

London School of Economics and Political Science

Making Domestic Violence.

The discursive emergence of domestic violence in the Hungarian media, 2002-2013

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relevance of the news media as facilitators of social change with regard to domestic violence in Hungary between 2002 and 2013. Specifically, domestic violence against women, once entirely “invisible” and “unheard of” under state socialism, and only sporadically noted in the 1990s, by the 2000s had acquired significant public visibility in the country. It is this rise in the public visibility of the issue, and the ways in which domestic violence has been progressively introduced and narrated in the Hungarian media in the 21st century, that forms the focus of the present thesis. In contrast to previous feminist literature, which tends to present the media as an institution of social control, this thesis investigates the role of the news media in discursively constructing domestic violence and engaging the emotions and moral judgements of the public, and thereby contributing to laying the foundations for social interventions against violence. It therefore understands domestic violence as discourse, and the media as both social institution and symbolic space with the power to influence our perception of the social world (including that of domestic violence); and it focuses on the agency of media texts in emotionally, morally or politically engaging publics with public issues and the suffering of others. It uses Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis, applied to a historically comparative case-study design consisting of three cases from the mainstream Hungarian broadcast news media, which were selected on the basis of their data richness and relevance. The thesis seeks to illuminate the complexities and contradictions involved in the emergence of domestic violence as a mediated discourse of public interest, and to address gaps both in the Anglo-Saxon literature on domestic violence in the media, and in the Central-Eastern Europe literature on domestic violence, which currently tends to overlook the role of the media.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In 1991, just after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, a 69-year-old Hungarian woman, Alaine Polcz, published an autobiographical novel titled *One Woman in the War* (Asszony a fronton) (1991/2002). The novel was based on her experiences during the Second World War and focused on her traumatic first marriage in 1944 and the subsequent months she spent as a civilian on the frontline, when the Red Army occupied Hungary and Soviet soldiers repeatedly raped her. The novel quickly brought literary fame for Polcz, who until then was only known as a child psychologist and thanatologist (therapist specialising in grief, loss and dying), and critics praised especially the “rigorous sincerity” with which she recalled her wartime rape. Indeed, the mass rapes perpetrated by the Red Army during the Second World War had been a taboo topic for decades in Hungary (see Petó, 1999, 2003, 2018a) and in other European post-communist countries (see e.g. Anonymous, 1953/2011 from Germany), and in this sense Polcz had indeed broken a long-standing silence with her account.

Interestingly, however, up until as late as 2010 critics failed to notice that the book in fact recalled in detail not only one, but (at least) two types of violence, both of a gendered nature, and that the first violence that Polcz had to endure did not happen during wartime, at the hands of foreign soldiers, but in peacetime, in her civilian life, at the hands of a known man: her husband (Vasvari, 2010). In fact, the first part of the book was about Polcz's marriage, and her heavy-drinking, unreliable husband, who abused her emotionally, sexually and (to a lesser extent) economically during their marriage, and to whom Polcz – despite being aware of the fact that the man did not love her – still felt a strong bond. While Hungarian critics could, right from the start, take note of violence against a woman if it was restricted to specific episodes of use of physical force by (armed) strangers under extreme conditions (such as the wartime rape that Polcz suffered at the hands of soldiers), they had difficulties in acknowledging violence if it occurred in everyday life, on an

ongoing basis, in various forms, and was perpetrated by somebody close, a husband.¹

The explanation for this difference in perceptions, I argue, is to be found – as well as in the specific political situation in which Polcz's book was published – in the fact that certain forms of violence are easier to acknowledge than others, due to their marked failure to conform to “legitimate” forms of exercising control over fellow human beings (Carter & Weaver, 2003, p. 23). Ultimately, what is perceived as violence (and how severe an instance of violence it might be perceived as) is largely dependent on the extent to which these actions diverge from unspoken social and cultural norms about “who is allowed to do what to whom” – in other words, violence is also a form of social inequality, with the violence of superordinate groups typically receiving less attention and more easily passing as non-violence (Hearn, 1998, p. 15).

From the perspective of gender and gendered inequalities, specifically, in modern societies there is a complex network of hidden assumptions about “normal” gendered social arrangements and human behaviours – for example, that “real” families should be under patriarchal control, or that men should show “dominance”. This ultimately enables many forms of violence to pass as an *accepted* and *unnoticed* form of exercising masculine control over women (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; 1998/2001). The actual positioning of these actions on the violence–non-violence spectrum, i.e. whether a type of violence gets noticed and condemned or passes unnoticed and/or is accepted, is linked to unspoken social and cultural gender norms. Kelly (1988, pp. 74-137) describes this spectrum connecting the myriad forms of sexism that women encounter every day (from seemingly small-scale actions that are often excused as trivial and harmless to more “serious” or even criminalised forms of male violence like threats, assault, rape or even murder) as a *continuum of violence* (1988, p. 74).² Within this continuum, domestic violence against women, especially its non-physical forms, typically falls into the more prevalent, and therefore more normalised and more “difficult to spot”, part of the violence–non-violence

1 In this respect, literary critic Pócsik's understanding of Polcz's marriage can be regarded as typical: in Pócsik's view, Polcz's marriage was not abusive, but “traditional”, since her husband “expected a traditional feminine role from her [...], total submission and compliance” (2008, p. 64).

2 Violence as a *continuum* means that the various forms of male violence against women – in Kelly's words, sexist violence (1988, p. 74) – are not understood as distinctly separate categories or as isolated incidents, but as elements of a repeated pattern of abuse: they are interconnected acts without sharp boundaries that reinforce each other, and are all rooted in broader social structures of male domination that they reproduce on a constant basis (1988, 2012). On how sexism intersects with other power inequalities, including racism, see Crenshaw (1991).

spectrum, and the reception of Polcz's book also demonstrates this.

In fact, given that around 2010 critics began to notice the domestic violence component of the story, the other important element in this anecdote about Polcz's book is the fact that the social perception of domestic violence *can change*. The findings of two large-scale surveys conducted among the Hungarian population in 1999 and 2010 (Gregor, 2014; Tóth, 1999a) on the social perception of domestic violence further confirm what the Polcz anecdote was already indicative of:³ that there was a major transformation in Hungary in this field in the 2000s, and also a significant increase of awareness around the issue.⁴

In accordance with this change in the *individual* perceptions of survey respondents, the issue of domestic violence has also gone through some major changes in the Hungarian *public sphere* in this same time period. As discussed in detail later in this thesis, since the early 2000s Hungary has adopted, among others, a number of legislative and policy measures against domestic violence, and also experienced waves of successful public mobilisation of (such as demonstrations, protests, petitions) on the issue. Furthermore, the topic of domestic violence, which, according to a retrospective account by a female journalist, was in the mid-1990s mostly treated as non-existent, unbelievable and was an “object of public ridicule” in editorial offices and newsrooms (Margit, 2002), by the mid-2000s began to appear in headlines and in prime-time news bulletins on a regular basis (Hüse & Konyáriné, 2008, p. 55), and by the early 2010s had even become a hot topic in

3 Without giving a full overview of the findings of these two large-scale surveys conducted in 1999 (Tóth, 1999a) and 2010 (Gregor, 2014), I note that it was especially the social perception of emotional abuse in marriage that changed strikingly in 11 years. While in 1999 the overwhelming majority of respondents (88%) did not perceive emotional and verbal abuse in marriage (such as humiliating put-downs) as an instance of violence (Tóth, 1999a, p. 38), in 2010 only 5.5% of respondents thought of emotional abuse as a “not severe” or “not very severe” problem, while 55.4% already thought of it as “very severe” (Gregor, 2014, p. 23). The change in the perception of physical violence inflicted on wives was less spectacular, but is still worthy of mention: in 1999 16% of respondents thought that battering a wife with a fist or an object would be still “entirely a family matter” (Tóth 1999a, p. 38), while in 2010 only 3.8% of respondents thought so, and 74.9% answered that physical violence inflicted on a wife would qualify as a “very severe” problem (Gregor, 2014, p. 23).

4 It needs to be noted that this radical change in perception and attitudes is probably not country-specific at all, given that a comparison of the results of two Europe-wide surveys conducted similarly in 1999 and 2010 indicates that “a major societal shift” happened in this field in other parts of Europe too, including in a number of older member states, for example Denmark, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal (European Commission, 2010, pp. 47-48). However, with only 74.9% of Hungarian respondents classifying physical violence as “very severe”, and only 55.4% of Hungarian respondents considering emotional-psychological abuse in similar terms, in 2010 Hungary showed the sixth and fifth lowest awareness of these two forms of domestic violence among the 27 EU member countries (pp. 54, 58-59).

the Hungarian media. In brief, domestic violence against women, once entirely “invisible” and “unheard of” under state socialism, and only sporadically noted in the 1990s (Parti, 2001, p. 245; Tóth, 2014, especially pp. 305-306), by the 2000s had gathered significant *public visibility* in the country. *It is this rise in the public visibility of the issue and the ways in which domestic violence has been progressively introduced and narrated in the Hungarian media in the 21st century that forms the core focus of the present thesis.*

I focus here on media representations and their ever-changing social and media-related contexts. I take the media as having a key role in the cultural and political construction of social life (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Livingstone, 2009) and as thus being an institution with a crucial role in shaping public awareness and opinion with regard to domestic violence. As I argue in the following chapters, definitions of domestic violence are inevitably mediated: narratives that offer a set of possible meanings of and attitudes towards domestic violence are typically regulated by the media in modern societies, as has been confirmed by a series of previous research studies from the EU (European Commission, 2010, pp. 12-22), the US (as cited in Berns, 2004, p. 24), and also from Hungary (Gregor, 2014, p. 21). In these studies, 70-93% of respondents answered that they were informed about the existence of domestic violence by the media and especially by television. Specifically, in Hungary the top three sources by which citizens indicated that they were being informed about domestic violence were all institutions of mass media: television (93.2%), print media (45.2%) and radio (36.3%) (Gregor 2014, p. 21).

Therefore, in the following pages I focus on the media and their role in making domestic violence an issue of public concern to a broad Hungarian public, and shaping it as such, as well as their role in circulating diverse social meanings of domestic violence in Hungarian society since the early 2000s. My core interest is in *discursive change* – the ongoing re-distribution, restructuring and re-utilisation of available discursive elements and the ways in which new meanings of domestic violence have been circulated in broader Hungarian society by the media – and in how this ongoing change has ultimately fed into long-term shifts in dominant meanings alongside a developing range of media platforms and technologies. Contrary to traditional perspectives that approach domestic violence against women as a sporadic occurrence, I employ a *feminist* perspective and view it as a frequent type of structural and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1998/2001) that is primarily

enabled by gendered inequalities, but also intersects with other power relations (Crenshaw, 1991; Hearn, 1998; Johnson, 1995).

Despite the prominent role of the media in shaping perceptions and constructing public issues, existing literature does not have much to say about the relationship between domestic violence and the media in Hungary. As of 2018, the media portrayal of domestic violence in Hungary is severely under-researched, with only two pieces of literature published on the subject: the contributions to a round-table discussion collected in one volume with three brief essays (23 pages in total) on the topic of “women in the media as victims of violence” (Balogh, Kassa & Sinkó, 2011) and a scholarly article on the portrayal of domestic violence in a popular Hungarian daily soap (Császár & Gregor, 2016), both available only in Hungarian.⁵ A third article, available in English, discusses an Amnesty International campaign video against violence against women that ran in Hungary in 2009 (Goering, Renegar & Puhl, 2017).

Therefore in the following sections of this Introduction, after giving a preliminary outline of domestic violence issues in Hungary since 1989, I present an overview of existing literature, with special emphasis on its gaps around media-related aspects of domestic violence as a public issue in a Central-Eastern European (CEE) country like Hungary. I go on to connect this repeated omission of the media from the research to a particular type of feminist activism – legal fetishism – which, since the early 2000s, has become dominant in this region and which strongly prioritises legislative and policy measures against domestic violence at the expense of reaching out to broader publics and raising public attention to the issue. I argue that this prioritisation ignores the entire domain of the (mediated) public sphere and the power of the media to construct domestic violence as a public issue. Moreover, it also thereby fails to come to terms with the power of the media to enable citizens to develop a moral, political or emotional engagement with domestic violence, and the concomitant potential of the media to contribute to society's collective learning processes about gender and violence, and – without questioning that societal change is multi-factoral – to facilitate societal change.

⁵ I should note that, of the three brief essays in the volume from 2011, only two were dedicated to the issue of domestic violence, while the third discussed a case of rape.

1.2 Domestic violence in Hungary since 1989: How the issue emerged from silence and became a hot topic. Preliminary country outline and historical overview

While in English-speaking Western countries domestic violence has been extensively researched since the 1970s, and its “discovery” was originally closely connected to the advent of second-wave feminism, in Hungary the discourse on domestic violence does not date back for such a long time, still less the study of its media portrayal. This is mainly due to Hungary having been a Soviet satellite state between 1949 and 1989, which resulted in the country remaining untouched by second-wave feminism until the 1990s (see e.g. Gal & Kligman, 2000; Mudure, 2004). Specifically, although the first-wave feminist movement had been present in the country from the 1890s (Acsady, 1999; Arpad & Marinovich, 1995, pp. 82-88; Szapor, 2004), in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the Soviets took control of Hungary as part of their political expansion into Central-Eastern Europe, the feminist movement was systematically silenced (Pető, 1998). In the subsequent decades feminism was proclaimed unnecessary, with the explanation that equality between the sexes would be achieved with the advent of communism (DeSilva, 1993).

This resulted, among other things, in domestic violence remaining invisible, and this began to change only slowly after 1989 (Johnson & Brunell, 2006, p. 576). With the fall of the Berlin Wall many gender-related issues could become subjects of political discussion for the first time in four decades, and a small network of anti-violence feminist NGOs was even established (*MONA*, *NANE*, *Habeas Corpus* and later *Patent*, among others), and in the 1990s the broader public as well as relevant professions – such as journalists, legislators, police officers, social welfare workers, lawyers or judges – “generally resisted acknowledging” the existence of domestic violence (Fabian, 2010b, p. 225; Margit, 2002). This ignorance around the issue was also supported by the general resistance of the Hungarian population towards politics “intruding” into private matters of citizens’ lives (a widespread reaction developed under the former political regime, see Konrád, 1984), and by Hungarian people’s conservative views on gender roles (Murinkó, 2014; Tóth, 2009, p. 1591;). Gender inequalities permeated – and still permeate – all strata of Hungarian society, including the political system; since 1989 Hungary has repeatedly

produced gender-imbalanced parliaments, with the highest percentage (11.6%) of women MPs reached in April 2018, which is still one of the lowest numbers in the European Union. Although Hungary adopted the Beijing Declaration of the Fourth World Conference on Women (CEDAW) in 1995 and the EU recommendations on gender equality also had some impact on Hungarian legislation from the early 2000s, when preparations for EU membership in 2004 started, these international and supranational institutions did not have any enforceable powers on a national level (Fabian, 2010c, pp. 54-55).

While after 1989 women, just like men, found themselves in a society largely defined by a neo-liberal market economy, Hungarians, like the citizens of other CEE societies, tended to see the public sphere as a “man’s world” and politics as a “dirty business best left to men” (Einhorn, 2006, p. 147), an opinion reproduced also by the governments in power, which repeatedly addressed women in their roles as mothers (and not as economic or political subjects operating in the public sphere). Women's issues were conflated with family, population and reproduction policies, thereby attempting to relegate women to an ostensibly “apolitical” private sphere, and this did not favour acknowledging the existence of domestic violence (see Einhorn, 2006; Fabian, 2010a, pp. 16-17; Nikolić-Ristanović, 2004).

Nevertheless, after 1989 there were some changes in the Hungarian legal system that affected general gender equality issues (for instance the 2003 Equal Treatment Act, which addressed discrimination against, among others, “women and mothers”)⁶ and concrete issues related to domestic violence (the criminalisation of marital rape in 1997, the 2007 Police Guidelines on Domestic Violence, the 2009 Act on Restraining Orders due to Intimate Partner Violence, and the 2013 Act on Intimate Partner Violence). Despite the improving legislative framework, the situation has changed only slowly, and Hungary has been repeatedly cautioned by international human rights organisations and EU institutions because of its inadequate treatment of gender equality issues (Amnesty International, 2007; Council of Europe, 2006; European Parliament, 2013), with one investigation directly focusing on domestic violence (Human Rights Watch, 2013). This last report gave a shocking picture of a country where victims routinely faced barriers to reporting violence,

⁶ For how the new Fundamental Law, entering into force on 1 January 2012, took an opposite turn and reinforced traditional gender roles through the definition of marriage, see Annus, 2014, esp. pp. 6-8.

received an inadequate response from the police, social welfare and medical institutions, and had very little chance of getting into one of the very few shelter spaces available. The poor quality of state support for victims of domestic violence was similarly pointed out in a Report of the European Parliament, which concluded that “combating violence against women and helping victims of domestic violence are typically left to NGOs and charitable organizations” (European Parliament, 2013, p.10).

On the other hand, literature on domestic violence started to emerge in the country as early as the 1990s. Until then, scientific publication and research had only sporadically differentiated between violence *within* and *outside* families – and moreover the available criminal statistics supported this distinction since until 2013 domestic violence was not a separate entry in the Criminal Code and, accordingly, statistics typically did not differentiate between violence committed by family members and by strangers (Tóth & Róbert, 2010, pp. 31-36).⁷ The first, ground-breaking works were published at the end of the 1990s (Morvai, 1998; Tóth, 1999a), and approached domestic violence from a women-centred, feminist point of view, although one (Tóth, 1999a) equated domestic violence with male violence against spouses and children.⁸

Since the early 2000s, a relative abundance of literature has been published on domestic violence (*családon belüli erőszak* / violence in the family), extending from feminist approaches (see e.g. Betlen, 2005; Gregor, 2014; Spronz, 2016; Tóth, 2003; Wirth, 2009); to family-violence approaches (see e.g. Grád, 2015; Herczog & Gyurkó, 2006; Ranschburg, 2006; Szeibert, 2015; Tamási, 2003; Virág, 2004a, 2005a, 2005b, 2006), with an increased focus on child abuse in families (see e.g. Farkas, 2013; Gyurkó, 2005; Herczog, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007; Herczog & Kovács, 2004; Herczog, Neményi & Rácz, 2002; Kerezsi, 1995, 1996; Lakner, Tordainé Vida & Tordai 1997; Lénárd, 1997; Révész, 2004; Szécheý, 2006; Trencsényi, Maleczkyné Hallók, Rucska & Prémné Horváth, 2008;

7 For an attempt to reconstruct the prevalence of domestic violence based on available statistical data from between 1997 and 2002, see Windt, 2005. For a brief overview of Hungarian-language literature on domestic violence in the 2000s see Tóth & Róbert, 2010, pp. 31-36.

8 Morvai (1998) presented a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with victims and people working in the judicial sphere, whereas Tóth's work (1999a) was a large-sample empirical study of, among other things, the prevalence of this issue. *Nőszemély*, a short-lived feminist zine from the 1990s (1991-1998) published by *Feminista Hálózat* (Feminist Network), a feminist grassroots organisation founded in June 1990, is also worthy of mention here. In 1995 it dedicated an entire issue to the topic of violence against women on the occasion of the Beijing Declaration (see Acsády, Bozzi, Bullain & Elekes, 1995). *Nőszemély* was available only in Budapest.

Tóth, 1999b; Virág 2004b), sporadically touching also on elder abuse (see e.g. Gyurkó, 2008), and even discussing such a controversial phenomenon as domestic violence against men (Hüse & Konyáriné, 2008; Tamási, 2005a, 2005b). This literature, although it included some prevalence studies, predominantly discussed the issue from a criminal, juridical or psychological point of view, or was written as guidelines for people in relevant professions, like police officers or child-care workers (but never journalists). As Tóth and Róbert note, a significant proportion of this literature has an overtly anti-feminist tone, as a reaction to the first-wave feminist studies on the issue, and is centred around the claim that victims are men and women equally (2010, pp. 32-33).⁹

The term “domestic violence” (*családon belüli erőszak*), as the above list demonstrates, had a relatively extended meaning – it included, for example, child abuse, which may look odd to Anglo-American readers – and moreover encompassed both feminist and family-violence approaches that – as in the Anglo-American world – characteristically clashed over the significance of the gender aspect (for these two approaches in the US, see Kurz, 1989). No wonder, therefore, that scholars repeatedly reported that people in relevant professions still tended to be confused about the meaning of this type of violence (Herczog, 2009; Tóth, 2014).¹⁰

Nevertheless, domestic violence has recently become a “hot topic” in Hungary due to a number of cultural and political factors. The political scandal that surrounded the passage of the Intimate Partner Violence Act in 2013, the growing number since the 2010s of (female) public personalities disclosing that they are survivors of domestic violence and the recent spread of new, networked forms of feminist media activism that reach a broader public than the traditional feminist media activism of preceding years have all contributed to domestic violence now being at the centre of public attention in Hungary. Overall, it is this historical process, here briefly outlined, during which domestic violence emerged from

9 It is worth noting that this rise of scholarly publications on the issue was accompanied by a number of not strictly academic pieces of writing, typically written for a broader public and predominantly employing a feminist approach: fieldwork-based, book-length essays (Haas, 2005; Hercsel, 2018; Nagy, 2005), information booklets (e.g. NANE, 1999; Szil, 2005) or mixed-genre publications (Bonino & Szil, 2006). Translations of English-language resources were also on the rise (e.g. Evans, 1992/2004; Johnsson-Latham, 2005/2007; McMillan, 2007/2009).

10 The National Institute of Criminology (OKRI) defined domestic violence (*családon belüli erőszak*) in 2005 in the following way: “violence, abuse, ill-treatment that includes all forms of physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect, and occurs between individuals who live in the same household and depend one on another in physical, emotional, financial, legal terms” (see Virág, 2005b).

silence and became a hot topic in the country over the past decades, that the present thesis focuses on, with special attention to the role of the media in this.

1.3 The Hungarian media from a feminist perspective: Gaps in the existing literature

Although the rapid changes that took place in the media systems of CEE countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall attracted significant international scholarly attention, these studies, especially initially, predominantly focused on media regulation, policy changes and their function in fostering new democracies. Much less attention fell on the investigation of the broader cultural and ideological significance of these changes, or their contribution to reproducing existing social inequalities such as that between the sexes (see Havens, Imre & Lustyik, 2013, pp. 2-3). Although recently CEE countries – and even the broader region of EU countries from the former Soviet bloc – have started to attract the attention of feminist media scholars (for research on Hungarian media specifically, see e.g. Barát, 2011; Imre, 2008, 2009, 2012; Norocel, 2018; Rédei, 2012), English-language literature on the media portrayal of domestic violence in these countries remains at best sporadic (for a notable exception see Băluță, 2015 from Romania). As indicated earlier, Hungary has produced only one piece of English-language scholarly writing on the subject, an article discussing an anti-violence campaign video (Goehring, Renegar & Puhl, 2017).

Similarly to English-language publications, Hungarian-language literature on the media portrayal of domestic violence is limited, indeed restricted, as noted earlier, to only two publications (Balogh, Kassa & Sinkó, 2011; Császár & Gregor, 2016). Moreover, even the broader field of gender and the media is currently largely under-explored in Hungarian-language research. While the media have been intensively explored from feminist perspectives in English-speaking Western countries since the 1970s (for overview see e.g. Gallagher 2003; Mendes & Carter 2008), in Hungary this perspective has started to emerge only since the early 2000s, and has not produced much research. Lately linguists working on gender in language have begun to fill this gap, producing a body of research that explores the intersections of gender and the media in Hungary through the analysis of media texts (see e.g. Dér, 2007, 2009; Eklics, 2013; Kegyesné Szekeres, 2007; Virágh,

2013). Kegyesné Szekeres's (2007) analysis, for example, focuses on the textual strategies that Hungarian print media texts have typically employed in the 2000s in order to push successful women professionals back into conservative gender roles. Similarly, Margit (2002), in one of the very first publications, used interviews to map out the gendered aspects of editorial practices of major Hungarian daily newspapers, and gave a shocking snapshot of the sexist newsroom culture in the country in the 1990s.¹¹

It is also worth noting the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), an international project registering the presence of women in national news discourses, the Hungary country report for which was produced by a local gender equality NGO (*Igen Egyesület*) and which was made available in both Hungarian and English: the report established the gendered patterns of Hungarian news omissions and stereotyping (2005, 2010).¹² The GMMP report from 2010 also claimed that, compared with 2005, there had been a slight increase in news stories that addressed issues of gender equality, but there were “still four times more news stories [...] that reinforced gender stereotypes than stories that challenged them” (p. 4).

While the aforementioned research has been done by independent researchers, lately the Hungarian state, too, has begun to investigate the subject. In 2016 the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (*Nemzeti Média- és Hírközlési Hatóság*) published a 136-page-long report on the representation of women on Hungarian television, and to a lesser extent radio, and respective audience attitudes. It encompassed four media genres (broadcast magazine programmes, soap operas, cartoon series for children and advertisements) and contained an additional chapter on “Abused Women in the Media”, the latter dedicated exclusively to the news media coverage of one case, a sexual assault at a

11 Margit diagnosed, among other things, a strong resistance from editors' side to so-called “feminist issues” such as abortion or violence against women, as a result of which these issues were pushed into a “spiral of silence”, as she stated, that is they were repeatedly blocked at all levels of decision processes in newsrooms. The two excerpts below from the interviews she carried out with female journalists are very illustrative in this respect: “I wanted to write about violence against women in 1995. I had a fight ending in shouting with my editor, who told me that I was lying. He told me that it was impossible that a woman would put up with her husband battering, humiliating and raping her for years”. “Once I was writing about marital rape: I was subject to public ridicule in the editorial room” (Margit, 2002).

12 Specifically, in 2005 only 12% of news subjects were women in Hungary and in 2010 25% (the global averages in these two years were 21% and 24%). The stereotypical representation of women in news discourse manifested, among other ways, as their very rare appearance in prestigious occupations (such as politicians or businesspeople), and the fact that they had the most chance of appearing on screens as celebrities, housewives or sexual objects (GMMP, 2005, p. 10). Women, in general, tended to appear as private persons or as representatives of popular opinion (GMMP, 2010, p. 4).

university in 2014 (therefore not relevant from the point of view of domestic violence) (pp. 65-75). This state-financed report did not contain an overall conclusion, and its quality was questionable, both in terms of its unclear research methodology and of the lack of relevant literature, which resulted in over-optimistic, uninformed conclusions and a lack of overall evaluation of the findings.

This relative lack of awareness of gender dimension in the media in Hungary, as exemplified by the above-mentioned scarcity of relevant literature on the subject, is also underlined to some extent by today's still widespread ignorance and insensitivity of media professionals with regard to gender issues in the country. Although *MÚOSZ*, the Association of Journalists in Hungary, does have a "Women's Department", which has in the past organised a limited number of conferences on the subject of women and the media, and there are also NGOs (*NANE*, *MONA*, *Igen Egyesület*) providing gender-training seminars for journalists, their impact on mainstream media professionals is rather small (although in the last couple of years, compared with earlier times, there has been a notable increase). Currently, awareness of gender in the media does not form part of journalists' formal training. However, recently a 48-page-long textbook aimed at raising journalists' gender awareness was published by *Független Médiaközpont*, an NGO promoting ethical journalism in the country (2014), and similarly Macharia and Morinière's *Learning Resource Kit for Gender-Ethical Journalism* has been published in Hungarian translation (2012/2014).

In conclusion, currently both international and domestic media scholars tend to overlook the gendered aspects of the Hungarian media, and consequently literature considering domestic violence from a media-related point of view is scarce. Therefore, in the next section I turn my attention to international literature that explores more broadly *domestic violence as a public issue* in Hungary. I argue that, although this research line brings us closer to the core focus of my thesis, still this literature repeatedly ignores the media-related aspects of the domestic violence story, and this omission is characteristic not only of Hungary, but also of other CEE countries.

1.4 The constraints of the "legal fetishism" perspective in Central-Eastern European

countries and its implications for discussing domestic violence as a public issue

At present, there is a lack in existing literature regarding how discourses on domestic violence have changed in the mediated public sphere over time in Hungary. Existing Hungarian-language research on domestic violence, as noted in section 1.1, is mostly limited to discussing the issue from criminal, juridical or psychological points of view. English-language research – which often discusses the case of Hungary within the framework of cross-country comparisons – although relatively abundant in publications that consider domestic violence as an object of public discourses in Hungary, is strongly *public-policy-oriented* and therefore tends to overlook the role of the media (see Dombos, Horváth & Krizsán, 2007; Fabian, 2010c, 2014a, 2017; Krizsán, Paantjens & Lamoen, 2005; Krizsán & Popa, 2010, 2014; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018a; Tóth 2014). This literature reproduces the kind of “legal fetishism” that Slovak-Hungarian-American scholar Vanya identified in 2006 as a crucial aspect of anti-violence feminist activism in the CEE region (2006a, p. v.). Specifically, legal fetishism, as Vanya states, involves a strong prioritisation of lobbying for legislative and other public policy measures against domestic violence, such as the introduction of separate laws on domestic violence, restraining orders or policy guidelines, at the expense of reaching out to broader publics, raising public awareness of the issue, and in general transforming broader cultural perceptions about gender and violence (Vanya, 2006a, pp. 164-168).¹³

Accordingly, this body of English-language literature mostly focuses on legislative and policy changes and the parliamentary debates around these, such as the first wave of anti-domestic violence measures introduced in the country between 2003 and 2009 (police guidelines and restraining orders) and, most recently, the adoption of a Law on Intimate Partner Violence in 2013 (on the latter see especially Fabian, 2014a; for a brief overview

13 These measures too can have a “symbolic message” for the broader public: the criminalisation of domestic violence, for example, can powerfully disseminate the idea that domestic violence is a form of violence, and therefore unacceptable. Vanya, however, argues that an exclusive focus on legal and policy changes, and the concomitant neglect of society's collective learning process about domestic violence, may well pose a risk to the effectiveness of the legislative measures already introduced (2006a, pp. 167-168). This insufficiency of legal remedies and public policies alone is indeed starting to be acknowledged by existing literature, which, after its initial optimism following the first gains in the field of legal remedies, has now become more sceptical about the effectiveness of top-down interventions only, and is increasingly connecting this lack of effectiveness to the “conservative views” that CEE societies share about gender and families (see e.g. Krizsán & Popa, 2014; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018a; Tóth, 2014).

see Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018b). There is also a small body of scholarly literature on domestic violence as an object of the feminist social movement in the country (Fabian, 2009, 2010b, 2014b; Vanya, 2006b), but these texts similarly focus heavily on legislative and policy changes, and only sporadically touch upon the issue of media activism against domestic violence.

To be sure, the investigation of legislative and other state-level policy measures against domestic violence is an important field of study, and contributes greatly to understanding what has happened in Hungary in the field of domestic violence since the issue emerged in the country's national public sphere in the early 2000s. An increased research focus on these policy instruments, however, has been combined with neglect of other, similarly important, aspects of the domestic violence story: most importantly, the role of the media and their power to construct domestic violence for a broader public, and thereby enable citizens on the one hand to learn more about gender and violence or on the other hand to develop any moral, political or emotional engagement at all towards the issue. This potential role of the media in raising public awareness of domestic violence and contributing to broader transformations in social perceptions of domestic violence – a transformation that Polcz's book and its changing interpretations, discussed earlier, well exemplify – is currently severely under-researched with regard not only to Hungary, but, as I demonstrate in section 1.2, to the entire CEE region.

The existing literature, besides focusing on legislative and policy changes, as mentioned, also tends to employ narratives and analytical frameworks that leave out the role of the media in these changes. Instead, changes are examined as products of backstage negotiations between local political authorities and anti-violence activists or feminist lobby groups, or understood as outcomes of external pressure executed on the Hungarian (or other CEE) state by international and supranational institutions, notably the European Union. Even if the role of the media is noticed here and there, this role is quickly downplayed, or – as is typical in the literature on Hungary – converted into an appreciation of the individual efforts of feminist activists in the country, and the underlying media-related mechanisms are not investigated at all (see e.g. Fabian, 2010a, p. 21; Fabian, 2014, pp. 161-162; Vanya, 2006b, p. 122-124). There are even entire forms of feminist activism that have fallen through the gaps of research, such as, for example, the recently emerging

digital feminist activism against domestic violence in Hungary, which relies strongly on social media tools. This novel form of activism remains outside the national research agenda, despite the fact that it was launched against a failed inclusion of domestic violence in the parliamentary agenda in 2012, so the topic is clearly connected to current legislative and policy agenda.

1.5 Domestic violence as a public issue: Shifting the existing focus from legislative and policy changes to the media and mediated public discourse

A shift of focus from legislative and policy changes to the public sphere and media-related developments implies, first of all, a change of vocabulary. Previous literature has made sense of the past through the lens of such notions as the adoption of specific laws or international norms, policy changes, measures and outcomes, implementation mechanisms. In contrast to this vocabulary, a media-focused approach to domestic violence requires the exploration of the subject through such notions as, for example, public visibility and public awareness, the inclusion/exclusion of the issue in the media/public agenda, the discursive construction of domestic violence in media texts, the diffusion in broader society of certain ideas, perspectives and discourses on domestic violence, relevant media discussions or lack of discussion of the issue. As the latter list illustrates, this domain, which forms the core focus of my thesis, is in many respects different from what has been covered by previous research in Hungary.

At the same time, however, it needs to be acknowledged that the three areas of domestic violence touched upon in the previous section, that is domestic violence as a public issue constructed by the media, domestic violence as an object of legislative and policy changes, and finally domestic violence as an object of feminist social movement and activism, are all mutually interrelated territories, and therefore cannot be fully separated. A goal of this thesis, in this respect, is, rather than offering a separate account of the media portrayal of domestic violence in Hungary, to shed light on the media-related and public-sphere-related aspect of the domestic violence story – an aspect that previous literature has so far ignored. In the following chapters, I enquire into the role of the *news media* in

constructing domestic violence in the public eye. In Hungary, in contrast to the UK, it was originally the news media that brought domestic violence to public attention, specifically in 2002 in connection with a tragic case of parricide (a teenage girl, Kitti Simek, shot dead her abusive stepfather). As I later explain in more detail, the news media have been actively circulating discourses on domestic violence in Hungarian society and participating in shaping public narratives around it since the issue first erupted into public attention during the case of Kitti Simek.

The place of this 2002 case in existing literature further illustrates why a media-focused approach would be fruitful here. This literature repeatedly identifies the launch of Hungarian feminist activism against domestic violence with the “decisive moment” on 20 September 2002 when Krisztina Morvai – a “lone feminist legal scholar” (Fabian, 2010a, p. 21) and long-time advocate of the criminalisation of domestic violence – appeared in a public debate on child abuse broadcast live on television, and at one moment turned directly to television viewers and asked for their support for the criminalisation of domestic violence (see e.g. Fabian, 2014, pp. 161-162; Morvai, 2004; Vanya, 2006b, pp.122-124). These authors convincingly argue that Morvai's passionate invocation of public support was met with approval, and in the following months a previously unforeseen number of supporting signatures poured into the offices of feminist NGOs.¹⁴ Elected officials also embraced the issue and in subsequent years, for the first time in the history of the country, a wave of policy changes came into effect that addressed domestic violence. What is not addressed in these accounts, however, is the fact that the issue of domestic violence was *not* brought into public awareness by Morvai alone, since by the time she appeared on television the issue had already been extensively discussed in the media for weeks in the context of the tragic case of Kitti Simek.

The process by which domestic violence emerged into the limelight and began to receive public support in the country is, in other words, much more complex and much less uni-directional than tends to be portrayed in the accounts currently available. The story about the “lone feminist scholar” who spoke up against domestic violence on television

14 The so-far most detailed account of interactions between Hungarian feminist activists and the media can be found in Vanya (2006a), where the author – drawing on the accounts of activists who either witnessed this process in person or heard about it – recalls the “decisive moment” in 2002 and the subsequent flow of supporting signatures into the offices of groups active against domestic violence.

and made the whole country step up against the issue is catchy, but simplifying. Such “decisive moments” usually have their own social and historical conditions and – given that this one happened in a TV studio – media-related conditions as well. Specifically, with the issue of domestic violence temporarily a hot topic in the Hungarian media, Hungarian feminist activists cleverly recognised the strategic importance of this situation and made use of it. But the reasons for this “hotness” were outside the control of Hungarian feminists – who back in 2002 did not have any impact on media agendas – and were probably more rooted in Hungarian media practices, for example the fact that teenage murderers had high newsworthiness in Hungarian newsrooms.

In summary, from a feminist media studies perspective, the narrative of Hungarian domestic violence that has been constructed by existing research – which currently reads as a story of legislative and policy changes generated by backstage negotiations between local political authorities and anti-violence activists or understood as outcomes of external pressure exerted on the Hungarian state – raises a number of questions, all connected to the media-related aspects of this story. Therefore, the task is to fill these media-related “gaps” that the current narrative has failed to reflect on. The opening and closing years for my research, therefore, are 2002 and 2013, two years already acknowledged in existing literature as key moments in this story, although their media-related aspects have so far not been considered, but only their relevance to legal/policy changes or feminist activism (see e.g. Fabian, 2014, p. 161-165; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018b; Morvai, 2004; Vanya, 2006b, p.122-124;).

Specifically, I have taken the year of 2002 as a starting point because – as the archive of the Hungarian news agency *MTI* (Magyar Távirati Iroda, n.d.) demonstrates – domestic violence had previously been mentioned only sporadically in the Hungarian media. I argue that the issue entered the media agenda through the tragic story of Kitti Simek (even before feminist activism would have raised public attention). As a closing point to my research period, I take the years 2012-2013. In these years, similarly to 2002, domestic violence was a “hot” media story. It was also an object of feminist media activism, with a push for criminalisation – and in the immediate aftermath of a domestic-violence-related political scandal that the news media had covered extensively a Law on Intimate Partner Violence entered into force in 2013 (a policy instrument that feminist

activists had been lobbying for since 2002). This narrative, therefore, offers an opportunity to investigate the ways in which domestic violence emerged into public visibility and was progressively introduced into, and narrated in, the Hungarian media in the period until its criminalisation, when domestic violence was officially acknowledged as a type of violence.

1.6 Opening the “black box” from the period between 2002 and 2013: Mediated discourses of domestic violence, discursive change and the agency of media texts in facilitating social change

The years 2002, then, was when domestic violence first emerged into the Hungarian mediated public sphere, and 2013 was when both feminist activism and legal changes marked an, at least temporarily, new stage with the criminalisation of domestic violence in the country. The goal of this thesis is to open the “black box” from the period between these two dates and to shed light on how public discourse on domestic violence changed historically in the given time period, alongside the media platforms and technologies becoming available in an ever-changing media environment. My core interest is, as noted earlier, that of *discursive change* – the ongoing re-distribution, restructuring and re-utilisation of available discursive elements in order to progressively produce new meanings of domestic violence and circulate these in broader society through the media – and how this ongoing change has ultimately fed into long-term shifts in dominant meanings and produced a qualitative difference between the situations in 2002 and in 2013. Discourses will be of central importance in my study, as they re-present the world to us and also relate and orient us towards others in this world (Chouliaraki, 2008b, pp. 688-691; Foucault, 1969/1972, 1975/1977). Since the given period was also rich in rapid changes in the media environment – first commercial broadcasting and later a rapid spread of networked media – the mediation of discourses of domestic violence also needs to be explored from the point of view of historical change in the available set of media platforms and technologies, and the impact of these changes on discourse, perspectives and voices with regard to domestic violence.

In summary, my research brings together domestic violence as *discourse*, the

symbolic power of the media to influence our collective constructions of the social world – through their capacity to circulate discourses – including discourses on domestic violence – in societies (Couldry, 2003), and ultimately the *agency of media texts* in (emotionally, morally, or politically) engaging publics with public issues and with the suffering of victims of violence, and thereby contributing to societal change (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008a).

Based on the above, my research questions are the following:

1. (main question) What specific discourses did the portrayal of domestic violence in the Hungarian news media use, combine and/or challenge between 2002 and 2013?
2. (supplementary question 1) What forms of emotion and moral norms did the media discursively articulate with regard to the suffering of the victims of domestic violence during this period? And, related, how did the media discursively activate certain moral and emotional proposals for engagement with victims and perpetrators, and more generally when faced with the issue of domestic violence?
3. (supplementary question 2) What were the implications of the above-mentioned discourses for power inequalities and practices of social intervention?
4. (supplementary question 3) How might the historical changes in media ecology have also contributed to changing the discourses on domestic violence in the Hungarian media?

In order to answer these questions, in *Chapter 2* I interconnect three distinct but complementary theoretical perspectives in order to obtain an overall theoretical framework for investigating the issue of domestic violence in Hungary between 2002 and 2013. Specifically, I bring together: i) a Foucauldian understanding of domestic violence as *discourse*, combined with the concept of hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001); ii) the media as both a social institution and a symbolic space with *symbolic power* to impact our

perception of the social world (including that of domestic violence); and finally iii) the *agency of media texts* in emotionally, morally, or politically engaging publics with public issues and the suffering of others.

In *Chapter 3* I elaborate on the methodological framework of my research and specifically the choice of Faircloughian *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) and its application to media texts selected from the mainstream Hungarian *broadcast news media* (television), employed in a historically comparative *case study* research design. This chapter also aims to clarify the rationale behind my choice of cases, and their relation to the ever-changing media ecology that the genre of television news faced between 2002 and 2013 in Hungary. I also discuss here why historical analysis and television journalism still matter, despite today's general tendency in media studies to focus on the present and the latest technological innovations.

Chapters 4, 5 and *6* discuss my three cases, from 2002, 2010 and 2012-13 respectively. The case of 14-year-old Kitti Simek from 2002, discussed in *Chapter 4*, has a special importance in my narrative, since it was through this news story that the issue of domestic violence entered the Hungarian mediated public sphere, that it was named, and that it came to be represented as a special type of violence. This new act of naming indicated the emergence of a new discourse, although at that time the issue was mostly constructed with a focus on children as victims. Here my major argument is that, although the media portrayal of this case was suitable for raising public attention to the *existence* of domestic violence and constructing it as an issue of public concern, this did not hold true with regard to the *nature* of domestic violence. This case was mostly portrayed as unique and extraordinary and therefore the chance to present domestic violence as having high prevalence in societies was missed. Moreover, the gender aspect of violence was sidelined, and a discourse of gender-neutral victimhood emerged.

The 2010 case of Roland Damu, a Hungarian soap opera actor and television celebrity who raped and battered his ex-girlfriend, discussed in *Chapter 5*, became particularly relevant because it introduced a novel focus on adult women as typical victims, and thereby unambiguously gendered domestic violence in the public eye, while at the same time also powerfully introducing victim-blaming in media discussions of the issue. As I argue, this case, by giving prolonged and extensive coverage to a case of domestic

violence that involved a prevalent type of male violence against women, leading to the incarceration of the perpetrator, the Hungarian news media successfully raised attention to domestic violence both as gendered and as criminalised by Hungarian law. On the other hand, the public debate that this case provoked ultimately closed down possibilities for challenging patriarchal assumptions about domestic violence, including on issues of agency and victimhood, as well as the emotions associated with these.

My final case is that of politician József Balogh, from 2012-2013, discussed in *Chapter 6*, which explores how the discursive terrain around domestic violence had shifted by 2012-2013 so that this could develop into a fully-fledged political scandal and inflate public emotions around the issue. As I argue in this chapter, at stake in this case was the re-opening of a public and symbolic space where the boundaries of public morality in the face of domestic violence could be discussed, negotiated and affirmed, and the socially accepted expressions of public emotion with regard to domestic violence shaped and settled.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to reflecting on the empirical chapters and on how the results in these answer the research questions. Here I summarise my findings and also consider ways forward for future research.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In the following pages, I describe and interconnect three distinct but complementary theoretical perspectives in order to obtain an overall theoretical framework for investigating the issue of domestic violence in Hungary between 2002 and 2013. This framework aims to bring together: i) an understanding of domestic violence as *discourse* (without questioning the physical/carnal materiality of the violence); ii) the media as both a social institution and a symbolic space with *symbolic power* to influence our perception of the social world (including that of domestic violence); and finally, iii) the *agency of media texts* in emotionally, morally or politically engaging publics with public issues and the suffering of others (and thereby acting as facilitators of social change). This framework also introduces the basic conceptual vocabulary that I use in the following chapters.

Firstly, I approach domestic violence – in line with post-structuralist insights – as discursively constructed, that is inevitably relying on semiotic systems such as language and image in order to become at all meaningful or identifiable in the social world. Here I present domestic violence as a discursive object which, ever since it originally emerged in second-wave feminism in the UK and the US, has been repeatedly and inevitably exposed to attempted redefinition by hegemonic interventions. At the same time, after giving a brief overview of the literature on domestic violence, I argue that it is a prevalent form of gendered interpersonal, structural and symbolic violence, enabled by existing gender inequalities and also characteristically relegated to the domain of private matters. By pointing out that exclusion from the domain of public matters is constitutive of domestic violence, since the “private” nature of this type of violence is a widespread justification for social actors to abstain from intervention or from acknowledging the prevalence of the issue, I place it in strong connection with the private-public divide and thereby also with the matter of achieving public visibility.

Secondly, I identify the media as having a key role in shaping and circulating the social meanings of domestic violence in modern societies, through the symbolic power

they possess not only to reflect but to construct our perception of the social world, and also their institutional power to give publicity to – that is, to draw public attention to – certain issues, and thereby endow these with (various degrees of) public relevance. In so doing, I argue that the media are indispensable for reaching a change in the perception of domestic violence at a broader social level and effectively questioning what is considered “common sense” regarding this type of violence. Based on the legacy of the Arendtian concept of the public sphere (1958) as a space of appearance, I argue that it is in the mainstream media that the social meanings of domestic violence are most powerfully produced, in strong connection with the large amount of public attention concentrated there. Moreover, my analytical focus falls on news as the genre most indicative of what counts as of interest to society as a whole, and news has indeed played a crucial role in Hungary in bringing domestic violence to citizens' attention.

Thirdly, I bring together literature on the mediation of suffering and on the feminist study of media representations of domestic violence, in order to further develop my analytical framework with attention both to gender bias in texts and to the agency of these same texts in emotionally, morally or politically engaging publics with the actors involved in domestic violence. In this section, I maintain that, while previous feminist literature convincingly argues that the mainstream media tend to downplay the prevalence of domestic violence in society (by presenting it as rare and/or marginal), to deem newsworthy only less prevalent, “exceptional” cases, and to differentiate between female victims on the basis of their degree of conformity to the current social order and to patriarchal ideals of femininity, this literature tends overall to cast the media as an institution of social control and therefore pays less attention to cases where the media may act as a facilitator of social change. Theories of the mediation of suffering, meanwhile, are typically less focused on gendered types of violence (such as domestic violence), but have a well-developed theory to capture the agency of media texts in engaging their publics morally and emotionally with spectacles of human suffering, as well as their agency in offering paradigmatic forms of feeling, of public conduct, and proposed forms of action on human suffering.

By bringing these two theoretical lenses together and entwining them in a Foucauldian framework combined with an insight into the symbolic power of the media, I

hope ultimately to reach an overall theoretical viewpoint from which the Hungarian news media's portrayal of domestic violence can be analysed as a mediation of suffering where meaning-making claims regarding domestic violence are strongly intertwined with performative enactments of public emotions and with imagined moral and/or affective communities. This power of the news media to engage their publics morally and emotionally with human suffering and to set norms of acceptable public conduct vis-à-vis specific instances of domestic violence is a useful theoretical premise that makes it possible to link media texts to engaged publics and, through these engaged publics, to the potential for social action – thereby ultimately also acknowledging the capacity of the news media to facilitate social change with regard to domestic violence. This potential of the news media is of particular importance to the present study because it is seeking to grasp the role that the Hungarian news media played in shaping the understanding of domestic violence among a broader public over a period of 12 years. Specifically, the study seeks to capture a time period in Hungary when the issue of domestic violence reached the awareness of the media and of broader populations for the first time, entered the legislative system, generated changes in state policies, and also repeatedly provoked bottom-up public actions (such as petitions and demonstrations). In short, with a focus on domestic violence, this study sets out to analyse how, in a transitional period, the media and their narratives facilitated public awareness, encouraged collective action and participated in a broader process of social change.

2.2 Epistemological foundations: Domestic violence as a discursive construction

As a starting point, I take domestic violence as discursively constructed. This means that, while domestic violence has an irreducible dimension of bodily/emotional harm, it also inevitably relies on discourse in order to be at all thinkable or meaningful in the social world. Discursive constructed-ness here means acknowledging the fact that our perception of the social world is inevitably dependent on semiotic systems such as language and image, and it is these systems that control which elements of the continuum of reality (and in what combination) can become a meaningful unit. For example, in a case of domestic

violence, constructed-ness refers to the available social meanings that enable us, in the first place, to imagine: whether intimate partner relationships can be abusive; in which segments of society we tend to locate such relationships; what we think about the motivations and agency of people in these relationships; what assumptions we make about the prevalence of domestic violence in society, and even its possible causes or solutions. Acknowledging the discursive nature of domestic violence does not mean a denial of its material nature (that it causes physical and/or emotional suffering), neither does it turn domestic violence into an object of subjective judgement. Rather, this approach helps us to explain the contested nature and the relative fluidity of definitions of domestic violence and its cognate terms currently in use in the public sphere, in line with the epistemological models now widely accepted (including those of third-wave feminism).¹⁵ Moreover, this approach makes it

15 Naturally, third-wave feminism is by no means a unified category; it is better to speak instead of third-wave feminisms in the plural. At the same time, however, this wave is generally characterised by a suspicion of essentialising and universalising categories of thinking and, accordingly, a tendency to use epistemological models that fit with this suspicion, like those of postmodernism and post-structuralism, which offer themselves as natural allies of a sort in doing away with metaphysical assumptions inherited from the past, and has generally presumed the (discursive) constructed-ness of the social. The strong impact of post-structuralism on third-wave feminism can be illustrated by the fact that in the 1990s, that is the decade usually indicated as when third-wave feminism started, there was an intensive and years-long public discussion in the main academic forums of feminism about what potential contributions post-structuralism could make to feminism and how feminism could embrace this kind of thinking. Quite a number of leading feminist thinkers participated in this discussion, including Nancy Fraser, Judith Butler, Linda J. Nicholson and Seyla Benhabib. (On third-wave feminism, see Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006. On the above-mentioned public discussions in the 1990s, see Nicholson, 1990 and 1994. On other theorisations of the relationship between feminism and postmodern and post-structural thinking at the beginning of the 1990s, see Butler, 1990; Cornell 1992; Fraser & Bartky, 1992; Fraser & Nicholson, 1988; Hutcheon, 1989; Wicke & Ferguson, 1994. On the various stages of Western feminism, and what was mostly at stake in these, see Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006).

Generally speaking, these days the history of the feminist movement in the Western world is mostly told through the analytical category of “waves”. This history of “waves” inevitably includes (as does any historical periodisation) simplifications and generalisations, which I too inevitably make when briefly recalling here the most widely cited significant aspects of these waves, in order to better contextualise third-wave feminism. The three fundamental waves of Western feminism are today understood as : i) first-wave feminism, usually understood as lasting from the last decades of the 1800s to the early 1900s, and mostly narrated as focusing on gaining equal access and rights for women in fields where their social inequality was explicit (for example, their right to vote, rights to education or employment); ii) second-wave feminism, lasting from the late 1960s or early 1970s to the turn of the 1980s/1990s, and understood as having risen in the context of other leftist movements in Western societies (like the 1968 student protests in Europe, or the civil rights and black power movements in the US). As Kroløkke and Sørensen point out (2006, p. 9), many well known formulations associated with feminism (such as “sisterhood is powerful”, “consciousness raising”, or “the personal is political”) date back to this second wave. In contrast with the earlier wave, which was characteristically “white” and focused on legal rights, the second wave markedly embraced the voices of women of colour and third-world women, and had a distinct focus on “culture”. It questioned and challenged the dominant gendered “codes” with the help of which societies perceived and organised their own social reality (Melucci, 1996). It was during this wave too, when academic feminism began to flourish, that the issue of domestic violence emerged. iii) The third

possible to describe historically and locally changing constructions of domestic violence (including the frequent de-gendering of the concept) as a product of struggles between differing discourses for hegemony over the meaning of domestic violence.

The concept of domestic violence that I am using here is indebted to post-structuralism and more precisely to Michel Foucault. Post-structuralism inherited from structuralism (and from the Saussurian linguistic model that structuralism relied upon) their insights into the linguistic nature of reality, into the relation – understood as contingent – between signifier and signified, and into language as a system where the meaning of discreet elements is always dependent on their relative position within broader linguistic units such as the sentence (Saussure, 1916/1960). This epistemological model has been modified at two crucial points by post-structuralism (see Hall, 1997, pp. 15-63). Firstly, post-structuralism ceased to assume that there is a one monolithic signifying system that structures our experience, and instead assumed that several systems are in operation at the same time, changing historically and locally, but also potentially clashing or overlapping with each other. Secondly, and relatedly, post-structuralism no longer understood subjects as mere functions of a signifying system and fully determined by it, but instead saw them as determined by several signifying systems at the same time. This implies a space of negotiation and agency for subjects. In this space there is always a (limited) set of subject positions available, and human subjects can negotiate these or even strategically use one subject position against another (see Hall, 1997, esp. pp. 35, 42). Foucault called these signifying systems *discourses*.

Within this conception of language, Foucault's notion of discourse is a technology of power that produces knowledge through the historically and locally specific uses of language (statements) within specific contexts of use (1969/1972, 1975/1977). Discourse is, in this sense, a prerequisite of meaning-production. It is discourse that produces and defines the objects of our knowledge, by regulating what is thinkable, say-able, and in general meaningful (that is, what ways of talking are thinkable with regard to certain

wave, beginning in the 1990s (see also above), is often understood as closely connected with the playful, the construction of women as “assertive social agents”, and with an increased focus on domestic violence, on body-related social practices, and on the media see Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006, pp. 15-21); on self-assertive consumerism and “faux feminism”, see Gill (2007), McRobbie (2009); on the rise of an anti-feminist backlash, see Faludi (1991); for a brief account of all three “waves” of feminism, see Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006).

topics). It also restricts and excludes other potential forms of knowledge and ways of talking as unthinkable and/or devoid of meaning. Discourse, in this sense, is a technology of meaning-making that runs through social practices and institutions at a given time and in a given space, regulating the objects, subjects and practices of our knowledge (1969/1972, 1975/1977). As a consequence, according to Foucault, the unity of a discourse is not based on an object or topic in common. This unity is rather assured by the *space* in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed in accordance with certain *formative rules*, that is discursive regularities that govern ways and modes of object construction (Foucault, 1969/1972, pp. 32-33.).

Such rules of discourse, however, concern not only meaning-making, but, for Foucault, they are also about power as an immanent, constitutive and ineliminable “element” of the social, a multiplicity of force relations, a constantly changing application of tactics and strategies that organises social relationships and interactions. Every act of meaning-making is also a claim to power and a claim to truth (“truth effects”), and these claims are also in operation in the inevitably different ways in which subjects are addressed and positioned by discourse (see Foucault, 1976/1978, pp. 92-102; 1977/1980, pp. 131-133). Discourse, knowledge and power are therefore inevitably intertwined. The Foucauldian claim that “it is in discourse that [strategies of] power and [techniques of] knowledge are joined together” (1976/1978, p. 100) also implies that discourses can be neither “true” or “false” nor “accepted” or “excluded” as a whole, and neither can they be completely fixed. It is rather on the level of the multiplicity of discursive elements – that is in the way these are constantly re-distributed, restructured and re-utilised – that these strategies and techniques come into play (1976/1978, pp. 98-100). This approach to discourse is elaborated further in Laclau and Mouffe's theory, where they combine the work of Foucault with that of Derrida (and to some extent Lacan) in order to re-formulate the old Gramscian concept of *hegemony* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 93-148). They locate hegemony in the field of articulatory practices, that is practices that establish a relation among discursive elements so that their identity is modified as a result of these articulatory practices (p. 105). Hegemony, in their interpretation, is a temporary fixing of the meaning of discursive elements and, therefore, no hegemonic practice can emerge if a discursive field is free of rival meaning-making claims / forces (that is if meanings are fixed), or if

there is no instability in the “frontiers” that separate these forces (p. 136).

According to the post-structuralist legacy of Foucault (and of Laclau and Mouffe), domestic violence is discursive not only because a new discourse appeared at a certain point in history – in the present case, during the second wave of feminism at the beginning of the 1970s in the UK and the US, which made domestic violence one of its central objects and started to speak about it – but first of all because of the *how* of this speaking. Domestic violence, which previously had been treated either as a “private” family matter, or medicalised as “perverse” (that is categorised as sexual abuse), and even more often had merely gone unnoticed and unnamed, emerged as a meaningful unit in accordance with certain *formative rules* in second-wave feminism. Specifically, these determine that it qualifies as violence, and moreover as a gendered type of violence that is embedded in broader social structures of gender inequality (on gendered-ness and violence as the two crucial aspects of domestic violence that early second-wave feminist discourses sought to make explicit, see Boyle, 2005, p. xiii). These rules would not have been possible without the opening up of a new space for discursive formation (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 32), where surfaces that previously had not been in interaction – those of the family, gender equality and violence – could come into contact with each other. In retrospect it is possible to argue that domestic violence, as it emerged in second-wave feminism, did not fit with the received grand narratives of violence, according to which violence would gradually diminish in modern states, become criminalised, and would be mainly found on the edges of society where the deviant, the poor and other socially under-privileged groups would be its main users (see Walby 2012, pp. 96-97). In contrast to this received interpretation, domestic violence was described as part of everyday experience, prevalent in mainstream society, and moreover in one of the central institutions of the modern state, the family.

Consequently, the act of naming *domestic violence* as such was not a mere renaming of one slice of the social matrix, but an offer (and an invitation) to radically restructure our experience of the social, to see links between the family, gender equality and violence, and thereby to place each of these in a new light. Such an offer clashes with other discourses that structure relations between given surfaces completely differently (irrespective of whether these discourses already have any object comparable to domestic violence), and it opens up the space for hegemonic articulations and practices.

Understanding domestic violence in the context of discursive space, where, due to the simultaneous operation of several discourses, a constant re-distribution and re-structuring of discursive elements is *inevitably* taking place, is a useful explanatory framework for discussing the fluidity of definitions of domestic violence and the fact that domestic violence is highly debated today in the Western world, including in Hungary. I discuss both these phenomena more thoroughly in the following pages.

2.3 Domestic violence as a discursive battlefield: Feminist constructions and their counter-constructions

Domestic violence does not have a clear-cut definition. There is a relatively broad range of terms in use, which refer to roughly the same phenomenon, but with significant differences in their meaning (for example, “intimate partner violence”, “wife abuse”, “family violence”, “intimate terrorism” or “men's violence to known women”). This proliferation of terms is partly due to the nature of knowledge in the social sciences, where it inevitably goes through re-contextualisations and paradigm shifts which result in the revision of terminology (for example, the coinage of the term “men's violence to known women” in third-wave feminism would not have been possible without an earlier shift and broadening of focus from “wives” and “battering” to include non-married female partners and non-physical forms of violence). It may also be due to a feminist critical concern that finding a definition that will work for all situations and at all times is difficult, and that therefore the concept needs some strategic openness, flexibility and constant re-shaping. But, on the other hand, this proliferation is also a product of the fact that many rival meaning-making claims are made in connection with domestic violence in a multiplicity of discourses, including non-feminist and non-academic ones, and these discourses have no common ground for formative rules of object-construction. In fact, decisions about which term to use – and consequently how to construct the object that a given term refers to – is always the product of actual configurations of power between various discourses that are in operation in the construction of domestic violence at a given time and in a given space – and these discourses differ most over the issue of *gender* (on the importance of naming, see

Krizsán & Popa, 2014; Lamb, 1991; Lamb & Keon, 1995; Verloo, 2007). Indeed, ever since domestic violence emerged as a discursive object in the early 1970s and became a subject of public discussion, it has been constantly exposed to attempts at hegemonic intervention by discourses that question the feminist frames of domestic violence, and most importantly its status as violence and its gendered nature.

Overall, discourses that operate in the construction of the meaning of domestic violence in specific contexts – and which altogether make up the *order of discourse* on domestic violence (see Foucault, 1971/1981) – can be very diverse.¹⁶ Of these, feminist discourses, despite their differing definitions of domestic violence, all construct it as *gendered* and as a type of *violence* (moreover, a type of violence that should be understood in the context of patriarchal social arrangements), thereby providing a high degree of consistency in the formative rules that guide their object construction. It is the questioning of either of these formative rules that qualifies other discourses, operating in roughly the same discursive space, as *resistant* or *opposing* forces to the feminist discourse. These opposing discourses – subsumed under the umbrella term of “patriarchal resistance” by Nancy Berns (2001, p. 262) – do not necessarily have a commonly shared and distinct set of rules of their own (that is, they do not form a unitary discourse), but are brought together through their resistance/opposition to the feminist constructions of domestic violence and their formative rules.¹⁷

16 Although the term “domestic violence”, which I am using here does not invite attention to the gendered nature of the violence it denotes, my choice of this term and not another is based on several facts: 1. “domestic violence” is used by both feminist and non-feminist discourses and is therefore more able to shed light on how the social meaning of this type of violence is always shaped by a multiplicity of discourses; 2. English-language academic publications written from a feminist perspective on domestic violence in Hungary have similarly chosen this term as the English equivalent of the Hungarian *családon belüli erőszak* (“violence in the family”); 3. as Jeff Hearn has noted, this is the term most often used throughout the world (1998, p. 28).

17 I should, first of all, mention the so-called “family violence approach”, which, ever since domestic violence emerged as a concept in the 1970s, has continued to serve as the main gender-neutral framework for approaching the issue. Social scientists working within this framework – most notably Richard Gelles, Murray Straus and Suzanne Steinmetz, to name the most widely cited authors – tend to locate the roots of the problem in the particular family and its pathological coping behaviours, thereby identifying the issue as a family-level problem, to some extent further enabled by society’s leniency towards violence in general. Therefore, these authors ignore precisely that component of the issue – (gendered) power inequalities – to which feminist approaches, including the present thesis, assign central relevance, by identifying this as the structural condition for the abuse (for a brief overview and comparison of these two approaches – i.e. the family violence approach, and the feminist approach – including their differences in naming violence, identifying its root causes, suggested interventions and even controversy over measurement tools, see Kurz, 1989).

On the other hand, even beyond these two opposing social scientific discourses, “patriarchal

In line with feminist understandings, I take domestic violence as gendered and as a form of interpersonal, symbolic and structural violence. Domestic violence is symbolic in the sense that it both exploits and reproduces the “naturalisation” function of hegemonic discourses, that is their ability to legitimate and naturalise the status quo. Specifically, domestic violence is one of the many everyday social practices – although a relatively visible one by now – that (in historically and locally changing ways) reproduce and naturalise gender inequality, normative gender roles and heterosexual male supremacy (Hearn, 2012, p. 162), so that these appear to be a kind of “second nature” (Bourdieu, 1998/2001; Butler, 1990). Although they too are originally discursive in nature, we do not perceive them as discursive because they are historically well-rooted and objectified in various forms of social institutions, habits and traditions – such as the patriarchal family – which altogether make them appear “natural”, “common-sensical” and “reasonable” (Bourdieu 1979/1984, 1998/2001). To put it more clearly, in the case of domestic violence there is a complex network of hidden assumptions about the “normal” and “natural” way of things in society (such as, for example, what “real” families, men and women should look like) that ultimately enable domestic violence to pass as an *accepted* and (until recently, mostly) *unnoticed* form of exercising patriarchal/masculine control over known women (Carter 1995). Domestic violence reproduces patriarchal social arrangements and also diverts attention from both victims' suffering and the fact that what we perceive as not being violence (that is, as a “legitimate” form of exercising control over fellow human beings) is already filtered by tacit assumptions about, as Hearn formulated it, “who is

resistance” to feminist constructions of domestic violence have also been repeatedly noted by feminist literature on less explicit and more subtle discursive levels since the early 2000s. Resistance of this kind has been documented across a range of countries and public discourses, such as the media, public policies, psychiatric and judicial discourses, and even volunteer services helping battered women (see e.g. Berns, 2001 from the US; Nixon & Tutty, 2009 from Canada; Eastal, Holland & Judd 2015, from Australia; Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010 from the UK; Krizsán & Popa, 2014 from Eastern Europe; Hearn, Strid, Husu & Verloo, 2016 from the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, to name just a few). These studies have pointed out the subtle and repeated *de-gendering* of domestic violence in these counter-constructions, but have also revealed various other recurrent strategies by which the status of domestic violence *as violence* can be questioned and/or blurred. These include the obfuscation of perpetrators' responsibility or the concealment of their violence (Phillips & Henderson, 1999; Coates & Wade, 2007), the diversion of attention from perpetrators' responsibility to that of victims (Berns 2001; Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010; Eastal et al., 2015) and the concealing of victims' resistance or blaming and pathologising of victims (Coates & Wade, 2007; Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010), to name just some typical examples. The absence from discourse of men as perpetrators, combined with the visibility of women as victims, can also be considered as typical (Phillips & Henderson, 1999). I discuss the media-related findings later in more detail.

allowed to do what to whom” (1998, p. 15).

Furthermore, domestic violence is also *structural* in the sense that, despite occurring between individuals, it is rooted in well-established structures of domination and inequalities of power at a broader social level (Galtung, 1969). First of all, there is that of historically far-reaching heterosexual male supremacy (hooks, 1984), but this also intersects with a complex range of other power inequalities like those based on race, ethnicity, class, religion or even age (Crenshaw, 1994; Gill & Mason-Bish, 2013). In general, what counts as violence – that is, why certain types of violence get noticed and condemned, while others pass unnoticed and/or accepted – is strongly linked to broader social structures of domination, and therefore violence is also a form of social inequality (Hearn, 1998, p. 15). Moreover, whether a certain type of violence is acknowledged as violence in a given society largely shapes the possible courses of action that victims can follow when seeking help and support or in attempting to resist. It may also impact the ways in which perpetrators, including perpetrators of domestic violence, abuse (Stark, 2007, pp. 172-196). Therefore, forms of domestic violence are typically historically, locally and culturally varied and generally context-specific (Hearn, 1998, pp. 31-32).

Nonetheless, as feminist literature has repeatedly pointed out, of the many existing social inequalities that may show up in intimate relationships, it is most commonly gender inequality that perpetrators of domestic violence take advantage of, given that these relationships are typically built on practices that are guided by gender norms. Domestic violence is *enabled* by existing gendered social inequalities, and is also an instance of their *enactment* (Stark, 2007). It is one of the many ways in which male superordinate power – which was once taken as representing the “natural” way of things, but over recent decades has been powerfully questioned in many societies – can be established and re-established in private relationships at the expense of women's agency, and women's social gains in general (see e.g. Hearn et al. 2016, p. 553; Stark, 2007). In other words, domestic violence is an abuse of power that both capitalises on existing gendered power inequalities in societies and also seeks to cement – or even to increase – these in the context of private relationships in order to maximise perpetrators' personal gains from these relationships. Since domestic violence primarily targets women, it also qualifies as a type of gender-

based violence.¹⁸

Over recent decades, in feminist literature, domestic violence has been increasingly grasped in terms of a *calculated, instrumental, ongoing* and *cumulative* abuse of power and control in relationships (see e.g. Hearn, 1998; Johnson, 1995; Stark, 2007). This contrasts with early feminist understandings, which, by focusing on battering, unwittingly contributed to an understanding of the issue in line with the general connotations of the term “violence”, that is as episodes of use of physical force (see. e.g. Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1976).¹⁹ As Stark points out, domestic violence can best be understood as a type of political crime, and more specifically as an offence to liberty. It attacks and severely restricts the victim's agency by depriving victims of rights and resources that are “critical to personhood and citizenship”, and its consequences for victims are similar to experiences of entrapment, kidnapping or imprisonment (2007, pp. 5, 15, 204). Control tactics and oppressive strategies can vary greatly and range from seemingly minor verbal attacks and public put-downs (often resulting in the victim's isolation from friends, family or workmates), through claims to full control over the victim's daily life (such as their daily schedule, budget, social life or personal care), to explicit threats and intimidation, where battering is only one (not necessarily present) element of the entire spectrum of abuse.

18 Gender-based violence, similarly to domestic violence, has been mostly “discovered” by second-wave feminism and its content is still constantly being re-shaped (for a discussion of alternative terms for gender-based violence, such as “gender violence”, “gendered violence”, “violence against women”, “anti-women violence”, “male violence against women” or “sexist violence”, see Kurz, 1997; Meyers, 1997, pp. 6-8). The term *gender-based violence*, which is now widely used by both international human rights organisations and EU institutions, has replaced the previously more accepted “violence against women” (for a detailed discussion of how gender-based violence came to be considered among the violations of human rights at international level, see Engle, 2006), and the two terms are still often used interchangeably to denote types of violence where victims are targeted because of their gender – or, in other words, because they belong (or are thought to belong) to a certain social group specified on the basis of their gender – with the vast majority of victims being underprivileged on the basis of gender, that is women and non-heterosexuals. Following from this definition, gender-based violence is often understood to bear many similarities with *hate crimes* (for a discussion of “gender-biased violence”, “gender-bias hate crime” and their embeddedness in the US discourse on hate crime, see Angelari 1994; McPhail, 2003; for a detailed discussion of the conceptual difference between gender-based violence and hate crimes, and their UK legislative framework, see Gill & Mason-Bish, 2013). Currently, gender-based violence is an umbrella term that encompasses quite a variety of types of violence, often overlapping, and ranging from physical violence (such as femicide or wife battering) through sexual or economic types to ostensibly “lighter” kinds of violence that mainly operate on an emotional level (but later may evolve into more severe types of violence) such as stalking or online harassment.

19 For a general survey of perspectives on and theorisations of domestic violence and its cognate terms in the 1970s and 1980s, see Kurz, 1989; on the textual boom on domestic violence and its cognate terms from the 1990s onwards, plus the main directions of this literature, see Bell & Naugle, 2008; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Kurz, 1997.

These tactics and strategies, however, as Spark reminds us, are typically built on practices that are guided by gender norms in relationships, and that operate through “gender-specific infringements of adult autonomy that have no counterpart in public life and are currently invisible to the law” (p. 15). Since this complex network of interconnections between violence and gender, as Spark has noted, goes mostly unnoticed and undiscussed in the public sphere (which is, we should add, one more enabling factor for domestic violence), feminist discourses aim at crossing the private-public divide, and uncovering domestic violence for the public.

So far I have discussed domestic violence as discursively constructed, that is as inevitably relying on semiotic systems such as language and image in order to become meaningful and identifiable in the social world. I have argued that domestic violence, ever since it was first conceptualised by second-wave feminism in the UK and the US, has been repeatedly and inevitably exposed to attempts at redefinition through hegemonic interventions. Following Berns (2001), I have subsumed discourses resistant or opposed to the feminist constructions of domestic violence under the umbrella term “patriarchal resistance”, and pointed out that domestic violence is typically shaped by several discourses simultaneously, depending on its locally and historically specific contexts. I have also argued that domestic violence is a prevalent form of gendered interpersonal, structural and symbolic violence, enabled by existing gender inequalities (and discourses that present the former as natural), and that, moreover, it is typically relegated to the domain of private matters, which is an additional enabling factor for violence and also a reason for the issue to remain unnoticed and/or undiscussed in the public sphere. I have therefore concluded that, in order to reach a change in the social perception of the issue, domestic violence needs to be brought to public attention. The next section is dedicated to elaborating the issue of public attention, by pointing out the crucial role that the media (especially the mainstream media) inevitably play in this process in modern societies.

2.4 Why do the (mainstream) media matter? Achieving publicity and symbolic power through mediation

In this section I discuss, following Arendt's legacy, the importance of *publicity* (i.e. public attention) to domestic violence. Moreover, given that publicity in modern societies is typically obtained through the mediated public sphere – that is the mass media and, since the spread of internet platforms in the mid-2000s, interactive and networked media – I also discuss domestic violence in the context of *mediation*, a concept denoting the broader social impact of the media in general (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Livingstone, 2009) and their *symbolic power* to construct our perception of the social world (Couldry, 2003). I further discuss why the mainstream media, where the greatest amount of publicity can be achieved, are crucial to feminist constructions of domestic violence. The typical ways in which the mainstream media and news journalism shape and frame discourses on domestic violence specifically will also be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Domestic violence, since it is a type of violence that has long been unnamed, ignored and relegated to the domain of private matters, first of all requires *publicity* (i.e. public attention) in order to achieve a change in the social perception of the issue. Ultimately, bringing domestic violence to public attention is a fundamental condition not only of raising social awareness around the issue, but also of enabling citizens to develop any moral, political or emotional engagement or attitude towards the issue of domestic violence. Any normative questions regarding whether domestic violence is represented in the “right” way to a broader public (that is, in accordance with feminist insights) or investigations into the social implications of these representations presuppose that domestic violence has already achieved publicity.

In modern societies, publicity is typically obtained through the mediated public sphere. Although the concept of the *public sphere* in media studies is typically traced back to the Habermasian understanding of the concept (1962/1989), which has become highly popular in media studies since the early 2000s (see Lunt & Livingstone 2013), here I am reaching back to one of its older definitions by Hannah Arendt (1958).²⁰ Specifically, Arendt – in contrast to the Habermasian understanding, which prioritises the ideas of

20 Habermas originally understood the public sphere in terms of an abstract and unitary space where public opinion is formed through citizens' widespread and egalitarian participation in rational discussion and debate about matters of public concern. This concept has been extensively criticised on various grounds, including its false assumptions of a unitary public sphere, of citizens' egalitarian and widespread access, and of rational discussion being the key feature of this sphere (for critiques see e.g. Fraser, 1990; Benhabib, 1992).

participation and social consensus on the common good – focuses more on competition for social recognition and the fundamental exposure of the “public sphere” to *publicity* (that is, to public attention). It therefore fits better the perspective of the present study, since it reflects the challenges typically facing attempts to bring feminist issues to public attention and give them access to the public agenda. However, as Benhabib has pointed out (1992, pp. 74-81), Arendt's original concept is difficult to apply to modern societies in its entirety and therefore needs some re-elaboration.

Arendt uses a twofold, self-contradictory model. On the one hand, she understands the sphere of publicity as an agonistic space where greatness is achieved and displayed through being seen and/or heard by unspecified others, that is spectators, and submitted to their judgement (a model Benhabib equated to the modern experience of politics). On the other hand she understands it as an associational sphere (modelled after the experience of the Greek polis and strongly contradicting the nature of the public sphere in modern societies), where citizens act in concert, coordinating their actions through speech and persuasion.²¹ The Arendtian model, however, has recently been further developed and refined by Adut (2012), who reaches back only to the agonistic part of the Arendtian concept and enriches it with a recognition of the multiplicity of public arenas and the distinction between publicity (i.e. public attention) and publicness (i.e. the mere being in a public space). He basically defines the public sphere as a general term denoting all (virtual or real) spaces that are fundamentally subject to spectatorship, which is understood in terms of the asymmetry “between the few who receive attention and the numerous who give it” (2012, p. 241). In Adut's approach, the public sphere is a dynamic sphere consisting of many public arenas and spaces receiving public attention to varying degrees, and where players are basically competing with each other for (scarcely available) public attention, which they may in turn use for either political ends (such as, for example, the social recognition of an issue or a movement, or the defamation of an adversary by a scandal) or non-political ends (for example, fame for celebrities).

Following on from Arendt and Adut, it is in the mediated public sphere that publicity for domestic violence can be sought and eventually achieved, and thereby social

21 For an alternative understanding of the applicability of the Arendtian concept to modern politics see Silverstone, 2007, pp. 29-34.

awareness raised around the issue (the achievement of publicity is not automatic, since publicness – that is the mere state of being in the public sphere – does not in itself automatically secure publicity. Moreover, publicity can significantly differ in its extent, see Adut, 2012, p. 244). Therefore, since publicity is disproportionately distributed in the mediated public sphere, certain segments of this sphere are more important than others in terms of their publicity-generating value. In this respect, publicity is also a prerequisite for the *symbolic power* of the media. Symbolic power is here the particular power of the media to construct, and not only reflect, our perception of the social world (Couldry, 2003, p. 5), a phenomenon widely theorised today in the context of *mediation*, that is the broader social impact of the media in general through their omnipresent and multidirectional influence on our everyday lives (Couldry & Hepp 2013; Livingstone 2009). Since publicness does not in itself automatically generate publicity, and since symbolic power cannot be reached without it, social reality is more powerfully produced in those segments of the mediated public sphere where a large amount of publicity is available.

On the other hand, this capacity of the media to endow certain – strictly selected and regulated – discourses with strong symbolic power, and thereby to make them the “taken-for-granted, natural-looking frameworks” for understanding the social (Couldry, 2003, p.1), can be re-formulated as the power of the media to endow certain discourses with a hegemonic position (and, thereby to activate their naturalising function), while excluding, marginalising or silencing other discourses. In this respect, the more central segments of the mediated public sphere, where the largest amount of publicity is concentrated – usually referred to as the mainstream media – typically strictly regulate and filter the discourses, perspectives and voices to which they grant access. Specifically, elements of counter-discourses that go against already established and therefore more powerful ways in which social reality is perceived, and that thereby give an oppositional interpretation of social reality – for example, feminist constructions of domestic violence – typically face *discursive resistance*.²² Although the feminist movement has made

22 Feminist discourses, with regard to their oppositional character in the face of more established understandings of the social world, are similar to “new social movements” (Melucci, 1996, pp. 8-9, 97-106). In Melucci’s understanding, new social movements are “new” because they characteristically differ from their predecessors, that is social movements that emerged before the second half of the 20th century in Western countries. New social movements have a specific focus on culture: they typically challenge and aim to upset the dominant “codes” of societies that structure the ways in which they perceive and

considerable progress in this area since second-wave feminism emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s, feminist and women's issues – including domestic violence – still often face difficulties in this area in terms of discursive resistance and access to the main channels of publicity (on the so-called "feminisation" of the mass media in Anglo-American countries since the 1990s and its complex and often conflicting relationship with feminism, see Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; on the mainstream–alternative media spectrum, see Rauch, 2016).

Hence, what ultimately becomes part of the mainstream media agenda and the way it is discursively constructed is both a result of discursive struggles and a reflection of existing social inequalities. It is, nonetheless, precisely the disproportionate distribution of publicity in the mediated public sphere, as discussed earlier, that largely explains why the mainstream media – despite their general tendency to resist oppositional interpretations of social reality – are indispensable for emerging social movements like feminism (see della Porta, 2013). The mainstream media form the segment of the mediated public sphere where, in strong connection with the large amount of publicity concentrated there, social reality is most powerfully "produced". Accordingly, the mainstream media are of essential importance to the issue of domestic violence and to achieving a change in the social perception of violence. Therefore, in the present study I focus on the portrayal of domestic violence in the mainstream media – and more specifically in the mainstream news media, because it was through the news that the issue of domestic violence originally entered the Hungarian media, and also because it is still primarily through their consumption of this media genre that people make sense of the world around them (an aspect I discuss in more detail in the next chapter).

In this section I have discussed the role of the media in shaping and circulating the social meanings of domestic violence in modern societies through the symbolic power they possess to construct, not only to reflect, our perception of the social world, and also through their institutional power to give publicity to – that is to draw public attention to – certain issues, and thereby to endow these with (varying degrees of) public relevance. Drawing on the legacy of the Arendtian concept of the public sphere as a space of appearance, I have argued that it is in the mainstream media that the social meanings of

organise their own social reality (1996, p. 8-9), a definition that also well describes second- and third-wave feminism. Melucci defines movements as "hidden networks of groups, meeting points, and circuits of solidarity which differ profoundly from the image of the politically organized actor" (p. 115).

domestic violence are most powerfully produced, in strong connection with the large amount of publicity (i.e. public attention) concentrated there. Moreover, I have restricted my analytical focus to (mainstream) news, since this genre played a central role in Hungary in bringing domestic violence to citizens' attention. In the next section I briefly summarise the findings of feminist literature with regard to the most typical ways in which domestic violence is shaped and framed by the media, especially by news discourse. In this sense, the next section is also strongly connected to the issue of media, publicity and symbolic power. On the other hand, at the end of the next section, and while not questioning the merits of this feminist literature, I also identify some theoretical gaps that prevent this literature from thinking of the media as potential facilitators of social change. The task of filling these gaps falls into my very last section, where, with the help of theories of mediated suffering and mediated emotions, I further develop my analytical framework so that in the end it become attentive both to gender bias in texts and to the agency of these same texts in emotionally, morally or politically engaging publics with the actors involved in domestic violence.

2.5 Domestic violence in the mainstream (news) media: Existing literature and its limitations

Since the 1970s, Anglo-American feminist media criticism has produced a large body of literature focusing on the mainstream media, with special attention paid to the news genre. It has repeatedly diagnosed and documented a masculine-biased culture in newsrooms, where news selection, hierarchisation and production are routinely carried out according to the value preferences and norms of heterosexual white men, as well as a persistent tendency of the mainstream media to employ and activate negative stereotypes of women (see e.g. Carter, Branston & Allan, 1998; Carter & Steiner, 2004; Carter & Weaver, 2003; Ceulemans & Fauconnier, 1979; Chambers, Steiner & Fleming, 2004; Gallagher, 1979, 1981; North, 2014; Ross & Byerly, 2006; Ross & Carter, 2011; Tuchman, Kaplan & Benet, 1978). Feminist studies of the media portrayal of domestic violence – a separate research line within the above field, flourishing especially since the 1990s and still Anglo-Saxon-

dominated – have similarly found persistent gender bias in media texts, and repeatedly pointed out that these reinforce gender inequality and a culture of violence (see e.g. Berns 1999, 2001, 2004; Boyle 2005, pp. 84-93; Braber, 2015; Bullock, 2007; Carll, 2003; Carter, 1998; Gillespie, Richards, Givens & Smith, 2013, Meyers, 1994, 1997; Nettleton, 2011; Sunindyo, 2004; Zeynep, 2006). The main findings of this research line, as I elaborate below, show how in the mainstream news discourse domestic violence is repeatedly subject to patriarchal discursive resistance. Portrayals tend to downplay male violence and its pervasiveness in societies, and instead to shift responsibility either onto victims or onto social groups whose violence is traditionally both less accepted and at the same time more marked. This links back to the work of Hearn, referenced earlier, according to which social perceptions of what counts as violence are strongly linked to broader social structures of domination (1998, p. 15).

More specifically, the findings of feminist literature can be summarised as follows. The media tend to portray domestic violence as *rare* and/or *marginal*, and to hide its deep embeddedness in mainstream society (see e.g. Meyers 1997, pp. 66-67). In-depth explorations of its social context are generally rare, while the high prevalence of the issue in societies tends to be ignored, and instead potential causes and solutions are either sought on an individual level (that is, on the victim's or the couple's side) or “outsourced” to socially marginalised groups (see e.g. Berns, 2004; Boyle, 2005, pp. 85-86; Meyers, 1997, pp. 29-34). Similarly, the media disregard the scale that connects “normal” people to perpetrators and – in order to keep domestic violence at a distance from mainstream society – to portray perpetrators and/or victims as profoundly different (e.g. victims as weak and helpless, and perpetrators as “insane monsters”). Accordingly, domestic violence also tends to be portrayed as *exceptional*, and is often presented in a sensationalist style (e.g. Meyers, 1994, p. 48; Carter, 1998). The more prevalent types of domestic violence typically remain only sporadically represented, while other less frequent types, for example cases ending in murder, receive a disproportionate amount of attention (e.g. Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-85, 91; Carter, 1998). The media tend to *differentiate* between female victims on the basis of their social standing (e.g. ethnicity, race, class or marital status) as well as of their conformity to patriarchal ideals of femininity, with low-status and/or less conforming victims receiving less empathy (e.g. Boyle, 2005, p. 92; Meyers, 1997, pp. 52-71;). In general, there is a

strong tendency to *shift responsibility* from perpetrators to victims, by minimising perpetrators' responsibility and agency (e.g. claiming that they acted under the influence of alcohol or out of jealousy or dissatisfaction with how victims were fulfilling their feminine role – such as taking care of housework or children) (e.g. Boyle, 2005; Lamb & Keon, 1995; Meyers, 1997; Nettleton, 2011). Victims are often not treated with respect, and thus often fall prey to secondary victimisation in the media.

The above findings are generally very convincing in pointing out how patriarchal resistance typically plays out in media texts in the case of domestic violence, and how this contributes to reproducing gendered social inequalities and a culture of violence. However, there are still some questions that this literature never or only occasionally addresses. These are in general related to the link between media texts, publics and social action. That is, although domestic violence is mostly represented in accordance with patriarchal norms in the mainstream news media across countries, Western history shows that from time to time domestic violence has been capable of generating massive public outcry, engaging broader publics with the issue, and in some cases even led to public action against violence (as happened in Hungary in 2002 and 2013), while other cases have divided a whole nation (e.g. the O J Simpson case). This agency of media texts, that is the ways in which they are capable of engaging publics with issues, inflating emotions, establishing (or breaking) social solidarities, building (or denying) a sense of belonging, and ultimately, through engaged publics, even of leading to social and political action, is, I suggest, under-theorised in existing feminist literature on the media portrayal of domestic violence. Therefore, in order to capture this agency of media texts, in the following pages I re-conceptualise the news media's portrayal of domestic violence in the context of theories of mediated suffering.

2.6 Engaging the public: The news media as agents of social change

The news media portrayal of domestic violence can be grasped theoretically as *mediated suffering*, that is suffering that is subjected to the politics of pity, a term originally coined by Boltanski (1999, pp. 11-12; see also Chouliaraki, 2006). The politics of pity refers to

that activity of the media with which they try to establish a kind of “sense of proximity” between the spectator and the distant sufferer in order to engage the spectator morally and emotionally in the suffering on the screen. “Pity” is a technical term here and does not necessarily imply that the actual emotion that is activated indeed has to be pity. Rather, it generally refers to the mediated nature of moral and emotional engagement on the spectator's part. Consequently, this kind of engagement (if achieved at all) is always and inevitably constructed: it is not a “natural” human reaction to suffering, but a historically and locally specific way of relating the spectator to the sufferer, which is regulated and controlled by the media discourse.

Theorising domestic violence as mediated suffering makes it possible to investigate the concrete ways and modes in which pity is activated: the ways in which mediation constructs the sufferer and the suffering, produces paradigmatic forms of emotion, ethical sensibilities and/or norms of acceptable public conduct with regard to on-screen suffering, or even paradigmatic forms of action against suffering. Moreover, narratives about domestic violence, instead of portraying exclusively the victims,²³ usually bring sufferers together with perpetrators and (if there are any) with benefactors, with notable differences in the activated affective regimes around these actors (this is the case even if the media portrayal of domestic violence, as discussed earlier, is often subject to shifts of responsibility from perpetrator to victim, and accordingly also shifts in the emotions associated with victimhood). Mediated moral and emotional engagement with perpetrators and with benefactors is in this respect also of importance, since it is part of the mediated regulation of affective regimes, ethical sensibilities and/or the activation of moral norms in the face of domestic violence. Ultimately, the ways in which the media discursively

23 When I use the term “victim”, I am employing the terminology of theories of mediated suffering to refer to people who are exposed to violence (or who have been exposed to it at an earlier stage of their lives). At the same time, I am aware that this term is highly controversial and loaded with additional – and usually negative – meanings in a range of Anglo-American public discourses, both feminist and non-feminist, that discuss violence. Accordingly, since the 1990s this term has been increasingly replaced by “survivor”, in order to invoke a more desirable subjectivity. As has been noted in previous literature, “victim” is usually associated with passivity, lack of agency and silence, whereas “survivor” can encompass a more heroic, active, empowered mode of living with a (past) experience of violence and is often even strongly associated with the act of “speaking up” and/or reaching out to others with similar experiences (see Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Naples, 2003; Orgad, 2009). As the replacement of “victim” with “survivor” would imply a break with the established terminology of theories of mediated suffering, moreover, since this specific dichotomy between the two terms is – as of 2018 – mostly unheard of in Hungary, I have kept the term “victim”.

construct distant sufferers, perpetrators (and occasionally benefactors) and engage (or disengage) spectators with them is also a form of mediated (global or local) citizenship. This kind of discursively constructed engagement typically appeals to shared (moral, social and/or cultural) values and imagined communities, and thereby establishes (or breaks down) any sense of belonging to larger communities of people, while at the same time excluding others as outsiders.

The idea that the media are capable of constructing *emotionally* engaged publics, and that emotional engagement would also be of central importance to political and civic agency is relatively new in both media and political studies. As Dahlgren has pointed out, the political and civic engagement of the media has traditionally been understood as devoid of any affective or passionate component, i.e. as a merely cognitive and rational type of attachment to public issues (2009, p. 83). In contrast to these traditional understandings – which in general postulate that emotions would be the antonyms of reason and rationality, and would necessarily have a distorting or corrupting role in the public sphere (see Hall, 2005) – emotions have been subject to significant re-evaluation in a number of disciplines, including media studies, and emotions, political sense-making and citizenship are now increasingly conceptualised as closely interconnected (Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 80-101). For example, today it is widely acknowledged that shared emotions play a crucial part in forming collective identities (such as nations) and are capable of forming or breaking social solidarities (see e.g. Ahmed, 2004; Anderson, 1991), or that they are necessary to any collective action (Flam & King, 2005; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001; Melucci, 1996). Similarly, over the last decade steadily increasing attention has been paid to the interconnections of the moral and emotional components of mediation, especially because of the spread of media research on humanitarian discourse and its power to engage “people's potential to care” (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008a, 2010, 2015).

While this “emancipation” of emotions in contemporary critical thinking is generally connected to the advent of the “Affective Turn” in social and cultural sciences in the 2000s (for an overview of this, see Geysler, 2012), in media studies it has also been provoked by an earlier development, that of the emotionalisation of the mass media in Western societies that took place roughly around the early 1990s. The emotionalisation of the mass media brought such phenomena as infotainment, tabloidisation and therapy

culture, which together have made emotional expression more central to Western mediated public spheres (see Pantti, 2011; Pantti & van Zoonen, 2006). The Affective Turn offered a rich vocabulary for thinking about emotions (and cognate concepts such as affects, feelings or sentiments) that media scholars could pick up and even enrich further. Accordingly, today the mediated public sphere is increasingly thought of as also being an “emotional public sphere” (Lunt & Stenner, 2005), that is a place where emotions are selected, constructed, managed and displayed publicly and often intertwined with political issues (see e.g. Rottenberg, 2018), as well as a space of “affective economies”, i.e. where emotions are empowered and accumulated through the circulation of texts (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 45-46; Kuntsman, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015). Even news journalism, a media genre traditionally seen as based on objectivity as a key professional value (see e.g. Tuchman, 1972; Gans, 1984), is nowadays increasingly also captured in affective terms, e.g. by emphasising its potential to “bear witness” to tragic events (Rentschler, 2009, p. 159; Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 305), to “socialise” the public in the proper expression of emotion with regard to certain events, and thereby to establish emotional citizenship (Pantti, 2011; Pantti & van Zoonen, 2006), or by grasping the “affective labour” of news journalism (Rentschler, 2009; on affective labour in general, see Hochschild, 1983).

To date, the power of the news media to engage publics morally and/or emotionally with spectacles of human suffering, and thereby to set norms of public conduct/feeling and establish social solidarities, has rarely been explored in cases of domestic violence (for some notable exceptions, see e.g. Bierria, 2010; Kuhl, 1997; Silberstein, 2003). Instead, media scholars have mostly studied natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes or famines (see e.g. Brown & Minty, 2008; Pantti & Tikka, 2014), man-made disasters such as rail crashes, cinema fires, or mass fatalities in football stadiums (see e.g. Pantti, 2011; Walter, 1991), violent deaths of politicians or other public figures (see e.g. Pantti & van Zoonen, 2006; Sumiala-Seppänen & Stocchetti, 2005, 2007), or reporting from war zones. The under-representation of domestic violence cases in these studies can be partly explained by the fact that domestic violence, with the exception of some high-profile cases, rarely makes the headlines (Boyle, 2005; Carter et al., 1998; Meyers, 1995, 1997) and therefore is rarely followed by a massive public reaction that would be thought worth exploring. Nonetheless, over recent decades, Western news journalism has witnessed some

domestic violence cases that provoked considerable public attention, inflamed emotions in broader society, triggered intensive public discussion, and some even brought citizens onto the streets. These cases, by achieving considerable and prolonged publicity, and consequently also considerable symbolic power in the social construction of domestic violence, typically offered a semiotically rich symbolic public space where meaning-making claims and appeals to moral norms and moral communities could be made, and where acceptable forms of public conduct and public emotional expression could be explored, negotiated and established in the face of domestic violence.

In the following chapters I analyse three cases of domestic violence in Hungary between 2002 and 2013, which, similarly to the above-mentioned cases, achieved outstandingly high media coverage and provoked massive public reaction. Since I am interested in media platforms and genres that have the most symbolic power to “produce” reality for spectators, I focus on mainstream television news journalism. It is to this segment of the mediated public sphere that traditionally a large amount of public attention is directed. As I explain in the next chapter, I have carried out an in-depth textual analysis of media texts with the help of Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a particular version of CDA that matches my specific interest in discursive changes in media texts and the ways in which these feed into long-term shifts in orders of discourse. I have analysed what these media texts “did” in the Hungarian mediated public sphere: that is, how they discursively constructed and activated social meanings, forms of emotion, moral norms and/or social solidarities with regard to domestic violence. Faircloughian CDA combined with a case study research design has also allowed me to locate these performative actions of media texts within the ever-changing media ecology of the Hungarian public sphere, and to explore in depth the social and media-related contexts of my selected domestic violence cases.

3. Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis, Historically Comparative Case Studies and Television News

In order to capture the role that the news media played in constructing domestic violence for the broader Hungarian public between 2002 and 2013, I analyse the portrayal of three data-rich domestic violence cases through media texts selected from the mainstream Hungarian broadcast news media (television), and investigate these with the help of critical discourse analysis (CDA). This chapter is dedicated to a justification of the choice of CDA (Fairclough) as a method, and of the case study as a research design and also as the underpinning for why historical analysis and television journalism still matter despite today's general tendency in media studies to focus on the present and the latest technological innovations. This chapter also aims to clarify the rationale behind my choice of cases, and how these, as televised news stories, interacted with the ever-changing media ecology that the genre of television news faced between 2002 and 2013 in Hungary.

Since I am interested in discourses and discursive changes in media texts, and what these media texts “do” in a mediated public sphere with regard to the issue of domestic violence, I have chosen a method attentive to discourse and to long-term discursive shifts in texts – CDA – and employ this on a media genre that people typically turn to in order to make sense of what is happening in the world and what is of social importance (Gans, 2003, pp. 1, 21; Reese, 2016) – that is, news and current affairs programmes. Moreover, my method is attentive to that segment of the mediated public sphere where traditionally a large amount of public attention is directed, and which consequently has the most symbolic power to “produce” reality for spectators – that is, mainstream television journalism. The following sections are intended to give deeper insights into the reasons why these methodological choices were made, and in general how these choices fit with my research questions. I discuss firstly Faircloughian CDA, secondly historical approaches and their continuing value in media studies, thirdly television and televised current affairs and their place in the new media era, and finally, at the end of this chapter, case-study research and the selection of my cases.

3.1 Critical discourse analysis: Investigating discursive change through in-depth textual analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an umbrella term denoting a particular group of textual analyses that employ a critical, socially engaged and hermeneutic approach to texts, with special attention paid to the relations between language (meaning-making) and power. CDA became institutionalised at the beginning of the 1990s, and its roots are traditionally traced back to critical linguistics (CL), which developed in England a couple of decades earlier, that is in the 1970s and 1980s (Wodak, 2001). While CDA is far from being homogeneous, all of its versions are characteristically focused on what Wodak describes as “[critically] analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (p. 2). The critical nature of CDA lies precisely in this act of uncovering how power inequalities are articulated, reproduced (or, occasionally, questioned) through texts, and how texts contribute to the maintenance of oppressive power structures at the broader social level (Meyer, 2001, p. 15). CDA also typically assumes discourses to be historical, and makes ample reference to their context (Meyer, 2001, p. 15). This emphasis on historicity renders CDA a kind of natural match for longitudinal, historical approaches as well as for context-attentive methods such as, most notably, case studies (on the natural alliance between historical analysis and CDA, see also Fairclough, 1992a, p. 9).

While some strands of CDA have openly emancipatory social goals and therefore, as Lazar has pointed out “are part of an emancipatory critical social science which [...] is openly committed to the achievement of a just social order through a critique of discourse” (2007, p.145), all strands, whether overtly emancipatory or not, pose questions about hierarchy and domination, asking which social position benefits and which is marginalised or excluded in the process of meaning-making (Fairclough, 2001, p. 125). In contrast to many other approaches that typically try to reach an allegedly neutral and detached position of the researcher, CDA is “always explicit about its own position and commitment” (Meyer, 2001, p. 17; see also Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 31). This focus of CDA on subtle and not so subtle power inequalities that sustain (or challenge) asymmetrical

power arrangements through language makes CDA *an ideal methodological match for feminism*, as Lazar has argued (2005, 2007). Given that patriarchy – similarly to many of the systemic power inequalities that CDA investigates and unfolds through the analysis of language – is hegemonic (that is, it mostly appears as consensual and not as a form of domination at all, and both men and women are, to a certain extent, complicit in its maintenance) and sustained by tacit and taken-for-granted gendered assumptions that inevitably also show up in discourses, patriarchal social arrangements can be well investigated through CDA. By unfolding these arrangements, as they show up in different contexts through language, feminist CDA can shed light on interrelationships of gender and power in discourse, and thereby contribute to reaching a “feminist humanist vision”, where the category of gender is not always inevitably subject to systematic privilege/lack of privilege, advantage/disadvantage, inclusion/exclusion in social life and its meaning-making practices (2007, p. 145).

Of the various versions of CDA, I use that developed by Norman Fairclough (1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1995, 2001), firstly because Faircloughian CDA focuses specifically on discursive change, which is also a topic of major interest in the present study, and secondly because this version of CDA makes extensive use of a specifically Foucauldian theory of discourse combined with a concept of hegemony, which are both discussed in detail in the previous chapter and of crucial importance to my theoretical framework. My choice of Fairclough has also been influenced to some extent by the fact that his version of CDA acknowledges feminist works and feminist perspective in general (see Lazar, 2007, p. 143). Without anticipating too much of what I explain later at greater length, it is primarily the double focus of Faircloughian CDA on individual texts and on their complex role in articulating power struggles between discourses (and the subsequent contribution of the same texts to long-term shifts in orders of discourse) that makes this type of CDA particularly suitable for the present study. Faircloughian CDA makes it possible to apply the Foucauldian concept of discourse and that of hegemony to concrete texts and to investigate discursive change in these. Moreover – on the basis of some well-selected media texts and their comparison, as I discuss below – it also makes it possible to draw conclusions about long-term shifts in the social meaning of domestic violence in the Hungarian mediated public sphere between 2002 and 2013.

Furthermore, in Fairclough, discourses are never “only” semiotic, but always have a social dimension, or, to put it more clearly, discourse is only one element – the semiotic element – of (historically and locally specific) social practices (Fairclough & Chouliaraki, 1999, p. 38). *Social practice* is a central concept in Faircloughian CDA, and – similarly to texts, as we see below – it takes an intermediary position between pre-existing abstract structures or permanences (as constraints) and actions (as spaces of agency) (1999, pp. 19-36). In Fairclough, social life is made up of social practices, that is of habitual ways of acting that are “tied to particular times and places, in which people apply resources (material or symbolic) to act together in the world” (p. 21). Social practices, therefore, are “forms of production of social life” (p. 22), and it is the semiotic-reflexive element of these social practices that Fairclough and Chouliaraki call discourse (p. 38). As Chouliaraki succinctly puts it, in Fairclough – following Foucault – discourse is “a productive technology of social practice that subjects people to forms of power while, at the same time, providing them with spaces of agency and possibilities for action” (2008b, p. 675). In Fairclough, discourses fulfill social functions, of which two are of particular importance: the fact that discourses, as already been pointed out, re-present the world to us (representational function) and the fact that they also – as so far not been particularly highlighted – relate and orient us towards others in this world (interpersonal function) (Chouliaraki 2008b, pp. 688-691). Discourses, through their interpersonal function, have the power to offer paradigmatic forms of “relating and acting upon oneself and others”, and “to cultivate certain types of identity and agency”, which, as Chouliaraki points out (2008b, p. 691), resonates with what Foucault called governmentality – a contemporary form of power that affects and shapes people's conduct through their sense of self-governance (Foucault 2004/2007, 2004/2008). This insight into the social functions that discourses fulfill allows me to address discourses as articulating and regulating not only meanings, but emotions and moral values, too, which are also a topic of major interest in the present study. This interrelated-ness of meaning-making, feeling and normative claims about taking action in the very process of the articulation of a discourse has been particularly highlighted by Chouliaraki (2006, 2008a), who, in the context of mediated suffering, conceptualised the media discourse as, among others things, articulating proposals for moral and emotional engagement with distant sufferers. All in all, this dialectical

embeddedness of discourse in the social world, where the (historically and locally specific) social thereby functions as a “condition of possibility” for meaning-making (Chouliaraki 2008, p. 674), is what ultimately enables CDA researchers to treat systematic semiotic choices in texts as subtle indicators of the ways in which social life “out there” is produced, including the subtle ways in which gendered power arrangements are sustained in the social world.

More specifically, Fairclough, in line with the broader characteristics of CDA discussed earlier, defines CDA as a “form of critical social science” that has a distinct theoretical perspective on language and a particular interest in the textual dimension of power relations (2001, p. 215). Faircloughian CDA characteristically combines the Foucauldian concept of discourse with a “text-and-interaction' sense [of discourse] in linguistically-oriented discourse analysis”, the latter inherited from critical linguistics (CL), and exploits this combination for an in-depth semiotic analysis of concrete texts (1992a, p. 4). More specifically, in contrast to the Foucauldian theory of discourse, which primarily investigates discursive processes at the macro-social level, Faircloughian CDA focuses on *individual texts* – or, in Fairclough's words, “discursive events” – and the ways in which texts, through articulating discourses, contribute to “longer-term constitution of 'orders of discourse””, and thereby to social and cultural change (1992a, p. 9). On the other hand, in contrast to previous linguistically-oriented discourse analysis, which, as Fairclough states, has often overemphasised the role of texts in reproducing existing power relations and their respective structures of meaning-making (1992a, p. 1), Faircloughian CDA, relying on the concept of hegemony, takes power relations as *dynamically changing* and reaching an equilibrium only temporarily. With the help of this step, Fairclough reaches a more complex and dynamic understanding of the relations between power and text than previous linguistically-oriented approaches did (for the importance of a dynamic concept of power and of hegemonic struggle in CDA, see Fairclough, 2001, p. 214).

The key insight of Faircloughian CDA is that texts are inevitably shaped by a dialectical tension between pre-established *structure(s)* (that is orders of discourse, genres or other textual conventions) that operate as constraints, and *action* (that is the particular act of articulation of the above structures by the given text), which always carries the possibility of productive digression from the structures already given (2001, p. 214). Given

that discourses both feed into and are re-articulated by texts, it is essentially texts that produce and reproduce discourses on a constant basis, by articulating already existing discourses (and thereby reproducing and further strengthening them), or by combining them in new ways (and thereby contesting and modifying existing discourses), or even by generating new discourses with the re-articulation or re-structuring of available discursive elements (1992a, p. 97). Briefly, in Fairclough all texts are inter-discursive and inter-textual (inevitably relying on previous texts, discourses, genres or other textual conventions), but at the same time they also have the potential to subtly digress from these existing conventions/structures through the particular ways in which they re-articulate and/or combine their textual and discursive predecessors (2001, pp. 214, 270; for a detailed discussion of intertextuality and interdiscursivity in CDA see 1992b). Ultimately, as Fairclough states, each text “may re-produce or transform pre-established structures” (2001, p. 212). At the same time, it is exactly these particular articulations of discourse by texts, and the eventual accumulation of these articulations over time, that contribute to longer-term shifts in the actual order of discourse.

This insight into the role of texts in articulating discourse (or digressions from discourse), and the long-term implications of these articulations for shifts in orders of discourse, assign a *double focus* to Faircloughian CDA: it always “oscillates” between a focus on shifts in the orders of discourse and a “focus on the productive semiotic work that goes on in particular texts and interactions” (2001, pp. 214-215). In other words, texts are always analysed with one eye on their broader discursive context, which is reached through a combination of interdiscursive and linguistic-semiotic analysis – a type of analysis that I too employ in the next chapters (p. 216).²⁴ On the other hand, Faircloughian CDA, given its strong focus on particular texts, does not directly address the issue of longitudinal historical analysis and its importance in tracing how discursive change unfolds over time, although Fairclough acknowledges that CDA is inevitably “a method for historical analysis” (1992a, p. 9). Therefore, in order to better grasp long-term shifts and changes in

24 The importance of the interdiscursive aspect cannot be overemphasised here, since the discursive composition of a given text, and more specifically the heterogeneity of this composition, is already indicative of whether a discursive change is taking place. The most telling sign, as Fairclough states, is the presence of contradictory or inconsistent elements in texts, which endow them with a “patchwork” appearance that soon vanishes and is gradually replaced by “seamlessness” as the ongoing discursive change begins to catch and solidify, and the new, emergent discourse subsequently becomes “natural”, “commonsensical”, or, in other words, naturalised (1992a, p. 97).

the social meaning of domestic violence in the Hungarian media between 2002 and 2013, I combine Fairclough with a longitudinal historical approach, more specifically, a diachronic comparative study, organised according to a case-study research design. I apply Faircloughian CDA to a small number of purposefully sampled domestic violence cases, each selected from various points during the 2002–2013 period, and formulate conclusions on the basis of their comparison.

In light of the above, the object of my study is the mediated discourse(s) on domestic violence in Hungary between 2002 and 2013, as it/they emerged and changed over time through historically and locally specific technologies and genres of mediation. That is, although I analyse specific media texts with the help of CDA, the primary focus of my study remains the *discourse(s)* that these texts articulate, combine or re-arrange, where discourse is understood as a regime of systematic semiotic choices in media texts (evidenced by patterns of co-appearance and combination), through which domestic violence can become meaningful to Hungarians, and can structure and shape their orientation to themselves and to others in their world. Given that in Hungary the issue of domestic violence originally emerged in the public sphere through the genre of crime news and current affairs programmes – and this media genre still plays an important part in shaping the issue for a broader Hungarian public – and that, of the various news media outlets, it has been – as I discuss below – the medium of television that has had the most symbolic power to “produce” the “reality” of domestic violence for Hungarians, I focus on how domestic violence has been mediated through the genre of *televised current affairs*. Moreover, by using a *case-study* research design combined with the CDA approach – that is, two context-attentive perspectives combined – I am also able to reflect on the shifting media ecology of the media texts in question, a context that changed rapidly in the 2000s and the early 2010s in Hungary (and in the rest of the world), and to some extent re-structured the place of television and televised current affairs programmes in spectators’ lives, as well as the ways in which they made sense of the world.

Since historical, longitudinal approaches are losing ground in today's media scholarship and the same holds true for studies of television, in the following two sections I discuss why long-term studies and scholarly attention to television are important, especially for the issue of domestic violence in the media. Following these two sections, I

discuss case studies as a research design and the selection of my cases.

3.2 The continuing value of historical and long-term approaches

Historical and long-term approaches are rather sporadic in today's media studies, which generally prefer synchronic methodologies to diachronic ones. Over recent decades media scholars have repeatedly pointed out that historical approaches, and longitudinal approaches in general, have been marginalised within media studies. Nicholas Garnham, for example, sees media studies as “enraptured by the new and the ephemeral” (2000, p. 24), while Alice Mattoni and Emiliano Treré argue that media studies have been predominantly focusing on the new media platforms that the new technologies brought (2014, p. 255). Michael Pickering has similarly diagnosed an overarching pattern of “present-centredness” in the field, with an increased focus on “newness and nowness” and “a continual skewing of attention towards the latest issues and developments in communications”, resulting in a kind of “technological determinism” that today mostly manifests as an increased attention to new media (2015, pp. 9-11.).

This lack of attention to historical and longitudinal approaches is much less prominent in the feminist literature on the media portrayal of domestic violence, considering that key feminist literature on the topic – from the 1990s, when scholarly interest in the subject significantly increased – has produced longitudinal studies as well as short-term investigations (for the former see e.g. Berns, 1999, 2001, 2004; Ryan, Anastario & Dacunha 2006). These long-term studies, however, have rarely focused on *change*, despite the fact that domestic violence, similarly to most public issues, typically evolves over longer time spans within the public arena, and although the portrayal of domestic violence goes through different changes and stages. Berns’s two landmark studies, referenced earlier, are a good example of this increased focus on discursive continuities: although they analyse the print media portrayal of the issue in the US over an impressively long period of three decades (1999, 2001), they conclude with the identification of patterns in media portrayals – the “patriarchal-resistance perspective” and the “individual frame of responsibility” – that have remained largely intact over time (1999, p. 86; 2001, p. 274).

Within such a scholarly environment, longer-term investigations focusing on change articulated through traditional media platforms and genres – such as this one – may look oddly out of line with today's methodological preferences. However, what these dominant preferences fail to grasp is exactly what sits at the heart of my research: the subtle ways in which the “new” gradually emerges from what is already established – in other words, a grasping of the slower processes of discursive and social change that may lead to the present.

Interestingly, this aspect of change over time was more prominent in earlier, second-wave feminist media scholarship on domestic violence, and in cognate research fields. The most illustrative example from early feminist literature appears to be Tierney's article from 1982, in which the author applies the theory of issue-attention cycles to describe the ups and downs in coverage of the battered women's movement in the mainstream news media in the 1970s in the US. Research in cognate fields (both in second- and third-wave feminist scholarship), such as the work of Barbara J. Nelson (1984) and Jenny Kitzinger (2004), similarly focused on change over time. They map the ways – respectively – in which child abuse and child sexual abuse, both lacking previous media discussion, developed into issues of public concern in the national media of the US and the UK respectively. These studies demonstrate the value of a focus on historical change in gender and media scholarship, since they trace how taboo topics broke through the threshold of newsworthiness and publicity over time. However, this aspect, as I have already pointed out, is not at the forefront of today's research agenda on the media portrayal of domestic violence, and even less present in its landmark texts (e.g. Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-93; Braber, 2015; Bullock, 2007; Carll, 2003; Gillespie, Richards, Givens & Smith, 2013, Meyers, 1994, 1997; Nettleton, 2011; Sunindyo, 2004; Zeynep, 2006).

This relative neglect in the current literature of a focus on change over longer time spans may partly be explained – as well as by the general preference of today's media studies for the synchronic methodologies discussed earlier – by the location in time and space that these scholarly works occupy in relation to the issue they investigate. Namely, when in the 1990s an increased academic attention started to be paid to the media portrayal of domestic violence by feminist scholars, first of all in Anglo-Saxon countries, domestic violence had already been part of the public arena in these countries for a relatively long

time. Tierney, Nelson and Kitzinger, however – similarly to the present study – considered issues that at the time of their investigations were relatively *new* on the national media agenda, and therefore, understandably, paid special attention to the ways in which these issues craved a space on the public agenda. This aspect of issue-formation and -development is marginalised in today's transnational feminist media discourses on domestic violence despite the fact that this scenario (that is, domestic violence freshly gathering ground in national public spheres and on public agendas) is probably much more common worldwide than is suggested by the typical reliance on the Anglo-American experience of current landmark texts by feminist criticism of the media portrayal of domestic violence. This is because domestic violence started to receive significant visibility outside Anglo-American countries only from the early 1990s, when the issue was included on the international human rights agenda (for more on this inclusion, see Engle, 2006).

Therefore, when in the following chapters I take a case-based, historical approach to examining how the issue of domestic violence changed discursively in the Hungarian mediated public sphere over time, I necessarily need to question some key assumptions of previous literature. Firstly, the assumption that tacitly normalises Anglo-American experiences from the 1990s onwards, which tends to overlook the fact that domestic violence follows different trajectories of change in different national public spheres. Secondly, the frequent assumption that the media *primarily* function as an institution of social and patriarchal control with regard to the issue of domestic violence (as discussed in Chapter 2). Instead, drawing on Chouliaraki (2006, 2008a), I focus on the potential of the media to serve as a moral agent of change in regard to domestic violence, through articulating proposals for moral and emotional engagement with the victims of violence. This implies that, in line with the dialectics of discourse perspective, I take media discourse as indeed subject to certain power structures (most importantly, patriarchy), but at the same time also in possession of historically and locally specific, regulated forms of agency, through which power structures can be challenged. I approach coverage of domestic violence in the media as shaped by an interplay of discursive continuities and discontinuities, as formed by the ever-changing power relations between (mediated) discourses, and as a space where continuity is mainly assured through repetition, while

discontinuity may emerge through major break points, such as fundamental re-distributions of discursive elements over time.

As mentioned, I sample media texts from that segment of the Hungarian mediated public sphere that traditionally receives the largest amount of public attention – that is the television news genre. As the primacy of the medium of television over online and interactive journalism is somehow less self-evident since the advent of the new media era, in the next section I dedicate some space to the place of television and television news in the new media era, and also give a brief overview of the main broadcasters and the broadcast ecology in Hungary between 2002 and 2013.

3.3 Television and televised current affairs and their place in the new media era

Similarly to historical approaches, studies of television and television news are currently somehow pushed to the margins of media scholarship. This decrease in scholarly interest over recent decades is usually justified by the claim that television viewership, with the rise of the multimedia era, has been in continuous decline since the 1990s (Cushion, 2015, p. 504; see also 2012, pp. 169-195).²⁵ However, as a number of media scholars (see e.g. Briggs, 2009, p. 1; Cushion, 2015; Miller, 2010, pp. 11-19) have pointed out, television is still the most influential medium in most countries around the globe, and accordingly television news “remains the most viewed, valued and trusted source of information” (Cushion, 2012, p. 1), even if today it is increasingly produced and consumed in a “converged” way, intersecting with other media (Briggs, 2009, p. 152).²⁶ Based on this *still ongoing* primacy over online and interactive journalism, I therefore focus on *television news* and *televised current affairs programmes* in order to investigate changes in the discursive construction of domestic violence in the Hungarian mediated public sphere

25 In Cushion's opinion, another aspect that may contribute to today's general scholarly preference for online and interactive media at the expense of television is that doing research on online news “is much less time-consuming than researching broadcast coverage”, and obtaining the latter can also be complicated and more expensive, at least compared with content freely and comfortably available online (2012, p. 184).

26 See also Smith (2009) on television – and not the internet – as the primary source of information for voters even during the 2008 US presidential elections, an event usually cited as a leading example of the increased role of the internet over traditional news media.

between 2002 and 2013. By focusing on this genre, I can reach that segment of the mediated public sphere where the social reality of domestic violence was most powerfully “produced”, that is where the *symbolic power* of media institutions over the issue was the strongest.

To be sure, television news, once a more or less self-evident category and primarily referring to fixed-time news bulletins and hard-news-oriented current affairs programmes, has since the 1990s become an increasingly hybrid genre across the world, and nowadays includes a wide range of subgenres, such as infotainment TV magazines, afternoon chat shows, political talk shows and celebrity news (Cushion, 2012, pp. 7, 15). In Hungary, this hybridisation of the television news genre had already started by 2002, the beginning of the period under observation, and, as in other parts of the world, resulted in a proliferation of broadcast news programmes and texts. Therefore, although in the next chapters I primarily focus on fixed-time *evening news bulletins*, I occasionally also consider other forms of television news, if these are especially relevant to the outcome of the news media portrayal of the case under study. In-depth interviews with the perpetrator or the victim, for example, were typically broadcast in these novel types of infotainment programmes, and news bulletins from time to time relied heavily on excerpts from these, as we see in the next chapters.

The Hungarian media ecology around television and television news also went through considerable changes between 2002 and 2013. First, during the early 2000s, Hungarian television news experienced the expansion of commercial broadcasting into the genre (an aspect that I discuss in more detail in the next paragraphs), with new types of news delivery appearing, spreading and gaining strength. A few years later, over the decade of the 2000s, with the rise of a multimedia era and the increased spread of online and interactive journalism in the country, television news, too, increasingly started to be produced and consumed in a converged way, that is by intersecting with other media platforms, genres and media material. This, combined with the spread of “media multitasking” habits among media users, resulted in the fact that, over those twelve years between 2002 and 2013, television news shifted from being a mono-platform type of news discourse into a multi-platform one with convergent circulations of news material (Briggs, 2009). My three empirical cases – discussed later in more detail – well exemplify this shift.

Domestic violence, once clearly restricted to crime news and the current affairs/social issues section of traditional news media outlets (both printed and broadcast), gradually expanded into the local, highly commercialised televised celebrity culture, and finally even started to converge with online media platforms, as a news story. In brief, over time the media ecology changed around television so that news stories, once primarily circulated through printed and broadcast mass media, by the early 2010s were surrounded by a multi-platform media milieu.

Since a detailed overview of the history of television in Hungary between 2002 and 2013 is beyond the scope of this study, here I just briefly note that, by 2002, an entertainment-driven, multi-channel and multimedia environment was a fact of life for broadcasters in Hungary as in any other part of the Western world (for a brief overview of the media history of the country between 1989 and 2010, see Paál, 2013).²⁷ The period between 2002 and 2013 is a relatively stable era in the history of Hungarian television, although some changes in the broader media ecology shook this stability (as discussed in the previous paragraph), with three major national broadcasters leading viewership statistics throughout the whole period: commercial broadcasters *TV2*, *RTL Klub* and – significantly lagging behind these – the main channel *MTV* (re-named *M1* in 2005) of the national public service broadcaster (for statistics see AGB Nielsen, 2018). The stability of this era is mostly due to the fact that this period fell between two major changes in the more immediate context of the Hungarian broadcasting ecology. The first change was the 1997 Media Law, which introduced a double system of public-service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting into the country – a development that made possible the launch of the two privately owned national commercial broadcasters *TV2* and *RTL Klub* in the same year, thereby breaking the monopoly of the state in national terrestrial broadcasting (and national television news delivery). The second change, in 2014-2015, included the sale of *TV2* (previously owned by a German media group, *ProSiebenSat1*) to investors with strong

27 Generally speaking, although, as media scholars have repeatedly pointed out, the development of the institution of television followed a very similar path on both sides of the continent, even before the fall of the Iron Curtain – with the majority of countries introducing regular television broadcasting in the 1950s, the popularity of television reaching its peak in the 1970s, and processes of deregulation and decentralisation starting to take place in the 1980s on both sides of the continent – in international literature “European television” is still mostly identified with Western European television, and television cultures – including cultures of news discourse – from the Eastern part of the continent tend to be only minimally addressed (see e.g. Imre, 2013; Mihejl, 2013).

ties to the current political government and a major transformation of the Hungarian public service broadcaster on 15 March 2015, which – by turning *TV2* from politically independent to strongly government-friendly, and transforming *MI* into a pro-governmental national 24-hours news TV channel – considerably increased state control over television news in the country (see Freedom House, 2015, 2016).²⁸

Between 2002 and 2013 the major Hungarian television news outlets were, as I have already noted, the two privately owned national commercial broadcasters *TV2* and *RTL Klub*, and the public service broadcaster *MTV/MI* – the three media outlets that I use as the main sources of my data in the following chapters. *TV2* and *RTL Klub* from the start represented an entertainment-driven and profit-oriented type of television, but due to their licence agreements both also delivered public service programming, including regular, fixed-time news bulletins and current affairs programmes (Terestyéni, 1999). These two broadcasters also introduced new, infotainment-oriented types of news programmes – characteristic in Western television since the 1990s – to the broader Hungarian public. These included current affairs infotainment magazines *Fókusz*, *Házon kívül* (*RTL Klub*), *Mokka* and *Napló* (*TV2*), political infotainment talk show *Heti Hetes* (*RTL Klub*) and celebrity talk shows *Esti Showder* (*RTL Klub*) and *Frizbi* (*TV2*). In contrast to these, *MTV/MI*, as a public service broadcaster, represented a more hard-news-oriented agenda and a more traditional style of news reporting and, similarly to many other Eastern European public service channels, was in general politically influenced by the current governments (see Bajomi-Lázár & Monori, 2007 for variations in time). Although the more tabloid-style news agenda of the two commercial broadcasters – together with many of the other new developments in Western news reporting on these channels, such as the increase in live news – also had some impact on the reporting style of *MTV/MI*, research from 2007 still revealed a significant difference between commercial and public-service broadcasters in the country. The evening news bulletins of *TV2* and *RTL Klub*, compared with that of *MTV/MI*, characteristically contained a higher percentage of soft news, and represented a more tabloid-oriented agenda (Bajomi-Lázár & Monori, 2007; Terestyéni, 2007).

28 This latter development formed part of an (as of 2018 still ongoing) broader process of transformation of the Hungarian media landscape, starting with the highly controversial 2011 Media Law, which significantly increased state control over the media in Hungary (for more on this see Freedom House, 2012; Urbán, 2016).

Therefore, in the following chapters it is the above-mentioned broadcasters and current affairs programmes that are the focus of my research, where I investigate the ways in which they mediated the issue of domestic violence to the broader Hungarian public in a fast-changing media milieu, and served as the focal points of processes of remediation of news stories across available media platforms and genres. The following section aims to give insights into the criteria by which I selected, out of the abundance of media texts available and dealing with the issue in the given period, the three cases most relevant to the topic of the present research.

3.4 Cases, the case study and case selection

Even if the concept of a *case* is fairly elastic, there is a relatively strong academic consensus on the fact that cases are real-life units of human activity that can be studied and understood only through detailed examination and in their context (Gillham, 2000, p. 1). The concept of a *case study*, however, although today widely used in qualitative studies, is often vaguely defined (for discussions see Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Smith, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Tight, 2010). Moreover, the case study's hermeneutic character tends currently to be undervalued when compared with other, more "rigorous", approaches (Yin, 2003, p. xiii). Indeed, the case study has undergone a strong devaluation in the social sciences since the 1950s, when, with the dominance of positivism, quantitative techniques were regarded as more "rigorous" and reliable. Its popularity, however, seems to be once again on the rise (Tight, 2010, p. 333). Bent Flyvbjerg, for example, has recently described cases as central research categories for social science research, on the basis of their affinity with the particular, the practical and the highly context-dependent. He even re-formulates the value of the case study in terms of positivist scientific ideals of reliability, validity and generalisability (2001). However, as Hyett, Kenny and Dickson-Smith point out, misunderstandings around the case study result from the variation in definitions of and approaches to case-study research, which often prevent scientists from developing a common understanding of the "practice and rigour" of the case study (2014, p. 1). They have identified the two most popular of these approaches as the "post-positivist"

(Eisenhardt, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Yin, 2003) and the “social-constructivist” (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Since the present study is based on post-structuralist – that is, social-constructivist – insights, it stays closest to the latter rather than the former.

The post-positivist approach assumes a singular notion of reality and aims to arrive at factual truths via the use of triangulation, a careful selection of multiple methods and, in general, the use of a rigorous case-study protocol (Hyett et al. 2014, p. 2). In contrast, the social-constructivist approach – based on a notion of reality as shaped by meaning-making systems – is characterised by a certain creativity or “analytical eclecticism” (Thomas, 2011, p. 512) combined with an adherence to the adequate selection, definition (i.e. boundaries and contexts) and presentation of the case(s), and the proper selection and handling of data sources (Stake, 1995, p. 131). This approach allows a high degree of flexibility in choosing study designs and analytical categories as long as: i) they serve the study of the case(s); and ii) a reflexive awareness is developed of the situation in which the researcher-object relationship is embedded (Stake, 1995, pp. xi-xii). In Stake's understanding, the case study basically intends to grasp the *complexity* and *richness* of the case(s) under observation, through detailed, in-depth data collection and analysis (1995) – something that the present study also does, by providing an in-depth exploration of meaning-constructions, with the help of CDA applied to case studies. Based on Stake's categorisation, my cases qualify as *intrinsic case studies*, that is their primary interest is the case itself and its particularities, in contrast to instrumental case studies where cases are explored for the sake of building a theory, or generalising across cases (1995).

In Stake's approach, as in any other approach to case studies, the most important criterion for selecting cases is their *relevance* for the research objective; they need to be selected to give the *maximum amount of information* about the research objective (see also Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010, p. 61). Whereas, in principle, the discursive composition and shifts in the news media portrayal of domestic violence in Hungary between 2002 and 2013 could be observed in any case of domestic violence randomly picked from the time period under investigation, some arguments can be made in favour of the claim that *high publicity* cases are more suitable for such a study in terms of their relevance. Domestic violence cases are in general strictly filtered in media discourse, and – as previous feminist literature has pointed out – it is typically non-ordinary cases that receive extensive media

coverage, at the expense of more frequent forms of domestic violence (see e.g. Benedict 1992, p. 8; Dobash & Dobash 1992, p. 6; Meyers, 1994, p. 48). For my purposes, these non-ordinary, “exceptional” cases have something that ordinary cases do not have: a large amount of *symbolic power*, that is power to define the social meaning of domestic violence more effectively than other cases do. It is this feature that makes them more suitable for the present study than less publicised cases (for symbolic power, see Chapter 2). Moreover, these cases often also generate additional public reactions, such as discussions or political actions, which produce even more texts. In other words, these cases also usually have a higher level of *data-richness*.

The cases presented below were, therefore, selected on the basis of these criteria – high publicity, symbolic significance and data richness. Moreover, in order to assure that they were cases of domestic violence in line with my definition in the previous chapter, I operationalised any instance of interpersonal violence where the perpetrator had systematically tried to gain control and dominance over victim(s) within a romantic or family relationship – and which Hungarian media outlets *named as such*. With such an operationalisation, violence not only between married couples, but also between common-law partners, ex-partners, unwanted suitors and their targets qualified as domestic violence, as also did violence between family members (including adult–child relationships). Including child abuse, too, in the operationalisation of the term (and thereby making some concession towards the family-violence approach to domestic violence) was necessary in order to take account of the shifting meanings of domestic violence in the Hungarian mediated public sphere, where Hungarian media outlets – especially initially – applied this term to cases, which other media outlets referred to as child abuse. In fact, the term, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 4, entered the Hungarian media agenda through a complex case of domestic violence, where a male perpetrator had been systematically abusing his entire family, but the case was shaped into a news story with a nearly exclusive focus on his teenage step-daughter as the victim.

As briefly indicated earlier, my cases also represent different stages in the changing place of television and television news in the Hungarian media ecology between 2002 and 2013. This media environment, similarly already noted, went through considerable changes during this period: first, commercial broadcasting expanded into the genre, and later the

increased spread of online and interactive journalism resulted in television news, too, increasingly starting to be produced and consumed in a converged way. The three cases introduced below well exemplify this shift, with domestic violence, once restricted to the crime news and current affairs/social issues sections of traditional news media outlets, gradually expanding into local televised celebrity culture – the latter enabled by commercial broadcasting – and finally penetrating and converging with digital interactive media as a televised news story.

Based on the above, I selected three cases spanning the 2002–2013 decade. All these cases enjoyed prolonged newsworthiness in the Hungarian news media, achieved a high level of publicity, and produced a large amount of media texts, which altogether assigns them a high relevance to my research objectives. The importance of these cases can be further exemplified by the fact that Hungarian media outlets still today repeatedly follow up on the characters in these news stories, and thereby ongoing media coverage sustains a public, collective memory of these cases among Hungarians.

3.4.1 The Kitti Simek Case (2002)

The case of 14-year-old Kitti Simek, who, after suffering a decade of abuse from her stepfather, shot the man dead, has a special importance in my narrative, since it was through this news story that the issue of domestic violence entered the Hungarian mediated public sphere, was named as such, and came to be represented as a special type of violence. Although other cases of domestic violence had already been represented by the Hungarian news media, the Simek case was the decisive one in that this new act of naming indicated the emergence of a new discourse. The special importance of the Simek story, however, lies not only in this act of naming, but in the combination of this act with the enormous publicity that the story received. It was this combination that ultimately enabled the case to raise awareness of domestic violence in the country, since back in 2002 Hungarian society was mostly ignorant of domestic violence issues. In this sense, as well as by giving a snapshot of the historical moment when domestic violence entered the Hungarian media, this case also serves to explore how local public discourses on domestic violence are formed, how existing discursive elements are re-distributed and restructured in order to

articulate new meanings, and how the subject positions related to violence (that is, the positions of victim, perpetrator and benefactor) and the core elements of violence (such as motivation and subtypes of violence) go through various narrative selection mechanisms in order to assign coherence to the story. I also explore the ways in which existing media technologies (in this case, print and broadcast media, tabloid and serious journalism) were utilised in order to circulate across Hungarian society these new meanings, including the paradigmatic forms of moral and emotional engagement with the victim and the perpetrator that these media portrayals offered.

3.4.2 The Roland Damu Case (2010)

Roland Damu, an actor and media celebrity known for his role in a *TV2* daily soap opera, battered and raped his ex-girlfriend in November 2010, and became the first high-profile perpetrator of domestic violence sentenced to prison in Hungary. Moreover, the story was steadily followed, with extensive media attention in the course of the eighteen months that passed between the crime and the legal sentencing by a second court. As one of the commentators on the case pointed out (Spronz & Puss, 2011), Damu's status as a public figure played an important role in his fall, since the media had already been – sporadically but repeatedly – reporting on his violent actions since 2004 (including, for example, an outburst of rage at colleagues on a celebrity cooking show), and these actions could be relatively easily recalled when the domestic violence incident took place. The footage of the cooking show, for example, was re-watched by “hundreds of thousands” on YouTube, as an online news magazine reported after Damu's first-court guilty verdict (Farkas, 2011). Because the case was treated as soft news until the sentence was pronounced by the first court, and because Damu was a *TV2* celebrity figure, the story spilled over a good deal into infotainment programmes, where Damu regularly appeared and where his ex-girlfriend, too, agreed twice to be interviewed. This case, therefore, offers the possibility of exploring the role of local celebrity culture and of the tabloidisation of commercial media in attracting public attention to a case that would normally not break the newsworthiness threshold of media outlets.

3.4.3 The József Balogh Case (2013)

My third and final case is the story of József Balogh, an MP of the conservative-nationalist party FIDESZ, who battered his cohabiting girlfriend in April 2013 to the point where she was in need of hospitalisation. The story hit the news at a specific moment when public attention to the issue of domestic violence was temporarily receiving a major boost in the country, due to the scandalous comments that another MP of Balogh's party had made a couple of months earlier in a parliamentary discussion of an important policy instrument against domestic violence (a bill). This comment provoked public outcry, and also marked Balogh's party as sexist in the eyes of many Hungarians. Although Balogh was far from being the first national politician to be caught committing battery, he was the first whose story received considerable media attention. Moreover, he became an object of public ridicule after he blatantly lied about his girlfriend's injuries in front of the cameras (he blamed their family dog for the woman's injuries), thereby drawing more attention to his case. In this respect, the story marks a specific historical moment when the issue of domestic violence, having already gathered strong public support for its criminalisation, became further instrumentalised in national political scandals. The second important aspect is that Balogh's lies intensified public emotions around the issue of domestic violence in the country, especially in the networked media, with the sharing of internet memes that mocked the politician. This prominent role that social media played in magnifying and shaping public emotions about the story introduces a new level of complexity into the broadcast coverage of the Balogh case, highlighting the role of a convergent, hybrid media ecology in socialising citizens into specific forms of emotional engagement with domestic violence.

Following this general overview of my cases, the next three chapters investigate each case in more detail through a number of selected, paradigmatic media texts, with the help of CDA. Audiovisual materials produced by the three major Hungarian broadcasters are freely and publicly available in the *National Audiovisual Archive* (NAVA), a digital archive originally launched in 2006 that I have used for data collection. Data from this archive, however, is not fully accessible for the whole 2002–2013 period, as the so-called “NAVA

Law”, obliging Hungarian broadcasters to render copies of their audiovisual materials publicly available, entered into force only in 2004, and consequently is not applicable to pre-2004 material (for a brief overview of the history of NAVA, see Kiss, 2017, p. 155-170). However, some material from public service channels produced shortly before 2004 – including the news media texts closely linked to my one and only pre-2004 case, that of Kitti Simek (see Chapter 4) – can be accessed through NAVA. In the one and only case of missing commercial broadcasters, I substituted for broadcast news the print news from one tabloid (*Blikk*) and one broadsheet (*Népszabadság*), both with the highest circulation numbers in the country back then. This allowed me to present a snapshot of a media milieu where domestic violence news stories were circulated through traditional news media outlets including both television news (which steadily remained the focal point for bringing domestic violence to public attention) and print news media,. Archived copies of *Népszabadság* are available today in most public libraries in Hungary, while those of *Blikk* were accessed at the National Széchényi Library in Budapest.

3.5 The next three chapters

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 investigate these three aforementioned cases, each through selected extracts from three major news media outlets, with the help of a CDA framework. The analytical categories employed are: i) domestic violence and its “actors”, that is victims and perpetrators, which I explore through naming, but also through characterisation, context and actors' agency (and the allocation of motives, if this occurred); ii) the media proposals for emotional and moral engagement with these actors in domestic violence (that is, the specific forms of emotion and moral norms that the media discursively articulated in the face of these actors and/or the issue of domestic violence, including attention to actors' on-screen violations of certain social norms that regulate public conduct and emotional expression); and iii) the proposals by the media for interventions on domestic violence (if there were any), through the identification of who should act on which kind of problem, and the implications of these proposals for the construction of domestic violence in the national public sphere.

Through this analytical framework, I follow the mediated discourse(s) on domestic violence in Hungary between 2002 and 2013, as these have emerged, changed over time and been articulated through the genre of televised current affairs in a historically and locally specific (and rapidly changing) media environment, the latter strongly shaped by the emergence of new forms of news delivery and reporting, and through novel media platforms, with which television and television news were in dynamic interaction. The primary focus of my study, as I explained earlier, is the discourse(s) that media texts articulated, combined or re-arranged. I explore how domestic violence, through systematic semiotic choices in media texts, was able to become meaningful to Hungarians, to structure and shape their orientation to themselves and to others in their world. The next chapter is specifically dedicated to the Simek case from 2002, through which the issue of domestic violence entered the Hungarian mediated public sphere, was named as such, and came to be represented as a special type of violence, thereby indicating the emergence of a new public discourse.

4. From Homicide to Abuse and from Perpetrator to Victim: The Simek Case and the Birth of Domestic Violence in the Hungarian News Media

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present an analysis of the so-called *Simek case* from Hungary in 2002, which was, I am suggesting, the first case of domestic violence to receive considerable media attention, and accordingly contributed to increasing public attention to the issue nationwide.²⁹ This chapter explores how this case came to symbolise a shift in the discursive paradigms of domestic violence, and specifically how domestic violence *entered the mediated public sphere* in Hungary through the case, obtained a *name*, and came to be represented and understood as *violence*. By giving a name and a lot of publicity to a hitherto unnamed and invisible type of violence, and by constructing it as an issue charged with a range of emotional and moral meanings, the news media's portrayal of the Simek case played an active role in laying the foundations for domestic violence becoming an issue of public concern and an object of social intervention in the country. Indeed, the Simek case was followed by a period when domestic violence became “a daily media event, an element of the political scene” (Hüse & Konyáriné Ménesi, 2008, p. 55), but further high-profile cases – discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 – did not emerge until the early 2010s. The Simek case still plays a significant role in the collective memory of Hungarians, as a readily available instance of domestic violence in parliamentary speeches (see e.g. Lukács, 2015), academic accounts of the history of Hungarian feminist activism (Fabian, 2009, 2014; Vanya, 2006a) and also in the media, which continue to follow the

²⁹ Despite the prominent role the Simek case played in introducing domestic violence into public discourse in Hungary, currently there is only one academic article partly dedicated to this case (Barabás, Gyurkó & Virág, 2006). Although this article explicitly addresses the media representation of the Simek case, it only analyses how the work of the police and various institutions of justice has been communicated, and does not touch on the issue of domestic violence as such. The Simek case is similarly missing from the only piece of academic writing dedicated to the media portrayal of “women as victims” in the country (Balogh, Kassa & Sinkó, 2011). This slim volume does not address any cases prior to 2007, and consequently fails to reflect on the ways in which domestic violence originally entered the Hungarian public sphere. Accordingly, the most useful summary currently available, at least regarding the first weeks of media coverage, is a journalistic article published in a political-cultural Hungarian weekly, *Magyar Narancs* (Gavra, 2002).

lives of the Simek family (see, for instance, Czellár, 2016; Temesvári, 2016).

By giving nationwide publicity to domestic violence, the Simek case not only served as an eye-opener for Hungarian society, which in 2002 was largely ignorant of domestic violence issues, but also made visible many of the limitations of and inherent tensions in Hungarian media practices that had not yet been tested on domestic violence cases. Media outlets repeatedly violated certain ethical norms of media portrayal that they had previously not been forced to consider, and these violations led to some far-reaching consequences that affected not only the media portrayal and the afterlife of the case, but also its researchability today.³⁰ Specifically, in the weeks after 3 September 2002, when news first broke about the case, Hungarian spectators could follow the Simek story day by day as a kind of true-life soap opera, with twists and turns rife with dramatic details of a private nature about the 14-year-old girl Kitti Simek, who – after a decade of emotional, physical and sexual abuse she (and her family) had suffered from her stepfather – took a gun and shot him in the early hours of the 31 August 2002. Kitti, with her mother's consent, regularly appeared on TV screens and in newspaper headlines with her full name and face revealed, participated in a popular political talk show, willingly gave interviews about the abuse, recalling how she shot the man, and talking about her feelings. In short, a great many private details (including the under-age perpetrator-victim's full identity) were publicised, which, while giving unprecedented insight into the nature of violence in families, at the same time also violated her right to privacy and rendered her vulnerable to the negative consequences of media exposure.

In retrospect, it is evident that this violation of norms was strongly connected to the general social, historical and media-related context of the case. The Hungarian media could not adequately resolve the dilemma of how to reconcile the right of a victim of domestic violence to *privacy*, on the one hand, with the right of domestic violence to *publicity* (as an

30 The researchability of the Simek case is limited to some extent today, as media outlets, even if not bound by existing Hungarian laws, are typically reluctant to share their original footages of the Simek story with researchers, often with the justification of protecting the victim's right to privacy. Accordingly, original newscast footage made by commercial broadcasting channels, including *RTL Klub* and *TV2*, the two major national commercial broadcasters in the country, which back in 2002 played a crucial role in covering the Simek case, is currently not available for research purposes. Also, footage made by *MTV1*, the largest public service TV channel in Hungary, are available today only in a corrupted form, that is with both the graphic overlay (caption) in the lower third of the original screen and the introductory words of the news anchors removed. Thereby persons appearing on the screen are often difficult to identify. Printed media, however, is fully accessible in public libraries.

issue that had long been kept hidden), on the other hand, especially in a situation where the victim – unaware of the potentially negative consequences of media exposure – willingly cooperated with the media (for a discussion of domestic violence as a privacy issue see McLaughlin, 1998). The emergence of domestic violence in the Hungarian public sphere, as catalysed by this case, quickly blurred the seemingly well-established line between the private and the public. But new boundaries (and corresponding media practices) were still to be established, especially in a media environment that had only just moved towards infotainment, as the first national commercial broadcasting channels were launched in 1997. What is more, the Simek case, with its strong focus on the hitherto “hidden” violent aspects of intimate life and personal accounts of these, also marked a shift in Hungary towards confessional and personalising tendencies in the media. This shift, first observed in Anglo-American countries in the 1990s, placed intimate life at the heart of media representations, and thereby created societies saturated with *mediated intimacy* – that is, media representations of intimate relationships (Barker, Gill & Harvey, 2018, pp. 24-26).

Ironically, this shift towards mediated intimacy – in the Western media traditionally linked to the emergence of media genres focusing on intimate life, such as reality TV shows and dating shows, and emotionalised, dramatic modes of presentation of personal stories and confessions (see Pantti, 2011; Pantti & van Zoonen, 2011) – coincided almost to the day in Hungary with the breaking news of the Simek story. While news of the latter broke on 3 September 2002, the first episode of *Való Világ* (Real Life), the localised version of the *Big Brother* reality TV show and as such the first media genre in the country dedicated to the intimate life of real citizens, was aired on 11 September 2002 by commercial broadcaster *RTL Klub*. The two “shows” therefore initially ran in parallel in the Hungarian media. This coincidence in time is also important because it brings attention to the fact that in 2002 Hungarian media outlets – although they had already felt “the call of the time”, i.e. a shift towards personalisation and the mediation of intimate life – were not yet experienced with the implications of exposing citizens’ private lives to the public. As a result, in 2002 Hungarian media outlets often did not exert enough self-restraint in sharing “newsworthy” data about the intimate life of members of the Simek family with the public, and the case soon fell prey to sensationalist media portrayals, with spectacularisation often sidelining substantial public discussion of domestic violence. However, even if the general

media portrayal of the Simek case did not meet normative expectations regarding how to cover domestic violence cases, the mere fact that a hitherto taboo case was now named as domestic violence in the Hungarian public sphere was still a significant step forward.³¹

The outstandingly high media visibility that the Simek case achieved – something that would have been impossible for an “ordinary” case of domestic violence – was also strongly connected to the fact that the story involved a very untypical type of perpetrator of homicide (that is, an under-age female) – a perpetrator profile that traditionally enjoys high newsworthiness in the Western media.³² The Simek case indeed belongs to a very rare type of domestic violence case, that of *adolescent parricide*.³³ As a result, domestic violence – a term originally coined by feminists to refer primarily to wife abuse (see e.g. Morvai, 1998) or abuse of wives and children (Tóth, 1999a) – entered the Hungarian news discourse by yielding an *alternative name* and an *alternative focus* to a rare type of crime (adolescent parricide) that the news media would have covered anyway, on the basis of existing media practices, in their crime news section, due to its high newsworthiness. This shift in names and perspectives, as I discuss below, was greatly helped by the fact that the Hungarian news media, spurred by the search for explanations, focused on the element of *abuse* that the under-age perpetrator had suffered from her parent – a direction of media focus that is relatively common in the case of adolescent parricides – and consequently reallocated the status of perpetrator and victim between the girl and her stepfather.

To be sure, the Hungarian news media already, before the Simek case, covered cases that qualify as domestic violence. However, what the Simek case brought was a

31 For similar reasoning, see Kitzinger, 2004. In connection with the emergence of child sexual abuse in the British media in the 1980s, she argues that in a case of taboo topics the mere fact that the media covers them is more important than the way in which they are covered.

32 On the disproportionately high attention that under-age and/or female perpetrators of homicide typically receive in the media in Western societies, see Heine 2013, p. 4; on the “ordinary”, that is most frequent, type of domestic violence – i.e. women falling victim to spousal abuse – typically not receiving much media attention, see e.g. Berns, 2004; Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-93; Meyers, 1997; in Hungary see Hüse & Konyáriné, 2008.

33 On adolescent parricide, see Heine, 2013. Adolescent parricides are mostly committed by severely abused teenagers (i.e. between 13 and 18 years of age), who – lacking the necessary means of self-protection (e.g. they cannot just leave their abusive homes) as well as, due to their age, a well-developed mental ability to consider alternative solutions – try to escape the abuse by killing the abusive parent or step-parent (Heine, 2013, pp. 7-8). Probably the most well-known case of adolescent parricide, at least in the Anglo-American world, is that of Ritchie (16) and Deborah (17) Jahnke from the US, who, after being severely abused by their father (then 38) for years, killed him in 1982. A much more recent and highly publicised case, where a (young adult) child, after decades of abuse, turned against a parent and instigated her murder – in the strict sense of the term not a case of adolescent parricide, but bearing strong similarities to one – was that of Dee Dee (48) and Gypsy Rose Blanchard (24) from the US in 2015.

change in *terminology*, in *perspective*, and consequently a change in *discourse*. The assumption that the year 2002 indeed brought a qualitative change in this field – in other words that domestic violence, previously only sporadically mentioned in Hungarian media texts, established itself firmly in the Hungarian media agenda from around that year – is further confirmed by the quantitative data provided by *Magyar Távirati Iroda* (MTI), the Hungarian news agency (see Magyar Távirati Iroda n.d.). These data indicate an outstandingly large rise in mentions of the term *domestic violence* (családon belüli erőszak) in 2002. According to *MTI*, the number of mentions of the term in Hungarian media texts was roughly 20 times higher in 2002 than in the previous year, and the increase continued, although at a more moderate pace, in subsequent years (see Magyar Távirati Iroda n.d.).³⁴ Naturally, these data do not tell us anything about the *ways* in which domestic violence was discursively constructed for the public back then – it is these ways that form the object of the present study.

In this chapter I explore the ways in which domestic violence was discursively constructed by the Hungarian news media in the coverage of the Simek case, with special attention to: i) its implications regarding typical victims, perpetrators and their gender, through analytical categories of lexical choice, but also characterisation and context; ii) the types of emotional and moral engagement that the media proposed as acceptable with regard to these actors in domestic violence; and iii) the media proposals for legitimate interventions on domestic violence, and the implications of these for the construction of domestic violence in the national public sphere.

4.2 Data, data selection and methods

As discussed in Chapter 3, I use critical discourse analysis (Fairclough) to analyse the ways

34 The statistical data available at *MTI* also demonstrate that it was indeed *domestic violence*, and not a rival term available to denote cases of violence within four walls, that entered and established itself on the Hungarian media agenda around 2002. Specifically, the two other cognate terms that had also been in use to some extent before 2002, if typically limited to professional discourse – *child abuse* (gyerekbántalmazás) and *violence against women* (nők elleni erőszak), the latter bearing strong feminist connotations in Hungary as elsewhere – did not experience such a large increase in mentions as did the term *domestic violence* around 2002 and in fact over the whole period from 1989 to 2013 (see Magyar Távirati Iroda n.d.).

in which the Simek case was covered by three major Hungarian news media outlets: the evening news programme on *MTVI* (the main public broadcasting TV channel in the country), *Népszabadság* (the largest political daily back in 2002, an independent left-wing newspaper), and *Blikk* (the largest tabloid paper, with a slightly lower circulation than *Népszabadság*). Of this pool of texts, which includes approximately 60 pieces of news, I give special attention to the peak coverage period from the 3 September, when the first news broke, until late September, when the story started to go cold (after this the story was typically covered only during the different stages of the murder trial, that is in April, June and September 2003, and in January of 2004 and 2005, although in the tabloids the story enjoyed newsworthiness only until around November 2002).³⁵ This couple of weeks had a decisive impact on the general news media portrayal of the case. I selected four texts (two full news stories and two excerpts) for deeper analysis, on the basis of their ability to illustrate the discursive constructions that I identify below as the most widespread, and therefore typical, in the news media coverage of the case. Accordingly, the next section is dedicated to an analysis of the “actors” in domestic violence – that is the victims and the perpetrators – and their gender, which I explore through naming, and also through characterisation and allocation of motives. After this, I analyse the types of emotional and moral engagement that the media proposed as acceptable for the above actors. The final section explores the proposals made by the media for interventions on domestic violence, and the implications of these for the construction of domestic violence in the national public sphere.

4.3 The birth of domestic violence in the news media: Naming the crime, and constructing perpetrators, victims and their gender

The main feature of news reporting on the Simek case was the shift from *homicide* to the element of *abuse*, and the consequent construction of Kitti as the main victim – this despite

³⁵ Kitti first was first given a suspended sentence (September 2003), but later sentenced to 26 months in prison (January 2004), which she avoided serving only when granted parole by the President of Hungary in January 2005. In 2002 in Hungary the age of criminal responsibility was 14, which Kitti had reached only a couple of weeks before the murder.

the fact that the story was more complex since Kitti was both a victim (of abuse) and a perpetrator (of homicide). In this section, by focusing on discursive practices around the actors in the news story, I investigate the selection mechanisms by which the media outlets filtered out or backgrounded certain subjects, actions and events while at the same time highlighting others, in order to give meaning to the story from the perspective of abuse. Therefore, the focal points of this section are the actors in domestic violence and the ways in which they were constructed through the choices made with regard to naming, characterisation and allocation of motives, and (where applicable) the nature of the suffering endured. I also explore the terms that media outlets employed in order to define and categorise the crime. In the second part of this section I investigate the ways in which the category of gender was connected by the media to violence, thereby giving additional meaning to the story from the perspective of abuse.

4.3.1 From homicide to abuse: Constructing perpetrators and victims

The fact that the Hungarian news media from the start treated Kitti as the main victim is well mirrored in the terms that media outlets used to tell the story and categorise the crime. The term “parricide” is never mentioned in any of the media texts that I studied – rather, media outlets referred to the story as a case of *domestic violence* (“családon belüli erőszak”, *Népszabadság*), *child abuse* and *child sexual abuse* (“gyerekbántalmazás”, “szexuális gyerekbántalmazás”, *MTVI*), or *physical and emotional terror* (“testi és lelki terror”, *Blikk*), and all repeatedly referred to Kitti's suffering as *abuse* or *sexual abuse* (on the importance of naming, see Lamb, 1991; Lamb & Keon, 1995). Interestingly, despite the strong focus on the element of abuse and the repeated use of the term domestic violence, none of the media outlets interviewed experts on domestic violence. Expert status was assigned only to a priest, a psychologist, the director of an NGO “helping victims”, and two experts on child abuse. This, together with the fluidity of terms used to categorise the crime, indicates that, in the Hungary of 2002, domestic violence, and still less its subtypes, were far from settled in a solid discourse through which their “reality” could be easily and seamlessly articulated.

The earliest media texts, released on 3-4 September 2002, which had a profound

impact on the overall media portrayal of the case, constructed Kitti's and her stepfather's personalities and motivations so that sympathy right from the start was with Kitti, while the stepfather acquired a monster-like personality. Media texts reported that Kitti “has put an end to a decade-long dread” (*MTVI*, 3 September 2002), “shot him in desperation” (*Népszabadság*, 4 September 2002), “could not endure the beating any more” (*Blikk*, 4 September 2002), and even when her perpetrator status was mentioned, the worst description was “homicidal little girl” (*MTVI*, 3 September 2002). The stepfather, meanwhile, was described as someone who “hit his wife, stepdaughter and 3-year-old daughter with a board, electric wire, and a whip”, “professed extreme right-wing ideas, and collected Nazi books” (*MTVI*, 3 September 2002), was “racist and an arms and weapons maniac”, “unemployed”, and who “in the spirit of Nazism, kept his whole family in severe physical and emotional terror” (*Blikk*, 4 September 2002), or “treated his family mercilessly” (*Népszabadság*, 4 September 2002). During this initial period media texts typically reported the abuse in much more detail than the murder itself (the murder received significant attention only later, as investigations progressed). Accordingly, abuse became strongly highlighted as Kitti's motivation for the murder (as later confirmed by the police investigation), and strongly linked to and explained by the stepfather's aggressive personality, epitomised by his frequently mentioned Nazi ideas (what is factually known is that the man indeed possessed Nazi books and an SS uniform).

By giving special significance to the stepfather's Nazi ideas, media outlets (with the exception of *Népszabadság*, we should add, which mentioned only the man's “anti-Roma” sentiments and “extreme right-wing” ideas) presented him as unquestionably an outsider, thereby removing both the abuse and its perpetrator from mainstream society. This type of media portrayal is by no means case-specific. The phenomenon of depicting perpetrators as monster-like or insane is well-known and widely criticised in the existing literature on domestic violence because it downplays the high prevalence of domestic violence in societies and encourages explanations at individual level instead of reflecting on the ways in which violence is enabled and legitimised in society (see e.g. Meyers, 1997; Berns, 2004; Zeynep, 2006, pp. 305-7). In the Simek case, the combination of this raging-monster image of the stepfather's personality constructed by the media, along with the uncommon nature of the murder that Kitti committed, made the whole case particularly vulnerable to

portrayals focusing on the *extraordinariness* and *exceptionality* of the case, even before sensationalist portrayals began to dominate coverage from the second week after the news first broke.

The following multi-modal news item, broadcast as early as 3 September on the prime-time news bulletin of *MTVI*, well illustrates how sympathetic identification with Kitti, as described earlier, was discursively created through a tactical use of language and image in the news, as a result of which Kitti's identity was shifted away from the status of perpetrator towards that of victim:

Homicidal little girl

[We see a village house from the outside, then the entrance from the courtyard] The 14-year-old girl has put an end to a decade-long dread. Over this period her stepfather had been beating her and the entire family on a daily basis. [We see Kitti in close-up, petting a dog] On several occasions he had hit his wife, stepdaughter and three-year-old daughter with a board, an electric wire or a whip. He had threatened them even with a gun. [Kitti's mother speaks to camera] “Whether I had it in my mouth? Well, yes, it happened... loaded with a bullet, at full-cock.” [The camera shows Nazi books] The stepfather professed extreme right-wing ideas, and collected Nazi books [We see Kitti coming out of a room] He often shut the family into the house, and did not let them meet others [New picture: Kitti and her mother are shown in close-up, the mother kisses Kitti's hand] He had even sexually molested the 14-year-old Kitti. This was something that the girl could not endure any longer. On Saturday at around 1.30 a.m. the head of the family fell asleep. It was then that the girl pulled out her stepfather's gun and shot him in the temple. [We see Kitti talking on camera, but not directly to camera] “...and then I felt very relieved, too, because I will be able to forget more quickly that I've killed him than... than these ten years. Because whenever I go to the beach or elsewhere, like I try on clothes, I try on lingerie in a shop, and look at myself, I will always have that on my back. And [at this point she looks into the camera] I will never be able to forget it in my life.” [New picture: two men in suits are sitting at a table in an office] The girl has confessed and pleaded guilty. [New picture: more people sitting around an office table] The police continue the investigation, and are helped by experts. [A man in a suit is talking to camera, without caption; it can only be assumed that he is a spokesperson for the police] “A forensic medical investigation is needed, even because of the sexual harrassment. The technical assault and the sexual abuse [the man grimaces] that her father had carried out has caused severe emotional pain to her, so we need a psychiatrist, too, and a firearms expert”. [New picture: village street] The police have reported that the girl has already reached the age of criminal responsibility, as she turned 14 on the 6 August. [New picture: we see two village women talking to Kitti's mother on a village street. Kitti is squatting alone, at some distance from them, and is petting a dog]. But she can remain at liberty for the course of the investigation.

As indicated earlier, the above multi-modal news item illustrates how the focus shifted from homicide to the element of abuse, and, accordingly, how the roles of perpetrator and victim (and the emotions associated with these) were distributed between Kittii and her stepfather. This is well observable already at the very beginning of the news item: although the title (“homicidal little girl”) puts the focus on homicide and the fact that it has been committed by an unusual perpetrator, the next sentence immediately excuses Kittii from the crime by stating that “the girl has put an end to a decade-long dread”.

The rest of the footage similarly diverts attention from the homicide to the abuse that preceded it. This is achieved through various discursive tactics. It happens firstly through assigning central importance to the stepfather's abuse, both in the family history and in the narrative of the day of the murder. Specifically, nearly half of the footage is dedicated to a detailed description of the violence that the family, primarily Kittii, had suffered, while the act of homicide is given only one sentence (“It was then that the girl pulled out her stepfather's gun and shot him in the temple”). Secondly, it happens through directly quoting Kittii about the abuse. She mostly talks about her own suffering and its irrevocability, including the mark that abuse has made on her body (this bodily mark, however, is not further demonstrated by visuals). Thirdly, it happens through the use of an expert quote to validate Kittii's emotional pain. The police spokesperson claims that “the technical assault and the sexual abuse that her father had carried out has caused her severe emotional pain”. All these contribute to the image of Kittii's victimisation, despite the fact that she was, at the same time, also a murderer. The footage makes use of visual elements, too, in order to bring the teenage girl emotionally closer to spectators, raise their sympathy towards her, and thereby contribute to portraying her in terms of sympathetic identification. Besides the fact that Kittii looks on screen like a normal teenager – what is more, one with a pretty, innocent face – she is often shown by the camera petting a dog, a potential indication of her capacity for bonding and love, which feeds further into the assumption already built that she, in contrast to her stepfather, is not an aggressive, anti-social personality.

4.3.2 Connecting gender, sex and abuse: Male violence, sexual abuse or child (sexual)

abuse?

The above news story also yields insights into the ambiguous ways in which the Hungarian news media established a connection between the abuse and the gender of people affected by it. In general, media outlets often struggled with the gendered aspects of the story, namely, that the perpetrator of the abuse was male, and his victims – given that the man abused the whole family, not only Kitti – were all female, but the nature of the abuse went beyond being merely sexual. The most common strategy for coping with the above dilemma was, as I discuss below, that of paying extra attention to the sexual elements of the abuse, and at the same time marginalising the mother – whose victim position in the face of the male perpetrator was made far less evident than that of the under-age Kitti – and thereby the topic of male violence against adult women.

The above-cited footage is illustrative of this process, as it gives special emphasis to sexual abuse, which, combined with the spotlight on Kitti's age and gender, converts the *gendered* nature of violence that both the girl and her family suffered from the man into *sexual* violence against under-age victims, i.e. child sexual abuse. It is telling that the footage, despite being relatively brief (its full transcript does not exceed one page), mentions Kitti's exact age three times and she is never described in gender-neutral terms (e.g. as a “child” or a “teenager”), but always by terms indicating both her gender and her age (“girl” or “little girl”). Also, the text assigns special significance to the sexual elements of the abuse that Kitti suffered. Firstly, it presents sexual abuse as both the culmination of all previous abuse she suffered and the trigger for the murder (“He had even sexually molested the 14-year-old Kitti. This was something that the girl could not endure any more”), despite the fact that this status of sexual abuse in the story had not been confirmed either by police investigations or by members of the Simek family (in fact, as later investigations and media reports revealed, sexual abuse had started years before Kitti shot him). Secondly, sexual abuse is the one and only form of abuse mentioned in the footage that is accompanied by a strong and negative on-screen emotional reaction (that is when the spokesperson for the police has a grimace full of disgust and embarrassment at the mention of it). This gives a special significance to sexual abuse, which serves as an indication to spectators of what would be the socially “approved” emotional reaction to

sexual abuse in general (on the power of the news media to habituate spectators to “appropriate” emotional responses, see Pantti & Nervi, 2006).³⁶

During the rest of the media coverage, *MTVI* attributed even further significance to the sexual element, and started to explicitly label the case as a story of child sexual abuse. *Népszabadság* and *Blikk*, however, followed slightly different routes. *Népszabadság*, while it similarly highlighted sexual abuse in the beginning, consistently referred to the story as a case of domestic violence, which it understood as inflicted primarily on women and children, and thereby foregrounded the gendered nature of the violence. *Blikk*, however, mostly emphasised the “terror” that Kitti had endured rather than consistently referring to abuse, but on two occasions it shared sensitive details about her sexual molestation (*Blikk*, 5 September and 30 November 2002). In short, while media outlets assigned varying degrees of importance to the element of sexual abuse, all of them highlighted the issue, thereby giving an over-sexualised tone to the media coverage of the case at the expense of highlighting the non-sexual elements and the generally gendered nature of domestic violence.

As I have already indicated, besides the *types* of violence, the media also selected the *victims* of violence that they deemed worthy of attention, and this also contributed to diverting attention from the gendered nature of the crime. The most significant victim missing from the texts – or even if present her victim status was downplayed and vague – was Kitti's mother. Despite the fact that she, similarly to Kitti, endured a decade of abuse, her suffering was rarely mentioned and was markedly overshadowed by Kitti's. In all the media texts I studied, there are only two in which the mother's suffering is explicitly addressed: the first is the text quoted above, where we are given the mother's brief first-person account of a tiny (although quite shocking) part of the violence she endured, and the other is a report from the Simek family's village, published by *Népszabadság* on 10 September 2002, where the newspaper mentions that the stepfather had also humiliated the mother several times in front of village inhabitants. In all the other texts, the mother's suffering is touched upon only by a reference to the man abusing his “family” – a very general term that fails to address her as an individual. Although the fact that the mother's

³⁶ It should be noted that by turning the story into a case of child sexual abuse *MTVI* was focusing on exactly the form of child abuse – sexual abuse – of which Hungarian society already in 2002 strongly disapproved (on the widespread disapproval of child sexual abuse in Hungarian society, see Gavra, 2002).

suffering was downplayed and mostly hidden in the media coverage of the case did protect the mother, in a sense, from the media invading her privacy, it also resulted in an erasure of adult female victims – the most typical victims of domestic violence – from the media coverage of the case.

In summary, the Hungarian news media arrived at the topic of domestic violence and abuse through a case of homicide committed by an under-age perpetrator, a child, that is someone who was both more vulnerable and less evidently responsible than an adult. What is more, she had previously fallen victim to, among others, a type of violence – sexual abuse – that Hungarian public opinion already unambiguously disapproved of back in 2002, in contrast to other forms of domestic violence that the girl had also suffered. The media portrayal of the case unequivocally placed the victim of abuse – and not the victim of the homicide – in the position with which spectators could most sympathise. The strong focus on the abuse and its child victim diverted attention from the mother, despite the fact she too was a typical victim of domestic violence, as well as demonising the abusive stepfather. Both of these factors pushed the general media portrayal of the case in the direction of emphasising even more the extraordinariness and individuality of the story, rather than focusing on its embeddedness in broader social contexts, including the inequality of the sexes and the high prevalence in societies of abuse in domestic settings.

4.4 Changes in proposed types of emotional and moral engagement: The implications of media exposure for the construction of the under-age perpetrator's victimhood

As indicated earlier, the most questionable aspect of the Simek case was the fact that several media outlets – including *MTVI* and, repeatedly, *Blikk* – exposed 14-year-old Kitti before the public. This media portrayal had a profound impact; her moral integrity was soon questioned and this is the phenomenon on which I focus in this section. Specifically, I explore the ways in which her quasi-celebrity status – a role that the news media assigned to her by repeatedly exposing her private life to the public and thereby raising her to temporary fame – clashed with the complexity of her perpetrator-victim status.³⁷ In the

37 On the strong connection between celebrity status and media attention directed to the details of an

previous section I discussed how the news media initially tended to ignore this complexity in order to present Kitti as an ordinary teenager who had fallen victim to abuse and was therefore undoubtedly worthy of compassion and sympathy. In this section I explore how the media handled this complexity as Kitti's social status changed when she appeared to make active use of the accumulated symbolic capital she had acquired through positive and extensive media attention. I first give an overview of how Kitti's media exposure occurred, with a special focus on her consent to what now looks like a violation of her privacy and a disregard for international norms of ethical media portrayal of children. Secondly, I give an overview of how the discursive construction of her “good victim” status by the media (and the emotions associated with this status) gradually changed as she remained in the spotlight for an extended period. I identify two characteristic discourses: the narrative of heroism and the narrative of blame, both created as a response to her quasi-celebrity status. I also discuss a particular appearance by Kitti on a fashionable television talk show, and the ways in which her public conduct and her management of emotions in front of the cameras (and the social expectations concerning these latter two) reinforced a negative change in the social perception of her victimhood.

While media outlets were not violating any Hungarian law by having Kitti appear in person on the news, since they had obtained the girl's and her mother's consent,³⁸ the disclosure of Kitti's full identity had originally happened without the consent of the Simek family,³⁹ and it was this that served as the main motivation for Kitti and her mother agreeing to be interviewed, so as to better control information flows on their case.⁴⁰ While nowadays it is widely accepted that reporting on child victims of abuse requires extraordinary caution, especially regarding the child's right to privacy, in 2002 a large part

individual's private life rather than their public role, see Rojek, 2001, p. 10; Turner, 2004, p. 8. On female celebrities and the gendered realm of celebrity culture see Williamson, 2013.

38 As later investigations led by the Hungarian Ombudsman for Data Protection confirmed. On the conclusion of the investigation, see Adatvédelmi Biztos Hivatala [Bureau of the Hungarian Ombudsman for Data Protection], 2002.

39 Media outlets originally relied on the pieces of information that the police, mostly in accordance with existing police guidelines and practices, made public about the crime on the evening of 2 September, that is Kitti's age and place of residence, to which *Mai Nap*, a tabloid, added Kitti's first name the next morning. This addition, although completely in accordance with the existing Hungarian media practice of naming suspects in crime news, proved to be crucial, as Kitti had a relatively uncommon first name and lived in a little village of not more than 300 inhabitants so could easily be identified by locals and by journalists. In retrospect, the one and only unusual step in the whole process was that in the case of an under-age perpetrator it was uncommon for the police to reveal their place of residence (see Gavra, 2002).

40 For Kitti's account of why she started to cooperate with the media, see Morvai & Simek, 2005, p. 50.

of the Hungarian news media lacked this insight.⁴¹ In retrospect it appears that Hungarian media outlets were just not prepared for managing the complexity of an underage perpetrator-victim and did not handle the situation with the required responsibility and self-restraint.⁴²

Among the media outlets under study, it was *Blikk* that – similarly to other tabloids as well as commercial TV networks – shared sensitive data about Kitti on a daily basis, and turned the case into a real-life soap opera. The Simek story featured in their headlines each day between 4 and 14 September 2002, a period during which Kitti, like a celebrity, willingly gave many interviews to the paper and her face appeared in their pages almost daily. Although the focus of these tabloid articles, as I discuss in the previous section, was mostly on the abuse that Kitti had passively endured, *Blikk* also repeatedly presented Kitti as an active agent who, although with some delay, ultimately took control of her own life by shooting a gun, and *therefore* as worthy of celebration. Accordingly, the tabloid presented the murder as an act of bravery and heroism (e.g. “Kitti is celebrated as a hero in her village”, “villagers are all talking about Kitti's brave act”, *Blikk*, 5 September 2002). In the same spirit, they also repeatedly presented Kitti, and even directly quoted her, as not feeling guilt or remorse: “Kitti does not feel guilty for killing her stepfather” (4 September 2002); “I would shoot the gun again” (directly quoting Kitti, 7 September). In brief, *Blikk*, besides actively contributing to the sympathetic identification that characterised Kitti's initial media portrayal, also employed a *narrative of heroism* to underpin the unusually intensive – and, at least initially, positive – attention it dedicated to Kitti, whose only action that elevated her above other, “ordinary” teenagers (and brought her public fame) was the fact that she had murdered a step-parent. In other words, if sympathetic identification was tailored to the story of the *ordinary* teenager who has been a victim of abuse, then the narrative of heroism that *Blikk* employed served to tell a story about an *extraordinary* teenager who had saved herself from abuse, and was therefore particularly worthy of public attention.

41 On the impact of media exposure on abused children, see Jones, Finkelhor & Beckwith, 2010; on ethical media coverage of traumatised victims, see Coté & Simpson, 2000.

42 Ironically, UNICEF guidelines on how to portray children in the media, including the guidance that the identity and face (or “any distinguishing feature or information”) of children who have fallen victim to abuse or have committed a crime should never be revealed, became available in Hungarian only a couple of months before the Simek case (see Herczog, Neményi & Rácz, 2002; for the updated version of the original UNICEF guidelines in English, see *Guide for Media Practitioners*, 2008).

However, the intensive and voyeuristic public attention that *Blikk* actively enabled towards Kitti right from the start by exposing her private life to the public on a daily basis, ultimately made the case vulnerable to sensationalist modes of portrayal, especially as the tabloid made repeated efforts to keep the story “hot” for an extended period, that is until November. In order to maintain public attention for such a prolonged period, *Blikk* shifted towards a narrative of blame and accusation, which was a radically different approach than what could be observed in the initial coverage of the story, and which constructed compassion and sympathy as adequate emotional and moral reactions to the events. *Blikk* interviewed more and more acquaintances of the Simek family, digging deeper and deeper into Kitti's past, and in the course of this presented Kitti as less and less innocent. The tabloid, among others, questioned whether the abuse had really happened, reporting that according to the stepfather's friends the man “was not attracted to young girls sexually, on the contrary” – a statement that *Blikk* described as “contradicting” Kitti's allegation (17 September 2002). They also reported that Kitti had been caught shoplifting the previous year (28 September 2002), and informed readers that according to the stepfather's mother, the man was “nice, gentle” and “exploited” by his family (8 September 2002). The tabloid also interviewed a number of “experts” (a bishop, a child psychologist, the head of an NGO specialising in “helping victims”, and a child welfare expert) about the case. All of these took a stand against Kitti and her mother, with the head of the NGO and the child psychologist explicitly blaming them for not having tried harder to seek help from the authorities (8 September 2002). *Blikk*, through this use of the narrative of blame, was able powerfully to keep Kitti's private life exposed to the public for a prolonged period, and thereby to exploit spectators' voyeuristic interest in her “extraordinary” personality and exploits.

While the two other media outlets, *MTVI* and *Népszabadság*, did not participate in this soap opera-like portrayal that *Blikk* employed, *Népszabadság* – the only media outlet in my sample that never interviewed Kitti and that tried to refrain from exposing her to public attention – switched to a less victim-friendly portrayal once it had become evident that Kitti, through her willingness to appear in public and confess the details of her private life, had established herself as a recurrent face in the media – or, in the newspaper's words, a “celebrity” (10 September 2002, p. 7). *Népszabadság* introduced their break with the

initial discourse of sympathetic identification with a reference to society's growing disapproval of Kitti's intensive media appearances. It reported that the police thought “the media have made a martyr of the little girl” (9 September 2002), and that they now detected a strong resentment among locals of Kitti regularly appearing in the media as a kind of “celebrity”, “made a martyr”, and “popularised by the media as a role model to follow” (10 September 2002). In the latter article, *Népszabadság* also quoted approvingly psychologists according to whom:

...exposing Kitti to media publicity all the time is so unreasonable. Since this otherwise kind, unpretentious, smiling thing who is in need of understanding and help testifies with each of her words that there are some basic rules that she has not internalised. And this is a harmful message. Even if the deforming impact that the ten-year-long suffering has made on her conscience is a valid excuse for what she has done. (p. 7)

As the passage above shows, *Népszabadság* located the problem in the “harmful message” that the media could convey by popularising someone of questionable morals. Thereby they reproduced exactly – although with more delicacy – the narrative of blame employed by *Blikk*. Whereas *Népszabadság* noted the “deforming impact” that the abuse may have had on the underage victim-perpetrator's emotional state, the potentially negative consequences that media exposure could have on an abused child escaped their attention, and instead they simply claimed that media publicity was “unreasonable”.

Generally, the idea that there may have been a connection between the abuse Kitti had suffered from her stepfather and her baffling conduct in the media – e.g. her claims, quoted earlier, that she “would shoot the gun again” or that she did not feel guilty – was never mentioned, still less discussed in any of the media texts in my sample. This lack of public reflection on the potentially negative effects that media exposure may have on a traumatised child becomes even more evident in the following excerpt from *Blikk*, which reports on an appearance by Kitti on a popular morning political talk show, *Nap-kekte*, on the national commercial TV channel *ATV* (*Blikk*, 8 September 2002). After informing their readers that Kitti arrived at the studio accompanied by her mother and solicitor, and that afterwards spectators could see her talking at length about the murder, notes that the teenager girl did not display the emotions that society would expect from somebody who

has just murdered a parent:

Kitti arrived at the studio wearing capri pants, now fashionable among teens, a white blouse and a pretty headscarf, she smiled happily, and had an amiable word for everybody. Nobody would think that this child had shot someone at close range not long ago. She does not behave at all like a murderer, but rather like an ordinary smiling teenage girl. [...] She is even talking about the bloody dawn as if she were recalling the story of a film from yesterday evening. It's creepy. Probably there is no one who could tell what she has in her mind. Not even her mother. (p. 9)

Blikk describes Kitti's affable behaviour and emotional distance-keeping from the murder as shockingly inappropriate to the situation (“creepy”), in other words as a violation of *feeling rules* – that is, rules that regulate socially approved ways of expressing and managing emotions in a given situation (see Hochschild, 1983, p. 64).⁴³ In the tabloid's description, the girl's looks and conduct (“fashionable”, “pretty”, “amiable”, “smiling”), although originally described in positive terms, once combined with her marked emotionlessness while speaking about the murder (“as if she were recalling the story of a film from yesterday evening”) become disturbing and alarming signs of her alleged inner emotional state. Kitti's public conduct, already stigmatised as “creepy”, is further highlighted by the tabloid's addition that “no one”, not even the person closest to Kitti (that is, her mother) can know how Kitti feels about the crime she has committed – a hint explicitly questioning the girl's moral integrity. It is also worth noting that the tabloid's intensive focus on the lack of socially acceptable emotions was not complemented by a reflection on the broader context of the situation. That is, *Blikk*, like *Népszabadság*, failed to bring attention to the potential links between such behaviour and trauma, or even with the consequences of a child's public exposure in the media. The fact that Kitti had been exposed to media attention and expected to show “normal” conduct while in a traumatised condition was in general lost in the coverage of the case.

In summary, Kitti's intensive media appearances resulted in the focus shifting from the chronicle of abuse to her personality and moral integrity, and in new proposals by the media regarding acceptable emotional and moral public engagement with this story.

43 On coverage of emotions in the news media, especially emotions reported as “appropriate” or not, and the power of the news media to construct and regulate “good” emotional citizenship, see also Pantti & Nervi, 2006.

Sympathy and compassion, once central emotions associated with Kitti's portrayal by the news media, gradually gave way to a narrative of heroism, and more importantly of blame and stigmatisation, the latter questioning the girl's moral integrity as well as condemning her media appearances and her public conduct. Similarly, while in the beginning the news media, by emphasising the abuse, were quick to offer excuses and explanations for the crime she had committed, such explanations were not offered for her media appearances, or in particular for her visible emotionlessness in front of the cameras when asked about the murder. Kitti, by not showing easily visible signs of remorse, failed to manage her emotions in public in a way that society would approve of, and this contributed further to her condemnation by the media and ultimately also to the questioning of her "good victim" status.

4.5 Patterns of social intervention in the texts: Habituating spectators to forms of (in)action

The media coverage of the Simek case, as we have seen, offered a relatively broad range of emotional and moral engagements that spectators could activate towards Kitti, including compassion and sympathy, which, especially initially, were emotions of central importance. These, at least in theory, could have provoked a widespread feeling that action needed to be taken against suffering and domestic violence. However, the perception of a need is not in itself enough to constitute spectators as public actors on domestic violence. For this to happen, domestic violence needs to be presented as a social phenomenon that spectators have the agency to act on, and concrete links to action also need to be provided, where such needs can be channelled (on the constitution of the spectator as a public actor see Chouliaraki 2008a, p. 832). In this section I consider the spectrum of options that media texts offered to spectators as paradigmatic forms of social action (or inaction) in the face of domestic violence. I then explore the ways in which domestic violence, once acknowledged as a social issue on which action should be taken, was pushed further in the direction of gender-neutrality.

In general, the media portrayal of the Simek case created media publics as passive

citizens in the face of domestic violence. One of the characteristic ways in which this was achieved (a technique mostly employed by *Blikk*, but sporadically also by *MTVI*) was that of presenting domestic violence without any social context. There was a lack of attention to potential causes and means of prevention, instead locating this type of violence at an individual level (on creating domestic violence as an individual problem, see Berns 1999, 2001, 2004). The *MTVI* news item quoted earlier well illustrates this technique of individualising violence (“Homicidal little girl”, 3 September 2002). It portrays abuse as resulting exclusively from the stepfather's aggressive personality, and remains silent about the institutions that could take responsibility for prevention and intervention. Violence is thus presented in this news item as something in which society intervenes only after it has already happened. The only form of intervention mentioned is investigation by the police, with the assistance of experts: “The police continue the investigation, and are helped by experts. [...] A forensic medical investigation is needed [...] we need a psychiatrist, too, and a firearms expert” (“Homicidal little girl”, 3 September 2002). This type of portrayal, by failing to bring public attention to potential causes and means of prevention, practically reproduces in spectators the helplessness of the victim (and if spectators refuse identification with the victim in order to avoid this position of helplessness, then a voyeuristic stance is at their disposal, through which suffering can be observed with a thrill, while keeping their distance – once again implying spectators' passivity).

This kind of portrayal was counterbalanced to some extent by an alternative option offered by the media texts to spectators as an adequate form of action against domestic violence. This alternative, present in all the media outlets in my sample, focused on the inadequacy of state institutions – typically the police, the village notary, and various childcare and medical services – and their unwillingness to intervene.⁴⁴ *Népszabadság* and occasionally also *MTVI* combined this portrayal with relevant information about the prevalence of domestic violence/child sexual abuse in societies. The media outlet that did the most to present domestic violence as an issue worthy of social intervention was *Népszabadság*, which dedicated separate articles to domestic violence, including relevant

⁴⁴ The unwillingness of relevant state institutions to intervene in cases of domestic violence was (and still is) a major problem in Hungary. On this issue, see the negative reports that Hungary repeatedly received during the 2000s and 2010s on the effectiveness of domestic violence prevention in the country: Council of Europe, 2006; Amnesty International, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2013.

information about the latency and frequency of the issue in societies, and the claim that typically the victims were women and children. The newspaper also repeatedly interviewed state officials about discrepancies in the existing system and planned changes, and thereby created domestic violence as a social issue on which action should be taken.⁴⁵ However, as I illustrate below, although these articles, at least in theory, could have provoked a perception of need for reform of state institutions, they mostly also failed to provide any concrete links to social actors that could act on such a need. On those rare occasions when such links were given, *Népszabadság* employed an ambiguous strategy with regard to non-state social actors taking action against domestic violence, and this ultimately, once again, constructed spectators as passive citizens.

The article below, published in *Népszabadság* on 21 September 2002, well illustrates the latter strategy. The article briefly covers a petition launched by feminist activists on the 20 September, in which activists called on people in top state positions to implement more effective state-level measures against domestic violence and also called on citizens to add their signatures in order to put greater pressure on the state.⁴⁶ Without anticipating in detail what I discuss in a later section, I note here that *Népszabadság*'s interpretation evolved, with the newspaper turning an initial *call for action* into more of a *report on action*, portraying social intervention against domestic violence as already happening and not in need of civil support. The newspaper article reads as follows (italics are mine and indicate excerpts from the original text of the petition):

Against domestic violence.

Public personalities and social organisations demand measures

In Hungary there is at least one child every month and one woman every week whose life is taken by "the head of the family". Therefore several public personalities and social organisations are calling on Parliament, the Government, the President of the Supreme Court, the Public Prosecutor and the Chief of State Police to pass a bill conforming to international norms on domestic violence and take measures in order to prevent domestic violence this very year. The call was

45 This increased focus in the newspaper on the general issue of domestic violence, however, went hand in hand with the Simek story losing its exemplary status as a case of domestic violence: after the 14 September 2002, *Népszabadság* stopped referencing the Simek story in social issues articles and restricted coverage to its crime news section.

46 For the original text of the petition, today widely considered to be the start of a series of bottom-up movements against domestic violence in the country, see Morvai, 2004, pp. 144-145; on the afterlife of the petition from the perspective of feminist media activism, see Vanya, 2006a.

published yesterday, when the recently murdered little boy's funeral [that of the 12-year-old Tomi Balogh] took place. According to the announcement, *so far no steps have been taken against domestic violence*, therefore now they call on everybody to join their initiative. The document was given sad actuality by the news on Friday reporting that a man from Hajdúhadháza, after a family dispute, had stabbed his eight-year-old son in the chest.

According to the call it does not conform to reality that state institutions would be forced to remain passive in the face of domestic violence, since over the last twenty years the UN, the Council of Europe and the European Union have elaborated in detail legislative models and models of action through which the safety of defenceless family members can be increased considerably. On the basis of these norms in nearly all countries of Europe domestic violence and criminal harassment qualify as criminal acts, and it is not victims who are removed from their families, but perpetrators who are restrained from their family members.

As we have already reported earlier, in the opinion of Katalin Lévai, the Head of the Department of Health in the Ministry of Labour, it is essential to revise existing criminal laws related to domestic violence and rape. An anti-discrimination bill can be passed in Parliament this year, and a position of Child Protection Ombudsman created at the beginning of next year. (p. 9)

The most salient feature of the above article is the fact that, although it reports on a petition launched by members of civil society, it downplays their agency as an effective form of taking action against domestic violence. First of all, the article is silent about the fact that the text it references was in fact a petition – that is, primarily intended to mobilise citizens – and not only an announcement addressing state officials. In the same spirit, *Népszabadság* also omits the names and identities of the people who launched it, or any links to persons, organisations or places where the petition could be signed by spectator-citizens, who could thus take action against domestic violence. It thereby erases all concrete links to public acts of civil agency. Instead, the feminist activists who launched the petition are referenced only in very general terms, as “public personalities” and “social organisations”, and the addressees of the petition are described as “everybody”. With these omissions and vague generalisations, the article can hardly have been read as reporting on a proposal for civil action.

On the other hand, the newspaper fully identified and named other social actors taking action on domestic violence. In the very last paragraph of the article a state official is named and her position minutely described. As a result, despite the fact that the newspaper introduces both the activists’ and the state official’s claims with phrases that are used for paraphrasing opinions without taking a stand on them (“according to” and “in the

opinion of”), the state official's statements – because expressed by someone whose position is fully identified, with consequent implied authority and general expertise on social issues – achieves more weight and credit than the unidentified activists' claim, even though the latter is also accurately recapped in the text. With these textual strategies, *Népszabadság* practically constructed the state as being the only competent social actor on domestic violence, at the expense of other valid forms of public action and most importantly that of citizens.

The other salient feature of the text is the fact that – along with acknowledging domestic violence as a serious social issue on which public action should be taken – it pushes domestic violence further in the direction of gender-neutrality, through 1) an increased attention to children as victims, 2) the concealment of wife abuse, and 3) downplaying male violence. Whereas the original petition identified both women and children as typical victims (see Morvai, 2004), *Népszabadság* dedicates disproportionately high attention to children at the expense of women. Specifically, apart from the first sentence of the article, where women as well as children are identified as typical victims, the only hints the article gives that gender is an important factor in this type of violence is the mention of rape and an anti-discrimination bill at the end of the text – hints insufficient in themselves to raise attention to the gendered nature of domestic violence, given that the gender factor has not been highlighted at all in other parts of the article. The descriptions of the two cases of child abuse that the article uses as illustrations of domestic violence – that is, the case of the “recently murdered little boy”, a reference to the 12-year-old Tomi Balogh, which was also mentioned in the original text of the petition, and the newspaper's own addition of the death of the eight-year-old boy from Hajdúhadháza, resulting from a “family dispute” – similarly evidences the omission of the gender aspect. Specifically, both cases, despite being selected, at least in principle, to illustrate domestic violence against women and children, are constructed as cases of child abuse. The description of these cases in the article conceals wife abuse and downplays male violence. Male violence against children is portrayed as resulting from a “family dispute” in Hajdúhadháza, whereas the article remains silent about the by then well-known fact that wife abuse was also an important context of Tomi Balogh's murder by his father.⁴⁷ Additionally, the article also

47 On the more detailed context of Tomi Balogh's murder by his father, including the facts that it followed

remains silent about the fact that the petition was being launched by feminists, that is citizens promoting gender equality. In brief, the newspaper clearly selects victims and types of violence from among the available cases in order to present domestic violence as a social problem on which action should certainly be taken, while capitalising on the social perception of children as the cultural emblems of innocence in order to present “good” victims in defence of whom society is probably most willing to take action. This is a victim profile to which adult women – and still less a teenager who has become a perpetrator of homicide – are less able to conform.

In summary, the media portrayal of the case mostly constructed spectators as a passive audience of domestic violence, and assigned the role of public actor exclusively to the state, thereby downplaying acts of civil agency already occurring in the country. Ironically, the acknowledgement of domestic violence as a severe social problem on which action should be taken went hand in hand with the Simek story gradually losing its symbolic power to represent domestic violence in media texts, while the perception of domestic violence moved further in the direction of gender-neutrality and children became the centre of attention as the most typical victims. By the time domestic violence was being portrayed, at least in some media outlets, as a severe social problem on which action should be taken, the Simek story had become so controversial, because of Kitti's previous media exposure, that both *Népszabadság* (the only media outlet in the sample that consistently portrayed domestic violence as an issue that should be tackled) and the petition launched by feminist activists omitted the Simek case, and thereby revoked its symbolic power to represent domestic violence to the broader public.

4.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analysed the Simek domestic abuse case through selected extracts from three major news media outlets across a period of peak coverage in September 2002. Using a CDA framework that employed the analytical categories of naming, as well as of

years of abuse by the head of the family, and that after the murder the man left a letter to his wife in which he explained to her that he had killed their boy with the intention of causing her emotional pain, see Morvai, 2004.

characterisation, allocation of motives and context, I have explored the ways in which domestic violence was constructed in terms of the identity of the event and its actors – that is, the switches from perpetrator to victim, from homicide to abuse, and from sexual abuse to domestic violence, the proposed emotional engagement of news publics with these actors, and the proposals for social intervention in the violence committed. I argue that the Simek story drew the attention of the media because of its traditionally high newsworthiness (as a case of homicide with a female, under-age perpetrator), but the case soon began to be narrated as a case of abuse, where abuse was further specified by various names, including that of domestic violence. However, with the news focusing on Kitti, a child, as the main victim of domestic abuse and marginalising the suffering of other family members, the term domestic violence entered the Hungarian public arena with the focus already shifted away from women, and with domestic violence already de-gendered to some extent, despite the fact that originally it was coined by Hungarian feminist activists. Thereby this case created domestic violence mostly in terms of a *gender-neutral victimhood*.

The identity of the event, as constructed by the media, was fundamentally shaped by the fact that these news media repeatedly failed to place the case in broader social contexts, rather showing a strong tendency to present violence as resulting from an issue on the individual level. Therefore, while the media portrayal of the Simek case was suitable for raising public attention to the *existence* of domestic violence, it did not do the same for the *nature* of domestic violence. Since the Simek case was mostly portrayed as unique and extraordinary, the chance to present domestic violence as having a high prevalence in societies, including Hungarian society, and as forming part of the everyday life of many citizens, was missed. The relevant discussion of domestic violence was further hindered by the fact that media outlets repeatedly violated the victim's privacy, exposed her to the public, and thereby made the story highly vulnerable to a voyeuristic consumption that did not favour socially engaged approaches to the victim's suffering or to the general issue of domestic violence.

Furthermore, despite the fact that a feminist, bottom-up movement was launched in the country against domestic violence within less than three weeks after the first news broke about the Simek case, the news media down-played the importance of civil agency in

relation to domestic violence, erased explicit proposals for public civil action, and instead gave a monopoly to the state in taking action against this type of violence. The Hungarian news media remained practically silent about existing channels into which spectators (if they were) emotionally and morally engaged with the suffering of the victim, could have channelled their need for action, and instead constructed them as an audience devoid of civil agency in the face of violence.

Despite all the negative sides of the media portrayal listed above, the Simek case did play an important part in raising public awareness of the existence of domestic violence in Hungary. It was the very first case in the country that both achieved very high media visibility and was identified and named as a case of domestic violence (or cognate terms), a type of violence that had been previously unnamed and kept hidden from publicity. Many characteristics of the media portrayal of the case (the focus on its extraordinariness, the sensationalist portrayals, the extended exposure of the victim's private life to the public) impeded, at least provisionally, relevant public discussion. However, the very same features contributed significantly to the high visibility that domestic violence achieved in the Hungarian news media, which overall led to a breaking of the silence around the issue in Hungarian public discourse.

5. TV personality Roland Damu's fall from grace: Televised fame, the emergence of televsual celebrity culture in Hungary and the place within it of domestic violence, 2010-12

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores a case of domestic violence from 2010-2012, in which Hungarian soap actor and TV personality Roland Damu was involved as a perpetrator, and through which a very central and prevalent form of domestic violence emerged into the limelight in Hungary: male violence against female intimate partners. The main issue at stake in this case was the possibility of re-defining domestic violence – which previously was mostly understood in gender-neutral terms, as we have seen in Chapter 4 – with the inclusion of the aspect of *gender*. As I demonstrate in this chapter, gender emerges as an important dimension of the reporting of domestic violence, particularly of naming the crime, the identity of typical perpetrators and victims, and also the ways in which this type of violence was perceived in terms of the dialectic between victimhood and agency. Also, because this case involved as perpetrator a well-known public personality whose fame had arisen from a local televisual celebrity culture that became established in the country only a couple of years earlier, this case also offers us the possibility of exploring the specificities of domestic violence as mediated predominantly through this celebrity-news-oriented segment of the Hungarian news media.

As police investigations later revealed, on 17 November 2010 Roland Damu, shortly after the end of his nearly two-year-long abusive relationship with his ex-fiancée Tímea Palácsik, shut her into a flat, where he battered and raped her. The woman reported the case to the police, and Damu, after two court appearances on 12 September 2011 and 20 March 2012, was finally sentenced to four and a half years in prison. The news of the crime broke very early on the following day, and the story was followed intensively by the Hungarian news media, especially its tabloid segment, throughout the eighteen months from the first news until the final verdict. This, as some media outlets later pointed out, made the whole case “a drama unfolding in the public eye” (“Damu Rolandot miért”, 2011)

and, more importantly, the “first case of domestic violence” in the country that was “nearly the whole time out in the public domain” (*RTL Klub, Házon kívüül*, 28 March 2012). Indeed, since 2002, when teenager Kitti Simek shot her abusive stepfather dead – the case explored in Chapter 4 – no other high-profile domestic violence cases had emerged in the Hungarian mediated public sphere, and the Simek case, because it was mostly portrayed as a case of child abuse, had not brought attention to those discursively more central forms of domestic violence involving the gendered violence of (adult) male perpetrators against (adult) female victims. In spite of its central role in the formation of domestic violence as a public issue in Hungary, the Damu case is currently very under-researched, with, as of late 2018, only one one brief, four-page-long scholarly article from 2011, when the case was not yet over, which – despite the fact that Damu was a TV personality and therefore strongly tied to the medium of television – focuses only on the tabloid press coverage of the case (Prischetzky, 2011).

As already mentioned, until the media brought the Damu case to public attention, domestic violence was not much discussed in the Hungarian public sphere, with the notable exception of the aforementioned Simek case; and neither were other forms of gendered violence, except for a high-profile case of rape, the “Zsanett” case from 2007 (for a discussion of the latter, see Kormos, 2011).⁴⁸ To be sure, cases of these forms of violence were regularly reported by the news media, but typically did not inspire extensive media coverage or discussion. Awareness-raising campaigns or investigative reports into these types of violence were similarly missing or scarce.⁴⁹ However, by the beginning of the 2010s a significant need for public discussion of domestic violence had accumulated in Hungarian society, for which the Damu case may have served as a *catalyst*. This is evident from the fact that shortly after the Damu case a strikingly high number of personal narratives on this subject attracted publicity, including a cluster of autobiographical novels written by survivors of child abuse (Anoni, 2013; Czapáry, 2013) or male spouse abuse (Demcsák, 2014; Péterfy-Novák, 2014). There was also a series of comings-out in the media, with local female celebrities and public figures sharing with the public their own

48 This rape case does not qualify as domestic violence, since the rape was perpetrated by strangers (more specifically, policemen). For further details, see Kormos, 2011.

49 The first notable piece of investigative journalism on the subject appeared only in 2009, when *Index.hu* published a series of interviews with victims of domestic violence (understood as both child abuse and spouse abuse) (“Fődíjas lett”, 2009).

stories about how they had survived male spouse abuse (for example, *TV2* anchorwoman Zsuzsa Demcsák on the *TV2* programme *Frizbi*, 14 October 2012; flautist Eszter Horgas in *Fókusz* on *RTL Klub 4*, November 2015). Interestingly, the first of these comings-out in the media, that of actress Athina Papadimitriou about her abusive marriage, preceded the Damu case by only a couple weeks (*Frizbi* on *TV2*, 22 October 2010), but the media attention this received was rather small, and by no means comparable to that attracted by the Damu story.

Damu's status as a soap actor and TV personality, characteristically tied to the emergence of commercial broadcasting in Hungary, did shape the media coverage of the case considerably on many levels. Langer defines a television personality as an individual who is “constituted more or less exclusively for and by television” (1981, p. 351), and Damu indeed first emerged into national fame through his role as the main “bad boy” character in *TV2*'s daily evening soap, *Jóban-rosszban* (In Good and Bad Times), launched in 2005. However, many aspects of his televisual fame point to a new type of television personality – as originally brought to scholarly attention by Bennett and Holmes (Bennett, 2008; Bennett & Holmes, 2010) – that appeared in the country only with the advent of commercial broadcasting. Specifically, Damu achieved televisual fame through a *constant building of his media image*, in which his private life and fictional role repeatedly and characteristically merged into the “seamless public persona” (Bennett, 2008, p. 35) of a charming bad boy. This building of Damu's image would not have been possible without a televisual celebrity culture having taken root in the country by the 2000s, or unless the broadcaster, too, had strongly enabled this image-building. *TV2* regularly gave additional circulation to Damu's image in a series of factual programmes, such as their celebrity news and celebrity reality shows – genres unheard of in Hungary before the advent of commercial broadcasting, which allowed Damu to perform *himself*. As a consequence, he had soon firmly established himself as one of *TV2*'s “faces”, and his image had also acquired non-televisual media circulation, first in the tabloid press.⁵⁰ By the time the news broke on 18 November 2010, Damu was a nationally well-known and popular personality, characteristically linked to *TV2*, and regularly attracting the attention of the tabloid media.

As a consequence of Damu's successful image-building in the media, the

50 On the subsidiary circulation of televisual images by other segments of the media, and their role in the establishment of television personalities, see Bennett, 2008, p. 35.

newsworthiness of the story about his battering and raping of his ex-fiancée, which in the case of an ordinary perpetrator would probably not have reached the attention threshold of the news media, was multiplied. As previous literature on the subject demonstrates, the most frequent and “ordinary” types of domestic violence, where, as in the Damu story, a woman has fallen victim to spouse abuse, typically do not receive much media attention unless the case ends in tragedy or a high-profile person is involved (see e.g. Carter 1998; Dobash & Dobash 1992, p. 6; Meyers, 1994, 1997; on Hungary, see Hüse & Konyáriné, 2008). Therefore, the Damu case is relevant because of its ability to bring attention to this “everyday face” of domestic violence in families that usually escapes media attention.

On the other hand, as some experts on gender have pointed out (Dankovics & Puss, 2011), since Damu's image was strongly tied to “soft” media genres such as the soap opera, celebrity reality shows and celebrity news, the newsworthiness of the story and especially its domestic-violence-related social relevance mostly escaped the attention of more “serious” media outlets. The story was mostly followed by the tabloid segment of the Hungarian media only and especially by the infotainment-oriented news programmes of commercial broadcasters and by the tabloid press. This phenomenon of media attention getting diverted from the social relevance and embeddedness of domestic violence cases of celebrities due to the tabloidisation of the story and/or its development into a media spectacle is far from being case-specific, as previous literature on the subject has demonstrated (see e.g. Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-85, 91; Braber, 2015, p. 96). However, as existing literature evidences, even cases as imbued with sensational spectacles and exploitative voyeuristic approaches as the O. J. Simpson case in the US have the potential to raise attention to important aspects of domestic violence (McLaughlin, 1998). As we will see below, this was true of the Damu case and its gender aspect, which highlights the emergence of gender-based violence into public attention.

Another implication of Damu's previous image-building was his increased personal exposure – both passive and active – to the media. Given that for a while he had practically lived his life in the public eye, a long track record of his previous scandals and crimes had accumulated in the media, over which he lacked control, and which was relatively easily recalled and re-circulated in public once the news broke about him battering and raping his ex-girlfriend. These previous media documents were able to serve as a kind of additional

proof of his perpetrator status and generally aggressive tendencies.⁵¹ On the other hand, due to his strong and long-standing ties to the media industry and his televisual skills, Damu was also in a privileged position to control his *present* media image and *re-fashion* it in a more favourable direction that would fit better with his own version of the story. This act of remaking his image, as we see below, almost took over a large part of the media coverage of the story, and was mostly trying to construct him as a subject worthy of compassion and pity. As a result, the media coverage of the Damu case was in many respects centred around the *perpetrator's* media image and the forms of emotion it discursively constructed, resulting in an on-screen competition between the victim and the perpetrator regarding where pity and compassion should be placed.

Damu's close and intimate connection to local televised celebrity culture also makes this case highly relevant from the perspective of *mediated intimacy* (Barker, Gill & Harvey, 2018, pp. 24-26). His on-screen persona was, on many levels, a product of media genres that placed intimate and private life – both “real-life” and fictional – at the heart of media representations (on celebrity status being closely tied to an increased focus of the media on these people's private life rather than their public role see Rojek, 2001, p. 10; Turner, 2004, p. 8.). Specifically, not only his frequent appearances in celebrity-related genres like celebrity news, celebrity talk shows and cooking shows – where he could “perform himself” – were of this kind. The soap opera in which he played a leading character – usually referred to as the “chief baddie” on the show – was similarly centred around the private lives of inhabitants of a fictitious Hungarian town, Csillagkút, which spectators could “peep into”. In this sense, when the news broke about his battering and raping of his ex-fiancée, which later developed into “a drama unfolding in the public eye” (“Damu Rolandot miért”, 2011), this information fitted nicely into the web of media representations around him that had already been established earlier.

51 To give an example, media outlets were happy to re-circulate the news that three years earlier he had hit one of his female colleagues after a party, or that at an early stage of his career he had once broken down the door of another female colleague (see “Soha nem tudta”, 2010). Some video footage on *YouTube*, to give another example, showing Damu in the middle of an outburst of rage during a celebrity cooking show, was watched by “hundreds of thousands” of users, as an online news magazine reported, after the first verdict against him was announced (Farkas, 2011).

5.2 Data, data selection and methods

Although the Damu case was covered by the print and internet news media, too, in the following pages – in line with the broader argument of my thesis – I focus on the broadcast media coverage. Broadcast media, and especially commercial broadcasters, served as the focal point of media coverage throughout. It was to commercial broadcasters that other news platforms regularly referred, and from which they re-mediated important content. In other words, the commercial media and their characteristic entertainment-driven and celebrity-focused news genres had a particular importance in the unfolding of this case, given that Damu, as a television personality and a local celebrity, was strongly tied to this medium and these particular media genres. However, as I established in Chapter 3, I extend my study to the three most-viewed national broadcasters, in order to obtain a more detailed picture of how this case was covered in 2010-2012 in the most viewed – and therefore central – segment of the Hungarian mediated public sphere, that is the public-service broadcasting channel, *MI*, and two commercial broadcasters, *TV2* (Damu's own channel) and *RTL Klub* (for viewership statistics see AGB Nielsen 2012). Data were collected with the help of *NAVA*, the *National Audiovisual Archive* in Hungary, and occasionally complemented with data from *TV2*'s own archive (if data from *NAVA* seemed to be corrupted or lacking). In this way I collected 178 news stories that dealt with the Damu case between 18 November 2010 (when the news broke) and 30 April 2012 (by which time the story had gone cold).

The distribution of relevant media texts among these three broadcasters shows that the public service broadcaster (*MI*) almost completely refrained from covering the story, while commercial broadcasters monopolised its reporting. This confirms my previous argument that the story was heavily tabloidised, that is cast in the genre of entertainment-oriented “soft news”. Specifically, of the three broadcasters, it was *TV2* (Damu's channel) that produced the most news items, altogether 132 items. Of these 29 were aired on the broadcaster's prime-time news bulletin (*Tények*), 35 on their off-peak news bulletins (*Tények Reggel*, *Tények Este*), but they regularly returned to the story also in their prime-time current affairs magazine *Aktív* (27), their morning news magazine *Mokka* (34), and

their late-night celebrity talk show *Frizbi* (9). *RTL Klub* – considered to have the most tabloid agenda of the three broadcasters (see Bajomi-Lázár and Monori 2007; Terestyéni 2007) – produced 49 items of news on the story, of which 18 were aired on their prime-time news bulletin (*Híradó*) and nine on their off-peak news bulletins (*Reggeli*, *Fél Kettő*), but they repeatedly covered the story also in their prime-time soft-news-oriented current affairs magazine *Fókusz* (12), and their celebrity news magazine *Reflektor* (3), and once (1) also in *Házon kívül*, a current affairs magazine mostly dealing with political and social issues. *MI*, the public service broadcaster, covered the story only once in eighteen months, in a very brief piece of early morning news, after the second-court trial.⁵² Therefore, although I focus more here on prime-time news bulletins, I necessarily also include the more soft-news-oriented broadcasts. This is especially because some of the latter type of programmes – such as the *Frizbi* celebrity talk show, where both Damu and Tímea repeatedly appeared and gave in-depth interviews – had a special relevance in constructing the perpetrator's and the victim's personalities for the public eye.

Since I am interested in discursive change in representations of domestic violence, I have used critical discourse analysis (CDA) – as explained in Chapter 3 – in order to explore the ways in which domestic violence (and cognate types of violence) was discursively constructed by the Hungarian broadcast news media. I explore naming (classifying the event as rape, assault or domestic violence), agency (specifying roles of victim and perpetrator) and emotions (proposed affective and moral engagement with Damu and Tímea), and the implications of all these for the construction of domestic violence in the national public sphere. Moreover, given that relevant data is available in abundance and media attention was very intense for an extended period of time (September 2012 – April 2013), rather than looking for “peak periods”, I seek to give a general overview of the dominant discourses, and select some texts for deeper analysis on the basis of their ability to illustrate the most typical of these discourses. My central arguments are that: i) the news coverage of the case underwent two terminological shifts that both pointed towards the construction of the story as an instance of gendered violence; ii) the media

52 Given that Prischetzky (2011) has referenced a piece of news from *MI* that I did not find in the *NAVA* database, I double-checked the lack of data from public service broadcaster *MI*. As an employee of the Media Services and Support Trust Fund (MTVA) -- a state fund currently in charge of, among other things, managing the archives of *MI* – confirmed to me in an email correspondence on the 9 April 2018, *MI* had indeed covered the Damu story only once between November 2010 and April 2012.

constructed pity and compassion as the most adequate forms of emotional engagement, but failed to reassuringly clarify whether these should go to Damu or to Tímea; and iii) while agency and victimhood emerged as key issues for understanding the nature of domestic violence, this focus often led to the emergence of victim-blaming discourses.

5.3 The politics of naming: Assault, rape or domestic violence?

The act of naming a perpetrator's actions is never innocent, given that labels and names can have far-reaching implications regarding how we construct a crime of violence and its actors: which parts of a course of events are considered part of a criminal act at all; what level of agency we expect from the victims; or which social groups (if any) we consider more affected by a given crime. These also have far-reaching implications for whether a given crime is constructed as socially pervasive (and, therefore, requiring social intervention) or understood as an individual problem (on the importance of naming, see Lamb, 1991; Lamb & Keon, 1995).

Damu's violence was referred to by various names and labels in the media. The overwhelming majority of media texts referred his actions by the legal terms “sexual violence” (*nemi erőszak*), “severe assault” (*súlyos testi sértés*) or (especially after 12 September 2011) “illegal restraint” (*személyi szabadság megsértése*). These terms were probably taken from police and court documents (given that back in 2010-2012 domestic violence was not a separate entry in the Hungarian Criminal Code) and inserted into the news discourse because of their particular suitability for meeting requirements of objectivity in reporting. The similarly frequent use of phrases like “he battered her, raped her and did not let her out of the flat”, usually combined with a clear indication of the day when the above acts happened (17 November 2010), can be understood as the approximations of the above legal terms in everyday speech (see e.g. *RTL Klub, Híradó*, 12 September 2012).

While the above terms fairly conveyed to the broader public the state of affairs that had served as the legal basis for bringing a charge against Damu, they had some problematic implications from the point of view of domestic violence. Most importantly,

these terms – in accordance with the fact that at the time of the Damu case domestic violence was not recognised as a separate criminal act in the country – fragmented the process of domestic violence into separate, one-off acts of (mostly) physical force. Thereby they wiped out precisely those characteristics of domestic violence that relevant literature has since the mid-1990s stressed as fundamental to this type of violence: its nature as an *ongoing* and *cumulative* abuse of power and control in relationships (see e.g. Hearn, 1998; Johnson, 1995; Stark, 2007).

Specifically, what became obscured in this way was the element of *coercive control*, which is the most typical form domestic violence assumes in modern democracies (Stark, 2007, pp. 193-4). Coercive control practically operates as a response to women's social gains in modern societies, including the formal equality between the sexes, serving as a kind of “counter-move” to undo these gains within the realm of the private. Through such typical tactics as isolation, intimidation, repeated put-downs and gradually depriving victims of their social, financial and other resources, perpetrators of coercive control exert a *cumulative* and *systematic* control over their victims, often invisible to the public, and target and erode exactly that agency, personhood and capacity for self-motivation in their victims that modern societies typically expect from and celebrate in their adult members (Stark, 2007, pp. 171-197). In the media coverage of the Damu case, this “invisible” side of domestic violence was brought to the attention of the public mostly only through Tímea's narrative, when she talked about the abuse that she had suffered from Damu on a daily basis during their relationship. Media outlets otherwise, when they simply relied on legal terms taken from legal documents, inadvertently obscured this process of accumulation and systemacity so crucial to domestic violence, and instead inadvertently constructed domestic violence in terms of one-off criminal acts. Moreover, the missing element of coercive control would also have been crucial to understanding why Tímea had not left her abusive relationship with Damu earlier, a question that – as I describe below – acquired a central role in those media portrayals in which the issue of domestic violence finally started to emerge.

A shift in the use of legal terminology can be observed after the first court trial on 12 September 2011, when the terms “abuse” (*bántalmazás*) and “domestic violence” (*családon belüli erőszak*) (the latter mostly used by *RTL Klub*) began to emerge in the

coverage of the story. Media outlets reported, for example, that “the actor [was] sentenced to six years of prison because of abuse and violence” (*RTL Klub, Híradó*, 15 September 2011); “after their break-up, he abused her and raped her” (*RTL Klub, Fókusz*, 15 September 2011); or made reference to “their abusive relationship” (*TV2, Mokka*, 15 and 24 September 2011); or began to use the term “domestic violence” (e.g. *RTL Klub, Fókusz*, 16 and 20 September 2011). Until then these terms had been nearly exclusively used by Tímea, the victim, in her narrative about her relationship with Damu (for an exceptional earlier use of “abuse” see e.g. *TV2, Aktív*, 16 June 2011). Tímea, throughout the whole case, consistently named what she had gone through as “abuse”, as an “abusive relationship” or less frequently as “domestic violence”. For example, when she first spoke to the cameras, on 17 April 2011 in the celebrity talk show *Frizbi* on *TV2*, she recalled that Damu “quarrelled with me every day, and there was abuse, too, nearly every day”. Just after the first court trial she told *RTL Klub* that “now I understand those women who do not dare to step out of an abusive relationship like mine was. Because going through this whole process, this indeed requires a lot of strength” (*Híradó*, 12 September 2011). The fact that Tímea's terminology was picked up temporarily by the media outlets after the first court trial can be read as a sign of her growing credibility among the public (given that a trial court's decision had just been made in her favour), and may also be indicative of the fact that her terminology – and the concomitant discourse on abuse and domestic violence – was slowly beginning to acquire the status of “truth” with regard to Damu's past actions (for truth claims, see Foucault 1976/1978, pp. 92-102; 1977/1980, pp. 131-133).

Another shift in terminology led in the direction of narrowing down the content of the crime. In close connection with the new strategy of the defence before the second court trial – when information leaked out that Damu's new barrister would seek to question the rape element in the story – media outlets began to focus more intensively on rape. Accordingly, Damu's crime was often summarised with a distinct focus on rape – for example, he was described as soon to stand in court for having “committed, among other crimes, rape” (*TV2, Tények*, 29 September 2011, 2 October 2011, 6 March 2012; *RTL Klub, Hírek*, 7 March 2012). Or he was described as having committed exclusively rape: “Roland Damu, the actor suspected of rape” (*RTL Klub, Hírek*, 28 February 2012), Damu's “severe rape case” (*TV2, Mokka*, 12 March 2012) or “ongoing rape case” (*TV2, Tények*, 14 March

2012). This focus on rape was especially intensive from early February 2012 onwards, when concrete details became public about the planned strategy of the defence, and continued until 20 March 2012, when the final sentence (four and half years of imprisonment) was announced in court, and TV channels returned to their earlier use of legal terms. This shift towards rape-centredness went in a completely opposite direction than the one discussed earlier, that is towards a radical reduction of the complex chain of events to only one of its components, the sexual component. This emergence of rape discourse into prominence in the media coverage of the case, however, also made it possible for rape-specific victim-blaming to enter the media coverage of the case.

Overall, the above shifts in terminology show that the Hungarian news media did not have a coherent answer to the dilemma of naming. Their terminology was oscillating considerably. This oscillation already in itself marks an inconsistency in media texts, in other words a discursive change in the domain of domestic violence. As Fairclough has pointed out, inconsistencies and contradictions in texts are indicative of a lack of a solidified order of discourse, and therefore of the fact that a seemingly contradiction-free, naturalised discursive construction of reality – here: the “reality” of domestic violence – is not available (1992, p. 97).

At the same time, it is worth noting that the two terminological shifts discussed above have something in common, namely the fact that both were moving from more gender-neutral terms – such as “severe assault” or “illegal restraint” – towards gendered types of violence, such as “rape” and “domestic violence”. This shift towards gender becomes more evident if we also consider the ways in which domestic violence, as I discuss in the next section, was unambiguously constructed as male violence against women in the Damu case (in sharp contrast with the earlier uses of the same term during the Simek case in 2002). The fact that, whenever the constraints of legal discourse were left behind in the news discourse, terminology moved towards being gendered is already indicative of how the issue of *gender* played a significant role in this terminological oscillation, and consequently also in the discursive change that took place around domestic violence in 2010-2012 in Hungary. In the next section, I examine the ways in which this emergence of *gender* and the fact that – in contrast with the Simek case – the victim was an *adult* woman, were ambivalently connected to the general issues of violence, agency and

blame.

5.4 Connecting violence, gender and agency: The ambivalent place of blame

In this section I explore in more detail how violence and its actors (that is, perpetrators and victims) become discursively connected to gender, with special attention to the implications of this connection for the construction of agency and victimhood. Firstly, I discuss the ways in which the Damu case, after the first guilty verdict was announced in September 2011, entered the current affairs programmes of both commercial TV channels, and was constructed there, with the help of feminist experts, as an exemplary instance of gendered violence – firstly of domestic violence (*TV2, Mokka*, 15 and 24 September 2011; *RTL Klub, Fókusz*, 20 September 2011), and to lesser extent of rape (*TV2, Mokka*, 15 September 2011; *RTL Klub, Házon kívül*, 28 March 2012). Here I also discuss briefly the context that the media constructed for these expert discourses, and the ways in which their political decontextualisation set the boundaries for discussing gendered violence in the media. Secondly, after establishing that existing victim-blaming media portrayals were a significant concern in these expert discourses, I extend my focus to the broader news coverage of the Damu story, and argue that victim-blaming emerged as a central issue there, too. Accordingly, I dedicate the major part of this section to the ways in which victim-blaming discourses permeated the news coverage of the story on multiple levels, ranging from indirect and covert forms to explicit blaming. As examples of the latter, I discuss in more detail the two 20-minute-long interviews that *Tímea* gave on a celebrity talk show (*TV2, Frizbi*, 17 April 2011; 15 April 2012) and the long excerpt aired by *TV2* on their prime-time news bulletin from the footage of the plea of Damu's barrister during the trial (*TV2, Tények*, 7 March 2012). Victim-blaming emerged slightly differently according to whether the story was constructed as an instance of domestic violence or of rape. While rape-related victim-blaming was mostly made unwelcome in the studio, in the case of domestic violence the media took a more tolerant and ambiguous approach. Below, I therefore consider separately domestic violence-related and rape-related discourses of victim-blaming .

5.4.1 Connecting domestic violence, gender and agency

Generally speaking, the current affairs programmes that the two commercial broadcasters dedicated to domestic violence presented relevant public discussion on the issue (*TV2, Mokka*, 15 and 24 September 2011; *RTL Klub, Fókusz*, 20 September 2011). They touched upon such important aspects as the latency of the issue, the systematic and cyclical nature of abuse in domestic settings, the difficulty of identifying potential perpetrators during the courtship phase of a relationship, and one expert even pointed out that the assumption that helpless women do not try to leave their abusive relationships was mistaken and it was rather “the legal framework that does not protect women who try to speak up, and neither is public opinion women-friendly” (*TV2, Mokka*, 15 September 2011). Another important aspect of all these programmes was the fact that, by consistently referring to perpetrators as “husbands”, “ex-husbands” or “boyfriends” and victims as “women” or “abused women”, participants discursively constructed domestic violence as *male violence against (known) women*. Moreover, by refraining from marking these men and women in terms of further social characteristics like their ethnicity, social standing or age, these programmes practically located domestic violence in mainstream society.⁵³

Interestingly, despite the fact that the programmes relied heavily on expert knowledge from feminist sources, the media outlets tended to refrain from marking these expert discourses as feminist or even as women-focused (experts interviewed or invited into the studio were predominantly working for *NANE* or *Patent Egyesület*, two Hungarian NGOs specialising in working with violence against women and overtly embracing feminist values). Rather, experts were typically referred to as “rights defenders” (*jogvédők*), that is without a clear indication of exactly whose rights they would be defending, and their NGOs as “associations for the defence of rights” (*jogvédő szervezetek*) (see e.g. *TV2, Mokka*, 15 September 2011; 12 March 2012; *TV2, Tények*, 11 March 2012). Programmes in which the experts’ strong connection to women’s issues was not obscured were less numerous. On these, experts were always referred to as “women’s rights

⁵³ The one and only current affairs magazine programme that framed the Damu case as an example of both domestic violence and rape similarly constructed these types of violence as male violence against women (*RTL Klub, Házon kívül*, 28 March 2012).

defenders” (*női jogvédők*), and their NGOs as “associations for the defence of women’s rights” (*női jogvédő szervezetek*) (*TV2, Mokka*, 24 September 2011; *RTL Klub*, 9 March 2012). The advantage of this strategy – that expert knowledge on domestic violence was mostly left unmarked by a gender perspective or any political view (such as feminism) – was that media outlets could endow these discourses with objectivity, impartiality and authority, and thereby give more “truth value” to the issues they discussed and the perspectives they employed.⁵⁴ On the other hand, in line with this lack of reference to feminist contexts, none of these news programmes touched upon the connection between domestic violence and the social inequality between the sexes in Hungarian society, and in general this connection was left undiscussed throughout the entire media coverage of the case.

The issue to which the above programmes paid the most attention was that of victim-blaming and its critique. In the Western world, domestic violence against women is usually perceived in terms of a binary of victimhood and agency, with, on the one hand, “helpless” and “powerless” women seen as forcibly subjected to their spouse’s rule and unable to rescue themselves, and, on the other hand, women “voluntarily” staying in abusive relationships that they could have “freely” left. This binary, as previous literature has pointed out, fails to account for the complexity of victims’ experiences, which typically lie somewhere between these two extremes, and are rather shaped by a dialectical tension between agency and powerlessness (Picart, 2003). In this respect, the coverage of Damu’s story was no exception, given that agency and victimhood emerged as central issues, either in the form of direct victim-blaming or in indirect form, through a reflexive referencing of previous victim-blaming in the case. Specifically, victim-blaming – as I show below – emerged in the media coverage of the Damu case firstly in the form of questions put to Tímea during her two interviews on the *Frizbi* celebrity talk show on *TV2* about why she had not left her abusive relationship with Damu earlier, and, to a lesser extent, in the form of Damu’s barrister publicly placing the blame on her for having been raped, during the second trial on 7 March 2012, which was broadcast later that day on the *TV2* evening news

54 This strategy of promoting women’s issues without their original feminist context had already been widely used – although not necessarily in connection with domestic violence – in Hungary, where the social recognition of feminism until recently had been, to say the least, sporadic and low (for a discussion of previous examples of this strategy as employed in Hungarian literary criticism, see Horvath, 2011).

bulletin. Current affairs magazines that approached the Damu case with a social issue frame strongly resonated with these instances of victim-blaming, and kept it at the centre of attention and critique, as illustrated by some of their headlines (“Why had Palácsik not left Damu?”; “Why do women put up with violence?”, *TV2, Mokka*, 15 and 24 September 2011).

These current affairs programmes, meanwhile, did practically try to serve as a kind of counterbalance to the freshly emerged victim-blaming discourse in the media by mapping the potential reasons that made women stay in abusive relationships and put up with the ongoing abuse. They addressed important questions that until then had not been discussed publicly, and thereby disseminated relevant information on domestic violence. The importance of these programmes, therefore, is difficult to dispute, in terms of their role in raising social awareness of the difficulties of leaving an abusive relationship. On the other hand, due to their nearly exclusive focus on women as victims, they were unsuitable to shed light on other, similarly important actors of domestic violence, on the perpetrators. By assigning centrality to the “why did she stay?” question, at the expense of asking about perpetrators, their responsibility, motivations and what they gained through violence – a characteristic and pervasive pattern in media portrayals of domestic violence across the Western world, as Berns (1999, 2001, 2004) has convincingly pointed out – they obscured the role of perpetrators. Of the 178 items of news in my sample, there was only one that brought into focus the perpetrator’s motivations and potential gains (*RTL Klub, Fókusz*, 20 September 2011). In all other cases the focus either remained steadily on women who stayed in abusive relationships, or neither party's motivations were explored at all.

The question: “why did she stay?” acquired a prominent role not only in the current affairs programmes focusing on domestic violence discussed above, but also in the two roughly 20-minute-long interviews that Tímea gave on the prime-time celebrity talk show *Frizbi*, on *TV2*, where she talked in detail about her abusive relationship with Damu (*TV2, Frizbi*, 17 April 2011; 15 April 2012). While these current affairs magazine programmes, as already pointed out, gave ample space to expert opinion and thereby disseminated important information on domestic violence that should have refuted many pre-existing assumptions, including the image of “helpless women” who “bring domestic violence on themselves”, the two interviews with Tímea on *Frizbi* were less helpful in this regard.

Tímea sat alone in the studio with an anchor who was – like the vast majority of media presenters in Hungary – untrained in domestic violence issues. In the 2011 conversation, after Tímea publicly confessed that Damu had hit her in the sixth month of their relationship, the anchor (who otherwise was very much sympathising with Tímea) started to bombard her with a string of questions like: “then why did you stay with him for another one and a half years?”; “but were you being this naive? You believed him each and every time that he would change?”; “how is it possible to stay in love with a man who beats you up every day?”.⁵⁵ Later he even asked her whether “a woman can be raped, in your opinion?”. The following excerpt is from their next conversation, which took place a year later in April 2012, but was conducted in a similar tone:

Anchor: There is a certain type of women, and you are one of them, who for some reason always go back, they no matter what restart with their husband, their boyfriend, the men who had abused them. There must be a particular psychology for this... why? Why can't someone say after the first slap in their face that this has been enough? And that I leave, and never again?

Tímea: Well, on the one hand I was in love, and on the other hand I am a weak-willed person. That is, I lack the ability to assert myself. And sometimes I even thought it was my fault.

The anchor's opening phrase, according to which “there is a certain type of women”, was already pathologising. It located the problem in the victim's personality, instead of considering the effect that abuse typically has on victims' self-esteem, and even more importantly the outer factors that make it difficult to just simply leave a relationship.⁵⁶ This phrase, like some of the anchor's previous questions (“then why did you stay with him for

⁵⁵ *Anchor:* So, after the first half year you realised that he was aggressive. He even hit you. Then why did you stay with him for one and a half more years?

Tímea: Because I was deeply in love with him. And when I tried to step out of the relationship, he always told me that I would get into the newspaper headlines [...] he tried to blackmail me. And when he hit me, or kicked my leg, or slapped my face with his fist...

Anchor: But are you being this naive? That you believed him each and every time that he would change?

Tímea: I was naive, and love has a huge power, too.

Anchor: How is it possible to stay in love with a man who beats you up every day?

Tímea: I have no idea. If I think back now, I am simply unable to understand myself, but in that situation, when your partner is there telling you in your face never again, then you always believe it, and it gives you a bit of hope.

⁵⁶ The latter was especially relevant in Hungary, given that – as was pointed out by international organisations repeatedly during the 2000s and 2010s – there was not much state support available for victims. See e.g. Amnesty International, 2007.

one and a half more years?"; "but are you being this naive?"), completely ignored the structural element of coercion, and therefore also the fact that a lack of agency cannot be routinely taken as a personality trait (see Stark, 2007, pp. 176-191). Ironically, in these moments the anchor seemed also to ignore a series of other facts that could easily have questioned the "naive" and "helpless" status that he so quickly assigned to Tímea – namely that, in contrast to the majority of victims, whose cases remain invisible, she reported her case to the police and followed through with a humiliating year-and-a-half-long legal procedure, as well as the media warfare launched against her, and even had the courage to stand in front of the cameras, things that later in the same interview she said she would never do again because they had been "so humiliating".⁵⁷

5.4.2 Connecting rape and agency

Like domestic violence, as discussed earlier, the issue of rape received separate coverage in a couple of news programmes during late 2011 and early 2012 as a result of the Damu case, and on these occasions the anchors, with the help of experts, tore apart some popular victim-blaming assumptions about rape. For example, that a clear mark of physical injuries on victims – which Tímea did not have – would be essential in order to prove a rape case (*TV2, Mokka*, 15 September 2011), or that victims could bring rape on themselves by dressing provocatively (*RTL Klub, Házon kívüli*, 28 March 2012). Experts also discussed the ways in which the practice of barristers humiliating rape victims in court – which happened during the trial of Damu, as discussed below – may contribute to victims refraining from reporting their abuse to the police (*TV2, Mokka*, 12 March 2012). Of these reports, one eight and a half minutes-long investigative segment on the subject of rape and domestic violence, aired on *Házon kívüli* on *RTL Klub* (28 March 2012), dedicated particular attention to the issue of victim-blaming.

Interestingly, a comparison of the news programmes dedicated to domestic violence and those dedicated to rape show that while the "why did she stay?" question was well accepted in the studio and by editorial teams, and was practically resorted to as the

⁵⁷ For a similar reading of an earlier, 22 October 2010, edition of *Frizbi*, in which the very same anchor interviewed actress Athina Papadimitriou – similarly a victim of domestic violence, but her case received much less publicity – with roughly the same questions, see Kocsis, 2011.

apparent key to a better understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence, the typical victim-blaming questions and assumptions connected to rape were not accepted in the same way. Popular elements of the “rape myth” – such as, for example, that women can trigger the act of rape by dressing provocatively, by flirting or by generally too approachable conduct, or that only women who are not respectable can be raped – were never posed as questions, but were always presented as forming part of the very problem of rape, and interlocutors and reporters always took a firm stand against their legitimacy.⁵⁸ An illustrative example of this discursive strategy is the voiceover added to footage aired on one of these news magazines, where a reporter documented with a hidden camera the reactions of passers-by to a strikingly attractive young woman, “Anett”, wearing a mini-skirt on the streets of Budapest:

Here we have the catcall, but another man, for example, walked up to her to tell her how attractive she was. Anett says she's okay with all of these. If someone dresses in a striking manner, then she has to bear the consequences, she says. But this is the limit. Going further cannot be justified. Like, for example, violence cannot. (*RTL Klub, Házson kívüül*, 28 March 2012)

The strong resistance of TV studios to victim-blaming rape discourses may partly be connected to the fact that only a couple of years earlier, in 2007, rape and rape myths had been extensively discussed in the media as a result of a scandalous rape case in the country, that of “Zsanett” (see Kormos 2011). Accordingly, the one and only instance of straightforward rape victim-blaming seen on screens during the Damu case was footage of Damu’s barrister György Ruttner’s plea during the trial on 7 March 2012, from which *TV2* aired a long excerpt on its prime-time news bulletin *Tények* later that day. Here Ruttner could be seen trying to question the credibility of the rape claim by putting forward, among others, the classic “provocative dress” argument against *Tímea*:

58 “Myths of rape” or “rape myths”, a term coined by Schwendinger & Schwendinger (1974) and Brownmiller (1975), were first brought to public attention by second-wave feminism in the 1970s, and have been widely discussed in academia ever since. Generally speaking, they refer to widely held stereotyped beliefs in Western societies about rape (including its causes and context), rape victims and rapists, which generally downplay or justify rape and create a climate hostile to rape victims (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Scholars have repeatedly pointed to victim-blaming as one of the crucial elements of rape myths, including, among others, the belief that women bring rape on themselves, the suspicion of the credibility of rape victims, and the tendency to exculpate perpetrators. On rape myths, see also Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Horvath & Brown, 2009; specifically on rape in the news media, see e.g. Benedict, 1992; Franiuk, Seefeldt & Vandello, 2008; O’Hara, 2012; Sacks, Ackerman & Shlosberg 2018).

So she [Tímea] brought her pink knickers and spaghetti strap top with her, both of which later got torn up by the plaintiff, but were left in the flat. By the way, these are the pieces of clothing that were left in the flat. Well, if the plaintiff goes there like this, the alleged plaintiff, then I see no reason why a rape would have been needed here. [Later Ruttner told a joke] What is the best contraceptive? And then they said that it is the aspirin, that was the answer to the best contraceptive. And then the layman asked, how would that be? And then the answer was that [Ruttner smiles] it is pretty simple, you just need to press it between your legs.

Although *TV2* did not comment directly on Ruttner's sexist and victim-blaming argumentation, probably in order to meet requirements of impartiality in reporting, the wording of the voiceover that they added to the footage suggested that the barrister may have gone too far, and that his conduct in the courtroom was at least unusual: “he spoke for five hours”, “he even told a joke”. At the same time, both *RTL Klub* and *TV2* reported very early on their prime-time news bulletins that *Patent Egyesület*, a local feminist NGO specialising in work on violence against women, was planning to organise a demonstration against the barrister's argumentation, which the NGO considered harmful to future rape victims and their willingness to report their cases to the police (*RTL Klub, Híradó*, 9 March 2012; *TV2, Tények*, 12 March 2012). Later, on 20 March 2012, *TV2 Tények* even dedicated a separate news item to the demonstration. But, in general, media outlets did not condemn Ruttner openly for his sexist discourse. The one and only news item where Ruttner's discourse was explicitly disapproved of by an anchor or reporter, was on the morning news magazine *Mokka* on *TV2* on 12 March 2012. The young and conventionally attractive anchorwoman – after Ruttner, who had been invited into the studio, interrupted her several times and voiced his opinion that the planned demonstration would be a “silly thing”, and that giving credit to rape victims in his opinion could threaten “men's rights” – finally lost patience, cut him short, and made it clear that she disagreed.

In general, victim-blaming repeatedly emerged, although in different forms, in the media portrayal of the case, and became particularly prominent whenever Tímea's motivations for staying in relationship/contact with Damu were explored. Current affairs programmes dedicated to the issue of domestic violence and/or rape tried to serve as a counterbalance to this victim-blaming discourse, and either used it as a tool to refute misconceptions or overtly treated it as part of the problem itself. But in certain respects

these expert discourses, too, inadvertently created a favourable context for victim-blaming. Specifically, by mapping the potential reasons why women stay in abusive relationships and put up with the ongoing abuse, while at the same time mostly leaving perpetrators' motivations and gains undiscussed, experts, too, directed the focus of attention to victims exclusively, and thereby created a favourable context for locating the root causes of domestic violence once again on the victims' side. A more radical approach, where gendered violence could have been explored in the context of perpetrators' interest in maintaining (or even increasing) existing power inequalities between the sexes, was not taken.

5.5 From bad-boy image to pity play. Media images and discursively constructed emotions

The fact that Damu, especially after September 2011, had practically conquered the Hungarian news media with his own image-building, and that Tímea made her voice heard only sporadically (altogether three times over the year and a half), put Damu, at least in principle, in a very advantageous position. Nonetheless, the two commercial TV channels differed considerably in the extent to which they gave space to Damu's self-representations and announcements and especially in the level of "truth value" they assigned to these acts of image-building. *TV2* was very selective about which of these could be included in their more serious news programmes (such as their prime-time news bulletins), and tended to restrict Damu's image-building only to their more entertainment-driven or explicitly soft-news-oriented news programmes, while *RTL Klub* was much more lenient in this respect. With these tactics, TV channels could considerably influence which perspectives, announcements or confessions acquired more truth value on their screens. In the following section I give an overview of the most typical types of such image-building, giving special consideration to the emotions that these images discursively constructed and offered to the public as a way of emotionally engaging with the story – most importantly through pity and compassion. I also examine the different stands that the two TV channels took with regard to these images and the ways in which they distributed truth claims between the

perpetrator's and the victim's narratives.

As already noted, the two broadcasters followed different strategies with regard to Damu and his image-building in the media, and accordingly the ways in which they constructed Damu's personality also differed. *TV2* assigned a special relevance to the story right from the start, since it had been Damu's employer; it took a clear stand against him right from the beginning and stuck to it throughout the whole unfolding of the case. As a consequence, *TV2* strongly focused on the suspicious elements in Damu's narrative and character. Even before the first-court verdict, when the newsworthiness of the story considerably increased, negative pieces of information were published about him, such as, for example, that he had “tried to hack” the lie detector (*TV2, Aktív*, 18 May 2011). In another example, they advertised one of their upcoming *Frizbi* celebrity talk shows – where Damu first spoke about what happened in detail – by pointing out that he “contradicted himself several times” (*TV2, Aktív*, 9 December 2010). After the first-court verdict, *TV2* even reported on their prime-time news bulletin that proof had emerged that Damu had been lying about his abstinence (*TV2, Tények*, 9 December 2011), and one of their anchors, on *Frizbi*, even launched a public call to “Damu's other victims” to come forward – a call to which indeed many responded. At the same time, though, *TV2* invited Damu or his relatives a total of six times onto their evening celebrity talk show *Frizbi* during that year and a half when the story was hot (but excerpts from these conversations very rarely made into the broadcaster's other, more serious, news programmes).

A good example of *TV2*'s general approach to the story was the news item on their evening news programme on 18 November 2010, in which they broke the news. This also functioned as the broadcaster's public announcement that it was terminating Damu's employment (“*TV2* in today's evening announcement terminates its working contract with Roland Damu with immediate effect”). Therefore, as a kind of additional justification, *TV2* also added a mention of one of Damu's previous scandals (“three years ago he already hit one of his female colleagues after a *TV2* party, and back then he defended himself by saying that he was drunk”), as a result of which Damu was practically presented on *TV2* as a *repeat offender* right from the start. In order to get a clearer glimpse of how his repeat-offender status was discursively constructed, it is worth citing the opening sentences of the report:

[anchor:] Roland Damu, who plays Előd Várnagy, the villain in the soap *Jóbanrosszban*, was interrogated by the police this afternoon. He is suspected of having battered a woman again. This time he battered his fiancée, who was taken to hospital by ambulance late last evening. Subsequently, the woman reported her own fiancé to the police [in the meantime newspaper headlines are shown in the background about one of Damu's previous woman-battering cases, the title reading "I did not hit, I just stroked her a bit"]. The soap actor is still under interrogation by the police, suspected of rape and severe assault. *TV2*, in today's evening announcement, terminates its working contract with Roland Damu with immediate effect.

Damu's criminal act is repeatedly presented as recurring ("he... battered a woman *again*"; "*this time* he battered his fiancée"), with a strong emphasis on the victim's gender ("battered a *woman*"; "the *woman* reported... to the police"; "he battered his *fiancée*"), which powerfully constructs him as a repeat *woman-batterer*. This interpretation was further supported by the old newspaper headlines, re-mediated into the news item, according to which "I did not hit, I just stroked her a bit", and later also headlines that read "Roland Damu was even beating his women" and "Roland Damu is a sex maniac". The video footage played in the background in one part of the report, in which Damu was shown as doing his regular boxing training (he was an amateur boxer), and another taken from the soap, showing a minor outburst of rage by the aggressive character he played, similarly drew attention to Damu's aggressive traits.

This type of portrayal, which, based on previous audiovisual documents, presented Damu as a repeat woman-batterer, remained central on *TV2* throughout the entire media coverage of the case, with the only significant difference being that the broadcaster soon stopped utilising excerpts from the soap and switched to the exclusive use of non-fictional audiovisual documents in order to illustrate and strengthen its claims about Damu's recurring aggressivity. Previously documented audiovisual material about Damu's past criminal acts and non-criminal misconduct emerged in large numbers, especially after the September 2011 first-court verdict. For example, the footage of a 2007 talk show where Damu confessed that he had already been in court for battering a woman (*TV2, Frizbi*, 25 September 2011), or the earlier footage, already mentioned, of one of his outbursts of rage on a celebrity cookery show in 2008.

By contrast with *TV2*, *RTL Klub* did not take such a clear stand and eagerly gave

space to Damu's image-building when, after the first-court verdict in September 2011, he significantly increased his appearances on the broadcast media, quickly re-inventing himself from a “bad boy” to a person worthy of *pity* and *trust*. At that time Damu was very actively using his existing media contacts and his celebrity status in order to appear on screens, re-fashion his image, and thereby bend public opinion more in his favour, a tactic that – as a legal expert pointed out – may have also been intended to place decision-makers involved in the upcoming second-court trial under emotional pressure (*TV2, Aktív*, 28 February 2012). The members of the Damu family (his mother, father, sister, current girlfriend and the girlfriend's family) mostly used *RTL Klub's* evening current affairs magazine *Fókusz*, besides the tabloid press, to declare their loyalty to and faith in Damu before the broader public. In one edition of *RTL Klub's Fókusz*, for example, in which Damu, his girlfriend and the girlfriend's mother were interviewed as a group, the mother confessed to the cameras her deep “happiness” that the two “youngsters” were planning to marry, “because then I would feel my daughter was safe” (17 September 2011). On another edition Damu told the reporter that “wherever I go, people come up to me, hug me, we shake hands, they ask me how I am. In the market an old lady made a package for me, and told me I didn't need to pay for it. I feel that people support me” (15 September 2011). The fact that Damu, throughout the entire case, declared himself *innocent* and talked about “an outer force that stands above” him and would be the real reason for his fall (*TV2, Frizbi*, 9 December 2010), also fitted this image, and Damu consistently stuck to this even after the first-court (and later the second-court) verdicts: “this is a well-thought-out defamatory campaign against me that was planned in advance, in order to leave my life in ruins” (*RTL Klub, Fókusz*, 12 September 2011).

This new image of Damu as a person worthy of pity, compassion and trust for a while entered the prime-time news bulletins of both commercial channels, that is *RTL Klub's Híradó* and *TV2's Tények*. On these bulletins, Damu and his barrister informed the public that, for example, Damu's father, “a man of advanced age, diabetic” had broken down when he heard about the guilty verdict, and “he needed medical assistance”, or that Damu, after being fired “found himself in a terrible financial situation” (*RTL Klub, Híradó*, 15 September 2011). Broadcasters also reported that Damu's 16-year-old son was “so worried for his father that he had to be taken to a mental health clinic” (*TV2, Tények*, 2

October 2011). This news – like much else, as *TV2* later revealed (*TV2, Aktív*, 28 March 2012) – may well have been leaked to the tabloid press by Damu and his barrister themselves, but Damu later commented: “I beg everybody, please do me this favour, leave my family in peace” (*RTL Klub, Fókusz*, 3 October 2011).

Opinion, however, from other sources than Damu's close environment was usually negative, and was available in relative abundance, especially on *TV2*, after the first-court verdict, and occasionally aired on their prime-time news bulletin, *Tények*. A Professor of Law, for example, who was invited to give his opinion on the case as an expert, referred to Damu as a “violent personality” (*Tények*, 13 September 2011). On *Mokka*, *TV2*'s morning news magazine, two of Damu's colleagues expressed their concern that he was “to put it concretely, [mentally] ill”, and added that “he can go insane from one moment to the next so swiftly, that I indeed think he needs [medical] treatment”, and that “he cannot tolerate it if he doesn't win” (*TV2, Mokka*, 16 September 2011). Another colleague, however, defended Damu, saying “if Tímea knew that Roland was so quick-tempered, then she should have been more careful not to upset him” (*TV2, Mokka*, 16 September 2011). It was also during this time that both *TV2* and *RTL Klub* interviewed one of Damu's former romantic interests, for the battering of whom he had received a suspended sentence a couple of years earlier (*TV2, Frizbi*, 25 September 2011; *RTL Klub, Aktív*, 22 September 2011), and that excerpts from the infamous edition of the *Hal a tortán* celebrity cookery show, where Damu had had a temper tantrum, were aired on *TV2*'s prime-time news bulletin (*Tények*, 24 September 2011). The spectacle of a raging Damu, vehemently cursing and kicking objects around in front of a bunch of frightened celebrities sitting silently and watching him, and the account of Damu's former romantic interest, in which the woman recalled in detail in front of the cameras – although without revealing her face – how Damu had battered her for four and a half hours solely because she did not want to become his girlfriend, definitely added more credit to depictions of Damu as a violent person pathologically incapable of controlling himself, and retrospectively also validated *TV2*'s initial assessment that he was a repeat woman-batterer.

In contrast to Damu, who intensively tried to control his image in the media and often appeared on screen, his ex-fiancée, Tímea, mostly evaded media exposure, and appeared in front of the cameras altogether three times: twice for a longer interview on

TV2's late-evening celebrity talk show, *Frizbi* (on 17 April 2011 and 15 April 2012) and once, only briefly, just after the announcement of the first-court verdict on 12 September 2011, when she spoke to both commercial broadcasters in the corridor in front of the court room. However, since her relationship with Damu as well as her full name and her face had been publicly known since early 2010 the latest, when she and Damu attended a celebrity show on TV2 as a couple, Tímea could not evade the negative consequences of media exposure even before she had spoken to any media outlets.⁵⁹ Damu, especially at the early stage of the unfolding of the case, repeatedly depicted her in a very negative light, accusing her of, among other things, uncontrollable jealousy, cheating, faking pregnancy, procuring prostitutes and smuggling (see e.g. TV2, *Frizbi*, 12 December 2010), allegations which later were circulated mostly by the tabloid press. Nonetheless, Tímea's image in the broadcast media was mostly constructed around her *vulnerability* and *lack of self-assertion* in the face of the man she loved, which, combined with her visible middle-class status (she was always well groomed, well spoken and strikingly well dressed) and her physical attractiveness, constructed her as a woman conforming to patriarchal ideals of femininity and moreover as someone who had had to endure these vicissitudes only because of having loved her man too much, and who was therefore especially worthy of compassion, pity and protection.

Her vulnerability was most evident during those episodes when she burst into tears in front of the cameras, such as during her first interview on *Frizbi*, but also after the announcement of the first-court verdict when she spoke to reporters, and was “sobbing”, a fact that later that day both broadcasters highlighted in their coverage of the story (see e.g. *RTL Klub, Híradó*, 12 September 2011; TV2, *Tények Reggel*, 14 September 2011). Similarly, her first interview on *Frizbi* was advertised with a slogan that already established *compassion* as the adequate emotional reaction to her narrative (“and now, what melts even the coldest hearts, the confession of the week!”), and the anchor's closing sentences on the show, in which he summarised the essence of Tímea's story, similarly pointed to compassion as the adequate reaction: “your story is indeed very shocking and surprising

⁵⁹ I should note that, in contrast to her sporadic appearance in the media in 2010-2012, today Tímea Palácsik is a recurrent name in Hungarian celebrity news. Since August 2013, when she married Hungarian-American ex-Hollywood producer Andy Vajna – a man who, under the Orbán government, has emerged into a position of power in the Hungarian film (2011) and broadcast industry (2015) –, her luxurious way of life receives repeated media coverage.

[...] it could have been very difficult for you” (TV2, *Frizbi*, 17 April 2011). At the same time, however, as already pointed out, Tímea had to face many victim-blaming questions during her two interviews on *Frizbi*, and on these occasions, instead of trying to defend herself, she repeatedly put herself down (“I was naive”; “I am simply unable to understand myself”; “I am a weak-willed person”; “I lack the ability to assert myself”), which may have added some negative traits to her media image. However, despite all self-put-downs, she also managed to present herself as a woman who was relatively collected, capable of summarising her story with intelligence and insight, and in general had already made some significant progress in her journey towards healing and greater self-assertion (for example, she repeatedly made reference to a campaign where she was helping other abused women and collecting signatures for the criminalisation of domestic violence).

In brief, both the victim's and the perpetrator's media images were strongly built upon their ability to provoke compassion and pity, and the two commercial broadcasters differed considerably regarding towards whom they encouraged compassion. In close connection with this, the broadcasters differed also as to whether they were receptive to Damu's new, re-fashioned image or continued circulating the old one which was likely to fix him more firmly in the perpetrator's position and present him as a repeat woman-batterer. Meanwhile, Tímea appeared only sporadically on screens, consistently activated elements of traditional femininity, including those of vulnerability and weakness, and thereby managed to come across as a victim of violence who was worthy of compassion, but at the same time did not threaten the patriarchal social order. However, due to the presence of discourses of victim-blaming in the media coverage of the case, her particular susceptibility to male violence strongly marked her on-screen personality and did not always receive satisfactory explanation, thereby leaving an important aspect of the issue of domestic violence unexplained. Since both the perpetrator's and the victim's on-screen personalities were constructed in order to activate the same public emotional engagement of compassion and pity, the media coverage of the story in many respects implied a public competition for these emotions, to which only the final verdict would put an end, by declaring Damu the guilty party.

5.6 Conclusions

The Damu case introduced the aspect of *gender* into the media discussion of domestic violence in Hungary, and offered a unique opportunity to shed public light on the everyday face of this type of violence, which traditionally had not received much media attention. In this respect, the issue, in terms of its newsworthiness, benefited from the televisual fame and concomitant public attention that Damu, a television personality and soap actor, had accumulated over time in the tabloid segment of the Hungarian media. This accumulated attention would not have been possible without the televisual celebrity culture – characteristically tied to commercial broadcasters and their tabloidised current affairs agenda – that had slowly and steadily established itself in the country over the previous decade of the 2000s. Due to Damu's fame, the case remained newsworthy over a prolonged period (one and a half years), and the broader public was able to keep following its unfolding in the public arena. Overall, by giving prolonged and extensive coverage to a case of domestic violence that involved a prevalent type of male violence against women, and where the perpetrator in the end was found guilty and sentenced, the Hungarian news media successfully raised attention to domestic violence both as *gendered* and as *criminalised* under Hungarian law – two aspects that during coverage of the earlier case in 2002, discussed in Chapter 4, had been sidelined.

At the same time, the fact that domestic violence emerged into publicity through the news platforms and through such genres as tabloid media and soft news, which were characteristically connected to celebrity culture in Hungary, in many respects shifted attention away from the social relevance of the case. The story was steadily confined to the news platforms of commercial broadcasters and the tabloid press, and was not covered by more serious media outlets, including the public-service segment of the Hungarian news media. The public-service broadcaster consistently ignored the story until the final verdict was out. Therefore, paradoxically, the task of mapping the social relevance of the case fell on exactly those media outlets – the two major commercial broadcasters, *RTL Klub* and *TV2* – that were, at the same time, interested in keeping the story tabloidised. Accordingly, the case received a social-issue framing only in a handful of current affairs magazine programmes aired on the above-mentioned TV channels. In these, domestic violence was

constructed as male violence against women, and the programmes primarily sought to refute, with the help of feminist experts, some popular misconceptions about the issue – primarily victim-blaming. The embeddedness of the expert knowledge in feminist discourses, however, tended to be concealed on screen. Therefore, the possibility of connecting domestic violence to the issue of inequality between the sexes in societies was missed.

Overall, despite the fact that the gender aspect received particular consideration during the media coverage of the case, and that domestic violence was acknowledged as a type of gendered violence, the media portrayal of the case remained inadequate in many respects with regard to domestic violence. A consistent discourse for articulating domestic violence was not yet available in 2010-2012 in the Hungarian news media, as is evidenced by the considerable oscillation also of the terminology that media outlets used to label Damu's crime, such as assault, restraint, rape, abuse, and finally domestic violence. Adequate coverage was particularly not helped by the fact that, of the aforementioned terms, preference was mostly given to legal terms that did not shed light on the core element of domestic violence, that of coercive control. Nor was it helped by the fact that the elements of rape received disproportionately high attention, while control strategies attacking the victim's agency were often not discussed. This, combined with the fact that expert discourses typically focused on victims and not on perpetrators, constructed domestic violence as a social issue characteristically affecting women, but at the same time continued to place women's enigmatic susceptibility to this type of violence at the centre of media attention. One of the focal points of the coverage remained the question of why women let themselves be abused, which opened up a vast symbolic space for victim-blaming discourses. Tímea, the victim was often questioned about how she contributed to the violence she had suffered, which ultimately created a discourse of complicit victimhood around this news story.

As with the issue of blame, the proper place of compassion and pity as adequate emotional responses to domestic violence was not reassuringly clarified, since Damu had launched a strong media campaign to bend public opinion towards himself, and repeatedly attempted to put himself in the position of the “real victim”, targeted by a “well thought-out defamatory campaign”. On the other hand, Tímea, too, managed to come across as a

victim worthy of compassion, pity and protection, by presenting a victim profile which was not threatening the patriarchal social order: she consistently activated elements of traditional femininity, including those of vulnerability and lack of self-assertion. As a result, compassion and pity, too, were constantly re-distributed on screen between Damu and Tímea, turning the entire media portrayal of the case into a kind of mediated competition over public emotions.

All in all, despite bringing the aspect of gender into publicity, and shedding light on the everyday face of domestic violence, the public debate provoked by the Damu case ultimately closed down possibilities of challenging patriarchal assumptions about domestic violence, including the issues of agency and victimhood and the emotions associated with these. This case was successful, however, in bringing attention to the fact that domestic violence – even if it did not figure as a separate entry in the Hungarian Criminal Code in 2010-2012 – was against the law, and that (at least some) perpetrators could be brought to court, and even convicted. All in all, Damu's fall from grace was indicative of the fact that domestic violence, once ignored and relegated to the realm of private matters in Hungarian society, had established itself firmly as a public matter in the country's public sphere, and become an issue to which Hungarian society would no longer automatically turn a blind eye, once it was out in the open. The next chapter explores how this new status that domestic violence had achieved by the early 2010s in Hungary – having clearly become a controversial public issue and capable of mobilising broader support from civil society – was utilised in Hungarian political life and feminist political advocacy in a new, more networked media environment.

6. Feminism on the Internet and on Television News: Negotiating the Boundaries of Public Morality with Regard to Domestic Violence in the New Media Era in Hungary, 2012-13

6.1 Introduction

In the following pages I analyse the domestic-violence-related political scandal from 2013 of “komondor” József Balogh – an MP from the ruling right-wing, national-conservative political party FIDESZ, in possession of two thirds of seats in the Hungarian Parliament since 2010 – who became infamous in the country as a woman-batterer. The mere fact that in this chapter we reach the field of political life and political scandals, and that a politician battering his girlfriend could become an object of public ridicule and embarrassment in the country, is already indicative of the fact that by 2013 the status of domestic violence had significantly changed in Hungarian society. Unlike in 2002, when breaking the silence around the issue could be achieved only through a tragic case of domestic abuse that ended in parricide, or 2010, when an eighteen-month-long case could completely evade the attention of serious media outlets just because the perpetrator was a tabloid celebrity, by 2013 the discursive terrain around domestic violence had shifted, enabling the issue to be recognised as more significant than just a piece of crime news or a tabloid story, and instead to develop into a fully-fledged political scandal and completely destroy a politician's public credibility.

To be sure, Balogh was far from being the first Hungarian politician to batter a woman, but previous cases had repeatedly evaded public attention (for details, see Oroszi, 2013).⁶⁰ In contrast to these, the Balogh story was followed by an intensive public reaction, including not only various forms of bottom-up political action and expression, but also responses from elected officials and even changes in policy instruments. The story also inflated public emotions around the issue to a previously unseen extent and, by creating a largely homogeneous emotional regime around the incident, intensively “socialised” the

⁶⁰ In one sense, attention, at least scholarly attention, to the Balogh story is still lacking, given that as of 2018 the story is entirely unresearched.

public to the proper expression of emotion with regard to the events, thereby forming certain social solidarities around domestic violence through emotional citizenship (that is, a sense of community through feelings shared in common. On emotional citizenship, see Pantti, 2011; Pantti & van Zoonen, 2006). However, as I argue in this chapter, the main issue at stake in this case was that of re-opening a public and symbolic space where the boundaries of public morality with regard to domestic violence could be discussed, negotiated and above all affirmed, and concomitant “feeling rules” – that is, rules that regulate socially approved ways of expressing and managing emotions (Hochschild, 1983, p. 64) – shaped and settled. On the other hand, I also argue below that this discussion and negotiation over the boundaries of acceptable public conduct with regard to domestic violence often merged with the public outcry over the fact that Balogh had lied about the battering, and in a ridiculously obvious manner, in front of the cameras. Moreover, public discussion of the broader issue of domestic violence – although it did take place to some extent and gender-related aspects of violence in particular did receive some special consideration – was pushed into the background in favour of a focus on public morality with regard to violence.

In close connection with my focus on public morality shaped by a media story, I take the Balogh incident as an instance of *mediated scandal* (Thompson, 2000, pp. 31-59). Scandals, by definition, involve a *transgression* of moral norms and values (Adut, 2009; Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Thompson, 2000) that becomes “known to others and [perceived as] sufficiently serious to elicit a public response” (Thompson, 2000, p.13). To be sure, the strong reaction of Hungarians to the Balogh story does not automatically imply that in 2013 there would have been a solid and broad consensus across Hungarian society with regard to the unacceptability of domestic violence – and still less with regard to the meaning of domestic violence. On the contrary, I would argue – in line with Lull, Hinerman and Thompson's general insights on the potential norm-setting role of scandals – that the Balogh scandal served rather as a catalyst for the articulation, assertion and negotiation of new boundaries of public morality and public emotions in the face of domestic violence (and specifically woman-battering) at a specific historical moment when there was an *increased uncertainty* about and *public awareness* of these boundaries. The national public discussion of domestic violence had changed only shortly before, and this

was also a moment of *increased expectations* of the Hungarian government to make its standpoint clear with regard to domestic violence in general (a context that I clarify in more detail below).

In such a situation, the exposure of a member of the ruling party as a perpetrator of violence understandably triggered a massive public reaction, and also put pressure on the ruling party to clarify its standpoint. Indeed, the scandal was followed by a number of responses from the party, including public announcements, investigations into the case and, most importantly, also the introduction of a new policy instrument (a law) against domestic violence, for which feminist activists in Hungary had been fighting for a decade. A bill on “partner violence” (*kapcsolati erőszak*) (the elaboration of which had previously been repeatedly blocked by the FIDESZ government) was presented in the Hungarian Parliament on 10 May 2013, in the direct aftermath of the scandal, by the FIDESZ government, and was discussed four days later and passed in parliament on the 10 June. The subsequent Act on Partner Violence came into force on 1 July 2013.⁶¹ Considering its role as a catalyst of an important change of legislation, the Balogh scandal can also serve as an interesting example of the role that the media and public opinion can play in the formation of state-level interventions against domestic violence – an aspect that I do not elaborate further here, but only briefly note, given that this aspect has been mostly neglected in previous literature from the Central-Eastern European region (see Krizsán, Paantjens and Lamoen 2005; Dombos, Horváth and Krizsán 2007; Krizsán and Popa 2010, 2014; Fabian 2010c, 2014a, 2017; Tóth 2014; Krizsán and Roggeband 2018a).

As I have already briefly indicated, I also discuss here Balogh's transgression in the

61 Although the content of this new law does not form part of the object of the present study, I should briefly note that it differed considerably from what feminists in Hungary were lobbying for. Most notably, it referred to “partner violence” (*kapcsolati erőszak* – a term freshly coined by the government in September 2012, and previously unheard of), and described this as being directed against “a co-parent, a relative, an ex-spouse, an ex-life partner, a guardian, a ward, a foster carer, or a foster child with whom the perpetrator is living or has lived in the same household”, and which would consist of repeated behaviour that is either “violent and severely erodes human dignity” or “pulls material goods out from jointly-held or jointly managed assets and thereby exposes the aggrieved party to severe deprivation”. Such a wording, as NGOs have pointed out, made it possible to ignore many existing forms of domestic violence – for example, stalking or reproductive coercion, and, most notably, forms of violence that occur between intimate partners or relatives who do not cohabit – and sometimes expected too many criteria to be fulfilled in order to acknowledge that violence had taken place at all – economic abuse, for example, would not be seen as taking place until victims suffered “severe deprivation”. Legislators also failed to set minimum penalties, thereby reducing the dissuasive power of the law. For more details of the drawbacks of this new law, see the press announcement signed by three Hungarian NGOs – MONA, NANE, Patent – and released on 5 June 2013: Nőkért Egyesület [Association for Women], 2013 (in Hungarian).

context of *mediation*. In modern societies, scandals are inevitably mediated: they do not exist independently of the media, but are constituted by them, in various ways, according to the available platforms and technological means (Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Thompson, 2000, pp. 31-59). In the present case, although it was an online news magazine that originally broke the news on 29 April (Kerner, 2013), and subsequently all forms of mass media covered the story until it faded after 2 May, it was *television* and *internet memes* that most notably shaped the ways in which the story played out in the media and developed from an incident into a fully-fledged political scandal. Specifically, television, through its capacity to bring physically distant people into close intimacy with spectators through close-up images and footage, thereby allowing spectators to scrutinise their conduct at close range, was able to *expose* Balogh to the public as both a woman-batterer and a liar, simply by confronting the politician in front of the cameras about the allegations of battering and capturing him apparently lying. This footage, therefore, served as a trigger for the scandal and subsequently remained a focal point of the entire media coverage of the story. On the other hand, internet memes, enabled by a complex media environment, quickly picked up the news of this exposure and, through their capacity to move swiftly across a vast range of media platforms and media texts, were able to accumulate, make visible and thereby *inflate* public emotions around Balogh's exposure, and to add more attention and drama to it; and they also played a major role in bringing spectators to a common platform in relation to the events by *shaping shared emotions and values* with regard to Balogh's transgressions.

This co-operation, so to speak, between television news and internet memes in shaping a media story into a political scandal was enabled by the existence of a complex media environment in Hungary in 2013 (as discussed in Chapter 3), where television news was increasingly being produced and consumed in a converged way, that is by intersecting with other media platforms, genres and news media material. After the rise of the multimedia era, the quick spread of online journalism and networked media as well as the spread of “media multitasking” habits among media users, television news, which had once been a mono-platform type of news discourse, evolved into a multi-platform discourse with convergent circulations of news material (Briggs, 2009). In Hungary in 2013, as in modern societies elsewhere, television viewers had increasingly developed habits of shifting from

one media device to another or even using them simultaneously (for example, combining surfing the internet with watching television) and, accordingly, televised news stories, too, had penetrated and converged with digital interactive media content, which internet memes were actually part of. Within such a media milieu, boundaries between television and social media platforms had become relatively fluid, with media content often re-mediated across these boundaries, a development which thus assigned a strongly intertextual character to television.

This chapter therefore examines the ways in which the Balogh story was portrayed on television news in a complex media environment strongly affected by internet memes. I examine the discourses that television news and internet memes (the latter understood as user-generated, bottom-up public discourses) employed and combined in order to portray domestic violence to the broader public, and also the ways in which they discursively engaged the public morally and emotionally in the events, and in which they brought about a change (if there was any change) in the existing order of discourse on domestic violence in the country. Given that the Balogh story developed into a leading news story at a historical moment when public discussion of domestic violence had changed considerably only shortly before – a fact that resulted in new discursive antagonisms and shifting relations of power between major local discourses shaping the social meaning of domestic violence in the country – I also examine how television and internet memes related to these discourses specifically.

6.1.1 Television and its capacity to discredit politicians through mediated intimacy and a politics of trust

In order to understand better how televised footage could trigger a political scandal, and to some extent also shift the public focus from the battering to the perpetrator's lies, here I briefly comment on the notion of mediated intimacy *in the context of political life*. Today politicians all over the world are assessed, to a considerable extent, according to a logic of mediated intimacy, in other words on the basis of their public conduct in front of the cameras and – based on these mediated performances – their (assumed) personal qualities as individuals, rather than of their achievements in the field of politics (Thompson, 2000,

pp. 119-158). The rise of mediated intimacy originally occurred in the context of a decline in traditional class-based party politics and the rise of television in European and North-American countries, both taking place during the postwar years. But mediated intimacy continues to shape political life even today (pp. 119-158) and, as noted in Chapter 4, lately has become particularly prominent in Western media in general, through their tendency to place intimate life at the heart of media representations (Barker, Gill & Harvey 2018, pp. 24-26). Regarding television specifically, mediated intimacy in the context of political life is particularly enabled by the capacity of television to convey close-up images, thereby allowing spectators to scrutinise politicians' conduct in front of the cameras at close range, looking for signs of credibility and trustworthiness by monitoring such elements of conduct as, for example, facial expression, body language or tone of voice, but also the appropriateness in general of their conduct to the situation (Bucy, 2011; Thompson, 2000, pp. 119-158). Accordingly, mediated political life today is strongly shaped by the logic of a "politics of trust", where politicians' personal integrity, credibility and trustworthiness acquire central importance (p. 112), an aspect that achieved a crucial role in the breaking and development of the Balogh scandal.

To be sure, credibility and trustworthiness achieved through mediated intimacy are highly susceptible to manipulation and deceit: conduct in front of the cameras can be practised, and, through good televisual skills, controlled to a considerable extent. Although television, too, is capable of orienting spectators' attention towards certain details of politicians' on-screen performances (or away from others), through such techniques as, for example, the angle and distance of the camera, the object of zoom shots, or details pointed out by voice-overs, these techniques – even if they can without doubt be misused for manipulative purposes – are ineliminable elements of televised news reporting. Attempts at manipulation and deceit, however, if these are by politicians themselves in front of the cameras, make up so-called "second-order transgressions". These are actions through which politicians attempt to conceal their original transgressions from the public eye – a frequent feature of mediated scandals, which often receive more public attention than the perpetrator's original missteps (Thompson, 2000, p. 17). Still, given that denials, lies and deceitful behaviour in front of the cameras sometimes are successful, politicians and other public figures are repeatedly attracted to controlling their public image through such

manipulative actions.

Therefore, when on the evening of 29 April 2013 millions of Hungarians watched Balogh on their TV screens with his injured fists and briefly explaining the battering incident to the cameras by blaming the family's blind komondor dog for his girlfriend's injuries ("our komondor dog... sprang at her and pushed her over... I don't remember") – footage that I analyse in a later section in more detail – spectators closely scrutinised his conduct (and physical appearance) for signs of credibility and trustworthiness. The fact that he lied – what is more, in a very apparent and ridiculous manner – immediately destroyed Balogh's credibility and personal integrity in the public eye, and it was this moment that in effect triggered the scandal. As a consequence the battering and the lying, both understood as transgressions, were often merged in the coverage of the story, as I will later elaborate in detail, and public responses were alternately to either or both of these, while internet memes often inextricably merged the two.

6.1.2 Internet memes: Shaping mindsets, shared values and emotions

Internet memes are characteristic products of the new media age, and are understood as user-generated "multimodal artefacts" – typically videos or still images – remixed by countless participants, which typically employ "satirical humour for public commentary" (Milner, 2013, p. 2359). Internet memes are today widely considered the "lingua franca" or the vernacular of digital political discourse (Rentschler & Thrift 2015, p. 334). Nowadays nearly all major events are followed by internet memes in the Western world, and it is therefore not strange that Balogh's public exposure by Hungarian broadcasters was also followed by the intensive circulation of internet memes commenting on this exposure. As Shifman has pointed out, internet memes typically arrive in groups and individual items may show considerable variety, but as a group they make up one polyvocal discourse in which the "different memetic variants represent diverse voices and perspectives" (2014, pp. 7-8). Therefore, even if internet memes individually do not look like a discussion, they do qualify as acts of engaging with matters of public concern (Milner, 2013, p. 2363), and therefore can be considered as forming part of socially constructed public discourses (Shifman, 2014, pp. 7-8). In line with the above, this study considers internet memes as

acts of *bottom-up public expression of opinion*, and consequently a *public discourse*.

Internet memes are primarily enabled by an interactive digital media environment, where they can be quickly produced, shared and remixed, and swiftly move from one media platform to another, but they can ultimately feed into the traditional media, too, as happened in the case of the Balogh story. Due to their capacity to reach and circulate across a high number of media platforms and texts, memes are able to accumulate, increase and empower perspectives, voices or even emotions, and thereby “shape the mindsets, forms of behaviour, and actions of social groups” (Shifman, 2014, p. 18), and articulate shared values and emotions concerning trending issues (Mina, 2014). Moreover, given that shared emotions have a crucial part to play in forming collective identities and are able to form or break social solidarities (see Anderson 1991; Ahmed 2004), internet memes also have the power to create emotional citizenship around issues of public concern (on emotional citizenship, see Pantti, 2011; Pantti & van Zoonen, 2006). All in all, internet memes have the capacity to articulate, circulate and even shape public perspectives, emotional and moral engagements and shared values regarding matters of public concern in a complex media environment such as Hungary’s in 2013. Before this, matters of domestic violence had once already provoked an intensive flow of internet memes in the country, in connection with an earlier domestic-violence-related event that I discuss in the next section.

6.1.3 Historical and policy context: The earlier events of 2012 and their legacy for the Balogh scandal

As indicated earlier, the Balogh scandal broke at a specific moment of increased suspense and public awareness of domestic violence, and increased expectations of the Hungarian government to make their standpoint clear with regard to the issue. This specific historical context had been created by another incident that preceded the Balogh story by only a couple of months. In September 2012 domestic violence briefly re-emerged in Hungarian public life through the rise of digital feminist activism in the country as a response to a failed inclusion of domestic violence on the parliamentary agenda, which brought a *change in the national public discussion on domestic violence*. It also made visible a wider social

feeling against domestic violence in the country than had previously been thought to exist, and made it evident that certain forms of public conduct on the issue that had once been accepted or at least tolerated were now susceptible to public contestation. The September 2012 events also created an expectation of the government to bring into force new policy instruments against domestic violence.

These changes were catalysed by the 11 September 2012 parliamentary discussion of a so-called *citizens' initiative* for the creation of a separate law on domestic violence (supported by more than 100,000 signatures), and by the fact that when, during this discussion, István Varga, an MP of the ruling party FIDESZ, suggested, in line with the party's policy, rejecting the initiative, he also added that in his opinion domestic violence "would not even come up" if women gave birth to more children (see "Fidesz Macho", 2012). Although this was not the first time such an initiative had been rejected, since local feminists had been using the institution of citizens' initiatives already for a decade to submit the issue of a separate law on domestic violence on the parliamentary order of the day, and absurd and sexist claims about domestic violence had been heard before in the Hungarian Parliament, this time Varga's insensitive words provoked a massive public reaction. Within hours, satirical memes mocking the MP's claim started to circulate on the internet ("Egy éjszaka alatt", 2012; Puskás, 2012; "Szeptember legjobb", 2012), and a demonstration dubbed the Women's Uprising was announced on Facebook by feminist activists and quickly gathered mass support (Abonyi, 2012). Within a few days, the quickly-growing support for the demonstration and the intensive circulation of internet memes across a vast range of online platforms and texts were so powerfully articulating public discontent that even major national TV channels finally started to cover the issue. Varga made a public apology, and the FIDESZ government, too, quickly backed down (FIDESZ, 2012). They announced the re-discussion of the initiative in Parliament even before the demonstration actually took place, and within a week legislators indeed passed a resolution to elaborate the initiative into a bill. The elaboration process, however, seemed to have reached an impasse by January 2013,⁶² until József Balogh became involved in a

62 In January 2013 domestic violence experts left the committee set up by parliament to elaborate the initiative into a bill, with the explanation that their suggestions had repeatedly not been taken into consideration. After this there were no manifest signs that the remaining members of the group would continue the work.

scandal of domestic violence in late April 2013.

As a consequence of the events in September 2012, feminist discourses, voices and social actors, which previously had been severely marginalised in the mass media and repeatedly ignored by political decision-makers, unexpectedly emerged at centre stage of national public discourses on domestic violence through a powerful digital feminist media activism.⁶³ Moreover, they also proved capable of attracting wider social support and even of achieving a change to the initial neglect of the issue by both political decision-makers and the traditional media. In fact, the networked media, by enabling Hungarian citizens to very visibly engage in matters of public concern by simply clicking on a button, offered a more open platform for political expression and in general for articulating political dissent on matters of domestic violence than did the mass media (on this relative openness, see Milner, 2013, p. 2360).⁶⁴ Therefore, the advent of the networked media – once backed up by traditional and digital forms of feminist activism in the country – was capable of significantly *extending* public discussion on domestic violence in Hungary in September 2012, compared with on previous occasions, and of embracing new, previously unheard or marginalised discourses, voices and perspectives, most importantly those of women and feminists. This implied an important change in the national public discussion of domestic violence in Hungary.

In September 2012 it also became evident that there was a significant difference in how the Hungarian government and feminist activists saw the issue. Feminists created the demonstration with strong gendered connotations (“Women's Uprising”), described domestic violence as primarily affecting female victims, and the majority of the internet memes, too, mocked the “woman as a child-bearing machine” element of Varga's claims, so the public outcry constructed domestic violence overall as a women's issue. The government's standpoint, however, when it finally ceded to the pressure and agreed to elaborate the initiative into a bill, was based on a gender-neutral notion of violence. It stressed in a public announcement that victims of domestic violence could be not only women, but children and men as well, and specified that the word “family” could not figure

63 On the networked media as a relatively new arena of bottom-up political expression and mobilisation in the country, see Wilkin, Dencik & Bognár, 2015.

64 Digital forms of feminist activism, compared with traditional ones, required considerably less financial and human resources for a successful mobilisation on issues of feminist concern, which was also an important advantage.

in the text of the upcoming law (see MTI, 2015). Whereas it would be difficult to argue against the fact that people of any gender or age can fall victim to domestic violence, the governmental standpoint failed to highlight the facts that, compared with men, women (and children) more often experience this type of violence, and that gender – exactly because it is constitutive of a system of unequal power relations in societies – is therefore a crucial aspect of the issue. Moreover, the broader context of this governmental claim – for example, the government's repeated refusal to sign the Istanbul Convention, which understands domestic violence as mostly violence against women; its adherence to addressing female citizens mainly through their role as mothers; its long-standing reluctance to acknowledge the family as a potential site of violence – made it evident that, even if there was to be a change in governmental handling of the issue, it would not be easy to reconcile a tackling of domestic violence with the conservative-nationalist agenda that FIDESZ had been pushing (see Fábíán, 2014a).

The Balogh scandal, therefore, broke at a specific historical moment when dominant values and norms with regard to domestic violence had just been abruptly and strongly questioned by bottom-up voices and social players. No consensus had been reached, even temporarily, over these norms and values, and although a public outcry over the inadequate handling of domestic violence by the government had been spectacularly articulated and even a concrete policy tool had been named and backed by broad social support, the introduction of this policy tool seemed to be delayed. It was also a specific moment when new meaning-making claims regarding domestic violence had emerged powerfully into publicity and clashed with existing norms, and new discursive antagonisms had been formed, in particular around the issue of gender. Overall, the rise of feminist discourses, and their spectacular movement from the margins to the centre of the Hungarian public sphere in September 2012, had unsettled the existing power relations between the various public discourses on domestic violence, but without reaching any lasting “resting point” or closure. This had created a situation of generalised uncertainty about domestic violence. Within such a context, the Balogh scandal was able to catalyse a range of domestic-violence-related social processes, including the clarification of norms and values with regard to domestic violence. It was further able to shape discursive antagonisms, and would even bring the process of law-making to a new stage.

6.2 Data, data selection and methods

In accordance with the approach established in Chapter 3, I employ here critical discourse analysis (CDA) to follow how the scandal developed and was covered by the three major Hungarian TV channels. I also examine how the story was commented on by internet memes. CDA is traditionally employed to analyse items that, even if multimodal (such as television news), usually have a textual component, and not all internet memes have such a component. So my choice of also analysing internet memes through CDA may seem unusual. But, as indicated earlier, I take memes as acts of socially constructed, bottom-up public expression, and therefore as being of a discursive nature. In fact, in the last couple of years, CDA has repeatedly been successfully employed on internet memes by a number of authors (see e.g. Adegoju & Oyebode, 2015; Milner, 2013; Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). Regarding television news, I investigate, as mentioned earlier, the three major national broadcasters, that is the prime-time evening news bulletins of *RTL Klub* and *TV2*, the two national commercial broadcasters that in 2013 had the highest viewing figures in Hungary, and the news programme of *MI*, the public broadcaster (in 2013 under strong government control), which was ranked third by viewing statistics (see AGB Nielsen, 2018). Given that the newsworthiness of the story significantly fell after the 2 May, when Balogh resigned from the FIDESZ parliamentary fraction, I focus only on the first four days of the media coverage of the case, from 2 April to 2 May 2013. Of this narrowed-down pool of texts, which includes altogether eight items of prime-time news (mainly produced by the two commercial channels, since *MI* mostly ignored the story), I discuss in more detail certain texts that had a more prominent role in influencing the outcome of the scandal (such as, most importantly, Balogh's exposure in the news on 29 April). In terms of internet memes, I identified altogether 40 items – 37 still images and three videos – the majority of which were widely circulated on the internet, including by major online news magazines and also the online versions of major traditional news media outlets. Some of these were even reported on off-line news bulletins. Specifically on the basis of what element of the Balogh story they were mocking, I grouped these into four categories and analyse them

accordingly.

6.3 The portrayal of the Balogh case on television

Between 29 April and 2 May 2013, when media attention to the Balogh case was at its peak, *RTL Klub* reported on the story every day, *TV2* three times altogether, and *M1*, the public broadcaster, which was under strong government control and therefore mostly trying to completely ignore the story, reported on it only once, when on the 2 May Balogh resigned from the parliamentary fraction of the ruling political party FIDESZ and became an independent MP.⁶⁵ Therefore, the available media texts are mostly those produced by *RTL Klub* and *TV2*. In general, *RTL Klub* and *TV2* covered the Balogh scandal roughly along the same lines. After their initial focus on the perpetrator and his lies, on the second day – that is 30 April – both TV channels switched to a more domestic-violence-focused portrayal, which they continued with throughout the rest of the media coverage. *RTL Klub* also complemented this switch with an increased focus on the victim's suffering. Moreover, as I elaborate in more detail below, both commercial broadcasters endorsed a feminist perspective on domestic violence, with both of them repeatedly presenting information on the issue from feminist sources. *TV2*, for example, conducted an interview with a feminist expert on domestic violence, while *RTL Klub* presented excerpts from an anti-domestic-violence campaign video that the same feminist NGO had produced. On 2 May, *RTL Klub* even connected the Balogh scandal to the events of September 2012, and informed spectators that the elaboration of a bill on domestic violence had been stalled for months. Since there was a major change in the portrayal of the case on the second day (with a switch of focus from lies to battering), I dedicate more space to items of news from the first two days. Moreover, since the trigger for the scandal was Balogh's exposure in front of the cameras on the very first day, I discuss this footage at greater length.

65 As a side note, it needs to be emphasised that having to leave the parliamentary fraction was not a severe punishment in any sense: Balogh was able to keep his MP status, his membership of the FIDESZ political party, and also his position as the mayor of his village, Fülöpháza. His loss, overall, was that at the next general elections in 2014 he could not run again for a parliamentary mandate, and when he was finally convicted in court of severe assault in February 2016 he had to pay a moderate financial penalty for the battering (400,000 HUF, which, as of December 2018, is equal to 1,107 GBP).

6.3.1 Constructing violence: Names, claims and opposing discourses

Generally speaking, the ways in which Balogh's story was reported differed considerably according to the degree of political control that broadcasters (and their selected interviewees) were subject to. The broadcaster *MI* (and the spokesperson for the Chief Prosecutor's Office and the Head of the FIDESZ parliamentary group, whom broadcasters regularly interviewed or referenced) were under strong control and therefore tended to obscure and downplay the crime, whereas the two commercial broadcasters were less bound by political constraints, and therefore able to explore the subject more freely. Overall, Balogh's crime was reported on in three distinct ways: i) as an assault (a one-off physical act) committed by an MP against his girlfriend, with added emphasis on the perpetrator's status as an MP and his attempt at concealing the crime; ii) as an instance of domestic violence, understood as a pervasive social problem; iii) as a dubious action by a MP of FIDESZ, which FIDESZ condemned and distanced itself from. The first type of portrayal was characteristic of the two commercial broadcasters' initial approach to the story, the second one became popular during the next couple of days, while the third type was employed by *MI*, which was strongly interested in demonstrating that FIDESZ was not liable in any sense for Balogh's misbehaviour.

Initially, both *RTL Klub* and *TV2* constructed the story as a high-ranking politician's involvement in a severe legal incident – an MP caught assaulting his girlfriend and trying to deny it. Accordingly, these broadcasters dedicated the major part of their news reports to Balogh, the perpetrator, whom they also interviewed, focusing intensively on his status as an MP (both broadcasters mentioned his MP status repeatedly, including in the title of their news reports), and explored the usual course of legal actions if such an accusation was made about an MP. Although initially broadcasters dedicated significantly less attention to the details of Balogh's crime than to his personality and to his lies, they were very clear about the severity of the crime and that it had been committed against a woman. *TV2* referred to Balogh's action as an instance of woman-battering (“he battered his girlfriend”), whereas *RTL Klub* identified it as an instance of “abuse” of a “cohabiting partner”, whom it identified as a woman (*TV2, Tények este*, 29 April 2013; *RTL Klub, Híradó Este*, 29 April

2013). Moreover, both broadcasters informed their viewers that the girlfriend's injuries were “severe” and that she had been hospitalised. *RTL Klub* also added that her nose had been broken. All in all, these pieces of information, although lacking in additional details, ultimately constructed Balogh's crime as male violence against a female intimate partner, more specifically an instance of woman battering. The two descriptions of Balogh's crime that did not fit this construction, but still appeared in these initial news reports, came from interviewees. The spokesperson for the Chief Prosecutor's Office described the case to viewers as a “family conflict” – and thereby partly shifted the blame onto the victim, as if both parties had been equally involved in the event. Meanwhile, the press announcement from FIDESZ, read out by an anchor, condemned “all violence, especially if directed against the weak, that is children, the elderly and women” (*RTL Klub, Híradó Este*, 29 April 2013). With this, FIDESZ managed to avoid commenting directly on what Balogh had done, but distanced itself, on a more abstract level, from violence against “the weak”.

In contrast with the outspokenness of *RTL Klub* and *TV2* about what type of crime Balogh had committed (an approach they adopted from the start), and the ample proofs they provided – from Balogh's on-screen exposure – that the politician had indeed been involved in battering, public broadcaster *MI* ignored the story for a long time and, when it finally reported it on 2 May, obscured the proofs of the battering and also Balogh's perpetrator status to some extent. Instead, *MI*'s main concern was to stress that FIDESZ had already distanced itself from the MP on whom suspicion had fallen. Accordingly, the title of its news report was: “József Balogh Resigns From FIDESZ Parliamentary Group and Becomes Independent” (*MI, Híradó Este*, 2 May 2013). The only person *MI* interviewed was a high-ranking member of FIDESZ, and in general the broadcaster dedicated significantly less effort to informing spectators about exactly what Balogh had done, compared with the detailed clarification it gave of the consequences of his resignation. Accordingly, *MI* only reported that “a couple of days ago the politician's life partner was hospitalised, because, *based on information from the press*, the politician has abused her” (emphasis mine). Thus, although *MI* did communicate the basic pieces of information about the nature of Balogh's crime – the words “abuse” and “hospitalised” did appear in the text – at the same time it also created a context around these claims that obscured the sources of information and their credibility, including the fact that the

girlfriend's injuries had been officially documented and reported to the police. The causes of her hospitalisation were especially vaguely described and presented as mere speculation by the press (“because, *based on information from the press*, the politician has abused her”).

This vague reporting style employed by *MI* – specifically, the way in which it partly acknowledged the abuse, but at the same time also obscured important details about it – was reproduced by a high-ranking member of FIDESZ, the only person *MI* interviewed. Antal Rogán, the Head of the party's parliamentary fraction, severely downplayed Balogh's responsibility, referring to his crime as “a severe problem going on between the politician [Balogh] and his life partner”, even if later he added that he “as an individual, a husband and a politician condemn[ed] domestic violence, similarly to all other members of the [FIDESZ] parliamentary fraction” (*MI, Híradó Este*. 2 May 2013). Rogán also stressed that, since by then Balogh “has resigned from the FIDESZ parliamentary fraction, it is only him who is in charge of deciding about the fate of his mandate”. With these ambiguous discursive tactics, the broadcaster was able to shift attention from the inconvenient details of the crime, and instead frame the story from the perspective of FIDESZ, and as something already resolved. Thus, spectators could feel reassured that, even if something bad had happened, it did not have any impact on the reputation of the political party, since the party member under suspicion was no longer in the respective parliamentary group. This news item, therefore, mainly offered spectators the opportunity to engage morally with FIDESZ, much less with the perpetrator (whose actions were both condemned and obscured), and even less with the victim (whose suffering was mostly concealed).

The third characteristic way in which Balogh's crime was discursively constructed became dominant after he had already been exposed as a liar. By 30 April, *RTL Klub* and *TV2* had shifted their attention from the politician to the nature of the crime – which they understood as “domestic violence” – and the ways in which players in relevant positions (that is, Balogh's party and domestic violence experts) were taking a stance against it. This switch of focus enabled the two commercial broadcasters to give ample space on screen to feminist, human rights approaches to domestic violence and thereby to counterbalance the conservative-nationalist, gender-neutral approach that FIDESZ had promoted in its press

announcements from the start.⁶⁶ *TV2*, for example, in its news report on the Balogh story on 30 April, explored the issue of “domestic violence” specifically. Although the spokesperson for Balogh's party, FIDESZ, once again briefly appeared in this news report and repeated the announcement from the previous day, according to which FIDESZ condemned all forms of violence “against the weak”, *TV2* gave an employee of an NGO specialising in domestic violence the status of expert, allowing her to appear on screen in a long video footage. This footage took up approximately half of the news report dedicated to the Balogh story. The expert, after pointing out that Balogh's explanation, according to which he did not remember battering his girlfriend, was not feasible, and also argued that “in a democratic, European country in the 21st century the equality between the sexes is not an issue of party politics, or one of taste, it is an issue of fundamental human rights”. The anchor also summarised the expert's view that “violence occurs in nearly all types of partnerships, independent of age, location and education”.

It is worth noting the tension between the two ways in which the expert and the spokesperson for FIDESZ constructed domestic violence. The expert employed a feminist approach and understood violence in terms of a violation of human rights, in close connection with the issue of equality between the sexes. Besides giving an expert opinion on the credibility of Balogh's explanation (namely, that not remembering was unfeasible) and locating domestic violence in mainstream society by stressing its high social prevalence, the expert also invoked certain political values (“democratic”, “European” and “of the 21st century”) and thereby located the issue of prevention of domestic violence in the broader context of the country's EU membership and of a generally democratic political establishment. At the same time, however – despite the fact that there was no child involved in the Balogh story – the expert also placed a special focus on children as victims in her discursive construction of domestic violence: “we simply do not belong to the club of civilised countries as long as we question to any extent the right of *women and children* to live their lives in peace, safety, free of physical, emotional, or sexual violence” (emphasis mine). This wording testifies that a children-focused understanding of domestic

⁶⁶ This change also allowed *RTL Klub* to shift the focus from the perpetrator to the victim and – given that Balogh's current girlfriend did not want to talk to the press – to present long excerpts from a 40-minute-long interview with Balogh's ex-wife, who claimed that Balogh had repeatedly beaten her, too, during their 25-year-long marriage (footage that I discuss in more detail below).

violence, originally formed in the Hungarian mediated public sphere in 2002 and explored in Chapter 4, was still embraced by Hungarian feminists in 2013. In contrast to the feminist approach, FIDESZ understood domestic violence as being “directed against the weak, that is children, the elderly and women”. With this wording – as explained earlier – FIDESZ homogenised the different types of victims under the broader label of “the weak” and thereby shifted attention away from the gender aspect (it also, as pointed out earlier, refrained from expressing a clear message about Balogh's responsibility for the battering). These two discourses, however, were not given equal status or equal space on the news bulletins. *TV2* gave significantly more space to the opinion of the NGO employee and presented it as expert knowledge, while the FIDESZ announcement was only given the status of a political opinion, although one that had been voiced by the political party that had the most power to influence the outcome of the case.

6.3.2 Exposure through mediated intimacy: Self-narrated agency, responsibility and on-screen emotion-management

As mentioned earlier, the trigger for the scandal – and the focal point of the entire media coverage of the story – was the footage of an interview, conducted with Balogh and aired by the two commercial broadcasters on 29 April, in which they exposed the politician as both a woman-batterer and a liar, by confronting him in front of the cameras about the allegations of battering. Through exploiting the capacity of television to bring physically distant people into close intimacy with spectators through close-up images, broadcasters allowed spectators to scrutinise Balogh's conduct at close range, and thereby arrive at their own conclusions about his trustworthiness, moral integrity and credibility (or rather lack of these). In this section I explore these pieces of footage, with special attention to Balogh's on-screen transgressions of norms – which I have earlier identified as “second-order transgressions” (Thompson, 2000, p. 17) – which ultimately triggered the scandal, and which took the form of either hard-to-believe elements and contradictions in his own narrative about his responsibility, or violations of certain social norms that regulate emotional expression and/or on-screen conduct in general. I also discuss how, through close-ups and anchors' summaries, the broadcasters oriented spectators' attention to certain

elements of the footage that yielded further evidence that Balogh was lying. At the end of this section I compare Balogh's on-screen conduct with that of the victim – or, more specifically, an earlier victim of Balogh, as his current girlfriend did not speak with journalists – whom *RTL Klub* interviewed on 30 April (and subsequently repeatedly aired excerpts from that footage), and who came across on screens as a credible person.

On 29 April Balogh presented himself in front of the cameras as a tired, hard-bitten person with limited memory or knowledge, who had access to the events of the night of the crime only indirectly, through the contradictory accounts of his son and girlfriend. Balogh reported both versions to the two TV channels, but went into detail only about the version he allegedly heard from his son, according to which “our komondor dog, who weighs about 80 kilos, and is unfortunately blind, became frightened of something, sprang at her [Balogh’s girlfriend], and pushed her over” (*RTL Klub, Híradó*, 29 April 2013): “the dog got frightened, that's what Szabi [Balogh's son] says, and as Terike [Balogh's girlfriend] entered the room with the tray in her hands, the dog sprang at her, and pushed her over” (*TV2, Tények*, 29 April 2013). At the same time Balogh did not reject his girlfriend's claims, according to which it was him who hit the woman, but recalled the girlfriend’s account with some visible unease and much more briefly: “she told me, too, when I asked her about what had happened, that I had hit her. But I do not remember” (*RTL Klub*). In the *RTL Klub* footage he claimed a total of three times that he “did not remember” anything. Similarly, when the reporter on *TV2*, after asking him about the girlfriend’s account, directly confronted him in front of the cameras about whether he could imagine at all that he might have hit the woman, he again claimed lack of knowledge: “I don't remember, frankly, I don't remember” (*TV2*).

Besides the fact that Balogh's attempt to shift responsibility for his own actions to their family dog (not to mention his claim that he could not remember whether he had hit his girlfriend) was hard to believe, his conduct in the broader context of the interview was also shockingly inappropriate to the situation. This inappropriateness became particularly apparent in the *RTL Klub* interview, where Balogh, who had previously looked rather sad (an acceptable emotional state in such a situation) quickly and visibly warmed up when he was asked about the village wedding party that he attended just before the crime happened, and recounted with great pleasure and joviality the large number of drinks he had that

night: “and we were in a wedding party, too, we drank a little, I drank, too, three, four, five.... er.... shots of pálinka, and about, no, altogether three decilitres of wine, I didn't drink beer, because I didn't like the beer they served” (*RTL Klub*). In short, by apparently lying in front of the cameras, and by showing considerable pleasure in a situation where society would have rather expected regret, shame, sadness or fear for his hospitalised girlfriend, Balogh violated not only the rules of *appropriateness* (Bucy 2011), but also *feeling rules*, that is rules that regulate the socially approved ways of expressing and managing emotions in a given situation (for the latter see Hochschild, 1983, p. 64). Combined with the hard-to-believe komondor story, these mistakes chipped away at his credibility almost immediately, exposed him to public ridicule, and made him an object of public embarrassment and outcry in the country.

While both TV channels clearly made efforts to report on the events with objectivity, they – especially *RTL Klub* – had already discredited Balogh to some extent even before the MP appeared on screen. First of all by the brief summary of the story that the anchor of *RTL Klub* gave at the very beginning, just after the audience was informed that Balogh had been accused, and his girlfriend hospitalised with a broken nose: “The MP has informed us that he had drunk a lot that evening, does not remember anything, but in his view it is their blind komondor dog who is responsible for everything”. While this was a more or less accurate summary of Balogh's words, by condensing all the relevant pieces of information into one short sentence the shock value of the komondor dog was increased and the absurdity of Balogh's explanation highlighted. The other point where *RTL Klub* hinted at some suspicion regarding Balogh's credibility was at the very end of the interview, when the reporter confronted him with the oddity of his story: “Well, that's kind of a strange story, isn't it?”. Furthermore, both TV channels pointed out the injuries to Balogh's hands (both in the voiceover and by showing close-ups), although both of them quickly added Balogh's explanation according to which “he obtained these while cooking stew”. With these tactics the TV channels were able further to enhance spectators' suspicion (in case they were still in doubt) towards Balogh's credibility, and to orient their attention towards available visual and audiovisual proofs that the politician was lying. These early news items, by uncovering Balogh's lies in front of the cameras, had a major role in putting a perpetrator of domestic violence at the centre of public attention and suspicion, and

thereby practically triggered the scandal.

Whereas the earliest news reports focused intensively on the perpetrator, and moreover Balogh's girlfriend throughout the entire case remained strongly reluctant to be interviewed, *RTL Klub* on its evening news bulletins on 30 April and 1 May managed to shed some light on the story from the victim's perspective, too. The broadcaster presented long excerpts from an interview, originally 40 minutes long, with Balogh's ex-wife, who thereby practically became a substitute for his girlfriend in the victim role. She not only talked about her painful experiences during her 25-year-long marriage to Balogh, but was also presented by the anchors as an insider witness, that is someone who "claims that she knows the man [Balogh] better than anyone else". Endowed with such high authority, the ex-wife, who looked a well-groomed, decent and intelligent woman capable of speaking about her painful memories in a reserved and easy-to-follow manner – that is, in high contrast with Balogh, a credible person – not only went into shocking details in front of the cameras about one of the many instances of physical abuse she had suffered from Balogh when one night he had beaten her with an aluminium kettle and she had had to flee, but verified the experiences of Balogh's current girlfriend, too, by claiming, as one of the anchors reported her words, that the girlfriend "had been seen many times in the village with a black eye or a broken nose". Anchors also reported that the ex-wife had warned the girlfriend, "but the woman allegedly did not believe her". Apart from this minor sign of doubt that the use of the word "allegedly" indicates in the anchors' account, the TV channel did not question in any sense the credibility of the ex-wife, and generally used her as a reliable person in a position of authority to further underpin the suspicion raised against Balogh – thereby creating a discourse of *righteous victimhood* around the story. Furthermore, this footage, by presenting a credible, trustworthy person in the victim position, was also able to engage spectators with the victim's suffering and provoke compassion – this although the general direction of the scandal pointed towards a focus on Balogh, the perpetrator, the public emotions associated with his perpetrator status, and also the boundaries of public morality in the face of violence.

6.3.3 Political-party-related incident or broader social issue? How the broadcast news media covered public actions against domestic violence

Ultimately FIDESZ, by making Balogh resign from its parliamentary group on 2 May 2013, managed to distance itself from the MP who had fallen under suspicion, and as a consequence the party-political context of the case decreased to the extent that the newsworthiness of the Balogh incident significantly fell. Accordingly, the political protests organised by both feminists and opposition parties were largely not covered by any of the major TV channels, since these protests mostly fell beyond the period (from 29 April to 2 May) when media attention was still high. During these four days, *RTL Klub* and *TV2* reported on two cases where opposition politicians came out against Balogh (they wanted him to resign from his MP role completely), but the demonstration organised by feminist activists on 16 May and the protests of opposition parties after the 2 May, in which they called for a purification of parliament from domestic violence perpetrators and the intervention of the Hungarian state against domestic violence, were not covered by any of the major news media outlets in my sample. The one and only exception was a demonstration in Parliament by a feminist NGO on 6 May, on which *RTL Klub* reported, and in which activists were portrayed as calling on Balogh to step down and on the government to ratify the Istanbul Convention. Media outlets also ignored the anti-domestic-violence actions of FIDESZ, namely that on 10 May the governing party quickly presented in Parliament the Bill on Partner Violence, discussed it four days later and passed it on 10 June 2013. In brief, due to the rapid fall-off in media attention to the Balogh story after 2 May, the majority of social actions against domestic violence were ignored by the mainstream broadcast news media. Once Balogh's ties to the ruling party FIDESZ had been visibly loosened, the media lost interest in covering the additional, domestic-violence-related aspects of the story.

In summary, while *MI* completely ignored the Balogh scandal until 2 May, *RTL Klub* and *TV2* dedicated considerable attention to it, and covered it along roughly the same lines. After an initial focus on the perpetrator and his lies, on the second day both TV channels switched to a domestic-violence-focused portrayal, and they then stayed with this. Moreover, both TV channels unambiguously embraced a gender-based notion of domestic violence, repeatedly presented information on domestic violence from feminist sources as

expert knowledge, and thereby implicitly took a stand against the rather gender-neutral notion of the issue that FIDESZ had promoted right from the start. *RTL Klub* even presented a reliable person in the victim's position and thereby introduced a discourse of *righteous victimhood* in the media portrayal of the story. Nonetheless, constructions of violence that sidelined the gender aspect, and shifts of responsibility away from the perpetrator, repeatedly appeared on screens, typically voiced by elected officials or members of Balogh's party.

Although *RTL Klub* put considerable effort into engaging spectators with the victim's suffering, by regularly presenting long excerpts from video footage in which they interviewed Balogh's ex-wife about her experiences, spectators in general had more chance to develop emotional and moral engagements – negative ones – towards Balogh, the perpetrator. Since Balogh was effectively caught lying in front of the cameras, and these were very apparent and absurd lies, he was very early on constructed as an object of public ridicule, embarrassment, shame and outcry. However, despite the facts that the Balogh scandal started as a story about an MP battering his girlfriend and the two largest national TV channels (*RTL Klub*, *TV2*) subsequently dedicated considerable attention to the issue of domestic violence in their coverage of the story, media attention quickly fell away after Balogh's ties with the ruling party FIDESZ were apparently – but not factually – loosened. This, together with the fact that many subsequent domestic-violence-related developments (such as demonstrations and changes in legislation on the issue) that followed from the scandal were not covered by the TV channels in my sample, indicates that the story received high newsworthiness only as long as it seemed to affect the FIDESZ government.

6.4 “Komondor Balogh” internet memes: Shaping mindsets, identifying transgressions

In this section I discuss the “komondor Balogh” internet memes, understood as acts of bottom-up public commentary about the Balogh story in a satirical mode. Moreover, given that these memes were also instances of political humour, which typically targets specific transgressions of existing values and norms, I also understand these internet memes as a

device of critique, that is public acts or attempts to “regulate” or “correct” misbehaviour through satire and humour.

Specifically, “komondor Balogh” internet memes appeared within a short time after *RTL Klub* and *TV2* exposed Balogh as a woman-batterer and a liar on 29 April 2013, and subsequently spread swiftly across media platforms. The day after Balogh’s exposure on television, *Index.hu*, one of the most popular online news magazines in Hungary, was already reporting an intensive meme circulation, and published 18 memetic variants from the series (see LB, 2013). *24.hu*, another online news magazine, published ten “komondor Balogh” internet memes the same day, of which five overlapped with those on *Index.hu* (Panda, 2013). In the next couple of days the “komondor Balogh” internet memes made their way into practically all major online (and some off-line) news media outlets, and some even reached mainstream television. On 2 May *TV2* re-mediated three of these on their prime-time evening news bulletin, as an illustration of the “embarrassment” that “the politician's explanation provoked in many people”. As of 2018 my collection, gathered from various sites on the Hungarian-language part of the internet, consists of altogether 40 “komondor Balogh” memetic variants (37 still images and three videos).

Nearly all these memes – with the exception of only four – contain a komondor dog, mostly a blind one, as either an image (with blindness evidenced by dark glasses), or a text, or both. Moreover, all memetic variants take a stand *against* Balogh, that is, no “counter-current” items were produced, which in general indicates that there was relatively strong agreement in Hungarian society on the negative assessment of the story (for a counter-example, see Milner, 2013, where he discusses memetic variants *pro* and *con* Occupy Wall Street). Their guiding formatting principle, in line with Shifman's observation on internet memes in general, is either mimicry or remixing (2014, p. 20). The simplest variants are composed of just a textual overlay on Balogh’s picture or an image of a komondor dog, while others lack any textual components but come up with surprising juxtapositions, and still others are primarily inter-discursive and relate in complex ways to existing discourses, often remixing elements of pop culture. Regarding their object of criticism, they show a relatively high variety. The simplest ones seem to be nothing more than humorous visual mementos of the Balogh story. Others aim at highlighting and mocking diverse inconsistencies in Balogh’s narrative, while still others more noticeably

express outcry, dissatisfaction or distrust over the ways in which the FIDESZ government handled the case, but always blend their criticism with a satirical tone. These types of criticisms often overlap in individual memetic variants.

Since I am primarily interested in these memes as public commentaries on the Balogh scandal, in the rest of this section I discuss the various memetic variants in terms of their main objects of criticism, that is *specifically which component* of the Balogh story they mock satirically as a transgression of norms and values. Since this component of mockery is not particularly highlighted in the currently most-referenced literature on internet memes, although it does acknowledge the importance of satire in this multimodal media genre (Milner, 2013; Shifman, 2014), I borrow here from Tsakona and Popa's concept of political humour (2011), which considers critique the core function of the genre. They understand political humour as social correctives, that is, public discourse attempting to “regulate” or “correct” misbehaviour through humour. In this sense, I argue that the “komondor Balogh” memes are *devices of critique*: they form a public discourse that, through mocking certain elements of the Balogh story, politicises the issue of domestic violence in various ways. With this criterion in mind, I have divided memetic variants into four groups: those mocking Balogh's lies and his attempt to shift responsibility to his dog; those mocking the fact that he had committed domestic violence; variants mocking governmental politics; and finally memes lacking such an apparent object of criticism, but which, I argue, can ultimately be considered as pointing to a national symbol of declining public morality.

The largest and relatively easily distinguished, group in my collection (nine of the 40 memes) mocks the specific element of Balogh's fabricated story where the blind komondor dog took over the role of the perpetrator of battering, that is the element of a *shift of responsibility* (see Figure 1 in Appendix). These memetic variants come up with various satirical interpretations of what an abusive, constantly belligerent dog can look like – for example, in one of the videos there is a flying, blowsy komondor who attacks innocent passers-by from behind a car – or, by means of sharp juxtapositions, they place the blind komondor dog in surprising contexts, thereby creating absurd “battering” situations. In this latter subcategory, the dog typically appears next to people who are being

pushed, beaten up or killed (for example, next to football players who are pushing each other on a football field, or next to a beaten-up Rocky Balboa). One of the most popular memes, which uses a famous example of war-time photo-journalism, *The Falling Soldier* by Robert Capa, also belongs to this subcategory: the blind komondor is pasted in just behind the soldier, as the cause of his fall. This group does not comment on the specifically domestic-violence-related component of the scandal, and neither is there any indication in them of woman-battering or violence against women in general. Instead, violence is portrayed as incidental episodes of the use of physical force in public spaces (which are often explicitly “male spaces”, such as football fields, boxing rings or frontlines of war), and inflicted on predominantly male victims – in fact, what they depict is male (physical) violence against men. This is a very traditional understanding of violence, and is characteristically untouched by the feminist discursive constructions of the issue that, as I have discussed earlier, were relatively strongly present in the broadcast coverage of the Balogh scandal.

The second largest group in my sample (eight of the 40 internet memes), in sharp contrast with the first group, mocks Balogh as a perpetrator of domestic violence (see Figure 2). Accordingly, these memetic variants typically portray bizarre episodes from the “idyllic” family life of domestic violence perpetrators, as imagined on the basis of Balogh's narrative, for example, what playing “mummies and daddies” may look like in such a family, or a video depicting Balogh dancing with his girlfriend at a village wedding party and repeatedly and rhythmically slapping her face between dance steps. Some of these variants also mock Balogh's denial, and the fact that he had shown no sign of regret, for example, in a memetic variant where his head is pasted onto a half-naked muscular male body, the textual overlay reads “OK then, I've broken Terike's [Balogh's girlfriend's] nose. And now what? The komondor dog was indeed blind”. Notably, if there is a victim portrayed in these memes, they are always women, either female family members (wives and girlfriends), or a young woman whose relationship with the perpetrator (Balogh) is not further specified, or a little girl playing “mummies and daddies” (that is, imitating the behaviour of adults in her own environment). Perpetrators, in turn, are nearly always male: in half of the memes the perpetrator is Balogh, in the rest the perpetrator is by turns a husband, a little boy, Adolf Hitler and a komondor dog whose gender is not explicitly

indicated (but probably male). This distribution of genders between victims and perpetrators shows that netizens predominantly understood domestic violence as committed by adult men against adult women, and even if children were in the images their abusive behaviour was portrayed as an imitation of adult life. In short, this group of internet memes unambiguously mocks the domestic violence component of the scandal, and understands this type of violence as male violence against women, strongly relying on available feminist discourses on the issue.

A third group of internet memes specifically targets governmental discourse and the ways in which the government handled the scandal (see Figure 3). For example, the remix of the “Keep Calm and Carry On” motivational poster originally produced by the British government in order to raise the public morale of the British population in preparation for the 2nd World War, re-interprets the original message of the poster as promoting the “morale” of FIDESZ and Balogh, encouraging them to “keep calm” and thereby sweep the matter under the carpet. Similarly, one of the most popular internet memes, which shows a panoramic view of one section of the Hungarian Parliament with MPs sitting in their seats and one of them, a male figure (probably Balogh?) with a blind komondor dog's head in place of his own, mocks Hungarian political culture as a space that tolerates perpetrators, and lets them stay in prominent positions. One of the internet memes in this group concretely references feminism: it shows the image of a komondor dog with a textual overlay that reads “I don't need feminism, only a good pair of glasses” and thereby mocks the government's blindness to domestic violence and its repeated reluctance to come out against perpetrators, but also constructs domestic violence as a feminist issue. Therefore, these memes first of all reflect the implications of the Balogh story for Hungarian political life and the lack of a satisfactory public morality, and specifically the questionable ways in which the FIDESZ government had “handled” the case and the broader issue of domestic violence in general.

Finally, memetic variants in the fourth group contain only images of komondor dogs, with or without dark glasses (although the latter case is less frequent) (see Figure 4). Representatives of this group had already figured in the two early meme collections that *Index.hu* and *24.hu* published on 30 April, showing how the komondor dog element of Balogh's narrative very quickly acquired a central position, so that the image of a

komondor dog was understood by itself as meaningful enough to be circulated as a reference to Balogh. Their object of criticism, however, is less explicit, since the simplicity of these images implies a very open meaning structure, capable of embracing a vast range of meanings. As of 2018, the “komondor dog” is still understood as both a concrete reference to woman-battering and a national symbol on a more abstract level that encompasses a range of negative sentiments about Hungarian political life, including anti-FIDESZ sentiments, dissatisfaction with the moral conduct of Hungarian politicians and disappointment at their corruptness (on these meanings, see Kárász, 2013; Nagy, 2015). Overall, these “komondor dog” memes quickly became a national symbol of a declining public morality – in other words, a strongly intertextual reference that, once this reference had been established, did not necessarily need to be anchored to a specific case.

In short, the “komondor Balogh” internet memes focused alternately on Balogh's violence, his attempt to ward off responsibility through denial, and the implications for Hungarian political life of the inadequate handling of the case by the government. Acts of physical violence were understood either as domestic violence (and as male violence against women), or as any type of physical violence between males in public places. This shows that producers and sharers of internet memes, when mocking types of violence within four walls, leaned towards accepting a gendered concept of domestic violence, that is one more in accordance with the feminist discourse than with the local conservative-nationalist discourse promoted by the FIDESZ government. On the other hand, the large number of internet memes in which violence was portrayed as affecting mainly men in public places is indicative of a lack of awareness of domestic violence in general. To sum up, although the komondor Balogh internet memes expressed many critical voices on the Balogh story, including feminist and anti-violence voices, battering was not their exclusive focus. Rather, they articulated a public outcry over Balogh's lack of moral integrity in general, and also served as a satirical counter-discourse to the government standpoint, and specifically its four-day delay in distancing itself from persons of questionable personal integrity or seeking to prevent perpetrators of violence from getting away with their crime. Ultimately, the memes even became a national symbol of declining public morality. Moreover, as mediated devices of bottom-up social and political critique in a satirical form, the “komondor Balogh” internet memes created a largely homogeneous emotional regime

around the incident: one of ridicule, outcry, indignation and embarrassment – public emotions that moved swiftly across a range of media platforms, and thereby powerfully ”socialised” the public to an adequate emotional response to these events.

6.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have analysed the Balogh scandal as it unfolded in a complex media environment strongly affected by internet memes. I investigated selected extracts from three major news broadcasters across a period of peak coverage from 29 April to 2 May 2013, and internet memes following Balogh’s public exposure on television on 29 April. Using a CDA framework that employs the analytical categories of lexical choices, allocation of responsibility, characterisation and context, I explored the ways in which domestic violence was constructed on screens in terms of the identity of the event, its actors (perpetrator and victim), proposals by the media for emotions associated with these, and also media proposals (or, rather, the lack of these) for social intervention on violence. Given that the actual trigger for the scandal was the perpetrator’s televised exposure as both a woman-batterer and a liar, I have dedicated special attention to these pieces of footage, and explored the specific ways in which Balogh violated certain norms that, in general, regulate politicians’ on-screen conduct through the “politics of trust”. The subsequent flow of internet memes, which I identify as having played a major role in bringing spectators to a common platform in relation to the events by shaping shared emotions and values with regard to Balogh’s transgressions, have been analysed as devices expressing bottom-up social and political critique, and, on the basis of their specific object of critique, I have identified four major meme groups.

Regarding the issue of domestic violence, news broadcasters, overall, were fairly explicit about what type of crime Balogh had committed. Although *MI*, the public service broadcaster under strong governmental control, ignored the story for a long time and was particularly obscure about the nature of Balogh's crime and his responsibility for it, the two commercial broadcasters very early on exposed Balogh to the public as a woman-batterer and a liar, and dedicated considerable attention to the battering element of the story, which

they understood as an instance of domestic violence. Moreover, both *RTL Klub* and *TV2* endorsed a feminist perspective on domestic violence: they repeatedly shared information on the issue from feminist sources that they presented as expert knowledge, and thereby implicitly took a stand against the notion of the issue that FIDESZ promoted from the start and which, in line with the party's nationalist-conservative agenda, attempted to sideline the importance of the gender aspect. Internet memes, however, were more ambiguous in this respect, and produced considerable oscillation between gender-based and gender-neutral understandings of violence. All in all, the broadcast media, at least its commercial segment, occupied a more feminist position on the issue than did the internet memes. Nonetheless, despite uncertainty on the gender aspect, the sheer fact that a perpetrator of domestic violence was located among the MPs of the ruling party remarkably raised the overall public visibility of domestic violence in the country, and, what is more, this was at a historic moment when the preparation of an important policy instrument against this type of violence had temporarily stalled in the Hungarian Parliament. The Balogh scandal, therefore, besides raising public attention to domestic violence, also re-introduced the issue to the public agenda after a couple of months of silence, even if the newsworthiness of the story quickly fell away after Balogh's party visibly loosened its ties with him. The majority of social actions against domestic violence were not covered by broadcasters because by then the political context of the case had started to fade.

In line with what has already been stated above, the focus of media attention remained steadily on Balogh, the perpetrator, throughout the entire media coverage of the case, despite the fact that commercial broadcasters, after their initial focus on his rank as an MP and his public exposure, quickly switched to a more domestic-violence-focused and victim-focused portrayal. They dedicated considerable coverage to the discussion of the broader issue of domestic violence, and one broadcaster (*RTL Klub*) even interviewed one of Balogh's victims, and portrayed her in terms of a righteous victimhood, i.e. as a trustworthy and credible person, in connection with whom questions about her complicity in her own victimisation do not arise. However, the ways in which Balogh's identity was constructed on screen through his exposure on television – that is, as someone whose attempts to conceal his crime with the help of absurd and ridiculously apparent lies violated rules of appropriate conduct on many levels, and who, despite his prominent position,

completely lacked the skills to manoeuvre in the world of the media – offered the possibility of a much stronger emotional and moral engagement (even if a negative one), than what was available towards any other agents in the story including the suffering victim. At the same time, the fact that his perpetrator status was evidenced through his on-screen conduct (he was obviously lying), also implied that the aspects of battering and lying merged in public responses to his exposure. This was well-reflected in the complexity of the komondor Balogh internet memes, which alternately mocked Balogh's violence, his obvious and absurd lies, and the implications of the case for Hungarian political life and public morality. But they all expressed, without doubt, a critique of the events, and thereby powerfully circulated public emotions of distrust, outcry, indignation and ridicule across media platforms. Overall, whereas the intensive focus on the perpetrator acted in favour of bringing attention to the boundaries of public morality and adequate emotional expression on violence, its drawback was that public discussion of the broader issue of domestic violence, including the gender aspect, around which governmental and feminist expert discourses spectacularly clashed, was pushed into the background.

All in all, the main legacy of the Balogh scandal was that, by focusing media attention on a high-profile perpetrator, it re-opened a nationwide public discussion of the boundaries of acceptable public conduct with regard to domestic violence, and asserted new boundaries. Moreover, for the first time in Hungary's history, it created a largely homogeneous and unambiguously disapproving emotional regime around a perpetrator and his actions of domestic violence, and thereby intensively socialised the public to outcry, disgust, embarrassment, indignation and ridicule as adequate forms of emotional expression with regard to perpetrators. The fact that an MP of the ruling political party could become an object of these public emotions across the country – as evidenced by the intensive meme circulation – made it evident that by 2013 Hungarian society had become much less tolerant towards perpetrators of domestic violence than before. Unlike in 2002 and 2010, when such a homogeneous emotional regime around perpetrators had not been created, either because the focus remained steadily on the victim of abuse (as discussed in Chapter 4) or because the perpetrator actively and repeatedly appealed for spectators' pity and compassion and attempted to present himself as the “real victim” in the case (as discussed in Chapter 5), the Balogh scandal offered an unambiguous public response, in the

form of mediated public emotions, to an instance of domestic violence. Domestic violence thus not only emerged as a centre of public attention for a short period through this scandal, but also created certain social solidarities around the issue, by bringing spectators to a common platform with regard to violence. Unsurprisingly, following this scandal in 2013, domestic violence and other gender-based types of violence (most importantly sexual harassment and sexual violence) remained a focus of media attention, and the news media covered stories of this kind in growing number, despite the fact that “anti-gender” and “anti-feminist” governmental propaganda began to take a strong hold in the country. In the next and closing chapter, after summarising the main findings of this thesis and drawing conclusions, I discuss briefly these post-2013 developments, and give an overview of the political, legal and cultural contexts of these, and why additional research on the topic would be particularly beneficial.

7. Findings and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the discursive emergence of domestic violence in the Hungarian media between 2002 and 2013. Specifically, it explores the role of the news media in constructing domestic violence in the public eye and in morally and emotionally engaging the public with the issue over the given time period. My research interest was triggered by the fact that in Hungary – as in many other EU member countries, and despite the fact that there was no large-scale feminist movement in the country – there was a major transformation in the social perception of the issue in the 2000s, but no research has hitherto discussed this transformation. Research was especially lacking in relation to the contribution of the media to this process, despite the fact that surveys have repeatedly indicated that it was primarily from the mass media that Hungarian citizens informed themselves about domestic violence (European Commission, 2010, p. 12; Gregor, 2014, p. 21).

After reviewing the broader feminist literature on the subject, it became evident that this scholarly ignorance about the role of the media in matters of domestic violence is not in fact country-specific, but is based on a chain of assumptions that are also evident on more general theoretical levels. Firstly, this neglect of the media seems to be endemic in the entire literature discussing domestic violence in the Central-Eastern European region (Dombos, Horváth & Krizsán, 2007; Fabian 2010c, 2014a, 2017; Krizsán, Paantjens & Lamoen, 2005; Krizsán & Popa, 2010, 2014; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018a). This literature has mostly been restricted to the analysis of legislative and policy changes (a focus that reflected the primary goals of local feminist activism), and has tended to see these either as products of backstage negotiations between decision-makers and local advocates, or as outcomes of pressures from international and supranational institutions, in particular the European Union. In either case, the role of the media in the construction of domestic violence for the broader public has not been considered, still less explored in detail.

Secondly, and even more importantly, it also became evident that the broader feminist literature on the media portrayal of domestic violence tended to view the media in

terms of an institution of social control, at the expense of their potential role in fostering progressive change (see e.g. Berns, 1999, 2001, 2004; Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-93; Braber, 2015; Bullock, 2007; Carll, 2003; Carter, 1998; Gillespie, Richards, Givens & Smith, 2013, Meyers, 1994, 1997; Nettleton, 2011; Sunindyo, 2004; Zeynep, 2006). This literature, which emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s in Anglo-Saxon countries, very convincingly points out how patriarchal discourses typically play out in the media portrayal of domestic violence, and how this contributes to the reproduction of gendered social inequalities and of a culture of violence. But I found that it did not address (or only occasionally addressed) the link between constructions of domestic violence and proposals for social or political action, despite historical evidence – including from Hungary – that domestic violence in the media, even if mostly portrayed in terms of patriarchal norms, is sometimes capable of generating massive public outcry and of engaging broader publics with the issue, and in some cases has even led to public action being taken against violence.

Therefore, in contrast to these previous tendencies and assumptions, I decided to make the *agency of media texts* in facilitating societal change the focus of my research. More closely, I was looking for something that established a connection between changing conceptions of domestic violence and proposals for social action, *without* implying a causal connection between media discourse and societal change or assuming that society would automatically be changing because media discourses were changing. Instead, I accepted societal change as multi-factoral, and took historical changes in media discourse(s) as only *one* – although a relatively important and often-neglected – dimension of a broader matrix of societal change around domestic violence. As a first step towards such an approach, I have argued here that media texts shape the social perception of domestic violence through their agency in discursively constructing this type of violence in the public eye. Therefore, I reached out to the concepts of *discourse* and, in close connection with this, of *mediation*. I took domestic violence as inevitably relying on discourses (that is, meaning-making systems) in order to become at all meaningful or to orient us towards others in the world. This was a key decision at the very beginning of my research, since I thus located my approach within the context of post-structural epistemologies, and more specifically Foucault (1969/1972, 1975/1977), and this decision also allowed me to analyse domestic

violence through the lens of *historical changes* in (mediated) discourses. I was able, thereby, to theorise discourse as a – historically and locally specific – productive technology of social practice, which on the one hand subjects people to certain forms of power, and on the other hand also provides them with “spaces of agency and possibilities for action” (Chouliaraki, 2008b, p. 675). Moreover, considering that domestic violence is a contested concept and typically shaped by several (feminist and non-feminist) discourses simultaneously, I complemented my Foucauldian notion of discourse with the concept of *hegemony* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Also, by accepting that it is primarily the media that circulate these discourses within societies, I located my research within the context of *mediation*, a key critical concept that stresses the omnipresent and multidirectional influence of the media on our everyday life, by emphasising that the media not only reflect, but – through their symbolic power – also fundamentally shape and construct our perception of the social world (Couldry & Hepp 2013, Livingstone 2009;). I thereby pinpointed a theoretical angle from which domestic violence could be theorised as being inevitably mediated; that is, its social meaning is constantly shaped by discourses that are typically regulated by the media. These mediated discourse(s) on domestic violence, then, could be explored in the light of the various proposals made by the media for meaning-making, feeling and taking action with regard to domestic violence – capitalising on the insight that, with regard to human suffering, the media may serve as a means of *moral education*, that is a symbolic space where proposals for (acceptable) emotions and moral claims are part of the very process of articulation of discourses (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008a). More closely, through the lens of this theoretical framework, mediated discourses of domestic violence could be investigated in terms of their use of language to articulate agency (i.e. by identifying actors in violence – perpetrator, victim – and their attributes and characterisation) and articulate emotions (i.e. specific feelings organised around these actors’ actions and personal attributes), thereby establishing normative claims concerning what is or is not right in the face of domestic violence, and what is the most appropriate course of action. This insight into the fact that meaning-making, feeling and taking action are closely intertwined in the articulation of a discourse served as a guiding principle in the formulation of my research questions.

I also needed a definition of domestic violence that I could accept as normative, that

reflected my own position regarding the object of my study, and from the perspective of which I could critically evaluate the emerging Hungarian discursive constructions that I was about to investigate. I took as a starting point Jeff Hearn's definition, according to which violence is always a form of social inequality regulated by a network of hidden and tacit assumptions within societies concerning “who is allowed to do what to whom” (1998, p. 15), wherein actions in pursuit of control/power over fellow human beings are always perceived differently along the violence–non-violence spectrum according to participants’ social standing (with the violence of superordinate groups typically receiving less attention and more easily passing as non-violence). I was able thereby to re-formulate domestic violence as a form of interpersonal, structural and also symbolic violence which strongly contributes to reproducing and naturalising existing social inequalities, so that these appear to be a kind of “second nature” (Bourdieu, 1998/2001). Although, on the basis of this formulation, domestic violence is capable, at least in principle, of exploiting any form of social inequality, I accepted the feminist claim that it is most commonly gender inequality that perpetrators of domestic violence take advantage of in order to gain power over their partners (although this often intersects with other social inequalities), given that romantic/intimate relationships are typically built on practices that are strongly guided by gendered norms. Kelly's notion of a *continuum of violence* (1988, pp. 74-137) also allowed me to theorise domestic violence as a prevalent form of violence against women. Following Johnson (1995) and Stark (2007), I also accepted that domestic violence – contrary to earlier understandings that focused on battering – is best understood, at least in modern societies, in terms of a calculated, instrumental, ongoing and cumulative abuse of power and control in relationships. The core component of this type of violence thus becomes *coercive control*, understood as a fundamental attack on the victim’s agency, that is exactly that quality that modern societies celebrate and expect from their adult members (Stark, 2007).

It was this theoretical framework that informed my main research question: “What specific discourses concerning domestic violence did the Hungarian news media use, combine and/or challenge between 2002 and 2013?”. I narrowed down my research to the time period between 2002 and 2013. On the one hand, until 2002 domestic violence had received only sporadic mentions in the Hungarian media (as demonstrated by statistics

from the archive of the Hungarian news agency *MTI*) (see Magyar Távirati Iroda, n.d.). On the other hand, the passage in 2013 of a Law on “Partner Violence”, which entered into force in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence-related scandal extensively covered by the Hungarian media, seemed an ideal closing point, since this was a highly visible instance of media-related state intervention against domestic violence which officially acknowledged its status as violence. Moreover, given that, as explained above, I was interested in addressing the mediated discourses on domestic violence as articulating and regulating not only meanings but also emotions and moral claims – considering that discourses have the power to offer paradigmatic forms of relating to and acting upon oneself and others – I also reached out for additional theories to further underpin and fine-tune my theoretical framework with special reference to the differing forms of emotions and moral norms articulated in mediated discourses on domestic violence in Hungary between 2002 and 2013.

First, I reached out to the concept of engaged publics and the today widely acknowledged facts that the portrayal of public issues by the media usually also creates some kind of emotional and/or moral engagement on spectators’ side, and that this engagement plays a crucial role in taking action on the given issue (see Dahlgren, 2009; Hall, 2005). This insight shaped my two supplementary research questions: “What forms of emotion and moral norms did the media discursively articulate with regard to the suffering of the victims of domestic violence during this period?”; and, relatedly: “How did the media discursively activate certain moral and emotional proposals for engagement with victims and perpetrators, and, more generally, with regard to the issue of domestic violence?” These questions served in general to map the ways in which the media discursively regulate possible moral and emotional engagement with the issue of domestic violence, and the forms of social intervention following from these. Specifically, these questions enabled me to enquire into the ways in which media texts engage spectators with both victims and perpetrators (and occasionally benefactors), set norms of public conduct and/or feeling with regard to domestic violence, appeal to shared (moral, social and/or cultural) values and imagined communities, establish (or break with) social solidarities, and build (or deny) senses of belonging around the issue, and ultimately also the ways in which media texts, through engaged publics, occasionally lead to social and political

action. Given that this agency of media texts in discursively regulating spectators' moral and emotional engagement with public issues and thereby contributing to social change had been under-researched in existing literature on domestic violence, I had to reach out for theories that already had a better-elaborated grasp of this agency of media texts, and to re-conceptualise the media portrayal of domestic violence in the context of these.

Although the critical analysis of discourse, particularly discursive psychology, has always paid special attention to the ways in which affect is signified through linguistic choice, I needed theories specifically dedicated to the media. Theories of mediated suffering were particularly useful in this respect (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008a), but I also relied heavily on other theories, which, in brief, have from the 2000s onwards made emotions a focus of scholarly attention in media studies. Specifically, since the early 2000s the mediated public sphere has increasingly been thought of as also an "emotional public sphere", that is a place where emotions are selected, constructed, managed and displayed publicly and often intertwined with political issues (Lunt & Stenner, 2005), and also a space of "affective economies", that is where emotions are empowered and accumulated through the circulation of media texts (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 45-46; Kuntsman, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015). Particularly useful in this regard was research that has specifically studied news discourse in terms of its potential for engaging publics emotionally and/or morally with major events involving human suffering (such as reporting on natural or man-made disasters, or the violent death of public figures), and thereby establishing (national or global) citizenship around the issue (see e.g. Pantti, 2001; Pantti & van Zoonen, 2006), as well as media research on humanitarian discourse and its power to engage "people's potential to care" (Chouliaraki, 2010, 2015). These theories, overall, offered me a theoretical framework for thinking about domestic violence in the media as a discursively constructed public discourse where meaning-making, emotions and normative claims are closely intertwined.

Given that I was primarily interested in discursive constructions and their change over time, the choice of *Critical Discourse Analysis* (Fairclough) as a method was an obvious one. Faircloughian CDA has allowed me to apply the Foucauldian notion of discourse (1969/1972, 1975/1977) and that of hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) to concrete texts, to investigate discursive change in these, and, through historical

comparisons, to draw conclusions about long-term shifts in the social meaning of domestic violence in the Hungarian media between 2002 and 2013. Considering that CDA typically makes ample reference to the context of the discourses under study (Meyer, 2001, p. 15), combining CDA with a multiple case-study design seemed a natural match. I applied CDA to some data-rich cases selected on the basis that they achieved an exceptionally high level of media coverage in the given period – and which thereby, due to their high public visibility, had the greatest chance of generating a change in the social meaning of domestic violence in the country. I was thereby able to grasp three key moments of the domestic violence story in the Hungarian media: the moments of i) acknowledging the existence of domestic abuse; ii) gendering domestic violence in the public eye, and iii) clarifying the boundaries of public conduct with regard to domestic violence.

I also restricted my analysis to *television news*, given that, according to numerous studies, television is still today the most influential medium across the world, including in Hungary. In addition, in order to address the fast-changing media environment that Hungarian television was a part of between 2002 and 2013, and the implications of this change in the dominant forms and platforms of mediation through which domestic violence was mediated, I added a third supplementary question: “How might the historical changes in media ecology have also contributed to changing the discourses on domestic violence in the Hungarian media?” This question was important because during the 2000s the Hungarian media environment gradually became more complex. With first commercial broadcasting and a concomitant infotainment-driven news reporting style and local celebrity culture gaining hold, and then interactive and online media becoming stronger and expanding considerably, it was logical to assume that the place of television news discourses in this media ecology may also have gone through some modification through increasing interaction with other media genres and platforms. Changes in media ecology also provided a justification for complementing my focus on television news stories with additional media materials, as case-specific media-ecology-related contexts (but at the same time keeping television as a focal point of my study). I gave specific consideration to coverage of my selected cases in: the print media (the tabloid *Blikk* and the left-wing political daily *Népszabadság*) in 2002; celebrity-related infotainment programmes in 2010, and internet memes in 2012-2013. This allowed me to present three snapshots of domestic

violence cases mediated by television in three different, historically specific media milieus.

On the other hand, my research intentionally did not address political changes in the media environment, although these were fundamental in the 2010s. The gradual transformation of the entire Hungarian media landscape after 2010 – when a new political regime started to gradually establish itself in the country and spectacularly increased government control over the media – first resulted in qualitative change only in 2015, which fell outside my period of investigation.

Given the above considerations, I carried out a CDA-based multiple case study, exploring my three cases through a threefold set of analytical frameworks. I investigated discourses in terms of: *naming* (that is terms or names that the media employed to describe and construct types of violence, including the characterisation of these specific types of violence, and – if there were any – references to their social prevalence); *agency* (that is the portrayal of the actors in violence – perpetrator, victim – their attributes and characterisation), and *emotions* (that is proposals by the media regarding appropriate forms of emotion and moral claims with regard to these actors' actions and personal attributes). I also explored, if there were any, the articulation of normative claims concerning the most appropriate course of action with regard to domestic violence, and specific links to social actors taking action.

7.2 Key findings

7.2.1 The Kitti Simek Case (2002): Acknowledging abuse

The “Simek case”, a shocking case of adolescent parricide (that is, the killing of a parent by a teenage perpetrator) discussed in Chapter 4, has a specific role in my narrative as, I argue, it was through this crime news story that domestic violence was originally brought to public attention in Hungary. Given that the focus of media attention shifted very early from the act of murder to the preceding abuse that the underage perpetrator (the 14-year-old girl Kitti Simek) had suffered from the parent-victim (her stepfather), the roles of victim and perpetrator were soon re-distributed between the teenager and the parent, and a

new discourse emerged: one that was specifically shaped for articulating and making meaningful the *abuse* element of the events, instead of the usual focus on the element of *homicide*. Accordingly, I argue, the main legacy of this case was that it brought public attention to abuse occurring *in citizens' intimate and private life* and acknowledged this as a type of violence. Hungarian society until then had been largely ignorant of violence within families, and tended to see it – with the exception of its most extreme forms – as a legitimate form of exercising control over family members (as demonstrated by a large-scale survey launched in the country a couple of years earlier, see Tóth 1999a). In contrast with this earlier perspective, the abuse that 14-year old Kitti Simek had endured was named by media outlets as an instance of “child abuse”, “domestic violence” or “terror in the family” – the last two taken from two earlier, ground-breaking Hungarian feminist publications on domestic violence (Morvai 1998; Tóth 1999a) – all terms indicating a type of violence occurring within four walls, in intimate/family relationships. I explored this case through selected extracts from three major news outlets – the public service broadcaster *MTVI*, the left-wing political daily *Népszabadság* and the tabloid *Blikk* – across a period of peak coverage in September 2002.

My main findings are that the status of victim was mostly assigned to the teenage girl exclusively, most importantly excluding the mother, who, like her daughter, suffered decade-long abuse. The abuse was constructed so that its sexual component received disproportionately high media attention. The teenage girl, who was practically granted a monopoly over the position of victim, was portrayed – until a major turn in the media coverage of the story changed her public image – in positive terms (good-natured, amicable) and also as strongly marked by her vulnerability, and therefore as a subject particularly worthy of sympathy, compassion, understanding and help. Detailed descriptions of the girl's suffering and the stressing of the irrevocability of her emotional and physical injuries were particularly likely to provoke compassion and pity, especially initially. At the same time, media texts created a monster-like personality for her abusive stepfather, and thereby depicted him as clearly an outsider from society. With these discursive constructions, media texts effectively created a black and white discourse on domestic violence that activated strong positive emotions towards victims, while at the same time encouraging condemnation of perpetrators' violence. Disgust and

embarrassment were particularly highlighted as appropriate emotional responses to the sexual abuse perpetrated by the stepfather and spectators were thus intensively socialised to what would be the socially “approved” emotional reaction to child sexual abuse in general.

On the other hand, I argue, depicting the stepfather as a monster-like personality also had profoundly negative implications for the overall media portrayal of the case: removing the perpetrator from mainstream society meant that his abusive behaviour was also not seen as a feature of mainstream society, but instead presented as exceptional rather than prevalent, and the coverage thereby failed to highlight its social context. The tabloid media in particular constructed the domestic violence as mostly rooted in the perpetrator's specific deviance and, therefore, as an individual problem. In this type of portrayal, understandably, neither the high social prevalence of the issue, nor the spectrum of behaviour that connects “normal” people with perpetrators was investigated. Instead the focus was on “exotic” details presented in a sensationalist manner. With these distancing discursive tactics that put a distance between violence and spectators, the tabloid media texts – besides shaping the case so that it conformed to a voyeuristic type of consumption – implicitly portrayed domestic violence in terms of the received grand narratives of violence: that is, as if only people on the edges of society would behave in this way (on these narratives, see Walby, 2012, pp. 96-97). Not least, the tabloid media texts also thus activated a very common way of portraying domestic violence, already intensely criticised in Anglo-American feminist literature as a type of portrayal that contributes to a culture of violence (see Berns, 1999, 2001, 2004; Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-93; Braber, 2015; Bullock, 2007; Carll, 2003; Carter, 1998; Gillespie, Richards, Givens & Smith, 2013; Meyers, 1994, 1997; Nettleton, 2011; Sunindyo, 2004; Zeynep, 2006). The public broadcaster *MTVI* and the political daily *Népszabadság*, however, employed a more socially engaged approach, repeatedly attempting to call attention to the high social prevalence of child abuse and domestic violence in Hungarian society.

Overall, the increased focus on the child as victim in the case strongly pushed the entire meaning of the element of abuse in the direction of *child abuse* and *child sexual abuse*, although of the three media outlets in my sample only one (*MTVI*) explicitly embraced this interpretation. The other two media outlets (*Népszabadság* and *Blikk*) employed cognate terms; specifically, *Népszabadság* consistently referred to the case as an

instance of “domestic violence” and repeatedly emphasised that this type of violence affects mainly women and children, while *Blick* used the terms “physical and emotional terror” and “terror in the family” (without commenting on the main victims). This oscillation of terms, together with the contradictions and inconsistencies they brought into the general media portrayal of the story, I argue, shows how back in 2002 domestic violence, understandably, was far from having an established discourse in the country. The new discourse that started to emerge was mostly focused on *domestic abuse* in general (that is, violence committed within a domestic relationship, by an intimate partner or another family member), which proved to be a very broad and loosely-defined discursive object. Moreover, as previously indicated, the media portrayals showed a strong tendency to give priority to the age-related aspects of the victimisation. In this way other, similarly widespread, types of domestic abuse that typically exploit gendered inequalities, such as male violence against female intimate partners – in this case Kitti's mother – were marginalised and mostly ignored during the media coverage of this story. Thereby a discourse of *gender-neutral victimhood* emerged.

This increased focus on a child-victim – that is someone who, due to her age, could not be held responsible for her own victimisation – had, overall, ambiguous implications for the general media portrayal of the case. On the one hand, and on the positive side, it did, at least initially, keep the coverage of the case entirely free of victim-blaming discourses – shifts of responsibility for their own victimisation from perpetrators to victims, which is a frequent discursive counter-move in portrayals of domestic violence, and which serves, among other things, to question, blur or conceal the violence aspect of domestic violence. The element of abuse was *acknowledged as a type of violence* (even if not necessarily a gendered type of violence) without any specific difficulty, and – after 20 September, when feminist activists launched a petition against domestic violence – it was possible to mobilise relatively wide social support against this “new” type of violence. On the other hand, because of this intense focus on innocent and vulnerable child-victims, other victims who did not conform fully to this description could be marginalised or even publicly stigmatised. This became particularly evident when the teenage girl's public image underwent a major transformation in the media, roughly a week after the news broke. She had not shown the emotions that society expected from somebody who had just murdered a

parent and as a consequence was no longer deemed able to fulfil the role of the “good victim”. Similarly, I found that at a later date, when domestic violence was further re-fashioned in the Hungarian media in order to be deemed worthy of social intervention, the focus on children as cultural emblems of innocence and vulnerability intensified.

So the discursive object that emerged through this novel discourse in 2002 in Hungary, and was named, alongside other terms, as domestic violence, conformed *only partially* to feminist constructions of domestic violence. Most notably, while it was successfully presented as a type of *violence*, its specific connection to *gender* remained unacknowledged. Ironically, as I point out, the focus on children was also embraced by local feminist activists, who called for – and successfully mobilised – wider social support for the criminalisation of this type of violence. One of the takeaways from the Simek case, therefore, was the fact that wider social support for the issue could be successfully mustered only if the focus was on children. This approach, however, raised serious questions regarding the concealment of other social groups as victims. Moreover, the ambiguous ways in which the media reported on the feminist activists’ petition against domestic violence indicated that during this initial period the news media remained sceptical about the relevance of (feminist) civic bottom-up actions against domestic violence, and instead saw only the state as a competent social actor.

Within this context, I would like to further argue that the emergence of the Simek case, with its strong focus on hitherto “hidden” violent aspects of citizens’ intimate and family lives, also coincided with a shift in Hungary towards the rise of *mediated intimacy* in the country – that is, a growing abundance of media representations of intimate relationships – and thereby followed a trend first observed in Anglo-American media cultures in the 1990s (Barker, Gill & Harvey, 2018, pp. 24-26). This trend – usually described as a rise in the confessional and personalising tendencies of the media, and traditionally linked to the advent of media genres focusing on citizens’ intimate lives, such as reality TV shows, reality dating shows or celebrity-related broadcasting genres – placed intimate life at the heart of media representations (Pantti, 2011; Pantti & van Zoonen, 2006). In Hungary, this shift was primarily enabled by the launch of national commercial broadcasters with the new Media Law in 1997 (see Bajomi-Lázár & Monori, 2007; Terestyéni, 2007). Commercial broadcasters introduced novel types of infotainment and

entertainment-oriented programmes including reality TV shows – as I point out, the launch of the first reality TV show, a localised version of *Big Brother*, coincided almost to the day with the breaking of the news about the Simek story (which, in turn, was shaped into a daily live soap opera by *Blikk*). Therefore, I suggest, media attention to the violent aspects of the Simeks’ intimate and family life – besides benefitting from the high newsworthiness that female and underage perpetrators traditionally enjoy across the Western world – should also be understood in the context of this broader shift that Hungarian television went through in the early 2000s in the direction of a previously unseen increase in media representation of intimate relationships and citizens’ private lives. The Simek case, which made public a large amount of private information about the abuse, gave the broader Hungarian public an unprecedented insight into the nature of violence in families.

As an instance of mediated intimacy, the Simek case was also highly vulnerable to voyeuristic types of media consumption, which previously had been enabled only by the tabloid print media in the country and their sensation-seeking modes of news delivery. In my study, the tabloid media were represented by *Blikk*, in 2002 the largest tabloid newspaper in Hungary, which developed the story into a daily real-life soap opera, rich in personal details that violated the victim’s rights to privacy on many levels. Violations of the Simeks’ privacy, however, extended beyond the tabloid media: not only *Blikk*, but also the public service broadcaster *MTVI* revealed the victim’s full identity, including her face and full name, and also let her appear in front of the cameras, where she – unaware of the potential negative consequences of media exposure – willingly gave interviews, and even talked at length about both the crime that she had committed and the abuse that she had suffered previously. By this, media outlets repeatedly violated certain general ethical norms regarding how abused children should be portrayed in the media. I conclude that this shows how the majority of the Hungarian news media was unprepared for the phenomenon of an underage perpetrator-victim, and did not handle the situation with the required responsibility and self-restraint. The only media outlet in my sample that never interviewed the teenage girl, and that generally tried to refrain from directly exposing her to public attention, was *Népszabadság*, a political daily. However, after a week even *Népszabadság* gave up this strategy as pointless and published the girl’s full name and photograph, which by then were well-known to the whole country. This shows how a solitary attempt at

ethical reporting on victims of abuse proved ineffective when not backed up by the broader national media environment in relation to the portrayal of similar cases.

7.2.2 *The Roland Damu Case* (2010): Gendering domestic violence

After long years of silence following the Simek case in 2002, the next high-profile case of domestic violence in the country occurred in 2010, when soap opera actor and TV personality Roland Damu was outed as having abused his ex-fiancée. The main issue at stake in this case was, as I argue in Chapter 5, the re-defining of domestic violence – which had previously, as already mentioned, been mostly constructed as gender-neutral and as affecting mostly children – to include the *gender* aspect. Specifically, this case was relevant because it shed public light on the “everyday face” of male violence against female intimate partners, which traditionally had evaded the attention threshold of the media (see e.g. Meyers, 1995, 1997; Carter, 1998). In this respect, the story, in terms of its newsworthiness, benefited from Damu’s existing televisual fame in the tabloid segment of the Hungarian media. This accumulated prominence, I suggest, was possible only in the televisual celebrity culture characteristically tied to commercial broadcasters and their tabloidised current affairs agenda and to the rise of mediated intimacies, which had slowly and steadily established itself in the country over the previous decade. The story remained newsworthy for a prolonged period (a year and a half), so the broader public was able to keep following its unfolding in the public arena, including the news of the perpetrator finally being sentenced to imprisonment. Hence, I suggest, through the Damu case the Hungarian news media successfully raised attention to domestic violence as *gendered*, and also to the fact that it was against the law (irrespective of the fact that in 2010-2012 domestic violence was not yet a separate entry in the Hungarian Criminal Code). On the other hand, I also identify some problematic points where media outlets closed down certain possibilities of challenging patriarchal assumptions about this type of violence. In line with the main focus of my thesis, I analyse the Damu case through selected extracts from three major national broadcasters (*MI*, *RTL Klub*, *TV2*).

A shift towards genderedness was most spectacularly present in the current affairs programmes of the two national commercial TV channels (*RTL Klub*, *TV2*), which

specifically dealt with the issue of “domestic violence” (named as such) apropos of the Damu story; and also in the shifts that occurred between the two trials in the *labels* and *names* by which news media outlets referred to Damu’s violence. The most important aspect of these current affairs programmes was the fact that, by consistently referring to perpetrators as “husbands”, “ex-husbands” or “boyfriends” and victims as “women” or “abused women”, they unambiguously constructed domestic violence as *male violence against female intimate partners*. These programmes primarily aimed to refute some popular misconceptions about the issue – primarily victim-blaming – with the help of feminist experts (the embeddedness of expert knowledge in feminist discourses, however, tended to be concealed on screens. Therefore, the opportunity to connect domestic violence to the issue of inequality between the sexes in societies was missed). At the same time, however, the names and labels employed in media texts elsewhere in relation to Damu’s violence showed the particular connection to gender only during two major shifts in terminology, when the initial and widespread use of legal discourse – which offered mostly gender-neutral terms, such as “severe assault” and “illegal restraint” – was temporarily replaced by discourses on “rape” and “domestic violence” (where both terms were unambiguously constructed as male violence against women). Nonetheless, I argue, whenever the constraints of legal discourse were left behind, the terminology moved towards characteristically gendered types of violence, which was indicative of the fact that the issue of *gender* indeed played a significant role in the discursive change taking place around domestic violence in 2010-2012 in Hungary.

On the other hand, the legal terminology that media texts predominantly used, especially initially, to describe Damu’s violence dissected the *process* of his violence into separate and *one-off acts* of (mostly) physical force and thereby wiped out exactly those characteristics of intimate partner violence that relevant literature had been stressing since the mid-1990s: its nature as an *ongoing* and *cumulative* abuse of power and control in relationships, with *coercive control* at its core, that is an oppressive tactic with which perpetrators characteristically target their victims’ agency (Johnson, 1995; Stark, 2007). The notion of coercive control was present on screens only sporadically, in the account given by Tímea, the victim, or indirectly through the frequent “why did she stay?” question, which occupied a central place in the media discussion of this news story. The

centrality of this question also shows that, along with acknowledging the importance of gender in this type of violence and the emergence of female adults – that is, actors with apparent agency – as the main victims, discourses of victim-blaming which, for reasons discussed earlier, were not present in 2002, also emerged with particular intensity.

The discourse on agency and victimhood emerged as central in the coverage of the story. This was present either in the form of direct victim-blaming – which was particularly strong in the two 20-minute-long interviews that Tímea gave, but also in the long excerpt that one of the broadcasters aired from the footage of the plea by Damu's barrister during the second trial. In an indirect form this was most apparent when experts appearing on current affairs magazine programmes reflexively pointed out the existing victim-blaming aspects of the coverage, and attempted to map the potential reasons why women might stay in abusive relationships and put up with the ongoing abuse. With this, I suggest, these programmes addressed important questions that until then had been undiscussed publicly. Still, the “why did she stay” question continued repeatedly to place the focus of attention back on women who stay, instead of mapping the motivations, gains and oppressive tactics of perpetrators who abuse. Therefore, I argue, one of the focal points of the media coverage remained the question of why women “let themselves be abused”, which – as previous literature had already pointed out – opens up a vast symbolic space for victim-blaming discourses (e.g. Berns, 1999, 2001, 2004). All in all, although domestic violence was unambiguously constructed as gender-based and characteristically affecting women, there was an increased focus on women's enigmatic susceptibility to this type of violence, and their specific lack of the agency required to stand up to it – it was a discourse of *complicit victimhood* that emerged around the case, with an increased focus on adult women's alleged contribution to their own victimisation. Thereby an important aspect of the issue was left unexplained.

Another important aspect of the case was the fact that the status of the perpetrator, Damu, as a soap actor and TV personality – someone whose fame relied on a *local televisual celebrity culture* – did shape the media coverage of the case considerably on many levels. This case therefore allowed me to explore the specificities of how domestic violence was mediated through this celebrity-news-oriented segment of the Hungarian broadcast news media – a segment fundamentally shaped by mediated intimacies and a

increased focus on private life (see Bennett, 2008; Bennett & Holmes, 2010; Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004). I argue that, as a celebrity, Damu's on-screen public persona was on many levels already a product of media genres and texts that focused on his private life (both "real-life" and fictional). Therefore, understandably, after the news of his domestic violence story broke, media outlets had ample opportunity – through reaching back to earlier footage about him – to shed additional light on Damu as a private individual, by placing the domestic violence story in the context of an already existing set of media representations about his private exploits. Meanwhile, due to his excellent contacts with the media industry, the actor was able to launch a media campaign to redeem his public image and present himself as someone worthy of compassion and trust.

Damu's celebrity status added greatly to the newsworthiness of his story, but exposed the entire case to tabloidisation and thereby shifted media attention from its social relevance. The story became steadily confined to the news platforms of commercial broadcasters and the tabloid press, and was not covered by more serious media outlets, including the public service segment of the Hungarian news media (the public-service broadcaster consistently ignored the story until the final verdict was out). Therefore the task of mapping the social relevance of the case fell, paradoxically, on exactly those media outlets (the two major commercial broadcasters) whose interest was in keeping the story tabloidised. In fact, the media coverage of the Damu case was in many respects similar to that of the Simek case: both cases were fundamentally shaped by a tension between tabloidisation, spectacularity and sensation-seeking on the one hand, and on the other hand more socially engaged approaches that sincerely attempted to raise attention to important aspects of the issue and its social relevance.

The Damu story, in contrast to both the Simek case in 2002 and the Balogh case in 2013, led to both the perpetrator and the victim appearing in public and telling their own versions of events. This specific feature of the story also had far-reaching implications for the moral and emotional engagement that the media portrayal of this case discursively activated with regard to victims, perpetrators and domestic violence in general, I argue. Specifically, as with blame (as discussed in an earlier paragraph), the proper place of compassion and pity, as appropriate emotional responses to domestic violence and victimhood, had not been reassuringly clarified, given that Damu had launched a strong

media campaign to bend public opinion towards himself, and repeatedly attempted to put himself in the position of the “real” victim, allegedly targeted by a “well thought-out defamatory campaign”. His image (re-)making practically occupied a large part of the media coverage of the story, and was mostly aimed at constructing Damu as a subject worthy of compassion in the public eye, and moreover as someone who was still popular and whom people trusted. On the other hand, Tímea, too, despite the fact that she appeared only sporadically on screens, in many respects managed to come across as a victim worthy of compassion, pity and protection. Tímea’s image in the broadcast media was mostly constructed in terms of her vulnerability and lack of self-assertion in the face of the man she loved, which, combined with her clearly visible middle-class status and her traditional attractiveness, altogether constructed her as a woman deeply conforming to patriarchal ideals of femininity, and moreover as someone who had endured these vicissitudes only because of loving her man too much. Thereby she ultimately managed to come across as not threatening the patriarchal social order, and thereby qualified as what earlier literature describes as a “good victim” (see especially Benedict, 1992). As a result, sympathy, compassion and pity were constantly re-distributed on screens between Damu and Tímea, thereby, I argue, turning the entire media portrayal of the case into a kind of mediated competition for public emotions.

The one and only public action that media outlets reported on in connection with the Damu case – a protest organised by a feminist NGO – addressed the inadequacy of state institutions when it stood up against victim-blaming in court. The fact, however, that both commercial broadcasters reported on this event shows that, in contrast to 2002, taking action on the issue was no longer perceived as a monopoly of the state. On the contrary, the position of the most competent social actor in matters of domestic violence was repeatedly assigned to domestic violence experts and activists, and, accordingly, bottom-up civic actions against violence were also acknowledged as a valid and newsworthy form of action.

7.2.3 *The “blind komondor” József Balogh case (2013): Clarifying the boundaries of public morality with regard to domestic violence*

The political scandal of József Balogh – an MP from the ruling right-wing, national-conservative political party FIDESZ, exposed by television as both a woman-batterer and a liar – indicated, I suggest, that by 2013 the discursive terrain around domestic violence had shifted and enabled the issue to be recognised at a more significant political level. As I argue in Chapter 6, the main issue at stake in this scandal was that of re-opening a public and symbolic space where the *boundaries of public morality* with regard to domestic violence could be discussed, negotiated and affirmed, and concomitant “feeling rules” – that is, rules that regulate socially approved ways of expressing and managing emotions (see Hochschild, 1983, p. 64) – shaped and settled. Moreover, the story inflated public emotions around the issue to a previously unseen extent, and, by creating a largely homogeneous emotional regime around the incident – one of embarrassment, outcry, indignation and ridicule – intensively “socialised” the public to the proper expression of emotion with regard to the events, and thereby also *formed certain social solidarities* around domestic violence through commonly shared public emotions.

Since the unfolding of the Balogh story in the media relied heavily on a complex media environment, and was strongly shaped by both television and internet memes, I analysed the Balogh scandal through selected extracts from the three major national broadcasters (*M1, RTL Klub, TV2*) over a peak coverage period – dedicating specific attention to two pieces of footage that unmasked Balogh as a woman-batterer and a liar – and also through the flow of internet memes that followed Balogh’s exposure on television. Internet memes, I suggest, served as a form of digital *bottom-up political expression*, as well as a *device of critique* at the time of the scandal. Due to their ability to swiftly move across media texts, they actively shaped collective mindsets, emotions and perspectives with regard to Balogh’s transgressions (Milner, 2013; Mina, 2014; Shifman, 2014). Nonetheless, I argue, the central medium mediating this scandal was still television. Balogh’s MP status, meanwhile, prevented the public service broadcaster from covering the story, and therefore the provision of media coverage of an important incident of domestic violence – as with the Damu story – once again fell to commercial broadcasters, which, in contrast to the public service broadcaster, were less subject to political control by the current Hungarian government.

This scandal – together with an earlier political incident from September 2012 –

also made it apparent that, for the first time in Hungarian history, there was a public controversy over domestic violence in the country, with two characteristically different sets of meaning-making claims clashing over the issue in the public sphere, both backed by powerful social players. Specifically, feminist constructions of domestic violence (which in September 2012 had already been backed by wider social support for criminalisation) constructed domestic violence with an increased focus on gender and on women as victims, whereas its counter-constructions, promoted by the Hungarian government (which was particularly reluctant to cede to the aforementioned bottom-up pressure), heavily downplayed the relevance of gender, and instead pushed for an understanding of the issue as violence “against the weak”.

Given that the majority of television news stories in my sample were produced by commercial broadcasters that gave preference to the feminist constructions of domestic violence, the dilemma of naming was less spectacular during this case. Media texts nearly unanimously referred to Balogh's deeds as “battering” and “abuse”, and understood them as pertaining to the broader issue of “domestic violence”, understood as male violence against women. In turn, governmental counter-constructions – which were mostly present on screens either directly, as voiced by state officials, or indirectly, as quoted from the press announcement of FIDESZ – referred to the battering as either “abuse”, or “family conflict” and as “a severe problem going on between the politician and his life partner”, and thereby partly shifted the blame onto the victim. In a similar manner, the press announcement from FIDESZ, which condemned “all types of violence, especially if targeted at women, children, the elderly or other people in vulnerable positions”, listed women as only one among the many social groups vulnerable to domestic violence, and thereby shifted attention away from the gender aspect of violence. With these discursive tactics, the government was able to conceal the perpetrator’s responsibility to some extent, and to question the gender-based nature of the violence he had committed. This governmental discourse, therefore, showed a strong similarity to the widespread discursive tactics that previous feminist literature had identified in other countries as patriarchal discursive resistance to domestic violence (see Berns, 1999, 2001, 2004; Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-93; Braber, 2015; Bullock, 2007; Carll, 2003; Carter, 1998; Gillespie, Richards, Givens & Smith, 2013, Meyers, 1994, 1997; Nettleton, 2011; Sunindyo, 2004; Zeynep, 2006). In a

similar manner, a considerable fraction of the internet memes, I found, remained entirely blind to the gender aspect of domestic violence. Still, as I argue, memes that commented specifically on domestic violence typically constructed it as gender-based and as typically targeting women, that is, in terms of the feminist constructions of the issue.

In order to acquire a better insight into the media-related dynamics that triggered the scandal, I also considered in more depth the two examples of broadcast footage that exposed Balogh as a batterer and a liar. Specifically, I point out how the two broadcasters captured Balogh in front of the cameras not only lying about the battering, but also violating a number of unspoken rules that regulate on-screen public conduct, and on the basis of which politicians today are increasingly judged. Here I borrow from Thompson's understanding of mediated intimacy in the specific context of political life (2000, pp. 119-158). He points out the centrality of politicians' televised public conduct to their political credibility, and more specifically how these mediated performances by politicians – enabled by the technological means of television – create a certain “politics of trust”, whereby politicians are judged on the basis of their assumed personal qualities as individuals, and primarily for their credibility and trustworthiness, rather than their achievements in the field of politics. I point out that Balogh's attempt to locate himself outside his own story and to avoid responsibility for his own actions was shockingly inappropriate to the situation, and violated all rules of appropriateness. Moreover, by looking happy in a situation where society would have expected sadness, regret or fear for his hospitalised girlfriend, he also violated feeling rules, that is rules that regulate the socially approved ways of expressing and managing emotions in a given situation (on these rules see Bucy, 2011; Hochschild, 1983, p. 64). Combined with the hard-to-believe story about his komondor dog being – in Balogh's recollection – the real perpetrator of the battering, these mistakes chipped away at his credibility. The two pieces of film footage, therefore, served as triggers for the scandal. Internet memes, which quickly picked up the news of this exposure and circulated it across platforms, also played a prominent role in arousing public emotions around Balogh and brought spectators to a common platform on the events by shaping shared emotions and values with regard to his transgressions.

Accordingly, one of the key findings of this case study was that, in contrast to the two other cases discussed, from 2002 and 2010, the Balogh scandal activated public

emotions specifically connected to the perpetrator and his actions, and only to a much lesser extent to the victim. (The victim – or rather, her substitute, Balogh's ex-wife – was constructed in terms of a *righteous* victimhood: a subject position implying trustworthiness and credibility, in harsh contrast with how Balogh, the perpetrator was constructed). Therefore, the emotional regime that the Balogh scandal created around the issue of domestic violence was characteristically different from what was seen earlier. Instead of sympathy, compassion, pity and understanding, this scandal activated public ridicule, embarrassment, and to some extent also disappointment and indignation. On the other hand, the object of these public emotions was often not Balogh's perpetrator status exclusively, but also his baffling and improper conduct in front of the cameras, when he tried to conceal his crime. My analysis of footage and internet memes indicates overall that the public outcry over the “komondor” Balogh story, although it specifically included anti-violence concerns, was not triggered by the battering exclusively. Rather, the scandal articulated indignation over Balogh's lack of moral integrity in general, and since he was also an MP of the ruling political party it also tapped into specifically anti-government sentiments. In this sense, the scandal worked as a sarcastic “social corrective” to the standpoint of the government, including its four-day-long delay in distancing itself from a person of questionable personal integrity, its by then long-standing reluctance to criminalise domestic violence, and the way it was shaping Hungarian political life in general. However, I argue, the fact that Hungarian society by 2013 did not tolerate women-batterers among politicians was successfully articulated, and thereby new norms of public conduct around the issue were asserted and supported by the largely homogeneous emotional regime that broadcasters and internet memes created around the incident.

Furthermore, and in close connection to the very apparent party-political context of the case, both television news and internet memes repeatedly established a connection between standing up to domestic violence – that is, normative claims regarding what course of action should be taken in the face of such events – and the discourse on a democratic establishment and Hungarian political life in general. One of my points of reference here is a prime-time news bulletin in which an expert described adequate state interventions against domestic violence and, more specifically, standing up against Balogh as closely connected to certain political values (“democratic”, “European” and “of the 21st”

century”), thereby locating the matter in the broader context of the country’s EU membership and in general of a democratic political establishment. Similarly, internet memes, which strongly shape, among other things, commonly shared moral values, also throughout the case often established a link between these two discourses, typically merging the outcry over Balogh's public conduct and dissatisfaction over the corruptness of Hungarian political life (or the decline of public morality in the country). On the other hand, despite these proposals from the media for action against domestic violence, the story quickly went cold once the FIDESZ government visibly (although not effectively) loosened its ties with Balogh. Therefore, only a small fraction of the political protests against Balogh organised either by feminists or by opposition parties were covered by any of the major TV channels, since these – especially the ones organised by feminist activists – continued mostly beyond the period when media attention was still high. This, I conclude, was indicative of the fact that the Balogh incident was mostly considered newsworthy because of its political context, and therefore the media subsequently, and understandably, lost interest in covering the additional, domestic violence-related, aspects of the story, including protests and legal changes in the form of the new Law on “Partner Violence” that the government introduced a couple of weeks after the scandal broke.

7.3 Conclusions

First and foremost, my findings indicate that the discursive emergence of domestic violence in the Hungarian broadcast news media was not a product of local feminist activism and grass-roots awareness, as previous literature has suggested (see Fabian, 2010a, p. 21; 2014, pp. 161-162; Vanya, 2006b, pp. 122-124;), but rather was connected to a broader shift in the country towards mediated intimacies, and, accordingly, also to the rise of commercial broadcasting, its more tabloid news agenda and sensation-seeking reporting style, and the consolidation of a local televisual celebrity culture and its specific genres (Barker, Gill & Harvey 2018, pp. 24-26; Pantti, 2011; Pantti & van Zoonen, 2006). Specifically, at the beginning of the time period under study, Hungary had not experienced a widespread feminist movement, and accordingly feminist perspectives were present

rather sporadically in the media texts I investigated from a period ending in the early 2010s. Therefore, this sphere was different from post-1990 Anglo-American mediated public spheres, which, according to Gill, have been characterised by “the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas”, where “feminist discourses are expressed within the media, rather than simply being external, independent, critical voices” (2007, p. 161).⁶⁷ In such a situation, the discursive emergence of domestic violence in the Hungarian mainstream broadcast news media, which I undertook to investigate, has inevitably taken place without local feminist activism having much control over the process, that is mostly *independently* of local feminist activism (the only exception being the case from 2012 discussed in Chapter 6), and accordingly also mostly independently of feminist considerations or specific sensibilities towards women’s issues in Hungarian newsrooms. Instead, my cases indicate that the emergence of high-profile domestic violence news stories was mostly rooted in the *sensation-generating capacity* of these stories – a dramatic crime story, a piece of celebrity-related gossip news and a politician's major on-screen faux-pas. This matches the insights of previous Anglo-American literature, according to which forms of violence against women are often reported in sensationalised ways (Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-85, 91; Braber, 2015; Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Soothill & Walby, 1991). However, I found that once these stories of outstandingly high newsworthiness had appeared feminists were able to push the issue further in the direction of social awareness and socially engaged approaches.

Within such a context, the gendered aspects of domestic violence, understandably, were initially pushed into the background, even within local feminist media activism that quickly reacted to the emergence of the issue into the limelight, as the Simek case from 2002 demonstrates. Through this case a new discourse emerged, that of domestic violence (*családon belüli erőszak*). Although the issue was mostly constructed in ways that sidelined the gender aspect in favour of an increased focus on children as victims, the terms that the Hungarian news media employed for this “newly discovered” type of violence did indicate that media outlets were reaching out to already available local feminist literature on the

67 Specifically, Gill argues that “one of the things that makes the media today very different from the television, magazines, radio or press of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, is that feminism is now part of the cultural field. That is, feminist discourses are expressed within the media, rather than simply being external, independent critical voices. [...] Indeed, it might be argued that much of what counts as feminist debate in western countries takes place in the media rather than outside it”. (2007, p. 161).

subject, and borrowing its terminology – specifically, the terms “domestic violence” (*családon belüli erőszak*) and “terror in the family” (*terror a családban*) (Morvai, 1998; Tóth, 1999a). In turn, when local feminist activists quickly picked up the case in order to call for wider social opposition to domestic violence, they adapted to the already established gender-neutral and child-focused construction of the issue in the media, prioritising victims who were, according to existing cultural norms, unambiguously worthy of pity and help. The petition launched in September 2002 is still widely considered as the beginning of local feminist activism against domestic violence (Morvai, 2004). However, the ambiguous ways in which this petition was portrayed in the news media were indicative of how, during this initial period, the news media remained sceptical of the relevance of (feminist) civic bottom-up actions against domestic violence, and instead saw the state exclusively as in the position of a competent social actor.

Nonetheless, between 2002 and 2013 mediated discourses on domestic violence notably shifted from gender neutrality towards gendered-ness, and the relevance of (feminist) bottom-up social actions on the issue were also gradually increasingly acknowledged. The media coverage of the Damu case indicated already that by 2010 it was possible to present domestic violence as a “women’s issue” and moreover one that the Hungarian state had not resolved reassuringly, even if the price of this portrayal was that the embeddedness of experts’ discourses in feminism mostly needed to be concealed, so the connection of this type of violence to the issue of women's social inequality was not publicly discussed. The inadequate handling of domestic violence by the state, however, became a spectacular object of public dissatisfaction and also the trigger for a “women's uprising” (a networked bottom-up social action organised by feminists) in 2012, only shortly before the Balogh scandal broke, and this was also the historical moment when a characteristically anti-feminist, gender-blind governmental counter-discourse on domestic violence quite visibly emerged in the Hungarian mainstream news media. According to available research results, it was in 2012 that domestic violence spectacularly became a *controversial public issue* in the Hungarian mediated public sphere, with opposing discourses embraced by powerful social actors (such as both government and feminist activists, with the latter able to mobilise wide social support on the issue). The Balogh scandal only increased this discursive antagonism and put pressure on the government to

finally introduce a new policy instrument – a law – against domestic violence (although this law mostly reflected the government’s standpoint on the issue).

The media portrayal of my three cases from 2002–2013 also sheds light on the emotional regimes generated around domestic violence, and/or the actors in violence, including mediated solidarity (or the lack of it) with victims and/or repugnance towards perpetrators. that engaged the broader public with the issue. My three cases featured two victims (Kitti Simek and Tímea Palácsik) and two perpetrators (Roland Damu and József Balogh), whose personalities the media discursively constructed in depth, and with whom spectators, accordingly, could engage emotionally and morally through a variety of media texts. The Kitti Simek case created a discourse of *gender-neutral* victimhood around victims, by prioritising the age-related aspects of their victimisation, and therefore, its coverage was particularly rich in media proposals for compassion and pity as well as proposals for taking action for (innocent and vulnerable) children. On the other hand, it strictly filtered out victims that did not conform to this idealised image of innocent victimhood (first Kitti's mother, later Kitti, too). In contrast, Tímea Palácsik's victimhood was from the start constructed in terms of a *complicit victimhood*, strongly enabled by a lack of acknowledgement of the structural element of abuse (i.e. coercive control) that she had endured. Accordingly, media proposals for compassion, pity and blame were all present, and allocated to both the victim and the perpetrator. Overall, I found that media proposals for sympathy, compassion and pity towards victims, although relatively numerous, were repeatedly interrupted by other proposals disseminating doubt about either the victim’s personal integrity (Kitti Simek) or her assertiveness and agency (Tímea Palácsik). In this respect the least ambiguous case, at least in terms of the emotions that media texts discursively constructed as “adequate” emotional responses to domestic violence, was that of József Balogh, a perpetrator who undoubtedly became an object of public ridicule and indignation in the country (and, accordingly, the media activated a discourse of *righteous victimhood* around his ex-wife). The largely homogeneous emotional regime that broadcasters and internet memes created around this incident established certain social solidarities, too, around domestic violence, and this was also indicative of the fact that by 2013 the tolerance threshold of Hungarian society for perpetrators of woman-battering had decreased. The Balogh scandal, therefore, asserted

new norms of public conduct on the issue.

One of the most interesting aspects of the trajectory demonstrated by my cases was, however, as already mentioned, the centrality of commercial broadcasting and mediated intimacies to the discursive emergence of domestic violence. The public-service broadcaster *M1* practically ignored both the Damu and the Balogh cases, although for different reasons, and they were covered only by the two national commercial broadcasters *RTL Klub* and *TV2*, which had a much more tabloid-style news agenda and were at the forefront of introducing new, hybridised, infotainment-oriented types of news programmes in the country (Bajomi-Lázár & Monori, 2007; Terestyényi, 2007). Tabloidisation and tabloid journalism – usually associated with attention to scandals, gossip, celebrities, unusual crime stories and other buzz-worthy topics and with a sensationalist reporting styles (see Ho & Abraham, 2009) – was a particular feature of my first two cases from 2002 and 2010. In fact, the Damu story started as a tabloid story. This indicates how, despite all the negativities associated with this reporting style (for more details, see Boyle, 2005, pp. 84-85, 91; Braber, 2015, p. 96; Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Soothill & Walby, 1991), tabloidisation and sensationalism – at least when social awareness of the issue was still low – played an important role in making domestic violence reach *high public visibility* in Hungary, as media outlets began to cover these stories because of their sensation-provoking potential (in line with broadcasters economic interests). It also needs to be stressed, however, that the media coverage of these cases was always *hybrid*, since the sensation-provoking style was always combined with investigative – and, increasingly, feminist – voices. In other words, commercial broadcasters, with their more tabloidised news agenda, lent increased public visibility to the issue of domestic violence, which was otherwise usually still ignored or received publicity only sporadically and without any lasting effect. This generated a *symbolic space* for further public discussion of the issue, also introducing the voices of experts and even raising awareness of a need to take action against violence (as demonstrated by the protests and petitions that followed the Simek and Damu cases, which were both highly tabloidised).

Broadcasters' increased focus on domestic violence also corresponded to a broader shift towards the rise of mediated intimacies in the Hungarian media during the early 2000s. The commercial broadcasters *TV2* and *RTL Klub* were at the forefront of the latter

trend, introducing new media genres specifically dedicated to citizens' private and intimate lives – reality shows and celebrity-related programmes, among others. My cases can be regarded as part of this shift: both the Simek and the Damu cases brought unprecedented media attention to the previously unrevealed violent aspects of intimate/family relationships, and through them shocking details about child abuse and male violence against female intimate partners surfaced. The Simek case shed public light on domestic violence by documenting a “reality out there”. With most of the accounts and proof presented in the media about the crime mutually authenticating one other, violence was portrayed as something that *had already been there*, but had simply evaded public attention and mediation. The Damu case transformed domestic violence into an *intertextual spectacle*, with contrasting opinions, attempts at re-fashioning the perpetrator's public image, and the concomitant constant re-circulation and re-mediation of additional media materials purporting to shed additional light on the perpetrator's (and to a much lesser extent the victim's) exploits and personal qualities. Finally, the Balogh case exploited mediated intimacy in terms of television's capacity to bring spectators into close “intimacy” with the politician, “zooming in” to showing him in close-up, and thereby provide unique *on-screen proof* that he was lying about the battering. In other words, discursive change in the coverage of domestic violence also coincided in each of my cases with different media conventions of truth-finding, in the context of mediated intimacies.

In summary, my findings indicate that the discursive emergence of domestic violence in the Hungarian broadcast news media was, especially initially, primarily enabled and shaped by the rise of mediated intimacies, i.e. media representations of intimate relationships, which was connected to the emergence of commercial broadcasting, tabloid television and televisual celebrity culture in the country, and their specific media genres and reporting styles. My cases exemplify how domestic violence received high public visibility mostly due to the sensation-generating capacity of these stories that the media chose to cover, and how these stories consequently also tended to undergo intensive tabloidisation. However, once they achieved a high level of publicity, these stories also brought unprecedented media attention to previously “unnoted” violent aspects of intimate/family relationships, and thereby opened up a symbolic space where the issue could be further discussed in public. Both feminist activists and news editors were able to

push the issue further in the direction of socially engaged approaches, and/or to shed light on the importance of the gender aspect of violence. As a result of all this, and despite the initial predominance of gender-neutral constructions of the issue, the tabloidisation that both the Simek and the Damu case underwent, and the often ambivalent media portrayal of victims (and of the emotions associated with these portrayals), by 2012 domestic violence had become a hot topic in the Hungarian media, with bottom-up and governmental discourses spectacularly clashing in the public arena, particularly over the importance of the gender aspect. The Balogh scandal, in this respect, served as a catalyst in the face of a much-debated issue and, for the first time in Hungarian history, created a largely homogeneous and undoubtedly negative emotional regime around a perpetrator.

In the next section I briefly outline the main changes that the discursive terrain around domestic violence has undergone in Hungary since 2013, giving particular consideration to the gradual consolidation of a new political regime, the establishment of a highly government-controlled media environment, and the rise of transnational anti-gender discourses in the country. These new developments, I argue, have created a highly ambivalent and politically divided discursive context around domestic violence.

7.4 Hungarian discourses on domestic violence since 2013 and ways forward for future research

In this section I give a brief overview of how the broader social-political context around discourses of domestic violence have changed in Hungary since 2013, a context which can be seen as a major “condition of possibility” for meaning-making regarding matters of domestic violence (Chouliaraki, 2008b, p. 674). I also give a short outline of how the Hungarian media landscape has been radically transformed since the conservative-nationalist right-wing political party FIDESZ entered into power in 2010, forming a government with the Christian Democratic People's Party, KDNP, and began to build a new political regime. Specifically, I touch upon the declining freedom of the press in the country, dedicating special attention to developments since 2015, when a new, government-friendly media empire emerged and consolidated itself. I particularly focus on two issues:

firstly, the emergence of the term “gender” as a symbolic enemy in the pro-government media discourse and the implications of this for gender-related issues; and secondly, how domestic violence has become instrumentalised in the pro-government media as a defamatory weapon for bringing down adversaries, thereby sidelining the social relevance of the issue in favour of its political use value. Finally, I give a short overview of some high-profile cases of violence against women (rape and sexual harassment) that the Hungarian news media, despite the politically discouraging media environment, has started to cover in relatively large numbers since 2013. I also briefly discuss potential ways forward for future research into the subject: among other things, I argue that additional research would help us to acquire deeper insights into developments since 2013, especially with regard to the implications that the presence of an anti-gender discourse in the country may have for discourses on domestic violence.

As noted in now numerous international reports, since 2010, when the FIDESZ government entered into power with a two-thirds majority in parliament, freedom of the press has been in a steady decline in Hungary and the country’s media landscape, too, has been radically transformed (Freedom House, 2012, 2016, 2017; Murphy, 2017; Simon & Rácz, 2017; Urbán, 2016). First, a new media law entered into force on 1 January 2011, which significantly increased state control over the media (Freedom House, 2012), and after 2015 a new, government-friendly media empire was established (Freedom House, 2016; Urbán, 2016). Specifically, a small group of government-linked companies have gradually and systematically taken control of a large part of the local media market: new pro-government media outlets have been launched (and, through state advertising, generously subsidised by state money), while already existing media outlets have been either sold to one of these government-linked companies and become government-friendly (as in the case of the second most-viewed TV channel *TV2*), or suspended, citing business reasons (as in the case of Hungary's leading broadsheet *Népszabadság*) (Urbán, 2016). The public-service channel *M1*, in turn, was transformed in 2015 into a 24-hour news channel, and thereby acquired a central role in disseminating the government’s message. As a result of these changes, pro-government media outlets have emerged into a hegemonic position over the Hungarian mediated public sphere as a whole, and only pockets of independent media are left, with journalists repeatedly reporting difficulties in carrying out independent

journalistic work (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2018; Freedom House, 2017; Simon, 2018).

According to investigative reports, pro-government newsrooms and editorials, even before their recent subsumption in late November 2018 under one super-company (see Kingsley, 2018), have become subject to the direct control of the Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister. News media outlets receive guidelines not only on topics to be covered, but also regarding ways of reporting and even use of language (Freedom House, 2017; Murphy, 2017; Simon, 2018; Simon & Rácz, 2017). Accordingly, politically-motivated stories have often been cross-posted – thereby increasing their reach – across a large number of news media outlets forming part of this new pro-government media empire, which all used the same lingo, dubbed by some observers as an Orwellian ”newspeak” (Simon, 2018).⁶⁸ These governmentally prescribed terms, topics and ways of reporting are clearly meant to create a parallel reality, and to eliminate and replace alternative terms and perspectives that would not fit into the government's narratives. Moreover, in recent years, pro-government media outlets have also become saturated with fake news items, which have often been used to smear political adversaries (see Bede, 2018; Kómúves, 2018; Milo & Klingová, 2017, pp. 22-24;).⁶⁹ In brief, this new and highly centralised media empire has started to serve as a powerful propaganda machine for the government.

From the perspective of the present thesis, it is the recent emergence of the term “gender” in this governmental discourse – used either separately or in compound words, like ”gender craziness” (*genderőrület*), “gender ideology” (*genderideológia*) and “gender theory” (*genderelmélet*) – that is worthy of particular attention. These terms can be identified as part of a localised version of a *transnational anti-gender discourse*, which has

68 Journalists have been instructed to avoid, for example, the word “refugee”, and instead use “migrant”; to avoid calling the Central European University – a private American research university, which, after many failed attempts to negotiate with the FIDESZ government, is currently in the process of leaving the country (see Enyedi 2018) – by its own name and instead refer to it as “the Soros University”, so that the name fits into the current government propaganda against financier George Soros; or always to describe NGOs that work on human rights issues or other topics disapproved of by the government as “foreign-financed civic organisations” (Simon, 2018; Simon & Rácz, 2017).

69 Without going into further details, the Hungarian fake news industry has been described by independent observers as a specific case in Europe where a disinformation industry is financed by the government itself, and which mixes the Russian model – i.e. content directly “imported” from Russia – and the US model, i.e. the establishment of a fake news media empire of one’s own’s, which then serves both propagandistic and business ends (Bede, 2018; Corruption Research Center Budapest, 2018; Kómúves, 2018; Milo & Klingová, 2017, p. 23).

lately been described by gender scholars as specifically mobilised against a vaguely-defined “gender ideology” and which has, since around 2010, spread quickly across a large number of countries around the globe (Corrêa, Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018; Grzebalska, Kováts & Pető, 2017; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Kováts, 2018; Kováts & Põim, 2015; Kumar & Paternotte, 2017).⁷⁰ The local Hungarian version of this transnational anti-gender discourse first appeared in the country around 2008-2009, intensely focused on sexual minorities and presenting “gender ideology” as an alleged master plan to “abolish the [biological] sexes”.⁷¹ But it mostly remained marginal until 2016,⁷² when it entered the specific discourse of the pro-government media empire. Thereby “gender” suddenly emerged into the focus of public attention, and by then the term had been re-fashioned also as a key symbol for a – similarly vaguely defined – (neo)liberalism and its alleged worldwide attack on (traditional, patriarchal) families, the latter understood by FIDESZ as a key underpinning of a “strong nation” (on the importance of nation and family in the FIDESZ discourse, see Fabian, 2014a; on the relation between neoliberalism and feminisms, see Rottenberg, 2018). In brief, since 2016 “gender” has become an empty signifier, primarily used as a defamatory linguistic tool by the government to delegitimise discourses that use it as an analytical category to address issues related to gendered social inequalities.

This emergence of an anti-gender discourse marks a break with earlier times, when gender-related perspectives were ignored or downplayed but not demonised by the government, as was the case around 2012-2013, when governmental and feminist discourses spectacularly clashed on matters of domestic violence (discussed in detail in Chapter 6). The specific consequences of the emergence of this anti-gender discourse for domestic violence and its media portrayal need further research. Lately Pető (2018b) and

70 Recently it has also been argued that anti-colonial frames (i.e. mobilisation against allegedly oppressive powers) and theories of alleged master plans and conspiracies to seize political power with the help of gender ideology are also central to these anti-gender discourses (Corrêa, Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018; Grzebalska, Kováts & Pető, 2017; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018).

71 For one of the earliest manifestations of this discourse in Hungary, see Mizsei, 2009. This article appeared in *Magyar Nemzet*, a conservative political daily, and, drawing on Gabriele Kuby – a German sociologist who had published, among other works, *The Global Sexual Revolution* (2012/2015), a landmark text of the anti-gender discourse – mentioned “gender ideology” (*genderideológia*) and “gender mainstreaming”, “unmasking” these as cover terms for an “ideology of blurring the [biological] sexes” (*nemi összemosás ideológiája*), where the latter, according to *Magyar Nemzet*, professed that sex and sexual orientation should be “freely chosen”, people should be changed, “their sex abolished”, and pedophilia legalised.

72 See Anikó Félix’s diagnosis of 2015, according to which in Hungary this anti-gender discourse “has not intensified at the same level as the other analysed countries”, i.e. France, Germany, Poland and Slovakia (Kováts & Põim, 2015, p. 62).

Kováts (2018) have pointed out some key political decisions for which these anti-gender discourses, embraced by the Hungarian government, may have served as a discursive underpinning, including the government's refusal to ratify the Istanbul Convention of the EU, which understands domestic violence as a form of violence against women – i.e. a gender-equality-related human rights issue – and obliges ratifying countries to introduce comprehensive preventive measures (for more on this, see Kováts 2018).⁷³

In fact, the one and only high-profile case of domestic violence that the media has covered since 2013 – that of Péter Juhász, the leader of a (small) left-wing political party *Együtt*, in political opposition to the FIDESZ government – pointed more to the *instrumentalisation of domestic violence as a political/defamatory weapon* in the pro-government media than to the emergence of anti-gender governmental discourses in media discussions of the issue. The dominance of this defamation function became particularly evident in the specific circumstances under which this story came to publicity, and in the fact that – in sharp contrast with my earlier domestic violence cases – an issue-based investigative approach was entirely missing. The case was not followed by any media discussions attempting to explore the events in the context of the broader issue of domestic violence. The news broke in pro-government media outlets, in February 2018, in the middle of the campaign season for the general elections of April 2018 (and therefore it seemed at first that this could be an instance of fake news). After a couple of days Juhász partly admitted the charges against him, and – in harsh contrast with how public service broadcaster *MI* ignored and downplayed Balogh's domestic violence story in 2013 – independent news media outlets, too, started to cover the case (Windisch 2018).⁷⁴ Despite

73 The latest development in this field – i.e. the government's announcement on 25 November 2018 according to which it is opening new shelter places for victims of “partner violence” and is setting up a crisis ambulance service for them, partly with the help of funding from the EU, but at the same time ignoring expert knowledge on the subject – indicates a return to an earlier governmental strategy, that of ignoring feminist perspectives and NGOs, and instead sticking to a gender-blind notion of “partner violence” (on the critique of this new government policy from a feminist point of view see Betlen, 2018).

74 Specifically, it was *Bors*, a government-friendly tabloid, that on 10 February 2018 broke the news about Juhász and his ex-girlfriend's ongoing child custody case, including the information that, according to *Bors*, court documents evidenced that Juhász had been accused by his ex-girlfriend of verbal, emotional and severe physical abuse, as well as illegal restraint (the documents have not been disclosed). Pro-government media quickly picked up the story, and added some further “details” to it (see Windisch, 2018). Juhász initially denied the claims, but after his ex released a press announcement in which, among other, things, she refuted Juhász's “false allegations” about her, he publicly admitted that during the Christmas break he had indeed “grappled with” his girlfriend (NT & MG, 2018). It was at this moment that independent news media outlets also started to cover the story. On 29 August 2018 *Bors* published an

this, overall, this new story did not facilitate, but rather closed down, possibilities for further discussing domestic violence in public. The case therefore marked a historical moment when, for the first time in Hungary, a domestic violence story was covered only because of its political use value. However, if considered in the light of the earlier discussed demonisation of the term “gender” in governmental discourses from 2016 onwards, this case may also point to a broader ongoing discursive shift around domestic violence today in Hungary, in which gender-related social issues – including domestic violence – become empty signifiers, with their social relevance and context removed, so that they can be better instrumentalised as a political weapon.

Despite the media environment being politically discouraging for independent investigative journalism, and the fact that since 2013 the Hungarian news media have not covered another high-profile case of domestic violence, there have also been some positive developments, suggesting that forms of violence against women, in general, are more often considered newsworthy in Hungarian newsrooms, irrespective of their political value. These have also been followed, to an increasing extent, by media discussions that explore the structural element of violence, including its connection to gendered social inequalities in Hungary. There have been at least two high-profile sexual harassment stories, in 2014 and in 2017, in the media portrayal of which issue-based investigative voices played an important part. The first was the story of a group of female first-year university students who were sexually harassed (one of them also raped) at a pre-university summer camp (“Az ELTE”, 2014). Then theatre director László Marton's case came to publicity in October 2017 as part of the *Me Too* movement (“Puszild meg”, 2017). These two stories (especially the second one, backed by a world-wide wave of digital grassroots activism) were followed by extensive public discussions that often explicitly addressed them within the context of gendered inequalities. The last couple of years have also seen, for the first time since 2007 in Hungary, a high-profile case of rape. In May 2016 László Kiss, former trainer of the Hungarian Olympic swimming team, was confronted in public by a 73-year-old woman, the survivor of a rape that Kiss, together with his friends, had perpetrated on her 55 years earlier – the woman shared her story with the public after Kiss had publicly

announcement in which it acknowledged that it had earlier misinformed the public about the case, with regard to the accusations of severe physical abuse and illegal restraint.

referred to her as “dead” and of loose morals (“Nem tudtam”, 2016; on the 2007 case, see Kormos, 2011). Moreover, as I am writing this thesis in early December 2018, I see an independent online news magazine, *Mérce*, publishing investigative reports of domestic violence on a daily basis during the Sixteen Days of Activism (a world-wide campaign against violence against women, launched in 1991), something that a couple of years ago would have been unimaginable.

Therefore, one way forward to complement this research would be to investigate further the implications of the presence of an anti-gender discourse in Hungary – or elsewhere, given that this is a transnational discourse – for media portrayals of domestic violence and/or other forms of violence against women. Another way forward would be to contrast and compare how the findings presented here differ from the portrayal of domestic violence in other media genres or platforms (for example, women’s magazines, men’s magazines, blogs or digital journalism), especially since 2010, when the topic started to receive more public attention; or in other geographical locations, most importantly other post-communist EU countries, which, like Hungary, are currently very much under-researched in terms of domestic violence in the media, at least by English-language publications. While this part of the European continent is increasingly attracting international scholarly attention, including the inclusion of its countries in cross-country comparative research on domestic violence (see e.g. European Commission, 2010), there is still a great deal to explore, unpack – and critically analyse.

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MEDIA TEXTS USED FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Chapter 4

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Chapter 5

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Chapter 6

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Appendix: “Komondor Balogh” internet memes

Figure 1. Images using juxtaposition to mock the element of Balogh's fabricated story where the blind komondor dog took over the role of the perpetrator of battering (in Image 3 the text translates as “Before” and “After”).



Figure 2. Images mocking the domestic violence component of the Balogh story.



“Let's play mummies and daddies!”
 “Well, if you want it so much.”
 “You've got it now, bitch?!”



“Is that what an aggressive family man would look like?”



O.K. then, I've broken Terike's nose. And now what? The komondor was indeed blind.

Don't get scared, Zoli, we'll just say she's fallen over the komondor dog, and it'll be fine.

Figure 3. Images mocking the inadequate handling of the Balogh incident by the FIDESZ government.



“Keep calm and blind komondor”

“I don't need feminism, only a good pair of glasses”

Figure 4. Images containing only a (blind) komondor dog

