

Dalma Feró - Orsolya Bajusz
Surviving Hungarian "feminism" and "leftism"

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Abstract

Our autoethnography, based on the dialectic of our personal experiences and the relevant literature, examines certain aspects of the hegemonic struggles taking place in the Hungarian public sphere. We use our respective but interconnected personal narratives as data to draw inductive conclusions within the limitations of the method. Our analysis is focused on actors who play an important role on the "progressive" side of hegemonic struggles, and we examine the fields, systems of relationships, and mechanisms by which they exert an influence. We describe the mechanisms through which progressive actors neutralize, transform, integrate, or silence public discourses that question the logic of dual hegemony, through which they restore the underlying moral order of good progressivism vs. Following the emerging conflicts, we reflect on the relationships between progressive actors, the habitus patterns that connect them, the relationships between allegedly separate (political, artistic, scientific) fields, as well as on the extension of the logic of the political field to other fields. At the beginning of our story, we critiqued modernity and liberalism as women (through feminist theory), but by the end of the story, we realized as Hungarians and as Eastern Europeans that the actually existing Hungarian feminism is a replicator of modernist myths and a tool of (cultural) imperialism.

Keywords: autoethnography, hegemonic struggles, feminism, left politics, NGO, culture, science, field studies, vampire castle, mobbing, cancel culture, no-platforming, self-censorship, tactical media

1. Introduction

The following is the story of our encounter with Hungarian feminist and left-wing activism. In the course of this encounter and its analysis, we acquired knowledge that we could not have acquired either by observation or by studying the literature.

We have previously written papers based on theoretical engagement and discourse analysis related to these topics (FERÓ and BAJUSZ 2018; BAJUSZ 2019; FERÓ 2019a; FERÓ 2020), focusing mainly on the macro- or meso-level. In this autoethnography, we discuss what it was like to personally experience the struggles around "gender issues", how we made sense of this experience, and what knowledge we gained: how we connected the micro level (including our own experiences) with meso and macro processes (see LASLETT 1999).

Through feminism, we encountered the rear-guard struggles of the declining liberal hegemony (GRAMSCI 1977[1947]; MOUFFE 2005; FERÓ 2020), and we are sharing the knowledge attained through this experience in this autoethnography. We experienced a particular,

hegemonic mode of contesting issues and combating opponents, which is often thematized in the media as a purely cultural phenomenon rather than as a part of a broader hegemonic struggle, and which has relatively little academic literature vis-à-vis its explicit prevalence and increasingly worrying dimensions in some countries. Besides the analysis by Angela Nagle (2017), mainly essays and journalistic analyses have focused on the interconnected dynamics of the 'vampire castle' (FISHER 2018 [2013]) and cancel culture (i.e. the culture of silencing). Our story testifies to the existence of cancel culture in Hungary, despite the fact that researchers and activists working on 'gender' usually deny that there is a significant domestic prevalence of dogmatic and censorious gender activism (especially transgender activism). As we have seen, what matters is not how many people believe and promote these ideas about 'gender', but how these actors are entangled in wider hegemonic struggles through institutions, networks, and funding, and whether they are capable of silencing even incipient critiques.

The culture of silencing is not in itself remarkable but as part of wider political struggles. In the extensive network that we encountered, actors playing a role in creating and maintaining a public sphere based on silencing and character assassination include NGO, academic, cultural and media workers. The culture of silencing also has unintended consequences: it contributes to obscuring the false dichotomy of two historical-political blocs opposing each other, and thus to the structuring of the public sphere through a moralising binary of false opposites (Western-oriented tolerant progressives vs backward barbaric haters).

The main question that we want to answer with our autoethnography is what actors in which arenas and through what networks play an important role in such a hegemonic struggle on the 'progressive' side. Our method produced knowledge that would not have been accessible by any other means. Our personal narrative consists of empirical data (descriptions of events and actors) and the interpretation of our experiences. In line with the logic of the hegemonic struggle, conflicts emerged in fields where hegemonic positions were at stake (e.g. expertise, networks, definitions, good practice). We analyse such changes and contingencies: how certain fields (especially scientific and cultural) also lose their relative autonomy. Our conclusions are inductive, so the autoethnographic narrative is the data from which we draw our (methodologically limited) conclusions.

2. Method

Autoethnography is a diverse genre that combines elements of autobiography and ethnography, illuminating cultural, social, and political phenomena and processes through individual experience (ELLIS, ADAMS and BOCHNER 2011). Social sciences adapt this method due to both questioning previous notions of power relations and the quest for objectivity inherent in traditional ethnography, so autoethnography requires a completely new set of evaluation criteria (ELLIS and BOCHNER 2000; SPARKES 2000; HOLT 2003). Although ethnography has never been free of the ethnographer's subjectivity, the ethnographic self has been banished in the name of supposed objectivity in traditional ethnography, while autoethnography reflects openly on subjectivity, intersubjectivity and emotions inherent to doing social science (COFFEY 1999; ELLIS, ADAMS and BOCHNER 2011). By representing and contextualising personal experience, autoethnography can make the inextricable link between the personal and the

cultural, social and political expressive and perceptive, rather than the separation and distance created by adopting descriptive language (ELLIS 2004).

Autoethnography is also an established way of giving voice to (previously) underrepresented social groups, therefore used by feminists and "indigenous" people (ETTORRE 2016; ELLIS, ADAMS and BOCHNER 2011). Our writing is primarily informed by the tensions between feminist and "indigenous" narratives, as we were caught in the middle of a political struggle as both feminist women and contesters of the kind of progressivism that follows the ethos of the 'developed West'. With our autoethnography, we seek to make tangible the cultural and social processes (HOLT 2003; SPARKES 1996) that we have come to understand in this environment. In our writing, the personal narrative is a leitmotif through which we narrate a particular experience (what it is like to get close to the political power struggles in Hungary through our involvement with so-called feminism), which is also an example of a much more general experience (what it is like to encounter an alien social and cultural milieu). As we contextualise personal experience, it necessarily becomes not only about our personal feelings, intentions, cognition and actions, but also about the socio-cultural milieu around us, in line with the genre of autoethnography.

Through our personal narrative and interpretation, we would like to reflect on the attitude structures already described by others, which are contingent on ideological regimes and the internal structural features of Hungarian society (Hadas 2020; Farkas 2011). Autoethnography is inherently subjective and speculative, as cultural studies is essentially an interpretation, and we do not claim any representativeness. This is the story of two women who got close to politics as civic participants in the original sense of the word. We did not get involved to write an (auto)ethnography. We were not participant-observers, but wholehearted participants, and important participants. With this text we are attempting an epistemic reflection (BOURDIEU 1989): reflecting on our position, but not attempting to objectify ourselves - we did not and do not want to assume the position of the objective, disinterested, impartial observer, who is above the research field as a representative of science. We describe the intentions that moved us and the principles we believed in. It is a conscious decision to treat our feelings as data, and accordingly, in our personal histories, we have both reflected on how we reacted emotionally in particular situations, and the responses we received from our environment. By interpreting the structuring logic of these encounters, inductively we arrive at the descriptions of broader cultural patterns and attitudinal structures.

Dalma Feró

I got involved in human rights activism as a naïve young university student, unversed in current social and political debates. I was completely unfamiliar with this milieu: my parents were first generation intellectuals, both from the countryside, had never studied in Budapest, had never been actively involved in public affairs, and didn't know people who were; my former friends and acquaintances had a similar background. I first volunteered in a human rights organisation, and then a few years later I started to get involved with feminist and "LGBT" issues. I never wanted to be an actor in the public sphere, it was more for our own entertainment that I and a handful of close friends brought humour and creativity to the pride march which was something like a funeral procession at the time. It was around this time that I began to interpret current affairs

from a leftist-critical perspective. A few friends and I formed a group to present leftist perspectives within the "LGBT" movement (FERÓ et al 2013). After a few years, we realised that all such criticism just rolls off from the entirely liberal "LGBT" movement, so we didn't want to invest any more energy in trying to "initiate dialogue".

It was around this time that I met a couple of women with whom I shared a feminist theoretical approach, very different from the ideas of those who considered themselves official feminists. This soon had its consequences: we were lectured, reproached and reprimanded for not being feminists according to the rules of the liberal public sphere. Despite all this, and without listening to my common sense, I convinced myself that it was worth bringing critical feminist ideas into the really existing feminist scene.

A topic that I had never dealt with before and had never been interested in soon became a watershed in the feminist community. This happened when a "transgender" activist I barely knew approached both Orsolya Bajusz and me just out of the blue, and wanted to ask us what we thought about TERFs, because if our opinion wasn't aligning with his opinion, then we had no place in feminism. We were caught by the thought police of trans activism because we probably had committed a social media crime through liking or commenting, and they wanted to punish us as a pre-emptive strike. Since I had refused to be questioned by this violent man, he soon started to rant against "transphobic" feminists (against us) on Facebook.

This is when the lynch mob campaign began and escalated: first lies about us and our personal lives, then increasingly blatant smears and threats. Had this been merely the whim of this one transactivist, it would never have come to this. The key moment is not how disturbed this trans activist was, that he sexually and physically assaulted several women, blackmailed several others with suicide threats, and made veiled threats to a women's rights organisation that he would file a discrimination suit if he was not hired as an operator of a telephone helpline for battered women. What made this dangerous was the fact that several individuals who identified themselves as feminists had rallied behind this man, an out-patient at a psychiatric hospital.

Central to the ensuing mobbing was a Facebook group. Founded in 2016, the main profile of the Genderfészek group in its first year has been the slander and defamation of "TERFs" (technically the two of us). The members of the group there and elsewhere in public posts called us crazy, insane, subhuman, hateful, violent criminals (we committed violent crimes with our articles!), disgusting, Fidesz supporters, fascists, nazis, people of Mária Schmidt (a conservative official) who are employed to destroy Hungarian feminism with Marxist articles. These so-called feminists have even joined forces with the main supporters of the sex industry to attack us together. These bullies, encouraging each other in this bubble, also harassed us in personal messages. Many years of my life passed with getting a stomach cramp from opening the internet.

Previously I only had a very superficial understanding of the feminist debate around transgenderism; I started to read more deeply about the issue in order to understand what was happening to us. I used to be of the naive opinion that transgender people were not harming

anyone by identifying with a “gender” other than their biological sex. I had no idea at the time how much more complicated this issue was, and I was shocked to realise that I was being persecuted for thought crimes. As I read up on the otherwise accurate feminist critiques that have now been pushed out of mainstream discourse and much of academia, I realised that rights claims based on 'gender identity' fundamentally affect not only women and children, but freedom of thought and expression. If rights claims are based on the 'recognition' of an indefinable and unprovable inner feeling that contradicts biological reality, then the naming and telling of reality is censored. The logical conclusion of these 'transgender' rights claims can lead to a dangerous dystopia, as can be observed in many Western countries.

In public articles and personal debates, I have tried to explain, using feminist concepts, where the limitlessness of gender self-determination conflicts with women's rights. Of course, this was not followed by a 'dialogue', but by a further campaign of slander, lies, and harassment against me. In retrospect, I regret very much that I ever tried to reason with this increasingly unhinged social milieu. Looking back at all these years later, I consider my trans-Jewish works (FERÓ 2018a[2016], 2018b[2016], 2018c[2016]) a much better initiative, in which I reflected on the same issues through my own means, with humour and creativity, without the illusion that anything can be explained to a lynch mob.

Over time, the "trans-inclusive" activists have made straw men of us, attributing to us every utterance they didn't like. On this basis, they tried to prevent me from speaking in public. For example, they wanted to have me removed from my radio programme in a community radio station, and they approached women's rights and gay rights organisations, urging them to issue a statement calling my writings hate speech, which they could then use in a lawsuit against me. On another occasion, a transgender former member of the green party threatened with his suicide to prevent me from speaking on another liberal radio station, and there were 'feminists' and their families who called on the editors and even owners of various media outlets to stop me from publishing in those media.

Among the many cases, I would like to highlight one of the most serious transgressions, when we were defamed by a so-called journalist in a national media outlet. This happened after the opening of the exhibition, which was hosting the screening of our Transjew short film. The trans activist that started to harass us first disrupted the opening, again positioning himself as a victim. After the opening Orsolya ordered him out of the room while I also told him to leave. He then continued the self-victimisation on Facebook, saying we "abused and threatened him", "de-sexed" him, with "despicable aggression beyond the Nazis". MNO's media worker, Dávid Lakner, reported the disturbed trans activist's Facebook comments as facts, and of course did not contact us before or after writing the article. It was quite clearly a character assassination campaign: a media worker belonging to the Genderfészek network publicly slandered us, two non-public figures, with the Facebook lies of a trans-activist. Of course, the media outlet was soon embarrassed by the article and took it down, but thousands or tens of thousands of people still read the slander.

Meanwhile, there were others in so-called feminist activism who also did not believe in the dogmas of transactivism: almost the entire women's rights NGO network. For a long time, we considered them our allies and tried to work with them to give greater visibility to the gender-critical feminist views that were being totally suppressed in the liberal public sphere. Yet we were too naive to consider that these actors, socialized in liberal networks, would not give up their positions. We did not want to realise that they never for a second stood up for us whilst we were being subjected to a series of crimes, yet they were lecturing and disciplining us on how we should behave and how we should speak. The way they pushed me to the front line whilst expecting me to smile and engage in "calm dialogue" with a herd of violent trolls and bullies in accordance with bourgeois liberal etiquette was in fact more outrageous than the open attacks of the transgenderists.

The hardest thing for me personally was realizing that the people I thought to be my allies and idealistic, principled people like me, turned out to be spineless manipulators. I didn't realise that they were trampling all over me to regain the resources and influence they had lost because of transgender activism, meanwhile still active in their same old political networks. In the background, they made deals with "left-liberal" parties and various industrial lobbies, and therefore their interests were sacrosanct: for example, the white-cap party woman mafia bosses¹ and their "civic" subcontractors cooperated on several occasions in the run-up to the 2019 EP elections (FERÓ 2019b). I had to realise that the problems are much deeper than I had first thought: transgender identity politics is not the only problem, but also the rearguard struggles of political interest groups defending their crumbling hegemony tooth and nail.

One of the very important things I have realised is that individual responsibility should not be swept under the carpet. Although individual actions happen within the wider context of social relations, and of course, the individual is shaped in dialogue with them, it is a mistake to deny individual agency. The progressivist network has morally relativised or outright denied the serious crimes committed against us, pointing at macro processes or on the 'internalised misogyny' of the perpetrators and thus their victim status, while we have been handed annihilating moral sentences for even one word deemed offensive, even if it was written in a six-member private Facebook group. It slowly dawned on me that they judged who was moral, responsible, oppressed or evil according to what supported their narrative. Yet it is not true that anyone could have been in the place of my cancellers, as I saw many people resisting the lynching mob. In my experience, those who became the chief instigators of the witch-hunt were those who, lacking real talent and knowledge, sought to assert themselves in the public sphere or felt power by merging into the lynch mob.

This mob culture, as I have come to realise, is not an enclosure within the wider public: it is made possible by, or an integral part of, or even an extension of its essential logic, exposing the wider problems of the public sphere. It is no coincidence that nobody wanted to address the problems around gender activism in the liberal public sphere because through this they would be exposing themselves, since the liberal public sphere and woke gender activism operate according to the same logic and through the same networks. As one public intellectual feminist

¹ https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20190522_miert-nincs-magyarorszagon-baloldal

reflecting on her own milieu (the children of famous fathers and mothers living in a posh area of Buda) has said, the informalities that pervade her own social milieu make the public sphere a playground for a select few:

In the vast majority of cases, there is no question of nepotism in the narrow sense, because there is no need for it: what you call bourgeois habitus, plus the social capital of trust that one's upbringing and parents provide, essentially guarantees, without any further intervention, that one has a thousand times better chance of getting publicity than others. This is also influenced by the fact that the older generation is happy to promote their mates' kids, plus the fact that this clique has known each other since childhood from here and there (camps, study groups, high school, parents' acquaintances). And a big part in all this is that the press workers do their job with about zero sense of quality. For me, it took years of reflection to understand that in this country, coming from such a social environment, you can really say just about anything, and that only I can control myself by studying, reading, saying no, because no one will do it for me, no one will "expose me.

These media personalities, politicians, and self-identified 'civic' activists, is a single network, a single undifferentiated field. For example, the 'strategy meetings' organised by a German political foundation's 'gender equality' officer were attended by party politicians, academics, 'civic participants' and 'journalists' alike. In a personal conversation, she also revealed how she was training a journalist of the Soros network to promote not only her activities but also her affiliated "experts", such as the 'expert' who offers individual and group therapy a "therapist" and a "porn expert" but doesn't even have a BA degree. The people in these theoretically distinct professions come from the same socialisation and milieu (an urban network, which has known each other since childhood, as well as certain educational institutions and 'civic' political communities), and this socialisation rather than professional, meritocratic selection criteria prevails.

Getting to know this milieu better, I understood why they are so keen to make people believe that men can be women, women can be men, as the fiction of human sex change fits perfectly into their modus operandi of claiming non-existent knowledge, talent, importance and often victim and/or hero status to themselves. The secret is that if they have enough money and institutional backing, they can pass off anything as oppression, victim status, and expertise. I was very quickly confronted with the fact that the "most progressive ones" want to sell an orbital downtown freakshow as a pledge of progressivism, but for a long time I saw this as an anomaly, not a necessity arising from a deeper structuring logic. Over time, I came to realise that the reason they cannot tolerate humor and irony is because they can only maintain their narrative with the pathos, the deference, the pious tone required by their declared victim status - as soon as this tone is challenged, their game is over.

I was so naïve that for a long time I didn't want to notice the signs that made it quite obvious that for the inner-city-Budapest network I belonged to a lower caste. Anyone who comes from outside into this environment has his or her role possibilities circumscribed: he or she can be an

expendable foot soldier, perhaps a token oppressed victim unable to speak for himself or herself, or if he or she does not prove to be a useful enough asset, a "barbarian" to be civilized, and if that fails, a public enemy. All this is backed up by a closed-circuit logic revolving around their own goodness: everything is judged in relation to this, everyone can only be inferior who does not see the world according to their interests and does not speak their language. Even then, it was clear to me that they wanted to destroy us because we spoke out of the 'progressive' consensus. I realised a little later that they dared to do this because we were nobodies by their standards. We were not affiliated with any political (including so-called civic) institutions, we were not part of any political or overlapping informal networks, and we didn't even try to play the "rational, serious public person" but spoke the truth directly and without tactics. This came, of course, with time, as in the beginning I was influenced by their mafia tactics: sometimes I even censored my own thoughts, simply finding it unthinkable to criticise certain 'progressive' causes. I can think of times when I have started to, but I have immediately dismissed the forbidden ideas. Gradually, I began to let go of the compulsion to conform and fit in, and then I began to believe my own thoughts and feelings.

Ultimately this is a story of captivity and liberation: I fell into the trap of a self-proclaimed vanguard that treated me as a dog at best, an asset at worst, but over time I managed to shake off the chains. During those times, I was truly free when I acted according to my own moral and aesthetic standards, when I could live with the humour and creativity that the sour activist tribunal was trying to uproot in me (as in everyone else). They wanted to deprive me of the very things that were most important to me: critical spirit, humour, freedom and liberation, *joie de vivre*, spontaneity and creativity. They wanted to strip me of my self-confidence, to make me stop believing in my own value judgments, following my own moral standards, and to make me believe that I could do nothing without them, that I could only do useful work under their guidance. If I had been alone, I might have believed their core lie: that there was *no alternative*, that there was nothing good outside of them, only the inherently demonic and evil Fidesz. They wanted to take away every external point of reference, and with it, my moral fibre, autonomy and free will - ultimately everything that makes me human.

When I left activism, I felt an extremely heavy weight being lifted off my shoulders. It was then that I realised what I had felt all along: that in this environment I always had a very strong gut feeling of unease, that I had to be constantly alert, watching every word I said and every move I made, lest I say something 'problematic' and end up being not only judged as a bad person, but as a subhuman. It was liberating to realize that the Budapest downtown morality drama was being played only in the name of morality, but amorally: whoever was declared hateful, evil, mentally ill, or a government patron depended on who refused to play by the rules of the so-called progressive interest groups.

These years brought me a lot of negative consequences. I lost my illusions and my trust because my honesty was abused. It was a terribly disappointing experience to realise that the milieu that I had hoped would create a kind of alternative, underground culture and community was really about social climbing and careerism. Where there should be an alternative culture, there are eye-rolling petty bourgeois values proclaimed to be universal. I used to have a lot of

pent-up anger and frustration about this. Fortunately, since then I have met many people who do not want to tell others what is right and wrong based on their own political interests, but who lead sincere and authentic lives. I now know that the only way towards an authentic life is to sever all ties with the progressive milieu and rebuild everything I have lost over the years: trust, faith, vitality, self-confidence and honest, constructive relationships. I will conclude this long episode in my life by sharing this knowledge, which I hope will help others who find themselves in similar situations.

Orsolya Bajusz

My political awakening was related to the fact that used to live in Western Europe so I experienced first hand that reality is very different from what I was supposed to believe about the "West". At the same time, I also questioned the progressive-liberal knowledge regime imported from the West, and realised how false is the nature-culture divide, just as most of what has been said the liberal (individualistic) Western-oriented about the functioning of our bodies, or the connection of the social to the somatic. I began to study contemporary philosophy and social theory, and I became involved with feminism through critical theories. I thought that feminism was a potential site for turning these theories into practice, and this autoethnography is the story of how I fell flat on my face.

I had my reservations about Hungarian feminist activism from the beginning, especially the constant martyrdom and victim worship, but at some point I had to decide whether I wanted it: yes or no. I decided yes, thinking whatever happens, happens. I got involved with feminism through art, precisely tactical media. Abortourism (2013) was the first project, funded by Norwegian NGO funds, through FKSE. Then the years went by, and our projects got banned, censored, sued. Once I was ordered off the roof of the Várkert Bazaar during the World Meeting of Families. This is exactly what happens when you climb to the balcony of the building hosting a global meeting of government and fundamentalist leaders with a 30-metre banner stating 'anyaszomorítók' ('you sadden your mothers'): you are asked to climb down. I took it more to heart when ARTE TV censored us: Dalma Feró and I were duly cornered and the reporters literally wanted to put sentences about Viktor Orbán in our mouths. Or the time when the Swedish PEN Association ("Publishing the forbidden texts, which can't be published in their own countries") refused to publish a commissioned article in their 15 March 2018 issue, in which I said that the culture war is causing the real damage, and it is not so simple to blame Fidesz and Orban for everything. The same article was published on a Hungarian site without any particular problems or backlash.

The real conflict started with the involvement of an "intersectional" "anti-exclusion" "human rights oriented" troll army, including a self-described "trans lesbian" activist who became so obsessed with Dalma and me that he followed me on the street, kept a list of where and with whom he saw me, and inquired about me from my acquaintances to whom he was as well as a total stranger as to me. Our trolls claimed in all seriousness that people who endow themselves with all sorts of alternative gender identities are an oppressed group, so disagreeing with their doctrine, even mocking it, is "verbal abuse", therefore I am abusive. From abusive I became a "violent criminal" and then a "dangerous lunatic".

My family was also a constant target of slander, I was harassed at work, even my cat was made into a meme, as an allegedly aggressive and vicious animal. I have been featured in political tabloids (I think all of them), there was a fake news article on the net for a few hours, written by a journalist based on comments from the troll army, suggesting that I should get two years in jail for violence against minorities - which meant shutting down a provocateur spewing lies about me at a public event.

However, instead of trolls and mentally unstable people who wanted to believe in their own fairy tales, the real damage had been done by those I naively thought to be allies, who, in the name of their self-asserted moral superiority, would have expected Dalma and me to tolerate all this as saints, even martyrs, imposing on ourselves all the rules of bourgeois etiquette and the liberal public sphere, or else we would endanger the supposed moral superiority of the "good" side. They thought I would be a good bullet catcher and an overall dupe, and I was for a while, out of pure idealism. I call them the 'nomenclature' by which I mean the paid 'civic participants' associated with political organisations, wannabe public spokespersons and those allied with them. This milieu is linked to the party-state nomenclature - for example, one of the main NGO feminist's father was an editor of the book listing kulaks, ie the wealthy peasant class to be eliminated. This woman made me understand what Bolshevik mentality is: to settle into something that someone else had built up through years of work and also to insidiously trample on that person, posturing as an authority figure. There was a Facebook group that I started and moderated for four years, putting in work on a daily basis, and this person immediately targeted me there. She wanted to make herself an authority figure by patronising and ordering others, even against our protests.

I kept feeling that a play was constructed around me and that I should play a part in it. There were times when the theatre was so absurd that I was threatened with the National Security Office, because of some minor nighttime incident in the party district, which the security guard did not care about at the time. The person who was trying to make herself a victim (making me a scapegoat) appropriated a whole legal category (used to protect MPs when testifying) to aggrandize herself- publicly calling herself 'a specially elevated person', and claiming the National Security Office is automatically going to investigate, because she is so important! Amongst sane people, someone who confabulates legal categories about her own importance would be the village idiot, but the nomenclature is explicitly not interested in the truth, not even in reality. They jumped in to dispense justice, theatrically display indignation, whilst mutually approving and jeering each other. Trying to tear down someone is as much a powertrip as pretending to be the saviours, the truth-tellers, the restorers of order, measuring out the truth on a pharmacy scale. These people instructed me how to publicly humiliate myself and cower, as is usual in these rituals: if one play-pretends the victim, the other must at least make a martyr of herself, in order to restore the (imagined) moral superiority of the side she represents. When I refused to do so, the nomenclature went into such a frenzy that even self-confessed liberals felt sorry for me, for the pure narcissistic rage and sadism that erupted from these 'respectable' women. I think it's because these little public showdowns and humiliations are the rituals that give them sadistic pleasure on the one hand, and on the other, reinforce their idea that they have to fall in line, and if they have to, no one else should get away. Symbolic victory is so important in this milieu that since I refused to publicly apologise and humiliate myself, the 'victim' (after threatening me with the National Security Office again) publicly apologised to herself on

my behalf and then accepted the apology she offered herself on my behalf. Some members of the nomenclature publicly claimed to be moved to tears by the imagined human greatness of this person, but meanwhile some puffed themselves up that if I apologized, I would be considered morally superior! It was as if they didn't want to tolerate me cheating them with a clever gesture (which I never actually made) and thus gaining symbolic credit. The goalposts of moral football are all over the place!

Meanwhile the trolls were lynching me and my alleged allies were disciplining me like a dog someone I naively thought was my friend called me to hysterically demand compensation for me tarnishing her personal brand by being cancelled. Since she was 'working with me', she demanded that I should 'take responsibility'. She wanted to put words in my mouth that would have made me a public scapegoat. Just the other day, an article came out about 'our' work 'together', and she posted it on Facebook, tagging everyone including the carpenter, the journalist, the 3d designer, but not me, who by the way, had the idea for the whole thing, and who spoke German and English well enough to convince an institution to host it. I was treated like some out-of-fashion handbag she threw disgustedly into the bottom of a cupboard. It was then that I understood that culture and art meant nothing more to these people than ritualised performances of self-indulgence and at most props for such occasions. They may read critical theory, but they don't understand or apply the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive discourse, they just keep saying "all is politics" and they acquire "cultural capital". I was living in a character assassination and my supposed "friends", my "allies" expected me to sacrifice myself just so that they could continue to keep up their perfect self-image, untarnished by an association with a 'sinner'. The subservient, frustrated, below-mediocre conformists (whom we had collectively pitied and supported for years before) finished the work of power-hungry psychopaths.

In addition to the "specially important person", this milieu also turned a serial plagiarist into a token female spokesperson. She gave a 20-minute conference presentation in October 2018, which is sentence by sentence available online, as we have come to piece it together, Dalma, myself, and an other colleague. Several members of the 'leftist' community tried to sweep this under the carpet (including the 'academic workgroup' I am going to mention later), but in the end an online portal hosting her column (also based on plagiarism) issued a statement about her series of plagiarisms. I (for disobeying, and thus becoming dangerous) was given a three-hour reprimand by an "academic workgroup", accompanied by a letter circulated behind my back. The letter was effectively a list of my alleged crimes and personal shortcomings, and obviously it reached me. The author of the letter (who was on the same panel with the plagiarist at the conference) even apologized for taking away the time of the addressees from their scientific work! As if my character assassination was some menial but unavoidable task, which he generously took upon himself. He wrote about me in a manner as someone who is on the verge of going mad or killing herself, so according to their own narrative they were risking someone's life, but it was not a problem, at most collateral damage. I did not matter at all, only as far as I was a useful puppet in their 'left-wing' networking, since the writer of the letter also works for a social-democratic foundation. "My allies" have finally showed their true nature: everything is a game and everyone is an asset. In the end, it was someone else's plagiarism that made me chuck in the leftist-feminist towel, and I only regret not doing it sooner. One of the participants wrote a letter the next day trying to explain what I did wrong: "the habit of throwing a

stone into stagnant water and ignoring the rippling." Without irony, they wanted me to adapt to their subservient mindset. I was not even supposed to obey the "orders" of corrupt authorities, but of corrupt private individuals on the payroll of the old left-wing parties, with no real whatsoever power, not elected for anything by anyone. I was supposed to subordinate my sense of justice and my human dignity to their political games, I was supposed to cross professional, human and moral boundaries just to not disturb their interest. It was at this point that it became clear to me that it was not just a few sociopaths who crossed my path, but that this whole milieu was based on reality denial and the total exploitation of people.

In this environment, people live in a constant psychosis, within a web of lies and contradictions. Instead of principles they have dogmas full of self-contradictions: for example, Jobbik (the right-wing party) was the devil itself for many years, but later on, large part of the leftliberal-activist network collectively encouraged people to vote Jobbik for 'tactical' (power-technical) reasons, under the banner of moral goodness. They scoff at the idea of a conservative mother having a feminine principle, but a transwoman may have a female soul, an innate gender identity, an inherent sense of femininity. Telling a joke may count as violence, but when ten men per day cums on the face of an underage, semi-literal Hungarian girl in a Swiss brothel, it is a job like any other. These are the people who fall over each other to help a homeless person, but they pick on each other wherever they can. The average Hungarian earns more than many of them, mostly doing more meaningful things with their lives, but a privileged status is an inalienable part of the self-image of the nomenclature. The people who did the things to me I describe in this paper ultimately have no whatsoever real power, which is why it was all so theatrical and exaggerated.

Just as our attackers wanted to turn us into scapegoats, our allies wanted to turn us into martyrs. Some expected us to be saints: I was advised to "take it like a queen", to keep my head high when people throw shit at me. If you throw shit at a queen, the bodyguards will take care of you. And the person who gave me this advice almost ended up making a martyr of herself by having a heart attack at a "debate" (where she wasn't even the main target of the lynching genderqueers). This milieu exploited my enthusiasm and my knowledge, but they looked down on me and despised me. I don't think it even crossed their minds that I was only putting up with them and their theatrics out of idealism. They thought so highly of themselves that they thought they could turn me against myself. They do the same gaslighting to the whole country that they did to us. They want to determine what is real, what we are allowed to feel, say, think, who counts as a good person. In the end, they fell victim to their own lies, believing that I do not abide by their hypocrisy, lies and games because I am either clumsy or weak - it never occurred to them that I did not want to. In the meantime, I thought, as long as they listened to me, that was fine, because I could campaign for my agendas, and then, if I couldn't take it any longer, I'd spill the beans. It was a huge naivety. They reacted to me talking about novel body ontologies or media theories as if watching a nature documentary - they nodded their heads 'yes, yes', and then everything went on as before, or rather, what changed was that after a while they tried to shut me up.

What also enables such cancellations (our story with Dalma is not unique, maybe the novel aspect was that it happened publicly and lasted years), is that identitarian propaganda dominates the art world so much that the smell of blood is more real and exciting than what passes as artistic or cultural production. It was possible because people enjoyed it. If the

provocateurs and the troll army had been ignored or shut down collectively, if there had been consequences, it would have ended.

What happened to us served many people on many levels. On the one hand, conflicts of interest were swept under the carpet, because ultimately what mattered were networks, collectively adapting to, and sustaining the liberal modality of the public sphere. On the other hand, for 'our side' it was possible to point to the opponents and claim that 'they are morally inferior', and many were simply enjoying the circus. Those who wanted to imagine themselves as more than they were (creative, cool, alternative), previously leeching off on my knowledge and creativity, jumped at the chance to discipline me as if I was a dog, commanding and punishing me as the custodians of order, morality, truth, and in doing so, exposed themselves as always just using me. What I regret most is that I accepted for one minute the unequal conditions, that I did not value my work or myself more. I see now where free labor and self-exploitation lead. You sacrifice yourself so much you end up as a human sacrifice. If I have to name one structural condition that got me into cancellation, it is free labour.

Naively, I thought feminism would be somehow similar to the contemporary art scene, or at most some kind of community-based green movement. What really interested me was putting posthumanist theories into practice. Instead, I got very close to politics without realising what I was getting myself into. I had to admit that the right-wing media's description of this milieu is broadly true, even if I disagree with most of their conclusions. I have experienced in my own immediate environment that the 'NGO civic participants' are really puppets of lobbies and politicians. I was the real civic participant who was being marginalised and sidelined by professional 'civics' because I refused to 'know my place' and was in the way of pro bono forging a platform under the banner of feminism for failed politicians, self-styled 'spokesmen' and foreign-funded lobbyists.

3. Conclusions

Feminism is the site of this autoethnography, but its real subject is the contemporary hegemonic struggle. In our analysis, we draw our conclusions adhering to institutional spheres of this struggle, and put them in dialectic with the relevant literature.

3.1. Progressive networks

When we got into the feminist and leftist scene, we thought of it as a network of several ideologically distinct groups loosely connected to each other. During our years there, we have explored how these seemingly disparate groups are conjoined at the level of personal relationships and ideology. Those who define themselves as liberal, left-wing or progressive, we refer to as progressives because they all have a worldview based on the moral dichotomy of progressive (enlightened, westernised, tolerant) vs backward (conservative, reactionary, prejudiced).

When we started to engage with reproductive rights issues, it was obvious that we were drawn into the struggle between the transnational liberal hegemony that was consolidating after the fall of the Soviet Union and the counter-hegemony of the right (MOUFFE 2005). Over time, we have

come to realize that liberal hegemonic networks are much more extensive than we thought and that those whom we thought of as our allies in the critique of this dual hegemony are in fact deeply embedded in liberal networks. During our years in feminism, we had the opportunity to study these hegemonic networks (and within them political, academic and cultural actors, media outlets, NGOs) their ideologies, and the relations between them.

The term 'liberal hegemony' can be misleading, because it does not only include those who consider themselves liberal. Instead, liberal hegemony has been able to neutralise, transform and incorporate a great deal of critique, including the liberationist ideas that emerged in the 1960s and some of the critical theories associated with them (WATKINS 2018), and also, to broaden their own camp, left-wing critical discourses centered on issues of economic inequalities (FERÓ 2020). Such a modality of liberal hegemonic rearguard actions has also appeared in Hungary since the early 2010s: more and more of those involved in liberal networks started to engage in left-wing rhetoric. We soon became aware that fundamental elements of critical theories (the central question of subjectivation and with it the constructed notion of identity, criticism of the public sphere, the particularity of both social formations and the analytical categories used to capture them) are often not understood by the (neo)Marxist, socialist or anarchist importers of progressive agendas. For example, that "gender identity" (like any identity) is not innate from birth, that "race" is not a phenomenon that transcends history and social contexts and cannot be transplanted one-to-one from the US to the Hungarian context, and generally that a moralist framing of current conflicts of interest serves to maintain a double hegemony. We tried to cooperate with them for years, and finally we became aware that they interpret critical theories on the basis of liberal premisses and weaponize them in their hegemonic struggles (see FERÓ 2020), in which they want to embody the liberal subject and create public spheres that correspond to liberal modalities: they want to be "experts" and "serious people".

In contrast, the feminist discourse relevant to us (the women's liberation movement and much of poststructuralist feminism) analyse why the liberal subject, the 'serious man' narrative, is inherently anti-feminist, just as the private/public distinction that emerges with modernity as the basis of the idealised public sphere in liberal discourse is a means of subordinating women (see e.g. PATEMAN 1980, 1983). As Rosi Braidotti puts it, "It is a historical fact that the great emancipatory movements of postmodernity are driven and fuelled by the resurgent 'others': the women's rights movement; the anti-racism and de-colonization movements; the anti-nuclear and pro-environment movements are the voices of the structural Others of modernity." (2013: 37). Central to these feminist analyses are also the exposure of the patriarchal and male-centered origins of 'common sense' knowledge of the body, along with critiques of science, the legal system, psychology and psychiatry, and overall the liberal notion of the public sphere. Such a modality of feminism goes against the interests of transnational networks supporting "feminist" movements aligning with their agendas.

For progressive networks, therefore, the emergence of a genuine feminist critique is twofold dangerous, because on the one hand they can be exposed as being experts of their own rituals and nothing else, and on the other hand because they would find it harder to build coalitions to represent the field (as the custodians of "women's rights"). They therefore incorporate critical discourses (typically as linguistic formulas and concepts) into their ontologically liberal

perspectives. As a prime example, the group at the forefront of our bullying has included capitalism as one dimension of its 'intersectional' list of oppressions in response to critiques of identity politics (see MÉSZÁROS 2018), while other groups have sought to resolve a conflicts around political representation by representing 'poor women' (see FERÓ forthcoming). These groups dealt with the conflicts arising from the crisis of representation by extending their moralistic worldview, and one important underpinning for this was a particular understanding of agency. The theoretical vagueness at the level of micro-processes and the vulgarisation of theories make it easier to interpret individual agency according to the situation at hand: who is the victim and who is the perpetrator, who has agency and who does not, is discussed according to interest: For example, one NGO feminist argued that the 'intersectional' feminist who has started the Genderfészek Facebook group and the whole bullying is actually a victim because she has internalised misogyny, while we are the aggressors because we use offensive language in our own private communication. The determinism of macrosociology can provide a tool for this, from which it is easy to derive the denial of individual agency and thus to underpin authoritarianism. Within the scope of downtown morality dramas, theory becomes in practice a legitimating ideology for psychologising and judging.

Central to these moral dramas is the notion of being human that the members of this milieu want to make themselves and others conform to. As outsiders to this milieu, we experienced all this first hand: the limit on experiencing our own possibilities and abilities, because we were treated as assets. We were not allowed to experience negative emotions, to show real vulnerability (not victim posturing), to take risks, because we were surrounded by malice and constant judgement. Negative emotions were pathologised, people constantly disciplined, and event sent to psychologists, which is why

2. See for example the debate between Tomcat and László Mérő and Tomcat and Péter György on a similar topic (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXfXdkw92oA> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMk902hA_CQ)

even swearing was a taboo, which has led to constant pent-up tension. However, public self-humiliation in 'atonement' was rewarded, because this milieu's politics were based on conformity and with it shame and guilt, and their fundamentally moralist worldview was sustained by these rituals. We have found that this milieu affects one's inner life so deeply that without anger, without experiencing despair and disappointment, one cannot get rid of such a level of toxicity.

We concluded that we were able to leave this environment, while maintaining our own integrity, albeit at great loss, unlike many other more unfortunate scapegoats, because we had such a different cultural background and habitus that after a while the milieu's affective economy became unbearable for us. Sociology, which focuses exclusively on the macro level, cannot explain who remains in progressive networks, and why, who leaves and why, and who and why stays far away from them. Beyond a certain point, it has become clear to us that the most important difference between us and those we had previously considered our allies is the habitus pattern that connects members of the progressive scene who might belong to different ideological camps, deal with different issues and operate in supposedly distinct fields. This habitus is inseparable from the fact that the members of the scene form a large circle of friends

and acquaintances, many of whom belong to the same families, who have known each other for generations, have been socialised in the same cultural and political institutions and have the same jobs. As far as we are aware, no academic study has addressed what Attila Márton Farkas (2008) captured in an essay:

In almost all cases, we find the same pattern of life course and career among liberal intellectuals in Hungary: faithful Moscovite parents (or grandparents), the child (or grandchild) is first a far-leftist, a left-wing opponent of the system, later a reform communist, and then a liberal after the regime change. Some ex-Moscovites of the older generation (e.g. Ágnes Heller, Márton Tardos) have experienced this transformation in their own personal lives. (...) One has the terrible suspicion that recent Hungarian liberalism is little more (at least in the cultural sense) than the resentment of frustrated children of radical, sectarian Bolshevik families. They disowned their parents, earnestly ceased contact with their world, yet continued their struggle against the despised-dreaded "bourgeois" Hungarian society, thus perpetuating the same cultural patterns. Therefore, from whom they appeal to for support at a given moment is as indifferent as the ideology in the name of which the whole struggle is being fought. Whether the new ideas and practices are to be imported from Franz Ferdinand's Vienna, Lenin's and Stalin's Moscow, Clinton's New York or Bush's Washington, with which they will change the "bad Hungarian mentality" and "eliminate the backwardness in the minds", is completely irrelevant. They are repackaging the same thing like the food counterfeiter who overlabel cheap canned food."

This is a strategy of semi-peripheral self-colonization (KJOSSEV 2000[1999]; FARKAS 2011), which serves foreign powers keeping the country in semi-colonial status. Our own experience also coincides with the essay of Farkas cited above, that the most important driving force of this milieu is the authoritarian acceptance and servicing of power relations, the worship of the current centre and the contempt for Hungarian society, rather than a belief in any given ideology (see also: HADAS 2020; LOMAX 1997).

The populist activities of such authoritarian progressives against "barbarism" and "evil" in the name of "modern European civilisation" essentially serve to maintain the global hierarchical order (FERÓ and BAJUSZ 2018). As an emblematic example of progressivist activism, Vera Mérő's Facebook page attempts to censor bachelor party gifts and 'naughty' wine labels, even though obscenity has always been part of European culture, while the same 'community' finds digital porn and the 21st century sex industry perfectly acceptable. This is another example of the plethora of meaningless dogma and self-contradiction characterizing this milieu. As if the civilisational "vanguard" role would require people to believe lies, and rally around them, in order to legitimise each other as the morally superior vanguard, better and more than the average Hungarian. This authoritarianism is demanded of anyone who enters this 'intelligentsia' of Budapest from outside. Our autoethnography is about the process of gradually recognizing these manipulations.

3.2. The relationship between experience, theory and practice

The struggle for hegemony is most often understood as a political crisis, but we would like to point out that it is also a crisis of knowledge: an ontological and epistemological crisis. Therefore feminism could be a space for new knowledge to emerge and become praxis, since feminist

critique has also investigated knowledge itself and its modes of production, and within them has questioned ontological divisions and hierarchies such as nature/culture. However, liberal hegemony has also captured elements of feminist knowledge production, as knowledge production has always been a central tenement of hegemonic struggles. Through our participation, we have seen how feminist ideas have been used in a reactionary way within the context of the knowledge crisis: existing feminist activism legitimizes the hierarchical dichotomies of modernity (civilization/barbarism, culture/nature, etc.), through the use of the concept of gender invented by post-WWII American sexology (see REPO 2015; FERÓ 2019a). The relationship between experience, theory and practice has been central to feminist critique since the beginning of the second wave. The women's liberation movement that emerged from the Western new left movements in the late 1960s based its practice on the questioning of institutionally accepted knowledge and the systematic analysis of women's lived experience (HANISCH 2006). Such feminism reflected on the fact that experience is created discursively, not apart from, but within a web of social relations. The interconnectedness of experience, theory and practice, one of the main features of other radical movements as well, has been simplified to the extreme by identity politics and its rapid expansion. An important feature of the hegemonic struggles of the last half century has been the instrumentalisation of radical civil rights movements in the US by philanthropic (elite) organisations working with government agencies to shape not only politics but also knowledge production and the social imagination, through the funding of NGOs and social science research and education (WATKINS 2018). Different versions of such identity politics were exported to Hungary after the regime change, but mainly from the 2000s onwards, mainly through the NGO network (GHODSEE 2004). Therefore, contemporary Hungarian 'feminism' in practice represents the interests of industrial and political lobbies - a grassroots kind of feminism would be critical of the big pharma, sex industry, and other kinds of lobbies, and of the left-liberal interest groups connected to them, instead of acting as their adjacent women's division. World-systems theory, which became popular in the Hungarian leftist milieu, opposes these liberal feminisms, among others, but it is completely deterministic, has nothing to do with individual agency and responsibility, and has therefore proved an unsuitable theoretical foundation for alleviating this crisis of both knowledge and representation.

Within such a context, we have tried to put relevant knowledge into practice, which has been prevented by all means by actors embedded in hegemonic networks, and this process has become increasingly violent. The experience we have gained in these years has proven more relevant than any theory, study or observation. The knowledge industry tries to make people disbelieve their own experience and value judgments, and believe only in what it calls credible sources. In the field, we have seen clearly that no matter how many theories and researches one reads, if one cannot select among them and only believes something if it comes from a "credible source" (i.e. an authority figure or institution embedded in political networks, e.g. sitting in the chair of an NGO or foundation, featured in the media, etc.), one will never understand anything. Properly contextualized, analysed and understood experience therefore played a particularly important role in our case, similar to the early days of the women's liberation movement.

3.3. "Everything is politics"

In progressive activism in Budapest, we often hear that everything is politics. This claim is based on a misinterpretation of certain critical theories: on the one hand, a twisting of the second-wave feminist slogan "the personal is political", and on the other, a conflation of different meanings of the word politics.

The "personal is political" was the slogan of the women's liberation movement, suggesting that the personal is always embedded the political, and therefore the common features of women's personal experiences must be understood in the context of unequal relations between women and men (HANISCH 2006). Today's hegemonic politics of recognition, however, takes the personal as a given, using aspects of the personal as foundation for politics rather than analyzing the political construction of the personal. For example, the construction of transgender identities are not examined, in fact such inquiries are a taboo, instead transgender identities are considered innate, and therefore the basis for political claims (FERÓ 2020). The claim that the personal is also political leads to the argument that physical and mental flaws and problems (from fatness to greasy hair to perversions) make someone a victim, thus rather than examining their individual, social and socio-political causes and contexts, personal flaws become instrumental in staking political claims.

The other distortion inherent in "all is politics" is the conflation of ideological formations and the logic of the political field. "All is politics" does not mean that social action has ideologies underpins, but universalising the logic of the political field. If theoretically independent and separate professions adapt the logic of politics, we are not simply talking about conflict of interest or field struggles, but all and everything becomes about the mere assertion of interests. Where everything is politics in this sense, there is no professionalism, because there are no boundaries. We have seen how individuals, who should belong to theoretically different professional fields strategise together, so with minimal exceptions, there is no real journalism, only media content production, no real culture and hardly any quality social science. This is how critical theories come to service the interests of lobbies and the networks that serve them.

3. 4. Culture

The universalisation of the logic of the political field also has effects on the cultural and scientific field. Ideologies do operate in the cultural sphere, but politics and culture have been separate practices since antiquity. Also the threshold for entry into artistic milieus has always been high, for example, the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde, as their names suggest, had always been closed, exclusive, elitist movements.

Nowadays the toolkit of art has reached outside institutions, similarly to how the boundaries between body and media blur away. The reasons for this are manifold: global causes include trends such as the privileging of participation, the increasing prevalence of social media, artworks made for Instagram and virtual openings. At the intersection of the glocal and local, imperialist foreign politics have taken an active role in shaping Hungarian art canons, especially new media: the Soros foundations entered the region with explicit political aims and also have taken an active role in the introduction of new media (toolkits and their use, media formats) among local artists (see for example Básthly, forthcoming). Media art is connected to the Soros Foundation to such an extent that the Department of Intermedia at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts still has the domain name intermedia.c3.hu, referencing the c3 centres, a subdivision

of the Soros Foundation. In Hungary, politics had already been entangled with the cultural field, as when the power-holding nomenclature changed, the old secretaries were appointed to cultural institutions, editorial boards and supervisory boards (SCHIFFER 2020; BRAUN 2020; RÉVÉSZ 2008), similarly to old KISZ (socialist state party youth organization) functionaries.

English-language personal accounts and essays have described the negative consequences of cancel culture (e.g. POWER and MILLER 2019; POWER 2020; TIPLADY 2019; Weiss 2020; Govinda 2020). The British Arts Professional conducted a survey of over 500 people working in the cultural sector (FREEDOM of EXPRESSION SURVEY 2020), which shows, among other things, that eight out of ten respondents censor their own opinions that differ from the "left-wing" orthodoxy. Two phenomena in particular contribute to the contemporary use of art as political propaganda: on the one hand, the cult of victimhood (CAMPBELL and MANNING 2018), which social psychological research links to sociopathy, manipulation and a sense of entitlement (Ok et al 2020; Gabay et al 2020), and on the other hand, the scapegoating mechanism of social media, especially Facebook (KRISS 2020). The first investor in Facebook was Peter Thiel, a student of René Girard, who described in detail the mechanisms of scapegoating - hence the conclusion that lynchings and incriminations do not just happen, but that the platform was (also) developed for this purpose. Some even speak of cancel culture as an inherently religious phenomena (BEINER 2020; LIMBERG and ARSOV 2020), based around such a sacrificial ritual. Broadly agreeing with this interpretation, we would add that in our case the participants were talking about highly ritualistic events that narrate the order of the world (and the place of them as individuals and groups in it) as "dialogue", "discourse". In doing so, they obscured the ritualised nature of their own activity and the affective registers where the real political work takes place (BAJUSZ forthcoming).

What we have seen in the Hungarian milieu is that the people for whom all politics is, see culture as a series of discursive games, as means to an end, opportunities and spaces for status struggle, and of self-aggrandisement. Self-proclaimed leftists, following Marxist discourse, often speak of culture as a superstructure, rendering invisible and beyond analysis the intersubjective and micro levels and the affective register. Following this logic, if everything is recognition (which is capital as well), then the internal logic of the milieu works as follows: if you manifest the right signals the right way with the right people in the right place, you can be an important person. The subject of such a social world is inherently unstable, always deconstructed and reconstructed out of social codes, already existing on a register of signs and identity elements. Any agency an individual can have comes from outside and is conferred on her by her social milieu through ritualised practices (such as cultural consumption, participation in knowledge production).

Extending the logic of the political field also implies the instrumentalisation of people: since subjectivity is effectively weaponised, progressive actors turn naive people into human shields and sockpuppets. Unlike naive, enthusiastic people participating in an alternative art scene, those who see art as a means to an end to their power techniques and political goals ignore the micro-macro divide, and even turn performative the collapse of this distinction (BAJUSZ 2019). An example of this dynamics (featuring the people in our autoethnography) was the 'game of institutions' where, for example, the players such as "mid-generation", "Ludwig Museum" and "economic dependency" could literally climb on each other's backs (Hódi 2015). The

self-aggrandisement of imagining oneself as an institution or other social actor fits the empty, amoral, and performative self, where there is no boundary between individual and institutional. In the social sciences, meanwhile, there is a general tendency to turn towards affective, somatic experiences, and to move beyond Cartesian dualism. Feminism is also only social constructivist in its postmodern reading (see e.g. BIEVER et al 2007). The rise of affect studies, hybrid sciences and posthuman media theories could be an attempt to go beyond essentialisms: biological determinism and social constructivism. As we understood understanding, feminism could have been a praxis of this.

3. 5. Science

In the feminist-leftist networks, we have mainly observed the transfers, boundary violations, boundary demarcations, or lack thereof, or in short, boundary work (Gieryn 2006 [1983]), between academic and non-academic fields, between some gender studies researchers and other academics, including social scientists, members of 'leftist' research groups and think tanks. These phenomena are by no means confined to gender studies or the so-called critical social sciences. We do not wish to mystify the autonomy of the scientific field: theoretically separate professional fields in reality often lose their relative autonomy. However, given its history, in the case of gender studies, this problem is particularly acute.³

From the boundary work of gender studies, we have seen the struggles around the boundaries between political activism and gender studies. We have observed how some actors in the political field (employees of NGOs and political foundations, activists not affiliated with institutions) seek to exercise control over the academic field (including "gender issues"), and also how some actors in the scientific field do not distinguish between the scientific and the political, following the logic of "all politics" as explained previously. Some political activists, such as the vocal members of the Genderfészek group, have never made a secret that they feel entitled to hold actors in the scientific field accountable, and even to decide what is good enough social science and what is not (whichever corresponds to their own political agenda), and also to accept their feelings and identities as unmitigable scientific fact. And some actors in the scientific field do give in to such blackmail or get involved in political struggles themselves.

3. Gender studies, for example, with its associated subfields (such as sexuality studies), was institutionalized by US philanthropic organisations with the unconcealed aim of promoting their own political interests (Watkins 2018). In Hungary and other post-socialist countries, gender studies courses emerged as a major part of the broader 'transition to democracy' through a 'shadow network' of US organisations and foundations, offering a wide array of scholarships and conferences, not only through local private US universities but also through the public universities of the region (Zimmermann 2007). The intensive links between gender studies and the political arena are perhaps best illustrated by the UNIFEM Hungarian National Committee, led by Klára Dobrev in the second half of the 2000s, which involved a number of gender studies researchers alongside party politicians and NGO feminists. We were not aware of these party-political links when we got involved in the 'feminist' milieu. The functioning of online gender studies or feminist social science Facebook groups, where the semi-formal communication of

the profession takes place, highlights many of these dynamics. In reality, some of these groups operate in exactly the same way as political groups: the logic of hegemonic struggles prevails over professional communication. This means that those at the forefront of the cancel mob feel empowered to be arbiters of social science because of 'personal involvement' ('transgenderism') or 'goodnes' (i.e. recognition of the demands of trans politics). In order to push their own political agenda, in their framing they often pit 'interesting theoretical debates' against the 'human lives' they are supposed to represent and protect. Through the fetishisation of 'relevance' and the moral framing of the debate, such media directly maps the power relations of actors outside the scientific field. Personal attacks and strawmanning (such as transgender activists calling analytical, scientific texts intellectualised hatred, mental masturbation or stupid crap without any support or explanation, and their authors evil trolls) - and through these methods making scientific discourse impossible - were not opposed by anyone in these groups. Meanwhile, PR campaigns and even women's magazine covers (if they featured a transgender person) were perfectly legitimate, even popular contents, to the extent that in some groups they made up and still make up a large part of the posted content.

However, it is not only some gender activists who pretend that the academic and political fields are one and the same, but also many gender researchers are not able to distinguish between these theoretically different fields - for example, some who have accepted that actors in the political field are accountable to gender activists and others who have themselves been involved in character assassinations. We do not contest that ideologies operate in science and that no social science can be free from ideology, but claim that the interests of political institutions and actors are clearly at work in an allegedly scientific milieu through the subjectivities they produce and shield themselves with.

There are actors for whom there are no boundaries between fields with theoretically different logics, to the extent that they see science as nothing more than a theatre of hegemonic struggle.

For example, for the "academic workgroup" mentioned in the text of Orsolya Bajusz, maintaining their moral high ground and impeccable public image was more important than reporting a plagiarism series to a university ethics committee. The boundaries between the academic and political fields are so porous that some actors in political networks easily convert their political capital into academic capital, using, among other things, the conferences and print volumes of political parties and foundations, and through them the media, as a springboard. Among these actors, some have proudly reported in private conversations that their 'academic' activities are also political strategising - along the lines of 'I give a little to this side, a little to that side', 'I tactically decide which journal and conference will fit the bill', and 'I quote xy to win the goodwill of the identity politics camp'. We have seen first-hand what happens when the struggle for hegemony becomes total and completely subjugates the cultural and scientific spheres - and in this respect the logic of the offensive launched by the current administration is essentially no different from what we have seen among the so-called progressive actors.

4. General conclusion, or from poststructuralist and posthumanist theories to practice: becoming-Hungarian

In the years when people literally tried to destroy us for interpreting critical theories, we felt the rage that drives collective revolt, and we understood something of the dynamics behind the Hungarian right. We came to the same conclusion as a large part of the Hungarian electorate: that Fidesz is a horror, but there is worse. By the end of our journey we understood that the "progressives" do the dirty work of transnational actors mostly for petty cash and symbolic recognition (Bajusz 2019), and since on the individual level it is all about the ego, it is very difficult not even to eradicate, but even to bypass this milieu. There are people who crave this and need this, and this is what they are able to comprehend. The more we got to know the activists from downtown Budapest who were passing moral judgements aligned with the interests of the political and industrial lobbies, the clearer we began to see that many vote Fidesz because they reject this progressive hypocrisy and believe that there is no alternative, but only Fidesz.

At the beginning of our story, we critiqued modernity and liberalism as women (as feminists, using feminist discourses), but by the end of our autoethnography, we continued doing so as Hungarians and as Eastern Europeans, and we came to the conclusion that the really existing feminism is unacceptable for both of us because it is an instrument of (cultural) imperialism. Under the banner of such feminism, self-violation becomes a condition of moral superiority, one is expected to suppress all impulses and overflowing emotions, to despise everything local and traditional, in other words, to turn against one's own self and social milieu. The rejection of this programme (which the majority of Hungarians collectively practice) is a critique of modernity in practice, and as such is linked to our feminist aspirations: ultimately, a feminist programme showing the way out of the vampire castle games of postmodern social constructivists through rethinking relations with material reality.

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