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MASTER THESIS | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Beyond the Shrink-Wrap: A National and Transnational Analysis of
Hungary's Law LXXIX Through the Lens of Law and Culture

verfasst von | submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Advanced International Studies (M.A.I.S.)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it
appears on the student record sheet:

UA 992 940

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt
| Degree programme as it appears
on the student record sheet:

Internationale Studien | International Studies

Betreut von | Supervisor:

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**diplomatische
akademie wien**
Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne

Abstract:

Hungary's 2021 Law LXXIX introduced controversial restrictions on LGBTQ+ content in media and literature, requiring such materials to be wrapped or removed from public access. Originally aimed at combating paedophilia, the law was amended to prohibit the exposure of minors to homosexuality and transgender identities, reflecting broader illiberal governance trends under the Fidesz-KDNP government. This legislation sparked significant cultural and political debates, highlighting the complex interaction between law, culture, and identity in Hungary. This master thesis first explores how cultural discourse and public controversies influenced the creation and passage of Law LXXIX, examining parliamentary debates, media narratives, and the impact on the book market, including legal challenges and social resistance. It reveals a dynamic cycle in which law shapes cultural practices, and culture, in turn, affects legal norms. The analysis then situates Hungary's law within a wider transnational context of gender identity codification, drawing on theories of cultural governance and identity politics to assess whether this legislation is an isolated case or part of a global pattern of legal regulation of gender. Building on the work of Naomi Mezey and Rosemary Coombe, the research demonstrates how law and culture are deeply intertwined, with legal norms acting as powerful frameworks that both mirror and transform societal identities and power relations. This work offers insights into how legal measures regulating gender identity impact freedom of expression and democratic values in contemporary societies.

Key words: Law LXXIX, Hungary, LGBTQ+ rights, Censorship, Transnational governance

Abstrakt:

Das ungarische Gesetz LXXIX aus dem Jahr 2021 führte umstrittene Beschränkungen für LGBTQ+-Inhalte in Medien und Literatur ein und verlangte, dass solche Materialien verpackt oder aus dem öffentlichen Zugang entfernt werden. Ursprünglich zur Bekämpfung von Pädophilie gedacht, wurde das Gesetz geändert, um Minderjährige vor Homosexualität und Transgender-Identitäten zu schützen, was die allgemeinen illiberalen Regierungstendenzen unter der Fidesz-KDNP-Regierung widerspiegelt. Diese Gesetzgebung löste erhebliche kulturelle und politische Debatten aus und verdeutlichte die komplexe Wechselwirkung zwischen Recht, Kultur und Identität in Ungarn. Die Masterarbeit untersucht zunächst, wie der kulturelle Diskurs und öffentliche Kontroversen die Entstehung und Verabschiedung des Gesetzes LXXIX beeinflusst haben, und beleuchtet dabei parlamentarische Debatten, Medienberichte sowie die Auswirkungen auf den Buchmarkt, einschließlich rechtlicher Herausforderungen und gesellschaftlichen Widerstands. Sie zeigt einen dynamischen Kreislauf auf, in dem das Recht kulturelle Praktiken prägt und die Kultur wiederum rechtliche Normen beeinflusst. Anschließend wird das ungarische Gesetz in einen breiteren transnationalen Kontext der Kodifizierung der Geschlechtsidentität gestellt, wobei Theorien zur kulturellen Governance und Identitätspolitik herangezogen werden, um zu beurteilen, ob diese Gesetzgebung ein Einzelfall oder Teil eines globalen Musters der gesetzlichen Regulierung des Geschlechts ist. Aufbauend auf den Arbeiten von Naomi Mezey und Rosemary Coombe zeigt die Masterarbeit, wie Recht und Kultur eng miteinander verflochten sind, wobei Rechtsnormen als Rahmenbedingungen fungieren, die gesellschaftliche Identitäten und Machtverhältnisse sowohl widerspiegeln als auch verändern. Diese Arbeit bietet Einblicke darin, wie sich gesetzliche Maßnahmen zur Regulierung der Geschlechtsidentität auf die Meinungsfreiheit und demokratischen Werte in heutigen Gesellschaften auswirken.

Schlüsselwörter: Gesetz LXXIX, Ungarn, LGBTQ+-Rechte, Zensur, transnationale Regierungsführung

Pledge of Honesty

“On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.”

Agota Kertesz

06.06.2025, Vienna

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1. Introduction

In 2025, the Hungarian band Carson Coma reached the semi-finals of the San Marino Song Contest with their politically charged track *Daddy Said No*, which premiered on San Marino RTV.¹ Although the song ultimately did not advance to the finals and thus to the Eurovision Song Contest 2025, it attracted attention for its critique of Hungary's political climate under the Fidesz-KDNP² government and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.³ The lyrics criticize what the band perceives as the repressive nature of the regime, symbolically portraying Orbán as “Daddy”, a figure of authoritarian control and the suppression of freedom, through the recurring refrain of him constantly saying no. The first two verses of the song read as follows:

[Verse 1]

*“My daddy isn't a big fan of my friends
He thinks they're washing my brain
The more he hates 'em, more I love 'em, I guess
It's causing him migraines”*

[Pre-Chorus]

*“So when they come together to have a good time
He locks me in my room
Wraps in plastic all my books
Naughty boys get no ice cream
And yet I scream, I scream, I scream, I scream
Whoaaa”⁴*

Focusing on the line “wraps in plastic all my books”, it refers to a practice that carries deeper meaning, one that may not be immediately apparent to an international audience. However, for Hungarians, this lyric holds significant cultural, political, and legal weight that warrants closer examination. The text points to specific legislation introduced by the Fidesz-KDNP government in 2021: Law LXXIX, along with additional consumer protection provisions. These laws were originally intended to introduce stricter penalties for paedophilic crimes,

¹ Carson Coma's song *Daddy Said No* was their entry into the 2025 Eurovision Song Contest. However, Hungary has not participated in the contest since 2019. While the reason for this has not been officially stated, outside sources cite the contest being overly LGBTQ+ friendly, as well as MTVA (Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelő Alap - Media Services and Support Trust Fund) lacking the financial funding to participate. As a result, Carson Coma chose another way into the contest via San Marino. Since the state is too small to always field its own acts, it allows artists from other countries to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest through its national selection. If Carson Coma had won, they would have performed under the San Marino colours.

² Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége - Alliance of Young Democrats
Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt - Christian Democratic People's Party

³ Bicsérdi-Fülöp, Á. (2025, March 1).

⁴ Carson Coma. (2025).

which is why it is also referred to as Child Protection Act⁵. However, the initial focus changed following amendments to the proposed bill, expanding the legislation to prohibit exposing minors to content depicting homosexuality or transgender identities in media and educational materials.⁶ As part of the law's implementation, a consumer protection regulation required bookstores to physically wrap books containing such content in shrink-wrap to prevent access by underage readers. In practice, the measure ended up restricting access not only for minors but also for adults, as these books were often removed from public display entirely. Moreover, bookstores were subjected to inspections by consumer protection authorities, and those found in violation faced financial penalties. Lára, one of Hungary's largest bookstore chains, challenged the fines in court, arguing that the law's language was vague and overly broad. Their legal challenge was successful, resulting in a revision of the regulation that made it less strict and ended the inspections. Meanwhile, there appeared to be no significant enforcement regarding the law's original aim in addressing offenses related to paedophilia, further raising concerns about its true intent and application of the Child Protection Act.⁷

Although the policy enforcement through consumer protection authorities was temporary, it left a lasting mark on Hungarian society. Shrink-wrapped books not only became a symbol of censorship and government control but also marked a turning point in how the LGBTQ+⁸ community came to be positioned as an antagonistic force to the heteronormative values perpetuated by the Hungarian government.⁹ Arguably, this shift contributed to the emergence of a more tangible civil anti-gender movement in the country.¹⁰ The regulation entered public discourse and sparked various forms of protest, including Carson Coma's song *Daddy Said No*. Notably, this was not the band's first critique of the government, yet, it was their first major effort aimed primarily at an international audience; Carson Coma has consistently used their platform to challenge the ruling coalition. *Daddy Said No* functions as a critical song, employing, among other figures of speech, the image of wrapped books as a metaphor for censoring certain content. By performing the song in English during the Eurovision selection process, the band aimed to draw more widespread attention to this distinctly Hungarian issue

⁵ The master thesis refers to the 2021 Law LXXIX as the Child Protection Act; however, this should not be confused with the earlier legislation of the same name, which the new regulation seeks to amend.

⁶ Linnamäki, K. (2022), p. 19-20.

⁷ See Appendix: Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

⁸ In the master thesis I will use the abbreviation LGBTQ+. It is a common abbreviation, which refers to various sexual orientations – lesbian, gay and bisexual – as well as non-conforming gender identities, like transgender identity. The letter Q is categorizes generally both non-heterosexual orientations and non-conforming gender identities. The + at the end of the abbreviation recognizes any addition sexual or gender-based categories, which might not be encompassed by the LGBTQ and is a sign of inclusiveness. Vitikainen, A. E. (2023). *LGBTQ*.

⁹ Linnamäki, K. (2022), p. 17.

¹⁰ Kováts, E., & Pető, A. (2017).

and to raise awareness about restrictive policies that silence marginalized voices. While Hungary's legislation stands out in its specific expression, most notably the literal wrapping of books, the broader message aligns with an international trend. The global movement to legally define and regulate gender identity is not limited to Hungary or other so-called illiberal democracies; it is increasingly visible even in Western countries.¹¹ Law LXXIX, therefore, reflects a transnational pattern: the politicization of gender identity and the effort to codify specific gender norms through legal frameworks. Across both conservative and more liberal democracies, there is a growing tendency to legislate definitions of what constitutes male and female, effectively reducing the complex concept of gender to a strict binary.¹² Within this framework, some identities are validated and protected by law, while others are excluded or marginalized.¹³ Thus, *Daddy Said No* can be read not just as a specifically national critique but as part of a broader transnational concern, one that questions the role of law in shaping societal norms and challenges restrictions on freedom to content about certain gender identity.

1.1 Research question and thesis outlook

This short introduction albeit only on a surface level exemplifies the impact of Law LXXIX on cultural production. It is within this dynamic and interconnected relationship between legislation and culture that this master's thesis finds its focus and seeks to explore more deeply. The central research question will answer how culture and law influence one another in the context of Hungary's Law LXXIX and its accompanying consumer protection provisions, and what broader international implications and assumptions can be drawn from this case study. To answer this, the thesis is structured in two distinct parts. The first part of this thesis examines the relationship between culture and law within Hungary, focusing on how public discourse and cultural developments contributed to the creation and passage of Law LXXIX. Although culture and law are often seen as separate spheres, this section explores their mutual influence, highlighting the role of cultural processes and events in shaping legislation and in turn the impact of law on cultural expression. The analysis begins by identifying key cultural events that preceded and arguably influenced the legislative process. These include public controversies, media discourses, and creative works that addressed issues which were later reflected in the law. The aim is to understand how such

¹¹ Abou-Chadi, T., Breyer, M., & Gessler, T. (2021), p. 311.

Peroni, L. (2024), p. 43-44.

Kováts, E. (2017), p. 175-176.

¹² Stammberger, B. (2022), p. 2.

¹³ Coombe, R., & Miller, T. (2001), p. 38.

culturally significant moments contributed to a political climate receptive to legal change. Following this, the thesis examines how cultural pressures were translated into formal policy. It looks closely at the institutional processes through which Law LXXIX was debated and enacted in the Hungarian Parliament. Parliamentary records, including transcripts of debates, voting outcomes, and most importantly legislative documents, will be used to analyse the arguments and cultural narratives presented by lawmakers. Special attention is given to political speeches that justify Law LXXIX and reflect broader societal concerns. A close reading of the legal text itself will show how the law regulates content related to homosexuality and transgender identities, particularly under the guise of consumer protection. The final stage of this study investigates the concrete requirements of the law, such as the mandate for certain books to be wrapped in plastic, and explores how these provisions affect cultural production, especially in the book market. This includes an assessment of how bookstores have responded, any changes in the accessibility and visibility of affected publications, and forms of legal and social resistance. To gain a fuller understanding, the study will also incorporate an interview with a key figure in said book market and an analysis of media discourse surrounding the law.¹⁴ By tracing these developments, this thesis aims to map the ongoing cycle in which culture shapes policy, and policy, in turn, reshapes culture — continuing in a hermeneutic circle. Aligned with the first part of the central research question, this section asks how Hungarian cultural discourse contributed to the development of Law LXXIX, and how the law subsequently influenced cultural practices and public debate, particularly regarding book distribution and the visibility of LGBTQ+ related content.

The second part of this thesis will engage in a comparative legal approach to situate Hungary's Law LXXIX within a broader transnational context. Shifting away from the cultural and discursive focus of the first section, this part centres on the legal codification of gender and identity, examining how such codification functions as a tool of illiberal governance, both within Hungary and beyond. Drawing on Rosemary Coombe's framework of identity politics and cultural governance, the analysis explores how legal systems determine who is recognized, included, or excluded in society. Coombe's perspective, which highlights how legislation structures belonging and marginalization, provides a critical

¹⁴ As part of this master's thesis, four interviews were conducted with the following individuals: Krisztián Nyáry, Creative Director of the Lira book company; Christian Autengruber, former Director of the Österreichisches Kulturforum in Budapest; Judit Zeller, a legal scholar at the University of Pécs (PTE); and a member of the Hungarian LGBTQ+ community who wished to remain anonymous. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of them for taking the time to answer my questions regarding Hungarian law. While not all interviews are reproduced in full, selected insights are referenced in the footnotes throughout the thesis.

foundation for assessing the hegemonic functions of law.¹⁵ The research builds on scholarship concerning illiberal democracies and the ways in which such regimes use legislation to enforce identity norms. Increasingly, law has become an essential instrument for advancing identity politics, particularly through the formal regulation of gender. By identifying comparable legal measures — especially in Western democracies that have adopted similar language — this section evaluates whether Hungary’s Law LXXIX is a unique case or part of a broader legislative trend. This includes examining whether similar laws employ child protection arguments or align with traditionalist or nationalist ideologies, signalling a shared pattern of framing across different political systems. Ultimately, this methodology seeks to understand how gender-related agenda setting and legal codification operates as a transnational phenomenon. In line with the second research question, this section asks to what extent Hungary’s Law LXXIX reflects a wider international movement to legislate gender identity, and how this trend is expressed in both illiberal and liberal political systems. Together with the first part of the thesis, this analysis demonstrates not only the reciprocal relationship between law and culture at the national level but also how domestic legal developments can have broader global implications, contributing to ongoing discourse about the regulation of identity.

1.2 Literature review

The cultural study of law is a dynamic and contested field, marked by methodological diversity and the absence of a single, unified theoretical framework. Scholars may approach this interdisciplinary area through lenses drawn from cultural and literary theory, anthropology, history, sociology, and philosophy, tailoring their methods to suit the particularities of each case study.¹⁶ As a result, defining the field with precision and determining how best to approach such studies remains a challenge. Nevertheless, foundational contributions by Naomi Mezey and Rosemary Coombe have been instrumental in shaping contemporary understandings of the reciprocal relationship between law and culture. Their work will serve as the theoretical foundation for the analysis of Law LXXIX, offering a framework through which to examine the ongoing cycle between legal structures and cultural production.

In her essay *Law as Culture*, Naomi Mezey challenges the traditional dichotomy that separates law as a formal and rational system from culture as fluid and ambiguous. She argues that law and culture exist in a dialectic relationship, continuously shaping and reshaping one

¹⁵ Coombe, R., & Miller, T. (2001).

¹⁶ Mezey, N. (2015), p. 39-40.

another. Mezey conceptualizes culture as “a set of shared signifying practices that are always in the making,” positioning legal systems not merely as products of culture but as active participants in the construction of cultural meaning.¹⁷ This perspective aligns with broader cultural theories, particularly those of Stuart Hall, who underscores the contested and evolving nature of culture,¹⁸ and William Sewell, who highlights the structured yet dynamic qualities of cultural meanings.¹⁹ These meanings are not fixed or universally accepted; rather, they shift across social categories such as gender, race, and class, and are inherently marked by contradiction and change. Within this framework, law functions as a powerful signifying practice that organizes identity, regulates behaviour, and helps society’s self-interpretation.²⁰ Legal authority is not autonomous but depends on interpretation, contestation, and application within specific cultural contexts. As Mezey observes, legal norms are deeply embedded in social practices that are, in turn, shaped by legal discourse. This co-constitutive relationship challenges traditional views of legal autonomy, presenting law as a dynamic and discursive force intricately entangled in social relations. Mezey’s concept of “slippage” is especially useful for understanding the cultural impact of Hungary’s 2021 Law LXXIX. Slippage describes the dissonance between the production of legal essence and the subsequent reception and rearticulation within a cultural context. This occurs when cultural practices or identities intersect with specific legal rules, sometimes aligning with them, at other times clashing. These encounters can alter both the legal norm and the cultural practice, with the potential to either eliminate a practice entirely or change its meaning and effect in ways that were not anticipated by the law’s original intent. Every legal rule, once implemented, enters a culturally specific environment where its meanings — both intended and unintended — begin to circulate, shift, and transform. Law, in this sense, is not static. Its significance evolves through its interaction with culture, a process that is ongoing and often unpredictable.²¹ Such slippage reveals law’s fluid nature and its ongoing evolution through cultural negotiation — a phenomenon evident in the contested interpretations of Law LXXIX’s regulation of LGBTQ+ representation and the symbolic wrapping of books. Another way to understand this dynamic is through Mezey’s use of Clifford Geertz’s concept of thick description, a method that interprets the layered social codes giving actions meaning within a cultural context. Instead of simply documenting law’s appearance in culture, this approach focuses on the interpretive struggles where law and culture intersect. It highlights their entangled relationship, showing

¹⁷ Mezey, N., Sarat, A. D., & Simon, J. (2020), p. 39.

¹⁸ Hall, S. (1997), p. 5

¹⁹ Mezey, N., Sarat, A. D., & Simon, J. (2020), p. 42.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 42.

²¹ Ibid. p. 54.

they cannot be separated cleanly. Cultural interpretation of law involves examining legal meanings where they are produced — such as in courtrooms and parliament — while also considering the cultural practices that inspire or challenge legal norms in their application. At the same time, it attends to how law and culture influence each other, blurring the boundaries between production and reception resulting in a circulation of shared, conflicting, and constantly renegotiated meanings.²²

Rosemary Coombe expands on this by emphasizing how legal discourse defines the boundaries of community — who belongs, who holds rights, and how individuals and groups are either recognized or marginalized. She underscores that legal categories such as citizenship, race, gender, and indigeneity are not static or natural, but are instead constructed through cultural narratives and historical power relations. Moreover, Coombe explores the ways in which individuals and communities actively resist these legal definitions. She argues that identity is not simply imposed by the law but is constantly negotiated through legal and cultural struggles. Marginalized groups, in particular, often challenge the law's restrictive definitions by asserting alternative narratives that push back against dominant frameworks.²³

Both Mezey and Coombe emphasize the subtle yet pervasive power of law, which often operates invisibly to shape everyday life by legitimizing certain meanings while suppressing others. Unlike informal cultural norms, law wields institutional authority that structures both public discourse and private identities. Mezey suggests that law may be viewed as a colony within culture, shaped and challenged by cultural practices rather than existing independently. This cyclical and entangled relationship between law and culture, captured in Mezey's notion of "law as culture as law," reveals the permeable boundaries and rhetorical nature of distinctions between these domains. Drawing on these theoretical frameworks, this thesis approaches Hungary's Law LXXIX not merely as a legislative measure, but as a cultural signifier — both shaped by cultural discourse and producing effects that extend beyond the legal text itself. Its impact on the publishing industry and the representation of LGBTQ+ identities calls for an analysis that integrates cultural interpretation with legal study. By employing the concepts of slippage and thick description, this research explores how Law LXXIX's norms are interpreted, contested, and rearticulated within Hungary's cultural landscape. Ultimately, it demonstrates how law and culture operate as co-constitutive forces that jointly shape meaning, identity, and social practice in contemporary Hungarian society.

²² Mezey, N., Sarat, A. D., & Simon, J. (2020), p. 56.

²³ Coombe, R., & Miller, T. (2001), p. 38-44.

While the first part of this thesis relies on the cultural study of law and draws on the theoretical frameworks developed by Mezey and Coombe, the second part engages with the extensive body of literature on illiberal democracies and the gender discourses that emerge within them. This section seeks to expand on existing research by not only analysing rhetorical strategies and agenda-setting mechanisms but also by examining the concrete legislative measures that reflect and reinforce illiberal ideologies. In doing so, it is important to highlight the most significant publications that inform this part of the thesis.

Katinka Linnamäki's *Not in Front of the Children* remains the only scholarly work specifically focused on Hungary's Law LXXIX.²⁴ Her analysis approaches the topic from two angles. First, she explores how illiberal regimes like Hungary define themselves in opposition to liberal democratic values, emphasizing nationalist, anti-EU, anti-immigration and anti-LGBTQ+ positions. Second, she identifies familism²⁵ as a central pillar of this illiberal identity, understood as an ideological commitment to the traditional family as the foundational social institution. Familism often serves as a justification for restrictive policies such as Law LXXIX, prioritizing conventional family structures over individual rights. As Linnamäki argues, familism in this context operates not only as a form of social policy but also as a mechanism for legitimizing broader nationalist and cultural agendas. It reinforces exclusionary norms and reshapes public discourse around gender and sexuality. While this thesis builds on Linnamäki's work, it extends the analysis beyond familism to explore the practical implementation of Law LXXIX within Hungarian cultural life, particularly its effects on book publishing. Moreover, unlike Linnamäki's primarily national focus, this thesis places Hungary's illiberal project within a wider transnational framework, recognizing its resonance across borders.

To support this broader perspective, this thesis also draws on the volume *Gender as Symbolic Glue*, edited by Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim.²⁶ This collection examines how conservative and far-right parties across Europe — specifically in Hungary, Poland, Germany, France, and Slovakia — use anti-gender rhetoric as unifying ideological “glue”. These actors portray so-called “gender ideology” as a threat to traditional values, mobilizing opposition to gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and comprehensive sexual education. The book's case studies of different states provide a detailed history of how anti-gender discourse has emerged and evolved in each national context, highlighting the ways these movements influence and shape public debate. The contributors argue for the necessity of stronger progressive responses to

²⁴ Linnamäki, K. (2022).

²⁵ Different spellings have been found: familism, familism, as well as familyism.

²⁶ Kováts, E., & Põim, M. (Eds.). (2015).

counteract the rise of this ideological fundamentalism, which increasingly threatens hard-won gender rights across Europe.

Extensions of the arguments presented in *Gender as Symbolic Glue* can be found in two significant works that further develop the understanding of gender politics in illiberal regimes. First, the comparative analysis by Weronika Grzebalska and Andrea Pető, titled *The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland*, offers a deeper examination of how gender functions as a central ideological battleground in illiberal state-building.²⁷ Focusing on Hungary and Poland, the authors argue that opposition to the liberal equality paradigm is not merely rhetorical, but is institutionalized through specific policy strategies — most notably, family mainstreaming and coordinated anti-gender campaigns. These mechanisms serve as foundational elements of illiberal governance, reshaping key concepts such as security, equality, and human rights. Grzebalska and Pető show that illiberal regimes often appropriate tools originally designed to promote liberal democratic values — such as gender equality funding and institutional frameworks — to weaken feminist civil society and suppress emancipatory politics. This strategic repurposing constitutes a distinct gendered modus operandi, highlighting the specific vulnerabilities faced by women's rights and feminist activism under illiberal rule in Central Europe.

In a complementary analysis, Eszter Kováts and Andrea Pető, in *Anti-gender movements in Hungary: A discourse without a movement?*, take a closer look at the manifestation of anti-gender discourse in Hungary.²⁸ They argue that although political and social rhetoric opposing so-called “gender ideology” is highly visible, it has not resulted in a cohesive grassroots movement. Instead, anti-gender narratives in Hungary are largely driven by political actors and conservative elites, who employ this discourse to undermine feminist and LGBTQ+ rights. Rather than reflecting widespread popular mobilization, anti-gender rhetoric functions primarily as a symbolic and strategic political tool. Kováts and Pető emphasize that its role is less about fostering grassroots activism and more about reinforcing illiberal political agendas and reshaping cultural discourse from the top down. Their work essentially demonstrates that no tangible civil movement is necessary; as such a discourse can be effectively established and maintained by political actors alone.

Abou-Chadi, Breyer, and Gessler analyse the renewed politicization of gender in Western Europe, focusing on how mainstream right and radical right parties have increasingly

²⁷ Grzebalska, W., & Pető, A. (2018).

²⁸ Kováts, E., & Pető, A. (2017).

mobilized gender issues as part of their political strategies.²⁹ While gender equality debates have long been part of Western democratic competition since the 1970s, recent years have seen a backlash, with conservative forces framing “gender ideology” and LGBTQ+ rights as threats to traditional values. Using social media data from seven Western European countries, the authors show that right-wing parties have markedly increased their public discourse on feminism-related topics — often to oppose inclusive gender policies rather than support them. This shift reflects broader political dynamics where gender becomes a contested cultural and electoral issue, raising questions about how progressive parties will respond to these challenges in future political conflicts, especially in terms of legislation.

Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe by Köttig, Bitzan, and Pető offers a critical analysis of how gender ideologies operate within far-right movements across Europe.³⁰ The volume highlights the paradoxical roles women play in these movements — both as participants in advancing reactionary agendas and as symbolic figures within nationalist, patriarchal narratives. Drawing on case studies from multiple European countries, the authors examine how far-right actors construct and instrumentalize gender norms to reinforce ethno-nationalist identities, mobilize support, and legitimize exclusionary politics. The book underscores that gender is not peripheral but central to understanding the structure and appeal of far-right ideologies, making it a crucial contribution to feminist political analysis and far-right studies.

The edited volume *Excluding Diversity Through Intersectional Borderings* explores how anti-migrant and anti-gender discourses intersect across Europe and North America.³¹ Drawing on Cassidy et al.’s concept of *intersectional borderings*, the authors examine how exclusionary political narratives and policies are shaped by race, gender, sexuality, and normative ideas of family. The volume highlights how these discourses are both propagated by radical-right movements and embedded in institutional frameworks like migration and welfare policies. It also considers the everyday effects of these exclusions and how they are contested or internalized by affected communities. This work contributes to critical scholarship on the intersection of identity-based exclusion and state governance.

In this literature review, the research of Birgit Stammberger’s *Back to Sex als "beyond binary"* shall also be mentioned as an important contribution that approaches the topic from a different lens.³² Specifically, she critiques the binary framing of gender in law and public discourse, arguing that such categorizations rely on politicized interpretations of biology

²⁹ Abou-Chadi, T., Breyer, M., & Gessler, T. (2021).

³⁰ Köttig, M., Bitzan, R., & Pető, A. (2016).

³¹ Merla, L., Murru, S., Orsini, G., & Vuckovic Juros, T. (Eds.). (2024).

³² Stammberger, B. (2022).

rather than on scientific consensus. While legal frameworks often invoke biology to justify rigid gender norms, contemporary biosciences increasingly recognize sex and gender as fluid and multifactorial. Stammberger highlights how popular science and media distort biological research to reinforce stereotypes, while critical gender studies emphasize that biological knowledge is socially situated. The article calls for a post-binary, transdisciplinary approach that views biology not as opposed to social theory, but as a field open to reinterpretation and collaboration.

2. The Start of the Cultural and Legal Cycle

In the following chapter two defining phenomena related to Law LXXIX will be described, both serving as an adequate starting point for the hermeneutic cycle of influence between culture and law. Each will be examined through theoretical frameworks developed by Naomi Mezey. The first is what she refers to as *the power of culture*, and the second as *the power of law*.³³

Mezey's concept of the *potential of culture* is rooted in the cultural and political discourse, as well as in cultural production, surrounding LGBTQ+ minorities prior to the passing of the Child Protection Act. The forthcoming case study will demonstrate how seemingly minor events can possess significant potency, especially when they are thrust into the spotlight and amplified within public discourse. Mezey describes this as the *potential and persuasive nature* of specific cultural events.³⁴ In the case of Law LXXIX, these events include the publication of a children's book and its subsequent destruction. This perspective foregrounds the pervasive influence of cultural practices, which shaped the legal norms that emerged with the 2021 legislation, effectively positioning law not above culture, but rather as its constituent. While in some cases law simply reflects prevailing cultural values, in others it actively supports cultural practices that might otherwise fall outside legal boundaries. This means that cultural practices can become so persuasive and widely recognized that they are translated into legal text, even if they are otherwise problematic. This latter instance is arguably exemplified by Law LXXIX, offering protection and legitimacy to certain highly contested cultural practices — namely, the restriction of specific content related to the LGBTQ+ community.

On the other hand, there is the *persuasive nature of law*, making legal texts one of the most potent and lasting forms of signifying practices within culture. Naomi Mezey proposes a

³³ Mezey, N., Sarat, A. D., & Simon, J. (2020).

³⁴ Ibid. p. 47-51.

paradigm of law as culture, in which most cultural acts, symbols, and practices are shaped by or traceable to the presence or absence of legal rules. In this view, law does not need to be explicitly present to exert influence; its absence can be equally powerful in shaping social life.³⁵ This dynamic is clearly reflected in the case of Law LXXIX: the absence of specific legislation concerning paedophilia triggered public outrage, generating pressure that ultimately led to the law's passage. Here, the absence of regulation created a cultural reaction strong enough to demand a legal response — demonstrating how deeply law and culture are intertwined. Law LXXIX, as can be argued through Mezey, is not a neutral or autonomous system but a dynamic, discursive instrument rooted in Hungary's cultural and social relations from which it emerges. It shapes and is shaped by identities, practices, and symbols, functioning as one of the most potent and lasting forms of cultural signification.³⁶

2.1 The Creation and Destruction of a Book

In September 2020, the Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület (Labrisz Lesbian Association) presented their book *Meseország mindenkié (A Fairy Tale for Everyone)*, an anthology of reimagined fairy tales. The book reinterprets both classical and traditional Hungarian tales by making the main characters members of minority groups, such as Roma and Sinti people, Jewish individuals, people of colour or members of the LGBTQ+ community.³⁷ The editors of the book *Meseország mindenkié* stated that they recognized a gap in the market with the lack of fairy tale heroes and heroines that reflect the lives of marginalized people, leading to this cultural product. As editor Boldizsár Nagy explains in the preface to the second edition “*all of us need stories.*”³⁸ He adds that fairy tales have likely existed since the dawn of time and have always been essential for society. Over centuries, they have changed organically, with one tale often existing in hundreds of different variations, passed across cultures and shaped by them. Thus, Labrisz invited both professional and amateur writers to choose a tale that was meaningful to them and rewrite it from their own perspective. The writers were encouraged to let contemporary experiences shape the stories and to choose heroes or heroines with whom those living in marginalized ways can identify. While the stories were not meant to be didactic, the goal was to give a voice to disenfranchised groups, not only in fairy tales, but also in Hungary more broadly. As Nagy acknowledges, it was a difficult project as the stories needed to have literary value, and though it was not intended to be a sensitizing anthology, it

³⁵ Mezey, N., Sarat, A. D., & Simon, J. (2020), p. 52.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 45.

³⁷ Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület. (2020).

³⁸ Ibid. p. 7.

still had to be a book that allows disenfranchised voices to be heard. The result was a collection of 17 reimagined fairy tales³⁹ aimed not only at children, but also at parents.⁴⁰

Only five days after the official introduction of *Meseország mindenkié*, on the 25th of September, Dóra Dúró, Member of Parliament and vice president of the far-right *Mi Hazánk* movement, held a press conference titled *Meseország nem az aberráltaké!* ("Fairyländ does not belong to the perverted!"). In her speech, delivered before she shredded a copy of the book, Dúró outlined her main arguments. She stated that the *Mi Hazánk* movement does not tolerate the exposure of children to what she described as homosexual propaganda, especially when it is presented through storybooks. According to Dóra Dúró, the inclusion of homosexual kings and transgender heroes or heroines in fairy tales is not part of Hungarian culture and she argued that the book spreads falsehoods and that traditional Hungarian folk tales encapsulate universal and timeless truths. Dúró further claimed that it was no coincidence that young children were the targets of what she called an aggressive homosexual lobby. In her view, education plays a crucial role in shaping values, and therefore young people should be prepared for family life, for becoming mothers and fathers. She added that children are hearing very little about these roles and that it disrupts their healthy and secure development if they are made to think that what is natural and ordinary is not. Dúró additionally asserted that the book was not only misleading children about fairy tales but also distorting Hungarian culture itself. By rewriting classical tales and inserting characters from minority and LGBTQ+ communities, the book was forging an image of Hungarian tradition that does not exist. For her, this was not simply an issue of literature but an attack on national identity. After delivering her speech, Dúró tore out pages from the book and shredded them in front of the press.⁴¹ This act became a symbolic moment, widely shared across Hungarian and international media. This stance was not limited to *Mi Hazánk*. Dúró's actions were backed by the ruling Fidesz party. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán commented on the controversy by saying that some of the stories in the book amounted to sexual propaganda.⁴² The incident became a focal point in Hungary's broader cultural and political conflict over inclusion, identity, and what is deemed acceptable in public education and children's literature.

The reactions to the book *Meseország mindenkié* were immediate. One of the most unexpected outcomes of the media stunt by Dóra Dúró was that it had the opposite of its

³⁹ *Meseország mindenkié* includes both fairy tales from world literature, like Snow-white, Hensel and Gretel or Cinderella, as well as tales from Greek mythology and traditional Hungarian stories, like Jancsi és Juliska.

⁴⁰ Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület. (2020), p. 7-10.

⁴¹ *Mi Hazánk Mozgalom a Médiaában*. (2020, September 26).

Both Dóra Dúró and the *Mi Hazánk* movement were repeatedly contacted for an interview to provide a more balanced perspective on the topic; however, they did not respond to any of the requests.

⁴² 24.hu. (2022, May 24).

intended effect. Rather than silencing the book, the controversy pushed *Meseország mindenkié* into national public discourse, helping it reach the top of Hungary's bestseller list in October 2020.⁴³ The attention it received extended beyond Hungary, attracting interest from European publishing houses as well. As a result, the anthology was translated and published in several languages, including Finnish, Swedish, Slovakian, and Polish. The children's book, coordinated by Dorottya Rédei and edited by Boldizsár Nagy, sold out its initial print run of 1 500 copies almost immediately. Because Labrisz is not primarily a publishing house, the first volume was small expecting only limited interest initially, but due to overwhelming demand by the end of 2020, people had to pre-order the book to secure a copy.⁴⁴ The controversy sparked a nationwide debate in Hungary: while some groups launched petitions against the book, the editor of the anthology saw the outrage and widespread attention as something ultimately positive. The public debate drew attention to the issues the book aimed to address, and it became a cultural milestone in discussions around identity, diversity and education. At the same time, there were increasing calls to ban the book from public childcare institutions under the pretence of protecting children. Opponents argued that exposing minors to the stories in the anthology would cause harm. One concrete outcome of this pressure occurred in the district of Csepel, where the mayor, Dr. Lénárd Borbély of the Fidesz party, banned the book from kindergartens and day-care centres, citing concerns from parents. Internationally, the book received strong support from LGBTQ+ rights advocates.⁴⁵ One of the most notable voices backing the book was actor and activist Ian McKellen. The story of *Meseország mindenkié* also reached global media outlets.⁴⁶ In September 2021, *Time* magazine recognized Dorottya Rédei, the project's coordinator, by including her in their list of the world's most influential people.⁴⁷ Continuing the pattern of destroying books, just a month after shredding *Meseország mindenkié* in September, Dóra Dúró targeted another children's book in October. This time, instead of shredding it, she tore apart Zsófia Bán's *Vagánybagoly és a harmadik Á, avagy mindenki lehet más*⁴⁸. As vice president of the *Mi Hazánk Mozgalom* party, Dúró justified her actions with similar reasoning as before, claiming that Bán's book was promoting homosexuality and labelling it as propaganda. Her main

⁴³ Bodnár, J. L. (2020, September 29).

⁴⁴ 24.hu. (2022, May 24).

⁴⁵ Iván-Nagy, Sz. (2020, October 8).

⁴⁶ Kovács, D. (2020, November 30).

⁴⁷ Herczeg, M. (2021, September 15).

⁴⁸ The title translates to *Tuffy Owl and Class Three A or Everyone Can be Different*

objections centred on the inclusion of a lesbian couple in the story, as well as the positive portrayal of a "dark-skinned child" who is welcomed and accepted by classmates.⁴⁹

2.2 Incidences of Paedophilia

Another significant component of the public discourse that ultimately contributed to the passing of Law LXXIX was directly influenced by the lack of existing legislation. This involved a series of high-profile cases of child abuse and paedophilia, particularly within state-run child care institutions, as well as a widely publicized scandal involving Hungarian diplomat Gábor Kaleta. One of the most crucial events that drew national attention to the issue was the revelation of Kaleta's criminal conduct, which intensified public concern and highlighted the perceived legislative gap. While serving as Hungary's ambassador to Peru, Kaleta was found to be in possession of more than 19,000 files containing child pornographic material, discovered by international investigators on his electronic devices. Although legal proceedings began in 2019, the case only reached public attention in Hungary in 2020, raising questions about possible efforts to suppress information. The perceived delay and lack of transparency triggered widespread outrage, demonstrations, and demands from parents and civil society for stricter measures against paedophilia.⁵⁰ Public frustration intensified following what many viewed as an excessively lenient sentence and fine imposed on Kaleta, further fuelling calls for legislative reform. Kaleta's case was repeatedly cited during parliamentary debates on June 1st, 2021, as a major impetus for the introduction of Law LXXIX. Notably, only opposition party members mentioned his name directly in their speeches, while representatives from the ruling Fidesz and KDNP parties referred to him only indirectly.⁵¹ Beyond this individual case, several reports emerged detailing incidents of child sexual abuse in state-operated residential care facilities. Some of these cases tragically resulted in the suicide of affected children, further amplifying public concern and adding political urgency to the issue. These cases were also referenced in select speeches by members of parliament.⁵²

⁴⁹ What is particularly interesting in this case is that Bán's book was published with the support of the Nemzeti Kulturális Alap (National Cultural Fund, short NKA). This led to criticism of the ruling Fidesz party by Dóra Dúró for using taxpayer money to support a book containing such content.

Bakró-Nagy, F. (2020, October 9).

⁵⁰ Dezső, A. (2020, February 9).

Dezső, A. (2020, February 11).

⁵¹ Országgyűlés TV. (2021, June 1).

Speeches given by MP Máté Kocsis (Fidesz) and Gabriella Selmeczi (Fidesz) did not mention Gábor Kaleta, while Balázs Ander (Jobbik) explicitly mentioned the name.

⁵² Országgyűlés TV. (2021, June 1). A speech given by MP Bernadett Szél mentions the issue of paedophilia in state-owned facilities specifically and extensively.

3. Thick Description – A Layered Legislative Process

The two distinct discourses — *Meseország mindenkié* and the symbolic case of Gábor Kaleta viewed through the pervasiveness of law and culture — add two distinct layers of meaning to the legislative text of Law LXXIX. The legal text, which will be introduced in the following section, does not exist autonomously or in isolation, as a neutral or objectively “good” or “bad” policy that simply happens to be passed. Rather, it is shaped and defined by the preceding cultural and societal events, and it reflects not only these influences but also a clear governmental intent to shape and arguably, to an extent, control public discourse through the bill itself. Policy-making, in this context, can only be fully understood through these pre-existing cultural narratives, in an effort to achieve what Clifford Geertz terms a *thick description* — a deep, contextual understanding of meaning-making processes. Thick description is a method of interpreting the layered social codes that give actions meaning within a cultural context, particularly by examining the interpretive struggles where law and culture intersect. Only by looking at the distinct cases of Gábor Kaleta and *Meseország mindenkié* can the broader cultural and political climate within the Hungarian Parliament be fully grasped. These cases reveal the underlying themes and tensions that inform the legislation, as well as the sentiments held and explicitly expressed by political actors in parliamentary speeches. They also reflect the intensity of the public discourse at the time, one that demanded a swift legislative response. The following chapter will explore these themes in greater detail.

3.1 Hungary’s 2021 Law LXXIX

Law LXXIX was produced and adopted within the Hungarian Parliament. Formally, the bill falls under the category of *törvényjavaslat* (bill proposal) with *jelleg módosító* indicating that the amendments are of a modifying nature. It was submitted on May 25th 2021, by the governing parties Fidesz and KDNP and was processed through *előrehozott eljárás*⁵³ (expedited procedure).⁵⁴ Initially, the bill received broad support from both government and opposition parties, as it was introduced solely as a measure to combat cases of paedophilia, particularly within governmental structures, which had sparked societal outrage and led to its original naming as the “anti-paedophilia law”. The proposed legislation aimed to introduce

⁵³ Judit Zeller – lawyer at the University of Pécs – kindly clarified that the expedited procedure holds no special significance in this particular policymaking process, because according to her, most of the policy process are expedited in the Hungarian parliament.

⁵⁴ All the information on the policymaking process for Law LXXIX can be found under the official parliament page of the Hungarian government. The whole process, including debates and the original draft can be found here. Országgyűlés. (2025). T/16365: A pedofil bűnelkövetőkkel szembeni szigorúbb fellépésről, valamint a gyermekek védelme érdekében egyes törvények módosításáról.

stricter measures against offenders, including the creation of a more easily accessible database of convicted individuals and restrictions on their access to professions involving contact with children. The first parliamentary discussions on the bill took place on June 1st. During these debates, oppositional parties unanimously endorsed the overarching goal of protecting children and enhancing accountability of offenders. However, they also voiced criticisms. Some argued that the bill appeared to be simply a response to the series of scandals, rather than a proactive measure. Others pointed out that, despite holding a two-thirds parliamentary majority since 2010, the governing parties had failed to introduce such legislation earlier. As a result, several opposition voices framed the bill as a form of virtue signalling, strategically timed to serve campaign interests rather than genuine child protection reform. Despite these criticism the opposition stated, they would vote for the original draft of the bill, in order to offer actual protection to children under government care.

However, relatively late in the policymaking process, within the already expedited timeframe, the Fidesz party and its coalition partner, KDNP, introduced significant changes to the amendments that altered the original focus of the bill. These changes included provisions banning LGBTQ+ related content, particularly in media and educational materials accessible to minors. As a result, opposition Members of Parliament (MPs), who had initially supported the legislation, withdrew their backing, citing the discriminatory nature of the newly inserted provisions. Attempts by opposition MPs to amend or remove these controversial sections were effectively blocked by the governing majority. In parliamentary speeches, non-governing representatives criticized the changes as a deliberate strategy to polarize public opinion and divide the opposition. They argued that the government had transformed an otherwise uncontroversial and broadly supported child protection initiative into a politically charged legislation.⁵⁵ The legislative process shows that while the initial framework sought to amend various existing child protection laws, the introduced changes reshaped its intent. Ultimately, the Child Protection Act, officially Act LXXIX of 2021, mandated restrictions on the visibility of gender diversity and LGBTQ+ issues under the umbrella of protecting children's autonomy.⁵⁶ Two of the most notable provisions are as follows:

3/A. § In the child protection system, the State shall protect the right of children to a self-identity corresponding to their sex at birth.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Országgyűlés TV. (2021, June 1). This is evident for instance in the speech given by Balázs Ander (Jobbik).

⁵⁶ De Groot, D. (2021, July).

Venice Commission. (2021, December 13).

⁵⁷ Magyarország Országgyűlése. (2021).

6/A. § For ensuring the fulfilment of the objectives set out in this Act and the implementation of the rights of the child, it is forbidden to make accessible to persons who have not attained the age of eighteen years content that is pornographic or that depicts sexuality in a gratuitous manner or that propagates or portrays divergence from self-identity corresponding to sex at birth, sex change or homosexuality.⁵⁸

Adopted on June 15th 2021 — less than a month after the submission — the Hungarian Child Protection Law introduced a wide range of amendments. The law affects several sectors, including regulations for audio-visual content providers, criminal offenses, and the establishment of a state body tasked with monitoring compliance. In education, the law imposes limitations on school curricula, particularly in sex education, biology, and natural science classes. It prohibits the presentation of family models that diverge from traditional heterosexual norms. Only government-approved individuals or organizations are allowed to provide sex education, excluding independent NGOs from engaging with schools.⁵⁹ Although the law theoretically requires a public list of authorized experts, such a list has not yet been published. These restrictions not only limit education but also create risks of criminal liability for teachers and school principals who fail to comply. In the media sector, the law bans the depiction of homosexuality or transgender identities to individuals under 18. This restriction affects advertising, television content, and even solidarity campaigns by private companies. The visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals and narratives is significantly limited in the public sphere.⁶⁰ One of the law's key measures is the creation of a roundtable responsible for monitoring compliance and issuing recommendations. However, concerns have been raised about privacy, as enforcement may involve publicly disclosing cases of non-compliance. Violations of the law are punishable by fines or prison sentences, underlining the serious consequences for those who do not adhere to the provisions. These privacy issues, along with the targeting of minority groups, have prompted legal challenges before the European Court

Original legal provision: A gyermekvédelmi rendszerben az állam védi a gyermekek születési nemének megfelelő önazonossághoz való jogát.

⁵⁸ Magyarország Országgyűlése. (2021).

Original legal provision: E törvényben foglalt célok és gyermeki jogok biztosítása érdekében tilos tizennyolc éven aluliak számára pornográf, valamint olyan tartalmat elérhetővé tenni, amely a szexualitást öncélúan ábrázolja, illetve a születési nemnek megfelelő önazonosságtól való eltérést, a nem megváltoztatását, valamint a homoszexualitást népszerűsíti, jeleníti meg.

⁵⁹ Interview with Christian Autengruber

⁶⁰ Notably, for most amendments, a two-thirds majority was not required, except for those concerning changes to media laws.

of Human Rights. The Court will assess whether the law complies with the European Union's fundamental human rights standards.⁶¹

After the law was adopted, it faced renewed scrutiny not only from left-wing opposition parties but also from the far-right Jobbik party. During the “napirend utáni felszólalás” (speeches after the agenda) following the vote on June 15th, a notable speech by a Jobbik representative summarized the broader concerns shared by the opposition. In this parliamentary address, the representative criticized the ruling parties' legislative strategy, highlighting what they viewed as serious flaws in both the process and the substance of the law. The speaker pointed out that it had become common practice for the government to introduce controversial proposals hidden within "omnibus laws," making it politically impossible for opposition parties to support them without compromising their principles. According to Jobbik, the Child Protection Law was another example of this tactic: while the original bill aimed at fighting paedophilia, a cause that should have enjoyed broad support, the government politicized it by adding unrelated and divisive provisions targeting LGBTQ+ content. The Jobbik representative underlined the importance of taking every necessary step to protect children against paedophiles, stating that despite serious concerns about the way the law was politicized, Jobbik decided to vote in favour of it. Their decision, they argued, was guided solely by the imperative to protect children, even though they accused the ruling Fidesz-KDNP coalition of prioritizing political gain over genuine child protection. The speaker condemned the government for exploiting sensitive issues to discredit the opposition rather than pursuing meaningful legislative outcomes. They also accused the government of sowing distrust among the Hungarian population. This reaction reflects the complexity of the political environment surrounding the law's passage, as even parties traditionally aligned with conservative values voiced frustration with the government's approach to law-making. The speech effectively summarized the key concerns raised by the opposition, highlighting the potential social consequences the law could have across Hungarian society.

The Fidesz-KDNP governing party offered only limited responses to these accusations. In summary, the inclusion of provisions prohibiting exposure to LGBTQ+ content was justified by the government as a way to ensure that Hungarian parents retain the right to decide what their children are allowed to consume. When examining the discourse leading up to the law's passage, this concern appears to refer particularly to certain children's books, which had become a focal point in political debates. Additionally, the measures were framed as a means

⁶¹ De Groot, D. (2021, July).

of protecting Hungarian children from what the government described as “gender ideology” — a concept that was explicitly linked to George Soros in one of the parliamentary speeches.

3.2 Consumer Protection and the Book Industry

In September 2021, Hungary introduced an additional regulation under Government Decree 210/2009. (IX. 29.), concerning the conditions for conducting commercial activities and related to the original Law LXXIX, in essence giving concrete effect to the implementation of the Child Protection Act. This decree, originally established to set general rules for retail and service activities, was amended to introduce specific restrictions regarding the sale and display of certain books.

(3) Within a 200-meter road (public area) distance from any entrance of educational, child and youth protection institutions, as well as churches or other places designated for religious practice, it is prohibited to market products whose primary element is the promotion of deviation from the gender identity corresponding to the birth sex, gender change, homosexuality, or the depiction of sexuality for its own sake.

(4) A product aimed at children, whose primary element is the promotion or depiction of deviation from the gender identity corresponding to the birth sex, gender change, homosexuality, or sexuality in a direct, natural, or gratuitous manner, may only be marketed separately, in closed packaging, distinct from other children's products. (5) In the case of books, the publisher is required to inform the retailer if the primary element of the book involves the promotion or depiction of deviation from the gender identity corresponding to the birth sex, gender change, homosexuality, or sexuality in a direct, natural, or gratuitous manner. This rule does not affect the retailer's right to assert a recourse claim against the publisher.⁶²

⁶² Magyarország Kormánya. (2009).

Original text: (3) Nevelési-oktatási, gyermek- és ifjúságvédelmi intézmény, valamint templom és vallásgyakorlásra rendelt más hely bármely bejáratától számított 200 méteres közúti (közterületi) távolságon belül nem forgalmazható olyan termék, amelynek meghatározó eleme a születési nemnek megfelelő önazonosságtól való eltérésnek, a nem megváltoztatásának vagy a homoszexualitásnak a népszerűsítése vagy a szexualitás öncélú ábrázolása, megjelenítése. (4) A gyermekeknek szóló olyan termék, amelynek meghatározó eleme a születési nemnek megfelelő önazonosságtól való eltérésnek, a nem megváltoztatásának vagy a homoszexualitásnak a megjelenítése vagy népszerűsítése vagy a szexualitás közvetlen, természetes vagy öncélú ábrázolása, a többi, gyermekeknek szóló terméktől elkülönítve, zárt csomagolásban forgalmazható. (5) Könyv

The new provisions targeted books intended for children that portray homosexuality or transgender identities. According to the amended regulation, such products must now be withdrawn from the youth sections of bookstores. Instead, they are required to be sold separately from other products, specifically designated away from children's sections to minimize visibility to minors. Furthermore, these books must be packaged in special sealed wrapping, preventing direct browsing by customers before purchase. Additional restrictions were also placed on the marketing and physical placement of these materials. They are prohibited from being displayed in shop windows or in prominent areas accessible to the general public. Moreover, strict location-based limitations were introduced: the sale of such books is forbidden within a 200-meter radius of schools, youth institutions, churches, or other places of religious practice.

4. Legislative Impact on the Hungarian Book Industry

After examining the events that decisively shaped the legal provisions of Hungary's 2021 Law LXXIX and analysing the policymaking process, attention now turns to the direct impact of the consumer protection provision, which seeks to regulate bookstores and the publication process. Whereas the concept of thick description was used to explore how cultural discourse influenced the legislative process by adding multiple layers to the legal text of Law LXXIX, this section additionally draws on Naomi Mezey's concept of slippage. Slippage refers to the dissonance between legal meaning and how it is received or rearticulated within specific cultural contexts. In other words, it describes the gap between the law's intended effect and the results of its actual implementation. This analysis focuses on how the intended goals of Law LXXIX and the consumer protection provisions manifested themselves and altered Hungary's book market and publishing industry. Slippage becomes particularly evident when cultural practices or identities, in this case homosexuality or transgender identity, intersect with specific legal rules. These intersections can sometimes align with legal intentions, but often they clash, resulting in outcomes that either suppress the cultural practice or change its meaning in ways that were not anticipated by the law's original purpose. Once implemented, every legal rule enters a culturally specific environment where its meanings begin to circulate, shift and evolve. In this sense, Law LXXIX and its associated consumer protection measures are not fixed; their significance and meaning develop through continuous interaction with

forgalmazása esetén a kiadó köteles tájékoztatni a kereskedőt arról, ha a könyv meghatározó eleme a születési nemnek megfelelő önazonosságtól való eltérésnek, a nem megváltoztatásának vagy a homoszexualitásnak a megjelenítése vagy népszerűsítése vagy a szexualitás közvetlen, természetes vagy öncélú ábrázolása. Ez a szabály nem érinti a kereskedőnek a kiadóval szemben érvényesíthető visszkereseti igényét.

culture, a process that is ongoing and often unpredictable.⁶³ In the case of the Child Protection Act, this dynamic arguably brought more attention to LGBTQ+ content, rather than diverting attention from it, and ultimately led to the complete cessation of the consumer protection regulation's implementation.

4.1 Practical Legal Manifestations

The first book to officially receive a fine under Hungary's 2021 Law LXXIX and the additional consumer protection regulation was *Micsoda Család!* by Lawrence Schimel⁶⁴ in 2021. This case set a precedent for the enforcement of the new legislation and appeared to continue a broader trend of targeting children's books, a pattern that had already begun to emerge before the law was passed, as seen in the controversies surrounding *Meseország mindenkié* and *Vagánybagoly és a harmadik Á*. In the case of *Micsoda Család!*, authorities argued that bookstores had failed to adequately inform customers about the book's content, particularly its portrayal of rainbow families through the everyday lives of two homosexual couples. As a result, a fine of 250,000 HUF⁶⁵ was imposed. The Pest County Government Office further accused the bookstore of not properly cautioning readers about the presence of behaviour patterns deviating from traditional gender roles. Although the Lira bookstore chain countered that the cover of *Micsoda Család!*, and promotional blurbs indicated that the story involved a rainbow family, the government office maintained that a more explicit warning was required. This case marked the beginning of a phase of selective enforcement under the Child Protection Act, where perceived deviations from the legal text could result in financial penalties.⁶⁶ Predictably, the legislation has had a complex impact on the publishing industry, even after its cessation. When the law was first introduced, it was not perceived as a serious or enforceable measure. Instead, it was seen as a performative act, passed amid the height of a political campaign and an intense public discourse around paedophilia, child protection and "gender ideology".⁶⁷ The dominant view held that the law was largely symbolic and unlikely to be rigorously implemented, thereby causing little immediate concern. At first, this perception proved to be accurate. The state did not fully enforce the measures set out in the legislation, in part due to the vague and expansive nature of the law itself and the additional regulations associated with it, some of which were unclear or difficult to interpret. Although the fine imposed on the children's book *Micsoda Család!* was a notable case, it remained

⁶³ Mezey, N., Sarat, A. D., & Simon, J. (2020), p. 54.

⁶⁴ Originally published in Spanish and English titled *A family like any other*

⁶⁵ This amounts to roughly 600 Euros.

⁶⁶ Mészáros, J. (2022, March 17).

⁶⁷ Országgyűlés TV. (2021, June 1).

This was mentioned both in parliamentary speeches, as well as by Nyáry Krisztián.

more the exception than the rule,⁶⁸ as regular inspections related to the legislation did not begin until 2023.⁶⁹

To better understand the impact on the book market, insight was provided through an interview with Krisztián Nyáry, the creative director of the Lira book group, who offered a first-hand perspective on the effects of the legislation. According to Nyáry, the enforcement operated on three distinct levels. At the first level lay the political narrative, which reflects the public statements made by politicians about the purpose of the law. The dominant claim being that the legislation protects Hungarian children from not only paedophilia but also a so-called "homosexual lobby" and thus prevents certain books from reaching young readers. The second level concerns the legal text itself, which outlines the conditions under which books may be sold. In this specific legal framework, children are defined as anyone under the age of eighteen. As a result, books deemed unsafe or harmful according to the law should be made inaccessible to all individuals under eighteen years old. Therefore, the legislation was applied equally to a three-year-old child and a seventeen-year-old high school student without further distinction. At the third level, the law's impact extended beyond restricting children's access to these books. It also significantly limited access for parents and other adults.⁷⁰ As an example of slippage, this practical outcome of the legislation's enforcement stands in direct contradiction to parliamentary speeches — such as the one delivered on June 15th 2021, by Bence Rétváry (KDNP) — which claimed that the law would empower parents to decide what reading material is appropriate for their children.⁷¹ Rétváry had asserted that the proposed legislation would both offer stricter protection for children against paedophile offenders and reinforce the principle that education, particularly in kindergartens and primary schools, should remain under the control of parents. He suggested that any external interference, especially from ideologically driven organizations allegedly supported by George Soros, amounted to an attempt to impose a form of re-education. According to Rétváry, the Hungarian left opposed this parental autonomy, as evidenced by their decision to walk out of

⁶⁸ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

This sentiment appears to be accurate, as most Hungarian news articles reporting on fines are dated in the year 2023.

⁶⁹ Mucsi, V. (2024, February 8).

⁷⁰ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

⁷¹ Országgyűlés TV. (2021, June 15). *Original part of the speech*: “Egy olyan módosítás lesz ma a parlamentben itt napirenden, amely egyrészt megvédi a gyermekeket a pedofil bűnelkövetőktől hatékonyabban, mint eddig bármelyik más jogszabály, szigorúbban, mint bármilyen más jogszabályt. Másrészt pedig rögzíti azt, hogy a nevelés az a szülők dolga, és ebben más ne szóljon bele sem az óvodában, sem az általános iskolában. És ez az a pont, ami miatt kivonul a magyar baloldal a szavazásról, mert meg akarják tagadni a szülőtől azt a jogot, hogy ők válasszák meg gyermekük nevelését, és ezt ne bízzák rá valamilyen intézményrendszerben egy Soros György által támogatott szervezet által kidolgozott valami ilyen olyan átnevelő programra, hanem a szülők maguk akarják ezt meghatározni. Nekünk meg kell védeni a szülőknek a szülőket, a szülőknek van joga a gyermekük nevelését meghatározni.”

the vote. He argued that parents overwhelmingly wished to retain the right to shape their children's upbringing and that the law in question was designed to safeguard this right. In practice, however, the legislation imposed broad restrictions on availability, banning certain books from any bookstore located within 200 meters of schools, churches, or youth institutions. In smaller towns, where bookstores are typically situated in central areas, this effectively meant that almost every bookstore would fall under these restrictions. Consequently, adults were subjected to the same limitations as minors, fundamentally altering access to a range of literary material. The slippage here is evident: rather than granting parents more authority over what their children read, the restriction impacted Hungarian society equally, effectively shifting the decision-making power to the government and diminishing parental autonomy.

According to Nyáry, the wording of the law is so exceedingly vague⁷² that compliance became difficult, even for those willing to adhere to it. The legislation prohibits three specific categories: firstly, books for minors that depict homosexuality, secondly, books that depict gender transition, and thirdly books that depict gratuitous sexuality. The uncertainty begins with the term "*ábrázolás*" (depiction), which significantly broadens the scope of regulation. All books that "depict" — meaning represent or show — homosexuality should, under this wording of the law, be made inaccessible to minors, furthermore, the legislation itself does not clearly define what constitutes "depiction".⁷³ This ambiguity left bookstores in an uncertain position, forcing them to speculate about whether any reference to homosexuality regardless of context rendered a book prohibited for individuals under eighteen. The legal text alternates between using the terms "promote" (*népszerűsít*) and "depict," further complicating interpretation with the expression "promote", leading to the same issue as mentioned above. As Nyáry points out, even the Bible contains depictions of homosexuality, leading to confusion over whether religious texts had to be also restricted in their accessibility to minors. This broad language placed bookstore operators in the difficult position of having to make legal decisions on a case-by-case basis without clear guidance. The notion of "gratuitous sexuality" (*öncélú szexualitás*, or "self-serving sexuality")⁷⁴ is another equally ambiguous term. A strict interpretation, according to Nyáry, could encompass any sexual activity that does not result in reproduction, a categorization that would apply to a significant portion of both Hungarian and global literature.

⁷² Judit Zeller confirmed that the law appears to be intentionally vague—a characteristic feature of what is referred to in Hungarian as *dermesztő jog* (numbing law), which leaves excessive room for interpretation, prompting individuals to refrain from action altogether to avoid the risk of being fined.

⁷³ In some cases, the legal text itself provides definitions.

⁷⁴ With this term the law seems to refer to pornographic materials.

At the level of enforcement, the state did not apply the law uniformly. Classic works, such as Shakespeare's sonnets addressed to men, literature that arguably falls within the scope of the legislation, were not targeted.⁷⁵ Instead, enforcement focused almost exclusively on contemporary literature aimed at children, revealing a selective and arguably politically motivated application of the law. One of the first cases of a fine issued under the new law was the already mentioned *Micsoda Család!*. Another high-profile example that attracted international attention was the Lára bookshop, fined for improperly displaying a volume from Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* comic book series. The series, which depicts a romantic relationship between two boys, was placed in the store's youth literature section and was not distributed in sealed packaging. This incident resulted in a 12 million⁷⁶ HUF fine for the Lára bookstore in 2023. Although Lára ultimately won the legal case, the fine itself gained widespread international media coverage and revived the global discourse surrounding the law.⁷⁷

In response to these fines, bookstores began relying less on the ambiguous definitions in the legal text and instead based their decisions on practical experience, paying close attention to which titles had actually been penalized during inspections. However, this strategy proved to be unreliable as well. According to Nyáry, enforcement varied significantly across counties, meaning different books were penalized in different regions, and identical infractions often resulted in varying fines depending on local authorities. The Lára bookstore franchise expressed concerns both independently and through the Association of Hungarian Publishers and Booksellers. Despite raising objections, the company continued to face inspections and substantial fines, the highest being the aforementioned 12 million forints for the wrongly displayed *Heartstopper*. In response, Lára adopted a legal strategy of challenging every fine in court. Hungary's other major bookstore chain, Libri initially followed a similar approach but later abandoned it following its acquisition by a state-run foundation.⁷⁸ According to Nyáry, Lára's decision to pursue litigation proved justified. Due to the ambiguity of the legal text, the company was able to win its court cases. These legal actions were undertaken not only as a matter of principle and despite legal costs often exceeding the fines themselves, but also in defence of the broader Hungarian book industry. As a relatively large and financially stable

⁷⁵ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

An analysis of news articles covering the issued fines reveals a clear pattern: only contemporary children's books appear to be targeted.

⁷⁶ This amounts to roughly 30,000 Euros.

⁷⁷ Bozzay, B. (2023, August 4).

⁷⁸ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

enterprise, Lára possesses the resources to mount legal challenges that smaller independent bookstores could not afford, effectively assuming a protective role for the sector as a whole.⁷⁹ The most significant impact of the legislation has been the creation of self-censorship within the book market, driven by the threat of fines, even after the suspensions of inspections. The law held bookstores and booksellers directly responsible if they sold books prohibited under the legislation or failed to comply with its selling conditions. However, self-censorship extends beyond the retail level, affecting publishers and authors as well.⁸⁰ According to Nyáry, publishers increasingly avoid selecting foreign books for translation if there is any risk that the material might fall under the law's prohibitions, particularly books portraying homosexuality or gender non-conformity. As a result, popular international youth literature and bestsellers are often excluded from the Hungarian market. Similarly, authors are choosing to deliberately omit LGBTQ+ characters from their works to reduce the risk of penalties. An important point brought up by Nyáry highlights that this form of self-censorship primarily affects books where LGBTQ+ characters are not the main focus, but rather appear as part of a side plot. Books explicitly categorized as LGBTQ+ literature — those that have previously been published and that cater to a specific audience who are actively seeking such content — continue to be produced and distributed. Self-censorship tends to manifest in general literature, for instance, in stories featuring a school class where a student is attracted to someone of the same sex, even if that student is not the main character. In these cases, publishers and booksellers often seek to avoid even incidental representations of LGBTQ+ individuals.⁸¹

The selective application of the law reveals further inconsistencies. While the legislation restricts portrayals of homosexuality and transgender individuals, it does not prohibit depictions of paedophilia, provided the relationship is heterosexual. This creates striking contradictions with the original “anti-paedophilia” intent of Law LXXIX: for instance, under a literal application of the law, *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann, which portrays an older man's love for a younger boy, would be banned in two-thirds of Hungarian bookstores, despite its lack of explicit sexual content. Conversely, *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, which depicts a sexual relationship between an adult man and an underage girl, remains legally permissible. This disparity underscores the selective moral framework underlying the law's enforcement.⁸²

⁷⁹ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

⁸⁰ Jankovics, M. (2024, May 11).

⁸¹ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

⁸² Ibid.

The inspection of bookstores was carried out by the consumer protection organization, which had been placed under the authority of county government officials. Originally tasked with ensuring that consumers are not being sold counterfeit products or subjected to fraud, these inspectors had been assigned the additional responsibility of enforcing the legislation on book sales. In practice, the outcome of inspections often depended on the personality and approach of individual inspectors. Bookstores reported that some inspectors entered the premises, apologized for the inconvenience, and simply filed a routine report without conducting a thorough inspection, while others searched for violations and issued fines. The penalties varied significantly depending on the county as well. According to Nyáry Krisztián, there had not been an official list of books that fell under the legislation. However, inspectors appeared to have focused on specific titles, often entering stores undercover, purchasing a targeted book, and then revealing their identity to issue a report. In some cases, purchases were made online and delivered to the bookstore, creating additional confusion about whether the infraction pertained to an online or in-store sale. This practice arguably highlights the performative nature of the inspections and casts doubt on the law's stated purpose of protecting children, as it is unrealistic to assume that a child would order a sealed book online, pick it up at a store and only then discover its content.⁸³

News coverage reveals that inspections had disproportionately targeted books that received media attention, paradoxically turning some into bestsellers. While this increased visibility in some cases benefited publishers and LGBTQ+ content, bookstores were left to bear the financial burden of fines. The repeated focus on certain titles suggests the existence of informal lists guiding these inspections.⁸⁴ Due to the vague wording of the legislation, enforcement became inconsistent. Court cases have demonstrated that, because of a grammatical error in the original text — specifically a misplaced comma — books only needed to be shrink-wrapped if placed among children's literature section. Although this error has since been corrected, the impact persists. Today, shrink-wrapped books have largely disappeared from bookstores. Stores either choose to sell the books, expecting to successfully challenge any fines in court, or they practice self-censorship and avoid stocking the controversial titles altogether. Shrink-wrapping, which presents an undesirable image for bookstores, has been largely abandoned.⁸⁵

⁸³ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

24.hu. (2023, October 9).

4.2 Slippage — Examining the Cultural Impact

After examining the direct impact and practical translation of the law into societal life, certain forms of slippage — deviations between the original legal text and its implementation in bookstores — are becoming increasingly evident. These will be explicitly outlined in the following passages to highlight the clear discrepancies between legal intent and actual manifestation, as well as their connection to the broader process of legal production. Attention now turns to how these dynamics unfold within a specific commercial space: the book market. The legislation's impact extends beyond the mere physical restriction of specific books; it has also led to the arguably unintended and lasting form of self-censorship. Despite the absence of explicit formal obstacles to publishing or selling certain materials, the intentional and voluntary withholding of information has become a widespread practice. This mechanism poses a serious threat to the functioning of a democratic society, as it obstructs free access to information, limits freedom of expression, and hinders the free flow of ideas.⁸⁶ Krisztián Nyáry concisely said: *"In my opinion, the most significant impact of this law on the book market isn't even the fines — it's the self-censorship it creates."*⁸⁷

Although the legal text itself does not explicitly mention or impose censorship, its restrictions effectively limit access not only for children but also for adolescents and adults, thereby functioning as a form of censorship in practice. However, the law has achieved something even more far-reaching: it has pressured bookstores, publishers, and authors into censoring themselves to avoid fines and to ensure their works remain widely accessible and suitable for public display in bookstores. This phenomenon particularly affects books where LGBTQ+ characters appear as secondary figures rather than main protagonists. While books centred explicitly on LGBTQ+ themes are still finding their audiences, often marketed as niche or specialty products, the broader loss is more subtle. Characters representing diverse identities are increasingly being cut from stories to remain "safe" for the market. As a result, many narratives that might have contributed to a richer, more inclusive Hungarian literature are lost before they ever reach readers.⁸⁸ While self-censorship has led to losses in the Hungarian book market, the legal restrictions have also spurred new literary responses as well as

⁸⁶ Bar-Tal, D. (2017), p. 37.

⁸⁷ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

⁸⁸ Measuring this phenomenon is inherently difficult, as it involves assessing the absence of something. Much of the assumption relies on statements made by the Lira bookstore company, particularly by Krisztián Nyáry. To properly verify the situation, one would need to interview authors who could confirm whether they have deliberately left out LGBTQ+ side characters from their works. Nevertheless, there are indications that self-censorship does indeed exist. This was subtly suggested by a Hungarian author and member of the LGBTQ+ community, who, understandably, did not wish to be interviewed about political issues in Hungary. However, during a conversation about the Hungarian book market, they implied that authors are, in fact, intimidated when it comes to publishing certain types of books. (but it remains anecdotal)

activism and cultural productions. One notable example comes from Krisztián Nyáry himself, who curated an anthology featuring LGBTQ+ characters in world literature as a direct response to the law. The collection, titled *Nem kötelező – Tiltott irodalom* ("Not Required – Forbidden Literature"), brings together classic literary works — both Hungarian and international — that depict homosexual relationships. According to Nyáry, the aim was not to provoke but to highlight the historical and cultural presence of LGBTQ+ narratives in literature. Although the book faced investigation in at least one bookstore regarding its placement on the shelves, no fine was ultimately issued. To comply with current regulations, the cover includes an "18" age restriction label, clearly indicating that it is not intended for children or teenagers. Importantly, the anthology does not contain explicit sexual content and is not intended as pornography; instead, it seeks to offer a literary exploration of same-sex relationships within a historical and cultural framework.⁸⁹ Another example of activism against this form of implicit censorship was a demonstration organized by university students, who distributed so-called "forbidden" books in front of a Libri bookstore in Budapest. The books — titles that, under the law, would be required to be sold in sealed foil — were handed out for free, with the option for recipients to make a donation in support of the cause. The demonstration aimed to draw attention to the effects of the legislation on literary freedom and access. In response, Libri criticized the students' action, stating that the books in question were not actually banned and remained available for purchase in their stores. Notably, this protest took place shortly after Libri was acquired by a government-affiliated organization, raising further concerns about the politicization of the publishing and book retail sector.⁹⁰

Beyond the tangible effects already discussed, the legislation's impact on the book market has given rise to less visible but nonetheless significant cultural consequences. Although this aspect has only been mentioned on the periphery of the broader discourse, it deserves closer attention. The provisions affecting the book industry have influenced not only the future of Hungarian literature, where certain characters may now be lost forever, but have also led to a broader reconsideration of Hungarian literary traditions and values. The law has fostered a practice of close reading, forcing publishers and booksellers to scrutinize each book for any "depiction" of homosexuality. However, it has also resulted in an implicit value hierarchy among literary works. As both the interview with Krisztián Nyáry and various reports on the fines illustrate, the enforcement of the law disproportionately targets contemporary Hungarian and international youth and children's literature. Meanwhile, classic works that also contain

⁸⁹ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

⁹⁰ Jelinek, A. (2023, July 24).
HVG. (2023, July 26).

depictions of homosexuality or paedophilia have largely been spared from penalties.⁹¹ This selective application of the law appears to grant certain books — especially older, established literary works — a degree of immunity, implicitly signalling a supposed higher cultural value attached to them. In contrast, contemporary authors and recent publications operate within a significantly more precarious environment, where the inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters or themes may incur financial penalties. As a result, the law not only restricts content but also reinforces a cultural hierarchy, making it significantly harder for contemporary (children's) literature that includes diverse representations to reach readers.

4.3 Beyond the Shrink-Wrap

Arguably, the most significant cultural sign that emerged from the legislation was the practice of wrapping certain books in foil to make them inaccessible to customers, particularly children. This practice quickly became a phenomenon, turning into a widely recognized symbol within the book industry and eventually extending beyond bookstores into broader Hungarian cultural consciousness. Although books are no longer routinely shrink-wrapped today, the impact of this practice remains.⁹² Initially, during the period when the shrink-wrapping was enforced, selective books were targeted for wrapping, and failure to comply could result in fines. Images of these foil-wrapped books began circulating on social media platforms and news outlets, sparking widespread outrage. Over time, the wrapped book became one of the most enduring symbols of legislation LXXIX and its additional regulations on books. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that this is a specifically Hungarian experience. While the legislation fits into a broader transnational illiberal trend, a topic that will be explored later in this thesis, certain consequences of its implementation are uniquely Hungarian. For a period, some books in Hungary became difficult or even impossible to access, a phenomenon not mirrored in the same way elsewhere.

Traditionally used to protect new books from damage, the shrink-wrap took on a new role: it was now also seen as a barrier meant to "protect" children from content depicting homosexuality or gender non-conformity. This added meaning is uniquely Hungarian and does not translate beyond its borders, a point highlighted in a video produced by the media outlet 24.hu titled "*LMBTQ-könyv? Ezen a legveszélyesebb dolog maga a fólia*" ("*An LGBTQ book? The most dangerous thing about it is the plastic wrap itself*"). In the video, filmed at the internationally attended Sziget Festival, young people were shown a shrink-wrapped book and asked why they thought it was packaged that way. Most assumed it was simply because

⁹¹ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

⁹² Ibid.

the book was new and needed protection. It was only after receiving hints from the interviewer that some were able to guess the wrapping was related to the book's content. Several festival-goers expressed disbelief upon learning that in Hungary, books addressing sexual education or LGBTQ+ topics were subject to such restrictions. The journalist even referred to the foil as a *Hungaricum*, a uniquely Hungarian phenomenon, underscoring how this particular form of censorship has become normalized and symbolically charged within Hungary, while remaining virtually incomprehensible to outsiders.⁹³

A way to understand the wrapping of books in Hungarian book stores is again through Naomi Mezey's use of Clifford Geertz's concept of thick description. As explained it is a method for interpreting the layered social codes that give actions meaning within a cultural context.⁹⁴ Rather than simply documenting how the law appears in cultural forms, this approach emphasizes the interpretive struggles over meaning that take place where law and culture intersect. The Hungarian example, particularly the symbolic weight of the shrink-wrap, is a vivid instance of this entanglement — where a legal requirement transforms into a culturally loaded practice, rich with implicit meanings that extend far beyond the text of the law itself and can only be decoded through the knowledge and awareness of the law.

Various activist actions have drawn attention to the controversial practice of wrapping books in foil, pushing the issue into wider public discourse.

One notable example involved a park bench, originally painted in rainbow colours by Amnesty International and the Municipality of Ferencváros. After the bench was repainted in Hungary's national colours (red, white, and green) by Fradi ultras⁹⁵, activists responded by covering it in foil and attaching a note that read:

*"Figyelem! Az LMBTQI+ tartalmakat újabban csak lefóliázva lehet
»közzemlére tenni«. Mindenki tudja, mi van a borító alatt." ("Attention!
LGBTQI+ content must now be put on public display only if shrink-
wrapped. Everyone knows what's under the cover.")*

This action was also a response to the 12 million HUF fine imposed on the Lira book company for violations related to the legislation. However, the Hungarian police quickly removed both the foil and the note.⁹⁶

⁹³ Trencsényi, Á., & Nyárai, G. (2023, August 14).

⁹⁴ Mezey, N., Sarat, A. D., & Simon, J. (2020), p. 56.

⁹⁵ Fradi ultras are a faction of highly committed and organized supporters of the Hungarian football club Ferencvárosi TC, whose activities - ranging from choreographed displays to politically charged expressions - reflect the broader socio-political dynamics and subcultural identities associated with football fandom in Central and Eastern Europe.

⁹⁶ HVG. (2023, July 14).



Figure 1: The park bench in shrink-wrap⁹⁷

Similar activism took place on the third anniversary of the law, when Amnesty International Hungary launched a photo campaign. Activists across four cities — Budapest, Debrecen, Pécs, and Veszprém — wrapped themselves in foil and photographed their daily lives. The campaign aimed to highlight the law's serious consequences for all of Hungarian society, especially for young people, who are most affected. By restricting access to information and isolating LGBTQ+ youth, the arguably law endangers vulnerable groups — a key point of Amnesty's mission statement.⁹⁸ This symbolic act of wrapping continued at the 28th Budapest Pride Parade on July 15th, 2023, where an activist also appeared wrapped in shrink-wrap, further underlining the ongoing protest against the legislation.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ HVG. (2023, July 14), ©Viktor Veres.

⁹⁸ Amnesty International. (2024, July 8).

⁹⁹ Kovács, M., & Kassai, Z. (2023, July 15).



Figure 2: Wrapping people up at the 2023 Pride Parade¹⁰⁰



Figure 3: Amnesty international campaign¹⁰¹

The impact of the 2021 Child Protection Act in Hungary became so pronounced that it now has its own dedicated Wikipedia page.¹⁰² This fact carries a twofold meaning. First, the existence of a Wikipedia entry on a phenomenon suggests that it has achieved a certain level of cultural significance. Even though the page currently exists only in Hungarian, this alone indicates that within Hungary, the issue is considered important enough to be recorded, discussed, and preserved for public knowledge. Second, the absence of translations into other languages highlights the highly localized nature of the phenomenon. It suggests that, for now, this law and its implications are primarily a Hungarian issue, deeply embedded within the specific cultural, social, and legal context of the country. The lack of an international Wikipedia entry may point to limited foreign awareness or engagement with the topic, reinforcing that it remains primarily relevant within Hungary's national discourse. It also reflects the uniqueness of the Hungarian legal system and social debates, which might not be immediately accessible or familiar to outsiders.

The existence of a Wikipedia page gives the phenomenon a form of legitimacy. It acknowledges that within Hungarian society, the law and its effects are significant enough to merit ongoing observation, discussion, and documentation. Even without broader international attention, the law's presence on Wikipedia ensures its place within Hungary's contemporary cultural and political landscape.

¹⁰⁰ Kovács, M., & Kassai, Z. (2023, July 15), © Márton Mohos.

¹⁰¹ Amnesty International. (2024, July 8).

¹⁰² See: Könyvfőliázás. (2024). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.

4.4 Change of the Legal Text

Ultimately, returning to the interview with Krisztián Nyáry, the Lára book retail group was issued multiple fines after the enforcement of the law began in 2023. In response, Lára chose to challenge these fines in court. Based on Nyáry's account and various news reports, it appears that following these legal actions, inspections carried out by consumer protection authorities, as well as the issuing of fines, ceased. Consequently, the practice of shrink-wrapping certain books also stopped for the time being. As Nyáry observed, while public discourse around LGBTQ+ topics remains active, the specific discussion about these issues within bookstores has largely faded. There are no longer visible protests or books wrapped in plastic. It seems the law had proven difficult to enforce in a consistent and lawful manner. Yet, as Nyáry noted, the lingering fear remains: the fear of renewed fines and, more subtly, the internalization of that threat in the form of self-censorship.¹⁰³ In parallel with the lawsuits, the language of the consumer protection provision was ultimately amended as a reaction to the lawsuits.¹⁰⁴ While the ruling party claimed the legislation had been made stricter, in reality, it was softened in a key area. The revised wording now stipulates that for a book to fall under the restriction, the so-called "offending content" must constitute a substantial part of the publication. This change reflects the tension between legal enforcement and socio-cultural pushback.¹⁰⁵ To illustrate this, Nyáry pointed to a case in which Lára was fined 5 million HUF¹⁰⁶ over a book containing 100 short stories about inspiring women and girls. One of those stories included a reference to gender transition — and that alone triggered the fine. However, Lára ultimately won the case, and under the revised law, such a fine would no longer be applicable. One story out of a hundred clearly does not meet the new threshold of being a "substantial part."¹⁰⁷

4.5 The Cyclical Relationship Between Culture and Law

This chapter's conclusion illustrates how Law LXXIX and specifically the consumer protection provisions not only impacted cultural practices but was transformed through its interaction with those practices. As the case study shows, the relationship between law and culture is dynamic and cyclical: legal changes provoke cultural responses, which in turn pressure the law to adapt. This mutual influence, what Naomi Mezey describes as the entangled, interpretive struggle between legal meaning and cultural context, shapes how laws are lived, resisted, and reshaped in everyday life. In the case of slippage, the law intended to

¹⁰³ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

¹⁰⁴ Stumpf, A. (2023, September 29).

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Krisztián Nyáry on April 1st 2025.

¹⁰⁶ This amounts to roughly 12,500 Euros.

¹⁰⁷ Kozics, J. (2024, March 3).

suppress cultural production by remaining vague and placing bookstores, authors, and publishers in a state of uncertainty. While this objective was partially achieved, creating hesitation in the inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters and limiting access to publications, the law failed in two of its stated aims: to empower parents in deciding what content their children could access and to decrease the visibility of certain content. Instead, it broadly restricted access, removing agency from both parents and readers. Additionally, the law also led to increased visibility and awareness of LGBTQ+ books and in some cases even stimulated further cultural production.

Shrink-wrapping books, introduced as a compliance measure, took on symbolic meaning, signifying inaccessibility and functioning as a form of soft censorship. This practice became legible only to those aware of the law, turning a mundane action into a cultural signal. Ultimately, the broader cultural response, particularly from the book trade and major players like the Lira chain, led to a reinterpretation of the legal text in practice. As a result, inspections ceased altogether, showing how culture not only responds to law but can reshape its enforcement and meaning.

5. Transnationally Contested Identity in Law LXXIX

After analysing Hungary's Law LXXIX at the national level, the next step is to broaden the perspective and situate this legislation within a transnational European context, since the bill is not solely the product of isolated domestic political developments, but also reflects a wider, cross-border trend in which states increasingly intensify gender-related rhetoric and attempt to legally codify gender identities and expressions. What makes Law LXXIX particularly significant is that it demonstrates how such legal measures, specifically restricting certain LGBTQ+ content, can be implemented even in the absence of a visible or widespread anti-gender movement. Rather than emerging from grassroots initiatives, Hungary's anti-gender discourse has been largely introduced and shaped by political actors. This discourse was not mobilized through public debate but is embedded in political environment as well as into law through implicit and institutionalized measures. In Hungary's case, this means that instead of relying on societal momentum, political stunts followed by legislation are used as a starting point for shaping public discourse.¹⁰⁸ As a result, this top-down approach has contributed to the eventual formation of societal (anti-)gender movements. While this dynamic is specific to

¹⁰⁸ Kováts, E., & Pető, A. (2017).

Hungary, in other illiberal countries such as Poland, there is usually a societal movement behind anti-gender rhetoric or it is broadly supported by the population.¹⁰⁹

Additionally, Law LXXIX is notable for its transnational influences, particularly taking inspiration from similar legislation in Russia. While Hungary's specific practices, such as wrapping certain books in foil, are unique and not mirrored in Russia or other states, the underlying intent of LGBTQ+ content restriction reflects a broader political trend, especially in Eastern and Central Europe. The law exemplifies current governmental approaches to gender equality and reveals the deep politicization of identity, showing a tendency across national borders to regulate "gender ideology" under the guise of protecting children and upholding public morality. These developments, however, not only mirror and influence trends in illiberal democracies but increasingly in parts of Western Europe, particularly within political discourse and certain media platforms.¹¹⁰ This suggests that the regulation of gender and identity is no longer confined to isolated national agendas, whether authoritarian or illiberal, but seemingly is part of a wider rollback of progressive social change.

Following the national level analysis of the so-called Child Protection Act using the frameworks of slippage and thick description, the focus now shifts to the dimension of identity: how it is shaped, policed, and contested through legislative means. A constructed notion of certain gender identities, from which Hungarian children must supposedly be protected, is central to Law LXXIX and key to understanding how similar legislative strategies might be replicated elsewhere. As cultural legal scholar Rosemary Coombe argues that law plays a critical role in defining the boundaries of community by determining who belongs and who does not, that is, which identities are recognized as legitimate and which are painted as undesirable. She argues that legal categories such as gender, race, or citizenship are not fixed or objective; they are constructed through cultural narratives and reinforced by dominant power structures. Such processes produce a hegemonic order that favours those who align with the state's preferred identity norms.¹¹¹ This dynamic is especially visible in Hungary, where Law LXXIX and its associated restrictions are not merely about child protection or content regulation. Beneath the foil wrapping lies an effort to constrain expressions of homosexuality and transgender lives. The law institutionalizes exclusionary perspectives of gender and promotes a cultural framework aligned with the government's

¹⁰⁹ Kováts, E., & Pető, A. (2017), p. 124.

¹¹⁰ Abou-Chadi, T., Breyer, M., & Gessler, T. (2021), p. 311-312.

¹¹¹ Coombe, R., & Miller, T. (2001), p. 38.

stance and political objectives, arguably aimed at mobilizing the electorate.¹¹² It serves to normalize and legally enforce traditional gender roles and heteronormative family structures, consequently marginalizing minority identities, particularly those related to gender and sexuality.

5.1 Gender as a Cornerstone of Hungarian Illiberalism

Since 2010, Hungary has undergone a significant political shift under the leadership of the Fidesz-KDNP coalition. With a two thirds parliamentary majority and a new constitution that came into force in 2012, the government set the stage for what Prime Minister Viktor Orbán explicitly described in 2014 as the development of an “illiberal democracy”.¹¹³ This marked a deliberate break from transnational liberal values — predominantly promoted by the European Union — and a turn toward a nationalist, majoritarian, and authoritarian form of governance. Hungary’s transformation displays key features of illiberal democracies, where formal democratic mechanisms such as elections and referenda coexist with a gradual but systematic erosion of constitutional checks and balances, as well as a weakening of individual rights.¹¹⁴ These regimes present themselves as corrective responses to the perceived failures of global neoliberalism, claiming to restore tradition and national sovereignty in response to widespread public disillusionment.¹¹⁵ A central element of their appeal lies in the politicization of identity, particularly through gender norms and traditionalist values. In these contexts, gender politics becomes a strategic tool for consolidating power and reinforcing a majoritarian cultural narrative.¹¹⁶ The rise of illiberalism has had an impact on the legal system as well, particularly in terms of legislative quality and adherence to the Rule of Law. Legal procedures are frequently fast-tracked through accelerated processes, and complex omnibus bills that bundle unrelated measures have become common. These practices compromise transparency, limit opportunities for public debate, and undermine the clarity and

¹¹² Voter mobilization plays a crucial role in Hungary, where electoral participation rates are relatively low—a trend that is common across many Eastern European countries. This low turnout underscores the importance of political strategies aimed at engaging and activating the electorate, particularly in contexts where democratic legitimacy and civic trust may be weakened.

Spöri, T. (2019, May 28).

¹¹³ Orbán, V. (2014, July 28).

Müller and Kis both firmly reject the concept of “illiberal democracy,” arguing that it is inherently contradictory. In their view, genuine democracy is inseparable from liberal principles and protections. Müller, however, offers a slightly more nuanced position than Kis. He acknowledges that while democratic governments may at times pursue illiberal goals, a political system cannot be considered truly democratic if its foundational structure is fundamentally illiberal.

Royer, C. (2022).

¹¹⁴ Linnamäki, K. (2022), p. 17-18.

Drinóczi, T. (2022), p. 260-361.

¹¹⁵ Linnamäki, K. (2022), p. 17-18.

¹¹⁶ Drinóczi, T. (2022), p. 360.

coherence of the legislative process.¹¹⁷ Law LXXIX exemplifies this pattern, reflecting procedural weaknesses, such as the rushed parliamentary process and last-minute policy changes, as well as addressing a range of issues, including media regulation, education policy, the role of the supervisory roundtable, and the ideological motivations typical of illiberal governance.

As is increasingly evident — and as argued by Grzebalska and Pető in their research paper *The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland* — a deeply gendered ideological strategy lies at the heart of this transformation. The illiberal shift is not merely political or institutional; it is a process that actively relies on gender politics as a counter-movement to a so-called “gender ideology,” making gender discourse a central component. As Grzebalska and Pető further argue, “gender” serves as symbolic glue that unites political, economic, and cultural concerns during a state’s transformation into an illiberal system. Hungary’s adoption of anti-gender ideology exemplifies this process. Rather than merely defending tradition — particularly in relation to family values — the government constructs “gender ideology” as a scapegoat, symbolizing the perceived excesses of liberalism, including feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive autonomy, academic freedom, and multiculturalism.¹¹⁸ Salla Linnamäki has noted that this turn toward “re-familization” is a broader trend across Eastern and Central Europe, representing a reversal of the defamilialist policies of socialist states. The renewed focus on the traditional nuclear family resonates with the experience of Eastern European countries, making it a powerful emblem in post-socialist societies.¹¹⁹ In *Excluding Diversity Through Intersectional Borderings*, the authors further show how illiberal regimes like Hungary deploy anti-gender and anti-feminist narratives to exclude sexual and gender diversity. It is once again argued that these regimes, rooted in discontent with liberal capitalism, channel widespread social concerns by scapegoating migrants and LGBTQ+ communities. Although they maintain the appearance of democratic procedures, their underlying goal is to undermine democratic principles, especially in the area of gender equality, through democratic tools and measures. Alliances between religious conservatives and populist leaders help drive this rollback of gender and sexual rights, often justified through rhetoric about protecting children and preserving cultural values. In this way, exclusion is reframed as a defence of national identity.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Drinóczi, T. (2022), p. 260-361.

Drinóczi, T., & Cormacain, R. (2021), p. 272.

¹¹⁸ Grzebalska, W., & Pető, A. (2018).

¹¹⁹ Linnamäki, K. (2022), p. 17.

¹²⁰ Murru, S., Orsini, G., Vuckovic Juros, T., & Merla, L. (2024).p. vi; vii; x.

The ideological focus on gender in Hungary is increasingly operationalized through a growing body of legislation and policy. The 2010 constitution elevated the heterosexual nuclear family to a central element of national identity.¹²¹ Since then, successive legal measures have targeted various LGBTQ+ related issues like gender studies and most notably, introduced the 2025, the ban of the Pride Parade. While these policies are framed as protecting children and national culture, they effectively marginalize individuals who do not conform to the normative gender binary and sexual roles, reinforcing a divisive narrative of "us" versus "them."¹²²

Despite the intensity of anti-gender rhetoric, Hungary has so far lacked a broad-based civil anti-gender movement. As Eszter Kováts and Andrea Pető argue in their 2017 study *Anti-Gender Movements in Hungary: A Discourse Without a Movement?*, this discourse has been largely driven by the state and has not been supported by sustained grassroots mobilization. In contrast to countries such as Poland or Croatia, where conservative Catholic groups and opposing nongovernmental organizations have played a central role in promoting anti-gender narratives as well as the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights, Hungary's civil society landscape is notably different. This can be attributed to several factors, including the limited institutionalization of gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, the relatively weak political role of the Catholic Church, and the state's active suppression of nongovernmental organizations that promote equality, which has significantly narrowed the space for public discourse. Politically, however, anti-gender narratives date back to the 2000s. The first government-led articulation of anti-gender ideology emerged around 2008, notably in high school textbooks that warned against a so-called "culture of death" attributed to gender equality. The rhetoric intensified briefly in 2010 in response to a socialist initiative aimed at removing gender stereotypes from preschool education, but it was not until 2014 that anti-gender discourse became fully entrenched in mainstream politics and state-owned media. This shift was catalysed by debates in the European Parliament over the Estrela report on sexual and reproductive health and the Lunacek report on LGBTQ+ rights. Both became turning points for Hungarian right-wing media, which framed them as threats under the banner of "gender

¹²¹ Article L of the constitution says the following: Hungary protects the institution of marriage as a union between one man and one woman, established by voluntary decision, as well as the family as the foundation of the survival of the nation.

The basis of family relationships is marriage and the parent-child relationship.

A person is either male or female.

The mother is a woman, the father is a man.

(2) Hungary supports childbearing.

(3) The protection of families is regulated by a cardinal law.

¹²² Linnamäki, K. (2022), p. 17.

ideology." Since then, anti-gender rhetoric has become a permanent feature of Hungarian political life, reinforced by populist narratives and conservative cultural values. The ideal of the heteronormative family dominates both state media and legal discourse, while gender equality is increasingly portrayed as a foreign, European Union–imposed threat to national sovereignty. In this framing, the European Union is cast as a main antagonist, seen as an external force attempting to impose foreign values on the Hungarian nation.¹²³

Although early anti-gender campaigns lacked grassroots momentum, recent developments — such as the banning of the Budapest Pride Parade in 2025 — show a deepening of the narrative and its growing role in societal polarization. As Balogh noted in 2014, although Hungary had not yet witnessed mass anti-gender mobilization comparable to that in other European countries, the foundations for such a discourse were already in place, making its eventual emergence within the political mainstream likely.¹²⁴ This development affirms the concerns raised by Kováts and Pető in 2017, who warned that an anti-gender movement could crystallize even in the absence of the typical preconditions observed elsewhere. The state's active promotion of the supposed dangers of gender ideology, combined with increasing involvement from political actors, media outlets, and conservative civil organizations, has transformed a once loosely defined set of societal concerns into a more coherent ideological framework. The adoption of Law LXXIX, which included consumer protection provisions, arguably marked a clearer shift toward a more polarized and publicly engaged political climate. This transformation was reflected in widespread protests and heightened civil participation.¹²⁵ According to Linnamäki, the law also signifies the beginning of a new wave of illiberal governmental policies. While earlier expressions of familism were supported through affirmative actions, Law LXXIX explicitly draws on an antagonism between heteronormativity and non-heteronormativity, indicating a more ideologically charged approach.¹²⁶ The passage of the law drew significant attention and provoked widespread response from the Hungarian public.

5.2 Gender Discourse as Transnational Trend

Importantly, the so-called illiberal transformation reflects broader international political tensions. On the one hand, Hungary's anti-gender agenda operates as a form of counter-hegemony against the liberal norms of the European Union, as previously discussed. Once seen as a guardian of rights and freedoms, the EU is increasingly portrayed as a hostile force

¹²³ Kováts, E., & Pető, A. (2017).

¹²⁴ Balogh, L. (2014).

¹²⁵ Kováts, E., & Pető, A. (2017).

¹²⁶ Linnamäki, K. (2022), p. 17.

imposing foreign values — effectively functioning as a cultural colonizer. Within this narrative, defending national identity entails resisting not only immigration but also the perceived influence of the so-called “gender lobby”.¹²⁷ On the other hand, there is arguably a reciprocal dynamic at play within Eastern and Central Europe, where countries influence and reinforce one another’s anti-gender discourse.

Notably, prior to 2008, there was no strong or widespread gender discourse among the Hungarian population. Yet, by 2020, the anti-gender narrative had gained enough traction to support legislative measures such as Law LXXIX and later the banning of the Pride march in 2025. This raises the question: how could such a law emerge in the absence of significant domestic demand? While the political anti-gender narrative promoted by state actors laid some groundwork, the transnational nature of illiberal ideologies and a kind of pressure exerted by the European Union is particularly relevant here. These are the two international factors with significant power on the domestic Inspiration and models are exchanged between states, illustrating a broader pattern. A clear example of this transnational influence is Hungary’s Law LXXIX, which heavily borrows from Russia’s anti-LGBT legislation passed in 2013.¹²⁸ Officially titled “For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values,” the Russian law, like its Hungarian counterpart, primarily targets LGBTQ+ people. It restricts access for audiences under 18 to content that presents or supports identities and expressions that do not align with traditional gender norms, including homosexuality and gender transition. The resemblance between these laws highlights how Hungary, despite the absence of a strong domestic anti-gender movement, adopted a legal and ideological framework shaped more by external models than by internal demand. In doing so, existing legislation was transformed into domestic law, adapted to reflect Hungary’s own specific characteristics.

The cross-border influence of anti-gender discourse among (radical) right-wing parties is increasingly evident and has been the focus of substantial scholarly attention. These parties have introduced a novel form of polarization and politicization — or more precisely, a re-politicization — of gender issues within their agendas.¹²⁹ This shift is largely driven by

¹²⁷ Murru, S., Orsini, G., Vuckovic Juros, T., & Merla, L. (2024).p. vi; vii; x.

¹²⁸ Amnesty International. (2021, July 22), p. 4.

Chopin, T., & Leclerc, E. (2023, October), p. 2.

Since Russian legislation can be difficult to fully understand, it was important to consult a legal scholar on the matter. Judit Zeller confirmed that there are clear similarities between the Hungarian and Russian laws.

¹²⁹ Examples of such agenda-setting can be found among radical right parties, conservative politicians, pundits, and media outlets. The 2017 coalition agreement between Austria’s ÖVP and FPÖ, as well as the positions held by Germany’s CSU, reflect a broader right-wing rejection of inclusive gender perspectives. These parties typically promote a binary understanding of gender and frame “gender ideology” as a leftist, interventionist agenda - particularly within the education system - that threatens traditional family values. This stance is part of

mainstream and radical right-wing actors who recognize the mobilizing potential of gender as a powerful antagonistic issue. The discourse often centres on questions of gender and sexual identity, and a growing body of literature is now dedicated to analysing this expanding transnational phenomenon. In Western European countries, where trends of secularization and progressive generational replacement have generally made conservative positions such as opposition to same-sex marriage less electorally popular, a notable shift is nevertheless occurring. The theory of *Excluding Diversity Through Intersectional Borderings* becomes relevant here, offering insight into this development. A significant portion of the electorate increasingly identifies as the “losers” of modernization and the neoliberal project, feeling alienated by societies they perceive as becoming too culturally progressive.¹³⁰ This sense of dislocation is no longer confined to Eastern and Central Europe. As a result, opposition to feminism and so-called “gender ideology” — including resistance to transgender identities — has emerged as a central theme in political discourse across the West. This rhetoric is not only utilized by radical right-wing parties but has also been adopted by mainstream conservative politicians, commentators, and media outlets, transforming it into a powerful and pervasive political agenda. While political and public discourse has undeniably made use of the anti-gender narrative, its manifestation in actual policymaking remains underexplored. There are few studies specifically examining this trend, and the political inspiration for exclusionary legislation appears largely confined to illiberal democracies and former Soviet countries.

The transnational anti-gender discourse across Europe is characterized by its growing influence across political, cultural, and social domains. In the book *Gender as Social Glue*, the chapter on *Anti-Gender Mobilization* argues that the discourse surrounding so-called “gender ideology” marks a new phase in Europe’s political landscape. It has introduced fresh fault lines into ongoing political debates, particularly those concerning gender, and has enabled a novel and highly effective form of political mobilization. This includes demonstrations, referendums, and petitions, which have filled a previous gap in civic participation.¹³¹ In her chapter, Pető asserts that while this rhetoric may initially appear as a narrowly focused anti-gender movement, it actually functions as a form of symbolic glue that unites specific political actors, not only in Hungary and in Poland. Moreover, she argues that it serves as a front for facilitating deeper, more systemic transformations in Europe’s political and value systems. For this rhetoric and political agenda to resonate, two possibilities arise:

a wider right-wing narrative that resists perceived state overreach and portrays gender inclusivity as an elitist, urban project imposed on ordinary people. Abou-Chadi, T., Breyer, M., & Gessler, T. (2021), p. 312.

¹³⁰ Murru, S., Orsini, G., Vuckovic Juros, T., & Merla, L. (2024).p. vi; vii; x.

¹³¹ Grzebalska, W., & Pető, A. (2018).

either the promise of gender equality has failed to deliver meaningful change, or it has only resulted in superficial progress across Europe. Interestingly, Pető attributes the potency of the anti-gender discourse not only to its messaging but also to a political framework grounded in “cultural exceptionalism.” This frames the movement as a resistance against a perceived colonization by imposed gender ideology, portraying the struggle as a fight for freedom culturally. In this specific case, the European Union is cast as the antagonistic colonizer. These anti-gender movements do not aim to achieve utopian gender equality in the near future. Instead, they focus on the political temporality of the present, capitalizing on the fundamental weaknesses of progressive politics and the promises — and anxieties — associated with rapid globalization and social change.¹³²

In summary, the main drivers of the anti-gender movement in both Eastern and Western Europe share strikingly similar motivations, serving a common purpose across regional contexts. Central to this movement is the successful mobilization by political parties that have leveraged anti-gender rhetoric as a potent political tool. It is framed as a resistance against what are perceived as colonizing morals and norms imposed by the European Union and other international actors, presenting the struggle as a defence of national sovereignty and cultural exceptionalism. This narrative resonates particularly strongly in the context of rapid social transformations brought about by globalization, which have left many individuals feeling alienated by neoliberal policies and progressive cultural shifts. Moreover, the movement is not confined to isolated national settings; it draws on transnational influences, with similar discursive patterns and strategies emerging across countries, reinforcing the broader and increasingly coordinated anti-gender discourse.

5.3 Eastern and Central European Disenfranchisement

While much of the discussion has centred on the rhetoric and agenda-setting of radical right and conservative parties, it is equally important to examine whether anti-gender sentiment translates into concrete policy measures. In some contexts, such as Hungary’s Law LXXIX or Russia’s so-called “anti-gay” law, this discourse has clearly shaped legislation. In Western Europe, however, the extent to which transnational anti-gender influence results in legal action varies significantly. Where legal manifestations do occur, they are often rooted in different intentions and are not necessarily based on the transnational anti-gender discourse described thus far, especially when compared to the more overt policies seen in Eastern contexts. Consequently, it is crucial to distinguish between discourse and law. While anti-gender rhetoric can shape public opinion and political agendas, actual legislation aimed at

¹³² Kováts, E., & Pöim, M. (Eds.). (2015). p. 126-128.

curbing what is referred to as "gender ideology" represents a far more tangible and enforceable expression of these views. Laws similar to Hungary's and Russia's bill are more commonly found in Eastern European countries, such as Poland, Romania, Lithuania, and Latvia.¹³³ This regional pattern raises the question of why these countries are more prone to codifying anti-gender sentiment into law. One possible explanation lies in the post-socialist experience of these nations. After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the subsequent integration into the European Union, many citizens in Central and Eastern Europe felt increasingly disenfranchised. The legacy of Soviet-era policies — particularly the deconstruction of traditional family structures, as well as national tradition in general — may have left a sense of social trauma. Moreover, the economic and social benefits promised by EU membership often failed to materialize to the extent expected.¹³⁴ This is evident not only in slower GDP growth compared to Western Europe but also in broader indicators of economic and social dissatisfaction. For many, the liberal project associated with the EU has become a symbol of false promises of freedom and economic benefits.¹³⁵ In this context, the anti-gender discourse functions not only as a cultural backlash but also as an outlet for broader discontent. It channels economic and social grievances into cultural terms, reframing perceived failures of integration as moral or ideological threats. This process leads to the rejection of core European Union values, such as minority and LGBTQ+ rights. Consequently, the move from rhetoric to legislation in countries like Hungary is not merely about resisting gender equality — it reflects deeper frustrations with globalization, modernization, and norms perceived as being imposed by the West. Thus, while anti-gender rhetoric is widespread across Europe, its translation into policy is more common in contexts where these cultural, historical, and economic factors converge. The legal codification of this discourse, as seen in Hungary or Russia, must be understood not in isolation but as part of a larger political and economic narrative, one in which identity politics serve as a proxy for unresolved structural inequalities. These prerequisites, however, do not exist in the same sense in Western Europe, due to the absence of socialism and the literal foundation of the European Union through Western European countries.

¹³³ European Parliament. (2021).

Euronews. (2022, April 30).

Euronews. (2023, October 26).

Reuters. (2024, July 1).

Statista. (2023).

¹³⁴ Radvánszki, Á. (2015).

¹³⁵ Karcic, H. (2022, May 18).

5.4 The Gender Binary in Western Europe

A 2025 case in the United Kingdom concerning the legal definition of “woman” has triggered reactions comparable to those following Hungary’s passage of the Child Protection Act in 2021. Although both cases reinforce a binary understanding of gender and aim to solidify traditional gender norms, the UK ruling emerges from a distinct legal and cultural discourse, separate from the explicitly anti-gender rhetoric prevalent in Eastern Europe. The UK Supreme Court’s landmark decision determined that, in the context of specific legislation, the term “woman” refers exclusively to biological females. As a result, transgender women — even those with a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) — were excluded from certain legal protections under the Equality Act 2010. The Court ruled unanimously in favour of defining womanhood in terms of biological sex, a decision with significant implications for the application of equality law. While this was welcomed by advocates of sex-based rights, it provoked serious concern among transgender rights activists. Originally brought in Scotland in 2018, the case highlighted a divergence in legal interpretations within the UK: whereas the British courts adhered to biological definitions, the Scottish Government maintained that transgender women with a GRC should be legally recognised as women and granted equal protections. This contrast points to a broader divergence between Western and Eastern approaches to gender identity.¹³⁶

Whereas countries like Hungary, Poland, and Russia portray gender identity as fraudulent or dangerous, often using religious or moral rhetoric, Western legal systems such as that of the UK continue to uphold protections for gender recognition, anti-discrimination, and bodily autonomy. Still, these Western rulings increasingly reflect a reassertion of “biological reality” in law, as seen in a broader pushback against gender self-identification policies. In Sweden, medical transition for minors has been paused, citing insufficient evidence. Norwegian courts ruled in 2022 that misgendering is not always hate speech, depending on context. In Spain, certain feminist groups opposed self-identification laws, arguing they may undermine women’s rights. In the United States, courts have upheld sex-based distinctions in contexts such as sports and prisons, particularly under conservative administrations.¹³⁷ These developments do not amount to an outright rejection of LGBTQ+ rights but reflect growing efforts to limit the legal scope of gender identity, often in the name of public safety, competitive fairness, or the protection of sex-based rights. As such, the UK Supreme Court’s

¹³⁶ The Guardian. (2025, April 16).

¹³⁷ Euronews. (2023, February 16).

Aristotle Foundation. (n.d.).

Reuters. (2025, June 3).

ruling is best understood not as an illiberal rollback but as part of an ongoing negotiation within Western liberal legal traditions over how gender is defined and regulated.

However, this legal reassertion of a binary understanding of sex and gender raises important questions when viewed through the lens of biological and gender research. While law and political discourse increasingly seek to codify gender in binary terms, biological and social scientific perspectives challenge the assumption that sex and gender are fixed or self-evident categories. The Hungarian constitution, like many national legal frameworks, treats sex as a biologically determined binary, yet this perspective oversimplifies a much more complex scientific reality. As established by scholars such as Birgit Stammberger, the binary concept of gender is not only a product of political rhetoric but also shaped by popular science and media, which equate scientific discourse with biological determinism and reinforce deeply entrenched stereotypes. Biological claims about sex and gender difference have long been politically contested. In recent decades, popular and media interpretations of cognitive science, genetics, and evolutionary biology have promoted a seemingly unquestionable binary gender order. These interpretations carry significant weight in public discourse, despite being rooted in cultural assumptions. Stereotypes — for example, regarding supposed gender-based differences in communication or spatial awareness — are not biological truths but rather sociopolitical appropriations of scientific findings. When empirical scientific knowledge enters public debate, it is transformed by the social and political contexts in which it is received and used. Even the scientific frameworks used to study biology are influenced by stereotypical ideas about gender. The production and interpretation of biological knowledge are social processes, meaning that scientific claims about gender are never neutral but are situated within specific cultural and ideological settings. This is especially relevant when empirical findings are used to make legal or ontological claims about the gendered body. Increasingly, the biosciences describe sex differences as complex, multifactorial, and context-dependent, undermining traditional binary models. While social sciences and activism have expanded recognition of gender diversity, public discourse and medical education often lag behind, still relying on outdated binary paradigms.¹³⁸

Legal innovations, such as Germany's introduction of a third gender category, reflect a growing awareness of gender diversity and fluidity. Nevertheless, this shift is not yet fully mirrored in clinical research or international law. Critical gender studies underscore that biological knowledge is always socially constructed and shaped by the stereotypes it seeks to explain. Concepts such as “gendered innovations” illustrate how integrating gender

¹³⁸ Stammberger, B. (2022), p. 2-3.

perspectives can enhance scientific understanding. A new post-binary biology is beginning to emerge — one that requires transdisciplinary dialogue and critical reflection. Biology need not be positioned in opposition to social science; instead, it can become a site of reinterpretation and collaboration. Exploring gender through the biosciences, when approached responsibly, offers opportunities to rethink both scientific and legal categories and open new pathways for inclusive knowledge and policy.¹³⁹

6. Conclusion

This thesis has explored the national and transnational implications of Hungary's 2021 Law LXXIX within the broader context of illiberal policymaking, societal polarization, and the ongoing struggle over LGBTQ+ rights across Europe. The significance of this analysis is underscored by recent developments in the legal arena: On June 3rd 2025, Advocate General Tamara Čapeta of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) delivered a legal opinion regarding Hungary's controversial legislation. Čapeta's 69-page document declared that Hungary's ban on LGBTQ+ content in schools and media violates fundamental human rights protected under EU law. This authoritative critique dissects the law's foundation, exposing it as grounded not in scientific or evidence-based concerns but in prejudice and stigmatization, particularly towards LGBTQ+ individuals, and notably minors. According to Čapeta, the legislation undermines essential rights of children, including their capacity for identity formation, the opportunity for peer acceptance, and the freedom to have private social lives. Not fulfilling its proclaimed intent to safeguard children, the law instead expands harm by erasing LGBTQ+ lives from the public sphere, reinforcing exclusion, and perpetuating social marginalization. Although the Advocate General's opinion is non-binding, such legal pronouncements historically exert considerable influence over the European Court of Justice's final rulings. Beyond the strict legal interpretation, Čapeta's argument represents a broader ethical and political critique of the erosion of democratic norms within some EU member states. The Hungarian government, for its part, continues to defend the law as a necessary child protection measure, firmly rejecting accusations of discrimination and cultural repression. This stark divergence captures the essence of an intensifying constitutional and ideological conflict between national sovereignty and cultural autonomy on one side, and supranational legal and moral frameworks on the other. The controversy over Law LXXIX epitomizes the

¹³⁹ Stammberger, B. (2022), p. 25-26.

complex tensions that arise when domestic illiberal policies clash with overarching European human rights commitments.¹⁴⁰

Tracing the trajectory of this legal confrontation reveals a deeply layered policymaking process. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, Law LXXIX was initially introduced in response to highly publicized domestic scandals, most notably the child abuse case involving former ambassador Gábor Kaleta and the heated debate surrounding the children's book *Meseország mindenkié*. These incidents triggered public outrage and created a politically expedient opening for the ruling party to enact swift and symbolic legislative measures. What began as a targeted legal response aimed at addressing paedophilia quickly evolved into a broader cultural intervention. Notably, late amendments to the bill incorporated explicit restrictions on LGBTQ+ content, thereby shifting the law's focus and political significance. This legislative pivot not only fragmented opposition forces but also enabled the government to present itself as decisively protecting children, while simultaneously advancing a cultural war agenda disguised as child safety legislation. The political strategy underlying Law LXXIX reveals quintessential features of illiberal governance. The bill was passed as part of an omnibus law — a legislative tactic allowing the government to bundle together unrelated measures, thereby circumventing rigorous parliamentary debate and expediting enactment. Furthermore, the law's intentionally vague language, especially regarding consumer protection provisions, opened the door to inconsistent and selective enforcement. For example, bookstores were fined for making LGBTQ+ content accessible to minors, yet penalties varied significantly depending on the inspecting authority. This ambiguity, described in Hungarian legal scholarship as “numbing law”, operates as a mechanism of control that induces self-censorship among individuals and institutions without direct prohibition, relying instead on the threat of unpredictable legal consequences. Paradoxically, the law's attempt to suppress LGBTQ+ narratives sparked new forms of public engagement and resistance. A particularly striking example was the mandatory shrink-wrapping of books containing LGBTQ+ characters — a seemingly minor regulatory detail that quickly became a potent symbol of government overreach and censorship. Far from erasing these narratives, the law inadvertently amplified public attention to the very content it sought to marginalize. This unintended amplification, or “slippage,” highlights the complexities and limitations of authoritarian cultural control, whereby attempts to repress cultural expression catalyze greater visibility and activism. Moreover, the legal pushback against Law LXXIX, including the

¹⁴⁰ The Guardian. (2025, June 5).

successful court challenge brought by Hungary's largest bookstore chain, Lára, compelled the government to revise its consumer protection guidelines. The amended interpretation narrowed the law's scope to materials where LGBTQ+ identity is a central and explicitly depicted theme. This dynamic reveals the dialectical relationship between law and culture: legal norms are not fixed texts but fluid instruments continually shaped through political contestation, institutional responses, and societal discourse. This cyclical process of regulation, resistance, and adaptation underscores the active role of civil society and market actors in contesting illiberal policies.

On a broader scale, Hungary's Child Protection Act must be situated within a constellation of illiberal tendencies characterized by the promotion of traditional familism and reinforcement of conventional gender roles. This ideological framework aligns with global anti-gender movements but also exhibits distinct regional nuances when analyzed through a transnational lens. Although anti-gender rhetoric has gained prominence across Europe, its legal manifestations diverge significantly between Western and Eastern member states. In many Eastern European countries, including Hungary, legislation concerning gender identity is more directly influenced by civil and political movements that explicitly seek to exclude and marginalize LGBTQ+ and other social groups. By contrast, Western European gender-related laws tend to emerge from bureaucratic or legal efforts aimed at administrative clarity, often reinforcing a gender binary without engaging in overt anti-gender campaigns. This divergence is deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts. Post-socialist Eastern European nations have grappled with cultural ruptures, societal trauma, and economic hardships following the fall of communism. Although accession to the European Union was initially seen as a gateway to modernization and prosperity, many citizens experienced disillusionment due to perceived economic marginalization, cultural dislocation, and a loss of national autonomy. Such conditions have fostered fertile ground for populist political narratives, where anti-gender rhetoric operates as a symbolic unifier. It constructs a shared "enemy" encompassing LGBTQ+ communities and supranational bodies like the EU, which are portrayed as threats to traditional values and national sovereignty. Hungary's Law LXXIX exemplifies this dynamic clearly. Drawing inspiration in part from Russia's infamous "gay propaganda" law, the Hungarian legislation reflects the impact of transnational illiberal currents on domestic policymaking. Significantly, Hungary did not require a broad, organized anti-gender civil movement to pass such legislation; rather, the law's enactment was largely a top-down initiative driven by state actors and reinforced by government-controlled media narratives. This phenomenon serves as a cautionary tale for Western democracies, which might assume

insulation from similar anti-gender measures based solely on the relative weakness of grassroots activism. The Hungarian example demonstrates that with sufficient political will and narrative control, exclusionary laws can be imposed irrespective of civil mobilization. Despite the formidable political support for Law LXXIX, the Hungarian case also offers a measure of optimism. Civil society organizations, judicial institutions, and commercial entities have mounted effective resistance. Activist mobilizations and legal challenges prompted substantive revisions to the law, demonstrating that even within illiberal contexts, domestic and international pressures can bring meaningful change. The ongoing interplay among transnational influence, local resistance, and civil society resilience illustrates the complexity and dynamism of contemporary legal struggles over gender and identity in Europe.

In conclusion, Hungary's 2021 Law LXXIX serves as a compelling case study of how illiberal states leverage legal mechanisms to advance exclusionary cultural politics under the guise of child protection. The law's trajectory - from reactive policymaking following public scandals to symbolic cultural warfare, through legal ambiguity and selective enforcement, to unintended public resistance and judicial contestation — reveals the multifaceted nature of illiberal governance. Moreover, the case highlights how regional histories, societal anxieties, and transnational influences intersect to shape gender and identity politics within the European Union. Ultimately, the ongoing legal battle and evolving societal responses to Law LXXIX reflect broader tensions between national sovereignty and supranational human rights obligations. They also underscore the potential for legal institutions and civil society to challenge illiberalism and defend democratic norms. As Europe continues to grapple with these contested terrains, Hungary's experience offers valuable insights into the resilience of marginalized communities and the persistent struggle for inclusive rights and freedoms in an increasingly polarized continent.

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Appendix

Interview with Krisztián Nyáry – Author, Writer, and Creative Director of Lira

Conducted on April 1, 2025, via Zoom, this interview offers valuable insights into the Hungarian book market and the enforcement of related laws in the country.

Original Interview

Author of this thesis: Jó, és pedig igen, én írok a Diplomácia Diplomata Akadémián egy munkát a magyar törvényről, a gyerekvédelem, vagyis gyerekvédelemről, és ezzel kapcsolatban csinálók interjúkat is. Azon kívül, hogy megnézem, hogy mit csinál ez a törvény Magyarországon, akarom is tudni, hogy praktikusán mi milyen befolyása van az embereknek az életére. És igen, ezzel kapcsolatban gondolom Önnek nagyon sok mondanivalója van még, hogy Ön nagyon sokat foglalkozott ezzel a joggal és Ezzel is kezdeném, hogy Ön hogyan találkozik a joggal. Nem csak mondjuk nem csak íróként, hanem kreatív direktorként. A Lira könyv Konzernnek?

Krisztián Nyáry: Igen. És hát én elsősorban ennek a könyves vonatkozásaival találkozom, de azért ez egy szerteágazóbb törvény ennél. De amiről én be tudok számolni, az az, ami, ahogy ez a könyvkereskedelmet érinti alapvetően. (..) Ugye azzal kezdeném, hogy. (..) Ugye ezt, amikor is 2000 22 től kezdve. (...) Akkor vezették be. Igen, akkor vezették be Ezt a törvényt, és és ilyen értelemben érinti a könyves világot, miközben ez azért az egyéb kereskedelmi dolgokat is szabályozza. És nem is csak egy jogszabályról van szó, hanem van ez az úgynevezett gyermekvédelmi törvény, és ehhez kapcsolódóan vannak mindenféle rendeletek, amiket be kell tartani. (...) Azt is hozzá kell tennem, hogy amikor ez a törvény született, akkor nagyon sokan mondták, hogy hát ez csak egy ilyen kampány hevében született jogszabály, és valójában nem kell ezt nagyon komolyan venni, mert. (..) Mert ezt amúgy sem lehet végrehajtani, tehát ezt nem. Nem kell semmit különösebben törődni, és bizonyos értelemben ez sokáig igaz is volt, mert mert az állam nem tartotta be a saját jogszabályban előírt mindenfélét, hogy akkor mit kell befőliázni, meg ilyesmiket, de ezek részben érthetetlenek voltak, másrészt pedig nem is hajtották őket végre. De aztán 2023 től elkezdték, elkezdődtek ezek az ellenőrzések. Azt kell látni, hogy ez egy háromszintű dolog, és ez a három szint

nagyon elkülönül egymástól. Az első szintje az az, amit a politikusok mondanak, hogy mi van ebben a törvényben, ami hát körülbelül leírható abban, hogy hogy ők megmentik a magyar gyerekeket a homoszexuális lobbától, ahogy szokták mondani, hogy hogy milyen könyvek ne kerüljenek a gyerekek kezébe. Ehhez képest van maga a jogszabály, amiben teljesen más van. (..) Mert az előír mindenfélét, hogy hogyan kell könyveket árusítani. De részben már a jogszabály szövege sem gyerekekről beszél. Pontosabban a jogszabály azt mondja, hogy minden 18 év alatti gyereknek számít, miközben az összes többi magyar jogszabály szerint a 14 éven alatti szám kiskorú számít gyereknek. Tehát itt tulajdonképpen ugyanolyan korlátozások vonatkoznak egy 17,5 éves, érettségi előtt álló fiatalnak, mint egy 3 évesre. De még ennél is. (...) Érdekesebb a dolog, mert valójában nem is elsősorban a gyerekek könyvvásárlását ÁSÁT akadályozza ez a jogszabály, hanem a felnőttekét, hiszen van benne egy olyan kitétel, hogy 200 méteres körzetében iskoláknak, templomoknak vagy gyermekvédelmi intézményeknek egyáltalán nem lehet ezeket a könyveket forgalmazni, magyarul felnőtteknek sem. Namost Magyarországon a könyvesboltok körülbelül kétharmada ilyen. Főleg a vidéki könyvesboltok, ahol egy városnak a központjában van minden. (..) És ráadásul az, hogy mit korlátoz a törvény, ez. Ez is úgy volt megfogalmazva, amit még az sem tudott betartani, aki betartotta volna. Vagy akár egyetért ezzel a korlátozással. Itt alapvetően három dolog van benne. Egyrészt, hogy tilos. (..) Olyan könyveket kiskorúak számára árusítani, amelyek megjelenítik a homoszexualitást vagy a nemváltást ábrázolják, vagy pedig az öncélú szexualitást ábrázolják. (..) Namost ez mind a három, különösen az első meg az utolsó. Ez egy olyan tág fogalom, amit egyáltalán nem lehet érteni. Mert mit jelent az, hogy megjelenít? Mert ott ugye úgy volt, hogy népszerűsíti és/vagy népszerűsíti vagy megjeleníti. Ami azt jelenti, hogy a nagyobb kategória az a megjelenít. Tehát a Biblia is megjeleníti a homoszexualitást, tehát minden megjeleníti, ami ami szól erről, vagy valamilyen módon szóba hozza. Még azok az egyházi könyvek is mondjuk, amelyek negatívan írnak erről, de megjelenítik. De ennél is nagyobb kör, az pedig az öncélú szexualitás ábrázolása, mert senki nem mondja meg, hogy mi az, hogy öncélú szexualitás. (..) Nagyon szoros értelmezésben ez valójában minden olyan szexuális tevékenység, amiből nem születik gyerek. Az öncélú, és hát azért nagyjából erről szól. A magyar és világirodalom szintén kétharmada körülbelül ilyen. Namost ehhez képest van egy harmadik szint, ez pedig az, hogy mit tart be a saját jogszabályából az állam, Mert nyilvánvalóan sem olyan klasszikus műveket nem büntettek mondjuk Shakespeare férfiakkal írott szonettjeit, vagy lehetne sorolni, amelyekre elméletileg vonatkozik, hanem kizárólag kortárs műveket, amelyek gyerekeknek szólnak. És valójában a könyvesboltok azok azt figyelik, hogy miért jár büntetés. Hogy mi a büntetési gyakorlat, aminek szintén semmi köze nincs a jogszabály szövegéhez, hanem egy valamilyen tapasztalat arról, hogy miért jár büntetés, miért nem. És ez sem egyértelmű. Mert amelyet egyik megyében büntetés jár, az a másikért nem. Az egyik megyében több, a másikért kevesebb pénz. Egyik kereskedelmi láncot jobban megbüntetik, mint a másikat, szóval ebben sincsen kapaszkodó. Ami történt a jogszabály bevezetése óta, amit nyilvánvalóan cégeként is meg, az a könyves érdekvédelmi szervezet, a Magyar Könyvkiadók és Könyvterjesztők Egyesülése en keresztül is elmondtuk, hogy mi a problémánk ezzel a jogszabállyal. (..) Amikor is ezek után azért nem történt semmi, ugyanúgy folytak az ellenőrzések, és nagyon nagy összegekre megbüntettek minket is. Volt olyan könyv, amiért 12 millió forintba. De ezek mind 2023-ban történtek. Azóta nem voltak ilyen ellenőrzések, és mi minden jelentősebb, mondjuk 100 000

Ft fölötti büntetés kapcsán pert indítottunk. Kezdetben a Libri is így tett egyébként, de aztán ők elálltak a perekétől. Azok után, hogy megvásárolta őket egy állami alapítvány. (..) És végül is jó döntésnek bizonyult, hogy pereskedtünk. Egyrészt mert mert a jogszabály szövege az az nagyon pongyolán rosszul volt megfogalmazva, és ezek ezekre rámutatva tudtuk megnyerni ezeket a pereket. 4 vagy 5 ilyen perünk indult, és abból már csak 1 nem zárult le. Ott egy alkotmánybírósági döntésre várunk, és utána indul újra elsőfokon a törvény. Ez a legnagyobb összegű büntetés. Ez a 12 millió forintos, amit első körben azért nyertünk meg, mert mert egy vesszőhiba miatt a. A törvénynek egy mondata az ellenkezőjét jelentette, mint amit gondoltak a politikusok, hogy jelent. De aztán ezt az a Kúria visszautalta első fokra. A legfrissebb fejlemény az, hogy megvár egy alkotmánybírósági döntést, és csak utána dönt erről. Szóval ez még a levegőben van. A többi többi ilyen pert megnyertük. Azért is perelünk még egy. Nyilvánvalóan egy néhány százezer forintos büntetésről van szó. Akkor önmagában az ügyvédi költség az drágább, mint amit be kéne fizetni. De részben ez elvi kérdés. Másrészt pedig bizonyos értelemben a könyvszakma helyett is csináljuk ezt, mert egy mi egy nagyobb és erősebbnek számító. könyves konzorcium vagyunk, de ha egy kis könyv független könyvesboltot megbüntetnek egy ilyen összegre, az nem perel, hanem bezár. És tulajdonképpen mi ezért folytatjuk ezt. Hozzá kell tennem, hogy bár nem elismert módon, de mégiscsak ezeknek a pereknek a hatására megváltoztatták a jogszabálynak a szövegét. És bár ott a politikusok azt mondták, hogy szigorították, azért valójában bizonyos pontokon jelentősen enyhítették azoknak a könyveknek a körét, amire vonatkozik, mert azt beleírták, hogy hogy az adott könyv meghatározó része kell, hogy legyen, azaz azok a kifogásolt pontok. Tehát például az egyik könyv, ami miatt minket megbüntettek, az száz történetet Tartalmazott ilyen példaszerű nőkről, lányokról, akik valamiben olyat csináltak, amire ma egy egy fiatal lány, aki ezt olvassa, büszke lehet. És ezek között volt egy ilyen nemváltásnak a története, és ezért büntettek meg 5 millió forintra. Ezt a pert megnyertük, de ma már emiatt a per miatt nem is lehetne minket megbüntetni, mert száz történet közül egy volt ilyen, tehát nem lehet azt mondani, hogy meghatározó része lenne a könyvnek. (..) És és azóta nem is voltak ilyen ellenőrzések. De hozzá kell tennem, hogy ettől ez a törvény még mindig érvényben van, és ott lebeg a fejünk fölött. Hogyha ez politikai, politikailag kifizetődőnek látszik majd, akkor akkor újra lesznek ellenőrzések. És szerintem a legfontosabb Fontosabb hatása a könyvpiacra nézve ennek a jogszabálynak, az nem is az, hogy büntetések vannak, hanem hogy elinduljon egyfajta öncenzúra.

Author of this thesis: Igen, azt akartam kérdezni, hogy ez befolyásolja.

Krisztián Nyáry: El is indult. Ugye hozzátartozik, hogy ez a jogszabály a könyvesboltokat, a könyvkereskedőket bünteti, illetve őket teszi felelőssé, hogyha olyan könyvet forgalmaznak, amit a jogszabály tilt. Most ez is szembemegy a korábbi gyakorlattal, mert amióta könyvpiac van Magyarországon, mondjuk kétszáz éve, azóta mindig a kiadónak a felelőssége volt, hogy mi van abban a könyvben. Ami nyilván azért is logikus, mert egy könyvesbolt, ahol van harmincezer féle könyv, az nem tudhatja, hogy egyenként, minden egyes könyvben most akkor milyen arányban van öncélú szexualitás? De. (..) Ezen is módosítottak kicsit. Szóval belekerültek a könyvkiadók is, és most már nem is tudom, hogy ezzel kapcsolatban mit akartam az előbb mondani.

Author of this thesis: Az öncenzúra.

Krisztián Nyáry: Hogy igen, de hogy az öncenzúra, az működik mindkét módon a kiadónál is meg a kereskedőnél is, a kereskedőnél úgy, hogy ha el akarja kerülni a büntetés meg nem nagyon lehet tudni most egy könyvnél, hogy ez most erre most vonatkozik, vagy nem, ezt megbüntetik, vagy nem, úgyhogy ezzel inkább nem kockáztat, nem teszi ki. Érdekes módon. És akkor a másik meg a kiadó, hogy egy könyvkiadó mondjuk ha lefordít nemzetközi ifjúsági könyveket, bestsellereket, akkor akkor nem fog olyat választani, amiben van mondjuk egy meleg karakter, mert akkor azért lehet, hogy büntetés jár, vagy végzettség. Inkább egy másikat. De igaz ez, hogyha egy szerző ír egy könyvet, akkor azt mondja, hogy jó, azt inkább hagyd ki azt a karaktert. De ezek minden esetben olyan könyvek, ahol ez egy mellékszál, mert valójában az az ilyen. Azok a könyvek, amikre azt lehet mondani, hogy LMBTQ könyvek, azok eddig is megjelentek és ezután is megjelennek és eljutnak a közönségükhöz. Tehát aki kifejezetten ezt keresi, az az ugyanúgy hozzájutni tenni. Ahol ez az öncenzúra működik, azok azokkal a nem ebben a zsánerekben sorolható könyvek, ahol mondjuk van egy mondjuk egy iskolai osztály, és van egy egy valaki az osztályban, aki aki a saját neméhez vonzódik, akkor az inkább itt látom ezt, hogy akkor, ott, ott próbálják elkerülni ezt a könyvkiadók, meg a meg a kereskedők. És még valami, hogy mi mutatja, hogy ennek a ennek az egésznek az égvilágon semmi köze nincsen a gyermekvédelemhez, az az, hogy ugye ez akkor indult el, amikor mindenféle gyermekmolestálási ügyek voltak, botrányok Magyarországon, amelyek mind alapvetően pedofil jellegű botrányok voltak. Most ez a jogszabály a pedofília megjelenítését nem tiltja, kifejezetten a homoszexualitást tiltja, és az a teljesen örült helyzet van, hogy ma minden korlátozás nélkül Magyarországon meg lehet ki lehet adni egy olyan könyvet, ami mondjuk egy egy pedofil viszonyt ábrázol, feltéve, ha heteroszexuális, tehát azt nem tiltja a törvény. De. De az, hogy két férfi megfogja egymás kezét, azt már igen. (...) Tehát hogy például a. (..) Ha betartanák a betűjét a törvénynek, akkor nem lehetne árusítani a magyar könyvesboltok kétharmadában a. (..) Thomas Mann Halál Velencében, mert ott egy idősebb férfi egy fiatalabb fiúba lett szerelmes. De semmi szexualitás nincs. De ez önmagában a homoszexualitás megjelenítése. De mondjuk Nabokov Lolitáját meg szabadon lehet, mert ott egy felnőtt férfi egy gyerek lányba szerelmes, sőt szexuális életet is élnek.

Author of this thesis: Hát. (..) Lenne egy kérésem. Azt mondta, hogy ez akkor jött, amikor voltak az esetek pedofíliával. (..) Ilyen összefüggést a Dúró Dóra val könyvre vallással is lát, hogy ezzel kapcsolatos ügyekben.

Krisztián Nyáry: Hogy ez Ez és ez ez. Ez egy viszonylag gyakori képlet Magyarországon. Nyilván ez nem bizonyítható, csak egymásutániságból azért valami ok okozati viszony is kirajzolódik. Amikor Dúró Dóra, aki egy szélsőjobboldali párt képviselője elkezdte ledarálni a neki nem tetsző mesekönyvet, akkor utána azzal reagált erre a kormánypárt, hogy hozott egy törvényt a darálásról. Tulajdonképpen ez még úgy is igaz, hogy hogy aztán már a törvény már hatályba lépett, sőt már az ellenőrzések is elkezdődtek, amikor a Nemzeti Múzeum befogadott egy ezt a World Press Photo kiállítást, ahol ugye volt néhány olyan kép, ami egy aztán Fülöp szigetek. Ábrázol, ahol ahol meleg idősök fogják egymás kezét. És akkor a Nemzeti Múzeum igazgatója, Simon László volt, aki korábban kormánypárti képviselő volt, és én voltam vele egy rendezvényen. Egészen pontosan egy olyan, egy egy. A Válasz nevű magyar ellenzéki

lapnak az ilyen vitaestjén kellett egymással vitatkoznunk. És ez akkor történt. És én azt mondtam, hogy hát azért ez a könyves világban is úgy kezdődött, hogy mert ott akkor Dúró Dóra kiállt a Nemzeti Múzeum elé, és hogy tartott egy sajtótájékoztatót, hogy hát micsoda borzasztó dolgok. Itt a homoszexualitást népszerűsíti a múzeum, amire a Simon László legyintett, és azt mondta, hogy nem kell ezzel törődni, és én azt mondtam neki, hogy hát ez azért ez a könyves világban is úgy kezdődött, hogy Dúró Dóra mondott valamit, és arról törvényt hoztatok, mert ráadásul akkor ő még képviselő volt, és ezt megszavazta. Mondta, hogy ezzel nem kell törődni, és valóban úgy tűnt, hogy az, hogy ilyen értelemben is szelektíven alkalmazza a törvényt a kormány, hogy hogy kormánypárti intézményekben ezt nem kérték számon. Tehát a Nemzeti Színházban is lehettek olyan darabok, amelyekben a homoszexualitás megjelent, de aztán valahogy mégiscsak az lett belőle, hogy őt kirúgták a Nemzeti Múzeum éléről, és más múzeumok meg hirtelen elkezdtek öncenzúrázni, hogy nehogy ott is ilyen történjen. Tehát ez egy létező képlet, hogy a szélsőjobboldal elkezd valamit, és aztán a kormánypárt meg ezt megvalósítja tulajdonképpen.

Author of this thesis: És az ellenőrzés az, hogy működik, vagy hogy volt, akkor bejönnek egyszer a könyvesboltba és megnézik ott, hogy milyen könyvek vannak kitéve, Vagy igen.

Krisztián Nyáry: Ez egy nagyon érdekes dolog, mert ezt a. (..) A nem jut eszembe a szervezetnek a neve. Akik ilyen fogyasztóvédelemhez, azok. Szóval ez régen egy önálló ellenőrzési hivatal volt. A Fogyasztóvédelmi Főfelügyelet, amit aztán megszüntettek és a megyei kormányhivatalok alá rendelték. De maguk az ellenőrök azok ugyanazok az emberek, akiknek elméletileg az lenne a dolguk, hogy hogy megnézzék, hogy engem átvernek e a boltban hamis termékekkel, meg meg ilyesmi, De hát ezt is a nyakukba tették, és valójában arról számolnak be a könyvesboltok, hogy tulajdonképpen ez ilyen egyéni kérdés, és az adott ellenőr habitusától függ, hogy van, hogy bemegy, és lényegében elnézést kér és nem ellenőriz, csak fölvesz egy jegyzőkönyvet, máskor meg meg lelkesen ellenőriz és büntet. És teljesen különböző önBöző mértékű, tehát ugyanazért a könyvére egyik megyében ötvenezer forintba büntettek, a másik megyében kétmillióra, és. (..) Azóta valahogy átszervezték megint ezt a fogyasztóvédelmet, és valami minisztérium alá kerültek, vagy összevonták valamivel. Nem tudom pontosan, de mindenesetre ilyen típusú ellenőrzés most már az elmúlt két évben nem volt, egy másfél évben biztosan.

Author of this thesis: És akkor volt egy lista. Vagy amíg mondjuk ezeket a könyveket nem szabad kitenni, vagy.

Krisztián Nyáry: Nagyjából azt láttuk, hogy hogy valami lista van. Igen, tehát keresnek könyvet. Odamegy. Ezzel mindig úgy van, hogy civilben vannak, és megvásárolják a könyvet, és akkor utána, amikor megtörtént a vásárlás, akkor megmutatja az igazolványát, és fölvesz egy jegyzőkönyvet. De olyan is volt, hogy online megrendelte, de odarendelte abba a könyvesboltba, és akkor se nem lehetett tudni, hogy ez akkor most egy online vásárlás vagy vagy könyvesbolti vásárlás, ami szintén mutatja, hogy ez egy. Ennek semmi köze a gyerekvédelemhez, mert online meg rendelek egy könyvet, akkor az biztos, hogy be van csomagolva, akkor is a könyvesboltban veszem át. Szóval az nem nagyon életszerű, hogy egy gyerek megrendeli a könyvet és ott átveszi becsomagolva, csak azért, mert akkor nem tudom

milyen tartalma van. De általában bizonyos könyveket keresnek, főleg azokat a könyveket, amelyek a hírekben megjelennek, és tehát amit azok a könyvek. Egyébként ez egy furcsa dolog, mert ezekből a könyvekből bestsellereket csináltak.

Author of this thesis: Igen.

Krisztián Nyáry: Tehát amikor ezzel a bizonyos mesekönyvhöz a Meseország. Című könyv, amit a Dúró Dóra is ledarált, az nem, nem a mi kiadóink adták ki, azt mi csak a könyvesboltjainkba Terjesztjük. Amikor azzal annak idején még megkereste a kiadó a lírát, akkor azt gondoltuk, hogy hát ez olyan réteggönyvből körülbelül maximum ezer példányt fogunk eladni, de hát akkora botrány csináltak belőle, hogy abból egy szuper bestseller lett, és a világon mindenütt árulják, de azokat az egyedi könyvek, azok sikeresek lesznek. Bizonyos értelemben a kiadó az jól is jár vele, csak hát a könyvkereskedőt megbüntetik, akkor még jól a dolog. Szóval ezeket ezekre mind felhívták a figyelmet, és tulajdonképpen népszerűvé tették ezeket a könyveket, és úgy tűnik, hogy egy ilyen lista alapján, de közben vannak. Tehát azt is tudom, hogy más könyvesboltba, ami nem hozzánk tartozik, én is összeállítottam egy könyvet. Bizonyos értelemben a törvényre válaszolva mondjuk ez az én írói válaszom, ami egy antológia olyan klasszikus irodalmi művekből, amelyeket úgymond megjelenítik a homoszexualitást. Erről részben erről szólnak magyar és világirodalomból. És volt olyan könyvesbolt, ahol azt firtatták, hogy ez miért azon a polcon van. De. De végül is büntetés nem született belőle.

Author of this thesis: És a fóliázás, mert hát könyvek elvileg ugyebár a fóliában jönnek, ez egyszerűen rajta hagyják. Vagy a könyvesboltoknak kell külön fóliázni a könyveket? Vagy ez hogy működik?

Krisztián Nyáry: Mivel a törvény ezt rosszul fogalmaz, érthetetlenül, és tulajdonképpen azt is ki lehet olvasni, amit mi a bírósági perben igazoltunk, hogy akkor kell befóliázni, hogyha ha máshova teszik, és nem, nem, hanem oda a gyerekkönyvek közé. De ez a vesszőhiba miatt van, amit azóta javította meg, egyéb okok miatt, és azért nagyjából az alakult ki, hogy nincsenek a könyvesboltokban a fóliázott könyvek, mert vagy merik árulni és és azt gondolják, hogy ez egy bíróságon elvérzik. És nem, nem fogják vissza kell, vagy nem eltörlik a büntetésüket, vagy pedig öncenzúra miatt inkább nem kereskednek vele, mert ez minden könyvesboltban rosszul mutat, ha fóliázott könyvek vannak.

Author of this thesis: És Ön mit gondol?

Krisztián Nyáry: Van egy pár ilyen, de nagyon kevés. Szerintem a Libri nél nincs is.

Author of this thesis: És Ön mit gondol, hogy miért pont most, vagyis 2021 ben? Mostanig ugye ezt nagyon felkapták az LMBTQ, meg ugye, hogy betiltották a Pride ot is. Hogy ezt most miért jött ennyire a közbeszédbe?

Krisztián Nyáry: Hát azt gondolom, hogy ezzel a kormánypártnak ez egy választási kommunikációs eszköz, semmi más nem érdekli sem a homoszexualitás, sem a gyermekvédelem. Egyszerűen azt méri, hogy ezzel lehet a saját szavazótáborukat

mozgósítani. De az derült ki, és az látszik minden közvélemény kutatásból, hogy a magyar társadalom többsége elfogadó a homoszexualitással, tehát azzal a magyaroknak nincsen baja, ha két azonos nemű ember együtt él a Pride al, van baja. Tehát nem véletlen, hogy a Pride ot korlátozzák, mert mert az, főleg azoknál, akik nem, akiknek nem a szeme láttára történik. Ez tehát nem budapestiek. Mondjuk azok valami teljesen más képet ápolnak erről. Mert húsz évvel ezelőtt ott még elég magamutogató dolgok történtek, ami mondjuk egy egy idősebb vidéki állampolgárt felháborított. És most is valahogy úgy képzelik el, hogy a Pride on nem tudom. Én rózsaszín bőrtangában szakállas férfiak egy kamionon ugrálnak, és erről tesz is persze a kormánypropaganda, hogy így gondolják, mert mert ilyen ilyen filmfelvételeket vágnak bele, amikor a Pride ról van szó, miközben az már évek óta egy egy békés és egyáltalán nem magamutogató felvonulás. Szóval ezért veszik ezt elő. Illetve hát most ennek a Pride ügynek nyilván van egy speciális oka is, mert azt akarják, hogy a legnagyobb ellenzéki párt ebben megszólaljon. Mert ugye a Fidesz szavazói oda vándorolnak. Ezek között sok konzervatív szavazó van, és tulajdonképpen az is jó, ha őket idegenítik el. De az is jó, ha azokat a városlakó liberális szavazókat idegenítik el, akik azt várnák, hogy hangosan Állásfoglaljanak a Pride mellett, mert valójában ennek semmi más oka nincsen, csak ilyen spin dr. dolog. És hogy ennek a magyar melegnek vagy a gyülekezési jog, vagy bármi egy a könyvpiac vagy akármi az áldozata, hát azzal nem nagyon törődnek. (..)

Author of this thesis: És különben Magyarországon milyen reakciókat látott a 2021 es törvényre?

Krisztián Nyáry: Hát nyilvánvalóan aki könyvesboltba járnak. Azoknak a nagy többségét ez felháborította, és és mi szinte csak pozitív, támogató dolgokkal találkoztunk. De hát azt hiszem, hogy ezt ők, mint mindent, előre megmérték, tehát úgy gondolták, hogy aki emiatt fordul szembe a kormánypárttal, az egy kisebb veszteség, mint amennyi ember. Ez pozitív üzenet lehetett. Úgy gondolhatták, hogy a szavazóik azok nem a könyvesboltok látogatói közül kerülnek ki. (..) De hát ennek még olyan hatása is lehet, hogy hogy mivel mi álltunk bele leginkább a nyilvánosság előtt ebbe az ügybe, és pereket indítottunk és. (..) Ez nagyjából egyszerre történt azzal, mikor a legnagyobb versenytársunkat, a piacvezető lírát megvásárolta ez az NCC nevű kormányközeli alapítvány, hogy nagyon sok olvasó vagy vásárló jött át hozzánk, tehát ilyen értelemben ennek ezt a lábukkal vagy a pénztárcájukkal is állást foglaltak az emberek. (..) Mindazonáltal mi egy könyvkereskedelmi cégcsoport vagyunk, meg vannak kiadóink is, de egy kereskedő azért az alapvetően mindig szereti betartani a törvényeket, tehát hogy mi nem akarunk egy politikai aktorként fellépni. Csak olyan esetekben, amikor az olvasás szabadságának vagy a verseny szabadságának ellenében történnek dolgok, akkor pedig muszáj. Szóval engem személyesen, mint magyar állampolgárt nagyon zavar az, hogy a magyar meleg kisebbséget kipécézte magának a kormány. De mint mindennek, a cégcsoportnak az egyik vezetője, én erre alapvetően a kereskedelem szabadságát meg az olvasás szabadságát korlátozó jogszabályként gondolok. Annál is inkább, mert felnöttek korlátoz abban, hogy nekik tetsző könyveket szabadon megvásárolhassanak. (4)

Author of this thesis: Éppen nézem, hát azt hiszem, mindegyik kérdést feltettem. (...) Hát igen, főleg abból az irányból szeretném ezt a jogot megközelíteni, közelíteni, hogy ilyen kulturális tanulmányokból ilyen, hogy milyen hatása van a jognak. Úgyhogy de úgy különben

a néptől nem láttam volna, hogy olyan sok reakció jön erre, mintha már egy kicsit ellennének fáradva az emberek ilyen ilyenben.

Krisztián Nyáry: Hát valószínűleg most a Pride kapcsán nyilván az egy az egy. Aktuális kérdés, de mert a könyvesboltokban ez olyan értelemben lecsengett, hogy nincsenek tüntetések, nincsenek szem előtt befóliázott könyvek. Tulajdonképpen ha még azt is el tudom képzelni, hogy ez kiderült, hogy kommunikációs szempontból nem működött, és ezért hagyták abba. De azért itt lebeg, és. Alkalmazhatják. Persze valójában a mi szerencsénk a bíróság előtt az volt, hogy hogy ez tényleg egy egy hirtelen ötlettől vezérelve kampány célokból előállított törvény, ami valószínűleg semmifajta jogi koordináció nem volt. Ezt valaki ott van egy a konyhaasztalon, megírta, és aztán elfogadták, és ezért tényleg több sebből vérzik. Ezt azok sem tudják betartani, akik akarják. Tehát amikor megszületett a törvény, ugye én elnökségi tagja vagyok a Magyar Könyvkiadók és Könyvterjesztők Egyesülésének, ahol mindenféle könyves szakember ül az elnökségben, többek között egy olyan kiadó kereskedő, aki vallási könyveket adnak ki. Azt gondolom, hogy egyébként a törvénynek az a kommunikált szellemiségével egyetért, de már feltette a kérdést, hogy akkor a Keresztény nevelés című könyvvel, amiben szó van a homoszexualitásról, akkor azzal mi legyen, mert neki a könyvesboltjai templomok mellett vannak, akkor azt nem lehet árusítani. Szóval neki is volt problémája, mert nem lehet, nem lehet megfelelni annak, ami oda le van írva, csak azt látjuk, hogy mi az, amiért büntetés jár, és meg azt is, hogy ez nem mindenre egyformán vonatkozik. (..)

Author of this thesis: Jó, nagyon szépen köszönöm még egyszer, hogy.

Krisztián Nyáry: Nagyon szívesen.

English translation provided by AI

Author of this thesis:

Good, yes indeed, I am writing a paper at the Diplomatic Academy about the Hungarian law on child protection, or rather, child protection in general, and in this connection I am also doing interviews. In addition to examining what this law actually does in Hungary, I also want to understand practically what impact it has on people's lives. And yes, in this regard, I think you have a lot to say, as you have dealt a lot with this law. And I'd like to start there: how do you encounter this law? Not only, let's say, as a writer, but also as a creative director. Of the Líra Book Group?

Krisztián Nyáry:

Yes. And well, I primarily come across it in terms of its relevance to books, but it is a more far-reaching law than that. But what I can speak about is how it fundamentally affects the book trade. (..) I would begin by saying that... (..) well, this, from 2022 onwards (...) that's when it was introduced. Yes, that's when this law was introduced, and in that sense it affects the book world, while it also regulates other commercial matters. And it's not just one piece of legislation, but there's this so-called child protection law, and connected to it there are all sorts of regulations that have to be followed. (...)

I must also add that when this law was created, many people said that it was just a piece of legislation born in the heat of a campaign and that, in fact, it shouldn't be taken too seriously,

because (...) because it can't really be enforced. So there's no need to bother too much with it—and in a certain sense, that was true for a long time, because the state didn't enforce all the stipulations set by the law, like what had to be shrink-wrapped and such. These were partly incomprehensible and partly simply not enforced. But then, from 2023, inspections started.

You have to understand that this is a three-level situation, and the three levels are very distinct from one another. The first level is what politicians say is in the law, which can basically be summed up as: they are saving Hungarian children from the homosexual lobby, as they often say, by preventing certain books from reaching children's hands. In contrast, the actual legislation contains completely different things. (...) Because it prescribes all sorts of rules about how books are to be sold. But already in the wording of the law, it doesn't actually talk about children. More precisely, the law defines every person under 18 as a child, while all other Hungarian laws define minors as under 14. So the same restrictions apply to a 17.5-year-old preparing for graduation as to a 3-year-old. But it's even (...) more interesting, because in reality, this law doesn't primarily restrict the book purchases of children, but rather of adults. Since it includes a stipulation that within a 200-meter radius of schools, churches, or child protection institutions, these books cannot be sold at all—which means not even to adults. Now in Hungary, about two-thirds of bookstores fall within such areas. Especially in smaller towns, where everything is located in the town center. (..)

And beyond that, the wording of what the law restricts was so vague that even those who wanted to comply couldn't. Even those who agreed with the restriction. It essentially contains three prohibitions: firstly, it is forbidden (...) to sell to minors books that depict homosexuality, depict gender reassignment, or portray gratuitous sexuality. (...) Now all three of these—especially the first and third—are such broad concepts that they are completely unclear. Because what does "depict" mean? At first, it was phrased as "promotes and/or depicts." Meaning that "depicts" is the broader category. So, for example, the Bible also depicts homosexuality. Anything that even mentions it in any form. Even religious books that write negatively about it—if they depict it.

But an even broader category is "gratuitous sexuality," because no one defines what that means. (...) In a very strict interpretation, this would mean any sexual activity not intended for reproduction is gratuitous—and well, that applies to roughly two-thirds of Hungarian and world literature.

Now, in contrast, there's the third level: what part of the law the state actually enforces. Because clearly, they didn't penalize classic works like Shakespeare's sonnets to men or many others that technically fall under the law. Only contemporary works aimed at children. And in reality, bookstores watch what results in fines—what the enforcement practice is—which again has nothing to do with the law's text. It's more a matter of experience: what gets punished and what doesn't. And this isn't consistent either. What's punished in one county isn't in another. One county issues larger fines than another. One book chain is fined more heavily than another—so there's no clear guideline here either.

What has happened since the introduction of the law—and of course, as a company, and through the booksellers' advocacy group, the Hungarian Publishers' and Booksellers' Association, we've made our concerns about this law known. (...) But even after that, nothing changed. Inspections continued as before, and we were fined very large amounts. There was one book that cost us 12 million forints. All of this happened in 2023. There haven't been such inspections since then, and for every significant fine—say, over 100,000 forints—we

filed a lawsuit. Initially, Libri did the same, but they later withdrew from the lawsuits after being bought by a state foundation. (...)

In the end, it turned out to be the right decision to sue. Firstly, because the law's text was very sloppily and poorly written, and by pointing that out we were able to win these cases. We launched 4 or 5 such lawsuits, and only one is still pending. We're waiting on a Constitutional Court decision, and then it will restart at the first instance. This is the largest fine—the 12 million one—which we initially won because a comma error caused the sentence to mean the opposite of what the politicians thought it meant. But then the Curia sent it back to the first level. The latest development is that they're waiting on a Constitutional Court decision before deciding. So it's still up in the air. We won the other lawsuits.

We're still suing over one more. Even though it's only a few hundred thousand forints, the legal fees alone cost more than the fine. But it's partly a matter of principle. And partly we are doing it in a sense on behalf of the book industry, because we are a larger and stronger book consortium. But if a small independent bookstore is fined that amount, they won't sue—they'll just shut down. And that's really why we're continuing this.

I must add that although not officially acknowledged, the text of the law has been modified as a result of these lawsuits. While politicians claimed the law was made stricter, in fact, in some respects, the scope of books it applies to was significantly reduced—because they added a clause that the disputed content must be a defining part of the book. So, for example, one of the books we were fined 5 million forints over included 100 stories about exemplary women and girls who achieved something admirable. Among these, one was about a gender transition story. Because of that, we were fined. We won that lawsuit, but today, because of that case, we couldn't even be fined for it—because one story out of 100 isn't a defining part of the book. (..)

And since then, there haven't been such inspections. But I must add: this law is still in force and hangs over our heads. If it becomes politically profitable, then inspections will resume. I think the most important effect this law has had on the book market isn't even the fines—it's that it has triggered a kind of self-censorship.

Author of this thesis:

Yes, I wanted to ask if that has any influence.

Krisztián Nyáry:

It has already started. And it's important to note that this law punishes bookstores, book sellers, and holds them responsible if they sell books the law prohibits. Now, this also goes against previous practice, because since there's been a book market in Hungary—say, for two hundred years—it's always been the publisher's responsibility what's in the book. Which is obviously logical too, because a bookstore with thirty thousand different books can't possibly know, for each one, how much gratuitous sexuality it contains. But (...) this was modified a bit. So now publishers are also included. And now I can't even remember what I wanted to say earlier about this.

Author of this thesis: Self-censorship.

Krisztián Nyáry: Yes, self-censorship works both ways — at the publisher and at the retailer. For retailers, it's about avoiding punishment. Right now, it's not really clear with a given book whether the law applies to it or not, or whether it will be penalized or not, so they don't

want to take the risk and simply don't display those books. Interestingly enough. And on the other hand, publishers — for example, if a publisher translates international young adult bestsellers — they won't choose a book that includes, say, a gay character because that might lead to punishment or harassment. So they pick something else instead. It's also true that if a local author writes a book, the publisher might say, "Better leave that character out." But these are always books where the LGBTQ+ element is just a side plot, because those books that are explicitly LGBTQ+ have been published before and will continue to be published and reach their audience. So those who actively look for such books will get access to them as well.

Where self-censorship really works is with books that don't fall into the LGBTQ+ genre but where, for example, there's a school class and one of the students is attracted to the same sex. That's where I see publishers and booksellers trying to avoid it.

And one more thing that shows that this has absolutely nothing to do with child protection is that this all started when there were all kinds of child molestation scandals in Hungary — which were basically about pedophilia. But the current law does *not* ban the depiction of pedophilia; it specifically bans homosexuality. The completely absurd situation is that today, in Hungary, you can publish without restrictions a book depicting a pedophilic relationship — as long as it's heterosexual, meaning the law doesn't prohibit it. But two men holding hands — that is prohibited.

(...)

For example, if the letter of the law were followed, two-thirds of Hungarian bookstores would not be allowed to sell Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, because there an older man falls in love with a younger boy. There is no sexual content, but the mere depiction of homosexuality is banned. Meanwhile, Nabokov's *Lolita* is freely available, where an adult man is in love with a young girl, and they even have a sexual relationship.

Author of this thesis: Well... I have a request. You said this started when the pedophilia cases happened. Do you also see a connection with the book shredding incident by Dóra Dúró in these related cases?

Krisztián Nyáry: Yes, this is a fairly common pattern in Hungary. Obviously, it can't be proven, but from the sequence of events, some causal relationship emerges. When Dóra Dúró, who is a representative of a far-right party, started shredding a children's book she didn't like, the government party reacted by passing a law about shredding. This is still true even though the law had already come into effect and inspections had begun when the National Museum hosted the World Press Photo exhibition, which included some photos from the Philippines showing elderly gay couples holding hands.

The director of the National Museum then was László Simon, who had been a government MP before. I was at an event with him — specifically, a debate organized by the opposition Hungarian newspaper *Válasz*. I said that this is how it started in the book world too: Dóra Dúró stood in front of the National Museum and held a press conference saying how terrible it was that the museum was promoting homosexuality. Simon László waved it off and said there was no need to worry.

I told him this started in the book world with Dóra Dúró saying something, and then a law was passed about it — and she was still an MP who voted for it. He said not to worry about it, and indeed it seemed the government applied the law selectively. In government-affiliated institutions, it wasn't enforced strictly. For example, the National Theatre staged plays that

included homosexuality, but eventually Simon was dismissed from the National Museum, and other museums suddenly began self-censorship to avoid similar consequences.

So yes, this is a real pattern: the far right starts something, and then the government party implements it.

Author of this thesis: And how does the enforcement work? Do they just come into bookstores once in a while and check what books are on display? Or...?

Krisztián Nyáry: This is a very interesting thing because... (..) I can't remember the name of the organization. The ones responsible for consumer protection, those... So, this used to be an independent inspection office, the Consumer Protection General Inspectorate, which was later dissolved and placed under the county government offices. But the inspectors themselves are the same people whose job theoretically is to check if you're being cheated in a store with fake products or similar things.

But this responsibility was also put on their shoulders, and what bookstores report is that it's basically an individual issue depending on the inspector's personality. Sometimes the inspector will come in and basically apologize and not inspect but just write a report; other times they inspect enthusiastically and fine the store. The fines vary wildly — for the same book, one county might fine fifty thousand forints, another two million forints.

Since then, consumer protection has been reorganized again, and it's been put under some ministry or merged with something else. I don't know exactly, but anyway, such inspections haven't happened in the last two years, definitely not in the past year and a half.

Author of this thesis: And then was there a list? Or was it that these books were forbidden to be displayed or...?

Krisztián Nyáry: We roughly saw that there was some kind of list. Yes, they look for the books. They come in. The inspectors always come undercover and buy the book, and then after the purchase, they show their ID and write a report. There were also cases where the book was ordered online but delivered to the bookstore, and then it was unclear if that counted as an online purchase or a bookstore purchase — which also shows that this has nothing to do with child protection. Because if I order a book online, it's packaged, and even if I pick it up in the bookstore, it's packaged. So it's not very realistic that a child would order a book and pick it up unpackaged without knowing what's inside.

Usually, they look for certain books — especially those that appear in the news — and these are the books they target. This is a strange thing because these books became bestsellers because of it.

Author of this thesis: Yes.

Krisztián Nyáry: For example, the certain children's book called *Fairyland (Meseország)*, which Dóra Dúró shredded, wasn't published by our publishers; we just distribute it to our bookstores. When the publisher first contacted Lára [a major Hungarian bookseller], we thought it would be a niche book and would sell maybe a thousand copies at most. But such a scandal was made out of it that it became a super bestseller and is sold all over the world. These unique books become successful in a certain sense.

The publisher benefits from this, but the bookseller gets fined, so it's not such a good deal for them. So these things drew attention to those books and actually made them popular. And it seems there is a list like this, but there are also others. I also know of bookstores that don't belong to us, and I compiled a book myself — in a sense, my authorial response to the law — an anthology of classic literary works that depict homosexuality, partly from Hungarian and world literature. At one bookstore, people questioned why it was on that shelf. But in the end, no fines were issued for that.

Author of this thesis: And the wrapping — because books supposedly come wrapped in plastic, right? Do they just leave the plastic on? Or do bookstores have to wrap the books separately? How does this work?

Krisztián Nyáry: Because the law is poorly and unclearly worded, and as we demonstrated in court, the plastic wrapping is only required if the book is placed somewhere other than with children's books. But that's due to a comma mistake in the law, which has since been corrected for other reasons.

Generally, the practice is that bookstores don't have wrapped books on the shelves because either they dare to sell the books and think the law would fail in court, so they don't have to remove the books or pay fines, or they self-censor and avoid selling those books because having wrapped books in a bookstore looks bad everywhere.

Author of this thesis: And what do you think?

Krisztián Nyáry: There are a few of these cases, but very few. I don't think there are any at Libri [a major Hungarian bookstore chain].

Author of this thesis: And why do you think it happened right now, in 2021? Up until then, the LGBTQ issues and even the banning of Pride hadn't been so widely discussed. Why has this suddenly come so much into public discourse?

Krisztián Nyáry: Well, I think for the ruling party, this is an election communication tool. They don't actually care about homosexuality or child protection. They simply measure how they can mobilize their own voter base with this. But it's clear, and visible from every public opinion poll, that the majority of Hungarian society is accepting of homosexuality. So Hungarians have no problem with two people of the same sex living together. What they have a problem with is Pride.

It's no accident that Pride is restricted, because especially those who don't witness it themselves — not the people of Budapest, for example — have a completely different view of it. Twenty years ago, there were quite flamboyant things going on at Pride that might have shocked older rural citizens. Even now, some imagine Pride as bearded men jumping on a truck in pink leather thongs. The government propaganda fuels this perception by showing clips like that when talking about Pride, even though for years it has been a peaceful and not at all flamboyant demonstration.

That's why they bring this issue up. Also, there's a special reason for the Pride case now — they want the largest opposition party to respond. Because Fidesz voters tend to migrate there, many of whom are conservative voters, and it's good for the government if they alienate them. It's also good if they alienate the urban liberal voters who would expect a loud stand in favor of Pride. So really, there's no other reason for this than spin doctoring. They don't care

if Hungarian gays, or freedom of assembly, or the book market, or anything else become victims.

Author of this thesis: And what kind of reactions have you seen in Hungary regarding the 2021 law?

Krisztián Nyáry: Obviously, those who go to bookstores — the vast majority of them were outraged. We encountered almost exclusively positive, supportive reactions. But I think the government measured this in advance, like everything else, and thought that those who turn against them because of this would be a smaller loss compared to how many people could see it as a positive message. They probably assumed their voters don't come from bookstore visitors.

This even had an effect because we were the ones who took the most public stance on this issue and filed lawsuits. This happened roughly at the same time as our biggest competitor, the market leader Lira, was bought by an NCC foundation close to the government. A lot of readers and buyers came over to us, so in a way, people took a stand with their feet or wallets.

Still, we are a book trading group and have publishers as well, but fundamentally a retailer always wants to obey laws, so we don't want to act as a political player — only when things happen against the freedom of reading or the freedom of competition do we have to intervene.

Personally, as a Hungarian citizen, it bothers me that the government has singled out the Hungarian gay minority. But as a leader of the company group, I fundamentally see this law as a regulation that restricts the freedom of commerce and reading. Especially because it restricts adults from freely buying books they like.

Author of this thesis: I'm just checking, I think I've asked all my questions... Well yes, I mainly want to approach this law from the cultural studies angle, like what effect laws have. Otherwise, I haven't seen that the public would react so much — it's almost like people are a bit tired of these kinds of issues.

Krisztián Nyáry: Probably the Pride is an immediate current issue, but regarding bookstores it has somewhat died down — no protests, no obviously wrapped books on display. I can imagine it turned out that from a communication perspective this didn't work, so they stopped it. But it still hangs there, and it can be applied.

Our luck in court was that this was really a law made on a whim for campaign purposes, probably without any legal coordination. Someone just wrote it up at the kitchen table and it got passed, so it's flawed in many ways. Even those who want to comply with it can't.

When the law was passed, I was a board member of the Hungarian Publishers and Booksellers Association, where all sorts of book professionals sit on the board, including a publisher who publishes religious books. He agreed with the spirit of the law as communicated, but he already asked what to do with the book *Christian Education* which discusses homosexuality — since his bookstores are next to churches, can he sell it or not? So he had problems too, because it's impossible to comply exactly with what's written, and we only see what gets fined and also that it doesn't apply uniformly to everyone.

Author of this thesis: Okay, thank you very much again.

Krisztián Nyáry: You're very welcome.

Disclaimer

This paper has benefited from grammatical and linguistic improvements, as well as support with translation and phrasing, through the use of AI-based tools.