

Article

Not in Front of the Child: Illiberal Familism and the Hungarian Anti-LGBTQ+ “Child Protective Law”

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Abstract

Research on familism in Europe usually focuses on family policies, pointing out how female reproductive and work rights are often contrasted with the interest of the family, as shown by the individualism vs. familism understanding of familism (familialism). Here, however, I focus on another understanding of familism that sees the family as the model for other social institutions. This novel angle on the European context enables research on a scarcely researched aspect: how familism is used to render non-heterosexual rights illegitimate. Turning to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s rhetorical understanding of politics, I show how the rhetorical use of the family legitimizes anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments. I focus on the Hungarian “Child Protective Law,” passed by the illiberal Fidesz-KDNP government in 2021. The content analysis of the material shows how the Hungarian government’s aspiration to protect children, both as crucial members of heterosexual nuclear families as well as symbols of the illiberalist future of the country, legitimizes anti-LGBTQ+ stances. This happens, first, through a discursive link between LGBTQ+ people and child abuse. Second, it occurs through the government’s familistic ideal of the Christian heterosexual family, which also constitutes its antagonistic frontier as the LGBTQ+ community. I argue for a new articulation of the illiberal “us” and its liberal frontier, where the ideal family, and in particular heterosexuality, function as a means of exclusion. This article contributes to existing literature on gender and illiberalism as well as to current discussions on the limits of the theoretical concepts of familism.

Keywords

child protective law; familism; Hungary; illiberalism; LGBTQ+ rights

Issue

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1. Introduction

Recent research sees familialism as “a major key tenet of the illiberal project in Central Europe” (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 167). Familialism in this context is understood as an ideology which values the institution of the family more than the individual interests of the family members (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). Most papers relying on this understanding of familialism investigate family policies to offer comparisons between different member states of the European Union (EU) and in particular of the Central-Eastern European region, such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. However, as research has shown, familism as the ideological usage of the family does not always directly translate into actual fam-

ily policies (Szikra, 2018; Szikra & Szelewa, 2010), but acts as an ideological base to which states and policy makers can refer to, to justify their decisions in matters that often exceed the scope of family politics (Szikra & Szelewa, 2010). To address this ideological use of the family, I use the term “familism” to refer to an ideology that prioritizes the family over other social institutions or that claims the family as the model for other social institutions (Ochiai, 2013, pp. 20–21; Tóth & Dupcsik, 2011, pp. 153–154). This family vs. other social institutions understanding of familism widens the scope of policies that are seen as familist, as it enlarges the focus from the family as an institution itself to other institutions that are also conceptualized through analogy to the family.

Familism (*familismo*) refers to the family as a central cultural value and most of the time case studies discuss immigrant social groups with Latinx or Asian cultural background (e.g., Choi et al., 2021; Hernández & Bámaca-Colbert, 2016). Most research highlights the positive effects of the familistic attitudes and behaviors of immigrant Latinx and Asian youth, such as stronger resilience to discrimination (for an overview, see Christophe & Stein, 2022). However, recent publications also draw attention to the limits of strong familist attitudes, especially its ambivalent or even negative relation to family members who identify with the LGBTQ+ community (Patrón, 2021). This negative correlation between familism and anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes calls for “consideration for systems of oppression,” such as patriarchy and heterosexism, when researching familism (Patrón, 2021, p. 1095). In Hungary, a typical post-Soviet country in the Central-Eastern European region, processes of re-familialization have been detected after the failures of defamilialist aspirations of state socialism (e.g., Fodor, 2014; Kampichler & Kispéter, 2014; Szelewa, 2006; Szikra & Szelewa, 2010). By analyzing the illiberal Hungarian government’s most recent political agenda of re-familialization, this article contributes to illiberal studies of the Central-Eastern European region, as well as to a broader discussion on familism, and especially its limitations towards the LGBTQ+ community.

I argue that in the case of Hungary, illiberalism and the illiberal “us” is constituted and legitimized by instrumentalizing the ideology of the family serving as a model institution for children’s moral development. To focus on this notion of the family as a model for social institutions and, in this case, a model for the illiberalist definition of familism, instead of family policies, I offer a qualitative content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015) of parliamentary debates that directly address the idea of the family on the highest, constitutional level, where the ideological framework of how the illiberal family is understood is secured. For the analysis I selected the “LXXIX Act of 2021 on stricter measures against pedophile offenders and amending certain laws to protect children” (hereafter LXXIX Act of 2021; Government of Hungary, 2021a), which came into force in January 2022 in Hungary. The aim of the article is to show how ideological familism is used to legitimate illiberal gender policies by demonizing queer sexualities.

2. Theory

Illiberal democracy, a term originating from Fareed Zakaria (Zakaria, 1997), is one of four established subtypes of defective democracies, that is, regimes that are minimally but not fully democratic (Bogaards, 2009, p. 411). It refers to a political system that is based on parliamentarianism and free elections which, however, derives from certain liberal democratic values “such as pluralism, individual freedoms, or checks and balances” (Laruelle, 2022, p. 304). Recent literature, however,

widens the meaning of the adjective “illiberal” from referring only to certain regime types, and “institutional realities” (Laruelle, 2022, p. 307), and introduces the term illiberalism (Laruelle, 2022), on which this article also draws on. As maintained by Laruelle (2022), illiberalism is a reaction to liberalism, a negative term, acquiring meaning only through its antagonistic relation to liberalism. According to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s antagonistic definition of politics (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), heterogeneous political demands organize themselves into a chain of equivalence around a common signifier, and their shared identity (closed meaning) is only granted by their negative relation to something else, something that they negate. This is how, in the Hungarian context, I understand illiberalism as a signifier, marking an antagonistic line between the illiberal “us” and the liberal “them.”

As Laclau states, antagonism is not just an external relationship between two positively definable terms, or in other words, two closed identities, but bears a constitutive function: The antagonistic other is necessary for any identity to represent “the fullness of one’s own identity,” as the antagonistic other offers a closure for one’s identity (Laclau, 2006, p. 104). In this sense, for Laclau (2006), the closure of an identity, for example, illiberalism, is only possible through the constitution of its antagonistic other, in this case liberalism. As illiberalism is not an objectively definable positive term, I understand it not as a coherent ideology, but drawing on Laclau (1983), as an empty concept that “represents a backlash against today’s liberalism in all its varied scripts—political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational” (Laruelle, 2022, p. 309). Furthermore, as the meaning of liberalism varies based on the context in which it is used, illiberalism becomes, in Laclauian terms, a floating concept (Laclau, 1983; Laruelle, 2022). This means that the antagonistic other is never fixed and can be constituted and re-constituted through a new antagonistic frontier or in relation to the different aspects of that antagonistic frontier. In the Hungarian case, for instance, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán first defined illiberalism as a work-based society as opposed to liberal welfare states and leftist ideologies, and second as a nationalist democracy, prioritizing national authorities over supranational ones, thus also incorporating anti-EU standpoints in his understanding of illiberalism (Orbán, 2014). In 2019, however, he expanded the meaning of illiberalism to Christian values and incorporated into his understanding of illiberalism, that has always advanced “a “traditional” vision of gender relations,” explicitly anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments (Laruelle, 2022, p. 310). Thus, in the Hungarian context, illiberalism, as a logic of rejection of certain values, signifies an antagonism intertwining anti-leftist, anti-EU, nationalistic stances (Palonen, 2018), where recently the demonization especially of sexual minorities has taken up a vital role. This demonization of the LGBTQ+ community, as I argue here, operates as a new antagonistic frontier to define the illiberal “us” as a heteronormative identity.

Familism is a theoretical concept that refers to attitudes, behaviors, discourses, and policies that put cultural or financial value on families. According to Ochiai (2013), at least four different meanings can be identified by the term. First, familism (*familismo*) refers to attitudes and behaviors that prioritize family ties over other social bonds, attitudes that are often associated with Latinx and Asian communities. In this context, familism is often referred to for its positive effects, manifested in reciprocal “support, comfort, and services” among family members (Hernández & Bámaca-Colbert, 2016, p. 463). Second, familism is used to research discourses that constitute an ideal model of the family in a given society. These discourses also constitute those who “derive from the family image” and “are attacked mercilessly” for it (Ochiai, 2013, p. 20). Third, familism refers to societies where family relationships serve as a model for other social institutions. Finally, familism can also refer to family policies that promote the value and obligations of family members, especially in terms of care work provided for other family members in opposition to public services (Ochiai, 2013). For more clarity, however, as stated before, in this article I use the term *familialism* when I refer to the fourth, policy-related meaning of familism, and *familism* when I refer to the other three, ideological-discursive use of the family.

Feminist critique often addresses *familialism* and criticizes family policies that reduce the importance of individual reproductive rights in comparison to the reproduction of the nation, seeing this as an illiberal response to demographic crises (Kemper, 2016, as cited in Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 167). These studies successfully point out the dangers that *familialism* poses to the reproductive rights of women (e.g., Duman & Horvath, 2013; Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). However, they leave the traditional heteronormative understanding of families unaddressed. As I aim to demonstrate here, illiberal systems instrumentalize ideological familism not just to hinder women’s rights, but also to demonize non-heterosexual people. LGBTQ+ communities in Central-Eastern Europe have been experiencing increased hostility as illiberal parties foster traditional models of the family (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). This is because another definition of familism positions the family as a social unit as “a sort of ideal (though rather unattainable) model for other social institutions” (Tóth & Dupcsik, 2011, p. 153). The family serves not just as the foundational unit of an illiberal society, but also as a model for it. Just as the illiberal idea of the family models nationalist, anti-leftist, anti-EU, and Christian stances, familist ideology contributes to legitimate illiberal politics. Familism sees the family as “the most important contributor to the cultivation of...attitudes that come to shape society” (Tóth & Dupcsik, 2011, p. 154). This positioning of the family above other institutions responsible for reproducing social attitudes makes the family the main institution where reproduction of illiberal attitudes can take place.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, I bring the second and third meaning of familism into the context of illiberalism in Central-Eastern Europe. In this sense, familism promotes an ideal form of the family and transfers this idea to other social institutions as well. Focusing on these antagonistic ideological-discursive facets of familism in the illiberal context enables me to address the limitations of other understandings of familism, especially of *familismo*. The illiberal instrumentalization of family values clearly indicates how familial relationships are determined by patriarchy and, in this case especially, by heterosexism. This aspect is often missing in familism research (Patrón, 2021). Second, I offer an analysis of how familism contributes to illiberal politics in practice. I examine how the instrumentalization of a heteronormative ideal of the family, based on the parent–child relationship, legitimates illiberal policies along anti-LGBTQ+ lines. I demonstrate an antagonistic relationship between the illiberal (heterosexual, familist) “us” and the liberal (queer, defamilist) “them,” constituted by the family and, in particular, heterosexuality, as the antagonistic frontier or means of exclusion.

3. Context: Familialism/Familism in Hungary

Literature on *familialism* usually classifies Hungary as a country where family policies provide “comprehensive support” (Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008) for families, that is, a country with “optional” (Leitner, 2003, as cited in Duman & Horvath, 2013, p. 23) or “choice-oriented *familialism*” (Szelewa, 2006, p. 3). This means that families receive both universal and insurance-based cash transfers for their children, and in addition there is also a wide network of public childcare facilities, as local governments are obliged to set them up. Nevertheless, as the amount of universal childcare support is very low, and the quality of childcare facilities varies significantly in different regions and is very poor in general for children between 0–3 years of age, the public, defamilialist “option” is strongly related to regionalism and classism (e.g., Fodor, 2014). On the ideological level, however, since 2008, after the political fiasco of the governing left-wing coalition, one of the most important political programs of the conservative Fidesz-KDNP coalition while building up its illiberal logic (Palonen, 2018) was to strengthen its conservative family politics (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018).

After the landslide victory of the Fidesz-KDNP in 2010, the government launched its family mainstreaming policies along with its anti-gender discourses (Kováts & Pető, 2017). The new Fundamental Law which replaces the country’s constitution was unilaterally adopted in 2011 and has since then been modified nine times by the government’s two-thirds parliamentary majority. The new law lays down “the conservative ideological foundations” of the government’s illiberal politics (Szikra, 2018, p. 8). A crucial part of this law is the ideological definition of the family and the imperative to protect it

as an institution of national value (Szikra, 2014, p. 500). Moreover, the Fundamental Law also ensured that a new family protection act was created (Act CCXI of 2011 on the Protection of Families) with the status of a cardinal law (Government of Hungary, 2011, Article L, (3)). Cardinal laws belong to a special legislative category, as they need a parliamentary supermajority to be modified. Furthermore, as they cannot be subjected to constitutional control, they occupy a quasi-constitutional position within the legislative system (Schweitzer, 2013). In the original Fundamental Law, and in the Family Protection Act, accepted in 2011, family was not explicitly defined, but its heteronormativity was nonetheless implied (Government of Hungary, 2011, Article L, (1)). The Ninth Amendment of the Fundamental Law, however, specified the heteronormative gender identities of adult family members, as it claims that “[t]he mother is a woman, the father is a man” (Government of Hungary, 2020b, Article 1). According to the argumentation for the Ninth Amendment of the Fundamental Law, the protection of families, as a heteronormatively defined institution, is necessary to preserve Hungary’s Christian culture in opposition to widespread liberal support for cohabitations and gender identities that derive from traditional, Christian, heteronormative values (Government of Hungary, 2020a).

By defining adult roles only as parental roles within families, the government also defined family not just as a heteronormative cohabitation sealed by marriage between a man and a woman, but also as an institution that is based on “the relationship between parents and children” (Government of Hungary, 2020b, Article 1). Further, the Ninth Amendment of the Fundamental Law successfully expands the compulsory heteronormativity it imposes on families to children as well. It states that children have a right to healthy mental and physical development. To provide children with this right, it claims that what the government sees as “healthy” is “the right of children to their self-identity corresponding to their sex at birth” (Government of Hungary, 2020b, Article 3). Thus, heteronormativity is framed not just as a norm but as a necessary predicament for the healthy mental and physical development of children.

According to my analysis, this modification already formed the ideological base for a new wave of the government’s anti-gender politics. Instances of the government’s anti-gender discourse emphasizing the need to protect the children’s (natural) sexual identities in schools and pre-schools, allegedly endangered by textbooks questioning the naturality of traditionally gendered identities, have occurred before 2010 (Kováts & Pető, 2017, pp. 117–120). However, the explicit connection between the protection of children and the government’s illiberal discourses is most striking in the LXXIX Act of 2021. It marks a new wave of the government’s illiberal politics that explicitly draws an antagonistic line between liberalism and illiberalism concerning heterosexual and non-heterosexual bodies, orienta-

tions, and practices. I argue that the package of legislative modifications collected under the LXXIX Act of 2021 ensures that the government’s hetero-compulsory ideological stand, fixed in the Fundamental Law, now explicitly informs and modifies certain policies in the field of media and education.

4. Material and Method

I applied the method of Qualitative Content Analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015) to map out in what ways anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments are justified in parliamentary discourses on child abuse. I chose this method as it enabled me to analyze not only the manifest subject matter of the material, but also its contextual and latent content (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, p. 86). The goal was a description of the content patterns found in the data to explain how the content categories of queer sexualities and child abuse intertwine. In the following I will demonstrate how ideological illiberal familism is used to interconnect child abuse and queer sexualities.

As a first step I familiarized myself with the themes to decide on the material. As a result of iterative sampling, the material consists of the text of the LXXIX Act of 2021, the proposal, the modifications, and the parliamentary debates related to the Act. The material also includes the text and proposal for the Ninth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary (Government of Hungary, 2020b), as these documents were frequently referred to in the discourse around the LXXIX Act of 2021. The LXXIX Act of 2021 started out as a proposal for the modification of the legislative framework enabling stricter punishment for child abuse offenders. The first parliamentary debate (1 June 2021) and the further proposals for modifications from the opposition parties discussed only this proposal (and in general agreed with it). The English translations of the passages used in this article are mine.

It is worth noting here that even though the LXXIX Act of 2021 repeatedly talks about pedophilia, pedophile crime, and perpetrators of pedophilia when talking about the sexual abuse of children, I aim to highlight the differentiation between pedophilia and child abuse, mistakenly neglected by the law as well as by MPs during the debates of the law (Herek, 2016). Accordingly, in line with the main motivation of LXXIX Act of 2021 to enable stricter measures against perpetrators of sexual offense against minors, throughout the analysis I use the term “child abuse” even if the original text refers to pedophilia.

Anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments became part of the proposal after the Legislative Committee’s discussion of the proposal, a week after its original parliamentary debate. The Legislative Committee describes itself as “a guardian of legislation” and its main task is to examine whether a proposal “enforces the provisions of the Fundamental Law” (Hende, 2022). Accordingly, the newly added comprehensive modifications were justified by the references to the Fundamental Law (Government of Hungary, 2021b). Oppositional parties

boycotted the parliamentary debate and voting about this new proposal (14–15 June 2021) and thus it was accepted with a two-thirds majority and without any opposition in the general vote.

After finalizing the material, I did two rounds of content analysis of the documents using the ATLAS.ti software. After the inductively generated codes and sub-codes were cross-checked, I finalized the coding frames and removed redundant quotations and those that are not relevant to answer the research question. As a result, I gathered 45 quotations organized into content categories shown in Table 1.

The three main content categories capture the three main recurring patterns across the dataset. The sub-categories refer to the manifest content of the quotes, whereas the three central categories stand for more abstract codes that incorporate also the latent and the contextual contents. As the coding draws on the latent and on the contextual content of the quotes as well, the central categories overlap. This overlap of the central categories is crucial to address the research question, as it indicates points of connection between them. To disentangle their connections, I turn to the sub-categories that belong to more than one central category and over-

arch across the material. Their analysis in the following sections unravels the links between the main categories with the focus on the *Anti-LGBTQ+* theme. The aim is to answer questions about how the categories of child abuse and LGBTQ+ are connected through a need to protect children, and how the Hungarian government uses the theme of protection of children to strengthen its familialist policies with illiberal motivations.

5. Results

The central category in the material is the need to protect children. This need is justified by the recurrent thematizing of child abuse and the harm that non-heterosexual people allegedly pose for children. The analysis, however, in accordance with the research question, puts the *Anti-LGBTQ+* category into focus and unravels its links to other categories. First, I show how a connection between the categories *Anti-LGBTQ+* and *Child abuse* is created to justify the need to protect children from non-heteroconform people. The sub-categories included in this section are *Liberalism*, *Media programs*, and *Sensitizing school programs*. Second, I demonstrate how the government's discourse constitutes an antagonistic relationship

Table 1. Content categories and sub-categories.

Category	Sub-category	The quotation refers to	Relative frequency in the dataset
Protection of children		the value and imperative of the protection of children	58%
	Family	family, marriage, parent-child relationship, responsibilities over children	49%
	Fundamental Law	the Fundamental Law, main values derived from the Fundamental Law	36%
	Christianity	Christianity, Christian values, the values of the Catholic church	31%
Child abuse		sexual abuse against a minor	47%
	Liberalism	the homogeneously constituted liberal "other," that is, left-wing media or politics, liberalism, and the Western countries of the EU	18%
Anti-LGBTQ+		an anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment	36%
	Family	family, marriage, parent-child relationship, responsibilities over children	49%
	Fundamental Law	the Fundamental Law, main values derived from the Fundamental Law	36%
	Christianity	Christianity, Christian values, the values of the Catholic church	31%
	Liberalism	the homogeneously constituted liberal "other," that is, left-wing media or politics, liberalism, and the Western countries of the EU	18%
	Media programs	certain content (programs, ads) that shall not be made available to people under the age of 18	18%
	Sensitizing school programs	extra-curricular sensitizing activities offered to students by people and organizations outside the school's own staff	9%

between the idea of an illiberal Christian family and the LGBTQ+ community by focusing on the sub-categories of *Family*, *Fundamental Law*, and *Christianity*.

5.1. The LGBTQ+ Community as a Threat to Children

The most significant sub-categories under the category *Anti-LGBTQ+*, *Media programs* and *Sensitizing school programs*, were only included in the proposal after the Legislative Committee's discussion. I argue that the package of legislative modifications collected under the LXXIX Act of 2021 assures that the government's hetero-compulsory ideological stand, fixed in the Fundamental Law, now explicitly informs and modifies certain policies, namely media and education. In the following I demonstrate how these policies are justified through a discursive connection between the categories *Child abuse* and *Anti-LGBTQ+*.

The subcategory *Media programs* refers to repeated passages in the law that thematize the prohibition of certain media content that is available to people under the age of 18. This content is defined as that which "depicts sexuality for its own sake or promotes or displays deviations from the sex at birth, gender reassignment or homosexuality" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 3. §). Mentioning these categories repeatedly together, the law text creates a connection between them, even though depictions of "deviations from the sex at birth, gender reassignment and homosexuality" are not necessarily instances of arbitrary sexuality. In some passages the text combines these categories equating so-called "deviant" media content with "pornography" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 1. § (2); 9. § (3)) or "violence" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 9. § (2)). The non-heteronormative and non-binary categories of media contents the law aims to prevent the underaged from encountering refer to portrayals of non-binary, transgender, and homosexual bodies, which are treated as expressions of the same practice, namely deviations from heteronormativity.

Another such area where new policies informed by compulsory heteronormativity are introduced is education. These modifications regulate extra-curricular sensitizing activities in schools for underaged children that are offered by people and organizations outside the school's own staff. In their content they are defined in the law text as extra-curricular programs dealing with topics "related to sexual culture, sex life, sexual orientation, sexual development, the harmful effects of drug use, the dangers of the Internet and other physical and mental health development issues" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 11. § (2)). The list suggests that the subject matter of sensitizing programs related to "sexual culture, sex life, sexual orientation, [and] sexual development" are potentially harmful and dangerous as they are mentioned as equivalent to programs drawing attention to "the harmful effects of drug use, [and] the dangers of the Internet" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 11. § (2)). In addition,

classes in topics on sexual education are explicitly associated with instructors with non-heteronormative sexualities who, either by being queer and/or by being unprofessional, pose harm to children (Government of Hungary, 2021b, to 11. §).

Thus, according to the argumentation for LXXIX Act of 2021, the prohibition of media contents and extra-curricular classes on sexual and gender diversity for the underaged is necessary to protect "the physical, mental or moral development of minors" (Government of Hungary, 2021b, to 9. §; to 11. §), which is exactly the same reasoning that is used to justify stricter legal measurements against offenders of child abuse (Government of Hungary, 2021b, General justification).

This analogy between exposing children to depictions of queer gender and child abuse evokes the historically widespread myth that non-heteronormative sexualities and child abuse are inevitably connected. This myth was repeatedly brought up during the parliamentary debates as well: "I would like to remind you that the LGBTQ movement has more than once been involved in similar scandals (János Volner, independent)" (Government of Hungary, 2021c, p. 30309). The myth assumes that homosexual people are more inclined to abuse children than heterosexuals, even though research has clearly shown that this assumption is false. In fact, in cases where the child abuser can experience adult sexuality at all, subjects with heterosexual adult inclinations are more likely to commit sexual crimes against children, even when the sex of the child is the same as that of the abuser (Herek, 2016).

Besides, LGBTQ+ sexualities are traditionally framed by the government as phenomena that are enabled and encouraged by the liberal West and are a threat to traditional, "natural" values. As the often-referenced Fundamental Law argues: "[N]ew, modern ideological processes in the Western world, which raise doubts about the creation of the male and female sex, threaten the right of children to healthy development" (Government of Hungary, 2020a, to 3. §). During the debates, pedophilia (not just sexual abuse), like LGBTQ+ rights, is also connected to "left" or "liberal" political values: "If there is a political trend within the bosom of which pedophilia can find protection, it must undoubtedly be sought on the left, left, or more precisely on the side of liberals (János Volner, independent)" (Government of Hungary, 2021c, pp. 30310–30311). Liberal politics and media are accused of "international attempts to make pedophilia socially acceptable" and "to sensitize society to pedophilia (Dr. Gabriella Selmeczi, Fidesz)" (Government of Hungary, 2021c, p. 30259). Through analogy, sensitizing school programs to non-hetero-conform sexualities are seen as similar attempts to harm the healthy mental and physical development of children. That is, the text reformulates the scientifically disqualified myth that non-heterosexual adults are more likely to commit child abuse through a novel analogy: LGBTQ+ people and representations

of LGBTQ+ people harm children's mental and physical development just as abusers do. Through this analogy, the government instrumentalizes child abuse to offer a false but tangible pseudo example of the non-tangible threat LGBTQ+ people allegedly pose to children. This leads to a new antagonistic frontier around children, between LGBTQ+ people as threatening "others" and "us" who ensure children's "healthy," heteronormative development. I will next discuss who that "us" consists of and what children in this context symbolize.

5.2. LGBTQ+ vs. Family

The most significant sub-category that justifies anti-LGBTQ sentiments by connecting this sub-category to the category *Protection of children is Family*. In the following, I present how the government's familism, promoting the model of the Christian heterosexual family, secured in the Fundamental Law, constitutes as its antagonistic pair the LGBTQ+ community in the researched material.

During the debate surrounding the LXXIX Act of 2021, MP Lőrincz Nacsá, a spokesman for the government (KDNP), felt it necessary to point out that the proposal, even though it technically belongs to the Judiciary Committee, was also voluntarily discussed by the Committee on Social Welfare, "because as a family committee, the committee for families, we are obviously affected by this issue" (Government of Hungary, 2021c, p. 30266). This relationship can only be "obvious" if we recall the Ninth Amendment to the Fundamental Law (Government of Hungary, 2020b) that defines the family as a parent-child relationship, that is, families cannot be understood without children. Based on the iteration of this relationship, the discussion on children, it is argued, cannot be separated from a discussion on families. This means that, in the context of this law, "children" refers only to those who are understood to be part of illiberal heterosexual families. Consequently, families, along with the government, play a crucial role in protecting their children. As a result, as the opposition points out, the government leaves children without families unprotected, for example, against sexual abuse (Government of Hungary, 2021c, p. 30276).

As the passage targeting the modification of the Family Protection Act states: "The protection of *orderly* family relationships, and the enjoyment of the right of children to a self-identity based on their gender at birth, shall be of particular importance for the protection of their physical, mental and spiritual health" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 10. § (2), my emphasis). This means that, according to the law, the protected heteronormativity of families functions as a guarantee for the heteronormativity of the children who are raised in such families. The government's attempts to strengthen heteronormative families to indirectly protect children and their heteronormativity, through heteronormative family life, is based on a familism that sees the family as the place where values are most effectively passed

on. Consequently, the need to protect children implicitly implies a need to protect heteronormative families as well.

Further, as since 2020 the Fundamental Law sees children as the "future generations" of the illiberal system (Government of Hungary, 2020a, General justification), only the protection of the heteronormativity of families ensures the future of the illiberal state. Based on the government's understanding of familism, the shaping of the attitudes of children themselves becomes the site of battle between liberalism and illiberalism, where only heteronormative families offer a safe environment for children's health, which, as previously argued, means heterosexual development. In this context, health is equated with the government's illiberal values, in which heteronormativity takes a leading role. In this sense, the government draws an antagonistic line between liberalism and illiberalism along hetero- vs. non-heterosexual differentiation: Adults with sexual and/or gender identities and bodies that do not fit heterosexual norms are seen to pose potential long-lasting harm to children merely by being visible to them. Conversely, adults embodying heterosexual identity, by virtue of modeling the sexuality favored by the illiberal government, supposedly contribute to children's healthy mental and physical development.

As such, the law sums up the government's discursive and legislative hostility against LGBTQ+ people that started in 2019. As same-sex couples are excluded from the right to legally marry in Hungary, according to the Fundamental Law (2020, Article L), they are similarly excluded from the right to claim they are a family ("Járványkezelés helyett," 2020). Besides, the alleged need to protect children from non-heterosexual adoptive parents was the main, albeit implicit, motivation for modifying the Civil Code in a way that significantly decreases the chances of same-sex couples and single parents adopting a child, as a parliamentary proposal of the government would only allow heterosexual married couples to adopt ("Járványkezelés helyett," 2020). The explicit connection between the protection of children and the government's anti-LGBTQ+ discourses is most striking in the LXXIX Act of 2021.

Some argue that the LXXIX Act of 2021 came into force only to direct attention away from the government's scandals (Dull, 2021) or to set the discursive scene for future sanctions from the EU that are expected to be unrelated to this law (Magyari & Csurgó, 2021). However, even though the law came into effect in January 2022, in April the government has organized a national Child Protection referendum on questions that in their content strongly resonate with this law. This took place on the same day as the parliamentary elections in 2022. According to government-friendly sources, the referendum was (purportedly) necessary to provide the government with a "double legitimization" regarding the enforcement of the law, after it had led to criticism from the opposition parties and from the European Parliament

(Ternovacz, 2022). The opposition media saw the referendum, however, as a polarizing campaign tool to mobilize voters for the general elections (Joo, 2021), that is, to mobilize voters by constituting a new illiberal antagonistic line that seeks to enforce heteronormativity.

Accordingly, I argue that the recently highlighted antagonism between the heteronormative, illiberal “us” and its non-heteronormative, liberal frontier culminates in the LXXIX Act of 2021 and related government discourses. This indicates a shift toward a new antagonistic frontier in Hungarian illiberalism, conceptualized as the logic of rejection of certain values. Consequently, the main signifier that captures the illiberal “us” in this context is the family, which symbolizes heteronormativity and the task of protecting children from “liberal” influences, conceptualized here as non-heteronormative people.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued for a new emphasis on the heteronormativity of illiberalism in Hungary. Even though the government has promoted heteronormativity before, this has previously happened in a positive context, as family friendliness, with policy-level compulsory heteronormativity being only implicitly present. The LXXIX Act of 2021, however, explicitly targets non-heteronormative sexualities, bodies, and practices in a negative, antagonistic way and modifies several policies accordingly. This antagonism is legitimized by an alleged need to protect Hungarian children from the harm that even mere depictions of non-heteronormative people would allegedly cause them. Children, in this context, mean both the future of the illiberal Hungary and, connectedly, present-day heteronormative families, the cornerstone of the government’s illiberal family politics.

The article adds to existing research on illiberalism and gender that considers familism “a major key tenet of the illiberal project in Central Europe” (Grzebalska & Peto, 2018, p. 167). The case demonstrated here shows that, in the name of illiberalism, the Hungarian government conceptualizes sex and gender with the aim of encouraging only the reproductive functions of sexed bodies that favor its illiberal reproductive/family politics (Grzebalska & Peto, 2018). What is more, as the article expands the meaning of familism as an ideal form of family and transfers it to other social institutions, it can conclude that familist policies cannot just be understood as an illiberal response to recent demographic challenges, as current literature states (Grzebalska & Peto, 2018). Family policies must also be seen as securing a space for the reproduction of illiberal values in which this reproduction of illiberalism is transferred to the private responsibilities of families. Further, by expanding the meaning of familism, the article shows how illiberal systems instrumentalize ideological familism not just to undermine women’s rights, but also to demonize

non-heterosexual people. As the article presents, in the Hungarian context, illiberalism, as a logic of rejection of certain values, has recently been used for the discursive demonization of sexual minorities. Using the Laclauian framework to conceptualize illiberalism, this demonization of the LGBTQ+ community, as I have argued here, operates as a new antagonistic frontier to define the illiberal “us” as a heteronormative family, that ensures its children’s “healthy,” heteronormative development. In other words, the analysis shows that the illiberal building of “us” as a community happens through the affective othering of those who deviate from heteronormativity and thus, supposedly, pose harm for the children (Palonen, 2021).

Besides, this article contributes to the international literature on familism beyond the illiberal context. By pointing out how illiberal politics can strategically use the values attached to families to legitimize illiberal policies, I draw attention to the antagonistic elements of familism. The illiberal instrumentalization of family values clearly shows how familial relationships are influenced by patriarchy and, in this case especially, by heterosexism. This critique is often missing in familism research (Patron, 2021). Finally, the findings suggest that the Hungarian government defines democracy as “sexual democracy” (Fassin, 2012, p. 288). Further research on how, in this context, heteronormativity serves “to justify, in democratic terms, the rejection of others” (Fassin, 2012, p. 288), and how it might justify also xenophobic and racist standpoints in Hungary, is encouraged.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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