PArtecipazione e COnflitto
http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 17(2) 2024: 577-592
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v17i2p577

Published 15 July, 2024

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Hegemony in Action: Crafting New Common Sense at Orbán's Hungarian Academy of Arts (2011-2023)

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the construction of a right-wing hegemony through the lens of its intellectuals. I examine the Hungarian Academy of Arts (HAA) [Magyar Művészeti Akadémia], a flagship institution in Orbán's Hungary that has not been previously researched. To understand the Academy's mental and material processes in tandem, I mobilize Antonio Gramsci's concept of common sense. With this concept, I approach the Academy's "popular conception of the world". With the help of ethnographic methods, I aim to study the heart of the state and analyze its power relations. The article argues that as much as the political economy of the regime, its ideas are full of paradoxes. These controversies do not stem from incompetence but from the contradictions of capitalism. Therefore, the article points out that the ideas of right-wing intellectuals are far from a coherent ideology. Institutions such as HAA consolidate these ideas into a messy mixture of common sense. In the case of HAA, the organizing principle of common sense is the feeling that right-wing artists were oppressed before Orbán returned to power in 2010, but they can now fulfill their vocation. By emphasizing how the beliefs and ideas of right-wing actors fuel an authoritarian capitalist regime, I bring three contributions to the literature. First, I demonstrate how the worldview of HAA is rooted in the past inequalities of post-socialism. Second, I go beyond the image of top-down propaganda and stress that the incoherence of common sense emerges from the regime's internalized contradictions. Third, I draw attention to the role of the state and its intellectuals in orchestrating the common sense to normalize the local regime of capital accumulation. As a result, the article claims that right-wing intellectuals should be neither demonized nor idealized, but their ideas must be considered along with their pasts and the regime they craft.

KEYWORDS: authoritarianism, common sense, hegemony, Hungary, Gramsci, Orbán regime, Magyar Művészeti Akadémia (Hungarian Academy of Arts)

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1. Introduction: Why do we study cultural institutions of authoritarian regimes?

"If the cultural decay is not stopped, Hungarians will be left with no choice but to rely on the battery factories", claimed one of the talking heads of the Magyar Művészeti Akadémia (Hungarian Academy of Arts, hereafter HAA) in a morning show in 2023. Until this point, the climate was friendly, and the broadcaster asked only soft questions. But by criticizing battery factories, the representative of the Academy touched a key pillar of Orbán's economic policy. Since 2020, electric battery investments have rapidly increased in Hungary (Czirfusz 2023). Government incentives fostered this expansion, and when Orbán announced his plan to make Hungary a superpower in the electric battery industry, the opposition and local NGOs fiercely criticized it. But the remark by the representative of the Academy was not taken as a break with the regime. Instead, the show went on as if nothing had happened. The HAA doyen's reaction against the battery factories may help debunk the image of intellectuals as cosmopolitan and liberal. His case can serve as a starting point for understanding how intellectuals are attracted to authoritarian regimes even if they have reservations. These disputes have material origins and embody the contradictions of authoritarian capitalism. The conflict between the hopes of a high-added value economy and the expansion of low-added value battery factories is just one of them. The divergence between the key industrial policy of the regime and its intellectual allies is not a unique case. Analyzing such cases can help move beyond simplistic views that intellectuals associated with authoritarian regimes are simply mouthpieces for these regimes. Through this, we can build a better understanding of the role of intellectuals in making new authoritarian rules.

HAA emerged hand in hand with the Orbán-regime. Before 2011, it operated as a precarious NGO. But prior to the death of the HAA's founder, Imre Makovecz, Orbán personally pledged to him to transform the Academy into a state institution—as various interlocutors recall. HAA is a resilient organization: after its enshrinement in the new Constitution of Hungary in 2011, it survived the waves of protests, boycotts, and sit-ins, and it now counts as one of the regime's few institutions that has not been restructured since 2010. In contrast with many art academies, HAA is not an educational institution, and compared to many organizations "of art", it is not only an institution of visual artists. Rather—and in the tradition of French art academies—it bands together a meritocratic selection of approximately 300, mostly elderly artists who receive a generous lifetime annuity. The HAA exercises an institutional power that shapes both mental and material relations. The state provides a real estate portfolio, a lavish budget (approximately 34 million EUR), and an influence over the allocation of other funds to the Academy. With its extensive infrastructure, the HAA amplifies the intellectual output of its members, allies, and grantees. The Academy runs a publishing house, a scholarship and grant scheme, a journal, a research institute, exhibition spaces, and a video production team. Around 200 administrators support the running of these operations, which are pervasive in local civil society (Nagy 2024). With the assistance of this infrastructure, HAA strives to be a moral and aesthetic standard for local cultural producers.

But what kind of art do they make? – friends and colleagues often asked me. It was impossible to answer these questions as the art and artists at HAA are so diverse. I will not detail this diversity here, which ranges from experimental theatre-making to socially engaged filmmaking to realist painting. Instead, I will map how HAA accommodates such variance and why it does not have a single theme or style. The inquiry of the heterogenous benchmark—the common sense—of right-wing cultural producers can neither be separated from the post-2010 capitalist state of Hungary nor equated with its official ideology. Instead of seeing right-wing intellectuals as opportunists or as masterminds ruling the population with propaganda, this article takes right-wing intellectuals seriously. In doing so, I map the origins of their ideas in lived reality and material conditions.

The article deploys Gramsci's concept of "common sense". This notion provides a unique tool for jointly analyzing the often-separated realms of political economy and intellectual production and is, therefore, very useful for examining beliefs in a materialist vein. His notion—in contrast with the English term—emphasizes

that beliefs are heterogeneous and rooted in social positions. Gramsci's concept is relevant to critical analysis of the situation in Hungary because it is a frontrunner in the current authoritarian shift of capitalist states. This constellation is comparable to Gramsci's context, which was interwar Italy. Moreover, Orbán's rule admits seeking to build hegemony.

The article aims to bring into dialogue and advance three research traditions: studies on right-wing movements, post-socialism, and new authoritarian trends. Researchers of right-wing movements have recently started using the lens of common sense to analyze cases such as the American Tea Party (Crehan 2016), the Polish and Italian far-rights (Pasieka 2022), and Hungarian nationalist music (Feischmidt and Pulay 2016). Still, these analyses are concerned with grassroots movements that try to capture the state. By contrast, my case centers on a state-orchestrated hegemonic process. Therefore, the case of the HAA shows how common sense develops when such a regime comes to power. The Hungarian case also stresses the tensions arising from the reconciliation of common sense with the local capital accumulation regime (for a similar attempt, see Firat 2020).

The article offers two contributions to the scholarship on post-socialism. One is that it sheds light on the beliefs of the dominant classes. This literature widely examines popular beliefs, but mostly through the cases of the marginalized classes (Kalb and Halmai 2011; Bartha 2011, Buzalka 2021; Pulay 2023), with a few notable exceptions (Gagyi 2016). In contrast, this article highlights the role of intellectuals in shaping common sense and statecraft. The other is a contribution to the robust and rising literature on the political economy of authoritarian capitalism (Bruff 2014; Scheiring 2018; Santos, Lero, and Gerőcs 2023). The concept of common sense expands these analyses by proving that the materialist analysis has explanatory power in the "soft" sphere of ideas. This working hypothesis will serve as a guideline to unveil how the ideas of right-wing cultural producers emerged from their life histories and were utilized by the Orbán regime. Last, I aim to advance the literature on cultural politics and policy. This tradition often focuses on flagship institutions (Barna, Nagy, Madár, and Szarvas 2018; Barna and Patakfalvi-Czirják 2022; Bennett 1995; Kristóf 2017) and sporadically uses ethnographic methods (Feinberg 2018; Szarvas 2023), but it rarely does both at the same time. I aim to demonstrate how ethnography can be a valuable tool for this research tradition.

After introducing the methodological and theoretical foundations and outlining the Orbán regime's key traits, I first inquire how unlearning pre-existing liberal norms is a key cornerstone of this common sense. Second, I highlight how a vernacular form of anticapitalism penetrates HAA and has a controversial impact on its actors' integration into Orbán's capital accumulation regime. Unlearning domination and vernacular anticapitalism are intertwined. Both contribute to the making of new power relations and the dismantling of old ones. Through these components, I will show that the common sense of HAA has a pro-systemic role, even though it is not coherent. By demonstrating that not even the flagship institutions of the regime have a unified ideological profile, I will emphasize that instead of defining the ideology of illiberalism, we should realize that its central feature is that various, often contradictory common senses cohabit in it.

2. Hegemony, common sense, and the Orbán regime

My analysis deploys two thrusts of the literature to examine the common sense of the Academy: a Gramscian and a regional one. First, I introduce Gramsci's notion of common sense and contrast it with the concept of ideology. Then, I turn to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which serves as an underlying framework for this article, to illuminate the connection between the two terms. Second, I will mobilize the literature on right-wing political shifts in East Central Europe, especially in Hungary, after 2010, to provide a social and historical context for the case of the HAA.

2.1 Common sense: A keyword from Gramsci

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (Marx and Engels 1998 [1846], 67). This article joins the research tradition of Marx and Engels to provide a materialist analysis of ideologies (Godelier 2012; Bourdieu 1992). However, the analysis of *The German Ideology* left open and unresolved: how is the mediation between the ruling class and the ruling ideas realized, and what happens when the ruling class is not a coherent unit? To clarify such questions, I deploy Antonio Gramsci's notion of common sense (Gramsci 2000), reinvigorated in the social sciences most notably by Kate Crehan (2016). There are three aspects to the notion of common sense that make it a valuable tool for my analysis.

First, as Crehan (2016, x) underlines, Gramsci uses the term common sense to capture how ideas arise from social classes. This usage is in stark contrast to the "overwhelmingly positive connotations" of common sense in English. However, in contrast with Marx and Engels, who occasionally used the term false consciousness to describe the beliefs of the popular classes, Gramsci emphasizes that all knowledge and ideas are rooted in social reality, even if dominant power relations distort them. He highlights that common sense "is a product of history and a part of the historical process" (Gramsci 2000, 327). Nevertheless, for Gramsci, the social origins of popular beliefs do not lead to their idealization. Second, Gramsci underscores the heterogeneity of the common sense. As he wrote: "common sense [...] cannot be reduced to unity and coherence even within an individual consciousness, let alone collective consciousness" (Gramsci 2000, 327). Therefore, this heterogeneity is twofold. Common sense is inconsistent even at the individual level since individuals navigate among contradictory social forces. This is even more true on the social level. That is why Gramsci (2000, 327) underlines that "'common sense' is a collective noun like religion: there is not just one common sense". But third, as Gramsci puts it, these beliefs are tailored to a certain level of unity by coercive means. The hammering of beliefs into such a unity is not peaceful but "may be done by 'authoritarian' means" (Gramsci 2000, 327). In this process of social violence, intellectuals play a profound role by mediating between the dominant and the popular classes and taming their inherent conflicts. At the same time, intellectuals depend on the dominant classes, which provide their material resources to live and work, mainly through the state. This is why these cultural institutions are sometimes referred to as ideological state apparatuses (Althusser 2014). Despite their self-image, intellectuals' common sense is not coherent, but they have the toolkit to conceal its contradictions.

Common sense, the "popular conception of the world" (Gramsci 1971, 199) never stands alone. It is a brick in hegemonic regimes. Hegemonies are never completed, are not self-serving, and are not based solely on force. Hegemonies are dynamic processes, and their daily renewal is crucial to maintaining their rule in the midst of social changes. They are parts of the social order of capitalism and ensure ever-changing forms of exploitation and capital accumulation. Hegemonies have coercive traits, but these are combined with consensual elements.

The concept of common sense recognizes that people's ideas are more than a false consciousness and contain a partial "looking beyond" the prevailing order. The concept precisely captures the messy mixture of false consciousness and seeing through (which Gramsci calls "good sense"). Therefore, we should ask how this messy mixture is integrated into hegemonies. Regimes can only go beyond domination and become hegemonic if they can coopt the experiences of the masses. However, there is a fundamental paradox. Masses experience the inequalities of capitalism while hegemonic regimes maintain them. Thus, all hegemonic regimes are penetrated by feelings and interests contradicting their core logic. As no regime can impose a complete false consciousness on the people, hegemonies cannot solve this paradox, but they can manage it. Thus, the process of hegemonies is a story of ongoing crisis management. One way they do this is by coopting feelings and beliefs of dissent towards the logic of capital accumulation. On the one hand, this coopting deepens

hegemonies' social penetration. On the other hand, it also internalizes the contradictions between rulers and ruled. This is also the origin of hegemonies' uncompleted and dynamic nature. The inquiry of their common sense can unpack that these contradictions are present not merely in the abstract political economy but also in lived reality.

2.2 The Orbán regime through the lens of Gramsci

Viktor Orbán's current rule in Hungary—since 2010—did not come out of the blue. The preceding two decades of post-socialist order were hallmarked by a Foreign-Direct-Investment-led development. This era had corresponding West-oriented ideologies and collapsed in the wake of the global crisis of 2008 (Gerőcs and Gagyi 2023). This article joins the literature that stresses that Orbán's regime tries to make a national capitalist class while remaining exposed to the global forces of capital. From this perspective, Orbán's rise is an "authoritarian fix" in which authoritarian measures do not come from his despotic personality (Bruff 2014). Instead, the real cause of authoritarianism was the economic need for authoritarian crisis management. As a result, authoritarianism is not merely a tool of a political party but serves capital accumulation.

The state plays a prominent role in reorganizing labor, capital, and capitalist classes in this regime. Thus, scholars used to describe it with concepts such as authoritarian statism (Poulantzas 2000 [1978]) or state capitalism (Alami and Dixon 2021; Szabó and Jelinek 2023). Hegemony provides a robust conceptualization of social rule. This concept emphasizes that coercion and consent jointly constitute domination. Common sense is a cornerstone of consent in hegemonic regimes, insofar as they coopt popular beliefs to deepen their rule. In the post-2010 regime of capital accumulation, the nation and national community played a central role, as noted by Orbán:

> In the great world race that is a race to come up with the most competitive way of organizing state and society […] a new form of state-organization that will make the community of Hungarians competitive […] the Hungarian nation is not a simple sum of individuals, but a community that needs to be organized, strengthened and developed (Orbán 2014; quoted by Geva and Santos 2021).

This speech became famous as Orbán's illiberal coming out. However, from our perspective, Orbán's association of success in capitalist competition with the strength of the national community is more important. The community has a long history of blurring uneven material and power relations (Wolf 1999, 26-27; Holmes 2001). Both Orbán and HAA have ambitions to shape community and common sense.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conflate the common sense HAA with either the common sense of the popular classes or with the regime's interests. While studies of common sense mainly focus on the ruled classes, it is not self-evident that the common sense of a privileged group (such as HAA's artists) would be identical to the regime's interests. HAA has a specific class profile: it consists of intellectuals. They are in charge of producing ideologies and have the infrastructure to do it. However, their experiences are rooted in a troubled social position. HAA intellectuals are trapped in a tension between their deep involvement in making a new capital accumulation regime and the fact that they themselves do not accumulate capital from it. This paradox underscores two crucial points. First, intellectuals do not produce the complete ideology of the regime, even if they desire to do so. Second, the common sense of the intellectuals and the masses is not identical, even if the formers believe it is.

3. "Studying Up": Examining a hegemonic regime – methods and ethics of researching a right-wing state

How should right-wing state apparatuses be researched? This project makes use of Nader's concept of "studying up" (1972), which urged anthropologists to tackle power by studying powerful institutions and organizations. This approach inverts Malinowski's (1922, 25) instruction that ethnographers "grasp the native's point of view" and attempt to grasp a dominant point of view. This shift in focus from popular to dominant classes demands a specific ethical consideration. In contrast with many left-liberal discourses, I do not aim to demonstrate the "bizarre nature", "absurdity", or "backwardness" of right-wing intellectuals' beliefs but rather the relation between their ideas and lived realities.

The article has a threefold methodology and relies on my 18-month-long ethnographic fieldwork at HAA, conducted within the framework of a PhD project in 2019-2021. The first and most central was participant observation since it offers a perspective beyond the institutional façade and press releases. During the fieldwork, I was transparent about being a researcher and was able to attend the artists' internal meetings (where ideas were often declared and clashed), the bureaucratic procedures (turning ideas into practice), and public events. Second, I rely on the actors' written and publicly spoken statements. As intellectuals, they spend a lot of time trying to understand their world by writing, talking, and creating art. In contrast with most of the population, this is their main activity, and they do it publicly, providing an enormous, easily accessible body of source material. Such products do not reveal how the institution operates but do reflect the actors' common sense well. Third, the article also utilizes approximately thirty interviews conducted with past and present decision-makers of HAA, and with some of its bureaucrats. Studying up addresses institutions and structures, not individuals, and I, therefore, anonymized all the information gained in closed meetings and conversations.

4. Un/Learning domination

"We need to expose the grievances we have suffered in recent decades".
—HAA member in a public conference

HAA's members' experience of subjugation is real: it was a material reality for decades. Unlearning—a pedagogical concept—can help to conceptualize this process because it highlights that learning new norms goes hand in hand with unlearning old ones. The common sense of HAA does not originate from the day in 2010 when Orbán was elected. For decades after 1989, HAA actors felt dominated and dispossessed, and they still talk a lot about these grievances. The most direct cause of their resentment is that until 2011, the Academy was not recognized as a state body (Nagy 2023). This sentiment did not disappear with their rapid rise to power. As the facet of their common sense, in this section, I inquire how they try to overcome their former subordination, and I conceptualize it as a process of unlearning. The unlearning of their previous subjugation is intimately connected to the naturalization of the Academy's novel domination. They are two sides of the same coin.

4.1 The experience of domination

Post-socialist Hungary witnessed a rapid inflow of Western capital. This was more than an economic process; it also heavily shaped the political landscape. HAA's allies, the national-protectionist political and financial elites, were mainly in the opposition between 1989 and 2010. A central grievance of this period for HAA was that between 1992 and 2010, it had fewer resources than its liberal rival, the Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Arts. As I have argued elsewhere, this was the case until its national-protectionist allies prioritized the elevation of HAA to a public body in 2011 (Nagy 2023).

As a result, a feeling of double subjugation emerged among HAA actors. They felt that not only liberals in power dominated them but also their national-protectionist allies (the various constellations of pre-2010 right-wing parties) did not treat them as equal partners. However, we should treat such perceptions with caution. Even if members of HAA were not the most esteemed figures of this period, they were intellectuals with prestigious and sometimes well-paid jobs, ranging from university positions to architectural studio ownership and journal editing. In this sense, their subjugation was relative. They held better material positions than most of society, but they felt subordinated compared to their political allies and to West-oriented intellectuals. This feeling influences HAA actors' mentality even a decade after becoming a state body.

The pre-2010 subaltern position of HAA has a lived character and emotional weight even in the 2020s. In other words, whether or not the members of HAA were oppressed, subjugation was nevertheless a common sentiment among them. HAA members often recall a certain patronizing rejection from their West-oriented opponents in the field of cultural production. The reality of rejection and subjugation remained a lived experience for the cadres of the Academy after its transformation into a state body in 2011. This feeling was even reinforced in the following months when protests obstructed the Academy's operation and led to the exit of some senior members. An academician who lived through this period on the frontline summarized their experience in an interview:

> A patronizing attitude was reflected in the hysterical rejection of HAA when it was enshrined in the constitution, in the refusal to realize that the money allocated for HAA ultimately builds Hungarian culture. From the expansion of our financial possibilities, I expected that through our activities, we would be able to overcome prejudice [towards us], to make beyond doubt [the quality of right-wing artists] what our more intelligent opponents knew in their hearts (HAA member, interview, 29 August, 2022).

These lines encapsulate the entanglement of unlearning the lived-in subjugation and the common sense of HAA. The interlocutor emphasizes patronizing rejection as a form of domination. At the same time, it also constructs an element of common sense in which the interests of the Academy are equal to those of Hungarian culture. Unlearning also fuels the vocation of HAA intellectuals. They often feel a calling to help not only their own and their cadres but also the entire society unlearn liberal and cosmopolitan dogmas. But as I will argue below, HAA actors' relative subjugation resulted not only in such conscious and militant positions but also in the internalization of domination.

4.2 Internalized oppression

Right-wing intellectuals were also integrated into the pre-2010 liberal hegemony to some extent. In an internal meeting, a HAA decision-maker complained about their own cadres: "It is common that our people [right-wing intellectuals] follow the other side, and if they shake hands with us, we don't wash hands for a week". Such lines highlight that right-wing intellectuals find that internalized oppression and self-hate penetrate even their own project. For them, this carries the risk that the cadres become stuck in a subservient role and respect the norms of their opponents. The above-quoted statement especially fits HAA's bureaucracy. In contrast with the academicians, who are the main beneficiaries of the HAA's privileged status, bureaucrats identify less with the institution. In their case, the contested status of the institution more often results in alienation from it. As one of them recalled, they are recurrently provoked in public events with comments such as they must live in Felcsút (the showcase village where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán grew up). In other cases, they experience flat denial from many media outlets when they try to popularize HAA outputs. While academics strive to shape militant common sense from their oppressed position, bureaucrats are less involved in molding the institution's common sense.

My fieldnotes indicate that HAA's leadership considers unlearning central, and this is why they target their cadres and not only the popular classes. They note that the identity of the right-wing intellectuals is not fully formed, and that it should be made and remade every day in a time-consuming process. This processual character often evokes a sense of failure, even among the key figures of the Academy. In an internal meeting, a chief officer gave a resigned assessment of their intellectual hinterland:

> Today, we do not even have six art theorists who do not reproduce the standards of the last 60 years. […] It is completely natural that the intellectuals integrated into the previous hegemonic regime do not want to hand over the territory. Their self-defense makes sense; however, we cannot articulate it in a public conference, just among us.

Such critical lines underscore that a new common sense does not emerge mechanically as the previous regime's political and economic structures collapse. Instead, learning the new and unlearning the old common sense requires coordinated efforts. Over this process, new knowledge should be produced, and new intellectuals should be trained.

4.3 Unlearning gender, learning ethnicity

Comparison of HAA policies on gender and ethnicity can show how a commonsensical understanding of social inequalities is learned and unlearned in a new hegemonic regime. A comparative angle can flesh out how unlearning some pre-existing common sense evolves in tandem with establishing new ones. HAA has a long history of prioritizing Hungarian ethnic minority artists from neighboring countries. In 2005, they admitted dozens of such artists to protest the then-existing policies about them. After 2010, the state-embraced Academy appointed a vice president and established a committee responsible for ethnic Hungarian minorities as one of its first steps. The committee held its first meeting in Vojvodina, beyond the borders of Hungary, where officers of HAA drew a parallel between the oppression of the Academy and ethnic Hungarian minorities. HAA also introduced an informal policy to award half its prizes to ethnic Hungarian minorities. Such a policy is a challenge for HAA members. Although HAA's sections organize field trips to ethnic Hungarian minorities, they often struggle to find appropriate candidates.

In contrast with HAA's quota to award Hungarian ethnic minorities, it has a different approach towards gender equality. During my fieldwork, I joined a town hall meeting of HAA members to sound out candidates for its new board. The ten male candidates sat on the stage, and one female was in the audience. Despite this contrast, the discussion did not touch on gender relations until the end of the event when one academician asked in writing whether the gender balance in the presidency should be improved. This question suddenly changed the atmosphere of the hitherto peaceful event. One of the candidates furiously commented that it was a fabricated issue, that if women artists were good enough, they would get on the board. In response, another female member yelled from the audience that many excellent women were in the room. Although there were hands in the air to join the unfolding debate, the moderator jokingly closed it. HAA's contrasting approach to ethnicity and gender-based inequalities shows how a new cultural institution of a new regime starts representing new inequalities in its narratives.

In conclusion, HAA's making of a new common sense is not taking place on a blank slate. To learn their novel dominant positions, they must unlearn their former subordination. As a result, the establishment of a new common sense goes hand in hand with deconstructing the previous one. This process is inseparable from the hegemonic shift, which provides the material resources needed for the Academy to accomplish this process. However, un/learning domination is a slow process, and the mental residues of the HAA's former subordination are strongly present even after the Academy's tenth year of domination.

As HAA actors felt subordinated during the 1990s and 2000s, many of them developed anger toward the key historical event of the period: Hungary's capitalist re-integration after 1989. With the rise of Orbán's regime in 2010, the previous unit of liberal hegemony and capitalism broke. In the next section, I will show that anti-capitalist tendencies survive in HAA, creating tension with Orbán's capitalist statecraft.

5. Vernacular anticapitalism

HAA backs a capital accumulation regime, but discontent with capitalism among its members is common. To understand this paradox, I coin the term vernacular anticapitalism. I aim to use this notion to conceptualize the various forms of discontent with capitalism that penetrate HAA. I map three aspects of this feeling: aversion to postmodernism, the West, and popular culture. I call this vernacular anticapitalism because it does not emerge from a systematic analysis. This feeling arises from members' sense of subordination in the 1989–2010 era. This subjugation provoked and was combined with the critique of the post-socialist capitalist integration. Analyzing vernacular anti-capitalist sentiments can reveal the origins of HAA actors' vocations, which keep the institution in motion. The term can also capture the root of their subtle clashes with Orbán's regime as it restructures local capitalism.

As an ethnographer, I was shocked by the number of anti-capitalist statements and sentiments in HAA. These statements were not the product of an internal faction but of the Academy's key actors. These sentiments were vernacular: they did not mobilize a consistent analysis and did not lead toward a political strategy, but they relied on a perception and explanation of social realities. A classic example of vernacular anticapitalism can be found in a laudation of a new member, delivered in 2016.

> [The Hungarian peasantry] had a well-functioning farming system for centuries, relatively independent even of the landlords and oligarchs of the time. Although they were heavily taxed, the village community had the land, forest, and floodplain on which the families living there could grow in wealth and population, albeit with much hard work. The merciless spirit of unfolding capitalism invaded this Arcadia. In the late 1700s, land ownership changed radically. Europe's largest concentration of estates gradually emerged in Hungary by draining the ancient water resources and forcing the peasants out of the fruit-growing forests. The Great Hungarian Plain has been turned into a wasteland by power-hungry, greedy lords (Zelnik 2016).

This was not a speech by a romantic peasant revolutionary in the nineteenth century but by the former vice-president of HAA. It was delivered in a flagship institution of a regime that concentrates land in the hands of the domestic bourgeoisie at an unprecedented pace (Fidrich 2013; Gonda 2019). As a result, these lines also provide an entry point to examine the tensions between HAA's vernacular anticapitalism and the state capitalism of the Orbán regime. In the following, I will examine three facets of this vernacular anticapitalism: (1) the critique of postmodern style and theories, (2) the critique of Western dominance in cultural production, (3) the critique of consumerism and popular culture. Through these facets, I will examine the dynamics of conflict and reconciliation between the vernacular anti-capitalist common sense and the state-capitalist development of post-2010 Hungary. I will also highlight that these ideas are deeply rooted in the material conditions of right-wing intellectuals in the political economy of post-socialist Hungary.

5.1 An anti-postmodern backlash

"We often needed a drink when Hungarian discourses revolved only around postmodernism". This is how a key figure of HAA introduced a book by the conservative British philosopher Roger Scruton. But how did this anti-postmodern become a cornerstone of the HAA's common sense, especially since the institution's post-2010 expansion coincided with the decline in popularity of postmodern theories?

At the core of the capitalist world system, the rise of postmodern culture was in conjunction with the emergence of post-Fordist flexible capital accumulation (Harvey 1989) or late capitalism (Jameson 1991). In East Central Europe, the rise of postmodernism coincided with the crisis of socialist regimes. This crisis of the 1970s-1980s in Hungary resulted in deepening political-economic dependencies of the core regions of the global economy. It weakened the bonds between the regime and its intellectuals and opened divergent paths for the latter. As in other socialist regimes, postmodernism emerged in late-socialist Hungary among "intellectuals who [sought] theoretical inspiration from, and discursive synchronization with the West", and it was "largely limited to small circles of literary and art criticism" (Zhang 1999, 78). These intellectuals integrated into the cultural and knowledge production of the core by following its aesthetic trends and by profiting from its professional networks. But they were just a section of the late-socialist intelligentsia. Parallel to them, the future HAA founder sought synchronization with rural communities and imagined these as cornerstones of the nation. The postmodernist response to the crisis of the 1970s was common among intellectuals who became key figures of the post-socialist, West-oriented, and market-liberalizing order, while the national-communitarian response was common among many future HAA members, who grew gradually hostile towards postmodernism.

Anti-postmodern stances and the rise of postmodernism were the two camps in a fight for the shrinking resources of late- and post-socialist Hungary. They were also indicators regarding alliances with factions of the political-economic elite. Similar anti-postmodern stances were already present in 1981 in the words of the future HAA founding President Imre Makovecz, who saw it as a false response to a real problem. Makovecz associated the rise of postmodernism with the crisis of the post-WWII developmentalist regimes (which he labels mass societies):

> Postmodernism [...], which has a fantastic atmosphere, is spreading like a plague among [...] young architects all over the world. It appears as a herald or caricature of something new and exciting. But it does cover something perfectly, and that is its brilliant feature. It explodes the mass society established in the meantime, not towards its faith but towards a lost past. […] A fantastic manipulation is taking place" (Makovecz 1986, 17).

As a result, in post-socialist Hungary, the reception of postmodernism became a battlefield among West-oriented market-liberalizing and national-protectionist intellectuals. Since the latter faction felt defeated in this struggle, postmodernism became a displacement of grievances for them. Most of these grievances were formed before 2010, but HAA only had the resources to wage war on them after 2010. In this sense, HAA's struggle against postmodern theories is an inherent part of its struggle against the dominance of West-oriented market-liberalizing intellectuals. HAA actors' association of postmodernism with local West-oriented, market-liberalizing intellectuals emerged from the recognition that this theoretical setting is part of uneven global relations or, as they would say, part of intellectual imperialism. This shows that HAA actors have a specific sensibility toward detecting and articulating the uneven nature of global capitalism and cultural production. In the following section, I will examine how these anti-globalization sentiments integrate into their common sense.

5.2 Anti-Western sentiments

The Publishing House of HAA has very few sold-out titles. One of them is a fierce conservative critique of the ideological aspects of US hegemony. It was written by a late member of the Academy, the Hungarian-born, US-based philosopher Tamás Molnár (2022 [1991]), and titled *Americanology*. In the following, I examine how the conservative ideology critique of the post-WWII US emerged as a central topic in HAA. Anti-western statements are prominent in the Orbán regime, but such feelings at HAA do not just mirror the messages of

the spin doctors. Just as the anti-western sentiments can be compelling for the popular classes who work on the assembly lines of German capital, these ideologies at HAA also arise from material conditions.

Artists around the HAA often perceive the late- and post-socialist times as the age of their subjugation. In their commonsensical explanation, their West-oriented, market-liberalizing rivals marginalized them in the post-socialist struggle for redistribution and recognition. They blame both the Western-dominated regime of cultural production and their rivals as its local junior partners. As one of them put it, "not only communism and fascism but also Euro-Atlantic civilization wants to appropriate the truth (even if not to the same extent)" . Like other aspects of HAA's emerging common sense, this narrative has a material basis. Artists around HAA are generally less involved in the global circuits of cultural production than their opponents, which fuels the national versus international crystallization of their struggles. The HAA actors' anti-Western common sense was reaffirmed after 2011 when the rapid expansion of HAA received countless attacks from abroad.

Hostility towards the uneven logic of global cultural production has several aspects. It often criticizes the capitalist logic of cultural production, which (re)emerged in Hungary after 1989. As a visual artist member of the Academy summarized in a conference:

> The position of curators seems transparent, but it is actually led by art dealers and, in this way, by money. As a result, the current road of the fine arts is the integration into the regime of for-profit galleries. Consequently, today, practical figures and careerist artists rule, not those who believe in something and are exploring themselves.

Other HAA actors emphasized in the same vein that a market approach took over the local fine arts scene, and only sales prices count. From this angle, the market logic of cultural production appears to be a system invented by the West.

The emerging common sense around the HAA also attempts to offer alternatives for Western-dominated cultural production. One of these is the cult of the nation and the state, and especially their combination, the nation-state. In this approach, the nation offers an alternative to uneven global cultural production. As a HAA member emphasized: "We should rely on local heritages and national culture in opposing colonization". From their angle, HAA appears to be the opponent of exploitative cultural production by providing de-commodifying scholarships, annuities, and pensions for its allied artists.

The critique of Western-led uneven cultural production also inspired HAA to move beyond the national frame. By realizing that "globalization is also an opportunity", they repeatedly tried to find new allies and forge connections with cultural institutions in China and India. In 2013, HAA curated exhibitions in The National Galleries of Modern Art in India. In 2017, it signed a memorandum of understanding with the China Academy of Art. In 2019, it organized a Turkish-Hungarian Art and Science Day. These attempts resonated with many Academicians' grievances about their lack of recognition in the West and the "Eastern turn" of the Hungarian political economy but proved to be one-offs.

The distorted critique of the uneven global cultural production is a cornerstone of the HAA's common sense. This denunciation fits the lived reality of many local cultural producers who could not benefit from globalization. Although HAA cannot organize any transnational alternative, it can tailor the critique. It reinforces the image of the state-capitalist regime as a national savior from the uneven global relations and the Academy as an actor liberating local artists from the constraints of the market.

5.3 Voices against consumption and popular culture

The third facet of the HAA's vernacular anticapitalism is its critique of popular culture and creative industries. This criticism is not unexpected since almost all HAA members are producers of elite culture—as an administrator sarcastically commented, "It is not accidental that we do not have a section of circus artists".

Since the Orbán-regime consciously exploits popular culture's social penetration (Barna and Patakfalvi-Czirják 2022), HAA artists have a good reason to feel threatened.

I attended a meeting where classical musicians of HAA complained about the distribution of state honors. They raged since—as they put it—many mediocre beat musicians receive state awards, while classical music is ignored. In this sense, the fight of HAA actors against popular culture is also a conflict within the elite of Orbán's regime, as the regime increasingly employs popular culture for its political agenda in a more refined manner. HAA musicians' grievances about state honors were not only about symbolic recognition. These honors entitle elderly artists—their colleagues and comrades—to an artists' pension allocated by HAA. Therefore, the distribution of honors is also a burning material matter. In the same vein, the aversion to popular culture is not a purely ideological conflict but also a struggle for material resources.

The critique of popular culture often goes together with the critique of uneven global power relations. As one of their allies put it in a conference: It matters whether Hungarian children grow up watching Marvel movies or reading the János vitéz [John the Valiant], the gem of Hungarian youth literature. HAA actors can even lament how global capitalism distorts the reception of their works. At a similar event, its late honorary president complained that his animated movie Fehérlófia [Son of the White Mare]—an adaptation of a Hungarian folk saga—had been rediscovered as a psychedelic film by a Western(ized) bourgeois audience. As he said, "Everything is already spoiled if drugs are needed to watch it". Theoreticians at the Academy crystallize such vernacular anti-capitalist critique of popular culture towards statism: "Institutions outside states and nations only maintain the mass cultural junk. It is all about fast and cheap production, standardization, shallowness, and spectacular and wholesome nihilism" (Falusi 2017, 84). Or as they conceptualize it in other cases: "Only the nation can provide our human nature, and no other entity will maintain it besides the state".

HAA's critique of consumerism and popular culture can even target flagship projects of the Orbán-regime. Such tension is especially manifest among traditional applied artists at HAA and the regime's reinvention of their discipline as creative industries. Many of these HAA members were recognized figures of the socialist manufacturing and construction industries, and the material basis of their livelihood collapsed in moments during the post-socialist de-industrialization (HAA 2019). Today, they have to face the "reinvention" of their profession under the umbrella of design. The Orbán regime heavily fostered the boom of the creative industries, hoping it would be an engine of the economy. With such expectations, in 2020, they also reprofiled the former University of Applied Arts into a Design University with large investments. In response to the reinvention of their profession, many applied artists of HAA resent the "creative industries". It threatens their profession and challenges elite cultural producers' role as the bearers of "creativity and talent" by expanding their notions towards entrepreneurialism.

This tension manifested at the end of a long day during a lecture on creative industry-led development. While most of the audience was half-asleep, one of HAA's most influential decision-makers started heavily criticizing the talk, stating that "the creative industries are the bluff of the twenty-first century". The commentary was conservative, glorifying bourgeois values and contrasting them with creative industries, optimizing in the short term. Likewise, when design came up in the presence of HAA's late president, he immediately started talking about its "negative aspects" such as "consumer society and growing social inequalities".

This paradox characterizes the HAA's approach toward creative industries. As an organization of elderly producers of elite culture, it is full of resentment. However, as an integral part of a regime that tries to raise the profit rates of its allied capital by fostering local creative industries, HAA cannot withdraw from it. As a result, and in parallel with critical stances, HAA fostered the accreditation of a "Design Campus" in the countryside, hosted lectures praising how the regime recognized the business role of design (Halasi 2020), and

published volumes on the *New paths in cultural marketing* (Dér and Márkus 2020). Consequently, HAA's common sense regarding popular culture and creative industries has emerged under the regime's constraints. Actors of HAA have to craft common sense under the umbrella of a state that simultaneously protects elite culture and poses risks to it. Since social reality is contradictory, common sense is too.

6. Conclusions: an ideological state apparatus without an ideology

This article engaged with right-wing actors' ideas and beliefs and analyzed them in tandem with political economy. To connect the seemingly distant spheres of the mental and the material, I mobilized Antonio Gramsci's notion of common sense that highlights the social roots of beliefs. I turned this analytical tool towards the case of the previously unresearched Hungarian Academy of Arts, which has served as a lavishly endowed flagship institution in Orbán's Hungary for more than a decade. My fieldwork at HAA demonstrated that right-wing intellectuals are not merely the agents of the regime's propaganda machine. Instead, their ideas reflect their life histories and vocations to realize their ambitions within the regime's framework. Another consequence of the distinction between the regime and the Academy is that while HAA looks like an ideological state apparatus, its ideas are just a slice of the regime's ideological landscape.

The article distinguished two central features of HAA's emergent common sense. For the first, I borrowed the pedagogical concept of unlearning. The Academy aims to unlearn its past subordination under Hungary's pre-2010 West-oriented hegemonic regime. As I have argued, the unlearning is also about normalizing their novel domination in Hungary's cultural production. In this vein, I have highlighted that unlearning is both about decomposing old power relations and making new ones. For the second feature, I coined the concept of vernacular anticapitalism. With the term, I tackled the paradox of HAA, which is allied with a local capital accumulation regime while anti-capitalist sentiments are widespread among its members. I highlighted that their past, post-socialist loss of status fuels their vernacular anticapitalism. Since the rise of Orbán, HAA actors have tried to unlearn former liberal norms that they associated with capitalism, which they often despised. As a result, the two facets of common sense are in constant tension. Many HAA actors developed a belief that capitalism destroys the values they create, and now they find themselves allies of a local capital accumulation regime. The case of the anti-battery industry figure of the Academy at the beginning of the article is only one example of this tension that penetrates common sense. As I have shown, not even a showcase institution like HAA has a single ideology. Therefore, instead of seeking the ideological essence of illiberalism, I stressed that its key feature is that it coopts various, often contradictory ideas.

As Orbán's regime is often described as the forerunner of the global rise of authoritarian and/or state capitalism, the study of HAA can be relevant beyond the borders of Hungary. Through the case of HAA's common sense, the article makes three contributions to the literature. These are lessons from Gramsci, and they are worth revisiting in the study of contemporary right-wing hegemonies. The first contribution stresses that ideas have historical and material roots. I have argued that HAA actors' worldviews are shaped by the inequalities of post-socialism and their alliance with Orbán's regime. Instead of labeling these ideas retrograde, I have demonstrated that they emerge from the social relations of the last decades and the present. Putting ideas back into the political economy does not make them irrelevant. As the article shows, the vocation of HAA actors fuels the organization. The second contribution underlines that ideas are incoherent. I pointed out that it is impossible to find a unified ideology of authoritarian regimes because they have no such a thing. The incoherent nature of common sense is an established finding regarding the popular classes, but the article proved that it is also valid for intellectuals. As I argued, inconsistency does not emerge in the lack of intellectual rigor, but it reflects the regime's internal contradictions. The third contribution shifted the focus from the popular to the dominant classes. I argued that common sense is a helpful concept for capturing the incoherent

ideas of privileged intellectuals. I stressed the key role of the state in crafting common sense. I suggested that regimes like Orbán's do not have to invent a new right-wing ideology: they mobilize pre-existing forms such as anticapitalism, statism, and anti-western sentiments. Placing the state in the picture showed that the common sense of HAA does not stand alone but is part of a more extensive hegemonic process. The article urged a historical and materialist approach towards authoritarian regimes. This path must go against intellectuals who often try to hide the material preconditions that define them. We must not fall into the same trap. It is not total concord that makes them allies of the regime, but the fact that they are building a joint project. Thus, we must trace the material roots of their mental structures instead of merely writing their history of ideas.

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