

‘Kínjában röhög az ember’*

– on human rights educators’ accounts of
censorship, commitment, and community
in contemporary Hungary

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* ‘One cackles in anguish’, Hungarian proverb

Abstract

The social acceptance of human rights education may vary a lot depending on factors like the exact topic, the methods, the educator, and the audience. In today's Hungary, the limitations to *what* can be taught, *where*, *by whom*, and *to whom*, are being imposed on the schools and the public sphere in various ways: through legislation, political statements, and media, for instance. Such developments have been observed with growing concern in the European Union and Council of Europe, both of which Hungary is a member to. This research sheds light on the Hungarian human rights' educators' experiences, emotions, and perceptions about how such limitations affect their work and other actions by themselves and the people around them. Using Dialogical Narrative Analysis to explore the stories told by human rights educators, and completing that with a content analysis of survey answers, this paper has a particular interest in discovering how censorship and self-censorship operate in the field of education when it comes to human rights topics. Furthermore, the stories reveal means of combatting and circumventing the censorship and building a supporting human rights educators' community.

Key words: Human rights education; Hungary; Censorship; Self-censorship; Non governmental organisations (NGOs)

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Introduction

‘Children’s rights are human rights, and human rights are children’s rights’, one could say, adapting the words about women’s rights by the Grimké sisters (1838, 1885), Cecilia Medina (1985), and Hillary Rodham Clinton (1995), among others.

The two-way equivalence in the phrase is essential, being everything but a rhetorical gimmick. The latter part of the sentence tends to be easily forgotten by those who interpret the *best interest of the child* only to suit their own political agenda, instead of respecting the indivisible nature of human rights.

In contrast, the focus of this thesis is on the people who do embrace human rights as a whole in their work as educators in Hungary – on those who perceive human rights literacy as an indispensable part of citizens’ knowledge that must begin to be constructed already in the early years of school. This paper sheds light on their deliberations, decisions, and experiences in a society where their commitment to human rights is not always compatible with the political hegemony.

The Hungarian phrase in the title of this work, ‘kínjában röhög az ember’, translates to ‘one cackles in anguish’. This oxymoronic proverb was used by an interviewee in reference to their reaction to an antagonistic news article published in a pro government web portal, and it captures tragically those struggles that are being discussed in this paper.

As the incidence raised by the interviewee suggests, human rights education in contemporary Hungary, especially when taking place at schools with minors, is a socially controversial phenomenon. My work intends to make visible the mechanisms that have the potential of narrowing down the space for human rights education, and to explore how such actions and events lead to censorship and self-censorship – or to ever-stronger commitment, for that matter – in the field of human rights themed education.

Schools as political tools

Schools for minors are the institutions at the core of this research. When looking at power struggles within the field of education and schools, one must first admit that the objectives of and limitations to the school curricula are obviously never free from politics. Schools are widely considered as the institutions raising future citizens, members of any given society. What is more, children *are* citizens and members of society, and school may serve either to control their liberties as citizens – or to actually help them fully embrace those.

To illustrate these struggles, I offer a very recent example of the one-sided perception of children’s rights by politicians. On the 15th of June 2021, the Hungarian parliament passed a bill amending a range of laws under a joint title ‘stricter actions against paedophile criminals and other amendments that are in the

interest of protecting children'.¹ Schools were at the core of the measures: pupils should not be exposed to the "promotion" of either homosexuality, of 'changing the sex,' or of an 'identity that is different from the birth sex'. Furthermore, the only external organisations that could be allowed at schools to hold health related activities would be those designated by the legislature.² A total of 17 European governments and the European Commission responded to the bill, calling it shameful and discriminatory.³ Furthermore, the Commission issued a press release declaring that an infringement procedure would be launched against Hungary.⁴ It is also worth mentioning that the general public reacted strongly to the new laws: the Budapest Pride almost doubled its attendance record to 30,000.⁵

As it stands, by passing the bill, the government of Hungary seem to have set yet another limitation to the contents of education at Hungarian schools. Those teachers and other educators who would prefer to enlighten their pupils about human rights face yet another restriction which must be overcome, circumvented – or obeyed. These choices form the core interest of my research.

Educators at crossroads

Education is a human right, and education about human rights is also an indispensable part of the institution of human rights. However, as political agendas may go against the full and indivisible realisation of human rights, educators might face situations in which they must decide whether they comply with the national laws and expectations, or choose to promote human rights to their students nevertheless. At such crossroads, the phenomena of *censorship* and *self-censorship* are present, and educators must carefully consider their own motivators and compare them with the risks attributed to human rights education.

In this paper, the analysed material consisting of survey answers and interviews offers insights into the realities of Hungarian human rights educators. The educators tell stories about how certain events have made them feel and react, and what they have observed in other people around them. I classify and analyse these stories by narrative types, aiming to make visible how the phenomena of censorship and self-censorship operate on an individual and societal level. On a more general level, this paper is an insight into

¹ Javaslát módosítási szándék megfogalmazásához a Törvényalkotási bizottság számára a pedofil bűnelkövetőkkel szembeni szigorúbb fellépésről, valamint a gyermekek védelme érdekében egyes törvények módosításáról szóló T/16365. számú törvényjavaslathoz .

² *ibid.*

³ Maïa De la Baume, 'EU Commissioner: We Will "Go to Court" If Hungary Implements Anti-LGBTQ+ Law' *Politico* (24 June 2021) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-ready-to-go-to-court-with-hungary-commissioner-didier-reynders-anti-lgbtq/>> accessed 28 June 2021.

⁴ 'Commission Takes Legal Action for Discrimination LGBTIQ' (*European Commission*, 15 July 2021) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3668> accessed 22 July 2021.

⁵ Márton Neményi, 'Fotók És Beszámoló a 2021-Es Budapest Pride-Ről' [2021] *NLC.hu* <<https://nlc.hu/szabadido/20210725/nahat-fel-nap-alatt-senki-se-probalt-meggyozni-hogy-muttessem-at-a-gyerekem-ilyen-volt-az-idei-pride/>> accessed 26 July 2021.

how fear, pride, commitment, trust, suspicion, courage, persistence, compassion, and other human emotions can affect our capabilities of choosing what is important to us and to say it out loud.

Background to the research project

The choice of topic for this thesis was motivated by many personal experiences of mine. First of all, my Finnish childhood and education have obviously left a mark on me. The safety and security of growing up in small and midsize Finnish towns, the wisdom and compassion of most of my teachers, and the chance to fully embrace my academic aspirations made me appreciate many parts of the Finnish society.

Furthermore, my mother and the Hungarian side of my family have raised me to look across the borders and see for myself how others live their lives. My grandparents' experiences under various regimes in Hungary, and their resourcefulness while facing so many hardships have stuck with me and evolved into a respect for all courageous citizens in Hungary – and woken my interest in their past, present, and future.

Education as a future-oriented sphere of society intrigues me because law and rights often feel too judiciary and politics centred to me. In the end, it is the youngest generations that have the best chance at shaping or re-shaping society, and hence their understanding of human rights will undoubtedly influence the whole course of a nation like that of the Hungarians.

Finally, my interest in human rights education led me to reflect on the issues of censorship and self-censorship.

Personally, I have experience from human rights education as a school visitor for NGOs in Finland and in the United Kingdom, and as a children's library tutor in France. Furthermore, I have volunteered for an NGO in Hungary in a community building project that was funded by the *Norway Grants*⁶ at the time. Comparing these experiences, I observed that speaking of the Finnish, British, and French experiences was easy, whereas the Hungarian ones I often kept to myself.

In one incidence, when I mentioned the name of the Hungarian NGO to a relative of mine, they advised me not to attend those activities, stating that the NGO was a "Soros agent". I did not stop contributing to their work that I found very valuable and even necessary, but I became more alert about the potential sensitivity of the subject.

The instant gut-reaction that I had witnessed in my relative, when I mentioned the name of the NGO, made me think about how that sort of an intuitive attitude had developed in them, and how wide-spread this type of thinking could possibly be in the Hungarian society. Having encountered one article relating to the

⁶ 'About the Fund' (*Norvég Civil Alap*) <<https://norvegcivilalap.hu/en/about-the-fund>> accessed 24 June 2021.

topic in the online portal *Abcúg* in 2019,⁷ I began to wonder how the professionals and volunteers in the field perceive the social and public pressures related to their work.

In sum, I myself felt that I could not tell everyone and everywhere about my affiliation to that Hungarian NGO. To be more precise, I surely *could*, but it would have probably entailed many tiring discussions and debates. It is fair to say that my stakes were low, nothing more worrying than that moderate bother. But what is at stake for the human rights educators, and how does it affect their speech, actions – and reception by others?

Research questions

My main research question is: *How is human rights education in Hungary affected by censorship and self-censorship?*

Furthermore, the answer to this main question necessitates certain sub-questions:

Does censorship affect the work of educators that would like to teach about human rights topics? If yes, then how? What is the role of self-censorship in this?

How does teaching and being vocal about human rights topics affect educators' careers and social relations (with e.g. family members, friends, colleagues, pupils and their parents)?

How is the human rights work of the educators supported? On whom can they rely and on whom can they not?

How do educators perceive the potential risks and rewards of human rights education?

Conceptual approach

This paper involves certain key concepts that must be settled prior to analysis. These are: human rights, human rights education, censorship, and self-censorship.

Human rights

The most simplified understanding of human rights is the idea that human rights are the internationally agreed fundamental rights, found in various documents. Nevertheless, human rights have certainly become a more robust and life-like part of our societies than mere international agreements. They have been implemented as part of national legislation, and they guide many political discourses – mostly as positive ideals, but sometimes they are also seen as unnecessary hinders to certain national exceptions.

⁷ Illés Szurovecz, 'Ferde Szemmel Néznek Rájuk, Ha Az Emberi Jogokról Tanítanak' *Abcúg* (12 September 2019) <<https://abcug.hu/ferde-szemmel-neznek-rajuk-ha-az-emberi-jogokrol-tanitanak/>> accessed 26 July 2021.

Galligan and Sandler call human rights a ‘fundamental ideology in modern societies’, and a ‘set of moral principles’, and even more than that, as they have become ‘embedded in a global consciousness’.⁸ Each of these characterisations are valid to my mind, and they offer a solid ground for defining what *human rights education* could possibly consist of.

Human rights education

Human rights as a set of legal documents and the education about the contents of those documents have gone hand in hand already in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948: ‘Every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance.’ Stating the obvious, knowledge of human rights is fundamental for the triumph of human rights. As the Council of Europe puts it on their information page about human rights education ‘How can people use and defend human rights if they have never learned about them?’⁹

Essentially, human rights education is the process of raising awareness on the fundamental, universal, and inalienable rights that have become *human rights* through agreements between nations – and as the above-mentioned *embedded elements* of global consciousness and moral principles. In the Hungarian context, I consider the relevant human rights to be the rights and liberties that are granted to individuals in the agreements and conventions which Hungary has joined.

Education on these rights may take many forms, but the aim of all endeavours in the field is to ‘create a world with a culture of human rights’.¹⁰ That is, the ideal outcome of human rights education is not a pupil that scores 10 out of 10 in a quiz, but a nation where the respect for others’ human rights is present in the everyday life, and especially in the functioning of the public bodies and the work of their officials.

Censorship and self-censorship

Pierre Bourdieu explains the use of language by a habitus through the *anticipation of profit*.¹¹ He describes the idea of markets, where the *linguistic habitus* offer their products¹² – the product in this case being the

⁸ Denis Galligan and Deborah Sandler, ‘Implementing Human Rights’ in Simon Halliday and Patrick D (Patrick Delbert) Schmidt (eds), *Human rights brought home : socio-legal perspectives on human rights in the national context* (Hart Publishing 2004) 23.

⁹ ‘Introducing Human Rights Education’ <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/introducing-human-rights-education>> accessed 22 June 2021.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Language and Symbolic Power’ 76–77.

¹² *ibid* 37–38.

speech. A discourse must be socially accepted to exist, and the acceptability of a discourse depends on the *laws of price formation* that are the social conditions of acceptability.¹³

Furthermore, Bourdieu highlights that each word and each expression might take on completely different, even antagonistic senses, as the values and prejudices of the sender and the receiver affect the interpretation of words.¹⁴ This phenomenon affects the acceptability of a discourse and hence leads to altering the use of language in different contexts.

The profit and sanctions anticipated by the sender govern *what* they say and *how* they put it. Demands of a specific market lead to concealed forms of censorship, as the linguistic habitus adapts to them.¹⁵

Maximisation of the *symbolic profit* is the objective of the habitus, as they – often unconsciously – anticipate the positive and negative outcomes – i.e. negative sanctions – of their speech. As one factor in this process, self-censorship may be the result of *anticipated* repression.¹⁶

Matthew Bunn, building on Bourdieu among others, urges the challenging of the brackets of *censorship* and *self-censorship*. Direct state censorship is to be considered an exception to the vast forms of censorship that are more subtle in nature, such as self-censorship. ‘It may ultimately turn out that effective authoritative censorship is not simply external, but insinuates itself into the circuits of communication, not simply coercive but also mobilizes powerful social currents, not simply repressive but also generates new forms of speech and thought.’¹⁷

What is more, the categories of *state* censorship and self-censorship might not always ideally reflect the reality. For instance, the limits to what is acceptable to be taught at schools might not be written in law but e.g. communicated through the (state) media. Furthermore, the sanctions might not be legal and predictable ones, but they might still be issued by a public body or an individual public official, and hence the risk of such consequences might lead to a chilling effect.

As a result, I mostly use *censorship* as an umbrella term in this paper, unless there are specific reasons to label a certain event as *self-censorship*. Such could be the case, for instance, when the anticipated repression is purely related to social pressures and not to the involvement of public authorities.

¹³ *ibid* 76.

¹⁴ *ibid* 40–41.

¹⁵ *ibid* 84.

¹⁶ *ibid* 77.

¹⁷ Matthew Bunn, ‘Reimagining Repression: New Censorship Theory and After’ (2015) 54 *History and theory* 25, 19.

Theory and methodology

New Materialism and situated knowledges

New Materialism is a theory the elements of which I find suitable for analysing the role of human rights education in a society like contemporary Hungary. Firstly, new materialist pedagogies stress the importance of making of knowledge, its 'collective and processual character', and 'the unmaking of knowledge', that is the 'unlearning the dominant ways of thinking, troubling the structures which condition academic knowledge production and dissemination, questioning institutions and authority'.¹⁸ Another important factor in the new materialist approach is how pedagogy is focused on possibilities instead of results.¹⁹ With critical and creative rethinking at its core, the idea of new materialist pedagogy is suitable for the assessment of the processes through which human rights educators aim to develop a sense for intersectionality and justice in their pupils, instead of settling for result-oriented traditional teaching that the curriculum encourages.

With respect to the fact that my research is based on the analysis of personal experiences of the educators, I am making use of the idea of *situated knowledges*,²⁰ belonging to the New Materialism Theory.²¹ New Materialism rejects the sharp divide between theory and practice and understands that every animate and inanimate element has its own agency. The interest relies on using every situated knowledge – that of the interviewees and mine.²² New materialism serves as the optional framework for assessing how desires, feelings and meanings also contribute to social production,²³ which is key in my setting where many of the factors that affect the subjects are such hard-to-define forms of causality.

Finally, New Materialism Theory is interested in how narrative and materiality affect each other within the entanglement of the human and non-human.²⁴ For this, Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) appears to be a valuable methodological tool for the embodiment of new materialism in my work. DNA tries to avoid the shortcomings of narrative constructionism and try to capture the entanglements produced within a

¹⁸ Beatriz Revelles Benavente and Olga Cielemecka, '(Feminist) New Materialist Pedagogies' [2016] *New Materialism* <<https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/f/feminist-new-materialist-pedagogies.html>> accessed 31 March 2021.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Haraway (n 18).

²¹ Monika Rogowska-Stangret, 'Situated Knowledges' [2018] *New Materialism* <<https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/s/situated-knowledges.html>> accessed 30 March 2021.

²² Haraway (n 18).

²³ Nick J Fox and Pam Alldred, 'New Materialist Social Inquiry: Designs, Methods and the Research-Assemblage' (2015) 18 *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 399 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=tsrm20>> accessed 31 March 2021.

²⁴ Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' (1988) 14 *Feminist studies* 575.

narrative that can be addressed as a dialogue between the different elements. DNA shifts the focus from narratives to assemblages.²⁵ I present its application to my work in the following *Methods* section.

Methods

The survey

I created an online survey that was distributed online through three different NGOs: Amnesty International Hungary, EJHA (*Human Rights Educators' Network*), and Emberség Erejével Alapítvány (*Power of Humanity Foundation*). The survey questions are available in *Appendix I*.

I received seven answers to the survey. The respondents were anonymous, hence overlapping with the interviewees is possible.

I apply content analysis to the answers to the survey, and this serves to offer an insight into what the human rights educators find important in their work, what affects their freedom, and how successful they feel in what they do. These build up a preliminary understanding for the qualitative analysis of the interviews.

The interviews

I conducted six individual, semi-structured interviews for this research. The core interview questions are available in *Appendix III*. The interviewees either contacted me based on social media posts or through e-mails that were distributed by the NGOs mentioned in the survey section above.

Out of the six interviewees, three were based in Budapest and three in smaller towns, none of them in particularly rural settlements. Four were women, and the other two were men. Three of the interviewees were employed by an NGO, while the three others either volunteered for one, or were involved in their activities in some other way.

Three of the interviewees had a pedagogical education, and one of them worked in a school as a teacher at the time of the interview. The rest of the interviewees were employed outside the traditional school setting, but they still considered themselves *educators* in one sense or another. All persons interviewed had experience in working with children in the role of an educator, but several of them had also worked with adults, and trained others to become human rights educators.

I refer to the interviewees by the pseudonyms Hab, Une, Mok, Ave, Nim, and Sap, which I attributed randomly to them.

²⁵ Brett Smith and Javier Monforte, 'Stories, New Materialism and Pluralism: Understanding, Practising and Pushing the Boundaries of Narrative Analysis' (2020) 2 *Methods in Psychology* 100016.

Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA)

My guiding principle in choosing the method of Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) was that of Frank: 'For the analysis to remain truly narrative, each story must be considered as a whole: methods that fragment stories serve other purposes.'²⁶ In my view, the stories which I was told during the interviews deserve to be analysed as entities. Furthermore, I find the presentation in the form of stories offering the best chance to conserve the emotions and passion that many of the interviewees invested in both their work and in the interviews.

However, having chosen *story* as the entity for my analysis, I must decide what kinds of accounts qualify as stories. Frank attributes certain horizontal and vertical characteristics to a story: 'Horizontally, a story is a segment of talk, writing, or other communicative symbolism that has at least a complicating event and a resolution.'²⁷ Vertically, there must be 'enough' characters, suspense, and imagination.²⁸ In the case of human rights educators' accounts in this paper, the suspense most often stems from the complicating event that has to do with power relations between different characters: the actions of one force the others to react, and choosing the right reaction for the moment creates the dilemma. Making sure that the accounts in the interviews have enough of such elements to qualify as a story is part of the process of picking the relevant stories.

By using DNA as my method for analysis, I have the chance to not fragment the stories. If I broke those stories down to pieces, focusing on finding certain words or expressions, for instance, I believe that the reader of this work might not fully grasp the human and emotional nature of the stories. Not only are the words, expressions, and sentences important, but so is the construction of a story with all the turns that it takes from the beginning to its end. The way one puts together and presents a story speaks to us louder than any of the words in that story alone.

Furthermore, instead of classifying persons, I find it very useful to compare their stories – between interviewees but also within the one and the same interview. This is part of the dialogical nature of the analysis. While the stories were told to me by different people at different times and places, they are in dialogue with each other. Firstly, many of the questions that I prepared as part of the semi-structured interviews were answered by all interviewees, and their stories concerned the same or similar events. Secondly, in many of the stories there are characters in common, e.g. media, politicians, and the general

²⁶ Arthur W Frank, 'Practicing Dialogical Narrative Analysis In: Varieties of Narrative Analysis' in James A Holstein and Jaber F Gubrium (eds), *Varieties of Narrative Analysis* (SAGE Publications, Inc 2012) 43
<<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781506335117>> accessed 11 July 2021.

²⁷ *ibid* 42.

²⁸ *ibid*.

public – the Hungarian society. Hence, through me, the interviewer and analyst, these stories enter into dialogue despite the seemingly one-sided procedure of producing these stories in the interview setting.

Thirdly, the different stories told by a single individual also are in discussion with each other. Consequently, none of the interviewees could be compartmentalised as a representative of any single narrator type.

Lastly, as Smith and Monforte put it, in DNA ‘stories are examined not simply for what is said or the narrative resources used to help structure storytelling. It extends analytic interest to what stories do.’²⁹ This is a key feature in painting the full picture about how the imagination and experiences of the human rights educators are reflected in the stories, and how the storytelling has effects on the interviewees themselves and further on me and the readers.

It is therefore the stories that form the greatest viable units for analysis, while also being the smallest worthwhile and informative unit to answer the research questions.

Picking the stories

Choosing the stories that are relevant to this research is a challenging task in the DNA method. The commitment to *unfinalisability*, a characteristic of DNA, is an important principle to take into account in this process. In Frank’s words, this means among other things that ‘dialogical analysis has no interest in presenting itself as the last word’.³⁰

Applying the idea of unfinalisability to this research, it is fair to admit that the stories presented here are merely a collection of accounts that spoke to me as the interviewer and researcher. They are told by educators witnessing themselves and their own surroundings, and concluding from what they perceive indirectly from others, and e.g. through media. These are the people that I came into contact with and who trusted me enough to share their stories – probably exercising some sort of self-censorship along the way, too. Out of the stories that they shared with me, I picked those that seemed to form patterns and connections with each other and concerned my interests about *saying* and *doing*.

With the themes of censorship and self-censorship, as well as Bourdieu’s notions about the anticipation of profit and sanctions in mind, I looked at the stories and tried to identify where there were traces of these types of conscious or unconscious choices – either made by the educators themselves, witnessed by them, or the knowledge of which had reached the educators through other agents. When I recognised such traces, I highlighted the story to be compared with others at a later stage of analysis.

²⁹ Smith and Monforte (n 19).

³⁰ Frank (n 25) 44.

The key questions

For the analysis of the stories, Frank provides a useful five-step guide to what kinds of questions can be used to analyse the narratives and their dialogical nature: *resource* questions, *circulation* questions, *affiliation* questions, *identity* questions, and questions about *what is at stake*.³¹

The resource question deals with reusing certain story elements that Frank calls 'primary resources for telling a new story',³² and in the framework of this research these are e.g. the shared feelings, experiences, aspirations, and characters in the stories.

I must take into account the difference in resources between the interviewee and myself, most likely leading me to miss certain references and nuances as a listener that has not experienced the reality of a human rights educator to the same extent as the interviewees. Furthermore, the differences in the resources between the interviewees is also an important point to consider, as these might vary due to several factors: profession, geographical location, gender, age, etc.

The circulation questions lead to questioning the nature of the interviewer-interviewee relationship and the level of trust within it. It comes down to whether the interviewees trusted both that I would be able to understand, and also either could not – or at the very least would not – misuse what they told me. One vital question is: why did the interviewee choose to tell *this* story to *me*? Would they tell some *other* story to someone *else*, and on what grounds would the receiving person or the situation affect the choice of story? What was left out of the story or added to it due to the audience – which is primarily me, but secondarily the readers of this paper?

The interviewees were aware that what they say could affect the contents of a public text, namely this paper. They also knew that they would be anonymised as individuals, but the affiliations to the well-known NGOs are visible in some of the stories. Given these frames of anonymity and publicity, I conclude that the interviewees trusted me at least to the extent that I would aim to stick to a truthful representation of what they said – as a distinction to some media or political movements who would look for even the slightest trace of something scandalous in their words.

In this sense, I surely stand on the shoulders of giants. The interviewees in general probably had a rather confident and supportive attitude towards science and research, sharing a trust in the scientific methods and community. The fact that I openly represented an established institution, and the field of the sociology of law, must have helped with establishing a bond of trust between the interviewees and myself.

³¹ *ibid* 44–45.

³² *ibid* 45.

Also, the use of a shared language, Hungarian, which was the native language of all interviewees, probably made me seem like a more approachable and capable listener to the stories than what I would have seemed like had I conducted the interviews in English. As I presented myself, I also explained my Hungarian background and how I had become interested in the societal developments there, which potentially gave me credibility as a person who could understand their stories without too much explaining.

Nevertheless, I was still an outsider, not a peer or a colleague. Sometimes the interviewees checked if I knew the meaning of some expressions, events, or names, and if I did not, they would explain them with a few sentences. It is also likely that they altered their vocabulary and possibly were less frank with me about some things than they would have been in the company of some colleagues or peers.

The third perspective, the affiliation questions, aims to make visible the interviewees' understanding of *us* and *the other* within the stories they tell. Due to the topic of the interviews that was well known to the people participating, these groups of 'us' in the stories would usually be ones such as *teachers, activists, human rights educators, the opposition to the government, liberals*, and so on and so forth. Hence, the 'other' might consist either of the adversaries of 'us' – or some passive characters in the stories.

As a natural successor to the affiliation questions, the identity questions explore claiming and rejecting identities, and experimenting with them.³³ Frank reminds us that although stories are used by people to express personal identities, the stories are 'made up from stock expressions'.³⁴ Finding traces of such recycling of identity expressions is a key part of this research, too, and will be discussed in detail in the analysis and conclusions sections.

The last question of 'what is at stake' leads one to look at how the stories might affect the narrators' own perceptions and attitudes towards how 'they hold their own'.³⁵ Such things in the context of this research could be *rights and liberties, or status and credibility*, for that matter, and the way how explicitly the interviewees present these is an essential part of the analysis.

These questions led me to establishing a typology of three narratives: narrative of restriction, narrative of adaptation, and the forging narrative. Each of these will be explained and discussed in their respective sub-sections under the section *Applying DNA to the stories*.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

Analysing the materials

Setting the scene: key events

To aid the reader, I briefly describe some events in the recent years that were raised by the interviewees and survey respondents and which make it easier to understand this paper.

Refugees in Hungary and the government actions – 2015

As a southern Schengen border state, Hungary received a record number of asylum applications in 2015, namely 173,000.³⁶ Early in 2015, already before the arrival of most asylum-seekers, prime minister Orbán had expressed his dislike towards the idea that “economic immigration” could bring any benefits to Europe, and his wish that there should not be “sizeable minorities” with “different cultural characteristics and backgrounds” in Hungary.³⁷ As more and more people with such backgrounds started to arrive in the summer of 2015, the government launched a major public campaign based on the same buzz words around economy and culture, which were likely to fuel hostile attitudes towards the non-Hungarian people that arrived.³⁸

Apart from communication campaigns, many of the actions taken by the government at the beginning and during the challenging times in 2015 could be classified as what Szalai and Göbl call *non-policy as a securitization tool*: ‘by only offering limited solutions to a problem, the securitizing actor can present both its willingness to curb the constructed threat, but also let it become more visible/acute for the audience in order to justify further, stricter policies.’³⁹

The anti-Soros statement in Pécs – 2017

In 2017, as a local NGO in Pécs, the *Emberség Erejével Alapítvány* (*Power of Humanity*, in English) received a funding of HUF 130 million from the Open Society Foundations that have been founded by Geroge Soros.⁴⁰ The Fidesz-KDNP fraction of the local city council proposed a statement that was passed in the council, declaring among other things the following: ‘We request every citizen of Pécs, as well as every company and organisation, not to offer premises to a Soros-like campaign centre [*sic!*]. They should not offer any premises to be owned, rented, or used by them! No one should be helping in risking the future of our

³⁶ Phillip Connor, ‘Record 1.3 Million Sought Asylum in Europe in 2015’ (2016)

<<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>> accessed 19 July 2021.

³⁷ Akos Bocskor, ‘Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the “Crisis” Year: The Orbán Government’s “National Consultation” Campaign of 2015’ (2018) 52 *Sociology* (Oxford) 551, 5.

³⁸ Nick Thorpe, ‘Hungary’s Poster War on Immigration’ *BBC* (14 June 2015) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33091597>> accessed 19 July 2021.

³⁹ András Szalai and Gabriella Göbl, ‘Securitizing Migration in Contemporary Hungary’ (2015) 7.

⁴⁰ Dániel Rényi Pál, ‘Pécs Közgyűlése Határozatban Kéri Polgárait, Ne Tűrjék a Városban a Soros Által Támogatott Alapítványt’ <<https://444.hu/2017/12/13/pecs-kozgyulese-hatarozatban-keri-polgarait-ne-turjek-a-varosban-a-soros-altal-tamogatott-alapitvanyt>> accessed 10 July 2021.

home, Europe, our motherland Hungary and our beloved city of Pécs, no one should be helping in realising the plan of György Soros.’⁴¹

The ‘Soros List’ – 2018

The Soros List (*Soros lista* in Hungarian) is a nickname given to a list of private persons, as well as representatives of NGOs operating in Hungary, published by the Christian-conservative weekly paper *Figyelő* (*Observer* in English). The claim in the publication was that the named people were “the people of George Soros”.⁴²

I personally remember well that already years before this particular incident, it was common to accuse some NGO or a public figure of being “in the pocket” of Soros, at least as early as in 2015. However, this list was remarkable probably at least due to its historically terrifying nature, as the listing of untrustworthy citizens belongs rather to a dictatorship than to an open and democratic society.⁴³ Hungary itself had had its own listings of that kind in the years of totalitarianism.⁴⁴

The *list* and *the listing* as concepts were brought up by many of the informants of this research as a somehow defining moment or experience, even if they were not named on the list themselves.

The amendment to Public Education Law – 2019

In July 2019, with a two-third Fidesz majority, the Parliament of Hungary passed an amendment to the Public Education Law.⁴⁵ According to many NGOs and opposition politicians, one of the changes to legislation construed the risk that the mere invitation of an NGO to run an activity at school could lead to the sanctioning of the director of that institute, resulting potentially even in their dismissal.⁴⁶

⁴¹ ‘Pécs Megyei Jogú Város Önkormányzata Közgyűlésének Tiltakozó Nyilatkozata 02-2/746-2/2017’ <<https://gov.pecs.hu/download/index.php?id=1056210>> accessed 22 July 2021.

⁴² ‘Itthon: Az Amnesty Válaszolt a Listázó Figyelőnek: Nem Ijednek Meg’ *HVG.hu* (12 April 2018) <https://hvg.hu/itthon/20180412_Az_Amnesty_valaszolt_a_listazo_Figyelonek_nem_ijednek_meg> accessed 10 July 2021.

⁴³ ‘„A Listázás a Diktatórikus Rendszerek Sajatja” – Az ELTE Alkotmányjogi Tanszéke Is Felszólalt a Figyelő Listázása Ellen’ (*Magyar Narancs*, 13 April 2018) <<https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/a-listazas-a-diktatorikus-rendszerek-sajatja-az-elte-alkotmanyjogi-tanszeke-is-felszolalt-a-figyelo-listazasa-ellen-110596>> accessed 19 July 2021.

⁴⁴ Péter Sipos and István Ravasz (eds), ‘B-Listázás’, *Magyarország a második világháborúban* (1st edn, PETIT REAL Könyvkiadó 1997) <<https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyarorszag-a-masodik-vilaghaboruban-lexikon-a-zs-F062E/b-F07EE/b-listazas-F07F2/>> accessed 19 July 2021.

⁴⁵ Csaba Tibor Tóth, ‘Elfogadta a Kétharmad a Közoktatást Tovább Korlátozó Köznevelési Törvényt « Mérce’ *Mérce* (12 July 2019) <<https://merce.hu/2019/07/12/elfogadta-ketharmad-a-kozoktatast-tovabb-korlatozo-koznevelesi-torvenymodositast/>> accessed 22 July 2021.

⁴⁶ ‘Tiltakozunk a Köznevelési Törvények Tervezett Módosításai Ellen - Amnesty International Magyarország Amnesty International’ <<https://www.amnesty.hu/tiltakozunk-a-koznevelesi-torvenyek-tervezett-modositasai-ellen/>> accessed 10 July 2021.

Fairy-tale book: *Meseország mindenkié* – 2020

In 2020, the *Labrisz Lesbian Association* published a book called *Meseország mindenkié (Fairyland is for Everyone, in English)*.⁴⁷ Prime minister Orbán was asked for his opinion by the state radio, and he demanded that ‘they should leave our children be’, referring to the publishers of the book and the LGBTQ+ community in general.⁴⁸

Later on in early 2021, the Hungarian Consumer Protection Authority declared that the book should only be sold together with a warning about ‘patterns of behaviour deviating from traditional gender roles’.⁴⁹ This resolution was then claimed to breach EU law (Articles 11 and 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights on the freedom of expression and the right to non-discrimination, as well as the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive) by the European Commission and formed one ground for the infringement procedure that the Commission launched in July 2021.⁵⁰

Content analysis

Survey answers

On important human rights topics

When asked to mention a few pieces of human rights knowledge that the respondent found important to be passed on as part of education, the answers included many concepts that may also be found in human rights conventions and declarations, but they also described a number of wider ideas. A complete table of the answers to this question is available in *Appendix II*, and here I analyse relevant parts of those.

In almost all answers the issues of discrimination as well as the peaceful, cooperative and tolerant relations between groups were somehow present. These seem to also be linked to the ideas on critical thinking, right to information, and being able to recognise breaches of human rights – either those of one’s own or someone else’s.

Apart from these recurring themes, some respondents had their own specific fields that they stressed, such as health, relationships, as well as one respondent’s more complex political terms such as peace and social justice.

The absence of explicit mentions about LGBTQ+ rights caught my eye, as well as the fact that only one respondent mentioned the ‘right to flee’, probably referring to the right to asylum. The Roma people and

⁴⁷ ‘Meseország Mindenkié’ (*Labrisz Lesbian Association*) <https://labrisz.hu/irodalmi_rovat/labrisz-konyvek/meseorszag_mindenkie> accessed 22 July 2021.

⁴⁸ ‘Orbán: Magyarország Türelmes a Homoszexualitással Szemben, de Hagyják Békén a Gyerekeinket’ *444.hu* (4 October 2020) <<https://444.hu/2020/10/04/orban-magyarorszag-turelmes-a-homoszexualitassal-szemben-de-hagyjak-beken-a-gyerekeinket>> accessed 22 July 2021.

⁴⁹ ‘Hungarian Consumer Protection Authority Slams Book with LGBTQI Characters | Háttér Society’ (*Háttér Society*, 19 January 2021) <<https://en.hatter.hu/news/hungarian-consumer-protection-authority-slams-book-with-lgbtqi-characters>> accessed 22 July 2021.

⁵⁰ ‘Commission Takes Legal Action for Discrimination LGBTIQ’ (n 4).

their rights were not mentioned explicitly either. One may assume that these ideas were included in the other mentions about non-discrimination and tolerance, but it is interesting indeed that respondents chose to use such general terms instead of naming certain groups, their hardships and their rights in their answers.

One obvious explanation is that the survey requested a short answer, although the word count was not limited. In such a situation general terms come in handy, of course. However, it also raises the question whether some respondents felt more comfortable with only raising issues on a general level, possibly due to lack of trust towards the survey platform or myself as the researcher. After all, the *interviewees* considered LGBTQ+ topics, rights of asylum-seekers, as well as Roma rights to be controversial topics in the Hungarian society, so that might be also one explanation to respondents avoiding them in their answers.

It is also possible that thinking in such general terms is merely an instinctive part of the professionalism of human rights educators, and they might have considered me capable and educated enough to interpret their answers to include all kinds of issues related to e.g. discrimination and intolerance. It would require more research to discover the reasons behind the absences that I observed, but I consider it worth the mention in this paper too, nevertheless.

On perceived success and its factors

On a scale of five steps (*very successfully – successfully – acceptably well – unsuccessfully – very unsuccessfully*), none of the seven respondents graded their human rights education towards the unsuccessful end of the spectrum. Four respondents deemed that they had been successful, and three felt that they had done acceptably well. I asked the respondents to assess their success ‘compared to their own expectations’. A question that would have led them to compare their success to their colleagues, or to educators abroad, could have generated a different kind of dataset, of course. The answers to the question, as it was formulated in the survey, might obviously be affected by particularly low or high expectations of an individual, but I think that the resulting set of answers reveal something about the respondent’s rather optimistic – or at least hopeful – general attitude towards their own work and its meaningfulness.

Furthermore, a follow-up question asked the respondents to *present any factors that they felt affecting their freedom as an educator*, both positively and negatively. Several answers named the support from colleagues as an aiding factor, and some also praised the cooperative parents of pupils. Furthermore, the educatedness and readiness of the educator themselves was mentioned as a positive force, along with the safety of the working environment and the supportive attitude of the director.

On the negative side, the superiors to the educators as well as the administrative stakeholders in general were named as hindering agents. ‘Currently I feel that the greatest constraint is the self-censorship, practiced by the school management and leading to inwardness’, one respondent wrote. The critique also

extended to the leaders of the school districts. One respondent wrote that there was no direct interference with education, but that human rights education was met with ‘disapproval’ nevertheless. ‘Closed, uncooperative parents’ were also mentioned by one respondent.

In the bigger picture, the rigidness of the curriculum together with the ‘servility’ of educators were mentioned as constraints. Furthermore, one respondent claimed that the education system was being ‘dictatorially controlled’.

The media and general attitudes were also mentioned as factors that affect the freedom of educators adversely. ‘The propaganda-media depicts the human rights activists and educators as enemies’, one answer told. Another respondent described the attitudes as follows: ‘As I work with LGBTQ themes, the resistance that is observable in Hungary makes it difficult to talk about anything openly.’

The various agents and phenomena present in these answers were brought up by the interviewees, too, as later segments of this paper will show.

Finally, when asked *how the respondents thought that people around them have taken their interest for human rights*, the majority wrote about mostly positive or neutral experiences. However, one answer stated that ‘it is best to keep it secret’, and another respondent had counted two persons that were opposed to their human rights interest – in contrast with the seven neutral and one supporting person.

Furthermore, one respondent mentioned that there are ‘attacking, condemning opinions always and everywhere’, even though most people do not take any stance. ‘They respect it, they applaud it, they find it weird’, one answer stated. In all, the supporting or neutrally accepting people seemed to form a majority in the respondents’ lives, and some people found the support from their employer, colleagues, friends, and family especially important.

Applying DNA to the stories

The narratives

I have identified three narrative types that the chosen stories belong to: the narrative of restriction, narrative of adaptation, and the forging narrative. I present the characteristics of each of these at the beginning of their respective sub-chapters, but as a rule of thumb, it may be said that the first type involves the stories that attribute the most power to censorship, and this gradually reduces toward the third narrative type.

Narrative of restriction

The first narrative presented in this paper is the *narrative of restriction*. Restriction here refers to the different kinds of actions, events, and chain reactions that lead to de facto restrictions of human rights education. The stories that represent this narrative type are accounts of how human rights education was

shut out from certain spaces, either abruptly or gradually. In Bourdieusian terms, these stories are about cases where the anticipation of *profits* was deemed so much lower by a habitus than the risks of negative *sanctions* that they chose to turn away from human rights education – in one form or another.

Many of the stories are accounts of the behaviour of someone else than the interviewees themselves, and this sets an obvious limitation to the knowledge that may be gained from the stories: one cannot be sure whether the seemingly effective censorship actually led to the birth of some new, creative ways of teaching about human rights. Hence the term ‘restriction’ instead of anything more absolute like ‘abolition’ – because while the stories discuss clear restraints to the ways of and venues for teaching about human rights issues, at least some of the educators affected must have come up with alternative solutions following the restrictions. (The next chapter on the *narrative of adaptation* concerns stories about those kinds of developments.)

I observed that in this narrative type, the restriction operates through many avenues and agents. Firstly, I was told about cases where it was the general public, the masses of people, that were targeted with communication that went against either human rights education or the NGOs promoting it – or both. This affected the school personnel as well, obviously, but they were not particularly targeted as recipients of these communications.

Secondly, some accounts shed light on cases where the directors of schools or other personnel, such as teachers, were the key targets of discouragement from freely exercising human rights education in their institutions. In most stories this scenario would lead to cutting ties with NGOs that offered human rights education.

Lastly, there was a partial manifestation of restrictions expressed in the stories: topical exclusion. Essentially, these stories concerned refugee and migrant themes as well as LGBTQ+ topics. The restriction in these cases was not observed as a complete resistance towards human rights education and the NGOs, but as exclusions of the topics that were deemed most risky by different agents.

Influencing the masses

Interviewee *Hib* describes the reasons behind the general avoidance of human rights topics on the societal level as follows:

Here we have a government that is repressing these things, and sometimes I even find this situation a bit hopeless. We stand up for a certain few things, but they are constantly making decisions and passing laws above our heads – say in gay matters, or any other social matter – that you simply cannot do a thing, your hands are tied. And it is very hard here, because I think that people are very afraid, and they do not dare to open their mouths and stand up for some issue. I think more and more people have started it, though, but it is still not enough, because people see that there is no point doing it. Let’s say they go to a demonstration

or they boycott something [...] and it is either retaliation that follows – or nothing at all. It is super hard to keep that fire burning.

This account of the general functioning of the society follows the same kind of narrative that is present in the coming stories about schools and human rights education in particular, too. Hib is speaking as an active professional in the field of human rights and referring to their own kind as *we*. The antagonist to *us* would be *they*, meaning those with political power and those passing the laws. These sides are in a struggle over *the people*, in a quest to encourage them to or discourage them from human rights activism. Concluding from the tone of despair, Hib is speaking from the position of an underdog, even admitting how ‘hopeless’ the situation feels to them. The story is not about a single incident, but it is a story of stories – Hib suggests that there is a continuum of complicating actions from the side of the government to which Hib and their likes try to react and keep the masses alert.

This story by Hib is one of the many representing the narrative of restriction and dealing with the *fear* incited in people, and with the *withdrawal* of masses from the reach of human rights education. The feeling of fear and the act of withdrawal are some widely shared narrative resources applied in storytelling when it comes to the narrative of restriction. It is noteworthy, though, that as all the interviewees were clearly devoted to human rights and raising awareness about them, this story by Hib, together with the other stories representing the narrative of restriction, describes how *other* people acted in avoidance of the controversial – or the most controversial – topics in the sphere of human rights. Hence, due to the lack of first-person testimonials, it is also important to keep in mind that individual acts of withdrawal might not always be signs of any kind of censorship. However, the pattern that these stories form together suggests that such deliberations about the social acceptability of human rights education and its risks are taking place in many schools.

As in Hib’s story, often the fear – or even terror – present in these accounts is of some mystical nature in the sense that it was hard to pinpoint *what* people might be scared of. Hib suggests that such fear is nevertheless one of the factors leading to the passivity of the members of society, and another reason would be the frustration and lack of belief in the fruitfulness of all or most human rights activism. The challenge to overcome in the story is therefore both to have people ‘open their mouths’ but also to ‘keep the fire burning’.

Une had their own examples to share about how fear operates, but compared to Hib, these stories included observations about much more direct causal connections. Whereas Hib mentioned the government as an agent behind the fear and frustration among citizens, *Une* offered insight into a more local chain of events.

Une recalled how their NGO was labelled a “Soros agent” some years ago:

When our foundation received funding from the Open Society Foundations, the Mayor of Pécs at the time, or the Fidesz members of the council, issued a statement asking the citizens of the town not to offer the foundation any space to operate and not to cooperate with us.⁵¹ On one hand, this led to us losing our office premises at the time, but this was then quickly corrected by a solidarity movement: there was a demonstration to support us, and we were also offered new premises. However, this ‘dribbled down’ into people’s minds, and as they knew that we were *persona non grata*, this was the point when the schools started to slowly but surely turn away from us.

The settings in Hib and Une’s stories are remarkably similar. The antagonists in Une’s story are once again those holding the political power, now on a local level. This time the complicating action was a straightforward one: the political statement against the foundation. And that led once again to restriction through the fear and suspicion felt by the audience, leading to the withdrawing reactions of the school personnel that the NGO would have desired to cooperate with. Mentioning the solidarity movement widens the group of the protagonists from Une and their foundation to some unidentifiable mass of like-minded citizens and organisations. It is quite likely that this group is larger in numbers than the group of politicians issuing the statement, but the imbalance in power and influence favours the latter. This is demonstrated in the outcome of Une’s story: the suspicions felt towards the foundation ‘dribble down’, because they are initiated by those in power.

Hib and Une’s stories are accounts of how small streams make great rivers – in the case of self-censorship. An action by those in power creates a presumption in the eyes of ordinary people about what kinds of deeds are desirable and what are not, even if no sanctions are being declared explicitly. When a citizen faces a situation where they must choose between actively engaging in favour of some human rights movement, or a teacher or school director must decide whether to benefit from the help of an NGO in human rights education, they evaluate the social acceptability of the options and the anticipated profits and sanctions from their actions. Unfortunately for human rights education, the benefits might be difficult to comprehend, especially on a small scale and in the short run, whereas the fear of retaliation – in some form or another – concerns consequences that could be imminent: changes in social status, disciplinary sanctions at work, friction in personal relations etc.

Choosing inaction, choosing not to engage and not to speak up – or not to speak *to* an NGO – might easily turn out to be the most socially acceptable choices to make. Hence, regardless of the commitment by the human rights educators both outside and inside schools, self-censorship cuts ties between important stakeholders.

⁵¹ See section *The anti-Soros statement in Pécs – 2017* for more information.

School personnel under pressure

In the above event that Une recalls, the discreditation campaign by the local governance was run publicly against the foundation. In contrast, a story by Mok talks about a more hidden process that did not function through the public opinion as much as through a direct threat that crossed the line between politics and school administration:

[We ran an] activity with a refugee theme, at the time when the topic was not reviled to the maximum,⁵² and we could still run those activities. A right-wing TV channel appears there to report about the event. The reporter tries to twist the words, asking about what we are doing there ‘about the refugees’. They are trying to lead with their questions... Just imagine a reporter posing close-ended questions, trying to lead it towards a conclusion that we are doing the wrong thing with the children. However, we have a very good and simple thing on our side: we only need to tell the truth. We deal with tolerance and cooperation in the activities, these are the competences that we develop. From this, the TV channel could... They did not cite anything from the conversation... But what they made from it was that ‘Amnesty develops with tolerance’, as if *tolerance* was a swear-word... ‘Amnesty teaches with tolerance’, it was, actually! This was okay. The TV channel became a laughingstock, but in that school, in that district, the Fidesz representative went there to tell that if there would be one more class like this, then it would be the director of the school that is held responsible. One sentence like this is enough. Not the direct supervisor in the administration saying it, but a political representative saying that they would hold the directors responsible... Or at least that they would start something... And this was just enough for that school to abstain from... Not only from the refugee activity... But from every other Amnesty activity, too.

As Mok’s story suggests, the involvement of a politician seems to have had a chilling effect on the school’s administration. ‘One sentence like this is enough’, Mok says, making a point about the absoluteness of political power. Once again, the narrative resource of *fear* is applied, but the factual threats behind it still remain ambiguous.

Mok presents the story as a logical and even unavoidable chain of events: once a politician came in, the director had no more room to manoeuvre from that point on. The school director plays an interesting ambivalent role in the story, transforming from a likeable character to some sort of a traitor. However, Mok does not put any blame on the director, which also indicates a similar sense of inevitability and normality as in Hib and Une’s stories.

What would the politician do if the director did not obey? What *could* they do, in the first place? It seems that the mere knowledge that *something* could happen was enough to create fear, to elevate the appreciated risks too high for the director of the school, and hence cut ties with Amnesty’s human rights

⁵² See section *Refugees in Hungary and the government actions – 2015* for more information.

educators. Once again, as the social acceptability of different actions is assessed by a third person – the director – the story does not offer an exact insight into the process of deliberation between the options. However, a director and their school that used to be open to Amnesty-led human rights education, is now out of the reach of such activities. In all, one may conclude that the politician–director interaction represents a case of active, top-down censorship – and not self-censorship – the exact sanctions within which only remained undiscovered to Mok.

It is also worth noticing that in both Une and Mok’s stories, the media played a central role, but the interviewees attributed a different amount of power to it. In Une’s story, the media directly affected the thinking of masses, whereas Mok ridiculed the piece of news that the TV channel could scrap together – even if that piece was still enough to convince the political representative of the seriousness of the issue and to take action. It can be concluded that the narrative of restriction covers a range of different kinds of chain reactions, all of which share a common outcome: people turn away from human rights NGOs, and they possibly turn away from human rights topics, too. In Une’s story the chilling effect operated through influencing public opinion and inciting general fears, whereas in Mok’s case, the key agent was the school director who could be influenced by the politician that was informed about the human rights education through the TV medium.

Another interviewee, Ave, had their own story to share about how the directors of schools might also be afraid of a certain ambiguous piece of legislation and therefore not dare to invite any NGOs to hold human rights education at their facilities. Ave first told how their NGO had observed a decline in the interest towards their activities at a number of schools, and then they presented their story about how the law and media might have affected this phenomenon:

What happened? Well, first of all, many things might have happened, and I have no insight into the things that might have occurred in certain schools. But what I do see is that there are NGOs who are receiving fewer and fewer invitations, and there is a phrase [in a law] that a director who invites an activity that goes against the rights of the child, or permits its presence in their school, may be sacked... Obviously this is not the wording in the law... But that they may be dismissed from the school. And these things are totally not defined there... ‘Going against the rights of the child’ is not really a legal category. [...] What are the programmes that ‘go against the rights’? But it seems that this sentence is the reason... That it induces fear in certain schools, school directors, teachers... ‘Whoa, we don’t need any trouble here [from the activities]’... ‘Amnesty has been in the cross-fire of the government media, the government-allied media, so we don’t need that trouble, hence we are not going to invite Amnesty.’

In Ave’s story, the threat is more tangible than in the previous accounts: the risk of dismissal. Nevertheless, the threat towards a single director is less explicitly pronounced than in the story of Mok. As Ave recites the

threat that is inscribed into law, they ridicule it too, pointing out its vagueness. Nevertheless, as the illustrative director character in Ave's story suggests, Amnesty entails 'trouble', and that legally potential – albeit not concretely proven – trouble creates an *anticipation of censorship*, leading to the act of self-censorship.

Besides being a story of restriction, the account seems like a story of frustration. Such elements of frustration are present in many of the stories that I qualify as presenting the narrative of restriction, like in the opening story by Hib. I also find *frustration* to be a reoccurring narrative resource for many of the interviewees, a pent-up feeling that urges the story-telling. It forms a certain identity: the storyteller is willing and capable of doing a job where they do not always have the wind behind them, and negative feelings are frequently present. Furthermore, telling the story is potentially a means for relieving that frustration, sharing the burden.

Topical exclusions

For to analyse a complementing dimension of the narrative of restriction, I turn to *Nim*, a schoolteacher who told me a story about a human rights themed video project. Along the planning process of that project there were instances when a pupil shared that they would not tell their father about the project, as well as a teacher rejecting the request to appear on the video, referring to 'someone in the family' that asked them not to do it. The most striking incident of restriction was, however, when the school director first approved the project after one day's hesitation but added: 'It should not be about migrants, though.'

Migrants or refugees were also a recurring narrative resource that many interviewees used to depict the most absolute restrictions – together with LGBTQ+ themes. Like in Mok's story above and in this story by Nim, the memory of the summer of 2015 and the government reactions to it had drawn a clear line between the acceptable and unacceptable. The developments of anti-LGBTQ+ censorship was less clearly identified by the interviewees, but the existence of it was recognised by Ave, for instance: 'I feel that these [LGBTQ+ themed] programmes are being less requested than the others, I think this is the feedback that I am getting... That this is a theme where the self-censorship is working better among the school employees.'

This section about the narrative of restriction introduced many of the threats that human rights education faces in today's Hungary, and how there are many gatekeepers that may hinder the social acceptability of certain human rights topics – or stigmatise even a whole range of communication that comes from certain labelled NGOs. In the next section, I will analyse the stories of adaptation, which concern two problems in particular, both also observed within the narrative of restriction: teachers and other educators turning away from human rights education, and the bashing of certain human rights themes in particular.

Narrative of adaptation

The stories that I consider as representing the *narrative of adaptation* talk about the creative – and often also indispensable – solutions that human rights educators have come up with in situations that have imposed threats or obstacles to their activities. In Bourdieusian terms, these individuals and organisations have recognised the risks related to teaching about human rights topics, but they have developed ways of distributing that knowledge so that the anticipation of profits becomes or stays higher than the risk of negative sanctions. Essentially, this outcome may be reached by either increasing the probability of achieving the profits, or by lowering the risks – or through altering both of these factors, of course.

Repackaging human rights

Mok told me a story about how the names of the activities that they offer to schools affect their acceptance:

The bullying class is popular, because bullying is clearly a problem at schools. Here is the important thing: even if I call it bullying, I am still dealing with human rights. The programme is building on the idea of how bullying can be avoided, [...] what kind of rights people have in such a situation. And maybe this was the good and fortunate thing, that we worked with names that refer to their everyday problems.

Furthermore, Nim explained their vision of the omnipresent human rights with the following story:

It is probably shocking to many that... They think that a literature competition goes so that we sit down and learn all the literature textbooks. While I think completely differently. I think that everything is related to everything. That... If there is literature... Then of course the human rights issues are in there, too. And of course, the *Meseország mindenkié* [fairy-tale book]⁵³ is – simultaneously – about literature, language, history, culture...

A narrative resource applied in these stories is the deeper understanding through an informal reading of human rights, which makes it possible for human rights NGOs to be one step ahead of the campaigns of fear and attempts of censorship. This understanding of the everyday nature of human rights, and of the necessity of the humane and peaceful idea behind the concept, is a key resource invoked in the stories that represent the narrative of adaptation.

The story by Nim is an ideal example of the narrative resource of *deeper understanding*. Such understanding can be part of an NGO strategy and also a characteristic of a human rights educator who has grasped that the contents of human rights and the societal ideals that they reflect may be taught in an infinite number of different ways – like in literature class.

⁵³ See section *Fairy-tale book: Meseország mindenkié – 2020* for more information.

The conflict element in these sorts of adaptation stories lies in the external pressure of what kinds of topics are suitable to bring up at schools, and the solutions were about finding what Bourdieu calls *the legitimate language*.⁵⁴ That is, the messages delivered in human rights training might remain unchanged, but picking the acceptable names to describe the activities was deemed important by some interviewees. This is also where *deeper understanding* comes in handy.

While it would be simpler to say out loud that there is a wide range of human rights which all must be upheld and respected, it seems that it is the *content* of these rights that really matters to the human rights educators in the end. However, Une expressed some doubts about the potential long-term drawbacks of repackaging human rights:

It becomes more and more actual to ask: how far do we keep ‘packaging’ it? [...] I was at a conference and there was a lecture about a good practice from Germany about ‘political education in elementary school’. [...] My friend reminded me that, despite the programme sounding great, we should under no circumstances call it ‘political education’, because schools would never allow us in with that. It could be ‘civic orientation’ at maximum. [...] It is not practical to call it that [the original] way. The question is: when and for how long do we need to apply this [renaming habit]? [...] If there is an LGBTQ activity, for example, how could we call it something else? We will have a ‘Family Day’ with focus on ‘coming out’, organised together with Amnesty. [...] I have a bad feeling about this kind of dilemma, [...] because I am afraid that one could feel fooled if they come to a ‘family day’ and then hears about six different LGBTQ topics there. Of course, at this activity we will communicate it very clearly what the contents are, but I give this as an example about the dilemma: how far can the words be distanced?

In sum, one could say that the NGOs must find the “neutral” words to describe their activities, but as neutrality is not a constant,⁵⁵ the expression used by Mok is a very articulate one: ‘words that refer to their everyday problems’. However, Une’s story raises the question about whether there is some irreplaceable value to the use of explicit human rights terminology. It suggests that the *deeper understanding* possessed by human rights educators could result in an undesirable conflict due to the *lighter understanding* – or deliberate misunderstanding – of human rights related topics by other members of society.

Trusting the wisdom of pupils

Nim told a story about how they create space for debate in the classroom:

A great deal of the debates are directed in the sense that I would like to shed light on the fact that certain generally accepted issues are up for debate. So that we start with platitudes... Platitudes that I find erroneous in the sense of human rights. So there are debates like this that are awakening... Or directed

⁵⁴ Bourdieu (n 11) 55.

⁵⁵ *ibid* 40–41.

ones... These are typically... I just say that 'Okay, I heard what you said. I would like to debate this. Is there anyone else that might feel that they do not necessarily agree [with what was said]? Is there someone who is reflecting on this?' Of course this is a provocation for there to be someone like that. Then we start, and sometimes I must say that 'this aspect in particular I do not contest either' or.. Or... I contest it for other reasons. So it is a debate in the sense that it is a discussion that starts somewhere and ends somewhere else – in the best case.

The narrative resource invoked by Nim is the *trust* towards the pupils who are to learn about human rights. Nim opens the room for the peers in class to discuss the human rights issues that arise in class, and they seem to be comfortable with leaving those debates in the hands of the pupils. Nim added that, on one occasion, the debate had lasted for a week after the class among the pupils, which made Nim very pleased. I consider this story to represent the narrative of adaptation because it is a creative way to make a greater impact than what an odd top-down human rights session could possibly achieve.

The trust extends also to situations that could be awkward for the educator, as Nim tells:

It was interesting when there was the fuss with the *Meseország* [fairy-tale book]⁵⁶, a piece of news was published that... That Amnesty [...] is actually 'targeting the school pupils' and 'infiltrating' because they do some methodology thingies... And doing this and that... I found it very amusing. In this instance, for example, I do so that when in grammar class we study textology and stylistics and other things, there I teach publicism with pleasure, too. Well I took this there! 'Let's have a look at how this is actually... What does it mean to 'infiltrate'? What is it that infiltrates?' And then I ask: 'Myself, for example, what am I doing? How do we assess this?' We then reached a conclusion that this article was written to be a discrediting piece, but if I read it well, it is a compliment.

The level of trust and openness depicted in the story is remarkable. As was discovered in the stories of restriction, the power of media can be immense when it comes to discrediting and stigmatising human rights education. The skilled educators are able to provoke the pupils into thinking on their own and together with their peers – without the need of excessive, specifically human rights themed lectures. The resource of trust makes it possible to counter a biased media by teaching media literacy – instead of merely being louder about human rights, the actual topic.

The forging narrative

Finally, the stories that I classified as belonging to the forging narrative make the important point that, in the end, human rights education is not about being wittier and more creative than those who would like to oppress the human rights activities, but it is rather the fundamentally necessary and righteous nature of human rights that keeps the educators committed to the theme – and to their community. The main

⁵⁶ See section *Fairy-tale book: Meseország mindenkié – 2020* for more information.

message within this narrative is that human rights are something above the party politics and the judiciary, and the promotion of them is noble and worthwhile despite any hardships. As Mok crystallised it: 'We only need to tell the truth.'

Shielded from attacks

When asked about why Nim was so confidently practicing human rights education in their school, despite the sometimes discouraging experiences with colleagues and superiors, and about how they deal with confrontations, they first assessed that direct conflicts were quite rare in the end. They went on to say:

If I encounter [aggression] nevertheless, I usually find a way to tame it... And... I read a lot, I go to theatre a lot, and language is my friend... I... I think I must be a difficult opponent to debate with. I mean that if someone does not have the arguments, I will confront them with the fact that they do not have arguments. So this way... It is easy. But I am surely in an easy position. Because I feel that I do not depend on my job. I feel that if they told me that 'this is not needed here', then I would not panic. Then I would do something else instead. Or somewhere else. This surely gives me some sort of assertiveness. This is the shield.

Nim mentioned *the shield* many times during the interview. It was their metaphor for the safe position that made the overt human rights education possible for them. In the above story they explain one fundamental of the shield: not depending on the job. That is, Nim has the chance to commit to human rights and their importance unconditionally. The metaphor of the shield was applied only by Nim, but the idea of serving something greater than the risks was expressed by many interviewees. Beside the *importance* of human rights education, these stories also referred to the sense of *neutrality* and fundamentality of human rights.

Mok described the protective neutrality of human rights as follows:

And you see, if anyone looks at any of the programmes, it is not incitement, it is not anti-government, it is not anti-right-wing, it is not against the ruling party... They are instead programmes built on human rights. On those human rights that also Hungary has signed. And which may also be found in many parts of the legislation. So we are not wanting anything 'extra'. [...] Once more: it is not an anti-state organisation, it is all built on human rights. [...] I do not [fear]. I take full responsibility for what I do, exactly because if it needs to be discussed or I must tell *why* I do it... I can back it with human rights.

As an entrepreneur and volunteer human rights educator, Mok probably also felt quite independent similarly to Nim, even if this was not expressed explicitly by them. In the case of Mok, the shield was the neutrality of the education that seemed perfectly obvious to Mok. Similarly to Nim, they found that arguing in favour of human rights and education about human rights was a straightforward task, hence they did not hesitate being open about what they do. Applying the Bourdieusian logic, even if there were risks of confrontation, the real risk of something really bad happening was considered low by Nim and Mok. Hence,

the anticipation of profit was much higher in human rights education from the point of view of these individuals.

Peer support

The *Civil Kurázsi* [project] is able to get into schools, too. You know, they bring the whole programme with them, several NGOs offer it in one package... And they do get into schools. But it varies a lot. There are schools where you can have this whole-day tolerance programme, and then there are schools where the director does not let them in... Or they say that... This is something that the Civil Kurázsi people often complain about... That often they face a situation where they are told that 'Sure, Amnesty may come, the homeless [NGO] may come... But not the gay topics!' So they try to cherry-pick... What is awkward to them should not come.

This story by *Sap* has a seemingly anticlimactical end to it, as it tells that the Civil Kurázsi joint NGO project are often indeed not allowed to certain schools because they want to bring all kinds of human rights NGOs' programmes with them – or none of them will go. However, this *collegiality* or feel of *community* and *solidarity* are the corner stones of the story. The results of topical censorship are seemingly escalated by the NGOs through the act of solidarity. The same resource of *community* was applied by *Sap* in another story about how they reacted to an antagonistic online article about their NGO:

There was no catastrophe in the end, but one still feels that there could be something worse... If they start to harass you, for example. [However, one reacts in] different ways: on the one hand, one cackles in anguish and is a little bit proud: 'I must be doing it right if these idiots target me.' But it is also frightening. [...] But still there is the pride and the comradeship, that we are in this together and we support each other... So there is this feeling too, a good feeling coupling to it. And we are convinced that we are doing good: we are not preaching, we are not spreading any doctrine, we do not want to indoctrinate... It is just that who is interested... I mean, I feel that 'eye-opening' is our task... Or those who are looking for tools, they could get them. If they want to deal with this [thematic] in any ways. And I see that there are... There are many people who would like to do something in this field.

Sap builds their story on the *shield*, too, and ties that resource to the *community*. The collegial network of human rights educators is built on the idea of politically neutral, fundamentally important human rights. Attacks towards *Sap* and their likes are met with pride and solidarity – despite the negative feelings that arise as well. With their story, *Sap* creates an image of a devoted group that gets forged together by hardships, and which does not bend under the pressure.

Discussion

Core theoretical materials behind this work were Bourdieu's – and Bunn's – theories on censorship and one specific form of it, self-censorship. As I let the stories speak to me, I had to admit that the interview

material would not offer me exhaustive and direct answers to the questions about where such censorship existed and how it affected the thinking and speaking of educators. Hence, in many cases I had to settle for the implied presence of censorship and self-censorship and focus on the various ways that the interviewees packaged these accounts. Fortunately, this approach led me to possibly even richer observations than I was initially looking for.

With confidence it may be declared that censorship affects the work of human rights educators in Hungary on many levels, and the external and internal mechanisms with which censorship operates were key elements of most stories that I chose to analyse. The findings confirm Bunn's understanding of the ambivalent effects – besides or instead of plain repression – that censorship may cause.⁵⁷ As my threefold narrative typology suggests, the reactions to censorship differed a lot depending on what different agents had at stake. In the case of the most devoted and independent people, censorship and the perceived self-censorship of others resulted mostly in ever-greater motivation and creativity. The actions of characters who formally had more at stake – like school directors, but also regular teachers and citizens – were presented as being more influenced by censorship.

The avenues for censorship to operate were various, too. Media played a decisive role in many of the stories, as did the official and communicative acts of politicians. The unclarity and unpredictability of risks of human rights education was characteristic to most of these events, which was implied by many of the stories and also expressed by some interviewees with a disclaimer: 'I cannot *really* know what happened'.

Especially powerful were the testimonials of how certain topics, like refugees' rights and LGBTQ+ themes, had taken on a stigma that did not need any further explanation in cases when education about that topic was repressed. Those stories brought forward possibly the most striking example of self-censorship and how it had developed within just a few years. Mok summarised it with these words: 'From a welcoming society we went on to become a hostile society. It sounds quite awful.' Research focusing solely on one of these most censored themes could offer some impressive findings which were unfortunately not within the scope of my project.

Despite the often-discouraging environment, openness and being vocal about human rights seemed very natural to most interviewees. The survey answers, too, revealed that support for human rights activities is rather typical in the social circles of human rights educators, and the feeling of community among human rights educators was a widely shared narrative resource in the stories, creating a strong identity. Friends and family were typically among the people that could be relied on, whereas the support from colleagues and superiors varied more, as did the attitudes of the pupils' parents.

⁵⁷ Bunn (n 17) 19.

Based on this research it cannot be concluded how real risks human rights education posed to people's careers in school settings. Nevertheless, the stories paint a picture in which the expected consequences were negative rather than positive, which in itself seemed to make many of the school professionals abstain from overt human rights education.

Concluding with Bourdieu's idea of *anticipation of profits*, the sense of belonging and support were certainly among the short-term positive forces that raised the anticipation, but quite clearly the perceived indispensability and usefulness of human rights education for the society was the major driving force for many educators. As such, the profits were projected quite far in the future by the interviewees. As Mok put it: 'It is a matter of decades to change these attitudes. Consistent, gradual work is needed. This is why Amnesty and other NGOs are important [...], as they get into schools, so that at least the generation there is offered the chance to think differently.' Contrary to the long-term profits that many educators were committed to, the risks that were discussed in the stories had to do with more imminent – albeit mostly hypothetical – threats, such as dismissal.

Implications

The three narratives identified in this paper offer an insight into the complex states of activism, human rights, and education in contemporary Hungary. One of my aims was to let the stories speak for themselves as testimonials to what it is like to be a human rights educator in Hungary, and especially about how the choices between speaking up and remaining silent, as well as between doing and withdrawing, come to exist.

Besides the mere importance of publishing stories and contextualising them for the reader, I do hope that my analysis could prove to be useful for the development of human rights education not only in Hungary but in other corners of the world, too. On the one hand, the narrative types that I observed could surely provide a starting point for a reflection and discussions among human rights educators about what the strengths and weaknesses of each narrative are – both in the public sphere and within their own communities.

On the other hand, I believe that by approaching narratives and the elements on which they were built upon, I have managed to preserve the human voice and relatability of the stories. Stories bring us together. They reveal how similar we are and inspire to create and join our own story to the book of other similar stories. In other words, I hope that by discovering this set of narratives, I have been able to present the stories in a way that speaks beyond national and disciplinary borders, and ultimately reaches the professionals and volunteers that find their own struggles in the narratives, even if the details of the stories as such would not speak to them on their own.

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Javaslat módosítási szándék megfogalmazásához a Törvényalkotási bizottság számára a pedofil bűnelkövetőkkel szembeni szigorúbb fellépésről, valamint a gyermekek védelme érdekében egyes törvények módosításáról szóló T/16365. számú törvényjavaslatához

Appendix I – Survey questions

1. Have you participated in human rights related training?

Yes / No / I prefer not to answer

2. Please describe briefly some human rights related pieces of knowledge that you find important to be passed on as an educator:

[Text box]

3. Compared to your own expectations, how well have you been able to pass on human rights knowledge in your work as an educator?

Very successfully / Successfully / Acceptably well / Unsuccessfully / Very unsuccessfully / I prefer not to answer

4. Based on your experiences, what factors affect (positively or negatively) your freedom in your work as an educator?

[Text box]

5. Based on your perceptions and experiences, what are the attitudes of the people around you towards your interest in human rights?

You may think about e.g. people at your work (superiors, colleagues and students), members of your community, as well as your friends and family, etc.

[Text box]

6. If you think about your answers to questions on this page, how do you perceive the importance of human rights movements (e.g. EJHA, Amnesty, Emberség Erejével) as organisations and a communities?

[Text box]

7. Please mark the type(s) of institution(s) where you work as an educator

	Public	Non-public	Other
Early childhood education and care facility			
Elementary school			

High school / secondary education			
University / tertiary education			
Other settings, educating minors. You may describe the settings:			
Other settings, educating adults. You may describe the settings:			

8. Characteristics of the settlement where you work:

Country: Hungary / abroad

Population (approximately):

Type of settlement: urban / rural / both

The most influential political parties in the council:

9. Approximately how many years have you worked as an educator?

[Number]

10. Last active year (if currently not working as an educator):

[Number]

11. Your age group:

Below 30 / 30-45 / 46-60 / Above 60 / I prefer not to answer

12. Your gender:

Female / Male / Other: / I prefer not to answer

Appendix II – Table of answers to question 2 of the survey

Question 2: *Please describe briefly some human rights related pieces of knowledge that you find important to be passed on as an educator.*

Answers classified based on how concretely I found them relating to human rights:

Clear-cut human rights concepts	Broader concepts	Other descriptions
<p>Non-discrimination, human dignity, equality (of sexes and between other groups alike), freedom of information and freedom to be informed, freedom of opinion and the right to health, the right to a healthy environment, and the right to childhood.</p>	<p>Equal opportunities, solidarity, civil courage, cooperation, peace, social justice, critical thinking, 'getting rid of violence', respect, tolerance, 'right to flee', right to heal, right to recover, right to think, right to decide, diversity, cultural differences between social groups, the consequences of discrimination, hate speech, knowledge about groups being discriminated against, saying 'no', protection of one's own limits, and relationships that are built on mutual respect.</p>	<p><i>'One must question how one's prejudices affect their own actions in society.'</i></p> <p><i>'Human rights are not just a matter of declaration: a state that has signed human rights agreements has also committed to the duty to protect and fulfil those.'</i></p> <p><i>'Raising awareness in those people whose rights are being breached.'</i></p> <p><i>'It is important that people know that human rights are universal and cannot be separated from one another. If one is breached, it means that all the others are breached, too. So, it is important to pass on that everything is connected, and a person's single act could have a huge effect on others.'</i></p> <p><i>'And it is indispensable to make known how important it is that an individual should always question everything, and look for the reasons behind everything, including their own behaviour.'</i></p>

Appendix III – Core questions in the semi-structured interviews

Background

What is your current position?

What did you study?

How did you become an educator?

Where have you worked before?

How long experience do you have as an educator?

Have you worked in different settings as an educator than in your current one?

Interest in human rights

What do human rights mean to you?

What are the human rights that you find most relevant to teach about?

How are human rights connected to the locals in your area? How well are their human rights being upheld?

How have other people around you affected your interest in human rights?

Educating

Who are your audience(s) when you teach about human rights?

How do you prepare a lesson/lecture that involves human rights topics?

Which human rights topics do you find especially difficult to teach? Why?

Which ones are easier? Why?

To what extent do you feel free to teach about human rights the way you would like to do it?

Relations outside work

Apart from your audiences at your work, with whom do you talk about human rights (related topics)?

Have you been in situations where your thoughts about human rights have met resistance?

Has the reaction in such situations been presented appropriately or inappropriately by your counterpart?

Concluding questions

As an educator interested in human rights, what are you afraid of?

What things would you like to change to make it easier for you to work as a human rights educator?