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Cultural Policy in an Illiberal State. A Case Study of Hungary after 2010

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Abstract

In social sciences literature, numerous attempts have been made to capture the political essence and features of Hungary's 'illiberal' regime but few were aimed at analyzing specific public policy fields in the illiberal democracy. This paper analyses the cultural policy of the Orbán regime, focusing on the role of ideology. A qualitative case study based on document analysis looks at the legitimizing function of *post-communist traditionalism* in a managed illiberal democracy (Csillag and Szelényi, 2015). Governmental policy making in the field of culture is analyzed on two interrelated levels: (1) attempts to rewrite the cultural canon, and (2) institutional and financial changes. The results show that post-communist traditionalism serves as a discursive framework for the partial replacement of the cultural elite as well as the redistribution of cultural positions and resources, thus contributing to the creation of a new, loyal elite for the managed illiberal political system.

Keywords: Cultural Policy; Cultural Elite; Illiberalism; Post-communist Traditionalism; Hungary.

1. Introduction: illiberal democracy in Hungary?

Fared Zakaria in his famous article noted noticed already in the 1990s that, in contrast with Francis Fukuyama's popular democratic teleology, countries that had recently undergone the process of democratization, did not turn into western type liberal democracies. Although these countries have institutionalized free and fair elections, they do not fulfil the criteria of rule of law, power sharing and the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In consequence, the concepts of democracy and constitutional liberalism became more and more separated (Zakaria, 1997). However, at that time the label of illiberal democracy was reserved for countries like Argentina or Kazakhstan. Post-communist East-European countries were considered as 'good students' of democratization; and the most distinguished ones, like Hungary or Poland, were even forecast to reach the honored state of consolidated democracy (Higley and Lengyel, 2000).

After the millennium and the inclusive EU-enlargement in 2004 when 10 Eastern-European countries were admitted as member states of the European Union, less optimistic judgments were raised in and about the region, assuming a certain 'backsliding' and the 'death of the liberal consensus' (Krastev, 2007). At that time, the credit of being the 'illiberal capital of the region' was attributed to Poland under the first government of the Kaczyński brothers. However, after the fall of the Hungarian social democrat–liberal coalition and the victory of Viktor Orbán's Fidesz gaining a two-thirds majority in 2010, this dubious glory went to Hungary. Since then, a renewed interest in political science has turned towards Hungary and a growing body of literature analyses the essence and features of the 'new Hungarian regime'.

The Orbán regime has been labelled, *inter alia*, populist democracy (Pappas, 2014), broken democracy (Bozóki, 2015), elected autocracy (Ágh, 2015), and mafia state (Magyar, 2013). Recently, Bozóki and Hegedűs have provided a comprehensive review of Hungarian literature and the state of debate about the Orbán regime (Bozóki and Hegedűs, 2017). They state that by now it is most commonly categorized as a hybrid regime, although some of the most influential authors do not share this view.

One of the sharpest critiques came from János Kornai, who sees Hungary's latest political changes as a U-turn: a systematic destruction of democracy. In his analysis, he describes the processes of centralization and nationalization as 'thousands of discrete changes moving to the same direction: to autocracy' (Kornai, 2015). In the meantime, he admits that in spite of governmental attempts to limit cultural pluralism, intellectual life is thriving in Hungary.

Steady critics target the weakening of the rule of law (Bugaric, 2016) with retroactive legislation and occasional amendments of the constitution. The legitimacy of the new Fundamental Law adopted in 2011 is also controversial (Arató, 2012; Jakab and Körösényi, 2012; Majtényi and Szabó, 2011; Tóth, 2012). According to the analysis of András Körösényi, the most important characteristics of the Orbán-regime are the strong, unipersonal centralization of power, the strong claim to legitimacy, anti-pluralist and populist political visions, and the claim to ideological hegemony. The result of these features are new and autocratic elements in governance, even if the regime itself is not an autocracy because it still passes the polyarchy test proposed by

Dahl (Körösényi, 2015). Autocratic tendencies in Hungary are often compared to Putin's regime in Russia. The most elaborated argumentation of the Putin-Orbán parallel is Ivan Szelényi's concept of *managed illiberal democratic capitalism* (Szelényi, 2015; Csillag and Szelényi, 2015). Szelényi argues that in spite of their illiberal tendencies, these two regimes are still democracies given that their government has a mandate gained through elections. Though the free and fair nature of the elections is questionable, especially in Russia, elected leaders are still widely popular.

János Kis, on the contrary, argues that illiberal democracy is not a democracy anymore because it is legitimated only by the political majority, with the minority being marginalized (Kis, 2014). Somewhat similarly, Halmai argues that the regime is hybrid because even its institutional structure is not democratic (Halmai, 2014). Bozóki calls it 'liberal autocracy'; an autocracy that respects some of the human rights (Bozóki, 2016). Bozóki and Hegedűs finally conclude that since 2014 at the latest, the Orbán regime is not a democracy but a centralized, personalized, illiberal, and anti-democratic hybrid (Bozóki and Hegedűs, 2017).

There is no concordance in political science literature whether the Orbán regime has a clear ideological orientation in the sense of a coherent vision of the good society (Downs, 1957). In a recent paper, Szikra grouped scholarly standpoints into three categories (Szikra, 2017). According to the first line of argument, political actions of the Orbán administration have no particular ideological orientation, but are driven by the pure interest of the ruling elite. This is the concept of 'the mafia state' (Magyar, 2013). According to the second approach, ideology is important but far from being coherent. Rather, a 'bricolage' method can be observed (Körösényi, 2015; Szikra, 2014). The third account is one of ideology-driven policy making (Mike, 2014; Csillag and Szelényi, 2015).

According to the concept of Csillag and Szelényi, the popular ideology of post-communist traditionalism/neoconservatism serves to legitimize the system of managed illiberal democratic capitalism. Post-communist traditionalism has its conservative elements such as 'patria, church and the (traditional) family'. However, this Eastern European type of traditionalism cannot be regarded as a classical conservative ideology since it embraces etatism and does not fully respect individual liberties.[1] The main characteristics of this ideology are the following: 1) socially conservative, 2) populist in the sense that it inspires social movements (culture wars) around socially conservative issues (like anti-LGBT), 3) differentiating between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, 4) anti-immigration and generally opposing affirmative action, and 5) patriotic and religious (Csillag and Szelényi, 2015). While the authors elaborate their concept mostly with regard to Putin's Russia and Orbán's Hungary, they note that actually the whole post-communist CEE region has proven to be receptive to this ideology: they mention, *inter alia*, Mečiar, Fico, Băsescu, Babiš, Lukashenko and Yanukovych. At the time of writing the article, in 2017, Poland under the Szydlo-Kaczyński government is the most striking case of post-communist traditionalism

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[1] Interestingly, while post-communist traditionalism is strongly anti-communist in its rhetoric, it sometimes refers to social phenomena typical of the Kádár era as 'traditional' (Dupcsik, 2012).

having become infamous for its planned but failed abortion ban (Bielinska-Kowalewska, 2017; Korolczuk, 2017).[2]

2. Cultural policy in the Orbán regime: context and criticism

The aim of my paper is to analyze the cultural policy of the Orbán regime with the help of the concept of post-communist traditionalism. In my analysis, I focus on cultural policy understood as government efforts to subsidize and control the arts. Since 2010, the ruling political elite has reallocated property rights, as well as public and EU funds to new loyal economic elites who are much more closely controlled by them (Csillag and Szelényi, 2015). In the field of culture, a similar process may be observed: the incumbent political elite aspires to the redistribution of cultural positions and resources.

According to its definition in public policy analysis, cultural policy emerges when agents of the political system intervene with the production, distribution and consumption of cultural products, services and experiences. Cultural policy then expresses a relationship between a political system and the cultural field (Vestheim, 2012a). In other words, cultural policy is an overlapping zone between the fields of culture and politics (Vestheim, 2012b), which is structurally conflict-ridden because of the different logic and interests of the two fields. In the cultural policy making process, agents of the two fields negotiate the level and form of public support to different areas of the cultural field. A variety of cultural policy models were first described by Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey, 1989).[3] In their typology, Hungary (like most EU countries) fits into the architect model in which an intervening state actively supports cultural production.

Discussing the relationship between cultural policy and the political system, Gray emphasizes the impact of different forms of democratic arrangements on cultural policy (Gray, 2012). Direct, representative and deliberative democracies are each associated with different types of cultural policies. According to this terminology, the Hungarian case could be classified as belonging to the 'democratic elitist' paradigm (Schumpeter, 1976). In this model, access and mass cultural participation is hardly emphasized. On the contrary, by providing forms of institutional autonomy for key actors, competing elite groups establish a situation where particular forms of expertise are seen as the basis for making policy choices, and the lack of this expertise disqualifies the masses (Gray, 2012: 512). This type of cultural policy model operates

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[2] There is already some empirical evidence supporting the concept of ideologically driven policy making in Hungary as well: Szikra, in her analysis on Hungarian social policy, carefully showed that post-communist traditionalism is indeed present in public policy making, especially in the case of family policy, although the restriction of abortion law has never emerged (Szikra, 2017).

[3] Their typology included 1) the *facilitator*, i.e. a restricted state that leaves culture to the market and private charity (e.g. the USA); 2) the *patron* state that plays the role of a rich *Seigneur*, supporting culture and the arts for their own sake (Great Britain); 3) the *architect*, i.e. the intervening state, which, with policy programmes, infrastructure and financial means actively supports cultural production, distribution and reception; and 4) the *engineer* type of state that is associated with non-democratic political systems. Many European states today represent a mixture of the facilitator and the architect models (Vestheim, 2012a). East European countries during the transition period shifted from the engineer to the architect, or in the case of ex-Soviet countries, to the facilitator type (Rindzevičiūtė, 2012).

through arm's length governmental organizations or quangos, and through forms of governance arrangements.

The Hungarian language does not distinguish between policy and politics. The expression 'kultúrpolitika' (cultural policy or politics) was associated with the ideological and political control and censorship of state socialism. Consequently, after the democratic transition, the term acquired negative connotations and the autonomy of culture was emphasized by all cultural and political actors (T. Kiss, 2015). However, it was also obvious that financial support of the state would remain indispensable (Marsovszky, 2003; Kiss, 2015). The solution included the foundation of formally autonomous arm's length organizations, such as the National Cultural Fund. Nevertheless, each and every government has been accused by their political rivals of favoring their ideologically friendly cultural actors.

As for the context of the cultural policy of the Orbán regime, it is important to note that Hungarian society is deeply polarized politically and ideologically. Left and right self-identification is especially strong compared to the European average (Körösényi, 2013). Among the cultural elite, polarization is even stronger, as educated groups in general and intellectuals in particular are more involved in political participation and public debates than other social groups (Kristóf, 2011). 'Culture wars' (Kulturkampf) have been prevalent phenomena after the collapse of the Kádár regime in 1989. In contrast to the political elite, the cultural elite was not affected significantly by the regime change; most of its members 'survived' the transformation period (Kristóf, 2012; Szelényi et al., 1995). Consequently, two parallel narratives used to dominate Hungarian intellectual life (Kristóf, 2017): according to the left-liberal view, the recruitment of the late communist period's cultural elite was primarily meritocratic, and cultural canons established in the transition period are culturally legitimate. According to right-wing intellectuals, leftist hegemony or dominance in culture is the product of 40 years of discretional adverse selection, and even after the regime change conservative and nationalistic views remained unfairly repressed by the post-communist elite. Attempts to balance this perceived unfairness included media-wars and the creation of alternative cultural awards.[4]

The electoral failure of his first administration in 2002 was attributed by Viktor Orbán to the strength of the surviving post-communist elite. In the next decade, he was continuously working towards strengthening the economic and cultural embeddedness of his party. Every year, Orbán gathered his loyal intellectual and economic elite to an exclusive meeting in the countryside, in the village of Kötcse. Beyond networking and teambuilding, the highlight of these meetings has always been a speech by Viktor Orbán. In 2009 – already certain of winning the upcoming elections – he explained his thoughts on 'culture's future role' to people who were going to be in important political positions in the coming years. In the absence of an official, written cultural policy program, this speech used to be the basis for the analysis of Orbán's principles on cultural policy. Here, he described the function of cultural policy as creating and maintaining the political community. Thus, culture is not a distinct sphere separated from politics. According to the future prime minister, the evaluation of the cultural elite (especially in Eastern Europe) is always based on its

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[4] For example, an alternative version of the highest artistic state award (the Kossuth Award) was created for right-wing artists who were not appreciated by social-democratic governments.

political rather than cultural achievements, because cultural achievement is always a matter of debate and there are no universal standards to measure it. In the meantime, these debates on values should stay within the narrow circle of the elite and not go public. In the public sphere, politics should be defined by a *central field of force* not divided by value debates but 'naturally' representing national values.[5] As it happened, Fidesz won the next elections by a two-third majority and got a second chance to realize its public policy vision.

Already the first Orbán government between 1998 and 2002 was heavily attacked for threatening the autonomy of the cultural field (Marsovszky, 2003). After 2010, the government's cultural policy was interpreted by its critics as an attempt at political homogenization and a radical elite change (Bajomi-Lázár et al., 2013). Arguably, this political programme regards the notion of culture as exclusive, normative and having an ideological function. In an influential collection of critical essays (Magyar, 2013), using the post-communist mafia state concept, Bozóki summarized the main characteristics of the cultural policy of the Orbán regime in six points: 1) concentration of power and centralization, 2) limitation of self-government, 3) state capture; 4) delegation of tasks to the political clientele, 5) aspiration to the homogenization of culture, and 6) relying on the method of 'punish and discipline' (Bozóki, 2013). A more sympathetic analysis (Pápay, 2014) questions the aspiration of elite change and argues that cultural policy under the second Orbán government lacks a strong conception. Pápay emphasizes the plurality of power centers within the government, and the heterogeneity of cultural policy making as a consequence of responsive politics. In this framework, the most criticized actions are only symbolic gestures for conservative voters (Pápay, 2014). In a case study on theatre, I empirically demonstrated the process and consequences of elite change in one cultural field at least (Kristóf, 2017).

3. Analysis

Analyzing cultural policy, Vestheim points to four dimensions that are important to consider: 1) aims, norms and ideologies; 2) institutional structures, agents and interests; 3) access and participation; and 4) distribution of economic resources. Beyond explicit cultural policies, he also emphasizes the importance of 'implicit' cultural policies that represent a 'hidden' ideology that legitimizes power structures outside and inside the political system (Vestheim, 2012a: 496).

In my present analysis, I focus on the first point above, including 'hidden' ideology, but also examine its effect on the second and the fourth points. I analyze the cultural policy of the Orbán regime on two interrelated levels: 1) attempts to alter the cultural canon (i.e. the body of work that is considered to be most important for the national culture) and (2) institutional and financial changes. Focusing on the discursive elements of governance (Hall, 1993; Korkut et al., 2016), I try to detect whether there is an ideological drive behind the actions of the government aimed at changing existing cultural structures.

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[5] See: http://www.fidesz.hu/hirek/2010-02-17/meg337rizni-a-letezes-magyar-min337seget/

In my analysis, I follow an explorative qualitative case study research design (Yin, 2009). It is a single-case study; I examine the cultural policy of the Hungarian government and do not compare it explicitly with other country cases. However, the implicit cross-case analysis behind my study might be a comparison to the cultural policy of other EU member states that assumedly do not display post-communist traditionalism (Csillag and Szelényi, 2015). Methodologically speaking, Hungary has been selected as a *deviant case* within the European Union for my analysis. Within the category of single-case design, the type of my research is an *embedded single-case study,* in which I study cultural policy through multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2009). The rationale of selecting the units of analysis was the following: I applied a mixed method research design. First, I collected the publicly accessible documents on the explicit and implicit cultural policy of the two Orbán governments between 2010 and 2016, focusing on art policy, and excluding broadly understood cultural fields such as cultural heritage or sport.[6] The core texts of the analysis from the government's part are the speech at Kötcse[7] and the National Avowal. I also examined the regular cultural policy analyses of the government think-tank Századvég. I supplemented this document analysis with a secondary analysis of media interviews with cultural political representatives of the government between 2010 and 2016. As a second step, all the documents were collected and coded using Maxquda content analysis software. The logic of coding was looking for the elements of post-communist traditionalism (listed in the Introduction) in the texts. Certainly, not all the elements listed by Csillag and Szelényi were relevant for cultural policy making. Issues of immigration or the 'undeserving poor' were hardly related to cultural policy issues. But elements of social conservatism and culture wars against liberalism; anti-LGBT and anti-Semitism, patriotism and religiousness were frequently identified and coded. In the following section I analyze those actions of the government as analytic units, where, according to the results of the qualitative content analysis, post-communist traditionalism, the ideology of illiberalism, provided a discursive framework for policy making. These actions could be categorized into two groups: two of them (illustrations for the Fundamental Law and the National Library series) affected the cultural canon, while the other three (power delegation to the Hungarian Academy of Arts, and changes of directors at the National Theatre and the New Theatre) were more concrete, altering institutional or even financial structures. After exploring the analytical units, in the discussion I try to bring together the traditionalist elements of the cultural policy of the Orbán-governments and answer my research question.

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[6] An analysis of media policy, though closely related to cultural policy, is also beyond the scope of my paper. It has already been analysed in the frame of party colonization (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013), while a systematic analysis of reallocated property rights is still lacking.
[7] This document was dated from 2009; but later documents referred to it so frequently that it was soon revealed as a core text, so I included it in the analysis (logically it also belongs to post-2010 cultural policy, as it sets the trends).

3.1 Attempts at rewriting the canon

One of the widely recognized characteristics of the Orbán government is a strong claim to ideological legitimacy. The new Hungarian constitution of 2011 begins with a preamble entitled National Avowal,[8] which contains many allusions to Christianity and national pride. For the popularization of the new Fundamental Law, a well-known Orbán-supporting intellectual and stage director Imre Kerényi was appointed as '*deputy of the prime minister responsible for laying the foundations of reflective national constitutional thinking and for performing the duties linked to the preservation and development of cultural values.*' This long and entangled title has been a good target for irony in the Hungarian media, though, after a while, Kerényi has been commonly referred simply as the 'deputy of symbolic issues'. With his appointment, a new position in cultural policy was created; the deputy of the prime minister was an outsider in the formal ministerial structure, his bureaucratic ranking is similar to a state secretary, but he is responsible only to the prime minister.

Kerényi's first activity was to set up the 'Tables of the Fundamental Law' in public offices. These were solemn places where ceremonial copies of the new Fundamental Law were placed so that anyone could freely study them.[9] His second idea – more specifically linked to cultural policy – was to commission paintings from contemporary artists on the most important events of Hungarian history from the last 150 years.[10] The paintings were ordered as illustrations to the new Fundamental Law and were presented in a road-show across the country. The large figurative pictures covered, among others, World War I, the Holocaust, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and also some more recent political events, such as the police attack on peaceful protesters in 2006. The last piece of the series was titled 'A New Constitution is Born'.[11] The first reaction of art historians was to criticize the anachronism of commissioning historical paintings in the 21th century. Secondly, the aesthetic value of some of the paintings was contested. Another cause for criticism was the price paid by the government, much above market price. Beyond these, the selection of historical events was also questioned; especially if the police attack in 2006 can be paralleled to the counter-Soviet Revolution of 1956. In the case of this painting, questionable subject and questionable aesthetic value were brought together. As a reaction to critics, Kerényi admitted that the goal of this project was to challenge the existing canon, and he attributed the attacks to this challenge:

Here we can find a logically constructed, powerful system, where chain link after chain link is realized, certainly you don't like it, because this is not the left-liberal canon.[12]

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[8] http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/02/00000/The%20New%20Fundamental%20Law%20of%20Hungary.pdf

[9] After a year, the project was declared to be very successful and the ministerial order was repealed.

[10] The memory politics of the Orbán government are beyond the scope of this paper, here I am confined only to their visual representation in the painting series. One very controversial example is the monument erected by the Orbán administration, the German Occupation Memorial in Budapest, Szabadság Square, see: http://www.euractiv.com/section/central-europe/news/controversial-monument-divides-hungarians-angers-jewish-community.

[11] A digital gallery of the paintings: http://hvg.hu/itthon/20111107_kerenyi_imre_festmenyek.

[12] http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20111109_kerenyi_imre

The canon-rewriting program of the government was not restricted to the sphere of visual arts. The next project – initiated by Viktor Orbán and implemented by the deputy of symbolic issues – was the book series called *National Library*, a government-funded new edition of Hungarian classics. The criteria of the selection were, again, the rewriting of the existing cultural canon. As Kerényi put it even more explicitly:

The canon of the national right should be strengthened, against the left-liberal canon that had hegemony for over 61 years. That is why the help of the state is needed here. Every considerable political regime tried to represent itself in buildings, founding newspapers and television channels. Political regimes have a demand to represent. This could not be left to a private publishing house.[13]

First, the Organization of Publishers criticized the project for its intervention into the publishing market. More serious critics targeted copyright issues: in some cases, literary property was unsettled, so several volumes of the National Library proved to be pirate editions. Kerényi attributed these problems to the hurriedness of the project and promised to settle copyright. In one case, he was unsuccessful, which resulted in dropping an important author from the series.

By now, 48 volumes of the National Library series have been published and about the same number are planned. Most of the books are unquestionable Hungarian classics. However, unlike in the case of the painting series, where the piece on Holocaust was painted by the reputed painter László Gyémánt, whose realization was completely mainstream and up to international Holocaust memory standards, the opening volume of the National Library was a saga by the controversial writer, Cecile Tormay, *The Old House* (written in 1914). Kerényi declared this choice as a symbolic act; the rehabilitation of the writer. Tormay was a popular and reputed writer of her time (even nominated for the Nobel Prize in the 1930s), but after WW II she was deleted from the literary canon because of her strong rightist orientation, irredentism and open antisemitism. After the collapse of communism, she was still not presentable. While other artists who were prohibited in the communist period as authors of 'bourgeois literature', like Sándor Márai, were re-added to the canon, Tormay, though republished, remained sub-cultural. It was only after the millennium, that she was rediscovered and – despite her known lesbian orientation – became an icon for the right-wing political community.[14] Nevertheless, *The Old House* is *another* book of hers, not the most famous and infamously anti-Semitic *An Outlaw's Diary.* Imre Kerényi assured the press that he was not planning to publish the *Diary* in the National Library series.

The canon-rewriting activities of the government were clearly intended to provoke culture wars. Besides the cultural legitimization of the government's political aims, the goal was also to challenge the existing interpretations of historical and literary canon. The cult of radical nationalist authors (many of them writing extensively on the

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[13] http://index.hu/belfold/2013/03/06/kerenyi_imre_a_farao_megbizasara_dolgozik/

[14] Besides Tormay, other two 'national radical' authors, Albert Wass and József Nyírő played similar roles in the struggles around the literary canon: their inclusion in the school curriculum provoked intensive debates (see for example http://www.hetek.hu/belfold/201206/irodalmi_kanon_leporoljak). One author of this radical nationalist 'triad', Albert Wass, has been widely popular among readers already since the 1990s in his own right, without government efforts.

Trianon trauma) contributes to the patriotic-nationalist character of post-communist traditionalism.

However, the anti-Semitic character of the same authors is rather uncomfortable for the cultural government. Anti-Semitism is an element of the contra-minorities agenda that is most relevant in the Hungarian cultural discourse but least tolerated in the Hungarian public sphere (anti-immigrant and anti-Roma views are more mainstream). Accordingly, open anti-Semitism is not accepted by the government. Viktor Orbán himself declared zero tolerance against it on several occasions. Imre Kertész, writer of the Nobel Prize winning Holocaust memoir *Fatelessness*, was awarded with the highest Hungarian state order (*Hungarian Order of St. Stephen*) by the Orbán government.[15] Director László Nemes Jeles was also immediately awarded by the government after his Holocaust-themed movie *Son of Saul* had won the Academy Award in the category of Best Foreign Language Film in 2016.

3.2 Institutional and funding changes

Political patronage in Hungary is rather extensive, not only in the bureaucracy (Meyer-Sahling, 2008) but also in the economic and cultural sphere (Kristóf, 2015). After every change of government, many positions in culture are redistributed, not so much out of ideological motivation as in the interests of the political clientele (Kristóf, 2017). However, in the case of the Orbán governments, ideologically supported political patronage attempted to restructure the whole system. In this section, I present three actions of the government shaping cultural institutions. The first one, power delegation to the Hungarian Academy of Arts even affected the Hungarian constitution, and significantly restructured the system of state support for the arts. The second action concerns the single position of the director of the National Theatre, which is of outstanding symbolic importance. The third action (New Theatre) shows how political patronage trickles down to the local level and allows a mayor to interfere with the artistic repertoire of a theatre.

Article X of the new Fundamental Law, after declaring that 'Hungary shall ensure the freedom of scientific research and artistic creation', as a new element, designates two institutions: 'Hungary shall protect the scientific and artistic freedom of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian Academy of Arts.'[16] Although this is a fairly liberal principle, it still aroused widespread criticism. The object of criticism was the Hungarian Academy of Arts. Why has the appraisal of a social organization, founded '*to facilitate the prevalence and protection of the values of Hungarian and universal culture, the respect of the traditions of Hungarian arts and the birth of new and significant artistic works*'[17] been so controversial? To understand this, one needs to be familiar with the history of the Hungarian Academy of *Sciences.*

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[15] Kertész was widely criticised for *accepting* the award, while the government was accused of cynicism, hypocrisy, etc. (see for example: http://magyarnarancs.hu/aszerk/provokacio-es-menlevel-91403/?orderdir=novekvo).

[16] http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/02/00000/The%20New%20Fundamental%20Law%20of%20Hungary.pdf

[17] http://www.mma.hu/en/web/en/index

The Academy of Sciences (founded in 1825) is the oldest and grandest cultural institution in Hungary. Originally, it had an Aesthetics Subsection, but that was terminated by the Communist Party in 1949. After the fall of communism, reflecting the deep political-ideological division of the Hungarian cultural sphere, two Academies of Arts were formed in 1992, curiously both claiming anteriority. The Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Arts (SZALA) was founded as an institution affiliated with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The Hungarian Academy of Arts (HAA) was created as an independent social organization. SZALA did not officially identify with any worldview but was perceived as an association of liberal artists. By contrast, HAA proudly declared its 'national commitment' and conservative views. Double membership in the two organizations was never prohibited and still exists. However, HAA also expects national commitment and public activity from its members, beyond cultural achievement.

The founding president of HAA, architect Imre Makovecz had a significant reputation as a right-wing public intellectual. When Viktor Orbán (a liberal politician between 1989 and 1994) made his conservative turn, Makovecz played an important role among right-wing intellectuals to make Orbán accepted as the political leader of the right. He died in 2011 but his Academy got into the new Hungarian constitution and the succeeding president of HAA, interior designer György Fekete (belonging to the same generation as Makovecz, but much less widely-known and reputed) became one of the most influential actors in cultural policy.

Before 2011, the two Academies of Arts served only as reputational institutions: it was an honor to get into them but membership hardly meant more than symbolic resources.[18] Moreover, their activities were not widely known by the public. However, constitutional recognition foreshadowed the increasing significance of HAA. Before long, it turned out that the government would like to delegate state functions to this cultural organization, re-established as an autonomous public body. To these delegated functions, the government assigned generous financial resources (see Table 1) and allocated a moderate (but yearly increasing) life-annuity for its Fellows.

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[18] Unlike in the Academy of Sciences, where full membership of the Academy includes a high life-annuity.

Table 1. State support for the HAA

2011	330 thousand euros
2012	5 million euros
2013	8,2 million euros
2014	15, 1 million euros
2015	17, 5 million euros
2016	22 million euros

Source: Magyar Narancs[19]

The first activity of the newly empowered HAA was the takeover of the Műcsarnok (Kunsthalle), the largest institution in Budapest designed for the exhibition of contemporary art. In the context of this takeover, HAA president György Fekete exposed his views on art and culture to the media, provoking indignation on the political left and criticism on the right as well. In a famous interview, Fekete declared that he did not believe in democracy and would not allow the exhibition of anti-clerical artwork in state-run institutions:

There must not be blasphemy in state-run institutions. [...] I don't give a damn about this modern democracy, for it's not modern and it's not democracy. It's not democracy, because it wants to put minority power over majority power. This is not democracy – it is anti-democracy. And in this, fascism, communism, this kind of liberalism – which I call 'pseudo-liberalism' I cannot take this into consideration.[20]

The director of Műcsarnok – previously appointed by and loyal to the Orbán administration – resigned in response to the takeover by HAA. Left and right-wing artists together signed a manifesto to express solidarity with him, while Fekete, based on previous criticism coming from the churches, labelled him as a liberal.

The figure of György Fekete rapidly became a symbol of all the government's allegedly anti-liberal and traditionalist cultural views. After his authoritative public statements on Christian and national values in culture, fears of attempts to cultural homogenization and even censorship were raised in the cultural sphere. However, Fekete is over 80 years now. His hardcore conservativism has not met with unanimous acknowledgement in right-wing intellectual circles either, not even at HAA. Some of

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[19] http://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/megy-a-kukaba-95820
[20] With English subtitles, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PErD2Bm5Des   date of the video: 2012.12.04.

the most famous members (among others the internationally reputed opera singer Andrea Rost) protested by quitting the Academy. Still, Fekete completed his second term as president of the organization. At the time of writing this article he has already declared his resignation (in the autumn of 2017), and his successor, to be elected by the members of the Academy, is not known yet. In the past five years, in addition to valuable real estate in Budapest, HAA was given a say in the allocation of state funding via the National Cultural Fund (NCF) and it established numerous scholarships, awards and a research institute.

The restructuring of the National Cultural Fund concerned several fields of art. The NCF was founded in 1993 as an institution to facilitate the autonomy of culture. It is a state-run fund, financed by gambling taxes. The distribution of financial resources is based on a competitive basis, and therefore the question of who delegates the application reviewers is of key importance. Originally, half of the members of the review committees were delegated by cultural organizations, and the other half by the Ministry of Culture. In 2015, the delegation system was changed: one third of the delegates are now appointed by the Hungarian Academy of Arts, and the other two thirds are shared equally between cultural organizations and the ministry. The government argues that this shift is an expansion of cultural autonomy, since the cultural sphere now delegates two thirds of the committee members. However, cultural organizations strongly disagree with this decision, as they were not involved in it, and they regard HAA as an agent of the government.[21]

HAA also has influence over the distribution of state awards. The title *Artist of the Nation*, the top state-funded artistic award in Hungary, is donated directly by the president of HAA. This award is intended for artists above 65 years for their life-work and accompanied by a life annuity amounting to 23 times the minimum pension. Seventy artists are allowed to hold the title simultaneously. Before the award was first distributed in 2013, guesses circulated in the media whether HAA would go on a 'culture war' and reward political loyalty rather than cultural achievement. However, the reception of the prize-list was rather positive. Though HAA rewarded a few of its own heroes and omitted some liberal icons like author Péter Nádas, film director Károly Makk, president of the rival art academy (SZALA), was among the recipients. Generally, the majority of the awards were distributed according to cultural achievement to artists who had nothing to do with politics or public intellectual activity.

Institutional changes were not restricted to delegating power to the Hungarian Academy of Arts. Theatre is a genre historically important for political power because of its direct effects and community experience. Moreover, unlike literature or other forms of art, theatre is controllable to a degree without censorship through state funds and appointment policy. Hungary basically has a state-funded company-theatre structure. All the larger Hungarian cities have their own local theatres with a permanent local company and, of course, Budapest has several theatres. Theatres are owned by local municipalities that have the right to appoint directors (jointly with the Ministry of Human Resources). Given this structure, the appointment of directors has never been just a matter of professional standards. It has depended on the party

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[21] On the protest letter of cultural organizations, see: http://mno.hu/kulturpolitika/levelet-irtak-a-muveszek-a-lex-fekete-ellen-1313365

affiliations of local governments. Since Fidesz won the municipal elections in 2006, most of the country town theatre directors have been resplaced.

Similarly to the two Academies of Arts, there are two Hungarian theatrical societies, and theatres can be members of one or both. The two organizations have very similar names: the older one is the Hungarian Theatre Society (*Magyar Színházi Társaság*), while the younger one – founded in 2008 as a 'counter organization' – is named Hungarian Theatrum Society (*Magyar Teátrumi Társaság*). Founding members of this new society distinguished themselves from the elite of their artistic field, who typically started their careers or even gained their positions in the communist period. They echoed Orbán's political vision about a specifically national approach, the importance of traditions and community in contrast with individualism and liberalism in the cultural field. The society's president, Attila Vidnyánszky, nicely summed up the ideas of post-communist traditionalism:

Every theatre in which many ideas are present has a right to exist. But for a long time, certain issues were handled as taboos and despised, such as patriotism, faithfulness, self-sacrifice, and devotion to God.[22]

Newcomer right-wing theatre directors were affiliated with the Hungarian Theatrum Society, which rapidly acquired influence in the sphere. They have a say in distributing NCF grants and have started to build up an educational center to counter the monopoly of the 'liberal' University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest.

In the Hungarian cultural sphere, the two most reputed institutional positions are the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the director of the National Theatre (Kristóf, 2014). While the former is elected by members of the Academy and is therefore no political appointee, the director of the National Theatre is appointed by the government and has always been a target of political debate as a symbolic position representing the traditions and values of Hungarian culture. Since the end of the 1990s, this debate has been even more heated, focusing on the design and location of the theatre building.[23] Since 2008, the National Theatre was directed by Róbert Alföldi, a reputed actor-director, who was the target of heavy attacks in the Parliament by the far-right party *Jobbik* during his term because of his alleged homosexuality and the 'lack of national commitment' in his artistic concepts. MPs of the ruling *Fidesz* party rejected these attacks and the cultural government let the director complete his official mandate. However, he was replaced at the end of his term with Attila Vidnyánszky, founding president of Hungarian Theatrum Society. Vidnyánszky, too, was an internationally renowned director, whose appointment followed more or less the same process as Alföldi's assignment (with the outcome of the competition being predetermined by the current government). Still, Alföldi's theatre was very successful, in terms of both critical reception and ticket sales, and the appointment of a new director induced a big cultural scandal. Even a few foreign theatre companies (including e.g. the Viennese Burgtheater) made a stand for the

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[22] http://index.hu/kultur/2013/12/12/ezer_nezopont_kell/
[23] The old building of the National Theatre was ruined by the communist government in the 1960s. After the regime change in 1989, every administration had its own concept on the design and the location of a new, representative building. The first Orbán-administration in 1998 stopped an ongoing construction initiated by the previous social-democrat government and built up another, architecturally very controversial building at another site.

displaced director, and domestic theatre audience queued up for tickets as a political demonstration. Through this process, Alföldi became an iconic figure and one of the most important leftist public intellectuals. In this case, culture war was not initiated by the government but it still broke out. Critics could then refer to it as evidence for their claim that the government's cultural policy aimed at a radical elite change.

Besides the National Theatre, there was another director's appointment that generated an international media reaction in 2011. György Dörner, an actor known for his far-right views, was appointed by Budapest mayor István Tarlós director of *New Theatre*, an otherwise rather insignificant downtown theatre in Budapest. The text of Dörner's application was leaked on internet, and gained attention for its unusually sharp anti-liberal tone:

I would also change the name of the theatre (New Theatre) because it now creates some false assumptions. It implies that everything that is new is valuable at once, though this is not true. Things that are new just for saying that they are new, can be fake or retrograde, especially in this degenerate, morbid liberal hegemony. If the municipality agrees, I would change the name of the theatre to Hinterland Theatre. Hinterland signifies the Hungarian nation suffering under social-liberal yoke.[24]

The assignment of Dörner provoked extensive protest, especially because he planned to associate with former politician István Csurka, who was named in the application as the future intendant of the theatre. Csurka was a reputed dramatist in the communist period who, after the collapse of communism, founded the far-right, anti-Semitic Party of Hungarian Justice and Life in 1993. Although by 2011 his party was virtually non-existent, and Csurka did not play a part in Hungarian politics any more, his involvement made Dörner's assignment an item on international media, and the mayor of Budapest had to explain himself (though he declared he would not do so). The mayor argued that he favored Dörner because the applicant focused on 'classical Hungarian drama, in a classical setting', one would say, a classical traditionalist priority. Nevertheless, when the new director wanted to open the season with Csurka's anti-Semitic drama *(The Sixth Coffin),* the mayor expressed his objections. Although in principle the municipality as the owner of the theatre does not have the right to interfere with its artistic repertoire, the controversial play was eventually not presented. Moreover, contrary to the plans, Csurka himself was unable to work in the theatre as he died in early 2012. After his death, New Theatre did not have any scandalous premieres. It went more mainstream in its repertoire, although it did present two of Csurka's *other* (not anti-Semitic) plays. Later, the New Theatre got into the news once more by giving place to a Christian Theatre Festival, where Imre Kerényi, the deputy of symbolic affairs, spoke publicly in a panel discussion about the '*lobby of faggots*' in theatre education.

If I were the vice-king, I would take away the right of teaching actors and all the money from the University of Theatre and Film Arts. [...] A new road should be found, one should fight against this force. This is, actually, the lobby of fags... one should create performances and especially schools against this![25]

Professors of the University of Theatre and Film Arts protested in open letters demanding Kerényi's resignation. The Minister of Human Resources hurried to declare that Kerényi's words were his private opinion. Apart from this statement, no apology was made from the government's side. Kerényi remained in charge, though much less in the foreground than before.

Traditionalist ideology can be interpreted as a tool for displacing members of the old elite. This seems to be true of theatre and, to some extent, the Hungarian Academy of Arts. Besides the National Theatre and New Theatre, many other new, politically loyal theatre directors were appointed by local governments with the help of the newly established Hungarian Theatrum Society. However, most of the new appointees, once in charge, did not turn to anti-liberal or markedly traditionalist artistic concepts (Kristóf, 2017).

Discussion

My research question was whether the cultural policy making of the Orbán government was driven by the ideology of post-communist traditionalism (Csillag and Szelényi, 2015). The content analysis has shown that in several cases, elements of the concept appeared on an official level in cultural policy as a discursive framework. Given the logic of cultural wars, it is not surprising that government actions selected in my case study as representative of post-communist traditionalism have at the same time been the greatest cultural scandals of the period studied. Nevertheless, my findings do not imply that the state attains a coherent illiberal propaganda in Hungary. The government initiated many other actions in the field of cultural policy without any hint of illiberal ideology. Rather, a double structure can be observed: representatives of anti-liberal ideology are typically not professional party politicians but former members of the political clientele, recently entrusted with delegated power by the prime minister. While the ministerial structure is responsible for the general management of cultural issues and maintaining institutions, symbolic issues and 'culture wars', along with the challenge of constructing a new elite, are assigned to the prime minister's own loyal intellectuals.

Among the elements of the anti-liberal half of this double-structured cultural strategy, many characteristics of Csillag and Szelényi's post-communist traditionalism/conservatism could be found (Csillag and Szelényi, 2015). First and foremost, the discourse of patriotism-nationalism penetrates all the actions of this cultural strategy. The book series *National Library* was designed for the reinforcement of nationalist authors within the literary canon. The Hungarian Academy of Arts explicitly claims that it expects 'national commitment' from its candidates. New appointees to theatre director posts emphasize the same. It is a crucial element, given Viktor Orbán's views on the function of culture, creating and maintaining the political community. Secondly, *religious allusions* are also present. Anti-liberal actors are speaking against liberalism in the name of Christianity, when they object to blasphemy or refer to the Christian cultural tradition. Nationalism is strongly linked to this narrative; based on the claim that Hungary is a Christian country, values of Hungarian culture are regarded as products of the Christian tradition, and hence sacred. The concept of sanctity penetrates cultural discourse in assertions like 'great Hungarian

dramas are sacred pieces' or the claim that the building of the National Theatre should be consecrated. Another noticeable element is occasional *anti-gayism.* Traditionally, this is the territory of far-right movements, which is the case in Hungary. Unlike in Putin's Russia, there is no state-supported anti-gay propaganda, and Budapest Gay Pride is organized every year, though always with a far-right counter-demonstration taking place. The far-right parliamentary party *Jobbik* targeted the sexual orientation of the director of National Theatre several times between 2010 and 2013, while MPs of the ruling *Fidesz* party rejected these attacks. However, at least in one case, a governmental deputy used anti-gay rhetoric ('lobby of faggots') for the justification of his claims on institutional change. The last and even more controversial ideological element is *anti-Semitism.* It is not present in governmental rhetoric in an explicit form. Rather, authors of Holocaust-themed pieces with international reputation, such as Kertész or Nemes Jeles, are highly honored. Meanwhile, in implicit cultural policy, the government's tacit definition of anti-Semitism is not inclusive: the principle seems to be that cultural achievement is separable from objectionable views, and not anti-Semitic works of anti-Semitic authors can be included in the cultural canon in order to strengthen the radical nationalist tradition.

Nevertheless, despite that in some of its actions the Orbán government uses post-communist traditionalist ideology, shifts made by the government do not constitute a coherent ideology-driven cultural policy. The results of incoherent governmental actions show that the main aim of the government is not an ideological homogenization of culture but the weakening of old elite structures and institutions to favor its own loyal cultural elite. Thus, anti-liberal rhetoric serves to provide a narrative framework for governmental moves aimed at eliminating old cultural structures with the goal of redistributing cultural positions and resources. This goal is implemented by 1) attempts to rewrite the cultural canon, 2) the occupation of existing elite positions in the cultural field, and 3) the founding new cultural institutions and positions, thereby creating or strengthening parallel/alternative structures alongside the existing ones in the cultural field.

Nevertheless, the case presented shows that the results of these governmental attempts were controversial as the government tried and backed down several times. Canon rewriting is one of the most difficult policy tasks. If a government is unwilling or unable to use the means of censorship, as in the communist era, it might be easier to include new authors in the canon than to eliminate others, as happened in the case of the 'radical nationalist triad'. The process of institution building was more successful, but the constraints here are somewhat similar. If the government does not eliminate rival cultural organizations or censor oppositional cultural products, its opportunities are limited to increasing support to its loyal supporters, as in the cases of HAA, the Hungarian Theatrum Society and the NCF, and cultural diversity endures.[26]

Another limitation for the Hungarian government was that administratively empowered cultural organizations remained very loyal but did not use their delegated power to homogenize culture or expurgate left-wing artists. György Fekete does not play the role of a 'cultural commissar' as it was feared, and Imre Kerényi took a back

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[26] A counter-example is Erdogan's illiberal Turkey, where direct intervention and censorship is forging ahead in cultural policy (Aksoy and Şeyben, 2015).

seat. New organizations, founded or strengthened as a gesture to a right-wing intellectual circle, principally served only as payoffs to the political clientele. Nevertheless, the narratives of the political sides did not get closer to each other. What is perceived as cultural homogenization by the left is understood by the new elite as a process of heterogenization or pluralization against 'liberal hegemony'. In spite of this, and beyond their anti-liberal attitude, members of the new cultural elite mostly aspire to general acknowledgement in the cultural field, which makes them support and reward cultural achievement regardless of its ideological content, as it was shown in the case study.

Csillag and Szelényi regarded post-communist traditionalism as a popular ideology appealing to ordinary people and used by the political elite to gain the sympathy of potential voters. The lesson of the second and third turns of the Orbán government is that Prime Minister Orbán is very successful in this, indeed using traditionalist concepts like anti-immigration and images of common enemies of the nation in a virtuoso populist way. Nevertheless, in the case of cultural policy, this populist use of ideology would not really work, because it is only the elite and not the majority of voters that are interested in cultural issues such as the activity of Art Academies. Why, then, is cultural policy making still important for the study of illiberal democracies? My case study showed that the relevance of cultural policy making lies in the successful creation of a loyal cultural elite for a managed illiberal political system. This resource redistribution process required the legitimizing function of post-communist traditionalist ideology, but it did not cause any deep or expansive traditionalist turn in the cultural field itself. The central field of force in Hungarian culture, envisioned by Viktor Orbán in 2009, has been created since then in institutional and financial, rather than in ideological, terms.

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