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**Championing Change in Rural Hungary the Role of
Emancipatory Subjectivities in the Construction of
Alternatives to Illiberal Authoritarian Populism**

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Championing Change in Rural Hungary the Role of Emancipatory Subjectivities in the Construction of Alternatives to Illiberal Authoritarian Populism

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss how state-supported land grabbing since the early 2010s by Hungarian oligarchs is enabling the maintenance of the authoritarian populist regime in Hungary, and how focusing on subjectivities understood as the ways in which people are brought into relations of power can help scholar-activists to start thinking about emancipation within such context. Scholar-activists interested by the rise of authoritarian populism in Europe and beyond need to pay attention to Hungarian authoritarian rural politics. Indeed, it is in the countryside that FIDESZ, Orbán's party, won the 2010 elections by pledging to stand up for the rights of Hungarian smallholder farmers. Furthermore, and more importantly, the authoritarian populist regime's central pillar, the one that maintains it, is agricultural land grabbing by and for national oligarchs who are close to the government. Said it differently, the Hungarian case highlights the need to discuss the link between domestic grabbing of agricultural lands facilitated by the Hungarian State on one side, and authoritarian populism on the other: how do they enable each other, with what effects, and more importantly: how to envision emancipatory rural politics in a context in which land and natural resources increasingly belong to those who are behind and benefitting from the authoritarian system? Constructing alternative political avenues requires new analytics to detect and fight oppressions in this and similar contexts. Based on a pilot research carried out in Hungary in 2017, my paper focuses on two aspects: (i) the rural subjects created by authoritarian rural populism; and (ii) the conditions in which the norms that influence the constitution of subjects may be broken. My hypothesis is that emancipatory subjectivities understood as those counter-conducts that challenge the subjectivation processes through speech and/or action need to be given attention because they may be conducive to challenging Hungarian authoritarian rural politics.

Keywords: Authoritarian populism, authoritarian rural politics, Hungary, land grabbing, emancipatory subjectivities

Introduction

In this paper, I discuss how state-supported land grabbing since the early 2010s by Hungarian oligarchs is enabling the maintenance of the authoritarian populist regime in Hungary, and how focussing on subjectivities understood as “the ways in which people are brought into relations of power” (Nightingale 2011, 123) can help scholar-activists to start thinking about how to challenge such regime.

Today, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Hungary, self-qualified as “illiberal democracy” and “revolutionary”¹ is recognised as one of the most authoritarian and illiberal European state (Caccavello and Sandell 2017). In the media, its politics are qualified as right-wing (e.g. McLaughlin 2018), anti-liberal (e.g. Tharoor 2017), anti-democratic (e.g. Rovny 2016), and are often compared to Putin’s Russia or Morawiecki’s Poland. To keep Hungarians in “revolution” and justify the regime’s offensive politics towards everything that could challenge its stability, it mobilises a discourse in which new “enemies” of the Hungarian People constantly pop up like in a shooting game in an amusement park. The “dangers” that these “enemies” represent are taken up by the media, controlled by the ruling power. Among the latest “enemies” are the refugees, the newspaper *Népszabadság* silenced in 2017, the European Commission, the Central European University and its funder George Soros, and NGOs that receive international funding.

It is in the countryside that FIDESZ, Orbán’s party, won the 2010 elections. It did so by pledging to stand up for the rights of Hungarian smallholder farmers, in particular in the face of the land grabbing scandals that had been revealed massively just a few months prior the elections (Fidrich 2013):- these revelations were about so-called ‘pocket-contracts’ that helped foreigners acquire land rights in Hungary despite the 2004 land moratorium. In József Ángyán’s recount, who became State Secretary of Agriculture after Orbán’s victory, in February 2010, just two months prior the elections, Orbán invited him and Sándor Fazekas who later became his rural development Minister, to Orbán’s house in his village of origin, Felcsút. It is there that he asked Ángyán to be part of his future government, help his campaign in the countryside and with the support of Fazekas, develop a rural development strategy that would please Hungarian smallholder farmers (Interview with József Ángyán, October 2017). Ángyán who used to be a respected professor in a Hungarian agricultural university, and a popular figure in agricultural syndicate circles, managed to rally the countryside and develop a strategy that if implemented, could have been rightly described as emancipatory, democratic, and socio-environmentally just. Indeed, it was supposed to encourage small-scale, diversified and environmentally friendly production systems and encourage the re-dynamisation of the Hungarian countryside by leasing out State-owned land to young Hungarian families willing to cultivate it in such manner. Unfortunately for Hungarian smallholders, the environment, and Hungarian democracy, the strategy ended up in the dustbin while its principal ideologue, József Ángyán resigned from his position after having understood that he had been merely instrumental for the campaign (Interview with József Ángyán, October 2017).

The Hungarian authoritarian regime has its allies: at the international level, Vladimir Putin has financial and geopolitical interests in Hungary through the Russian company Rosatom that was given in 2015 an impressive 12.5 billion € contract to build two additional reactors to the nuclear power plant in the Hungarian town of Paks (Dunai 2017), a nonsense in a country whose environmental characteristics allow for not only more environmentally friendly, but also cheaper alternatives to nuclear power via renewables (Greenpeace 2017). At the national level, Orbán’s allies are a few key figures that were made important and rich by the regime: among them, Sándor Csányi, the wealthiest person in Hungary (Forbes 2017), a businessman and banker who is not only a shareholder in the Hungary-based multinational oil and gas company, MOL group, he is also the exclusive owner of the Hungarian food manufacturer BONAFARM², which is in the process of becoming an inevitable actor in the Hungarian agricultural and food processing scene.

¹ (2014).

² BONAFARM had a failed intent to grab approximately 10 000 hectares of land in Zambia in 2011 (Zambia

The Hungarian case calls for increased scholarly-activist attention to how authoritarian populism (Scoones et al. 2017) is maintained by, and affects rural areas, as well as how emancipation can be envisaged in such context. I argue that there is one main reason to this need to pay increased attention to what happens with rural areas in Hungary on top of the fact that it is Orbán's rural voters that have been mostly fooled and that have been initially the object of 'populism': today, the authoritarian populist regime's central pillar, the one that maintains it, is agricultural land grabbing by and for national oligarchs who are close to the government. Said it differently, there is a need to discuss the link between domestic grabbing of agricultural lands facilitated by the Hungarian State on one side, and authoritarian populism on the other: how do they enable each other, with what effects, and more importantly: how to envision emancipatory rural politics in a context in which land and natural resources increasingly belong to those who are behind and benefitting from the authoritarian system?

This paper is divided into three parts. First, I present my theoretical and methodological approaches. Second, I discuss how the politics of land-grabbing in Hungary by mostly Hungarian oligarchs enable the maintenance of the Hungarian authoritarian populist regime. Third, I focus on the moments and conditions through which emancipatory subjectivities could emerge in response to authoritarianism.

Theoretical and methodological approaches

My discussion of the link between land grabbing and authoritarian populism in Hungary focusses essentially on the subjects that the politics of land grabbing create. For Butler, subjectivation is broadly understood as the "making of the subject" (1997). It is "a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject" (1997, 84 italics in original). Subjectivation occurs, for example, through the discourse on land when it creates the figures of what is considered as *the* Hungarian farmer in certain times and places. Some subjects comply with the discourse and try to become what they are 'supposed' to be, while others resist or strategically use the discourse to become 'something' else, sometimes outside the discourse. In the process of subject creation in land-grabbing politics, a particularly interesting aspect relates to self-conceptualizations (of one's own identity as a person entitled to Hungarian land) as they can be analysed as strategies of "governing the self" (Foucault 1982) that become also part of the everyday enactments of land politics. But, subjectivities are always "in the making" (Sundberg 2004): disciplining discourses and practices can always be "(re)configured, subverted, and transformed by individuals" (Sundberg 2004, 46-47).

My second focus in this paper is on the possible moments and conditions in which the norms that influence the constitution of subjects (especially the subjugated ones) are broken. As Butler claims, norms must not be understood as operating in a deterministic way. Rather:

[n]ormative schemes are interrupted by one another, they emerge and fade depending on broader operations of power, and very often come up against spectral versions of what it is they claim to know (...). (Butler 2009, 4)

Therefore, in addition to analysing the subjects and the operation of the norms that create the subjects, I speculate on the moments and the specific circumstances under which the norms could be broken and emancipatory subjectivities could emerge.

This working paper was written based on a pilot research in Hungary during the second semester of 2017. It included 13 qualitative interviews with researchers, journalists, activists, policy-analysts, as well as staff of environmental organizations in Hungary. It also involved reviewing secondary sources on the topic such as policy documents, research publications, blogs and journal articles. My analysis also relies on information gathered through informal interactions with my personal network of people from Hungary who try to envision and support alternatives to Hungarian authoritarian populism.

The politics of domestic land grabbing in authoritarian populist Hungary

The discursive shift from the dynamic young Hungarian smallholder farmers to the lazy Roma living on welfare

The development of Hungarian authoritarian populism under the Orbán government started off by using the scandals that emerged just a few months before the 2010 elections on land grabbing by foreigners. It built on a nationalist rhetoric that stated that Hungarian land should go to Hungarians, and held out the prospect of a socially sensitive land policy that would not only support existing Hungarian smallholder farmers, it would also lease out State-owned land for young Hungarian families willing to settle in the countryside. The latter families were discursively constructed as the dynamic albeit traditional rural people that would engage in diversified production of *háztáji* (small-scale, backyard, good quality, traditionally Hungarian) agricultural products to be sold via short circuits such as farmers' markets. This discourse was enabled by the fact that by then, the Hungarian State not only owned a great quantity of land, Orbán declared publicly that the "State will buy rather than sell land" (Ángyán 2015).

Indeed, after the fall of communism in 1990, a relatively important proportion of land remained in the hand of the Hungarian State. In 2014, 23% of the lands of the country were still owned by the State (Ángyán 2015). According to Ángyán's (2015) study (2015) that uses data from 2014 from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (*Központi Statisztikai Hivatal* -KSH), in 2014, this corresponded to 1,7 million of hectares of productive land owned by the State, of which 500 000 hectares were arable land, 1,2 million of hectares were forested land, the rest being so-called non-productive land such as protected areas (Ángyán 2015, Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2014). The dismantling of State-owned socialist farms was followed by an agrarian reform via the distribution of compensation vouchers to formerly expropriated land owners. Only the original receiver of the voucher could in theory use it to purchase agricultural land (Hartvigsen 2014). Despite this restriction, the commercialisation of compensation vouchers happened in such a way that it favoured wealthy Hungarian actors interested in investing in land rather than former cooperative workers (Roszík 2011, Szabó 2013). Despite this situation that contributed to an increasing polarisation of the agrarian society, the agrarian structure remained relatively fragmented in comparison to other European countries (Hartvigsen 2014), essentially because of the already-mentioned, large amount of land in the hands of the State that the latter could lease out to producers via long-term agreements.

It is worth highlighting that Hungary recently had two instruments that can be qualified as potentially emancipatory for rural areas, even if one of them was developed only with the aim of winning the 2010 elections. They are: (i) the 2004-2014 land moratorium, and; (ii) the already-mentioned national rural strategy written in 2010 that included a social program intended to develop small-scale diversified family farming by repopulating rural areas with young families.

The 1994 Law LV, known as the land moratorium concerning arable land stipulated that foreign citizens, legal entities or any other organisation without legal personality could not, - until its expiration, -(which happened in 2014 essentially due to pressure by the European Commission)-, acquire ownership of arable land or any natural reserve in Hungary. In addition, even a Hungarian private person could only acquire up to a maximum of 300 hectares or 6000 golden crowns (*Arany Korona*) of value (Téglási 2013). In reality, while the moratorium did limit to a certain extent land speculation by foreigners with much higher purchasing power of relatively cheap Hungarian land than Hungarian citizens, it contributed to the rise of the so-called 'pocket contracts'. Originally used to describe land deals with foreigners that omitted the date of purchase, and that were kept 'in the pocket' until the moratorium is lifted, the expression has been generalised to describe all kind of contracts utilised to overcome the existing legal restrictions (Fidrich 2013), including the commercialisation of compensation vouchers to non-original owners of the land, or the overcoming of the authorised maximum superficie limit. According to Roszík (2011), more than 1 million hectares of land had been acquired by foreigners via 'pocket contracts'; the foreign owner (that in many cases was a Western-

European company) usually relying on Hungarian foremen who would ‘lend’ their names for the contract(s) (Fidrich 2013, Roszík 2011). As for the superficie limit, it has been usually overcome by using family members’ names to acquire extensions of thousands of hectares (Ángyán 2015).

The second instrument is the 2010 national rural strategy (*nemzeti vidékstratégia*) for the 2012-2020 period: as I am writing these words, it can still be found on the Hungarian government’s website (www.vidékstrategia.kormany.hu) despite the fact that it has never been adopted and that the current political measures go in opposition to it. The strategy, which was a reason to be hopeful for many Hungarian smallholders, environmentalists, and activists concerned with social and environmental justice, rightly describes itself as innovative in comparison with former Hungarian rural policies. On the website that still bears the logo of the Ministry of Rural Development (*Vidékfejlesztési Minisztérium*) that has been dismantled since then, it explains the innovative character of the strategy with the arguments that its goal is an integral rural development policy, because it gives priority to the development of family farming, and because instead of monocultural mass production, it favours a type of agriculture based on quality production, a fragmented agricultural structure, as well as environmentally and landscape- friendly management ³ (www.vidékstrategia.kormany.hu).

In particular, the strategy’s central pillar was the so-called demographic land program (*demográfiai földprogram*) aimed at increasing the quantity of state-owned land, and lease it on the long-term to families and young people who live and work on the farm and who are willing to raise two or more children (Ángyán 2015). Clearly, this program would have made increasingly difficult land accumulation and land speculation and would have contributed to strengthen diversified family farming, and to attract young people to the countryside. Not less importantly for FIDESZ, the program would have inserted itself well in its populist and right-wing rhetoric about ‘land to Hungarians’ and Hungarian rural traditions, a point of convergence FIDESZ used to have with Hungary’s second most popular political party: the extreme-right-wing JOBBIK.

I have already signalled that in Hungary, public attention is focussed on artificially made up enemies, which reminds of Carl Schmitt’s concept of politics as as rooted in friend-enemy distinctions (1932). While land grabbing via ‘pocket contracts’ had been conveniently used by FIDESZ to win the elections in 2010, the importance of land grabbing in contributing to maintaining the authoritarian populist system remains relatively invisible. This is reinforced by the fact that the commercialisation of most state-owned lands to be done by the end of 2015 was announced by the government in August 2015, in the midst of the refugee crisis whose handling fuelled into a politics of fear that kept Hungarian people’s minds occupied. Of course, the strategy for land grabbing had been prepared earlier. For example, some lease contracts had been given to national oligarchs 2-3 years prior to 2015 so that they could easily benefit from the land commercialisation process that prioritised the leaser before any other potential buyer. This type of strategy contributed progressively to the discursive invisibilisation of foreign investors and national oligarchs’ responsibilities in the processes that make the poorest and most marginalised populations vulnerable, and to the blaming of people who have nothing to do with such processes such as refugees or Georges Soros. The young, dynamic, Hungarian rural people who used to be constructed as the main subjects of the never implemented rural development strategy have been progressively replaced in the public discourse on the ‘backwards’ and poor countryside by the figure of the lazy *Roma* living on welfare (Schwarcz 2012). Indeed, as Krasznai Kovács highlights the racist underpinnings of the government’s rationale:

“ One of the key driving rationales for this [welfare] programme by the majority Fidesz government who instigated it is to ‘make gypsies work’, to break the ‘dependency’ of local communities on the state, as traditionally (so the political rhetoric goes), gypsies have become too lazy to work and ‘milk’ the system in a calculating, targeted way” (Krasznai Kovács 2016, 175).

³ My translation.

Of course, this ‘issue’ of the *Roma* lost importance in the governmental discourse as it started focussing on the need to defend the Hungarian borders from refugees or the necessity to counter the ‘Soros-plan’.

To be European or not to be European?

The EU’s land policy and common agricultural program (CAP) are fuelling Hungarian authoritarian populism in the meantime that the EU is conveniently blamed by the government and its allies as being anti-Hungarian. This happens at two levels. First, land market liberalisation promoted by the EU is favouring land grabbing motivated by speculation on land prices. This has been denounced by FIDESZ when it motivated foreign land grabbers to acquire land in Hungary, but is now enacted by national oligarchs to enrich themselves and to indirectly maintain the authoritarian system. For example, the average price of a hectare of land is 1 million Hungarian Forints (HUF) equivalent to 3300 Euros, while in Holland, the hectare costs 35 times more, approximately 115 000 Euros (Ángyán 2015). The 2015 thunderstorm commercialization of formerly State-owned land attracted most wealthy Hungarians, like Sándor Csányi mentioned previously, to buy land without the aim of producing it. These Hungarian oligarchs are speculating on the fact that within a short time, (one of my interviewees talked about just a year’s time counting from the date of our interview: that means before the Fall 2019), the EU will start an infringement procedure against Hungary thereby obligating the country to liberalize its land market. That moment will bring more wealth to the wealthiest Hungarians: they will happily sell their land to foreigners. In addition, the outcome of this thunderstorm land privatization will strengthen Orbán’s anti-EU and nationalist discourse. Indeed, he will most probably blame the EU to explain to his supporters why so many foreigners will get hold of Hungarian land so quickly, thus fuelling the anti-EU and anti-foreigner sentiments of his right-wing voters.

Second, several of my interviewees as well as Fridrich (2013), Roszík (2011) and Ángyán’s studies (2015) suggest a link between land grabbing on one side, and the Common Agricultural Program (CAP) as well as the push by the European Union to end the 2004 land moratorium on the other. Said it clearly: CAP and European land policies have indirectly played an important role in enabling the development of authoritarian populism in Hungary. Indeed, direct income support via CAP’s Area Scheme provides farmers with an income proportional to the area that is being worked on. The income generated by CAP payments while waiting to be able to become the official owner of the land have been a great motivation for investors. Just like in the case of the foreigners who engaged in ‘pocket contracts’, the concerned amounts are huge as exemplified below by Roszík when talking about the case of foreign grabbers:

around 300–500 million HUF (or €1.1–1.8 million) in national and EU agricultural subsidies have been given to these foreign land grabbers since Hungary’s accession to the EU (Roszík 2011, in Fridrich 2013, 132)

National oligarchs’ reliance on CAP payments is also supporting their speculation on land prices. According to Krasznai Kovács who studied the implementation of CAP in Hungary (Kovács Krasznai 2015), the rate for 2014 was around 240 €, which is a significant amount, especially for those who own big quantities of land. It is also a significant when one puts it in relation to the average price for which the State leases land, which is around a 100 € per hectare (interview with a staff member of a Hungarian environmentalist organisation, October 2017). The latter means that even if one does not do much with the leased land, he/she receives a benefit of more than a 100 € per hectare by declaring it as an agricultural land in the system. Also, one of my interviewees told me that the CAP related controls are biased in Hungary: their implementation is the responsibility the Agricultural and Rural Development Agency (*Mezőgazdasági es Vidékfejlesztési Hivatal*), which instead of choosing the producers to be controlled randomly, chooses them among the farmers who “don’t agree [with the regime]”. Additionally, the control system works in such a way that towards the ‘upper spheres’, it is depersonalized and rendered apolitical (Kovács Krasznai 2015). Thus, when the fines are distributed

for the (rightly or wrongly identified) non-compliances and seen as unjust by the farmers, the government is not blamed for the unjust implementation of the system as the street – level bureaucrats claim that they are not responsible for the procedures, and their critiques point more to the inadequacy of the European policy thus reinforcing again Orbán's anti-EU rhetoric, instead of pointing to the political oppressions generated by how the procedures are implemented in Hungary (Kovács Krasznai 2015).

Orbán's post-European Magyar farmer

While the paragraphs above suggest that EU's free land market as well as its CAP have played an important role in enabling the development of Hungarian authoritarian populism via its central pillar, - land grabbing by national oligarchs-, it is important to stress that according to my interviewees, Orbán does not need the EU anymore to maintain its regime and will be thus increasingly capable of relying on the figure of what I call the post-European *Magyar* farmer. The post-European *Magyar* farmer is the oligarch, the aristocrat of a new feudal system, the neoliberal entrepreneur who will capitalize on Hungary's agricultural assets, some of its national products (*Hungarikums*) and the cheap labour force to be found in the Hungarian *hinterlands*. According to my interviewees who are knowers of the internal debates within the Parliament, this will be enabled by a rural policy architecture that gives the power to organize the agricultural sector to big integrator agricultural companies, such as Csányi's BONAFARM. This is of course the total opposite of the never-implemented rural development plan discussed above, as it uses land as a pure commodity rather than a source of social, historical, and cultural wealth related to a nation's well-being and its democratic development. Worryingly for biodiversity, in several of my interviewees' opinion, national lands with a protected status will follow agricultural lands' fate. While in 2015, there has been already an intent by the government to attribute the management of protected areas **from nature conservation organizations** to the national land portfolio management institute (*Nemzeti Földalap Kezelő szervezet- NFA*), which has economic rather than conservation interests (Benedetti 2015), the opposition by organizations such as WWF in Hungary, Birdlife Hungary and the Hungarian Association for Environmental Protection (*Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége*) led to a major mobilization which ultimately contributed to a presidential veto to the initiative. However, for several of my interviewees Orbán has backed out on this point only temporarily. After winning the 2018 elections (which is most likely as I am writing these words), he will probably undertake the privatization of protected areas too.

Furthermore, according to my interviewees, the contract with the Russian company Rosatom is going to take the relay in providing the necessary liquidities for Orbán to keep not only his oligarchs' but also his poorer voters content once the State will have no land to lease and no CAP payments to manipulate. As one of my interviewees stated:

[from the 12.5 billion € contract agreed with Rosatom,] if you have only 1% corruption rate which is extremely low, then you are already able to finance everybody (...). [In addition], Hungary needs loans to finance its pension system and health system and you cannot get loans for that - you can get loans for power plants- and with that loan, you are able to subsidize other things... (...) [the government's] rhetoric is that Hungary doesn't have a stable enough renewable energy supply and that's why we have to have [the nuclear power plant in] Paks. [In reality, Orbán's problem with renewables is that they] lack this point of central control [which is needed for the authoritarian system to maintain itself]. (Interview with a Hungarian expert in environmental policies, September 2017)

The situation recalls the use of mega-projects to maintain authoritarian systems in places faraway from Hungary. For example, in 2014, in Nicaragua, the authoritarian government of Daniel Ortega gave a hundred-year concession to a Chinese millionaire to build a transoceanic canal. The Nicaraguan government's support to such environmentally and socially devastating project (López Baltodano 2014) is justified by the need of liquidities, not only necessary to maintain the local elite content, but also to subsidy some social policies - key for maintaining authoritarian populism.

In sum, the politics of land grabbing that underpins Hungarian authoritarian politics have mobilised, one after the other, the subjectivities of the smallholder young, dynamic, neo-rural farmer, the poor *Roma* rural populations living on welfare and the post-European feudal *Magyar* producer to, in the end, divert attention from the oppressive and exclusionary politics of land grabbing by national oligarchs.

Emancipation

If subjectivities are understood as “the ways in which people are brought into relations of power” (Nightingale 2011, 123), emancipatory subjectivities can be understood as those counter-conducts (Foucault 2007, 75) that challenge the subjectivation process through speech and/or action. In this section, I discuss how envisioning emancipatory subjectivities can help scholar-activists to start thinking about emancipatory rural politics in the Hungarian context.

The potentially emancipatory subjectivities of the connected rural subjects

Permaculture, seed exchange initiatives, farmers’ markets are growing in Hungary, however, even when they are put in place by people who otherwise oppose the regime, few rationalise it as initiatives that could challenge authoritarian populism. As Scoones *et al.* highlight, because this is the case in many places, scholar-activists have an important role in helping the local communities together with the global community “to reimagine rural spaces and democracy, underpinned by emancipatory politics” across scales and places (Scoones *et al.* 2017, 12). Indeed, as they state:

The radical potential of these local, rooted alternatives (...) may only be realised when they are connected to a wider debate about political transformation, in rural spaces and beyond. This in turn requires situating practical grounded ‘alternatives’ in a broader historical, social and political context, where deepening, linking and scaling up become essential (Scoones *et al.* 2017, 11).

According to my interviewees working closely on alternatives with people who could be described as the Hungarian *bobos* (*bourgeois-bohemians*) would be an avenue. These young Hungarian educated women and men who are whether neo-rural people or interested in becoming ones via implementing environmentally and socially friendly production and living practices have one important strength: they are informed and connected. They could be central for challenging authoritarian rural politics via scaling-up of emancipatory initiatives and making them become the base for democratic emancipatory politics, would they rationalise them through an emancipatory political rationality. Through internet, not only can they access the information that the Hungarian government tries to hide from its citizens, they can also establish solidary connections with initiatives abroad as well as benefit from the support of the half a million of (mostly young) Hungarians who fled the country because of the lack of economic and social opportunities in the current Hungarian context. These dissidents to whom I also belong too (most of them being opposed to the regime) can be of great support for those in Hungary ready to soil their hands and boots to engage in the construction of emancipatory rural politics. Hence, the Hungarian *bobos*, and the model of production and consumption they convey, are potential subjects and agents of Hungarian emancipatory rural politics. They however need to build alliances with other groups that are systematically oppressed by the system: smallholders, *Roma*, women, among others.

The importance of the moments in which emancipation comes about

Despite the oppressive context, a myriad of counter-conducts emerge (Foucault 1982), that can all become the spark needed to start emancipation. People are brought into relations of power through specific subject positions, but the subjectivation process is always contested, always in the making. This is key to bear in mind when one is an activist-scholar because it gives hope. These moments in which counter-conducts emerge need to be better known, discussed and built-upon to be able to extend

scholar-activists and Hungarian lay people's imaginary of what is possible in terms of emancipatory rural politics and how population groups, can break out from subjugated positions and become emancipated. Some counter-conducts have been already successful such as the already mentioned campaign to stop the government's intent to privatize the management of conservation areas. The case of The Kishantos Rural Development Centre is another symbolic example. The centre has been working for more than twenty years on 452 hectares of state-owned land leased out to implement an organic show farm functioning in partnership with a folk high school. The State decided to end the Centre's lease contract in 2012, and open up the possibility for other 'local producers' to lease it. The 'local producers' who won the bid were not 'local producers': according to Ángyán's investigation (2016), they were a conventional 2900 hectares agricultural firm, a businessman, a major who is not farming; farmers from dozens of kilometres away, and a construction business. After getting the lease in 2012, these beneficiaries got the right to buy the land in February 2016 from the State (Ángyán 2016). The mobilisation demanding the government to reverse its decision on the lands was huge (Greenpeace 2014), while the new leasers spread chemical products on the so-far organically produced lands and destroyed cultures. A lawsuit was also engaged against the Hungarian State, that was in 2016 rejected by Hungary's constitutional court (where the government has also its agents), and taken to the European Court with the help of Greenpeace Hungary. The Kishantos case shows how the emancipatory rural subjectivities of organic farmers allied with environmentalist people can challenge authority. These cases need more clear strategies by scholar-activists to help them becoming true challenges to authoritarian populism.

Furthermore, putting the Hungarian situation in perspective with situation in other places can be enlightening especially for those who think that there is no way out from Hungarian authoritarianism "unless the system implodes or gets rotten due to its own moral decadence similarly to what happened once with the Roman Empire", as stated by one of interviewees. Another of my interviewees who is involved in the degrowth movement in Europe, stressed that Hungarians tend to think that emancipatory rural politics are more possible in any other place than Hungary. However, in Hungary, more than elsewhere in Europe, there is still land in the hand of the State, there is a culture of appreciating the local, the *háztáji*, the traditional. These elements fit well with small-scale farming and democratic organisations (but however can become as dangerous as emancipatory). In addition, it was not long ago that there has been an intent to develop a rural strategy based on visions of small-scale farming, cooperation and agro-ecology that benefitted from the support of majority of local farmers as the former State Secretary for Agriculture who designed the strategy 'toured' the country to get the support of these farmers. These farmers, while temporarily silenced, intimidated and oppressed by current Hungarian rural politics are still out there, hopefully waiting for the spark that will lead to change that will eventually be deemed as emancipatory.

The need for new analytics of emancipation in oppressive contexts

Based on my discussion of the Hungarian case, I argue that emancipation from subjectivation, especially in authoritarian contexts, should not be imagined as always leading to the overcoming of oppression. Madhok's (2013) theorisation of agency in severely subordinated contexts is useful to understand the type of emancipation that is likely to be observed and needs to be supported in Hungarian rural areas. Madhok mourns the fact that most accounts of agency and autonomy have what she calls an 'action bias', in that they identify agency and autonomy with free action. She argues for a shift in our thinking about agency, —and I add emancipation— "from privileging action as the principal site of recognition and analysis of agency to thinking about how persons articulate their reflexive considerations in their speech practices" (Madhok 2013, 37). When theorising emancipation, this shift away from "overt actions to an analysis of cognitive processes, motivations, desires and aspects of our ethical activity (...) is crucial, particularly within condition of severe oppression where it is hard to commit particular kinds of action (Madhok 2013, 37-38). Furthermore, when thinking about the possibilities for emancipatory politics to come about, it is crucial to understand them as always "in the making" likely to be "(re)configured, subverted, and transformed by individuals" (Sundberg 2004, 46-47). Hence, as scholar-activists interested in challenging authoritarian populism, we need to be attentive to both counter-conducts like the cases described in this section as well as

speech acts: when specific people refuse to be considered as the ‘lazy *Roma*’, ‘the blamed recipients of subsidies’, when they claim subject positions that are emancipatory for them, such as the smallholders who very recently contributed to imagine the Hungarian countryside democratic and dynamic.

Conclusion

The link between domestic land-grabbing and the maintenance of authoritarian populism is key topic for scholar-activists concerned by the recent rise of illiberalism and/or populist right-wing governments in Europe who want to contribute to challenge the mechanisms that maintain authoritarian populisms. While such type of land-grabbing has already been written about (e.g. Ángyán 2015, Fidrich 2013, Greenpeace 2014, Szabó 2013), its importance and the precise mechanism through which it works is under-discussed both in international academic spheres and in Hungarian scholar activist circles as it gets diluted among other topics such as the lack of free press in Hungary Orbán’s racist refugee policy his anti-EU rhetoric or his anti- gender equality stance. However, as one of my interviewees argued:

[if the regime changes,] one can re-open a newspaper that has been closed, environmental and social policies can be changed, but once the land tenure system has been changed, it is very hard to revert it... [because] land reform is not an expression that sounds well in Europe today (Interview, October 2017).

Constructing alternative political avenues requires new analytics of emancipation in this context. It requires understanding emancipatory subjectivities in authoritarian contexts as reflexive speech acts that may result in counter-conducts . Whether these emancipatory subjectivities lead to social and environmental transformations towards justice and equity depends largely on how these are built upon, or to the contrary- constrained. However, in line with Madhok’s argument, I argue that emancipatory subjectivities need to be analysed and treated as a “site of self-conscious reflexive activity” (2013, 63), that are extremely important for activist-scholars who seek to understand where desperately needed emancipation from oppressions is going to emerge from, and where these require for support. Put it differently, looking for emancipatory subjectivities is not about looking for heroes, but for emancipatory reflexive practices that may happen in the right time and the right place and may subsist long enough to provide the spark to start the fire that will challenge authoritarian populism.

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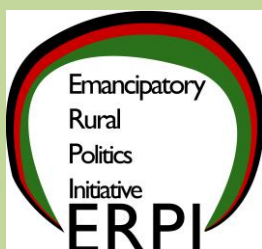
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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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