

Social Responses to the “Hybridisation” of the Political System

The case of Hungary in Central-East European Context

Modern revolutions come in various colours – rose, jasmine, orange or tulip – but they can also hide beneath pseudonyms, like the Arab Spring, the Bulldozer Revolution or the Revolution of the Elections. But what *are* they: symptoms of decay or hellfire; the most recent stops on the universal merry-go-round or the light at the end of the tunnel? Creative ways great powers use to further their geopolitical interests, or the long-hoped-for awakening of rootless and deranged societies?

Revolutionary identifiers have become, if not religions, at least a sort of *Weltanschauung* in our small corner of the world, complete with lifestyles, identities, language codes, leisure activities, literature, and political parties. Nowadays, when two strangers meet, they spend the first few minutes scanning each other: first the external identity markers (newspapers, tattoos, accessories, etc.), then the hidden meaning behind the usage of words and expressions (e. g. “ethnic minority” – denoting “gypsy” for certain people in Hungarian –, “decent people”, “well, of course, *those* there...”, etc.). Then they will check whether the other one goes to government rallies or demonstrations of the opposition; whether they attract or repel each other; and whether they will continue talking or prefer to buzz off in opposite directions.

The latest wave of what has been called “colour revolutions” has arrived splashing onto the split reality of present-day Hungary. (Or it is the split reality of present-day Hungary that caused the waves? – As you prefer.) Several authors argue that the word “revolution” does not apply, and they are probably right, because the romantic aura of this word renders its proponents rather helpless in the face of cynicism. But for the sake of clarity I opt for this expression to denote *metaphorically* those (postmodern, postindustrial, etc.) *new social movements* that have stepped up in the last fifteen years

1 Főiskolai docens, EKF BTK; e-mail cím: krasztev@gmail.com.

against the deficits in democracy within semi-authoritarian regimes, especially in post-socialist countries (though some political analysts include the “Arab Spring”). Obviously, there are many things that require explanation and interpretation: what exactly these movements are; why they emerged; and how our Hungarian movements enter the picture (in other words, how our “split reality” has modified the ideas and modes of opposition that came from other parts of the world); who are those engaged in this rebellion, why this way, and what their aims are.

Forms of movement

A relentless researcher of movements – there are hundreds of such people all over the world, who have authored miles of books on library shelves on this topic – would shamelessly declare that the history of the world, or at least the cultural history of the world, can be described as a history of movements. In ancient times, there was the Zoroastrian religious movement, then Manicheism, and finally Christianity itself. In the Middle Ages, each social and political protest in religious disguise was a movement, from the Bogumils to the movements of Jan Hus, John of Leiden and Thomas Münzer down to the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. After the theocentric world view was shaken by the Enlightenment, and Man could at last start to control his own fate in modern industrial society – our virtual historian of movements would continue – Providence was replaced by self-provision, transcendent grace by responsibility, salvation by the desire for an earthly paradise, or at least an optimally comfortable life. From this was born the “project-oriented thinking” of the modern industrial age; the new economic and political systems were created by movements organized around the “salvation strategies” of political, ideological and ethnic communities, nation-states, totalitarian states; that is, practically the whole social, political and economic environment we were born into. These modern or industrial movements are characterized by Habermas by their central problem, it being the distribution of wealth (Habermas 1981). Claus Offe expands this idea further when he claims that these movements belong to the “old paradigm”, and defines them as movements functioning according to the principles of the free market, taking growth and efficiency for granted (Offe 1985). This was still the case later, in the 20th century, and it resulted in the compromise between the capitalists and the workers’ movements, who were “loyal to the regime”. Thus, a balance – representative democracy – was established, with the mediation of the political parties. In this struggle for general welfare, civil initiatives merged into the

multitudinous professional policies whose aim was development: the power of the political and the industrial system was based on productivity and development, and departmental politics (as well as civil society, entangled in departmental politics) was designed to serve the welfare side of this intensive activity.

Let's look out from our movement-historical perspective for a moment: this was the age when Leslie White's "general theory of evolution" was a dominant theory of culture (i. e. the more efficiently a society spends energy, the more developed it is); the Western world believed in John M. Keynes's economic ideas (i. e. if underdeveloped regions copy the model of developed ones, they will also develop); and modernization was imagined as a linear "civilizational" process going from the centre towards the periphery, as Giddens described it (Giddens 1990). In this civil-political idyll of high capitalism, order and clarity reigned, since – as Offe says – no alternative could offer more than that (Offe 1985).

The new social movements, on the other hand, were brought to life by the revolutionary (there is no better word to it) atmosphere of the 1960s. With typical vagueness, Habermas attributes this phenomenon to the increased importance of the "grammar of lifestyles", meaning that the "new politics" does not focus on economic, social, personal and national security issues, but rather on quality of life, human rights, individual self-realization and a direct participation in public life (Habermas 1981: 36). Liberation movements and workers' movements lost their appeal – the new movements, mobilizing masses of people, are alternative ecological, anti-nuclear, feminist, regional-autonomist, peace and human rights movements (fighting for the emancipation of immigrants as well as sexual and other minorities). Offe calls this new situation "the new paradigm", but also approves of expressions like "new politics", "new populism", "neo-Romanticism", "anti-politics", "unorthodox political attitude", "unconventional politics" and "politics of upheaval" as explanations for this new paradigm (Offe 1985: 825). According to Offe, the new social movements are characterized by three common features. First, they are related to the (physical) existence of the individual – body, health and sexual identity; neighbourhood and city; cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity. Second, they lay more emphasis on existing values such as autonomy, self-government and self-provision as opposed to manipulation, control, dependence, bureaucratization and over-regulation. The third common feature is the way people participate in the movements: these movements are informal and egalitarian; they function intermittently; there are no static roles (hierarchies); each person represents only him/herself; their mode of operation is the campaign; it is organized in networks, with volunteers helping them and supporting them financially;

and their main ways of expression are street actions and demonstrations. Since they are mostly single-issue movements, they are incapable of negotiating or compromising with the powers-that-be; they are engaged in a game of all or nothing (Offe 1985: 829–832).

To sum up the aforesaid: in this period, the idea began to take root that there are a multitude of worlds living side by side, with various ideologies and identities, lifestyles and subcultures, none of them superior or inferior, and none of them possessing the one and only political, economic or cultural truth. It was also in these years that the liveability and sustainability of our environment, rather than growth, became a central issue; along with the idea that our world is inhabited by trained and multifarious individuals who are capable of assimilating to changing conditions; and that good political power, one that guarantees and coordinates this polychromatic world, is theoretically possible. Let's look out from our movement-historical perspective again: following the rupture in 1968, the stability of centre and periphery was upset, the value of subjectivity increased, and individual experience was subsumed into academic knowledge; as for the economy, the Keynesian conception of development was replaced by a decentralized regional politics relying on internal resources; Julian Steward's "specific evolution" replaced White's as the standard theory of culture (development is measured not by energy consumption, but by the liveability of the environment); as for social theory, Giddens's linear model of civilization was replaced by Samuel Eisenstadt's conception of "multiple modernities" at the turn of the millennium (our world is shaped by the aggregation of globalizing modernization processes starting from multiple centres) (Eisenstadt 2000). In this new state of affairs, civil society is no more a mere ornament on the hat of institutionalized politics – it claims direct control and influence for itself, and desires to mediate between the society (dynamically changing in step with the development of technology), and representative democracy (sluggish and lethargical in the last few decades).

A bad series

If we glance at the following series: Slovakia (1998), Serbia (2000), Belarus (2001), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), Azerbaijan (2005)... Arab countries (2011)... Hungary (2011–). After the shock of ethnocentrism we may feel at this undignified company ("what the hell do *we* have to do with *these* guys?"), we can as well start and think if we can come up with any indicators that make us better than them. Perhaps we

should just accept that we belong to the “extreme” category. In the meantime, let’s stick with similarities – I will come back to the few differences later on (though they will not make us any happier).

Historically, one of the similarities is obviously the enforced modernization of these societies, started in fits, then stalled, and the resulting mistrust that ensues within them; another is the rhetoric, and only the rhetoric, of free-market capitalism, etc. The historian Stephen Kotkin has called state-socialist societies *uncivic societies*, and the Hungarian example certainly proves this: the Kádár regime was efficient enough to make opposition seem futile and thus eliminate social solidarity and autonomy, and these attitudes continue to live today. The consequences of this attitude are dwelt upon by almost all the authors of our volumes: in these countries civil society was either out of function when the semi-authoritarian regimes came to power, or if it did function, it seemed just as foreign for these societies as the political power, since in our part of the world most organizations were established either to satisfy the big international sponsors, or were financed by political parties for their own interests.

In Hungary, for example, the hope for the creation of an independent civil society disappeared when the environmental opposition movements that started in the ’80s fell apart by the ’90s (see András Tóth’s paper on the LMP [Politics Can Be Different] party Tóth 2013: 179–233.) and the democratic opposition grew seamlessly into mainstream politics. As Lucan Way writes, the Arab Spring did not (and will not) turn into something similar to what 1989 was in Central and Eastern Europe (Way 2011: 14), but we can now also say in hindsight that our 1989 did not make up for 1968 – it did not result in a change of attitude. What we got stuck with instead was a withered Western representative democracy, without the civil “antibody” that should go with it. (In the words of a 19th century Hungarian poet Gyula Reviczky we planted a palm tree on the Great Hungarian Plain.)

Civil society, fawning upon omnipotent, institutionalized politics, managed to reproduce the pre-1968 Western model – however, in our part of the world, the backdrop to all that was not the promise to maintain the consensus on welfare and growth, but rather paternalism (i. e. political power can never be good, but at least it can give you something). In fact one can discover shocking parallels between the construction of the semi-authoritarian post-socialist regimes, their rhetorics, power games and corruption, on the one hand, and the everyday reality of our present-day system in Hungary, on the other. In 2011, Lucan Way co-authored a monograph with Steven Levitsky on the post-Cold War authoritarian “hybrid” regimes. They call hybrid those regimes which preserve democratic institutions (parliament, constitutional court, etc.) pro forma (for the sake of international legitimacy, for example), but use them

only to reproduce their power: first they turn off the tap of economic resources for their opponents, then they monopolize the press, squeeze out their opponents from every economic and administrative position, and reshape the election system to suit them. They do this with a loud nationalist-populist and anti-EU/anti-American rhetoric, making allusions to conspiracy theories, and citing the historical wrongs committed against their nation, making use of the channels of centralized media, thereby making the populace believe that they are all participants in the fight for independence of a small nation that has suffered a lot (Levitsky Way 2010)². The case of Lukasenka and Belarus exemplifies how fierce criticism from abroad can make an even bigger star of a dictator if the domestic soil has been well prepared (see Balázs Jarábik's essay in this volume). And the bad news is that these stories keep repeating.

Several authors mention that the leaders of hybrid regimes like to copy “best (or rather, worst) practices” from each other: they are especially quick in reacting to the machinations of the opposition, sometimes even using preventive measures (Way 2011; Krastev 2007; Nikolayenko 2012). The most sophisticated ones – Aliiev, Putin, Lukasenka – established their own quasi civil organizations and institutes of public policy and political analysis well in advance; they enacted a law for the financing of these organizations and another law for paralyzing the independents, then organized mass sympathy demonstrations for the government, and patriotic activities for the youth. These people are still in power, and offer tons of ideas to our hybrid regime flourishing in Hungary – though one could argue that in 2013, with the fourth amendment of the Constitution (to mention a difference between our country and the rest), we have most probably earned our place in the flagship. And since the above-mentioned experiences indicate that the reactions of autocratic leaders of our age seem to follow a uniform logic, we have little reason to doubt that what Ivan Krastev outlines may become Hungary's future as well: “These were regimes where the citizens had the right to vote, but the governments reserved for themselves the privilege of counting the votes and announcing the results” (Krastev 2007: 237). The extension of the right to vote and the secret list of voters outside Hungary is merely the first, awkward attempt down this path.³

2 See for instance PM Orbán's lecture, delivered in Băile Tuşnad, Romania, Transylvania on 17 June 2013. Hungary is carrying out a national economic policy (in Hungarian) http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/beszed/a_kormany_nemzeti_gazdasagpolitikat_folytat (last access 2014. 04. 01.).

3 Applying the methods of “chain voting” and “transporting voters” like in the by-elections in the town of Baja in September 2013 are just few examples of what can be expected during the elections in the Spring of 2014 http://hvg.hu/itthon/20130928_Meg_kell_ismetelni_a_valasztast_Bajan (last access 2014. 04. 01.).

Our own palette

And now I come back to the dilemmas listed at the outset: what, after all, are these movements, sprouting from a muddy, eastern soil, assuming a political role but with a civil narrative (thus hybrid themselves), and colouring the era of the twilight of certain hybrid regimes? Ivan Krastev is definitely skeptical about the myth these civils have created about themselves. He doesn't think that it was their intervention that saved democracy: "The concept of civil society was fundamental for the colour revolutions as the idea of the 'third estate' for the French revolution. The role played by the NGOs was deemed as important for the success of the colour revolutions as that played by the Bolshevik Party in the success in the 1917 revolution in Russia" (Krastev 2007: 239). So the solution, according to Krastev, is: "If one wants to be written about in history books, it is necessary to ensure that one has something to do with writing them. This is what the NGO leaders did. They were not only among the leaders of the colour revolutions, but, more importantly, they have been the most active interpreters of the events. They were the ones fluent in English and in democracy-speech" (Krastev 2007: 239). This is especially true of Pavol Demeš, was the Central-Eastern European director of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, as well as co-editor of the volume in which his paper, as well as Ivan Krastev's, was published (Forbrig – Demeš 2007).

Ivan Krastev was undoubtedly right that the West adopted and supported the civil narrative of the colour revolutions in order to satisfy its own narcissism. However, a paper by a no less excellent analyst, Martin Bútorá, makes the important statement that external intervention can only be successful if there is a genuine social consensus about the necessity of overthrowing autocracy (Bútorá 2007: 26). The counterexample of Belarus and Azerbaijan have proved this: where the political and civil opposition is divided and uncertain, all attempts seem to backfire.

But even if a society is apolitical, if there is a consensus between trade unions, churches, local governments and other democratic forces that democratic institutions must be restored – as was the case in Slovakia – then the days of the autocratic regime are numbered. Whether it is toppled by civils acting as the hinterland of the unified political opposition, or by politicians, inspired by civils, it does not quite matter – it is the outcome that matters.

If we take the "new paradigm" (Offe) of the new social movements as our starting-point, we can safely say that the West did not do more than hastily transplant the post-'68 conception of politicized

civil society onto the soil of the new autocracies. This is what they wanted to see, and – again, using Offe’s concepts – this is what they in fact created: between the “institutionalized political factors” and the private sphere, they wedged in the new movement so that it would make political actions within the civil society, and thus question both private and political practice, as well as the system of institutions of both. These simulations of new Western social movements soon took over the tasks they usually assume in these regimes, i. e. they acted as an “immune system”, like in representative democracies – with more (Serbia, Slovakia) or less (Ukraine, Georgia) success. And where the “revolutionary situation” was not ripe yet – to use a nostalgic expression – (Belarus, Azerbaijan), the investment of the West into the transplantation of best practices was in vain; they only wasted time and money (Nikolayenko 2013; Demeš – Forbig 2007).

To return to the difference between the colour antecedents and the situation in Hungary, it is not only in comparison with the respective power mechanisms that we are worse off – we are quite at a disadvantage in the civil sphere as well when compared to the revolutionary antecedents. Perhaps because Hungary is an EU member, and the international community trusts internal, institutional solutions, or perhaps because the outer world has ceased to be interested in us – in any case, our civil opposition receives practically no external support (except for – mostly counterproductive – admonishments addressed to those in power). If we observe the activities of the Hungarian opposition from the inside, it is notable that nowhere – probably with the exception of Azerbaijan and Belarus again – did opposition activism entail such an existential disaster as it did in Hungary. Those in power are aware of the political affiliations of everyone (which events they attend, etc.), especially on the local level, so those who work in the public sphere shirk from any kind of activism. Those opponents of the regime who work in the private sphere can say goodbye to state commissions and tenders. Performers, with a few exceptions, are scared that they will find their name on the blacklist – as opposed to performers in Slovakia, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine – since cultural venues (theatres, halls, etc.) are mostly state-financed. Independent media has been relegated to the internet. Of all the autocracies described here only the most totalitarian one has been capable of preventing masses of quality professionals to participate in the opposition.

This is the human side of the situation in Hungary. A decisive difference between the Hungarian regime and other hybrid regimes may be found in ideological background. The government’s programme of “system of national cooperation” is part of a well-elaborated, consistent strategy for the destruction of

the society, a strategy that started in 2002, when members of the now ruling Fidesz party appropriated the use of the red-white-green cockade, worn by people on the national holiday of 15 March to commemorate the 1848 Revolution. This was the moment when private political preferences became individual identities, represented by external symbols – a self-definition against those with different political views. Families, friendly circles, communities at work and other places were split because of this sophisticated power trick. Total cooperation, that has proven to be the necessary minimum in the case of all the colour revolutions so far, and that the more sober Hungarian politicians preach about to no end, can be found only in half of our split society: the half that does not dote upon the new political identity with a quasi-religious belief that obliterates all rational thinking. Starting from 2011, a number of small groups have been organized spontaneously around a single issue, ignoring the problems of others, so there is no unified civil narrative that could articulate the aim of the opposition (i. e. the elimination of autocracy). This was not the case where external help was available, and where there was central support, though of course with democratic supervision.

We can clearly see this in the case of “Milla” FB movement. Its dilemmas involve finding answers to the question: how can we get involved in politics while remaining civils? The way Milla joined the party Együtt 2014 (Together 2014) was typical: the association, mostly with figures who had not been active in Milla before, joined the party, but Milla itself (whatever it is) did not. Milla celebrated the national holiday of March 15, 2013 in a peculiar way: even though it is part of the unified opposition, the speeches by its leaders – in which they gave voice to ideas diametrically opposed to that of the opposition – were held by separate figures and on separate stages.

The case of the LMP (Politics Can Be Different) party is similar: for years, there was a rupture within the party, and finally they split into two, effectively sacrificing themselves for their dream of “political civilness” and their demand for a complete change of elite and of rhetoric. Thus LMP represents the concept of *new social movement* known from textbooks; as well as its inverse, which is not civil *and* political, but *neither* political *nor* civil. So, besides the main rupture in the society, smaller cracks have appeared; unfortunately, this does not indicate multifariousness and heterogeneity but rather a complete lack of understanding of the aims and priorities.

Revolutions and the opposition

Try as I might, I can only find very complex answers to the dilemmas outlined in the very beginning of this study. Colour revolutions are symptoms of decay, since in many cases all they achieved was the coming to power of a new but not necessarily better elite; they are also hellfire, because in some cases they resulted in the birth of a civil society that can mediate between the new elite and laymen; they mark a recent stop on the universal merry-go-round, because the representative democracy they devoutly wish has not yet started on the path towards democracy (the regime has stayed in place), yet the light is already visible at the end of the tunnel because once authoritarian regimes are toppled, the powers-that-be are at least forced to exhibit some self-restraint. And it is partly a creative way great powers use to further their geopolitical interests, since without external intervention, the new social movements could not have been successful. Finally, it is also awakens rootless and disintegrated societies because these movements can only take root only where there was a genuine need for them.

What we are experiencing in Hungary now is less than a revolution but much more than spontaneous resistance. Our multiply split reality determines the actions of anti-authoritarian political movements but it does not channel the single-issue demonstrations of romantic civils and students into a struggle for any political goal. Civil movements may be able to grow in the future, co-opting unsatisfied and organized masses – say associations of employees or self-organized Roma groups – whereas students may be able to find an ideal goal that does not tie them to any of the political parties, e. g. mobilizing people for participation at the elections (even if this is not a very original idea), thereby maintaining the momentum that seems to have been lost lately.

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