serpents
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/444529>

Conclusion

In this essay, I meticulously examined the intricate interplay between Islamic art and astronomy, focusing on a specific artefact—a mortar from the Metropolitan Museum of Art that dates to the Islamic Golden Age. The aim of my research was to discover why symbols with different meanings—the personifications of Mars, Jawzahr, the constellation Sagittarius, and a falconer—were selected to appear on the mortar. By researching their meanings and drawing connections, I came to the conclusion that the integration of celestial and astrological symbols was not merely decorative but served practical and protective purposes. The mortar is an example of the intricate interplay between medicine, astrology, and cultural beliefs in mediaeval Islamic society. The warrior figures representing Mars and the archer symbolising Sagittarius show that celestial imagery was used to imbue everyday objects with talismanic power. The medicinal and superstitious themes of the mortar are present in the falconer and the harpies, as they are both connected to the soul, reflecting the integration of celestial symbolism with everyday life and medical practices. Furthermore, they highlight the fusion of different cultural elements within Islamic traditions. The depiction of Jawzahr, the invisible eighth planet responsible for eclipses, as a seated figure surrounded by dragon-headed snakes is particularly noteworthy. Its presence creates a connection between the other figures, as it has an astronomical and medicinal side too.

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LIZA BAJKÓ-ISTVÁNFY

Judging a Book by Its Edges: Contemporary Fore-Edge Painting

Fore-edge painting, the art form in which artists use the edges of books as a canvas, may be unfamiliar to some. However, the centuries-old technique has recently started to reach a growing audience and has become increasingly admired in many countries. (This trend is confirmed by the anonymous booksellers with whom I have discussed the phenomenon.) This article explores the contemporary practices of fore-edge painting, focusing on the reasons behind its newfound popularity and relevance. As a researcher and practitioner of fore-edge painting, I have witnessed this increasing interest firsthand. By examining the art form's history alongside contemporary artists working in the field, it becomes clear that social media and our changing perception of books have contributed to its revival.

In the following sections, this article delves deeper into the world of fore-edge painting by first briefly exploring existing research on its history, then looking at how present-day artists have adapted the art form, focusing on typical schemes and sprayed-edge designs usually found in bookstores. Through interviews with two practising artists, I will explore how social media platforms, especially communities like Bookstagram, have played an important role in the art's revival.

By examining these developments, this article aims to contribute to a broader understanding of fore-edge painting and how historical art can be reinterpreted in the age of social media to serve contemporary demands and trends.

History of fore-edge painting

Previous research on fore-edge painting is mostly about its history (Hansol, 2016; Jobson, 2013). To gain insight into the present of unique paintings, it is also important to know what people's relationship with the art form was like in the past. Fore-edge painting has a long and intriguing history, believed to date back to the 10th century, when fore-edges were used to mark the title. However, it was in the late 17th century that this type of art gained significant recognition in England with the help of the Queen's bookbinder. As noted by several studies, the anonymity of most fore-edge painting artists makes pinpointing the exact origin of this practice challenging (Adversaria: Special Collections Provenance at MSU, 2014). However, most scholars agree that the simplest form of fore-edge illustration gained popularity with the work of the Italian painter Cesare Vecellio in the 16th century. His contributions to the art form are thought to have marked a shift in purpose from identification to aesthetic enrichment through painted scenes from the Bible (Hansol, 2016).

The next industrial breakthrough occurred thanks to the Edwards family of Halifax in 18th-century England. Unlike their predecessors, they prioritised customer preferences and selected designs after long consideration to resonate with book buyers. Interestingly, only a few novels were painted at the time, and volumes of poetry were much more common (Weber, 1966). In comparison, at present, poetry books are not the canvases most preferred by painters; they often paint thicker and longer books, as seen in the works of artists like Maisie Matilda and Alice Diógenes. The customer-centric and innovative approach of the Edwards family pushed them to become one of England's most successful binderies, refining the artistic skills of fore-edge painting. The Edwards family actively pushed the boundaries of the art form itself. Their influence extended beyond design choices, with the family actively experimenting with new techniques and materials, paving the way for further artistic exploration within this unique art form (Ansley, 2020).

The Edwards family created a new style of fore-edge painting. The generic motifs were gone; instead, landscapes were painted on the books, featuring hills, picturesque bridges, and forests. The Boston Public Library collected 214 fore-edge painted books. More than 85 of the landscapes featured scenes specifically from the United Kingdom, showcasing national pride in the form of art (Digital Commonwealth, Massachusetts Collections On-

line, no date). Portraits were also a widespread option, depicting historical figures, literary characters, or, in some cases, the book owners. Religious motifs were also displayed on the edges, since they were mostly painted on prayer books. In book art dating back to 1795, Adam and Eve can be seen in the Garden of Eden, with grazing animals in the background. Another religious fore-edge painting depicted the theme of the famous Annunciation fresco painted by Filippo Lippi. While some of these paintings were placed on Bibles to mirror the books' content, this approach is less frequent than choosing a visually appealing theme unrelated to the content (Digital Commonwealth, Massachusetts Collections Online, no date).

With the spread of capitalism, book decoration also took a new direction. By the latter half of the 19th century, bookshops recognised the opportunity of fore-edge painting as a marketing tactic to sell slow-selling overstocks. These decorative designs, mostly unrelated to the books' contents, attracted the attention of American tourists looking for unique souvenirs during their travels in the United Kingdom. "This period also saw the quality of the paintings go down while prices went up" (Ansley, 2020). The painted designs were frequently copied, so the same elements may have appeared in several copies (Ansley, 2020). Many publishers likely viewed fore-edge painting as a purely decorative and lucrative addition, attracting buyers and increasing book prices. Even though the opportunity to sell fore-edge painted books was more widely recognised, books were still not accessible to the wider public—only to wealthier individuals. Later, during World War I and II, the demand for books significantly declined, and the production of new works slowed. This led to a decrease in the art form, leaving a huge gap in the history of fore-edge painting. However, between the two world wars, one artist named Miss C. B. Currie tried to revive the art of fore-edge painting with her works. Miss Currie was the first fore-edge painter to sign all her works, ensuring the tradition was not entirely lost (Carter and Barker, 2004).

Since then, a few artists have tried to keep this unique appreciation for books alive. Martin Frost is one of the most acknowledged of them. Since the start of his career in 1970, he has painted more than 3000 book edges. Most likely, it is the result of his work that the art form is still around us today (based on an interview with Maisie Matilda and looking at social media activity). Frost is still active on social media, particularly Instagram.

Although his posts do not reach as many people as the new generation of artists, Frost regularly creates social media posts and holds workshops (Frost, 2019). It is hard to determine exactly, but approximately in the last five years, in addition to hand-painted edges, machine-printed/sprayed designs have started to emerge. These sprayed-edge books are widely popular in bookshops all across the world and can be easily bought in almost all Hungarian bookshops.

The history of Hungarian craftsmanship in fore-edge painting is even less known. For this reason, I visited craftsmen pursuing bookbinding in hopes of gaining information about the history of the craft in Hungary. Unfortunately, binders yielded no information, and I realised that the art form was never widespread in Hungary. In the last years, there have been some artists who are advertising the art form especially to the Hungarian audience (bookofhails, no date), creating a space for a potential revival. Even though this book art is still not widespread, I believe that, just as it has abroad, it will also gain renewed interest in Hungary, and more readers and artists will find inspiration in creating special editions.

In recent years, not only has fore-edge painting received a growing online audience, but so has book art in general. Book art can take on many forms; it can be an altered book, an original print, or a letter. There is no definition of what an artist's book can be; it is a one-of-a-kind art object that shows and tells a story using various materials and artforms and involves the participation of the examiner. Artists' books "push the boundaries of traditional reading while maintaining the intimate relationship that a book fosters between object and reader" (The University of Chicago Library, no date).

Fore-edge paintings create a new layer to the book, making them more than just a reading experience. As aesthetic objects, they can be displayed and appreciated on a new level, even if they have been read more than a hundred times. The experience is different than reading an online book. Moreover, a fore-edge painted book is not just an artwork you can observe from afar. These books carry a sense of intimacy that is lost with online reading because artists' books build on touch and materiality; the audience has to hold them in their hands to fully understand their meaning and importance (Poulton, 2018). Traditionally, these unusual books have been found in fine art libraries and special collections. However, such books are becoming more accessible to all ordinary readers with the help of the Internet.

Design

The painting process of the edges is different from painting on a traditional canvas, and with recent technological developments and mass production, handmade fore-edge paintings have become a rarity. Traditionally, the procedure begins with the preparation of the book by carefully sanding and priming the page edges to create a smooth base. Artists must select the paint carefully because if the paint is not the right quality or density, the book pages may stick together or the paint might flow in between the pages. For this reason, artists usually work with watercolour and gouache. After the pages of the book are pressed firmly together, artists create a quick sketch of the design before beginning to paint. This requires steady hands and the smallest brushes. When artists want to create an even more unique look, they make a vanishing fore-edge painting. This design was used more frequently in the past. In this case, the image can be seen only when the leaves of the book are fanned because the image is applied to the stepped surface. If the page edges are gilded or marbled, the painting miraculously disappears when the book is closed, and when the book is fanned again, it magically reappears (Frost, no date-a). Martin Frost is one of the few contemporary artists who still actively create detailed vanishing fore-edge paintings.

Unlike in the 19th century, contemporary fore-edge artists often favour themes directly linked to the content of the book. Frequently, these chosen subjects have already gained widespread recognition through film or television adaptations, such as *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings*, attracting audiences familiar with these famous stories. In these books, either the main character of the story or a memorable, important scene usually appears. Another contemporary practice is to adjust the painting to match the cover. The artists use the same colours and patterns as those used on the cover of the book. This was previously not possible for fore-edge painters to do, as the books had a simpler one-colour cover due to the limitations of early printing and bookbinding techniques, which restricted the intricate designs that can now be achieved.

Before the advent of the Internet, fore-edge painting was mainly shared through traditional venues like galleries, exhibitions, and private collections. These spaces provided some opportunities for artists to showcase and sell their crafts. However, fore-edge painters often worked in anonymity, as it was common for their works to go unsigned, with the primary focus

on the finished product, not the creator. Additionally, developments in the publishing industry and improvements in printing technology reduced the demand for handcrafted edge decoration, which in turn reduced the popularity of the craft.

This decline was so significant that fore-edge painting was deemed a critically endangered craft by the Heritage Crafts Association UK (Carpenter, 2017). However, unlike in the past, when audiences primarily encountered fore-edge painting in specialised venues, platforms like Instagram and TikTok now allow artists to reach a global audience from their studios, bringing a large audience into the picture (Eyal, 2014). By uploading videos, the artist can give the audience a closer look at the painting process, so viewers can appreciate the skills, unique talent, and craftsmanship brought closer to them. Viewers can interact by commenting, engaging in discussion, and sharing the content, and, over time, this can lead to a willingness to support the artist's work and content through social media interactions or by purchasing their creations.



*Figures 1 and 2. Martin Frost is seen painting a copy of William Cowper's *Poetical Works*.*

The art form started to appear in foreign and Hungarian bookshops a few years ago. According to my conversation with a Hungarian bookbinder, fore-edge painting has never been a popular practice in Hungary, and based on my research, the first Hungarian book with sprayed edges was published in 2020 (Armentrout, 2020). These books are not hand-painted, but rather sprayed in bulk with machines (BookStyler Farbschnittservice,

2024). The look is somewhat similar to the hand-painted ones, with the advantage that it is more easily accessible, thanks to its being available in almost all bigger book chains. These special editions of sprayed-edge books began to spread all over the world, as customers wanted to buy an extraordinary copy of their favourite book at an affordable price. Some publishers started to publish all of their new books with sprayed edges, while others tended to republish their old bestsellers in limited numbers.

In the American Barnes & Noble, 220 books with sprayed edges are currently available. With advancements in technology, four-colour digital edge printing has become available, allowing publishers around the world to use this technique to make their significant books stand out (Anonymous book publisher, 2024). The fore-edge designs produced by publishers are mostly based on the cover; if the sprayed edges are only one colour, it is the same as what appears on the cover. On the other hand, if the publishers choose a more complex design, the same elements will appear on the edges as on the cover. For the latter, a great example is Colleen Hoover's bestselling *It Starts with Us*, the edges of which are sprayed so that the decoration on the cover extends to the edges. The delicate daffodil pattern seen on the cover continues on the spray-painted edges, offering a surprise for readers.

Revival of Fore-Edge Painting: Social Media and Influencers

Contemporary fore-edge painting is witnessing a renaissance, with a great number of artists experimenting with the art form. New artists have emerged using social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where they showcase and promote their arts and crafts (Diaz, 2021). Platforms that emphasise short video content are particularly powerful tools for visual storytelling and delivering work to a wider audience. An instance of this is the success of Maisie Matilda Jackson ([maisie_matilda_art](#)), who has more than one million followers on TikTok, and many of her videos have reached even more people. An example of her art is illustrated by one of her videos, which was seen by six million people (Jackson, 2023).

The video in question employs a compelling narrative structure. Beginning with the yet unpainted *Harry Potter* book series, Matilda guides the viewers through the artistic process. After she places all seven books into

a book press, she starts painting on them. The whole process looks mysterious, as the spectators do not know what will happen next, leaving the viewer eager to see the outcome. Mostly, only a tiny part of the painting is visible at a time, which makes viewers compelled to watch until the end to witness the final work. What makes the process even more interesting is that the audience can see many hours of hard work in just a 50-second-long video. The finished artwork features a scene with the beloved characters of the *Harry Potter* universe. At the end, the video offers a close-up view of each book, allowing the audience to appreciate the details of her work (Jackson, 2023).

As a result of short videos by Maisie Matilda and other artists, the art form has witnessed a notable upswing in popularity, capturing the fascination of both collectors and newcomers to the art world (Diaz, 2021). This renewal can be partially attributed to the unexpected impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. People confined to their homes started crafting. It is important to distinguish between these hobbyists and artists. While both enjoy the creative process, artists tend to invest more time in developing their skills and pursuing a career in their chosen art form (Kouhia, 2023). Matilda, who was only a hobbyist at that time, started experimenting with different styles and techniques in book-edge painting. After her early creations went viral online, she found a welcoming audience and gradually transitioned into an artist, illustrating how passion combined with growing expertise can transform hobbyists into more serious artists. This case demonstrates the ability of social media to not only bring back the old form of art but also allow people to present themselves, making the division between hobbyists and professional artists less apparent.

Why did her videos go viral? The art form had almost been forgotten; however, during the pandemic, people spent much more time with themselves and on the Internet. Matilda had already learnt about the unique art form at university, but only a year later, when she came across a fore-edge painting video on the Internet, did she try to make it herself.

Due to its recent presence on social media, it has gained a lot of popularity, and there are now lots of artists engaging in the craft in both a professional and amateur capacity! I think the reason behind it is using current media like *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of The Rings* to bring it back into popular culture and modernise it in a way that appeals to the younger generations (Jackson, 2024).

Uploading videos to social media shows that artists are not only reviving fore-edge painting, but also fostering a deeper connection with buyers. Perhaps, as Alice Diógenes states, “To be an artist nowadays also means you must become some sort of content creator” (Diógenes, 2024). Alice Diógenes, who encountered fore-edge painting in 2021 after watching a video online, became intrigued by the art form and started creating it herself. After she got her first commission to make a custom book painting, there was no going back. Since then, she has been working on fore-edge painting as a full-time artist and entrepreneur. She shares all of her artwork on her social media page, which brings the art to many newcomers who are inspired by her videos and decide to paint their books themselves.

In the ever-evolving digital landscape, artists must create an online footprint, which helps them bring together an online community and inspire creativity. “The undeniable advantage of the Internet is its interactivity, the



Figure 3. A customised edition of *It Starts with Us* by Colleen Hoover

wealth of multimedia possibilities, and the unprecedented amount of content available online. The keyword is therefore interaction” (Berezki, 2022). Artists can now interact with their followers through comments or by making “Ask me a question” stories on Instagram (in which followers can ask any question, and the creator will answer them in a video or through a public message). This deepens the connection between content creators and followers. “Gen Z is now used to connectivity in content consumption and feels bad when it is not available to them”

(Berezki, 2022). Young viewers are now used to easy access as well as a variety of Internet content, which is why they expect it to be more interactive.

To fulfil the demand, both private entrepreneurs and artists have to change their tactics and address the requests of this new generation that is more technologically oriented. However, it is important to note that the traditional art world does not die, even without the help of social media. Fore-edge painting, for instance, is still seen in galleries, museums, exhibi-

tions, and private collections, where artists may have to hire an agent or curator to connect with their audience. Nevertheless, in the culture of social media-based artistry, creators are also influencers. It is no longer enough to paint beautifully and be creative. They have to understand marketing, assess the customer base and demand through market research, create content on social media to advertise their art, start a company, and figure out how to operate the business legally.

Bookstagram and online interpretive communities

Other rather large existing online communities also contributed to the rise of the art form. There is a platform for readers where they can share their passion for reading and all things book-related, including book collections, special and unique copies, and book reviews. This online circle is known as none other than #booktok and #bookstagram. The proposed platform provides a place where discussion and empathy between users never end. The community is constantly evolving, most notably as authors, marketers, and publishing professionals increasingly use these platforms to promote new titles (Bronwen, 2021). Alice Diógenes also agrees, and she mentions one essential factor for this: “social media, namely the popularisation of the online book communities. Here, content creators can share all things book-related, which resonates with fore-edge painting through which artists create one-of-a-kind books” (Diógenes, 2024). The work of artists and publishers has led to the art of fore-edge painting becoming significantly less endangered, as well as a general increase in awareness of the craft. Although fore-edge painting is becoming progressively popular, the art of vanishing fore-edge painting remains critically endangered (Carpenter, 2017).

Although precise data is difficult to obtain without paid analytics tools, several indicators suggest a growing awareness of fore-edge painting in these communities. By analysing Google searches, we can see that searches for fore-edge painting began to increase in 2021. Searches for the term “book art” are much steadier, but similar to the previous search, somewhat more people have been searching for it since 2021. Several recent news articles and blog posts have highlighted the revival of fore-edge painting, often drawing connections to its discovery by the online book community, such as My Modern Met and Foxtail Books.

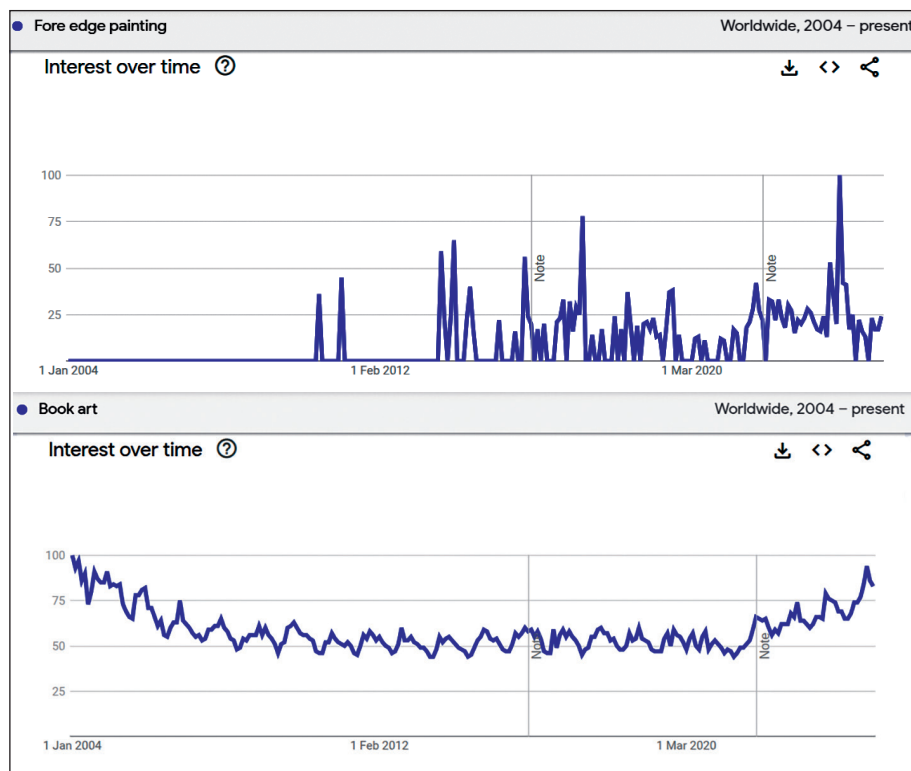


Figure 4. The number of searches for the terms “fore-edge painting” and “book art” on the Internet in the last decade. This information was provided by Google Trends.

Free social media platforms make most of their income by relying on advertising. To maximize their profit, they aim to keep users engaged as long as possible, creating more opportunities to display ads. When a post about fore-edge painting appears on one’s feed, it is not just a coincidence. The algorithm selects such content because it predicts that the user will interact with it by watching, liking, or sharing. This engagement signals to the platform that the user enjoys this type of video, which encourages the algorithm to show similar videos. By creating a customised feed full of content that keeps users scrolling, the platform ensures they remain online longer. The longer the users stay, the more advertisements they will see, thus increasing the revenue of the platform.

Hungarian and international publishers also take advantage of the opportunities provided by social media. We can see on their Instagram plat-



Figure 5. This is a copy of *Elizabeth the Queen: The Woman Behind the Throne* by Sally Bedell Smith painted by the author of this article (2023), watercolour on book edges. This piece features a portrait of Elizabeth II, with elements representing her life.

not decorated” (Anonymous book publisher, 2024). The selection of books for fore-edge decorating is based on several criteria, including anticipated interest, the topic, and stories of international success (Anonymous book publisher, 2024). Pictures and videos with sprayed books generate more comments and usually more likes than pictures of other books. Comments

forms that they are increasingly promoting new sprayed-edge books in the hopes of generating likes, comments, and income. Similarly, Könymolyképző and Vörös Pöttyös Könyvek do the same on their TikTok pages. From the answer of a book publisher I interviewed, we find that it is worth advertising sprayed-edge books on social media: “It can be seen that the sale of edge-decorated books is usually higher compared to the majority of similar books that are



Figure 6. First fore-edge painting attempts by the author of this article (2022–2023), watercolour on book edges.

mostly mention how magnificent these books look, but other cases serve as proof of the online spread of the book art: “What’s the purpose of spraying the edges? Just discovered about them cause of booktok and im curious” writes a reader under a TikTok video of an author (rin.walker, no date). As a response to independent artist content creation, publishers also started to share behind-the-scenes videos about the process of spray painting the fore-edge. A video demonstrating this process received more than one million views; in the comments, people shared their appreciation: “What is this sorcery?” and “All books should be like this”—the last commenter received 115 likes on their suggestion (BookStyler Farbschnittservice, 2024).

In summary, fore-edge painting is a complex art form, an expression of creativity and a love for a physical book. By just painting a layer onto the edges of a book, the object gains a whole new meaning, as it is both an artwork and a functional object. The endangered craft is experiencing a revival, partially through the contribution of social media. With the help of talented artists and algorithms, the art form has reached a whole new audience. A disappearing occupation has gained new power and now strengthens book communities, allowing artists to pursue their hobby as a career. Also, the enthusiasm shown in comments, likes, and shares suggests that book art still draws attention in the digital age.

This renewed interest in fore-edge painting provides an opportunity for future research on the influence of social media, such as to what extent social media may have influenced other endangered art forms. Even in the field of fore-edge painting, there is a huge opportunity for research, since there are relatively few publications on the subject.

As publishers increasingly incorporate sprayed-edge designs into standard book production, this trend is likely to encourage more people to appreciate the beauty of book art and inspire even more to explore fore-edge painting. If artists can merge traditional techniques with new technologies and ideas, and if publishers can actively support this practice, then together they can ensure the continued relevance of fore-edge painting as an art form for future generations.

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BLANKA PILLÁR

Politically Apolitical—Hungarian Youth in *Fejlövés* (1968) and *Moszkva tér* (2001)

“Will a bottle of whisky get us to Gellért Hill?” and “I can’t go on, I can only live” are the expressive sentences of two seemingly distant protagonists in two remarkable and iconic Hungarian feature films that portray young people during turbulent times of Hungarian history (Bori, 2001): *Fejlövés* (The Fatal Shot), made in 1968, and *Moszkva tér* (Moscow Square) from 2001. In response to the domestic political context, Hungarian filmmakers always turned to political themes (Petrie, 1974, pp.255–273). Such films, concentrating on Hungary’s tumultuous 20th-century history and rich cinematic legacy, hold exceptional significance on national and international fronts (Tőke, 2016).

The dominant ideology of Hungary (or then the Hungarian People’s Republic, between 1949 and 1989) was Marxism-Leninism (Laszlo, 1964); however, the Socialist Era of Hungary was much less homogeneous than the prevailing ideology suggested. This 40-year period can be divided into the Rákosi era (1949–1956), ruled by Mátyás Rákosi, and the Kádár era (1956–1989), which followed the 1956 revolution and was marked by the name of János Kádár. During the Rákosi era, the Hungarian Working People’s Party was a follower of Soviet communism and Stalinism, which is why Rákosi was called “Stalin’s best Hungarian disciple” (*Sztálin legjobb magyar tanítványa*). It was during this period that collective farming (*termelőszövetkezet, kolhoz*), which copied the Soviet system exactly, was es-

tablished, the cult of the individual was reinforced, private property was nationalised, the Stakhanovite movement began, and communist ideology was implemented by open violence (Szabó, 2009, pp.158–160). Between 1953 and 1955, Imre Nagy became president of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic, and his rather reformist policy of turning away from orthodox Stalinism brought some relief during the Rákosi era. The 1956 revolution was the nationwide uprising against Stalinist terror, after which János Kádár took over the leadership, and under his direction, he established a regime that can be called a “soft dictatorship,” Goulash Communism, or the Hungarian Thaw (Pap, 2015, pp.41–43).

Although compared to the Rákosi era, a kind of relative liberalisation, a “global communism” did indeed emerge in Hungary, especially after the 1960s; however, everyday life was characterised by a lack of political will, conviction, and the will to act, along with a sense of political incompetence, intimidation, proscription, and resignation (Cora, Kiss and Olasz, 2020, p.202)—there was no longer such an explicit climate of terror, yet there was an almost palpable sense of emptiness, lack of opportunities, and control by the State and the System. *Fejlövés*, Péter Bacsó's fourth feature film, delves into the overwhelming sense of suffocation, disillusionment, hopelessness, failure, and greyness that characterised this era. The movie uses a minimalist approach to depict the mood of the generation it represents, as it becomes an imprint of an era in which young people first experienced the more permissive but silently suffocating climate of Kádárism while the Leninist assertion that the youth were important allies of the socialist revolution continued (Greene, 2013). In comparison, during this period, youth subcultures in the West became countercultures, and a sort of cultural revolution unfolded, which Hungarian youth saw as a manifestation of their desires—although their knowledge of the real West was minimal and state-controlled (Horváth, 2009, pp.163–183). In addition to standing as an accurate imprint of the fascinating Hungarian '60s, *Fejlövés* is a timeless work that speaks to the youth of all ages with its raw and austere style (Schubert, 2004).

The years following the regime change (1989–1990) were characterised by openness towards the Western world, freedom, and liberation, but also by uncertainty and a lack of trust in the government (Bíró et al., 2016). The film *Moszkva tér*, directed by Ferenc Török, is regarded as a cinematic rep-

resentation that captures the public sentiment and mood of this particular era. This cult film, which portrays the youth of the period in a realistic and unfiltered manner, manages to encapsulate the decade, replete with both high hope and profound misery for the Hungarian people (Szász, 2001).

These two films are about distinct periods, yet they share peer interactions as a theme and, even more so, the notion of not caring (Szabó, 2001). However, while peer interaction and documentary tools show estrangement, suffocation, and the hopelessness of not caring in *Fejlövés*, peer interaction shows the freedom of not caring in *Moszkva tér*. But how do the visual components and the composition convey the messages of the films? How is hopelessness portrayed in *Fejlövés* during a time when one cannot make an explicit statement? Based on my research, the visualisation of the documentary features in *Fejlövés*, the combination of different elements (compositional aspects, acting, camera movements, techniques, and styles) in *Moszkva tér*, and the colouring and posters of the films, among other factors, contribute to transmitting the movies' messages. In *Fejlövés*, the contrast with contemporary groups, the lack of verbalisation, the actors' facial expressions, and the documentary features all contribute to the overall sense of bleakness and hopelessness that characterise the film.

In this paper, I explore how the defining traits mentioned earlier in *Fejlövés* and *Moszkva tér* emerge, discuss how these films communicate their messages while portraying young people of their own eras, and then present my findings by giving an elaborate analysis with the necessary film historical context. This research paper was conducted using relevant analyses published by prominent Hungarian and international film scholars and draws upon my own examinations of film form and style elements, close readings of selected scenes, genre analysis, semiotic examination, and contextual breakdown.

Both *Fejlövés* and *Moszkva tér* have relatively straightforward plots, with few protagonists, timelines, and plot threads. Péter Bacsó is one of the most significant, multiple award-winning Hungarian screenwriter-directors, who later directed the cult classic *A tanú* (The Witness, 1979), a satirical dramedy and his fifth feature film. His fourth feature film, *Fejlövés*, follows Klári, a divorced twenty-two-year-old nurse who quits her position at the hospital and moves to Pest with her unemployed boyfriend, Laci. There, she meets Laci's friend, Béla, who supports himself by stealing cars. The

three of them drive to Kecskemét to see her family. Klári's mother rejects her and her lifestyle, so they return to the capital and discover that Laci's father intends to report him for car theft. The young people have no home or prospects, so Laci suggests they commit suicide using the gun found in the stolen automobile. They set off for the Visegrád Forest, an iconic Hungarian landmark, where they intend to commit suicide together. On the way, however, Klári hesitates and suggests to Béla they wait until Laci shoots himself, and then, instead of following him to his death, they should defect together.

The uniqueness of *Fejlövés* can be partly attributed to its documentary nature, which has been present since the film's inception. In 1965, Péter Bacsó read a five-line police report in the newspaper *Népszabadság* (The People's Freedom, Hungary's most renowned national political and public daily newspaper until its closure in October 2016—Polyák and Urbán, 2016), which reported the conviction of two young people for “participating” in a suicide. As the director summarised it: “A 19-year-old worker and his slightly older lover, a divorced young woman, and one of the boy's friends decide to commit suicide together. They ‘borrow’ a car, specifically a Ministry of Interior vehicle, in which they find a service pistol. They decide to run with it while the gas lasts, and then all three take their own lives. However, things turn out differently” (Esti Hírlap, 1967, p.2).¹ To create *Fejlövés*, Bacsó thoroughly studied the investigation material, contacted the convicted individuals (the real person behind the character of Béla served his prison sentence in Sátoraljaújhely, and the woman who inspired Klári worked as a nurse in Kecskemét), and even reached out to their families and former workplaces. The use of documentary tools in cinematography profoundly impacts the audience's engagement with the story, thereby forging a closer emotional connection. Given their stripped-down and naturalistic way of portraying reality, these tools enable the audience to perceive the film's narrative with greater accuracy and relate it to the real world (Sherwood, no date). By employing these tools, *Fejlövés* presents an unvarnished and raw view of the country and Hungarian youth, where there is no room for theatricality or fiction.

¹ Translation by the author.

Emphasising the documentary aspect, Péter Bacsó meticulously reconstructed the actual events hour by hour when adapting them to the screen. Together with screenwriter Péter Zimre, they wrote a screenplay faithfully following reality, initially titled *Csirkék az országúton* (Chickens on the Highway). Every scene in the film was shot in the actual locations where the events had happened. Although capturing the intimate reality posed a significant cinematographic challenge, the award-winning cinematographer János Zsombolyai's handheld shots, taken from a parallel-moving motorcycle or even on a custom-made trailer, effectively and realistically followed the characters' paths in both the vehicle and life. The shots are so authentic that they refrained from using background projections, and the opening long take reflects the observational reality creation typical of direct cinema, a documentary style that aims to capture reality objectively and directly, using hand-held cameras, live synchronous sound, and long cuts. Movies employing this technique, such as Albert and David Maysles' *Salesmen* (1969), Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery* (1956), or Agostino Imondi and Dietmar Ratsch's *Neukölln Unlimited* (2010) omit the use of montage and narration, instead relying on the authenticity of the events captured. While *Fejlövés* introduced technical innovations, it also sparked ethical considerations in the documentary filmmaking field. The American direct cinema approach maintains an observer perspective, unlike the French *cinéma vérité*, which sometimes intrudes on the filmed space with microphones and disruptive questioning, often during the editing process (Dér, 2011, p.32). *Fejlövés* does not follow the *cinéma vérité* approach, and the camera is present only as an observer; it is not explicitly stated that what is seen on the screen is part of a film, making it even easier for the viewer to see the characters' stories as part of their own lives.

These documentary-minimalist style elements and filmmaking techniques in creating a Hungarian feature film evoke the Budapest School's historical era in cinema (Gelencsér, 2010). Although this era is generally considered to have taken place from the 1970s onwards (1973–1981), according to Gusztáv Schubert, one of Hungary's more prominent film scholars and film critics, *Fejlövés* is more of a precursor to the significant documentary-style fiction films that became prevalent in the latter half of the 1970s (Schubert, 2004). This assertion is particularly reinforced by the film's sociological interest, orientation towards actual events, and the in-

clusion of amateur actors who could have been part of the story. Bacsó considered this aspect particularly important from a dramaturgical perspective: “I found it inconceivable to play *Fejlövés* with actors because the style of this film is not built on dialogues but on primary behavioral forms” (Esti Hírlap, 1967, p.2). Thus, he sought a “romantic worker boy,” a “more daring but repressed character” (a person with latent rage), and a “tragic 20-something-year-old girl” (Esti Hírlap, 1967, p.2). Since the characters are built from broad indicators and basic behavioral characteristics rather than from nuanced, finely developed personality traits, the director’s intention must indeed have been to create a more universal, archetypal story that would present an intuitively graspable picture of the lives of young people in socialist society. This cinematic approach, particularly the usage of amateur actors during filming, is intended to present the characters and their dynamics as realistically as possible, showing a slice of life with people who are not professional actors; therefore, they could be anyone, including any of the viewers.

This argument presents an unexplored realm of analysis, suggesting that the film’s intended audience is not merely confined to people who have experienced the socialist era. Rather, it can have a powerful impact on anyone who can relate to the melancholic state experienced by the characters. This could be due to a dual directorial intention: to portray the experience of young people under a softened dictatorship and to carry a universal message that later generations could relate to.

The camera movement confirms this intention: the visual embodiment of documentary traits is also reflected in the fact that we see the characters either from a very long distance or a very close distance. This technique allows us to immerse ourselves in the characters’ experiences through the close-ups and evaluate their behaviour through the long and medium shots. However, the frequency of cuts is unbalanced, consistently positioned either too close or too far from the camera, resulting in an unsettling and disoriented feeling that corresponds with the film’s tone (Sharman, 2020).

In *Fejlövés*, a sense of despair, oppression, aimlessness, and drifting is particularly palpable throughout the scenes (Nemes, 1979). When the three protagonists head towards Kecskemét, they playfully compete with a Western group of similar age on the road, holding onto each other, and the foreigners refuse to let go of Klári’s hand, but she is not letting go either



Figure 1. Screenshot via NFI's YouTube Channel—The foreign teenagers are holding Klári's hand and trying to pull her into their car. This is one of the brightest moments in the movie, visually. <https://youtu.be/7C6Uyn5y-Sc?si=PTAWIWLByM4P4c0d>

(Figure 1). In this scene, it becomes apparent that Klári and her companions have not given up on liberation, happiness, or the carefree, stereotypically youthful feeling the foreigner group represents; Klári, Laci, and Béla want to have fun, and they are happy to do so, they are just so constrained and deprived in their daily lives that they do not have any capacity for action. They just need something or someone to bring this carefree joyfulness into their lives since, in their Kádár-era weekdays, even their momentary joys are burdened by the puritan, authoritarian, and bitter parental worldview defined by Schubert as an “avid adult dictatorship” (Schubert, 2004). Politics is not present in the world of Klári and her companions, but an imprint of repression is everywhere. The dictatorship has been softened, yet everything is forbidden: not even sitting on the ferry railing is allowed. They do not talk about politics and are not critical, but this kind of silence also shows a system where the thoughts and interests of young people are not significant; they live as subordinates in their own country. This prohibition and silence weigh on the young people, so the contrast is stark when they are placed alongside foreign youth in a scene. The juxtaposition gives the viewer room to see how the young Hungarians are trying to be lifted out of the monotonous world of the grey. Even though the film is black and

white, there are a lot of grey undertones, so visually, it is also a representation of the greyness the characters live in. Other movies made in the same year were in colour, such as *Bolondos vakáció* (A Cloudless Vacation, 1968, directed by Károly Makk), and other Bacsó movies were more vivid even though they were shot in black and white, such as *Szerelmes biciklisták* (Cyclists in Love, 1965). But the foreigners cannot succeed in saving them, as the symbolism of the scene shows. There is a masterfully created substantial discrepancy between the genuine, enduring happiness experienced by foreign youths and the Hungarian ones who experience joy only momentarily (while holding onto each other or until they are separated by passing vehicles), living it out in a stolen car, unable to transfer to the other vehicle.

In contrast to the ephemeral happiness of the characters in *Fejlövés*, Ferenc Török's *Moszkva tér* paints a different picture of Hungarian youth and their peer interactions. The juxtaposition with peer groups, as in *Fejlövés*, also plays a consequential role in *Moszkva tér*, as it is present in almost every scene. The movie is set in Budapest during the 1989 regime change, where the four main characters (Petya, Kigler, Rojál, and Csömör) navigate their lives after finishing high school exams. Despite the exciting and turbulent political changes, their concerns revolve around transitioning into adulthood: parties, girls, and smaller or bigger shenanigans. Our characters eagerly await party invitations at Moszkva tér (now Széll Kálmán tér), one of Budapest's most central and most iconic locations, obtain matura questions (the exit exam used in Hungary) in advance by cheating, and forge train tickets.

Although *Moszkva tér* is Ferenc Török's university graduation film (exam film), it combines documentary and more theatrical elements, showcasing the young people of its era. The film alternates between documentary tools, such as handheld camera shots, bringing authenticity and lifelikeness to the movie. These shots allow the cameraman to closely track events, giving the audience a sense of immediacy, and may replicate a character's movement in point-of-view shots (Brashear, 2024). It also features video-clip-like cut scenes (especially the party scenes) and discreetly compact visual symbols (e.g. references to colour or freedom in almost every scene), which exude a sense of composition (Kalmár, 2016). This duality is also reflected in the choice of actors and casting. Some of them went to drama school (Gábor Karalyos as Petya, Eszter Balla as

Zsófi) and others were high-school students (Bence Jávör as Ságodi), while the older characters were played by respected, well-known actors (Erzsi Pápai, Imre Csuga), among whom Ilona Béres, the high school principal and the embodiment of Kádárism, stands out: her character is pure hypocrisy, lukewarmness, and frivolous authority (Szász, 2001). The same mixture is reflected in the fact that this film was made in 2001 (not in the period it is about), yet it is considered a highly authentic generational film (*nemzedéki közérzetfilm*) that aims to portray a generation's response to a social context and capture a state of being with distinctive, panoptical storytelling (Nemzeti Filmintézet, no date). This prominent position is helped by the fact that every piece of clothing, utensil, and location faithfully reflects the now laughable Westernised Balkanism of the regime change, i.e. West-imitating elements from the Balkans spilling over into Hungary during the regime change (Szabó, 2001). The film's message is also reflected in its composition, since most dialogues are improvised. In this way, the lack of a script makes the film more lifelike and unpredictable (Szabó, 2001). This element allows us to see that the unadorned elements in *Fejlövés* convey impressions and moods opposite to those conveyed by the same elements in *Moszkva tér*. In the first case, the film form contains rigid, strictly documentary elements (Bacsó even specifically banished the anecdotal elements to preserve the dryness of the style, while anecdotal storytelling forms the basis of his other films), thus portraying the rigidity of the strict way of life and the boundaries of the people living under the Kádár regime. Meanwhile, in the second case, the experimentation with genres and film forms conveys playfulness, freedom, and informality, which also transmit the perception of the life of young people of the era (in this case, during the regime change).

In both films, the characters' perceptions of life are best illustrated by their attitudes towards politics, since they all have in common that none are explicitly interested in the world around them. In *Fejlövés*, Béla and Klári want to defect, but there is no mention of exactly what keeps them imprisoned in this country. No specific political figures are named, nor are the words socialism, communism, or the Kádár era mentioned. This lack of verbalisation is an imprint of an oppressive, silenced, materialistic world where the captors (who cause the Byronic spleen and lethargy of Klári and her companions) are not even articulated. Yet for Klári, Laci, and Béla, not

caring brings not freedom, but suffocation, as they feel trapped in a system where the only way out is suicide. They are also confined spatially, since they can only cross the border illegally, and so their illusory freedom with the stolen car becomes a critical symbolic component, where the car's running out of petrol symbolises the characters' dwindling will to live (Schubert, 2004).

In contrast, the characters of *Moszkva tér* use the names of political figures freely and without filter, even in the context of swearing ("Who the tit is Imre Nagy?" says Rojál). Petya and his circle of friends (who are constantly interacting with peers, as the story centres around friend groups) are able to witness the funeral of János Kádár, an event of great symbolic significance in the context of the two films, as Kádár is portrayed as the oppressor in *Fejlövés*. In contrast, in this film, he is powerless because he is deceased. Additionally, the protagonists can watch the reburial of Imre Nagy on television as the world opens up to them, resulting in a decrease in political falsehoods, an influx of Western values and products, and a general sense of freedom, representing the first breaths of '90s democracy. However, they are still dealing with their own very closed world because they can *choose* not to care about everything that goes on around them, and this only gives them the freedom and space to party, have fun, fall in love, be mischievous, cheat, shoplift, and be young. The "guardians of the system" seem to be complicit in this; their power is negligible, and the film also takes an ironic view of authority: the homeroom teacher criticises and eludes the system, the policeman accepts the breakfast rolls from boys eating breakfast illegally on the bridge, the night watchman of the Gellért baths even turns on the wave at night for some skim money, and the taxi driver will take them anywhere in exchange for some whiskey. One of the most important scenes of the film for my analysis is also a scene with peer interaction, particularly when Zsófi's boyfriend tells off Petya and his friends, who are sneaking into one of the parties illegally (it is basically only in this one scene that the boys are held accountable), for theft and vandalism. He is also taken off the moral high ground when it turns out that the boyfriend is going to the Russian embassy for various programs, i.e. he is presumably a beneficiary of the old regime (Kalmár, 2016).

The attitudes and emotional worlds of the characters, as well as the messages of both films, are powerfully conveyed through visual means, includ-



Figure 2. First poster via MaNDA

already hit her. This may imply that she is not in the crosshairs of death by her own free will (i.e. the crosshairs of death did not hit her because she intended to commit suicide), but that something or someone is waiting for her and forcing her to be in the crosshairs. This poster could depict the life experiences of young people dispossessed by a gutting system that gives them no incentive to live.

The other poster for *Fejlövés* (Figure 3) is in black and white and shows a scene from the film where the three characters are physically close to each other, and Béla is handing a gun to Klári. Here, too, it is worth observing the facial expressions of the characters: on Béla's face (the young man in the driver's seat), there is a look of superiority, but also a kind of resignation, as if he were Pontius Pilate who

ing the imagery of the films' posters. Therefore, we can get an accurate picture of the sentiments and character types the movies represent before even seeing them. *Fejlövés* has two official posters, one in colour (Figure 2), namely red, white, and green, which clearly and unmistakably evoke the Hungarian flag, thus indicating that this is a universal story about national youth. Despite its colourfulness, the image of Klári's head in the crosshairs has no joyful connotations. The facial expression of the female protagonist on the poster conveys a sense of disillusionment and boredom, reinforced by the fact that she does not look at the camera, as if the crosshairs have

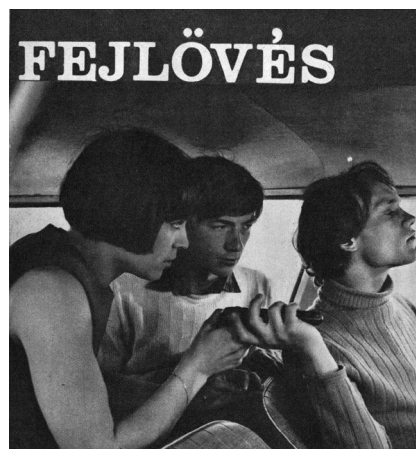


Figure 3. Second poster via NFI

“washed his hands” when handing over the gun. Klári’s face shows concern and tact, as if she is afraid of what they are about to do (in this respect, it is also important to note that they are the two who will not actually commit suicide), while Laci’s gaze shows darkness and dedication—he is aware of what it means to want to break free from the system.

In contrast, the poster for *Moszkva tér* is almost bursting with life, full of colour (also, remarkably, different shades of red, white, and green, which may convey a similar message to the poster for *Fejlövés*) and combining various patterns and collage techniques, which also suggest the looseness and complexity of the film and the era. It might seem that the contrast between the posters of *Fejlövés* and *Moszkva tér* is due to a change in audience expectations regarding movie posters. However, if we examine a poster of *Hamvadó cigarettavég* (also directed by Bacsó, 2001), made in the very same year as *Moszkva tér*, it is visible that it uses subdued brown-yellow elements and, similarly to *Fejlövés*, harkens back to the overwhelming hopelessness, acquiring simplicity with its usage of font, poster imagery, and colouring, which all transmit the message of that film (Figure 4). Thus, we can conclude that *Moszkva tér*’s poster is not simply intended to serve the demands of posters in the 2000s, but effectively disseminates the image of carefree young people during the regime change.

In addition, the tagline on the poster of *Moszkva tér*, which serves as a brief description of the film, can be translated as: “party, chicks, wheels” (*buli, csajok, verda*), thus setting a tone for the story and its central themes. Moreover, all these words are expressed in a very colloquial form in Hungarian, so the tagline defines a linguistic register used by a certain age and social group. Furthermore, one of our protagonists is shirtless, which also



Figure 4. *Hamvadó cigarettavég* poster/
DVD cover via Lira



Figure 5. Poster for *Moszkva tér* via Port.hu

strongly symbolises the freedom that once seemed impossible in Hungary, as depicted by *Fejlövés* (Figure 5).

In conclusion, the two seemingly different but undoubtedly brilliant films, Péter Bacsó's *Fejlövés* and Ferenc Török's *Moszkva tér*, create the feeling of authenticity through different techniques (documentary and collage), which are shown through visual components and visual symbolism (for instance, colouring), compositional aspects, acting, camera movements (the proportion of close-ups and long shots and the harmony, or lack of harmony, of the cuts), and styles. Both movies represent the lives of young people from two distinctive

periods of Hungarian history who share a common lack of care. Yet, they process this indifference in terms of the political system they live under. While the repressive, confining system of *Fejlövés* stifles and disillusions its young people, the liberated characters in *Moszkva tér* consciously choose the freedom of not caring and achieve more freedom by it. As observed, the films' every niche detail serves to convey their message artistically and provide a complex and truly multifaceted picture of a country that is, at its core, intertwined with oppression, showcasing ups, downs, valleys, and hills—and it is as if they present two completely opposite Hungaries, yet both are unadulteratedly and bittersweetly Hungarian.

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